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Wayland Magoon, interviewed by John Springer, Part 1

Wayland Magoon

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**Transcript of an Interview
with Wayland Magoon
by John Springer
June 22, 1999
Lewiston, Maine**

The following interview was conducted for the MAINE VIETNAM VETERANS ORAL HISTORY PROJECT. Tapes and transcripts of project interviews have been deposited at the Maine Folklife Center at the University of Maine at Orono, where they are available to the public in accordance with the Center's policies. Some restrictions may apply to the use of these interviews by researchers. The Maine Folklife Center should be consulted concerning fair-use guidelines.

Reference copies of the tapes and transcripts are also available in the library of the University of Maine at Farmington and in Special Collections in Ladd Library at Bates College, Lewiston, Maine.

Monique Leamon of Casco, Maine, transcribed the recordings.

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The Maine Vietnam Veterans Oral History Project collection includes personal narratives about serving in the United States Military during the Vietnam War. The nature of these recordings is to document the personal experiences of the people who served between 1955 and 1975.

Accounts may include foul language, offensive slang, and graphic descriptions of battlefield violence including accounts of physical and psychological injuries, killing, death, dismemberment, suicide, and symptoms of post-traumatic stress. Some content may be sexual in nature and include discussion of sex trafficking.

Views and opinions expressed in these interviews do not reflect the views and opinions of the University of Maine System or its campuses.

Listener discretion is advised.

WM:Wayland Magoon

JS:John Springer

Tape One, Side A:

JS:This is an interview for the Maine Vietnam Veterans Oral History Project. It's an interview with Wayland Magoon, I'm John Springer, and the interview's taking place at the Muskie Archives at Bates College in Lewiston, Maine on June 22 at approximately 4:00 PM. And that's it, you can start.

WM:OK, all right, go ahead.

JS:First we can start off, maybe you can tell me a little bit about your childhood growing up in Maine, or, or anywhere else, you've traveled a little bit.

WM:No, that's, I was born in Maine, in Skowhegan. You want the dates?

JS:Sure.

WM:March 28, 1947, so that makes me fifty two. I grew up in Skowhegan, went to the Skowhegan schools through my sophomore year, and with my junior and senior year I transferred over to MCI in Pittsfield and I graduated there in 1965.

JS:Did the, did the military play a role in your household at all?

WM:My grandfather was a career Navy man. He was in the Navy I think like between WWI and WWII so he didn't really see WWII, but he was a gunnery man in the Navy. No one else in my family was in. My dad worked, had the family farm and he tried to enlist for WWII but they wanted him on the farm, and he had an asthma problem also so he didn't, he didn't, so my grandfather was the only one. And, I mean, we knew that, you know, my grandfather was in the Navy and that type of thing.

JS:What was the general consensus about the military and the government in your, while you were growing up.

WM:Oh, that the government was probably the place to go to get your job, if you ever wanted a good job to last go into the military or get a government job. They were Roosevelt people I guess, and he took everybody out of the Depression and everything, so it was the consensus around that the military and the country and the government was a good thing.

JS:What's the, what's the first time you remember hearing anything about Vietnam?

WM:Probably it was, I think I was like a sophomore in high school, and I remember seeing something maybe on a *Life Magazine* or a *Look Magazine*, whatever it was at the time, and I guess I remember JFK sending the first advisors over is what I remember, and those being the Green Berets I think is what they were. Or maybe they weren't Green Berets, but they were the advisors that went over first, I guess that's when I first remembered it.

JS:What did you think about it?

WM:I don't think I had any real opinion about it. I mean, it was just something that you heard about and that they did and I, you know, it was part of what they had to do.

JS:So tell me about the time when, well, when you ended up getting into the military.

