

Jay Murphy

2/24/84

Q. Dr. Hanrahan

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Q. When did you go to Vietnam?

A. June of 1969.

Q. Where were you at the time?

A. I'd quit high school and was working in Georgia in Albany and got a draft notice and had to go. I turned 19 in October and got my draft notice in November.

Q. What did you think about getting drafted?

A. Well, I wasn't very tickled about it. My father was a career man in the Marine Corp so I was prepared and used to the military, but I didn't want to go.

Q. Did you feel that it was a little unfair that they selected you?

A. No. I was along with a lot of it, being selected. I was just hoping that they'd pass me up but they didn't.

Q. What did you think of the war at the time, this was in June of 1969. You didn't know you were going to Vietnam, but you were in the army and you know there's a war on in Vietnam, had you been following the war at all?

A. Not really that close. I'd watch it on the news at night. I didn't really understand anything about it, why we were there, or any of that. I really didn't pay much attention to it. My father had spent a tour over there.

Q. Did he talk to you about it or give you some idea why he felt we were there?

A. He really didn't talk very much about it. He was in supply over there. He had a few stories to tell when he came home just because we wanted to hear some war stories.

Q. Well that's unusual, father and a son.

A. Yes. Matter of fact when I got my orders to go over there my father told me he'd go, you know a father and son can't go at the same time. He said he'd be in supply and I was in the infantry, he was afraid something would happen to me, he knew he had a better chance of making it back than I did. But after I got in it kind of interested me, so I wanted to go. Probably if I hadn't got orders to Vietnam I'd have been disappointed, after I got in and got trained and everything.

Q. Where did you do your basic?

A. I took basic training at Ft. Bragg, North Carolina and infantry training at Ft. Gordon, Georgia. Eight weeks of basic and eight weeks of infantry training.

Q. Were you selected for the infantry? You said you would have been disappointed if you hadn't gone to Vietnam?

A. I didn't volunteer for the infantry or anything. At that time that's what they wanted.

- Q. What did you think of the training you got, do you think it prepared you for what you were going to be into?
- A. Yes, it prepared me pretty well. Of course, I learned a lot of new things once I got over there but the training was excellent.
- Q. What was your MOS?
- A. 11 Bravo, Infantry.
- Q. Did you go over as a replacement?
- A. Yes, I went over as a machine gunner, they trained me the last part of my infantry training, they focused on the M60 machine gun and that's what I was trained on. When I first went over there they didn't make one a machine gunner right off but an assistant gunner.
- Q. What outfit was that?
- A. I was with the 2nd and 35th infantry when I first got there and stayed with them about 3 months and then I transferred to K Company 75th rangers after that. We were still attached to the 4th infantry division, I stayed with that division the whole time I was there.
- Q. So, when did you land in Vietnam?
- A. I think it was about the 5th of June 1969 when I got over there.
- Q. Where did you land?
- A. Cameron Bay. They had a replacement depot there.
- Q. How did you feel when the plane came down and you looked out?
- A. It was hot and everybody was dressed in Olive drab. All the people on the plane except for maybe a handful of guys that were going back over after leaves or whatever. We didn't know what to think, we'd heard stories about this and that, I thought when the plane landed we were just going to have to run off and find cover. But it wasn't like that. It's pretty close to state side, that part is.
- Q. You were kind of nervous as to what would happen?
- A. Oh yes, real nervous.
- Q. I suppose the guys scared you with some stories, just making them up probably. So it was hot what else were you feeling?
- A. Well I was anxious to get to a unit and find out what it was all about. It really interested me, I enjoyed the time that I spent in the army I don't have any regrets. But I was anxious to get to a unit and get the experience you needed to stay alive. They kept saying once you got out there and you spend some time in the bush and get in some fire fights, then you know how to stay alive, then you're OK. And I wanted to do that, the main thing on my mind was getting back home and the sooner I got out there and got some experience, the better chance I figured I had.
- Q. I guess you soon found out what it was about?
- A. Oh yes, the first day after I left Cameron Bay I went to Pleiku where the 4th infantry was at that time and I spent 7 days there in jungle training. It's just a training everybody goes through when you first get there.

- Q. Do you think it was a good training?
- A. It was real good. It kind of counteracted some of the things I'd been trained for in the United States mainly because it changed, after you got to Vietnam it was a little bit different and they adapted it to Vietnam.
- Q. Well what was different, what were you seeing that was new?
- A. Well for example they trained us on an APC army personnel carrier in the United States and we all rode on the inside of it. Well in Vietnam nobody rode on the inside of it we all rode on the top.
- Q. Why is that?
- A. Well it doesn't have armor on the outside, its mainly for transportation and if something happened you had a better chance of getting. . .
- Q. In other words the guys didn't feel safe getting inside if a shell would go through everybody would be killed right?
- A. Yes. So they rode off the top of it.
- Q. That was the kind of thing you began to see that was the smart thing to do, not get inside. What else was there different?
- A. Oh, just like in the United States, we cooked our food with a mess kit, collapsible mess kit and in Vietnam you just opened up a can and heated it up over a piece of or heat tank.
- Q. Where was your outfit when you joined them?
- A. Well the base camp was in Pleiku, we went out to what they call the L2 oasis, that we operated out of, when I first got there and from that L2 it was the big one that had a smaller one called L2 penny, which was the one I operated out of. I didn't spend any time on the fire base. I caught the helicopter there and flew out to my unit which was in the field. I stayed in the field eight months before I got an R&R or anything like that.
- Q. After eight months, that was a long time wasn't it?
- A. Well I could have taken it earlier but I just figured I'd wait until the latter part of my tour and take those, it'd make the time go a little bit faster.
- Q. What kind of a place were you in? Was it the jungle or the hills or what?
- A. It was in the central highlands, the jungle, a lot of hills.
- Q. Was that in the I corp?
- A. Two Corp.
- Q. It was within days then that you were out on the line?
- A. Right, about 8 days after I got to Cameron Bay.
- Q. If you wanted to get in the war, you got in it fast?
- A. Oh yes, I got in it fast. As a matter of fact, when I got to my unit, I was in Charlie Company, 2nd, 35th infantry and the second day they made me an assistant guard just because they wanted me to get some experience before they gave me the machine gun. We went out on an ambush and got ambushed the first day. So, I got my feet wet real fast!

