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Q. When did you first go to Vietnam? What was the date?

A. Aug. 1967.

Q. How old were you then?

A. 20 years old.

Q. ~~Were you in school here?~~

A. I had finished my freshman year ^{at Morehead State} in June of 1966. ~~I was drafted in Sept. 1966.~~ ^{This September I was drafted} I was in the army ~~from Sept. 1966 to Sept. of 1968~~ ^{for two years,} and one of them was in Vietnam.

Q. ~~Was it a shock to get drafted after one year?~~

A. ~~No,~~ I knew ^{that summer I would be drafted} about it before I came ^{was at Morehead} to school. When I came down here for a post summer session course, while I was here I got a draft notice. [My mother called and she took it back up to the draft board and they told her to tell him to come and see us and I got a deferment for one year.]

Q. ~~Being in school did not keep you deferred, did it?~~

A. ~~No, no.~~

Q. ~~How did you feel about being drafted? Did you feel frustrated?~~

A. ~~No,~~ not really. I think I was always patriotic. I ~~think~~ ^{I meant to report} it was something that was inevitable at the time. That I was going to be drafted and I think that month was the most people that had ever been drafted, 86,000 people. ^{I was going to Vietnam to stop aggression. That was good enough for me.}

Q. ~~That was in Sept. 1966.~~

A. ~~Yes.~~

Q. ~~You weren't volunteering.~~

A. I ~~didn't volunteer but I didn't refuse either.~~ Had I known then what I know now. . .

Q. ~~You would have been better off if you had volunteered, is that what you're saying?~~

A. ~~No, no.~~ I would have been better off not going.

Q. Of course, the war was just beginning to heat up then, did you have any idea of why or what the war was all about?

A. I don't know if I didn't follow it.

Q. Did you watch it on the TV

A. mostly newspapers.

Q. Why did you think you were being sent to Vietnam?

A. To stop communist aggression.

Q. This is what your country is asking you to do?

A. That's what I thought.

Q. Where did they send you for your basic training?

A. Ft. Hood, Texas.

Q. When you finished that when did you go?

A. I stayed there for the first year and then Vietnam the second year.

My basic training ^{in Texas} was at Fort Hood, Texas. I don't know why they put me in a tank

AIT

- Q. What was your training at Ft. Hood, did they get you into the infantry right then?
- A. My basic and AIT training was in tanks.
- Q. How did you get in to the tanks?
- A. That's just the way my scores came out and that's what they needed. I think they're saying now that there is lot more manipulation, almost down to the individual than they were aware of ~~at the time~~.
- Q. I hadn't heard that. You mean there was political influence?
- A. Yes. I'm trying to remember where I read this. It was in Time or Newsweek. This was somebody's theory.
- Q. How long ago did you read this?
- A. Maybe a year ago.
- Q. That would be something interesting to follow up?
- A. I know where it was. I read it in the book My Lai. I was 10 miles north of there and it occurred while I was there.
- Q. What was your job as a tankman? *My job was called loader*
- A. It's called the loader. ~~It was an M-48 tank.~~ I trained on a M-60. The M-60 was a little more advanced.
- Q. How much training did you have before you went over, about a year?
- A. Not quite a year, 7 months.
- Q. Do you think you were ready then? *Was trained for not quite a year*
- A. Yes, ~~yes we were.~~ *They* were handpicking ^{ed} this unit, ^{from} people who were serving all over the world. Particular M.O.S.'s, sergeants, people who had served in Korea. They put the unit together. When everybody got there, about 800, we started to go out and do maneuvers in Texas, which was similar to Vietnam, as far as the heat.
- ? Q. The Americal was an armored division?
- A. Well, I don't know. We came out of the 1st Armored Division, but we weren't it was one of the first units to use tanks and armored personnel carriers in that terrain.
- Q. ~~You were on your way to Vietnam in Aug 1967.~~
- A. ~~We went on a troop ship.~~ *We flew from Texas to Oakland, California, to get on a ship. Took 11 days to get to Vietnam*
- Q. ~~You were with the same guys all the time, then?~~
- A. I was with 25 guys I had met in basic training. We stayed together the entire two years. *Some didn't survive*
- Q. ~~Did you all survive.~~
- A. ~~No, several didn't.~~
- Q. Where did the ship, were you on one ship? Were the tanks with you?
- A. No, a month before we left, we put the tanks on a train at Ft. Hood and they were put on a ship at Beaumont.

he landed at

Q. ~~Where did you land in Vietnam?~~

A. Chu Lai. That's about 30 miles south of Danang.

Q. ~~What was your first feelings when you got there? Tell me a little about that.~~

A. We were pretty well trained, but scared. *By the way* We had looked at the country for half a day because we came over on ship. It was like World War II, everybody on deck, I thought it was going to be a beach invasion. But they had a dock and brought us right up to it and then loaded us on trucks.

