

# Interview with William Bock

History 300  
Professor Birkner  
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Celia Timbers

**Celia Timbers:** I'm Celia Timbers, it is November 9, 2018 and I'm sitting at Weidensall Hall [room 201] at Gettysburg College with Bill Bock. Can you tell me about your childhood?

**Bill Bock:** Well, that was a long time ago. I was born in Canada. My dad was overseas in India. And my mother, when I was three years old, took me from Montreal to New York on a ship to Liverpool through the Suez Canal to India, train across Bombay to Galact and met my father, he hadn't met me. Lived in India, the Philippines, Hong Kong. Came back to the United States 1955, had two sisters born in '47 and '50 and went to school and became an "American boy" in Saddle River, New Jersey and did the normal things. Went to Ramsey High School. Went on a field trip, we went to Gettysburg, Pennsylvania and I was very impressed with the battle field. I came back, looked at the school and applied and became a freshman at Gettysburg in September of 1962.

**Timbers:** That's so eventful! What was it like moving around as a kid?

**Bock:** Exciting! Back then you didn't pick up a plane a travel so travels from train across India, as I mentioned, across America. You didn't fly from San Francisco to Japan or Hong Kong or Minoa, you took a boat. Big old American steamship lines, SS President Wilson and Cleveland, you leave San Francisco you go under the Golden Gate bridge, you arrive in Hawaii with leis and streamers and then you go to Japan and then Hong Kong. So, yeah it was exciting. I spoke Hindustani because we had servants and there were no English-speaking kids, so I grew up with their kids and learned to speak Hindustani. Went to international schools and didn't know anything about baseball, but I could play cricket. It was a different upbringing and it changed my life a little bit because obviously you're exposed to different cultures and growing up between the end of the war and 1960, there was still a tremendous amount of destruction and poverty in the world and I was exposed to that too. It gave me a different appreciate of life even as a child.

**Timbers:** What were you involved in at school, any activities, jobs, clubs?

**Bock:** Wow. I was a paperboy and had sixty-seven papers and pedaled around the neighbors. The cost for six days of a newspaper was thirty-three cents and if they were miserable tippers you got thirty-five and if they were big league tippers you got fifty-six [laughs]. I worked on a dairy farm for two years in the summer because I wanted to be a vet and that changed my mind.

**Timbers:** So, I know we talked about you touring the battlefields, but were there any other factors that helped you choose Gettysburg College?

**Bock:** This sounds so naive, but no. I mean I knew it was a good school, and it was a beautiful campus. I looked at Bates and Bowdoin, but it was really the battlefield that did it.

**Timbers:** How was it integrating into the Gettysburg College community?

**Bock:** Gettysburg back then did not have the geographical disparity of students. Lots from Pennsylvania, New Jersey, Maryland. I think there was only one black student on campus, and he happened to be the quarterback, Snuffy Parsons. So, it's certainly not representative of American today. In fact, a friend of mine, Dr. Tom Hardy, he's an army colonel and a real "big man on campus," great guy, football player and so on and so forth. Tom wrote me the other day when we were talking about high school in Philadelphia, Liberty High School, they lost sixty-four of their young black students in Vietnam and Tom wrote, "I never really understood what it meant growing up as a middle-class American boy going to Gettysburg College because this was not an intercity college." But yeah, Gettysburg was pretty isolated and insulated back then.

**Timbers:** What was the college like at that time? What were you involved in? How was the campus set up?

**Bock:** We had a much more structured environment. We had mandatory assembly, I think they did away with Chapel the year before I was there. But heavily influenced by chapel. We had mandatory, I think it was Thursday, convocations if you will. Very structured, you were expected to be at class at zero-eight-hundred. A lot of good times though and they were pretty innocent

good times. Interfraternity Council Sings, and Hayrides, and parties and a lot of influence of athletics. The Greek System was very prevalent, a little bit Klan-ish. You broke into fraternities and then you didn't do a whole lot of mixing after that because you had a group. But it was pretty healthy. I was a structured environment, everyone kind-of dressed the same way, I don't think there was a whole lot of difference in thought, we were middle class students enjoying a pretty good four years between '62 and '66 insulated from the rest of the world.

**Timbers:** Did Gettysburg College experience any protest activity like there was going on at other campuses?

**Bock:** I wasn't aware of any until getting involved in the memorial project. I understand certainly after the class of '66 left it was more prevalent, but I don't remember any of it. As I try to think back at that time, we were all sons and daughters of the greatest generation. Our dads and fought in World War II for the most part and our moms were at the Homefront, Rosie the Riveter and so forth. We grew up in John Wayne movies. And the idea of protesting against a war that between '62 and '66 was not such a hot war, and what I mean by that was that there were *that* many casualties and if we did hear anything about it, it was against decorum in America kind of thing. I think it was in the year ahead that we became as individuals more aware of the Vietnam War. but certainly, on campus I was oblivious to it.

**Timbers:** What were you involved in on campus?

**Bock:** I was a member of Phi Sigma Kappa, right across here on Carlisle Street. And I had a job exercising horses outside of schools and I spent a lot of time there and rode all over the battlefield, before you were restricted. And I worked at a gas station right up on the corner across from Route Fifteen. And in fraternity life I was the social director for a year or two. Those were the big things. ROTC, yeah.

**Timbers:** How did being in ROTC influence your life on campus?

**Bock:** First of all, back then freshman and sophomore had to either be in gym or ROTC. And I'd had enough of gym in high school and I just thought, "well, I better try this out." So, it was not unusual on Tuesday afternoons to see lots of blue uniforms and lots of green uniforms because every other sophomore and freshman was in ROTC. And again, it sort of opened my eyes. All of a sudden we had young officers teaching us about things none of us were exposed to, small unit tactics, leadership in the army, far different from what most of us knew. So yeah, it was kind of interesting. We learned about weapons, military history. It was radically different from the normal nine to five academic activities of the college.

**Timbers:** What kind of time commitment was ROTC?

**Bock:** Not all that much. We had "drill" every Tuesday afternoon, then we had classes every Tuesday and Thursday, but it was not academically rigorous, you weren't getting algebra exams that's for sure. The academics of it were secondary to that fact you were being exposed to something quite different than most of us were used to.