Q. How did that happen, can you recall?

A. Well we were leaving our company area there going out to set up an ambush, and they were waiting on us. The point man got killed and another man got a leg wounded. And the machine gunner that I was carrying with, I was helping he got shot, his chin shot, so I started carrying the guns.

Q. What was your feelings in all this, the first day like that?

A. I was scared to death. I tried to crawl inside my steel pot, I kept hearing people say you know when you get over there that steel pot, its awful small but you'll try to get inside it one way of another. I didn't believe them but they made a believer out of me that day. That opened my eyes to a lot of things it wasn't glamourous.

Q. Who was your leader, was it a seargant?

A. Yes, we had Seargant Perry, a black guy when I first got there. He was an E-5, a platoon Seargant.

Q. What kind of a leader was he?

A. He was real good, he was a careerman in the Army and he'd been in 10 or 11 years and he'd had one tour in Vietnam so he knew what he was doing. He was probably, besides myself, the best platoon seargant they ever had. His tour ended two months after I got there.

Q. What was his name?

A. Alonzo Perry.

Q. Where was he from?

A. I think he was from Corpus Christy, Texas.

Q. So how did you feel about having a black guy tell you what to do?

A. It didn't bother me, as long as he knew what he was doing. I wouldn't want a white guy to tell me what to do if he didn't know what he was doing.

Q. Race or color didn't mean anything then?

A. No. - - -

Q. Was there much, how did you get along with the black guys?

A. Well at that time the black power movement was real strong in Vietnam. Most of the black guys that I was in contact with I didn't get along with them very well. They just wouldn't cooperate, they didn't like being out there and they weren't going to stay out there. After I was Seargant most of the ones that came to my platoon, I gave them something to do in the rear because I didn't want them out there with a bad attitude getting somebody else killed long with theirselves. Now, some of them, the ones I kept out there were excellent as good as any white guy. But as a majority probably one in five were good enough to stay out there. Now thats what they wanted was to be in the rear. If they weren't going to do their job out there - I didn't like giving them what they wanted just out of spite but I had to I wasn't going to take a chance.

Q. You said one out of 5 of the black guys were good soldiers, how would you rate the whites?

A. Most of them were real good. I found that guys from the South that had lived in the country were probably a little better than somebody from the North or the South that lived in cities. Somebody that had hunted and fished, these type of things. Guys that were in the boy scouts were better or they adapted to it better than guys that hadn't been. Portirican guys were real good, for some reason I don't know why, they just adapted to it and made good soldiers. Now there were some guys from the North from New York City that made good soldiers too but as a whole those kind of guys raised in the country and so forth adapted to it faster than the others. As a whole everybody over there did their job and did it well. They had the same thing involved as I did.

Q. You say their job, what do you mean by that?

A. Well in an infantry company you had four rifle squads in a platoon and each person is designated a certain job. An ammo bearer carries ammo and keeps it clean for the machine gun, if he doesn't keep it clean it won't go through the machine gun and the machine gun won't go off. When I say do their job, they would do it without me having to make them do it constantly. It was automatic, they got up the first thing in the morning and cleaned the ammo or cleaned the rifles whatever needed to be done to get through until the next day. Some of the guys were just 18 and 19 years old but after they learned - probably the most difficult part of being new over there was just learning what you have to do to take care of the job thats been assigned to you, whats the easiest and fastest way to clean a rifle, you don't want to break it completely down and spend 30 minutes putting it back together. You want to break it down and clean it as fast as possible, you might need it. Thats probably the hardest thing to learn, what to do and when to do it. After you've got that learned you did the job well.

Q. What about your officers did you think they were good soldiers?

A. Well some of them were real good, some were mediocre some were more poor. Probably the best ones were the West Point graduates because of their training they knew more. Probably a close second behind them were-just the OCS officers, college graduates most of them, that had gotten drafted and signed up for OCS and went through that and training. The worst were ROTC officers, the ones that they learned it in college but what they learned wasn't enough. The ROTC officers more of them got killed or wounded than the other ones. Mainly because they didn't know what to do or didn't do what they should have done because of lack of training. The OCS is a 90 day school, but its intensive training, day after day, everyday, where its stretched out over 4 years with ROTC and something you learned when you were a freshman you were liable to forget when you graduated. I guess that had a lot to do with how well they performed.