Q. ~~What was your first impression?~~

A. It was scary, the unknown. I just didn't know what to expect. People were different. I remember coming into the land. We came into Danang on a big troop ship and then they put us on LSD's and took us down from Danang to Chu Lai. When we were going down there we passed a place on the land that was jungle, and you said, "Boy, look at that." It was just like the jungle you see on TV. But Chu Lai was pretty well settled.

Q. ~~Some of the guys talked about the heat. Did it get to you?~~

A. *The heat* It was terrible. I had a heat rash from the day I got there until the day I left. After a while you just ignored it.

Q. ~~What caused it do you think?~~

A. Just not used to it.

Some guys complained about the smell but

Q. ~~Some of the guys talked about the smell?~~

A. I looked at that as just part of the culture. A lot of our people were narrow-minded. These people must be something less because the American way is the best way and these people didn't live like us.

Q. ~~How were the people living that you saw?~~

A. Once you got past a pretty good size village, about 250 people, that was civilized. But after that, plumbing was non-existent.

Some guys got the impression the Vietnamese were less intelligent, but

Q. ~~The effect on all the Americans was one of looking down on them?~~

A. Yes, ~~I thought so. Being less intelligent.~~

Q. ~~Did you feel that way yourself?~~

A. No, ~~I don't think so.~~ *I* never really had any feelings about any of them.

Q. ~~Did you have much to do with any of the people?~~

A. ~~I did some.~~ I like to meet people, *so I got to know some of them.*

Q. ~~Tell me about some of them. Did you try to carry on a conversation with any of them?~~

A. I met a man, I think we were on Hill 10. There was a man who came around with his family and we would pay him *and his wife* to fill up our sand bags, pay him a penny apiece. *the* They would do a thousand a day. *the* They wanted American money.

Q. ~~Is that about all you had to do with them?~~

A. Yea, ~~they worked for us.~~ I went to Hill 10 several times. We were there for about 2 months. Three or four times we ate with them. They had fish and greens.

Q. ~~You thought they were pretty nice people?~~

A. Well, yes. It was their country.

Q. ~~Could they talk with you in English?~~

A. There was always somebody in the village who could speak English.

Q. ~~What seemed to be their attitude towards Americans?~~

A. They were glad to have us there for the money, but it seems most of them resented us there fighting their war. That was the impression I got.

Q. ~~They resented that?~~

A. ~~Yes~~ In every village there was a lot of people who just ignored you and they were probably the real nationalists. It was like, "I don't like you, but we can co-exist." And then there were some people who were always helpful.

Q. How did you feel about that? You were over there helping these people. Were you a little put out that they didn't appreciate you more?

A. I didn't ^{really} personally because all the people I came into contact were friendly and appreciative. It was different in the bigger cities.

Q. ~~You didn't experience that personally.~~

A. ~~No~~, it was all small villages where I was. Chu Lai was even rural. Not as big as Elliottville. I remember a place called Tam Ky. It was like going to Owingsville. It was big enough to have a town square and a policeman, but that was the whole town. We went into a restaurant there and it was one of my first experiences, the owner of the place you could tell he was apprehensive. He wanted us to come in, but he was apprehensive. I don't know if somebody had wrecked the place before or what.

Q. ~~How could you tell?~~

A. ~~He was just a little teary.~~

Q. ~~He must have had a bad experience?~~

A. I guess. Somewhere along the line his family came in. We weren't wild or anything and he served us a dinner. We didn't know what we were eating. They advertised hamburger. But we got whatever he was eating. It cost us about 80¢ for the whole meal. We just had a nice time.