**Timbers:** How did being in a fraternity shape your life on campus? Were there any specific meaningful memories you have?

**Bock:** Well it taught me how to party [laughs]. Some lifelong friendships, that's for sure. I'm very close to a fraternity brother from the class of '64, Harvey Goss. [For example,] we've known each other for fifty years. Harvey's been a very generous benefactor to the college, comes back here a lot. He lives in Ellicott City, Maryland. A couple other guys, Bobby Geller [1966], Tom Rost. Tom became a federal judge, he just passed away three months ago. Bob lives in Philadelphia and runs his big boat up from Florida to New England just for the fun of it. So, yeah, it was the friendships that developed and since I've become involved in The Vietnam Project, I met Sue Hill, and Tom McCracken, and Tom Delavergne, and David Reichert. Again, after fifty years you just reestablish friendships and work together well. We've all had different

experiences, but the one thing about come back to Gettysburg and meeting some of our fellow alums, I won't say you pick up right where you left off fifty years ago, but it's pretty easy to catch up on who did what to whom and blah, blah, blah and fall back into nicknames, and shared memories, and "Really? That happened? What?" Selective retention.

**Timbers:** Was there anyone specifically from your childhood or your time at Gettysburg that influenced you?

**Bock:** There was a professor, Lou Hamman, remarkable guy and Dr. [Roger] Stern. Those were two people that I really remember, and again the friendships of fellow students.

**Timbers:** What was it like being a History major?

**Bock:** Well, as a mentioned in one of our emails, I love history. It's the stories of people in societies. To me, it's the foundation of pretty much everything we do. And I saw that confirmed when I was at a lecture at the Army War College in Carlisle which takes sharp young lieutenant colonels and colonels and grooms them for positions of greater responsibility and a renowned military historian came and spoke to the class and he said, "you must study history to understand what's happening today and how it will affect what's happening tomorrow." And that's true. Those who do not know history are condemned to repeat it and we see it over and over and over again. The Vietnam period influenced American foreign policy and American society for fifty years and we didn't learn anything from it. And we got ourselves involved in Iraq with many of the same errors in judgement that occurred between 1960 and 65 and 68 and to the end of the war in '73.

**Timbers:** Do you think that coming from such a different background, from your travels, changed the way you saw Gettysburg or interacted with the other students – being such an insulated campus?

**Bock:** Yeah, I think. I didn't go around advertising I lived in Hong Kong, the Philippines, and could speak Hindustani. Yeah, I think so. The US is a big county and from Maine to California, sometimes there's no reason to leave. But yeah, I spent my sophomore summer working in Denmark for an uncle and the Gettysburg College choir was there. When I was in Copenhagen that summer I went to Berlin and kicked around for a little bit and that was a far different cry from working at the shore at Atlantic City [laughs]. Although maybe being on the Jersey shore was always a cool thing to do. Yeah, I certainly didn't advertise that, but it couldn't help but influence you.

**Timbers:** How did your military experience begin? Did your involvement in ROTC affect that?

**Bock:** Well, in a way, yes. Because the American military sends its military all over the world and if you're an economics major you really don't think much about working in London and Paris or Amsterdam or Singapore. But if you're taking a military course you know we have troops in Japan, and Korean, and in the Philippines, and Guam, and Germany, and France, England, and Spain, and Italy, and Ethiopia, and Greece, and Turkey and all the sudden you realize "Hey! The American military's all over the world." So, that's a little different, that's for sure.

**Timbers:** Do you have any specific memories about the beginning of your service?

**Bock:** We had to take two years of gym or ROTC. At that point I decided, "you know, this is pretty cool. I think I might want to continue on my junior and senior year." I was a Canadian. So, all the sudden it was discovered "we've got a Canadian in our midst," and a Canadian cannot become an American Army/ Air Force/ Marine officer; you have to be a citizen. So, I had to think about it and realize I'd been in the United States since '54, this was 1964, I'd been here ten years, "do I want to become an American or not?" And I decided yeah, I did. So, I studied for my citizenship test, became a citizen in 65 and that allowed me to continue on with ROTC and

receive a commission. So, I'm one of the few people who raised their right hand a swore to preserve, protect and defend the constituent of the United States first as becoming an American citizen and secondly becoming an officer.

I just re-became a citizen of Canada again about five years ago when Canada opened up its immigration policies. If you were once a Canadian you could apply again to be a Canadian as long as you didn't renounce your citizenship. I had a son working overseas and it's very difficult for an American to work in Europe if you're not a member of the common market [European Union], so he asked me to consider becoming a Canadian. I sent my birth certificate and 260 bucks and got a Canadian passport and then he became a Canadian based on my citizenship and that allows him to work in Europe as well as Africa as a Canadian versus an American. And secondly, it's much safer to travel in a Canadian passport in many parts of the world. That's a short story long.

**Timbers:** What was it like having to take your citizenship test in college?

**Bock:** Well, being a history major and being interested in American history in general, I went before a judge in Hackensack, New Jersey and we exchanged pleasantries and he asked me how does a bill become a law, and I told him, and what are the three branches of government and I told him, and what does the date 1776 remind you of and I said, "that's when Adam Smith published *Wealth of Nations*." He looked at me and he was grinning at me or laughing like you, so let's put it this way, it wasn't very hard.

**Timbers:** After you got your American citizenship then you finished the ROTC program at Gettysburg, then what was your next step?

**Bock:** We were commissioned right across the street in Christ Chapel. That means you go from being a civilian to immediately being an officer. Well, you are second lieutenant in the Navy, Marine Corps, or Army, but that is the lowest officer rank and it's like being a "freshman" when



you arrive to college. You just walked in the door, so you have to be trained and schooled. Yeah, we graduated on Sunday and I was commissioned on Sunday, on the fifth of June, 1966.