WM:Let's see, I guess to make a long story longer, I went to college. At that time, like in 1965 when I graduated, if you either didn't have a college deferment or some medical deferment, you were in the draft. So I went from MCI, I graduated MCI and that fall I went to Thomas College and had a college deferment. I went to Thomas for a year and a half and I really didn't care for college, and I was playing in a, at the time, like a garage rock 'n roll band in college, and we played a lot up at the ski area, up at Sugarloaf, and we played at the Red Stallion. And that kind of got in the way of school and I enjoyed that more, and so the school didn't have to notify the draft that I was out of school, but if the draft asked, they had to tell them, so they kind of kept it a secret for maybe six months that I was out of school. And in June I guess it was I got a draft notice saying that I had to report to the draft board in Skowhegan and I was drafted, and I was going into the Army at that point.

JS:What did you think?

WM:I don't know, I, it, it was something that, I mean, that you had to do. I mean, I didn't think about not going because of I guess my grandparents, I guess at one, at one point in high school or at MCI I did talk to a Navy recruiter about going in the Navy but there was a waiting list because people were trying to get in the Navy or the Air Force, people didn't want to go in the Marines or the Army at that point because that was almost a sure thing that you were going to go Vietnam and, at that time. So I had thought about going in the service at one point, and then I went, went to college. But it was something that I just, I

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had to do and it was because I think of my grandmother, my grandfather and my folks, the way they thought about the United States, I mean, the way I thought. I, I mean, there was no question that I wasn't going.

JS: So what do you think when you get your, your draft card there, what do you do after that?

WM: I think I was in Connecticut at the time, I was working in Hartford in Connecticut, and I had a job like for the summer or something down there and I had to travel back to Maine, and I think I came home like the day before I was going to go to be drafted. So, I mean, I didn't think anything of it. I thought, I guess there was something in my mind that it was, I really wasn't going in, it was just that I was, you know, when I showed up at the draft board and the lady at the draft board said, oh no, you're, you're on a bus this afternoon heading over to Bangor to be tested or whatever and you're in the Army at that point. And I go, oh, okay. So I guess I might have called my folks and said, you know, throw some, some clothes in a bag because I'm going to Bangor this afternoon. And that's what happened. We boarded a bus like at four o'clock in the afternoon, headed over to Bangor and, at the induction center over there, and stayed at the YMCA that night and the next day I was inducted. And I think that afternoon we were on a plane for North Carolina for Fort Bragg, down in North Carolina.

JS: Well what's it like to have your life changed in a matter of two days?

WM: I don't know, I, maybe it's, I guess it was a, kind of an upheaval of some sort, but I, I mean, it was an adventure too at the same time. It was something that, you know, I didn't have to pay for to do and I was just going and I just kind of went along with it. I mean, there wasn't any, any question. And then once again we thought, well, we're probably, we're not, I guess when we were in Bangor we thought, well, let's see, the closest basic training was Fort Dix, so that wouldn't be too bad down in New Jersey. And then the next, the next day when we all found out we were going to Fort Bragg in North Carolina, it was, oh well, okay, we're a little bit further away from home. But it was just one of those, one of the things that we, I mean, you did I guess.

JS: Tell me a little about the procedure when you got to Bangor, for the draftees?

WM: Let's see, I think there were, I think it was four, three or four us that went from, from Skowhegan, and we met up with maybe, at the induction center, it was at

the Federal Building over on Harwell Street, at the Post Office, that area, and we got up the next morning and we all kind of, we were in this building and had a physical there, lean left, lean right, cough, bend over, spread your cheeks, you know that thing, and, I mean that was basically the thing and, you know, any questions, medical problems or anything. And you know, you hear stories about people saying they were crazy or doing other things to get out but I don't remember anyone really having a problem or saying anything like that. I mean it was, everybody there seemed resigned to the fact that they were drafted. I guess we took some tests if I recall there, maybe some, there was some testing either there or at the induction center down in North Carolina, at boot camp, I can't remember, that's a little hazy. I remember losing a lot of sleep and not sleeping a lot and just kind of moving along in kind of a haze. How that happened, I don't know, other than that I don't remember a whole lot about it.