- Q. So these West Pointers you felt were the best ones. Sometimes I hear from different guys that I talk to that some of the officers were more interested in their own careers than they were in the men.
- A. Well that was more in the upper officers, Major, Colonel, on up. It just seemed like they were more interested. Well they'd been in a long time and they wanted to do the best they could, make as good an impression as they could to make more rank. It seemed like they didn't care as much, they didn't worry about the regular grind as the others. Where the other officers, the OCS guys would do their job and go home just like we would.
- Q. What about this business with the body count. Do you think that was a good way to measure how well or how poorly the soldiers were doing?
- A. In my unit, I was with the 2nd, 35th infantry, we didn't have that many kills. We always took a body count, you never got a kill unless you counted a body, a lot of times we knew we killed more than the bodies that were there, just because they drug them off before we got to them.
- Q. So there wasn't a lot of stress on getting a high body count?
- A. No. When I went to K company, 75th Rangers we got, if we had 3 confirmed kills. If you had a kill and there was somebody there around you at the time of the kill or if you were by yourself and somebody else saw the kill. . .
- Q. Was there many of the enemy killed in the time that you were there?
- A. In the units I was with there were quite a few, it was just because we ran into them more. It wasn't like everyday or once a week you'd have a fire fight, probably the whole time I was there I was in 20 fire fights in a 14 month period. We had little confrontations where a couple of shots were fired but as fire as just contact with the enemy, probably twenty times.
- Q. Who was the enemy?
- A. Well the ones that we fought mainly, were NVA regulars and we ran into a few VC, but not very many. Most of them that we made contact with had uniforms and hats.
- Q. Did you think they were good soldiers?
- A. Yes. They were real good, excellent. They were dedicated. We took a prisoner one time and he didn't have a weapon. He crawled into a hollow tree and he got inside and he never would come out we had to forcibly pull him out of that tree. We had an interpreter there that said we weren't going to kill him but he still wouldn't come out, we had to forcibly take him out. I thought they were real good soldiers. Now the South Vietnamese, they were very poor.
- Q. That's what a lot of them have been telling me, the Arvins. Why did you think they were poor?
- A. I don't know.
- Q. The same people, Vietnamese.
- A. They were afraid it seemed to me like, they were so timid. The North Vietnamese were very aggressive but the Arvins were real timid, they didn't talk very much. They only did what the absolutely had to. You couldn't get an Arvin to do something without telling him to do it. They never took it upon themselves to move up in a fire fight or something. We didn't operate very often with them, but the times that we did it just seemed like they tried to stay behind the GI's as much as possible.

Q. What did you think of that situation where you'd gone over there to help these people defend their country and you found they weren't defending themselves?

A. It started changing my attitude about being over there, quite a bit. I kind of looked a like shoot this guy doesn't care whether these people come down here and take over his part of the country or not, why should I care. When I first got over there you know, it was Red, White, and Blue. I was fighting for my country and I was going to do what was right well a few months after I was there it started to change.

Q. And most of the change began to be what? What would cause this change that you're describing?

A. Well, it was just mainly the attitudes of the GI's was I'm here and I have to be here and I'm gonna do what I have to do to get home and not any more than that. I want to stay alive. The South Vietnamese, the soldiers, they didn't care and the civilians they didn't seem like they cared any.

Q. Do you think too, it was the way you were fighting, the strategy you were using, you know the American army was using that began to dawn on you that the best thing you could do was to try to stay alive?

A. Oh yes. We spent about eleven days one time trying to take a VC bunker complex over top, well about halfway up the hill. We had tanks and gunships, called the artillery in on them and finally they all left and we got up there and destroyed the bunker complex and to me it seemed like a pretty strategic point, where they could put mortars in there and shoot mortars into the fire base, or rockets or something. We got up there and the next day they came in, picked us up and took us somewhere else. What was the sense in taking it if we were just going to give it right back to them. All we did was tear up a bunch of bunkers and cause a little aggravation to have to put them back together. That happened a lot of times. We'd operate one day and they'd have a certain place they wanted us to go and then halfway through the day they'd make us turn around and go right back to where we came from. It just seemed like that upper echelon all they were trying to do was keep us moving they didn't really have an objective for us to meet, they really didn't have any direction. A lot of times probably more often than not they had somewhere for us to go and when we got there they had something for us to do but it got kind of frustrating to walk all day and carry a 60-80 lb. rucksack on your back and then they say boys we want you to go back to where you were. It would have been a lot easier if we'd just stayed there all day.