**Timbers:** So then, after graduation what did you do?

**Bock:** I went to thirty/forty miles up the street to Indiantown Gap and reported to the ROTC summer camp that was just starting there and spent three or four weeks there as a junior junior lieutenant. I thought it was pretty slick because all these college kids were there, and I have a bar on my shoulder and I taught them map reading, not because I was an expert in map reading but because I had studied for a week and knew how to read a map just a little bit better than them and faked it.

Then I went to Fort Sill, Oklahoma, which is a home of army artillery and that's where young officers as well as enlisted men learn how to fire and operate 105 mm 8 inch 175 Howitzers, the big guns of the army. And it's intensely focused, disciplined courses because you are taking an artillery piece and a big shell and firing it seven miles and you hope to get it on target and you have to deal with the elevation, the temperature, the wind, the age of the barrel, the age of the ammunition, the type of ammunition, the humidity in the air etcetera, etcetera, etcetera. So, you just don't want to put something in the barrel and pull the lanyard and hope that it arrives over there [points to the right] because I might arrive over there [points in the left]. It's a very intricate process all based on mathematics. So, it's all done by computers now but back then we did it all in books and if you didn't know how to add two and two you were in deep trouble. It was an amazing, eye opening experience in how difficult this stuff is. There was no bullshitting your way around it. You could not say that the Battle of Hastings took place in 1066 in September; it took place October 25<sup>th</sup>, but if you said September you might get away with it. But if you're doing that, then no, someone dies or gets hurt.

So, I went to Fort Sill then I immediately went to Fort Benning and took the army's basic paratrooper course and that was three weeks of learning how to jump out of a plane. Then I went to Korea. I was commissioned, left Gettysburg on the fourth of June and then probably the third of October I was on the Korean DMZ. Boy that's a real [whistles] that's a real quick change in your life.

**Timbers:** How did you feel during your training being that fresh out of college?

**Bock:** Obviously it was a brand-new experience but you're with people in the same situation. The West Point class of '66 was with my group of young officers going through that training and they were head and shoulders above us in military discipline and understanding of the military. I would say for the most part 98% of them were just wonderful guys, really sharp, disciplined guys. And they were happy to be out of West Point with a little bit more freedom, but they were sharp, sharp young officers, much sharper than we were. But the learning curve was pretty steep and fast and within a year you probably couldn't tell the difference between an ROTC educated officer or a West Point officer. But the ones that came out of West Point, man, they knew their stuff, there's no doubt about it.

**Timbers:** Do you think that your Canadian roots changed the way you saw the war or how you felt about your service?

**Bock:** No, I don't think so at all. Nope, no. Canada was just a place I was born. I spent a year in Canada I guess between '53 and '54 but no, there was no influence on where I was born or the fact that I had been a Canadian. Although, many times I reflect on the fact that 68,000-70,000 Americans were going to Canada and I had come South. I thought that was rather strange.

**Timbers:** Did you feel ready once you got to Korea?

**Bock:** That's a good question, no. First assignment like that you are still learning. But you were not expected to feel not ready, if anything you were expected to show a little bravado. I was very

fortunate, I was an artillery forward observer and the job of the forward observer was to stay with the infantry and the armor and call in the artillery or the tactical air support, or the helicopter gunships, or the fighters, or even naval gunfire. So, you live with the infantry and provide that support. Well, I was assigned to a unit on the Korean DMZ. The Korean DMZ is 181 miles long from one end of Korea from the other, it's where the fighting stopped in 1953 and American forces were assigned an eighteen-mile sector in the Khe Sanh corridor which is the historical invasion route to the South. And there was one brigade of I guess 45,00 men up there stationed along eighteen miles, there were twelve guard posts and the ones that my unit were responsible for were Katie, Lucy, and Barbara. They were up on hilltops, we would go up there and, in the afternoon, spend the night at that guard post watching for infiltration coming down from the North. During that period, '66 - '67, there were a number of attempts from North Korean infiltrator to create a diversion attacks in Seoul which is only thirty-eight miles from North Korea. And they made an attack on President Park's wife. It was a very hostile and active area. It was sealed off from the rest of Korea by the Imjin River. There were only two bridges and we carried weapons and we had armbands that said United Nations. But you had North Korea, 2,000 meters of demilitarized zone, the DMZ border, 2,00 meters of demilitarized zone, and then South Korea, and then this river. So, the only things that were up there were American soldiers, a bunch of pheasants, a bunch of deer, deserted villages, and very sad ones because you'd walk through and you might see a child's shoe poking out of the dirt, and old trenches from the war. It was as close to warfare as you could get. There were hostile firings and we were armed, and we were always ready for something, so it was a great proving ground. I learned a lot and I taught a lot because a forward observer is absolutely useless until he's needed to call in fire. I was kind of like the third lieutenant, so I volunteered to do somethings and I did a lot of teaching and I also took out patrols and was with people on the guard post. I was mentored by

these young soldiers in learning how to become a better lieutenant. And it was a very very valuable experience, like being an intern to a great prof or something like that, you know, you can learn from them. So yeah, it was a good experience. I wouldn't want to repeat it again. When you're out in the cold at twelve degrees below zero lying on the ground looking over at a deserted hillside waiting for something to happen, that's not so positive but in days like today, except it might be twenty-eight degrees and sleeting, you don't stay inside, you go out, you're walking through the bushes there's no excuses, you just do it, you just do it. And that's kind of a, you know, 'dog ate my homework' you know, a lot of people get away with that for their entire lives but there's no excuses in situations like that.

**Timbers:** What kind of things were you teaching in Korea?

**Bock:** Again, map-reading. Learning where you are on the face of the Earth is very critical. Today we have GPS back then you had a map and a compass. You looked at your map and your compass and you say, "over there is the Peace Light so you can see there's a hill and there's a railroad..." so that's how you focus on where you are. I taught first aid, I taught communications, I taught rules of engagement. Just basic soldier kinds of things. And remember a lot of these young troops were just out of Biglerville the first time out and here they are in a foreign country doing a job they never expected to do. So, there was a lot of mentoring of these guys too. You know, helping them along, seventeen, eighteen year old kid can be very naïve and you also have to teach them, "hey you're getting paid, you can't spend it all on this, that, and the other, you have to save it." It's a lot of dealing with them as little brothers and helping them along.