JS:What was the feeling amongst you guys that were up in Bangor when you found out you had to go to North Carolina the next day?

WM:I don't know, I guess everybody made phone calls home to say where they were going. I [*unintelligible word*] remember I did, and I had a girlfriend at the time and I called her and told her where I was going and then, you know, we just said goodbye at the time I guess, I don't...

JS:What did your family think?

WM:I don't really remember. I mean, there wasn't any, any big problems with it. I know that the other thing that people thought about, well, if you're in the Army and you do well in your testing, you might get sent to Germany at the time, because of the Cold War thing, so that was the other option I guess that you did hope for, that, you know, you weren't going to go to Vietnam. That was a, kind of a hope all the way through I guess, because it was, and I guess nobody wanted to tell you that that's where you were going specifically, but if you were drafted it was, you only had to spend two years obviously rather than more if you did, if you enlisted.

JS:Tell me about when you got to North Carolina.

WM:I think we flew into Pope Air Force Base, which was right across from Fort Bragg, North Carolina, that was the 82nd Airborne were there, where they were from. And I guess I kind of remember it being sandy and hot. It was in

July and the, the people that kind of greeted you and brought the inductees in were guys from Vietnam who had very short time when they came back, so that they really didn't put them on a base somewhere, so they just kind of, actually they hassled us guys is what they did, I mean, we were the, we were the new guys. So whenever they called us to attention, they'd say we want to hear you snap to attention. So everybody *[unintelligible word]* say attention and you'd say, snap, and you'd go into attention, and there was a big roar of this everybody saying snap. It later carried on into, when you finally got your, your boot camp assignment which was there, and the drill sergeant would say attention, some guys would forget that you weren't supposed to say snap at that time. So for a couple of days, you know, everybody, and if you made a mistake you always had to get down and give somebody twenty or thirty pushups or whatever. So that was, and they were kind of, oh yeah, you guys, *[unintelligible word]* going to Vietnam, yeah, I had buddies there and they didn't come back. And so they had some stories that they would tell and things like that. But once again you were given all your gear and you had a duffel bag and you threw it all in your duffel bag and I remember polishing boots, trying to get your boot shined just right for, get ready for boot camp which was going to happen in like a day or two, after you got all your stuff and you did your testing. I just remember like being in a haze, kind of, it's kind of skipping a beat type of thing because you'd lost sleep and that sort of thing. I guess I finally caught up, I mean I finally caught up on my sleep and everything but I remember, you know, being up at four, five o'clock which you weren't used to and then doing things until late, actually late in the evening I think, when we got in, too, it was late, at the induction center. And I guess I remember at one point when we first got there that the drill sergeants or whoever they were at the induction center asked anyone that had any knives or weapons or whatever to bring them down front, and I don't remember anyone from our group going but there was a few guys from Baltimore that went down front and threw their pocket knives or whatever they had into a big basket that they were carrying with them. That was one thing I do remember.

JS: Was there any different attitude toward you because you were a draftee rather an enlisted?

WM: From everybody *[unintelligible word]*?

JS: I mean by, yeah, just from....

JS: Well, I think a little bit. We got a little bit of hassle from the drill instructors

because we were draftees, that we didn't volunteer. Not as much though as we, as the fellows from the National Guard, what they called the NGs. Those guys were there just probably for summer basic training, then they were going to back to their units wherever they were in the States and just do their, whatever they had to do for their National Guard duty. But the, I think we, being the draftees, also felt a little bit better because we didn't have to spend the time in that the people who enlisted spent maybe three or four ye-, they knew they had three or four years ahead of them and we only had two. And, you know, if somebody liked it they could reenlist or whatever they wanted to. There might have been a little animosity but I, I mean, it wasn't enough to be concerned with I don't think.

JS: So what happened after North Carolina?