Q. ~~Did this happen early in your time over there?~~

A. ~~Yeah, probably in Nov. or Dec. 1967.~~

Q. Did you have anything to do with the ARVN's?

A. Our unit had ARVN soldiers that worked with us. We had several interpreters.

Q. ~~What did you think of those guys?~~

A. I was impressed with most of them. It's like anything else. The people who are sincere about what they're doing do a better job most of the time. And it was just like our soldiers. The good soldiers were the ones who were conscientious and there were others who weren't. Most of the ARVN's had a better idea of what the war was about than we did.

Q. ~~How long were you with the ARVN's?~~

A. We were with them the whole year.

Q. Did they fight with you?

A. They might be on the same operation with us, but would be sweeping in a different direction. Everybody was aware of where they were in case they got into trouble we could help.

- Q. But the general feeling about the ARVN's were that they were good soldiers, knew what they were doing and they had a good idea of why they were fighting?
- A. For the most part, but you have to remember that there weren't too many of them.
- Q. How many are you talking about?
- A. In our unit, they might have been 10-15.
- Q. Were these men from the villages?
- A. Yes, but they were regular army, stationed right there.
- Q. When do you get into your tanks?
- A. The tanks were down at the beach and we found our tanks. Then we were there 3 or 4 days and a guy on an APC got malaria and I had to replace him. I became the right flank gunner on a track for the first 4 months.
- Q. What did you think of those vehicles?
- A. They were uncomfortable, but pretty effective?
- Q. They tell me the guys never wanted to get inside them?
- A. Well, that was the bad thing. Later on, after I was there awhile, we were fighting regular NVA soldiers. They had RPG's, like a bazooka that was armor-piercing. There was several times if you hit a land mine with an APC it wasn't good to be in them. There were a lot of things flying around. It was dangerous.
- Q. Now that you've got this assignment as a gunner on an armored personnel carrier, what do you do, go into action against the enemy?
- A. We went through the village of Chu Lai right up Highway 1 about a mile and that's where our headquarters were, it was called Fat City. That's where the squadron commander was. We had A, B, and C troops. A troop went to Fat City and they were there for or five days and then dispersed them. Then we came to Fat City and they had structured buildings and a firing range. When we were first there we only had a couple of missions because the enemy was further away in the hills.
- Q. You didn't have much contact with them?
- A. No, not early. In the year I was there, the unit was engaged in eleven major battles. The first major battle was the first week in Sept. about three weeks after we got there. The first time we had anybody killed or wounded.
- Q. What were your impressions of that? Describe it.
- A. What happened was that the enemy was bright enough to know that they were not going to be able to confront a platoon of armored personnel carriers. They weren't going to go head to head. What they would try to do is get us off the vehicles. There weren't any infantry troops around. And once you got off the vehicles then you were on their ground. What we were doing was chasing one of their units into a real dense area where if you went all the way through it you'd come to the ocean. Half woods, half jungle. You could only go so far in there and then we were told to dismount. So everybody on each APC becomes an infantryman at that instant. We got off the tracks and about the first fifty feet was clear. What they had done was dig holes just deep enough to stand in. They did it in a circle. Then they covered the hole up and had bamboo sticks and twigs and sod covering it up and they would stand down in them and when the infantryman came walking by; I think the first man I saw get killed there was Francis Schwartz from New York. When he walked by they shot him in the foot and when he fell down they shot him in the head. They're gonna get detected but they kill 4 or 5 people real quick. And it causes panic, especially with green troops. We were well trained, but training and real combat are two different things. You can simulate a war as much as you want to, but you can't simulate the feeling.