**Timbers:** What kinds of relationships did you make with the other men serving over there?

**Bock:** Well, an officer and their men, its distinguished, you're friendly with them but you're not their friend. And there always has to be a distance, it doesn't have to be a rude distance, but you

can't "fraternize" because that breaks down discipline. And again, you can show interest, and compassion, and talk to people, and work with people. Just as in class you might go to a professor's house and have a beer with him and his wife and meet the kids, but you don't go out carousing with them, because it breaks down the respect and discipline, and so on and so forth. With your fellow officers, it's a different story. You're basically all alike, you've shared experiences as far as training, schools, airborne, ranger, you're all in the same situation. You bitch and moan and talk about girls, they're your social equals. And the military has a great hierarchy. You know, lieutenants and captains don't "fraternize." There's discipline and there's rank and there are orders being received and given so you quickly learn the structure and you can be friendly and respectful, but you do not cross those lines.

**Timbers:** How long were you in Korea for?

**Bock:** Let's see, from October until May.

**Timbers:** And then where did you go after that?

**Bock:** I went home on a thirty-day leave. And then went to Vietnam.

**Timbers:** What was it like being home after serving?

**Bock:** It was surreal. I had been gone such a short time that it wasn't too difficult. Hey, it felt good to be able to sleep till nine in the morning instead of being up at 5:30. It felt good to be driving a car again. I didn't see many friends because they were all gone, too. It felt a little bit strange because you leave home in '62 and you come back in '67, well, things have changed. I guess there were some antiwar issues going on in '67, but nothing that I was again, really aware of, and if I was aware I dismissed it as you know, that stuff.

**Timbers:** And did you go back to your parents?

**Bock:** Yes, I did. Saddle River. And I don't remember much about that month, I don't think I did anything special. Maybe it wasn't even a whole month [laughs], but I did leave Korea and go

home then come back. But it was relaxing. It was June, we went swimming. I guess saw some friends, but I don't remember too much happening in that month.

**Timbers:** So, then you went to Vietnam?

**Bock:** Yes.

**Timbers:** And what did you do there?

**Bock:** I was still a junior lieutenant, I was a first lieutenant this time. I was an experienced forward observer and I joined an artillery unit in Pleiku, then started working with infantry units in the central highlands near the Laos and Cambodian border.

**Timbers:** What was a typical day like, if there could even be a 'typical' day?

**Bock:** Somedays were extremely boring, others were not. You basically were in a hostile area and you always had to be alert to that. Conditions, we had no hooches, we had no barracks, we lived on the ground. And that meant when you moved into an area you dug a hole for yourself, you might live in it for a day, two days, or a week. The longer you were there, the better your hole got, you filled up sandbags and you made yourself a little area. If you moved out the next day, you just dug a hole in the ground and slept in it. It's a pretty challenging environment.

[laughs], yeah it is.

Yeah, I have very few pictures from that period, but the committee asked us to provide some pictures that could be used in a slideshow, so you asked about what a typical day was. That's where I spent Christmas 1967 [points to a worn out photo of a desert landscape with mountains and forests in the distance]. And I kept it, you can see all the, I guess it's mold, but I kept it all these years because I when I think I'm having a bad day I look at that and I say, "you know, it wasn't that bad." And this is a picture of the Laos and Cambodian border, this is an artillery piece right here, and I was somewhere up [points to mountains above the artillery] and this was an airstrike going in and these guys were watching it. One of the lieutenants gave me

this picture and said “hey you remember that move” [referring to when he moved up to the mountains during the airstrike]. These were the kind of mountains and if you look at it, it’s not much different than the mountains surrounding Gettysburg if you go towards the West to Cashtown and over the route to Chambersburg. Heavily forested, Central Highlands had beautiful waterfalls, triple canopy, one layer of trees, then a second, and a third layer, monkeys, once and a while you’d hear an elephant and you might see a tiger, not real up close, just a flash or something like that. But, beautiful, beautiful area, inhabited by the Montagnards, the French word for people of the mountain. And the women were bare-breasted and in breechclotts, the men just wore breechclotts, they carried crossbows. They practiced slash and burn techniques of farming, so they go in and slash the ground, burn it, grow manioc [cassava] and some root kind of vegetable, harvest it and then move on to the next place. They had pigs and goats and once and awhile cows. They were proud people, indigenous people, much like our American Indians. They were discriminated against by the South Vietnamese, they considered them [The Montagnards] second class people and they were primitive. We evacuated some Montagnards with Chinook CH47s and here are these huge helicopters come down to these people in breechclotts, you know... carrying crossbows getting on them. That’s a juxtaposition of society that you can’t even begin to comprehend and a lot of them had served as scouts with the French and I spoke fairly decent French so often I was the interpreter with some of the older men that had served as French Scouts and up in the Highlands there were a lot of French towns, towns that still had a French influence. There were Catholic orphanages and small businesses with South Vietnamese, some of them had been educated in France. So, the French imprint was fairly recognizable even through the South Vietnamese had fought strenuously from 1945 to 1954 to get rid of the French, ending with the battle of Dien Bien Phu, yet there was still a French influence. Not all of it was bad.

Typical day, it could be absolute boredom, or you could get word to ‘saddle up and let’s go’ and off we went sometimes with helicopters, sometimes moving. And I looked on a map the other day and the year I spent in Vietnam probably covered the same amount of territory between here and Harrisburg. That’s all. Thirty-seven or forty miles. We walked everywhere, for the most part. And you might cover six or seven miles a day and at the end of the day you were exhausted because you were carrying equipment, you were alert, you just weren’t strolling up to the Peace Light, you were alert and focused. Again, 90% of the time utter boredom, 10% of the time sheer terror. One of the big problems we had was trying to keep our guys wearing flak jackets, big heavy plastic kind of, god they were heavy, and they were hot, and you *hated* them. People would leave them behind or wouldn’t wear them, but a few rounds would fly by and mortar would come in and [whistled] everybody would put on the flak jacket and they wouldn’t take them off for a week and the same with digging holes. “Hey Jones, you call that a hole?” “Oh well its deep enough sir. Come-on man.” The next night a mortar round would come in and the next night everybody would be digging away to China. And it’s just the way people are, you know [laughs].