Q. They sure made it a young mans war didn't they you had to be in real good shape.

A. You had to be in good shape thats for sure.

Q. In other words, this way of fighting tended to lower morale of the soldiers, the Amreican soldiers?

A. Well, yes. I don't really think our morale was that low it was our attitudes toward the war were bad.

- Q. What would be the difference, are we using different words to describe the same thing?
- A. Well, when I think about morale I think about your morale as far as attitude toward your officers, your MCO's, that was always good. You knew who was in charge and you did what you were told without question. The units I was in that's the way it was and that's the way it stayed. Everybody didn't like the army, they didn't like being there but they knew they had to do what was expected of them in order to get back.
- Q. You felt that the officers were in it as much as you were and they were doing their job, is that what you meant?
- A. Yes. They looked out for us, we had good officers. Now we had some bad ones that made a lot of wrong decisions. I remember we had one company commander, it was during the dry season and we were out of water and we'd been out for I guess 60 days something like that and we had a helicopter bring in a bluet, a big rubber container, full of water for the company and he wanted us to shave with it, he didn't want us to fill up our canteens with it. He was afraid a General or Colonel would come out there and he wanted his men to be clean shaven. We didn't care about shaving we wanted some water to drink and cook with, to wash with.
- Q. And that would create a lot of resentment?
- A. Oh yes, a lot of them got people killed, some of the officers that didn't know what they were doing, just because of their ignorance to a situation people died.
- Q. You must be thinking of certain times like that, when that happened?
- A. One instance in particular, we called in Delta Tango which is designated targets at night. You call artillery in around your perimeter, that way after the artillery pieces on the fire base have a sight, a target, if you get over run or something happens right there at your perimeter all you have to do is call them and they don't have to adjust, they fire around and it hits right outside your perimeter and then you adjust it your foreign observer adjusts that. One guy, he just didn't know how to do it but he wouldn't let the foreign observer do it and he called the artillery right in on us and killed four people. Three rounds hit right in the middle of the company areas where we were set up for the night and four people died just because that his ignorance and he wouldn't let anybody that knew how to do it, do it, he wanted to do it. He wanted to experiment with it, but you know you don't experiment with people's lives.
- Q. Had he just come in, what was his rank?
- A. He was a captain. He'd been our CO for about six weeks I guess.
- Q. It was just a very bad error of judgment on his part is that it? It didn't have to do so much with his poor training or he was just new, but it was, he should have known the proper way to do this, is that what you're saying?
- A. Right, he just didn't learn that part.



- Q. Is that the incident that you remember most vividly?
- A. Well that one and another time we had a, I think he was an ROTC Lieutenant. I was walking point and I had another guy behind me and then there was a radio man behind him and then the Lt. was the next one back. But we walked into a U-shaped ambush and as soon as the fire broke out the Lt. pulled the rest of the platoon back, everybody from him on back he made them all pull back and left the three of us up there. Well when the shooting started the radio man got a shot in the chest and me and this other guy, there just happened to be an empty bunker that wasn't anybody in and on top of it, we jumped into that hole there, and he pulled them so far back with incoming fire that they couldn't move back up to get to us, and as a result of that, I didn't have anything but just a regular army issue bandage to put on the guys chest, if he'd stayed up there we could have gotten back with the platoon and called in and the medic could have taken care of it, but as a result the guy died, just because, we were right in the middle of conflict and couldn't move around very much and we couldn't drag him back through there, back to the platoon.
- Q. How come they could ambush you, but I don't hear very many stories of the Americans ambushing the Vietnamese?
- A. We ambushed them a few times too.
- Q. It was almost like Indian war the way you guys describe it to me. Ambushing and there's no real large units fighting each other are there?
- A. No. Now with the K 75, the second unit I was with we never moved above platoon strength, we never above company strength and normally we went out on what was called a hatchet team, three man patrol, you take two M 16's and an M 60 machine gun and that's all we did we set up ambushes. Normally we didn't take a body count if there were over five enemy there. A couple of times they were moving in platoon strength and all we did was fire and run. We'd have a place to meet, the three of us. It was like hit and run, the same thing they were doing to us.
- Q. Do you think that they were better jungle fighters than you were?
- A. I don't think they were that much better, they just knew it, they lived out there everyday, they were born around in there and they just knew the terrain and where the trails were the high speed trails were and how to get through there better. They were littler than us and they could move a little closer to the ground and get through the trees a little bit better too. A lot of times they'd hit us and we never even got a glance of them. They were that fast. They'd fire and by the time we got together they were gone.
- Q. What seemed to be a typical strategy on their part?
- A. Mainly theirs was to hit and run. They operated in three or four man teams.

Q. Is that all, three or four?

A. Now a few times we ran upon them where they were in a platoon and a couple of times company strength but as a whole the majority of the time it was just a few of them and like I said a lot of the time we never knew how many there were because we'd never get to see them. They just fired where we'd probably fire a whole clip full of ammo they'd only fire two or three shots and then they'd run. Sometimes they'd hit people, sometimes they wouldn't.

Q. Did you ever hear of what was called the Kit Carson?

A. The Kit Carson scouts?

Q. Yes, I'd never heard of that of course you know Bobby Williams, he was talking about that, the first I'd ever heard about Kit Carson scouts.

A. We called them Kansas City Stars, the same letters.

Q. Where'd you get that from?

A. Somebody just made it up and we called them that. It just sounded a little bit better.

Q. What did you think of those guys?

A. Well when they first came to your unit, they were good and then after they got, we'd always have a Vietnamese Arvin interpreter around, the Kit Carson Scouts couldn't speak English very well, like this one guy all he could say was I need food. I need water. I need ammo. When he first got there he was reall good, real helpful and he knew a lot and he was supposed to have been an NVA officer when he was with them but after a few months he got onery just like the South Vietnamese. He didn't want to do anything, he wanted to lay around.

Q. I wonder what motivated them to do that, to betray their own?

A. I don't know other than at the time I was there I said I don't know why anybody'd want to fight against us were going to win theres no way anybody can beat us. I kind of believe that's the attitude they took. Of course it turned out different.

Q. You mean they got discouraged?

A. Yes. They just figured that they weren't going to win the war and decided to come over. Of course, it didn't work out that way.