- Q. What was the feeling like? Describe it. What were you carrying, an M-16?
- A. Yes, I had an M-16 and because I was a tank crewman I had a 45. I don't know, it's kind of like the eye of a hurricane, that moment when you know that something's going on. I don't know if I can describe it. If I thought about it. It's exciting, but that can be misconstrued. It's not exciting like watching the basketball team to to the NCAA tournament. The adrenalin flowed.
- Q. Were you walking along a path?
- A. No, we were going on a line across.
- Q. Did you know you were going to walk into something?
- A. No, we had no idea.
- Q. You didn't realize what they were doing to you?
- A. The unit that we followed in there probably got down in holes and that was the whole deal.
- Q. So this is a lesson you learned the first time.
- A. Oh, absolutely. You get that close to death and you get humble real quick. Then its frustrating. You say these people are really doing this, they're really shooting. They're using live bullets. You grow up in about a week. Even a mature person becomes more mature.
- Q. What was your part in that first battle?
- A. I was on the second line and when they entered the thick part of the jungle, the guy who got killed, his best friend went in to get him and he got hit too. What happened was, we were starting to go in there, in fact, one of the times I was really close to dying and I didn't for some reason. We walked in there and I was next to walk in that same area. And the medic went down there and they had pulled this guy out. He had been hit in the chest and the medic looked at me and said, "Will you help me?" I stopped to help the medic and that's why I didn't up in there.
- Q. How did you feel seeing this guy die?
- A. Well, it was, I tell you. I don't know, it's just a helpless feeling. It's a person one minute it's nothing. When they dragged the first guy out, I remember. It's not only you have to be in this war, but they ask you to do things like going to get your friends body. That's part of it. After the first week, it became second nature. They dragged him out of there and over to a track that had the back door there and it looked like he had a quarter of his head was blown off. The foot would wasn't that bad, but it was the head wound that killed him.
- Q. About 4 men killed?
- A. Three died and another was wounded badly.
- Q. It didn't last long?
- A. No, about thirty minutes.
- Q. Did you hit any of them.
- A. No. When we finally found out where they were. Some of them escaped but some of them were caught in their holes.

Q. How many of the enemy do you think was there to begin with?

A. Probably 15.

Q. Against how many?

A. 70 or 80. One other thing. When they brought that first dead guy out, Frances. You could do anything to him you wanted. Throw him around, kick him around. I remember that was one of my first impressions of death. He became like a doll. I'll always remember that. It was so futile.

Q. Did you know him well?

A. No, I remember him.

Q. That was your first battle?

A. Yes, that occurred between Highway 1 and the ocean. The next time it was back in the mountains. We were chasing regular NVA infantry, that had been spotted and got a call, we were supposed to go further up Highway 1, but they called us up and said no we were going over there. I forget what they called it. I forget the battle. The infantry unit had come in and fired on army personnel across Highway 1 and then retreated into the hills. They called us, we were chasing them for an entire day.

Q. Were you in your vehicles?

A. Yes. They called us and we chased them and it was the first time that I saw that they buried their people alive. When they had wounded they would take them along. And then if it became inconvenient they would bury them if they were still living.

Q. How do you know that?

A. Because the graves were shallow, just barely covered.

Q. How do you know they were alive?

A. Because we saw them. We took the dirt off and the people were still breathing. One guy was shot in the shoulder and the leg and he was still breathing.

Q. Was he dying?

A. He was suffocating, but he wasn't dying from the wounds. In fact, they tried to get information out of him. It was right at the base of a mountain. When we got in there, there were fires still burning, food cooking. They just had evacuated. They had wounded people and there were 3 or 4 graves around.

Q. That was the battle. You were chasing them. Was this the search and destroy?

A. Yes, that's what we did. When we first got there, like the first week, they knew we would not come into contact with any enemy, but they sent us out to search. It scared us to death, but it was like training. They knew nobody was out there. The whole country had enemies as far as I knew, which wasn't true. Geographically, they had farmers by day and soldiers by night, but you didn't know who they were. But normally you could walk around in any village and do what you liked. The enemy, the Vietcong and NVA, were organized and had headquarters out in the mountains.