**Timbers:** How much interaction did you have with the native people in these places?

**Bock:** They were up in the Highlands, very very few in the towns like Kontum, a nice provincial town, a river running through it, there were shops and I remember getting a pomme frites and steak dinner one time... but it would be like going through Biglerville, a whole lot less advanced than Biglerville. But you know, shops, and streets and pigs and chickens running around. And you had a little interaction, but you were never invited to dinner because you were a foreign army in their country and they looked at you as just ‘big Americans’ with the helicopters and so on. So, there was little interaction there.



With the Montagnards a lot more because we took great pains to ensure that if there were Montagnards living in this area that they were moved out. And I say they had been moved out, we escorted them to different areas and they were happy to do it because they got food, money, and so on and so forth. With the Montagnards there was more interaction, but you were dealing again with very primitive people, so a lot of them would just grunt and sign. You didn't discuss Voltaire and the meaning of the cave, none of that stuff. But there was interaction in that way. But again, Celia, one thing you got to remember, my experience was one tiny little sliver of the pie, you know? And I once read a book written by a Vermonter who was a bugler with a Calvary unit in the First Vermont Calvary. But he was stationed in the D.C. area, and as you know Confederate forces were pretty close to Washington a lot of the time, Fredericksburg, Manassas, all of these. And he was a part of a Calvary unit that rode everyday around Washington. And what was fascinating was, because we [Bock and his wife] live near there, he talked about Chantilly and Nokesville, places I know because I've driven through and around them. And he focuses on three things; what they ate, where they slept, and how tired the horses were. And it was day after day after day [bangs table], of those observations. Why? Because that's what his life was like. I remember reading once that some officers came by, and there was one blonde officer who was very haughty and demanding and we had to play songs, because of the bugler. And when he left, I asked what his name was, and he said it was Captain Custer [laughs], that's an interesting little vignette. The point I'm making that is, as junior officers you just had a little slice of the pie and you look at it at Gettysburg College. You've been here almost two and a half years and you have a good understanding of the college, but you don't have the same understanding of the college as President Riggs, who's responsible for fundraising, hiring, and the future of the college, and multimillion-dollar budgets. And it's the same way for us junior guys, we were just tiny little insignificant cogs in the wheel if you will. What we knew and

experienced was just that tiny little sliver and we knew it well, but we certainly had no macro understanding of much.

**Timbers:** What did you do on the days where there was no action?

**Bock:** Sleep. Maybe if we were near a river, we'd take off our clothes and jump in the river, wash our clothes, sometimes you'd get hot meals during the day. If we were near a base camp we got lifted in and we got clean clothes and sometimes they showed a movie on a screen... there were Donut Dollies, and these were special services, ladies that came literally with donuts and coffee. And sometimes there was a USO Show, I think I saw one, Bob Hope. Sometimes they'd bring in pallet loads of warm beer [sticks his tongue out in disgust]. You wrote letters, because there were no cellphones, there were no emails. You wrote letters, and you could write them free, all you had to do was write 'free' on the top and it would get home, you didn't need to put a stamp on it. It was free, what a benefit, what a benefit. We lived for R-and-R, rest and relaxation. You got three days and you could go to Hawaii or Bangkok or Hong Kong or Australia for three days. So, everybody lived for that. We got newspapers, *Stars and Stripes*, it was usually three or four days old. We listened to radios, guys took photographs. I remember once, I was looking at some photos and this young soldier comes up behind me and says "lieutenant, what do you got there?" so I said, "remember what waterfall we saw a couple weeks ago," and he said, "yeah yeah I remember," "well I just got some pictures." I'd seen a waterfall coming out of a hill, so I took a picture of it with a little tiny camera, that fit in your ammo pouch. He said, "I got some pictures too, let me go get them," so he comes back. Well the guy was a semiprofessional photographer, so he laid at the bottom of the pool and he took pictures of the water streaming out of the hills and light, spray. And I've got this picture of a dog peeing out of a thing [laughing, referring to the pictures he took of the waterfall]. I looked at it and I said, "oh wow." And guys

played cards and we had a radio station out of Saigon. Did you ever see the movie *Good Morning Vietnam*, with [tries to remember his name] Robin Williams?

**Timbers:** Yes.

**Bock:** You know you'd hear Rolling Stones and stuff like that. Kind of surreal existence. But yeah days off were basically sleeping, and sometimes classes, sometimes cleaning weapons, getting haircut. But we sure didn't have Friday afternoon classes, then you just raise hell for two days then go back to class. None of that [laughs].

**Timbers:** Did you have a lot of communication with your family?

**Bock:** Letters, yeah letters. And I think I went to Australia and I called home, and of course that was a long distance, expensive call when you reverse the charges. And you talk to your mom and dad, I think one of my sisters was still home, but strained phone calls... "How are you?" "I'm OK, I'm OK, how's the dog?" [laughs], those were strained phone calls. And again, Celia, it sounds so amazing fifty years ago the things we take for granted. I just asked you where 945 Baltimore Street was, and you found it [referring to when I helped him GPS directions before the interview], fifty years ago you'd have to go out in the hallways and look for yellow pages and see if there was a register for the motel, it might have a diagram, or you asked someone "Hey! Where's 945...?" It's the same thing when I talk with young Iraq and Afghanistan veterans. In fact there's a Major I was talking to the other day who's a couple blocks away, and he and his wife used to Skype and correspond and that's amazing! You take it for granted, but it's just amazing. Mail call, the chopper would come in with mail and everyone would run around to the chopper and some sergeant would yell "Jones! Johnson!... Frederick..." and then the guys who wouldn't get mail would walk away. And that's no different from the Revolution, or the Civil War or World War I, or World War II, and here we were in Vietnam crowding around a

helicopter would wait for mail. It's a pretty simple life. And what do we do now? [types on imaginary keyboard] Email! Seconds, Seconds!