Q. So you found yourself going out everyday trying to find the enemy, you take a particular place then move away from it. That was frustrating, did that build up a lot? Did you seem to be doing a lot of walking and wondering what it was all about or why you were doing this?

A. Yes. But after a while you qiut wondering why and just do it. Say well shoot I'm going to do it for a year and then go home.

Q. You keep counting the days then?

A. Oh yes, every single day. Everybody over there had helmet graffiti. They'd write their girlfriends name or little saying and stuff on their helmet and everybody had a calendar on their helmet and they'd mark the days off every single day, that's just the way it was everybody wanted to go home and they couldn't wait to get there.

- Q. What do you think of that as a way to start a war?
- A. As far as you sentence somebody over there for a year?
- Q. Yes, and after awhile it began to dawn on you that you're not really attacking any positions of the enemy to take them and say OK we've captured this town or we've taken this river or we've taken this bridge. That was the story of even Korea, you could look at a map and see the retreating army or the advancing army and so forth but you couldn't see this kind of thing in Vietnam?
- A. It was real. I just couldn't understand, like I was talking to a chaplain one day and he was talking about a friend of his that was in a certain part of Vietnam and he said he's not there anymore the VC hold it there and I just couldn't imagine why we would let them hold, the VC hold a part of South Vietnam with the equipment and the men that we had, how they could get away with that, but we did, it was like we never did really try to win. Now the GI's if the huys like myself, if they'd said you guys win the war, we could have won it but it just seemed like politics played too big a part in it.
- Q. Well whatever this policy was, did you understand the policy? You just said whatever the policy was, I'm wondering what you meant by that?
- A. The policy of them just moving us around? No I never, well the way I understood it was they had something better for us to do in another area but when we got to another area they didn't have something better to do, it wasn't a hotter zone or something like that. A lot of the time it just seemed like they wanted to keep us moving around.
- Q. But you didn't become discouraged?
- A. No, I never did. The fact of the United States losing the war and Vietnam, never even entered my mind. I knew we were going to win there was no way anybody could beat the United States in the war.
- Q. That's what you kept saying to yourself?
- A. Yes, and that's probably the majority of the people that I was in contact with, that's the same attitude that they had. Most of us didn't like the tactics that were used as far as the way the war was being fought but we always figured they'd wise up some day and fight it the way it should be - you know fight it the way they fought World War II. But they just never did. After I came back, well they'll get it together. Like when Nixon started bombing North Vietnam again, we thought things were going to change now, we were going to start winning the war but he started bombing them and that's all he did, everything where I was remained the same.
- Q. His policy was to increase the bombing as he withdrew the men from Vietnam. Were you getting reports of these withdrawals taking place when you were over there?
- A. Oh hes. We, I can't remember what they were called, but a lot of guys were getting to come home early because of that. They'd get to come home thirty or sixty days early, because they were in a group that was being withdrawn.

- Q. That was a real break for them then? How about the guys that stayed there like you under those conditions was that discouraging or demoralizing?
- A. No, see I spent fourteen months there and my regular tour was supposed to have been for twelve months but theres an early out you can get if you've got less than a hundred and fifty days left. When you rotate from Vietnam back to the United States they go ahead and let you out. At that time when I went over if I'd rotated when I was supposed to I would have had to spend two full years in the army, and the way it turned out I spent nineteen months and five days in the army. Thats because I extended and I had less than that 150 days to go when I rotated.
- Q. And that was really your concern?
- A. Yes, getting out of Veitnam and getting out of the army. That was my basic goal in life, getting out of Vietnam and the army.
- Q. How about the drug situation, was it beginning to be noticeable in Vietnam when you were there?
- A. Marijuana was pretty prevalent. Thats the only drug I was ever in contact with. The only time any of the people I was around ever used it was when we were in a pretty secure area. When I was made seargant and they gave me a platoon anybody with it or caught with it got an automatic, at least Article 15 Court Marshall because I wasn't going to put up with that.
- Q. Did you have much of that, did you have a couple of cases?
- A. Four or five guys I wrote up for possession. I'd frisk them before they went on an operation, I'd make them lean up against a tree and go through their pockets. I wouldn't even let mine carry cigarettes when they were on a hatchet team, I wouldn't let them carry any kind of matches or anything because the NVA could smell it and it'd give your position away. I let them carry two cans of sea rations per day. Thats the food they could eat when we would go out, we spent three days on a hatchet team operation. Other than that they weren't allowed to have anything, but their food, plastic spoon, poncho liner, ammo, weapon and that was it.
- Q. How much older were you than these guys?
- A. I was about the same age, well I was 19 and 20 when I was over there, I turned 20 October of '69.
- Q. October of '69 and you were responsible for the lives of how many men?
- A. 32 men.
- Q. How long were you there before you got that responsibility?
- A. I was a PFC when I got there in June and in October I was made seargant. I made spec 4 about two months after I got there and then Seargant in Oct.