Q. But you would have to go out and get them?

A. Yeah, they would come in and attack a village.

Q. How did you think about fighting them from vehicles? Did it work out for you?

A. No, it doesn't seem.

- Q. Were they adapted to that kind of fighting or were they useless?
- A. They were almost useless because you go through a rice paddy with a 52 ton vehicle you would get bogged down and we spent a lot of time digging tanks and tracks out of the mud. The time I spent during the monsoons in 1967 I was more of an infantryman than anything else. And that was easier. Because there was only you and your own equipment. On a tank you had extra equipment to take care of. Everybody had to do maintenance. And you get stuck in the mud and you were a sitting duck. If they could get close enough with their mortars, they'd blow you up.
- Q. I suppose they did a few times.
- A. Yes, yes they did. They were always trying.
- Q. So you spent a lot of time as a soldier with a rifle.
- A. Yes.
- Q. How were you organized then in squads or platoons?
- A. We didn't abandon the vehicles. We stayed in one area. If they discovered the vehicles weren't right for the terrain, they just took them out. They were used for transportation mostly.
- Q. So it became foot soldier against foot soldier, right?
- A. Yes.
- Q. Your job was to go out and find them.
- A. Yeah. We went out of 7 man patrols. There was always a patrol leader. I was the M-60 machine gunner. Somebody always walked point. I was generally second in line. It depended on where you were. If there were a lot of booby traps, then you had a point.
- Q. When would you go out on these patrols?
- A. At night, after dark and come back before morning.
- Q. What did you think of that kind of operation?
- A. It was silent, no communication. We were sent out a lot as a listening post, stay in a certain spot. Engage the enemy if they got close enough but mostly to listen. If the enemy was coming in your area, then you could shoot. Let me tell you something real quick, the most miserable night I've ever spent in my life. It was monsoon season, rained all the time. We were living in hooches, almost like a neighborhood. We would do patrols at night and during the day we would do what we wanted. It had rained all day, it was just miserable. We knew we had to go on patrol. They put us in the back of a track and it would take us as far as it could and then let us out. We would walk for another 500 or a thousand meters. Then the track would go back to base camp. I remember we were all down there getting ready to get in this track and I thought about letting everybody out behind the mess hall and not go out that night because it was so miserable. And then when we got there I got right behind the driver. We got there and set up an L-shaped patrol, right on the dikes. I sat with my legs crossed, Indian style, and the water was in my lap. It rained all night long and hard. I remember sitting there and the temperature had dropped and it felt cold. I had on long johns, two pairs of pants, rain pants, 2 or 3 shirts, field jacket, helmet, gloves. I was soaked to the skin. Couldn't see 5 feet. My machine gun was submerged in water. And that's the way we stayed all night. Didn't do a thing. Couldn't lay down, couldn't sleep. That's the worst night in my life. We thought there was no way the enemy was dumb enough to come out in that weather.

Q. How many hours?

A. From 10 at night until 5 or 5:30 in the morning.

Q. You did a lot of that, didn't you.

A. Yes.

Q. You did a lot of searching, but very little destroying.

A. Right.

Q. Did it become frustrating.

A. It seemed like it was futile. A lot of time and money spent. Didn't get any results.

Q. Did you get discouraged?

A. Oh, yeah.

Q. Was the morale low?

A. It was in a lot of infantry units because people didn't necessarily train together and they were thrown together and didn't know each other. Our advantage was that we had been together for a year. Our morale was better. I don't think we were as discouraged, but frustrated.

Q. Did you get angry?

A. Yeah. Whenever somebody was killed or wounded, I think is when you felt the most frustration. To watch people, especially when people die and you are limited in how you can react. You can't just jump out of the fox hole and fire at the Germans 300 meters away. That wasn't how it was, they would be gone. That's what was frustrating. It wasn't necessarily good friends, either, just a human life. It was such a waste.

Q. You remember the guys in your squad pretty well? How long did you stay together?

A. about 2½ or 3 months.

Q. Do you remember them now?

A. Well, as a matter of fact, the sergeant who was the leader of the patrol, he was a former student here in 1961. He was on a football scholarship. His name was Robert Thurston from Portsmouth, Ohio. He was an E-6. The platoon sergeant was also a former student here from Olive Hill. His name was Don Gilliam. He was here in 1951. He had been in 16 years. Thurston had a harder time than the rest of us because he was overweight. He was a good soldier.

Q. I never heard of three guys from the same school in the same patrol.

A. They were picked because they were specialists.

Q. Did those two guys survive?

A. As far as I know. We didn't get rotated as much as the other units. Most of us stayed a whole year together. Thurston left the country. Gilliam is retired and lives in West Point, Ky.

Q. Do you ever hear from him.

A. No.

Q. Who were the other guys in the patrol?

A. I'm trying to remember. One guy was from New York State. He was a big guy. Farmer type. He preferred the winter and talked about camping when he came back. There was a guy from Pennsylvania. He was the other machine gunner. This guy who carried my ammo was from Philadelphia. He was about 6'2" and weighed 140 pounds.