**Timbers:** How did you feel when you got mail from home? Did it help you?

**Bock:** Oh sure, yeah! But again, kind of strained, you hear "oh I went to a part, did this... so and so got engaged..." and you're saying "Jesus Christ, look at this crap." [laughs] It made you feel good and at the same time you think "why am I over here and they are having all the fun?"

**Timbers:** What were your sisters doing during the war?

**Bock:** One was at Muhlenberg and Allison was in nursing school, yeah. Because they are three and six years younger... wait a minute, I guess Lane was still in high school and Allison was still in nursing school.

**Timbers:** So, then you said you were in Vietnam for a year, and then where did you go after that?

**Bock:** I was a little sick, so I went to Aberdeen Proving Grounds [Maryland]. I was asked to interview for a job as an aide, 'aide de camp' as they say in French, which is the assistant to a general. I had an interview, I was accepted. He was the Commanding General to the Army Missile Command at Red Stone Arsenal, Alabama which was headquartered with Wernher Von Braun Marshall Spaceflight Center. And the army, after World War II, were the missile experts and then when Kennedy directed a man on the moon, the civilian NASA side took over. But the army and NASA were very close together. So, I went down to Red Stone to work for this very very demanding, hardworking army major general. And I remember I still had cuts, we called them comealong vines, they are kind of prickly, nasty stuff that would grab your skin and I still had marks from them. Here I was sitting in a desk with Dr. Von Braun and another boss with my boss and I'm looking in and there and I'm looking at these scratches and I'm thinking, "oh my god in five weeks all of this has changed." And I had a brand-new Austin Healy, well. I ordered

an Austin Healy but it didn't come in, so I got a new Triumph 50, a little six cylinder sports car with British racing green, with wire wheels, with tan interior, and a high speed. It was a hot little car. I was driving around, life was good. Life was really good.

**Timbers:** What did you do down there? What were your responsibilities?

**Bock:** You're working as an administrative assistant, you're coordinating schedule, travel, working on personal correspondence. You are a uniformed executive assistant, you do everything you can to make his life easy. He'll say "Bill, I need to get ahold of so and so this morning, how about 10?" OK good. Get on the phone, do the coordinating. It would be like what President Riggs has. President Riggs might say, "Hey, how many students do we have from New Jersey?" well, someone's going to find that out for her. She's not going to go through the roster and look. That's the kind of stuff, but you also sit right next to people who are making big decisions and you learn how decisions are made. You're in the back of the room with a notebook taking notes. It's a pretty cool job. And you see them on tv, I don't know if you've seen pictures of these White House, but there's these guys wearing gold cords, they are in uniform wearing gold cords, and they are presidential aides. They are a little bit different because they are dealing with the military and the interactions with the president. And the gold cords are called aiguillettes and everything in the military has a purpose. Well, in the old days the Civil War, a general would have an aide and the aide would carry the map, and he'd carry the binoculars, and he'd do this that and the other. And he took care of the general's horse. So, when the two of them would ride up, the general would get off, the aide would grab his horse, and he would take this rope off his shoulder with a big spike, stick it in the ground and tie the horses to it, and then walk off with the general. So today that tradition is seen with the rope around the shoulder. So anytime you see a rope on the shoulder you know he's an aid, he is working with the general. If he comes up, you sort of, "do you need something?" or get out of his way because "he's got something to

do. He's not just hanging around. And that's one of the cool things about the military. Marine officers, on their hats. You know here's the top of the hat and there's a big red X on the top. Nobody can see it? Why do they have a red X on the top of their hat? Marines were the infantry on navy ships and they were up in the rigging firing away. The officer was on the deck coordinating the fire, so as they look down from one-hundred feet and there's a guy going like this [waves his arms], and he's got a red X on his hat, that's the guy you want to be looking at because he's telling you what to do. And unless you know that you just say, "well why do these guys have that on their hats?" [laughs].

**Timbers:** What was the experience of being an aide like for you? What did you learn about yourself or your skills?

**Bock:** Well, like I said, you're with a boss and he went on to become a deputy commander of US forces in Europe. So, I asked if I could go along and he said "fine," so I went along, and we went to Heidelberg. He was placed in a villa that used to belong to a Nazi big-wig and it was a huge beautiful home on the banks of the Neckar River in Heidelberg and it had the old portico where they brought the horses and carriages in. And there were 350,000 army troops in Europe and he was the second in command. He had a Jeep, and he had a Chrysler, and he had a helicopter and he had a fixed-wing aircraft, and he had a train! It was the coolest job in the world. He was all over the place and he'd say, 'next week I want to go to Berlin, and I want to do this, and I want to do that...I want to stop here....' So you'd set up the schedule and say, "hey General, tomorrow afternoon we need to leave at five, get on the train go to Nuremberg and have dinner with the Mayer and the such and such, then we'll get back in the train and we'll go to Berlin the next morning," I mean that's pretty cool [laughs and grins]. And I got to see and meet Henry Kissinger, obviously I didn't have dinner with him and play cards with him, but I shook his hand

because he was visiting. So that's was a really, really eye-opening experience. To travel in Europe and work with him, those were two incredible, incredible years.

**Timbers:** That's amazing! So, you were an executive aide for two years, then what did you do?

**Bock:** I left him, I went to Munich and worked an administration job in Munich. And I met my wife in Munich. Then I went to Fort Benjamin Harris in Indiana for nine months of schooling. And then I was sent to the Army War College up here in Carlisle, I was an Admin Officer. Valerie and I bought a 1796 stone farmhouse, thirteen acres, had a couple of horses, and a barn, and a pond, and a log cabin. We had a son born there. From there we were transferred to Japan, I was a liaison with the American Embassy in Tokyo. Spent three years there. And then was assigned to Alexandria, Virginia and I worked at the Headquarters. And then spent a year working on the fiftieth presidential inauguration, I was the Chief of the Special Plans Office, coordinating the support of 10,000 troops involved with President Reagan's second inauguration. And then I became the head of a computer agency that was responsible for the control of the twelve-million people entitled to military benefits and privileges. To make it real short, if you weren't in our system you didn't get medical care. Well, that meant you had to enroll, keep track of twelve-million people; their births, their deaths, their divorces, all these taxes changes. Because, you the taxpayer were paying for their care, if they were legitimately authorized. And that was a major, major, major operation. I did that for three years and then decided that twenty-two years in the army, we were happy and bought a home everything was looking good, and they wanted me to go back to Europe. I said, "hey, you know? I think it's time we shook hands and say goodbye." So, I was very busy, I mean we just condensed twelve years very quickly, but yeah that was... the last part of our life.