- Q. You were given this responsibility almost immediately, comparatively speaking.
- A. That's what I wanted, to be the guy in charge. The guy in charge gets to make the decisions, that way at least in my mind the decisions would be right. I didn't like going along with somebody else's decision, so that's what I wanted.
- Q. Did you always know you had this leadership quality to you?
- A. Yes I always, I'd rather lead than just follow most of the time through life. When I was in Basic training, I was the platoon leader. I didn't have any rank, but I wore a patch around my arm with sergeant stripes and I was the one in charge of the platoon in basic and when I was in infantry training I was a platoon leader.
- Q. I suppose it was guys like you that helped keep the army together then? Keep these guys alive?
- A. Yes. There were a lot of guys like me too, I mean real good folks that really cared about getting back and getting everybody else back too. When one of my people got hurt it hurt me a lot. I never did get really very close to any of them but I always talked to them, we always told stories about home and stuff like that.
- Q. Was that just your personality that you didn't get close to them?
- A. Well being in a leadership position I just felt like it was better than I didn't. I'd seen a couple of guys that they'd made pretty good friends out of a PFC or a spec 4, just because the guy was a friend of his he thought he could get by with anything. I didn't want that problem.
- Q. You can't really give orders to a guy that's a friend then? Is that the way you felt?
- A. Yes. When we had some time off on the fire base or on a stand down or something like that some of the other sergeants and lieutenants would drink and smoke grass with them and stuff but I never would. I just couldn't write a guy up for drinking in the field or smoking grass in the field if I'd done it with him so I just, it's not saying I didn't drink or smoke any grass. I just didn't let them see me do it. I wanted to make sure my rear end was covered at all times and in order to do that I had to keep my stuff pretty straight.
- Q. You're certainly describing yourself as a good soldier who did his job. You must have felt very proud of yourself then?
- A. Well the main motivation for me wanting to be a good soldier was my father was an excellent marine and I wanted him to be proud of me. I wanted to step off the plane with sergeant stripes on and ribbons and medals and my father to be proud of me.
- Q. Is that the way it turned out?
- A. Yes, that's exactly the way it turned out.

Q. So when did you; you got out of the Army in 1970?

A. Yes, July of 1970.

Q. I bet those last days must have been pretty nervous days waiting for your time to be up.

A. Oh yes. Well in the Infantry when you've only got 30 days left on your tour, they take you out of the field and put you on a fire base.

Q. They took you off the line then?

A. Right, when I had thirty days left.

Q. Well, even the day until that happened i bet was the. . .

A. Oh yes. When they put you on a fire base, me being an NCO they had to give me a job and I was in charge of the helicopter pad. My company was coming back to the fire base and I knew they were coming back so I told them, I'll go back to the rear and take a bird back to the rear and buy beer and liquour and cokes and stuff and have it waiting on you when you get here. I had eighteen days left to go and I went back and bought all that stuff and loaded it on a bird and was coming back to the fire base and the bird got shot down.

Q. You were in the bird?

A. Yes. And I can remember all the way down, you know they say your life passes in front of your eyes, the only thing I could do all the way down was 18 days left to go and I'm going to die when this bird hits the ground. Of course it didn't turn out that way.

Q. What happened?

A. Well the rounds hit the engine and knocked the engine out, but through the auto rotation of the bird falling, air bushing up on the rotar slowed it down to where when we got close to the ground the pilot just banked a turn and we hit. It just bent the skids up underneath it. One guy wasn't holding on tight enough and when it hit he fell out and broke his arm but other than that nobody got hurt.

Q. You hit pretty hard then?

A. Oh, yes pretty hard.

Q. I bet you were scared?

A. Yes, scared to death. I didn't like to fly. I was in another crash when we were leaving Cambodia, we spend three weeks there, and when we were coming back I was in a troop carrier a Chinook double bladed choppers. My platoon was on the inside and when it was taking off it crashed, it turned over and fell on top of two deuce and a half trucks with guys in them, getting ready to convoy out and I think 31 people got killed. That burned me out of flying. I loved to fly those helicopters up until then.

Q. Was it shot down?

A. No it was just a misjudgment. We were trying to move out as fast as we could but the pilot didn't do it right, didn't fly it right.

Q. You mean he didn't get up there fast enough?

A. Well it took off and it seemed like, I was on the inside you know, but it took off and then it went back down and hit real hard then it took off again and it just turned right over and fell on top of those trucks.

Q. Did the guys in the helicopter survive?

A. Well all of my men did. The only person that got hurt was me and I bumped my head on the escape hatch - I was the first one out and I hit my head on the door when I was getting out. We all made it out, we thought it was going to explode so we got out as fast as we could. Most of the ones that got hurt were the guys in the trucks and then the people standing around when the rotar blades hit, that honeycombed stuff turned into shrapnel and it went into them and cut them up. Killed some like that.

Q. When did you go to Cambodia? Was that part of that Parrot's Beak attack?

A. Yes it was when we went in and stayed for about a month. They told us it was because of public opinion back in the United States was the reason they were pulling us out. We probably did more good in that three weeks, when I say more good I mean made more contacts and found more caches and weapons and food and equipment in that three weeks than the whole time that I was in Vietnam, than all the other times put together. As far as getting VC and NVA equipment and things like that. We could have done a lot better but they pulled us out so we had to come back.

Q. Did you see any of the NVA, make contact with them?

A. Yes, we made contact with them, not a lot, it seemed to me like they were stowing all that stuff in Cambodia because it was closer to where they wanted to be in Vietnam. And they just hadn't gotten around to the time when they were going to come down and get it and then move it into Vietnam. We didn't make anymore contact as far as fire fights, than the normal time in Vietnam. I think in one cache we found something like 300 weapons in it. AK 47's, SK's and B 40 rockets. They had a lot of that stuff stored over there.