Q. That was the seven of you?

A. We always had a medic. I can't remember him. There was somebody else who carried a M-79.

Q. It's kind of remarkable that you all survived.

A. As far as I know we did.

Q. Were you wounded?

A. No, I was never wounded.

Q. You got through in one piece?

A. I suffered wounds as a result of the war, but not a direct result. I was backing up an APC where there hooches were lined up. Thurston told me to move the vehicle. The latch to the driver's compartment wasn't closed and I didn't have my helmet on. And the hatch fell down and hit me on the head and I bit through my lip. Another time we were on a hill and ran into units of the NVA. There were 2 artillery units and they put us on the perimeter. Every day somebody had to clean out the outhouses and burn it. This was one of the first times we had new people. One day the sergeant told me to take this new guy and go on this detail. So he and I went. I asked him if he knew where the fuel point was. They had diesel fuel and JP-4 fuel, which the jet planes used. I told him to get 5 gallons of diesel and he came back with JP-4 and sprinkled it on. I got down there on the edge to light it and it exploded in my face. I got 2nd degree burns. Wasn't really that bad. I never got hurt in combat.

Q. You were in eight major valleys?

A. This one particular day was the worst battle I was in. I remember going out a couple of miles with infantry units. They would ride out on our tracks for so far. We went to one area across a small river and stayed there as a blocking force because they thought the enemy was in a particular place. What happened was the NVA had come down and dug into the mountain and they have 2 horseshoe shaped tunnels at the base of the mountain and they were underground. They were in there. This infantry unit walked right in there. They called in gunships and the first one was shot down. They called us to come over there. What happened was two trucks came in first. On the left was rice paddies and the mountains were on the right. It looked like an old country lane, but they had one tunnel dug under the lane and a heavy track would cave in. I was in the tank and the gunner, he was always on a tank broken down and hadn't seen any action. We closed the hatches and were sitting in there and the tank commander said we were stuck and going to have to do something. The fighting had slowed down some. This was an ambush. The infantry unit was 200 meters to our front. Another guy came on the radio and said an RPG round was landing near you. So we got out. I had an M-79 and dropped it and never even stopped to get it. The second platoon came up. I ran over to the nearest track but a medic was working on two wounded guys and I couldn't get in. So me and another guy went around the back and we saw an enemy soldier getting up in this ditch. It was that old confrontation, we didn't know what to do. I was there almost 7 months before I saw an enemy soldier, you actually came eyeball to eyeball.

Q. How far away was he?

A. About the length of this building, maybe a little less. I didn't shoot at him and he didn't shoot at me. He had his weapon ready.

Q. You didn't have any instinct to shoot him?

A. Well, I didn't have any weapon. I had a pistol on my hip, but I didn't remember it. We turned around and ran back to another track. The tank commander had gone to another tank. We had lost our troop commander, he had been shot in the stomach. The infantry had about 18 of their 25 guys killed the first barrage. We could see where the enemy was over at the base of the hill shooting. For some reason, this Captain started running at them shooting his pistol. He got killed and we retrieved him.

Q. What did you think of the officers you had?

A. We had some advantages because we trained together. The Lt. graduated 2nd in his class from West Point. When we heard he was coming we thought he would be a turkey but he was one of the best we had, a really nice guy. We had good officers and bad officers. The man who replaced our Lt. who got shot and sent to Japan, it seems was from an OVC school. He had taken ROTC. The second day he gathered all the men in the platoon and introduced himself. He stood on top of one of the tracks and showed us these two books. He said he knew all about this war because he had read about it. We had a West Point man who had identified with us and didn't hold his rank over us, and here comes this new guy with a really bad attitude, we were subordinates. But he was a subordinate because we were veterans of the war. There were about 60 people there and all but 2 or 3 walked away. I knew more about it because I had been there 6 months. After awhile a couple of the old sergeants set him straight. He didn't last long. I think he was only there a couple of months. He went to headquarters.