WM: Well, North Carolina we had the basic, basic training. I don't remember if it was six week or eight week, but the thing that we did do, it was kind of a trial company that we were in and this company, they were trying to get more people through basic training to I guess fill the slots that they needed, so what we didn't do is we didn't do a lot of marching to our different, things like the rifle range or whatever other places we went to. We were bussed or trucked to the different places. We did our calisthenics in the morning, we did our marching during the day to, to get the marching down and your rifle, the arms thing, whatever that was called. But as far as doing things, we went by bus or by one of those cattle, what they called the cattle trucks or big duce and a halves. And we would go by these other guys who weren't in this type of situation and I, at the end, at the P, what they call the PT test, the physical training test at the end, we had as many high scorers in our group as the people who did all the marching to everywhere they went, so that was kind, kind of interesting. I don't know how I found that out or where it came about, but I noticed that we were doing a lot more riding I guess than some of these other people who were, I think they were in after or before us a little bit or whatever, because there were like rotating companies of people in boot camp. I mean, the barracks next to you would empty out a couple weeks after you got there because they were in their last weeks of basic, and then we were in our first weeks, and then by the time the new guys, I mean, we were getting out, those barracks would fill up with somebody coming in for just like two weeks, *[unintelligible phrase]*, so we'd kind of haze them a little bit. And so it wasn't, I don't know, it wasn't too bad. I was a platoon guy, too, during basic training which was like an acting sergeant, which, you know, you stood out in front of your platoon and you were the one that took responsibility for everybody in the

barracks type of thing. It wasn't too bad. And the drill sergeants wanted me to stay and become a drill instructor, but that was an infantry position, drill instructor, so at any time you could be transferred to the infantry and then possibly like to Vietnam. And the infantry wasn't the place you wanted to be in Vietnam. When you were in basic you did take a lot of tests and found out what you wanted to do or what you were good at. And, you know, some people were good at different things. I'd had a couple of years of college and I, I thought the engineers was going to be the place to go, yeah, let's hear it for the engineers, we're going to go and do drafting all day, right? Engineer drafting, you know, sit at tables and everything. That's not what the engineers were, they were combat engineers, and the combat engineers were usually the first guys into a place to clear away things or build things or blow up things or whatever. But I didn't know that so my, my friend and I, who was from Madison, and he was drafted also, he and I kind of went through basic together and went through what they call AIT, advanced individual training, and we went in the combat engineers out to Fort Leonardwood in Missouri and we left some time in, let's see, July, August, I think it was like September we were out there, September or October we were in Fort Leonardwood out in Missouri. And we then got our engineer, combat engineer training which was learning how to string barbed wire, learning how to build Bailey bridges, learning how to build timber bridges, demolitions, we learned how to use C-4 and dynamite, we learned land mines. It was mostly hand type of things and also rifle, rifle company type. It was, even though you were an engineer, you also were a rifle company or a rifle platoon, whatever, and so we had basic combat training too. We weren't into any mechanized bulldozers or bucket loaders or anything like that at that point, so we were, I was there until Thanksgiving I guess and, out in Missouri, and I, I got sick just before the graduation from there. Oh, I had made, let's see, when you're inducted you become private E1, out of basic training I was a private E2, and out of AIT I made a PFC, which is private E-3. And then from, from there you were assigned to your duty station and from there we went to, a lot of us from this, from this AIT, went to Fort Bliss in Texas to the 31st Engineer Battalion, which was our duty station. My friend who was from Madison, he got stationed in Germany, and I think he made a phone call home I think, because at that point if you knew somebody, you could possibly get some decent duty if you knew someone, you know, like a senator or a congressman or whatever. So anyway, he got stationed to go over to Germany and I went to Fort Bliss in Texas and it was kind of a known fact that this 31st Engineer Battalion was going to be going to Vietnam at some point. So we were down in Texas, but the battalion was up in New Mexico at the New Mexico National Guard Barracks, it was a place that was maybe forty

or fifty miles outside of El Paso, up in New Mexico. And we had, at that point there were fellows who had come from these other mechanized schools who ran the bulldozers and the bucket loaders, and we had jeeps and duce and a halves and five ton dump trucks, graders and jeeps. And when I got, I was, I was getting, I got there late because I was sick for like a week in the infirmary at, in Missouri, and I went home late because at that point we were able to go home, and I was home over Thanksgiving that year, and I came back to, I went to Fort Bliss and then was there and I went back home during Christmas, and then we had January, February, March in New Mexico and we did all our training out in the desert, which was really, you know, the desert climate was really good training for the jungle climate, I, you know, I mean, I don't know, that's the thinking of the brass in the Army I guess.