[Pulls out a large stack of photographs] That's us getting married, this was my best man, you can see it was a very informal wedding he was in Levi's. This guy, [pointing to a man in

uniform] lost his leg in Vietnam and he was a helicopter pilot Jim Kahn just absolutely great guy. And he would put signs up on the bulletin board, "Lost! One shoe!" [laughs], because he now only had one leg. And then one time we had a class on chemical, biological, radiological warfare and a very pretty little army lieutenant nurse came in and she was talking about atropine syrettes [a special kind of syringe], which are needles you can get. In other words, if there's a chemical attack or a terrorist attack you take this needle, put it in your leg, push the button and you're... insulated from this attack. Right? So, she was talking about this and how you use it and so on. And she says, "I've got one here with nothing but a few grams of purified water. Would anyone like to volunteer?" Jim raised his hand, so she said, "OK, what you do is you just punch it into your thigh and so and, and so forth." We're all looking so Jim takes it and [slams the table] pushes it in his side and the needle goes like this [bends his finger]. He said [laughs uncontrollably], "must be a bad one," and she just went [makes a surprised face]. [continues with the pictures] And that's our daughter down in Mount Vernon, I taught her how to ride. These are my two boys [pulls out a picture of two horses], that was a couple of years ago. He's the great-great-great grandson of Secretariat, great little horse... that's the one I ride all the time, but now I'm riding him. Chance and Prom King [he laughs] ... that's my dad, my son, and my daughter that was probably twenty years ago... that's my wife and son in Japan, I guess... and that's my son not having a good day [showing a picture of a little blond boy crying, he laughs and smiles]. He's a forty-one-year-old lawyer living in Cape Town... he was a pinup boy in Japan. He paid for his college education by doing photoshoots for clothing manufactures, yeah yeah. Because, blond hair, he was all over the place. And then he came home and found out he was just another blond kind, you know? This is my wife and Christian at Subic Bay in the Philippines... This one's in Japan, Valerie had just given birth. We have a farm up in Carlisle. That's our farm, and this our barn in Mount Vernon... and this is my son and daughter, he lives in Africa, and *that*



[pointing to a dark figure in the back] is a gorilla! You see the looks on their faces? They went to see Gorillas in the Mist, you know, Fossey? You know who I'm talking about.... And this is my wife riding a caribou in the Philippines. And these are my two boys [his horses] making up after fighting. And this is my wife's passport photo. And this is his [Christian's] passport photo. And this is my daughter who is an account executive, runs a hedge fund out in Malibu, neurosurgeon out in Chicago [point to a young boy in the picture], and that's my son he's in Africa. And this was '02, so my daughter was a senior at UVA, and he [Christian] was in law school. And this was me, Smedley, our dog, and my son [laughs] in a pond at Carlisle. I just grabbed them to show you what military family's lives were like.

**Timbers:** What was your wife doing in Germany when you met?

**Bock:** She worked for the Consulate in Munich. The embassy was in Bahn, but Munich's a pretty big, exciting city so they had a consulate there. And I met her there, you want to know how we met?

**Timbers:** Yes!

**Bock:** I was driving a Porsche, and I was very happy to be alive. I was in downtown Munich in an area called Schwabing, which is the... the nightclub area, like Georgetown and so on, and so forth. I had been to a couple bars and eh, hadn't done too well [laughs]. So, I was going home, and I pulled around the corner and I see this very attractive blonde in a short skirt, yeah leather skirt and so on. And she was putting Deutschmarks into a machine for a cup of coffee so I roll down the window of the Porsche and I say, "Fraulein, darf ich ihnen eine tasse kaffee bitte kaufen" [Miss, may I please buy you a cup of coffee?] and she said, "Jack, I can speak English better than you can!" So, I never bought her the coffee, but we did get together... so forty-four years later and I still haven't bought her any coffee [laughs].

**Timbers:** What an incredible story! How did you feel once the war ended?

**Bock:** Yeah, that's a good question. It was very clear by 1970 that this was a losing war.

Wearing a uniform, I remember two horrible days. One was opening up *The Stars and Stripes* in Germany and seeing the picture of dead students at Kent State and I just could not believe that National Guardsmen had fired M1s at American students protesting the war. The sinking feeling in my stomach, I can just feel to this day. We were sitting with the General, having breakfast at an immaculate table eating our scrambled eggs or whatever and Steward brings in *Stars and Stripes* and I thought "oh my god." The second bad day was hearing about My Lai [massacre against unarmed citizens] and again I couldn't believe this was happening. I just could not, could not comprehend it. And, my experience in Vietnam, we were very careful with civilian casualties. We did *not* fire. And to hear that this had happened was just appalling. So, it was an internal disgust. It would be like being at Gettysburg and graduating with have a 3.8 average or whatever, graduating Summa Cum Laude or whatever, and then finding out five years later that the other three people bought their grades. It's the same like, "What? How could this happen in this college that I love? How could this happen?" It was that same feeling. It took a long time to get over that and the disgust, the shame, and at the same time knowing not everyone was a captain [Ernst] Medina or a Lieutenant [William] Calley. Yeah, did people get killed accidentally, absolutely. But, to hear of the excesses, the horror, that was hard. That was really, really hard. When [President Jimmy] Carter pardoned, amnestied all the guys who went to Canada, I didn't have any problem with that. Some people did, but I didn't have any problem with that. Since then, I've come to the realization and the conclusion that hey, it was a bad war, that we should never have been involved in. I have no issues with the antiwar movement. I do have any issue with antiwar protesters taking it out on the young men and women who went over there to fight. They didn't go over there because they wanted to, they went over there because they were ordered to. And they served their country, some well, some not so well. But to take out