Q. It seems to me the NVA gave you a hard time?

A. Oh, yeah. They'd come down the Ho Chi Minh trail as part of a big offensive. Maybe 2 or 3 days before this incident and they told us they were going to have a B-52 strike. We were about 2 or 3 miles from Laos, and the Ho Chi Minh trail was about a mile and a half into Laos. They had 2 B-52's from Bangkok. They were dropping 2 thousand pound bombs about 4 miles from us, the other side of a small mountain. I could see the glow and it shook our vehicle. It was a memorable night. It was so destructive that I remembered I felt sorry for the enemy, because they were within a mile of it. It was like a nuclear explosion. It was that kind of power. You could hear them in the distance. It was awesome. That was one time I was thankful the enemy didn't have the firepower that we had.

Q. Somebody said that if they would have had the same firepower. . .

A. They would have won. I'm not so sure they didn't win.

Q. Why do you say that?

A. I'm not knocking any of our units. There were a lot of inner city people and drop-outs. We engaged an enemy that was better. They were in their back yard. They didn't have a heat rash year around. They didn't have diarrhea. They could lay down and go to sleep. We couldn't. It was their war. They were well-trained, especially the NVA units. They used women. Even the Vietcong held their own, they were fighters.

- Q. We were fighting their war. Did you ever get the feeling that was the wrong way to fight it?
- A. Well, yeah. More and more futile to chase the enemy and they're dug in and they kill 10 people before you can find them. What was the sense of it? You take a hill and then left it. As far as the overall picture, I don't think the communist government of North Vietnam was too concerned.
- Q. Do you think we could have changed the tactics and won the war? A lot of guys said we didn't even try to win it.
- A. That was part of the futility?
- Q. Who were you blaming for this?
- A. Well, the only ones we were aware of was the generals. It was only after I came back and read a lot about it that I became aware of the politicians being directly involved and as far as the White House, Lyndon Johnson. The only ones I could blame was the high ranking officers. A lot of them would come out just so they could be in a battle zone and get some medals. We were in contact with a lot of officers and we would ask them what's going on.
- Q. What would they say to you?
- A. We're trying to win the war, son. Communist aggression. But that didn't justify it. If I died defending my home, that's something a little more tangible. But what did we do over there?
- Q. Were you having that feeling at the time?
- A. Yeah. Those feelings occurred when we came back from a mission and somebody had gotten killed. There was always a letdown feeling. They talk about how people in Vietnam drank a lot and used drugs. . .
- Q. Do you think there was a lot of that?
- A. It was much more than the American people will ever know. What else can you do to live with this reality. You go out with a good friend and he don't come back. When I was there it was mostly beer and marijuana. The hard drugs were mostly used in the seventies. They didn't stop us from using any of it.
- Q. You got all you wanted?
- A. Well, if you were in the field you got what was left over. The people in headquarters got most of it first. It was like, we weren't really escaping, we were trying to forget it. There was an advantage in that you were only good friends for a couple of years. If somebody was killed you could go home and forget about it. It wasn't like losing one of your lifelong friends. The pot smoking was about 95%. The beer drinking was just a beverage. Officers smoked it too. At the time it was a crutch. It was the frustration of it.
- Q. You never felt at any time that you were a winner, always a loser?
- A. Right. You go to a place where the enemy knows it like the back of his hand and don't know anything. They never stopped and said this isn't working out.
- Q. You must have been glad to get out of it?
- A. I came up with a hearing loss, 10%. Not enough to send me home, but enough to get me out of the field. The last month and a half I was a jeep driver at division headquarters for a civil affairs officer. That last month and a half was a load off my shoulders. Had my own jeep.

Q. How did you get your hearing loss?

A. The infantry that had got hit stayed out all night and we went out the next day to pick them up. When we came out we were going past the mess tent. I was sitting on a tank and the mess sergeant said to send somebody over and he would give us some hot dogs. Where I was we were on the perimeter and some people were on watch and I got elected to go get the hot dogs. This was the hill where the artillery was. They have a fire command and I was carrying the hot dogs and walked by and didn't hear the fire command and I was right behind the 8 inch guns when they fired and it punctured my ear drum. I got to goof off for about 3 weeks.

Q. When you got back to the states when did you land?

A. Ft. Lewis, Washington. That was in Sept. 1968.

Q. Then you were right out the army?

A. I was discharged in 36 hours. They took our papers and then we went to a mess hall and had a big meal. Most of the people I came back with were the ones I went with.