JS: Why did you say you kind of, everyone kind of knew that the 31st was going to Vietnam?

WM: I don't know. They, somehow the rumor was out there that, the drill instructors knew it or somebody knew it somewhere, so there was a, you know, I mean, it was kind of fordrawn that you knew you were going, or, you know, you knew that the company, the battalion was going to, was going to Vietnam at some point. And I guess in, in March I guess, we started like putting all the, the machines, all the bulldozers and things, the guys started doing that. I became, well, what I did when I was in there is I became a jeep driver and radio operator for a platoon lieutenant and, no, I'm sorry, com-, let's see, the company commander was a captain, the lieutenant was a, yeah, he was a platoon leader for, and he was a lieutenant. So I became his jeep driver and radio operator and that's what my job became. It was something that I guess people did train for but, I don't know, I got the job somehow. Oh, I guess because they saw I was a PFC, made PFC out of AIT so they said maybe he's got some brains or something, I don't know. But anyway, so we started getting all the machinery ready, I mean we were greasing cables on the winches on the duce and a halves and the five ton trucks, and doing things to batteries, I can't remember what we were doing, but we were getting everything ready because they were going to ship everything over before we left on the boats. And at one point I remember we drove, we drove all the vehicles down to the rail head in El Paso and drove the five tons and duce, and all the machinery onto flatbed trailers and then we all went back to, to New Mexico, the barracks, and I mean we knew, we knew we were going at that point.

JS: You said the training in New Mexico prepared you well for the...?

WM:No, I was being sarcastic.

JS:I was just making sure.

WM:No, I was, I mean, we were in the desert, I mean, you know, in the desert building bridges over things that, you know, there weren't any rivers in and, I mean it was dry and hot, I mean it wasn't, you know, jungle stuff. But I, that's, I was kind of, it was the Army, I mean, that's what the Army did [*unintelligible word*], I mean it was, I don't know that I, you know, at some point you've got to take it serious, but then, you know, other times it's just, it's just so bizarre, some of the things that they did. And why we went from a desert climate to, but I guess, you know, you've got to have room for everybody somewhere, so, anyway, that's what we did.

JS:So what were you thinking at this point, thinking about your experience in Vietnam and...?

WM:You mean before we went?

JS:Yeah, how, your experience so far in the Army and in Vietnam at that point?

WM:Well, I don't know, I, there were guys who were in the battalion, in the company or wherever that had been over to Vietnam before so I mean you questioned them about what it was like and what they did and what you could expect. And you wondered if, I guess, if all their stories were, you know, were true, what they were telling you. The experience, once again I don't know, it was just something that you had to do. When you're in the Army you're told what to do every minute of the day almost, except, you know, when you're sleeping I guess, that's your time. Most every time, or I guess except for when you're on leave or whatever, you take a weekend off, then I mean you're just, you're told what to do and you just kind of have to believe what people, what people tell you. I guess at one point I had qualified for OCS school, officer candidate school, when I was in basic, and I wanted to go into the engineers at Fort Belvoir, Virginia, I mean, I was trying to get a little bit out of it and that might have helped you if you were an officer a little bit. That school was closed. I could have gone to artillery OCS in Oklahoma, but if you became a lieutenant in the artillery, you were probably a forward observer and that might put you either in one of those little planes that flew around and observed and saw where the shells were falling, and people were shooting these guys out of

the air, so that wasn't too neat. And I also qualified for warrant officer school, and I could have flown a helicopter. And I guess, even though, I mean it, I mean today when I see a helicopter flying around different places and I say, you know I should have done that. Because, I don't know, at some point, for some reason, I thought maybe I wouldn't go even though I was a helicopter pilot. And I always wanted to fly, and never, I never, and that's the one thing I guess I regret about the whole Army experience is I didn't go to warrant officer school and learn how to fly a helicopter.