that hate spitting, which I think is overblown a lot. To take it out on the young, mostly young men and a few young women, that was absolutely wrong. That was wrong. You take it out on your elected officials that sent you over there. And, we've seen a total reversal with that in the wars of Iraq and Afghanistan which troops come home, and they are applauded. They are meet in Maine. Welcome Flights. But people come out, and you know, you've been on an eighteen-hour flight from Baghdad and you get off, you're sleepy eyed, and there are a bunch of old farts clapping. It makes you feel good. And that didn't happen to Vietnam vets. I had one friends who graduated from Gettysburg who came back from Vietnam, went to law school, and never told a soul that he'd been an officer or that he'd been in Vietnam. He never told a soul [banging the table with each syllable]. If I'm at all bitter, then yeah, I'm also bitter about the lies the administration told and the Gulf of Tonkin incident, [Robert] McNamara knowing that the war was lost in '65, and in '68 we lost 16,800 men. So those are the things I look back on and am very unhappy about.

**Timbers:** What impact did your service have on you?

**Bock:** Oh, I've been out of the service for thirty years and three months, but it certainly shaped my life. Many, many, many good memories about it. It opened my eyes, allowed me to travel to thirty more countries and live in four more countries. And I meet some great people who I still in contact with. I've been skiing in The Alps, and I've climbed glaciers in Norway, and skin-diving in the Aegean, and taking a camel-caravan in Ethiopia. I mean those are cool experiences. And, they talk about the army, fun travel and adventure, well there is some. You know, Elizabeth born in Tokyo, Christian living in Japan as a kid. Those were good times. All over Germany and so on. Yeah it influenced me a great deal, I don't dwell on it. But, yeah, a real positive experience.

**Timbers:** How, in your opinion as a veteran, would you want the Vietnam War to be viewed in society today?

**Bock:** That the United States never commit its young men and women into a war, unless they fully understand why, and what we should hope to gain out of that war. We still haven't learned that lesson. It was very clear in World War II, what the mission was, we can boil it down to "save the world from fascism". You land on the shores of Normandy and you move to Berlin to squelch the enemy. It's very clear. And, to avenge the attack on Pearl Harbor and to restore peace in Asia. Those are clear objective. What was our objective in Vietnam? We don't know. What was the objective in Iraq? We don't know. What's our objective in Afghanistan? Ehh, we don't have terrorist to have another place to such and such. But we are committing young men and women and they are still dying, and we don't have a clear understanding. What's worse is that we've learned to accept it. We've learned to accept it, and that's bad. We've learned to accept gun violence. You know thirteen dead in California. I heard some women say, "I'm tired of hearing our thoughts and prayers with you," that's bullshit. You know, we have to come to grips with this issue in our society and it's the same with the applied violence of warfare. And I think we've got this dedication coming up and we are committed to it.

Look at these faces [holds up a packet of Gettysburg graduates who lost their lives in Vietnam, featured on the memorial]. Young Stephen Doane, this is an early one...I've got the pictures of these guys in uniform... you can see how young they were. Rick Bruchell [Edgar] he stepped on a mine on the forth of June 1966, killed instantly. I got commissioned right across the street the next day. He served in JFK's funeral cortege and everyone one of them. [flips the page to show another veteran], President of his fraternity. John Colestock, he's brother of Sue class of '67. Jim Ewing [James], Navy Seal. Andy Muns [Andrew], the Navy declared him a deserter because he failed to show up to his ship, his sister took thirty-three years and proved to them, the Navy, that he didn't desert and that she found the murderer. And the Navy prosecuted the murder, resorted him to active duty, and in 2001 an empty coffin was buried in Arlington

National Cemetery. Look at that one! Bob Morris [Robert], that was Sue's husband, got killed in Spain. Chuck Richardson [Charles], shot down in his... Birddog in 1968. Andy Marsh [Andrew] died in Thailand in a crash. Dan Whipps [Daniel] died in Spain in a crash. This is of our presenter, Steve Tracy. George Callan, he got a silver star and died in front of his platoon in Kanto, his son and his wife are going to be here tomorrow. Steve Warner, demonstrated against the war, drafted out of Yale Law School, went to Vietnam, took amazing pictures of the soldiers who fought and did the dying. He got killed in ambush, left his \$10,000, SGLI Serviceman's Group Life Insurance, to the college, and about four big boxes about half the size of this table. And they laid here for twenty years till a professor and a couple of students opened them up in the early nineties and said, "what's this?" Well, beautiful pictures. The Smithsonian heard about it, sent to around the United States, and many of them are up in the Special Collections section of the library...an antiwar protester and he's left a legacy for hundreds of years. A book was written about his by a federal judge, [Arthur] Amchan? No, I can't remember his first name. Amchan. But anyways, federal judge, called *Killed in Action* about him [*Killed in Action: The Life And Times Of Sp4 Stephen H. Warner, Draftee, Journalist And Anti-war Activist* by Arthur J. Amchan]. And Doane spent just a semester at Gettysburg, he was a little rough academically. Went to Vietnam, received a silver star for his heroism. Seven of his men pinned down, takes a grenade throws himself into the bunker and kills himself to save his men. WOW. Medal of honor recipient.

And you know these are the guys that walked this campus with us, they are the people that I remember and the country, the nation, should remember and I wrote this and it's going to be on the brass plaque next to the monument. ["Do not view these names engraved in cold black granite as indistinct figures from a very different time—a decade of conflict which raged generations before you were even born. Look at them and see them as students very much like

yourselves—our classmates, who lived, loved and studied here at Gettysburg College and then went off to serve their Nation and died.”] These are all these memories of these guys... and that quote [showing the proof of the memorial itself] came from Archibald MacLeish, Pulitzer prize winning American poet. He served in World War I. His brother died in World War I. And on November of 1941, Veteran’s Day, which would be a little less than a month before Pearl Harbor he wrote a poem entitled, “To the Young Dead Soldiers” and this is a phrase out of it, and it applies in 1941 to the young men who died twenty years plus before that, as it applies today. “We leave you our deaths: give them their meaning. We were young. We have died. Remember us.” The legacy of Vietnam is not to forget their sacrifice.