Q. Do you think if you had stayed on that mission a lot more could have been done?

A. Yes I think so. Well we would have messed up their supply line considerably if we could have stayed there three or four months.

Q. What went in a company of you?

A. My company went in but there was about six battalions from the 4th infantry division that went in there. At that time I think just about every infantry division was sending somebody over there so it was quite an operation, a lot of people, a lot of Americans went into Cambodia. I felt like if everybody else found the kind of things we found we made a pretty big dent in them. If we could have stayed over there we'd have hurt them a lot more, but we didn't get to.

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- Q. Was there any other types of operations like that, that you've been involved with?
- A. No, Cambodia was the only one like that I participate in. Really the time that I was there I didn't hear of anybody going into Laos or anywhere like that. It was just that one operation into Cambodia.
- Q. So you got to the point then where you finally leave despite your narrow escape in that helicopter and you got out. Where did they send you too?
- A. Ft. Lewis, Washington.
- Q. Tell me what happened after that?
- A. It was the 29th of July 1970. They fed us a steak dinner and after that they took us to another place and they tried to get us to re-up in the army which was kind of ironic! But anyway, nobody decided to stay in.
- Q. What did they do, the Seargant get up and give a big talk:
- A. No, it was just a formality that they had to go through I guess. It was a guy just like us, his time wasn't up and all he did was there was a bunch of literature on each desk and he picked up a trash can and walked around and everybody threw their literature in and he said does anybody want to re-up and nobody wanted to, so he said OK come on and we went and got our dress uniforms issued to us. Thats what we had to wear home, and some orientation and they gave us separation pay and money for a plane ticket and we left.
- Q. Did you leave with your uniform on and did you have decorations?
- A. Yes.
- Q. Did they arrange for that before you got there or what?
- A. Well they gave me my medals I got in country, back at the base camp. The company clerk keeps a file cabinet of everybody that gets medals or they've got personal stuff like that. They kept all the decorations I got back there and I just put them together on the ting I got at the PX, I wanted my daddy to see them.
- Q. Where did you meet him?
- A. It was in Neburn, North Carolina. He was living there, at the time he was stationed at Cherry Point.
- Q. Is he still in the service?
- A. He's dead now but at that time he was still in. He died in 1978.
- Q. Was he in the service when he died?
- A. No, he retired in 1971.
- Q. What was his rank when he retired?
- A. He was a warrant officer - W-4.



- Q. He didn't have very many years of retirement?
- A. About 7 years. He had heart trouble. He had a heart attack when he was in the service and he had another one right after he got out, well he had one in '73 which paralyzed him and he was invalid for five years.
- Q. Now this was in Cherry Point South Carolina that you got together. When did you come up to Morehead?
- A. I went to East Carolina University for three quarters and I transferred we're originally from here, Sharpsburg, and my father wanted to come back here. He moved back here and I stayed in North Carolina and went to college then transferred to Morehead, I wanted to be close to my family. My brother was going to Morehead.
- Q. So you really came back to join your father up here. When did you come to Morehead, 1971?
- A. Yes, 1971, Fall semester.
- Q. What was your major?
- A. Physical Education and Recreation. Now I work for a commodities broker in Lexington.
- Q. Yes. How did you get to that job?
- A. Well I taught in Fayette Co., Owingsville, for a year and a half and teachings not my cup of tea.
- Q. Do you like what you're doing?
- A. Yes, I really love my job. I meet different people everyday.
- Q. How did you get your job?
- A. I'd been in the grocery business since I was real small and always worked part time and full time in grocery stores and stuff. And I was self employed at one time and went broke in the grocery business and after I finished doing that, I got a job doing this.
- Q. So there really wasn't much preparation in your education at Morehead for what you're doing now was there?
- A. No. I quit high school when I was 15 and I took a GED test while I was in-the service and got my equivalency. But when I got back to Ft. Lewis and they gave my my separation papers it said civilian education nine years and I didn't want that to be on my record so I said the only way to do it, I'm too old to go back to high school and finish, is to get a college education.
- Q. All they gave you credit was for a 9th grade education?
- A. I did have a high school equivalency diploma which got me into college, but it was still kind of a stigma that I wanted to erase. When I went to Morehead I thought that's what I wanted to do, teach, but I didn't.
- Q. How was your years at Morehead, a guy that had been through all that you had. You were a member of the Vets Club? Did you get in with those guys right away?
- A. Yes.

Q. Do you remember Don Butler?

A. Yes. Last time I saw Don was at Lonnie's house, not this past homecoming but the one before.

Q. You were on campus in 1971 and there was a confrontation between the anti-war students and the ROTC guys, remember?

A. I don't think that ever happened when I was on campus, I heard about it.

Q. It had happened before you got there?

A. It must have. The time that I was in Morehead I just really didn't pay any attention to the anti-war stuff or anything like that. I didn't talk about Vietnam very much, except for around the Vet Club with the other guys.

Q. Why was that?

A. It just seemed like the things I wanted to talk about people weren't interested in. All they wanted to do was hear about how many you killed and how you killed them. There was a lot more to Vietnam than just killing people or people getting killed. The things I wanted to talk about people didn't want to hear.

Q. Was it the kind of things we're talking about now?

A. Yes and just crazy things that went on. I wanted to tell everybody about my R & R and Sidney Australia and they didn't want to hear about that. They wanted to hear some kind of a big war story.