JS: Why didn't you think you'd go if you flew *[unintelligible word]*?

WM: Well, once again, the story is that if you were good enough in helicopter school, and of course I was going to be good enough, I mean there was no question, that you might end up being an instructor yourself, you could be an instructor. Some of these guys actually wanted to go over to Vietnam and fly in helicopters because there was the, there were two that were really neat. There was the Cobra at that time, which was the Cobra gunship helicopter, I guess they still have some of those around, which was the one that held the cannons and the rockets and it was a narrow thing, and I mean it was a, it was a attack helicopter. And then there was the little Lotz, the light observation helicopter which was kind of used, it was similar but didn't have as much armor in it, but it flew really fast and it did some other things. And so that was the things that you thought you might be able to get to, I mean, so you might be able to be an instructor, you might not have to go and fly in Vietnam, but I mean your chances were good that you were going and being a helicopter pilot because that was the main mode of transportation over there, were helicopters. And the other thing, you had to sign up for another year and had to go in for another year and I wasn't sure that I wanted to do that because I had a girlfriend back home and I was in love and all this stuff, and, you know, I was going to come back home and get married and yada-yada-yada. But anyway, that's another story.

JS: Did that explain your thinking about finding jobs or ways to not go to Vietnam? You know, finding a position maybe like going into helicopter school maybe to not go to Vietnam?

WM: Yeah, it did but I guess the extra year, I wasn't willing to do the extra. I, it was just enough to think about the two years that I was going to be in. Oh, my God, I mean two years was, I mean when you're all of like, well actually I was twenty one, I turned twenty one just as I was leaving. When you're twenty

one, I mean jeez, two years is an awful long time, you know? And, you know, I guess I traded that to know two years that I'd be out, to another year of being in the service.

JS: So after you load the vehicles on and you go back to the base, to the barracks, what do you do then?

WM: I don't know, I guess we, we didn't have, couldn't do any training and it wasn't very long, I mean we knew we were going, so I guess we did whatever we did and at some point we got orders to, to go to Vietnam and the reason why I remember it was my twenty first is because I had my first legal drink down in the airport, I turned twenty one I guess like the day we flew out of El Paso airport. We had charter planes and we were flying, we were flying to San Fran-, well actually to California, to San Francisco, or the other side of San Francisco which is, whatever, there's a big base over there and I know it because I was there a couple years ago, I went out to see the, some of the things in San Francisco. Anyway, we flew to San Francisco and we boarded a boat. We had the engineers and we had some other guys that were going and I can't remember what they were, but we boarded a boat in San Francisco and it took us twenty one days to get from San Francisco to Vietnam. Oh we had a, excuse me, we had a stop in Okinawa and we actually were able to get off the boat in Okinawa, and I think we had like a day in Okinawa. And that was *[unintelligible word]*, I don't know if it was half way or a little bit more than half way, to Okinawa. And actually a couple of guys didn't come back. They stayed, they stayed on Okinawa, they were AWOL. I don't remember who they were but they were in the engineer company that we were in. They didn't, they didn't come back.

JS: So what did you, called your family and told them and talked to them and, when you got your letter that you were going to Vietnam?

WM: Oh yeah, yeah, we knew that at some point, I can't remember when I knew I was going. Maybe, I think we knew we were going at Christmas time, when I went home for Christmas. And we had, it was what, it would have been Christmas '68, and then of course '69 there was the, it was all the snow and everything and it snowed, I couldn't get back in time, when I was supposed to be, so I had to let the Red Cross know that because the airport, everything was snowed in up here *[unintelligible phrase]* and I got back late down there in, I think at Christmas time. But at that point we knew we were, we were going to be going and I think I even, yeah, I got, I asked my girlfriend to marry me

before I went and I got her a ring and all this stuff, you know, it was one of those, one of those deals, you know. Oh yeah, I'll wait for you, you wait for me, you know, and oh yeah, great, and you know, so at that point we knew we were going I guess, it was Christmas. And, every-, you know, everybody, you know, be careful, keep you head down, you know, yada-yada, all that stuff. So your friends were still around I guess at that point or you'd see them at Christmas time and, you know, what are you doing, oh I'm in the Army, I'm going to Vietnam, oh good, see you later, you know. So, I don't know, I guess at the time you're still young and I don't know if the word is reckless but you just don't understand that, you know, things can happen to you, you know, that way. Although I guess you're seeing or looking at the television and seeing the body counts in the news and stuff like that, the evening news, I guess that kind of rings a bell at some point with me, I don't know if it was before I went in or after I got, I don't remember.

JS: So, what was it like on the boat?

WM: We had a wicked storm out of San Francisco somewhere, I don't remember where. It was, it was this, our platoon was in charge of cleaning up one of the heads on the boat and everybody got sick, everybody was seasick, it was awful. The, you know, you'd get in line for dinner and you'd have to hold on to the hand rails in the hall and the guys coming out of the, out of the chow hall would be barfing on the way out, or not even making it to the bathrooms. And we had to clean it up, that was our, our place that we had it was we had to clean up the bathroom which wasn't fun. But I can remember sitting in the galley and, on the boat, and it was kind of in the middle because you could see both sides, and you'd look, you'd have to hold your tray and you'd be leaning this way, and you'd look down out of one porthole on one side and you'd see the water on the porthole, and you'd look in the other one and you'd see the sky in the other one. And then after a while the boat would go the other way. And it was, it was stormy, there were some big waves. I've never seen such big waves. On the way over, I read The Rise and Fall of the Third Reich because it was a big book. And went out on deck quite often and went out at night and things like that, on the deck of the boat. We were squeezed in down below, there were, I think bunks were five high with the guys, I mean there was only a space maybe, what, eighteen inches, two feet between the bunks, and if you had the top bunk it wasn't bad because you had a little bit more room because of the bulkhead above you, so the top bunk was the one to get. Although people wanted to be near the bottom to get out easier, but I think I remember taking the top bunk because I had more room. And I remember it

just, it took twenty one days. But the good thing about the twenty one days, though, it counted as our in country time, so from the time we left San Francisco, sailed out the bay and by Alcatraz, that was the first time I saw Alcatraz, underneath the Golden Gate Bridge, it started counting as in time, in time country, so we only had, I mean you started counting then, you only had eleven months and nine days or whatever left to go, all the way over. And they weren't shooting at you at that time.

JS: So what was the, what was the attitude like on the boat, though, amongst everyone?

WM: Oh, I don't know. I can remember a couple of guys had guitars and they'd play guitars, and a lot of gambling going on, always was a lot of gambling, either dice or cards or whatever. I think everybody at that point was resigned to the fact that, I mean, you know, we were on our way and there was, I mean, you're not turning this boat around unless there was a big cease fire along the line, you know. I mean, this boat was going over there, and that's where you were headed.

JS: What did you do on your day off in Okinawa?

WM: Went and had a real beer, or whatever their beers were over there, bought a camouflage hat, because we hadn't been issued any camouflage or green stuff and it was one of those floppy type hats I remember, and we bought hats and went into a bar and just kind of walked around and saw the sights as I recall, I mean whatever sights you could see in Okinawa. I guess it was, there was like a strip where all the bars were, like there was, you know, I guess in any town. And we went to some Air Force base over there at some point as I remember. And then from there they bussed us into Okinawa. I don't remember a whole lot about it.