Q. You didn't have any trouble then, adjusting to the younger students?

A. No.

Q. The anti-war people didn't bother you?

A. No, not at all. Towards the end of my tour I could see why they wanted us out. We obviously weren't going to win the war and what was the sense of us staying over there if we weren't going to try and win it. I never did demonstrate in any demonstrations or anything.

Q. Did you yourself become anti-war about the whole thing after you got out?

A. Well in my attitude I did. I wasn't vocal about it or anything but I felt like we needed to get out. But I wanted it both ways. I wanted to win and get out.

Q. You must have felt a little angry at the way you were used. Is that the way you felt, that you had to risk your life day after day and you were wondering for what. Is that what you're saying?

A. Yes. What am I doing here, we're not getting anything accomplished.

Q. And you brought back with you, that attitude?

A. Yes. I looked at it like well I had to go they can go too, if they can get back fine, so be it, if they have to stay over there, let them stay over there, I made it through and they can too. I didn't talk about Vietnam a lot because the impression I got from a lot of people was they didn't want to hear about it.

- Q. Well it seems to me as if this is the first war back home people weren't interested in. Did you feel that?
- A. Oh yes, I felt like probably half of the American people couldn't care less whether it went on or was over with. But it was drug out for so long. I believe the first American casualty was in 1963, from '63 to '74, eleven years in a war, people just got bored with it I guess. There wasn't any, like in World War II they were accomplishing something when they landed on Normandy and won that part, they had some real estate there that would hold them, they could see.
- Q. So who are you blaming this that you're talking about and where did you center your criticism or your anger or disgust?
- A. I didn't really. . .
- Q. I guess another way of putting it is, who do you hold responsible for what happened?
- A. I just looked at it as the people that were running the country needed Vietnam for the American economy. I still kind of feel that way, the American economy was pretty stable while Vietnam was going on. I think when we pulled out we started going into a recession and I just felt like that's the reason they wanted that war to go on as long as it did, to keep the economy up.
- Q. Keep employment at home, going steady?
- A. Yes. In my opinion, I don't think it's a good enough reason myself but. . .
- Q. How did you come to believe that?
- A. Just from what people have told me, just talking back and forth. I could see where, after we pulled out from Vietnam is when the inflation started rising, interest rates started going up and stuff.
- Q. Well, that's true. 1973 and 74 that began, I remember. You can see the connection there definitely with Vietnam. But you think that the politicians were seeing economic benefits for the United States in this war, that we were prosperous because we were fighting the war?
- A. Well yes, there were a lot of jobs, defense jobs and things like that that were eliminated when we pulled out. Of course that's probably wrong but at the time that's the way I looked at it.
- Q. Do you think that the other guys you knew felt about the same way? Become cynical about it?
- A. Yes. I didn't want to admit that I'd been used by my country. I wanted to have a reason that we were over there. I mean we had a pretty decent purpose for being over there, Communist aggression we wanted to stop and we didn't achieve the goal we set, we didn't stop it. We wasted a lot of American lives and a lot of money and we didn't reach our goal, they still took South Vietnam and now it's a communist country. That was the part that hurt the worst. And I'm sure a parent of a young man that was killed over there has a pretty decent reason to be bitter about that, you know their son died and we didn't win. I think if I was a parent I'd feel a little bit better about it if we had won. Of course, if you lose a member of your family you can't. . .

- Q. Does that feeling that you were used begin to develop after you get back more?
- A. Yes.
- Q. As you saw how the war was going and it was definitely going down the drain?
- A. Now over there my main concern was just getting back and after I got back that's when the feeling came.
- Q. Do you still carry on that feeling? As much in a way as your talking about it now to me?
- A. Yes, I kind of feel like they, I don't feel like my country owes me anything I'm real tickled I'm an American, I don't want to be a Russian or a Vietnamese, I want to be an American and I feel like I was lucky I was born in America. I don't feel like they owe me anything.
- Q. Well do you feel that some of you had to do this but very few had to go through all this and where is all the other guys, they didn't have to do any of this. Did you have that feeling?
- A. No, I figured if a guy is lucky enough or smart enough to keep from having to come, than so be it, more power to you. If I'd have been in a position where I could have gotten out of going I'd have done the same thing.
- Q. You said that at the beginning when we first started talking but once you went in you determined to be a good soldier. More for you, thinking of your father back home, that's what kept you going in a way, is that what you're saying?
- A. I just wanted to prove to myself that I could handle something like that. I'd never been saddled with any large amount of responsibility in my life and I'd always, I was a high school drop out and had worked odd jobs here and there, I hadn't really accomplished anything that I could be proud of. I just caught on to it fast. Everybody likes to find something that they're good at, well I was good at that, I found out that I was good at it, even though I didn't like it very much I still tried to do the best job I could do.
- Q. That's been more to your credit that you could do something well, that you didn't like. If you can do under those circumstances, then when you really do find something that you like then you're going to take off.

Not all the veterans come back in one piece like you did. And all the fellows that you met at Morehead and the ones that I've talked to, all of them seem to be quite successful and if their lives were on edge for a while from the year in Vietnam, they made the adjustment back into civilian life, got themselves an education, got themselves a good job, steady work, seem to be doing quite well, but they're are so many that are not doing that, how do you feel about them?

- A. Well I think that the guys that because of Vietnam are disabled now should be taken care of by the govt. no matter what it takes to take care of them.