JS: So after Okinawa you have, get back on the boat.

WM: Yeah, we get back on the boat. We're back on the boat and we sail out of Okinawa to Vietnam and I guess as we get, as we get there we can see, like a day, we had to, the place we were going we were told, or the place we were landing, had been shelled the night before or whatever, so we had to stay off the coast, and that next night I remember we were all outside at night looking at the, I don't know which way we were but I guess maybe it was a sunset whatever, and after it got dark there was some, you could see the explosions

and things like that, you know. Aw, jeez, you know, here we go. And we, so they pulled out of, out of range and we stayed out one more night. And the next day we went in and we got in these landing craft like they did in WWII, in these things, and we had no idea where we were, I mean we're going to Vietnam and we've got all our gear on. At this point though all we had was our rifles, but we don't have any ammunition, so we, it can't be that bad, you know, you figure, well we don't have any ammunition but we got our guns and we had our flak jackets and all our, our helmets and our duffel bags and whatever else we were carrying. And we got into these landing boats and we went in and they, I guess they got us up, I don't remember like going through the water or anything, but they got us like up to the beach, and the thing goes down in the front and we look out, and we've landed at Vung Tau, which is the in country R&R center, so here are these guys and these women, Vietnamese and Americans, and they're lying on the beach and wondering, you know, what's going on here with these guys. And we're of course coming of with our, think we're going to be, you know, fighting our way onto shore or whatever, you know, so it was quite a, quite a paradox, is that what, what I, I mean to see, you know, people lying on blankets on the beach and then us coming in and, to this place in Vung Tau. And then I guess we boarded busses and went to, it must have been a soccer field, I remember a big, big field type thing and we all sat there because in the Army it was always hurry up and wait. Always, you had to go somewhere and when you got there you had to wait for something. And at that point they had, oh, we got on some airplanes, that's right, it was during the day, we got on some airplanes and we went to, they flew us into our base camp which was Black Horse Base Camp, and that was at a place called Xuan Loc and it was the, whatever the Black Horse Cavalry was, they were the armored cavalry with the armored personnel carriers and the tanks, and also they had helicopters. And it was in a, in a forest that they'd cut out as a base camp, and we were going there to finish working on the base camp as a, the whole ba-, yeah, the whole battalion went there. And when we got there all our vehicles were there and, you know, you went over to your jeep or your truck or your bulldozer whatever, and you know, there it was. I mean, how it got there I don't know, but everything was there waiting for us. And then we started, we still didn't have any bullets at that time either. And the first night we were there, the place got shelled, on the other side of us, it was a fairly big base camp and there was a runway and everything in it, *[unintelligible word]* helicopters, and we got shelled on the other side. We still didn't have any ammunition, and so the next day the lieutenant and I went out in the jeep around to the bunkers, around the outskirts of the, and in the bunkers there were boxes of ammunition so we picked up some boxes of

ammunition out of the bunkers, which later we replaced but at least everybody had some ammunition. But, you know, at that point we, I guess we didn't need it or, we didn't need it at that point.

JS: So what did you think the first night when you got there and you saw the shell fire and you had to pull back out?

WM: It was unnerving. I mean, you know, that, you knew you were there at that point and you knew it was real, and you knew that that was where you were going. I mean there wasn't anything [*unintelligible word*], it was a little strange.

JS: And you got off, saw them on the beach.

WM: That was even weird. That was weird, I mean, it went from strange to weird, you know? I mean, that was, to see the shelling the night before and then to come on shore and see these people on beach towels and everything and, you know, in the water. It was, it was just, I mean that was weird. And then from there I guess we, yeah we, we, I mean we were, we were there, I mean we were on, we were in Vietnam.

JS: So what were your first impressions of Vietnam?

WM: I don't know. I guess, I guess I remember it was hot and muggy as far as that went, and there were strange smells, too. I finally found out what it was, it was diesel and human waste, because that's how they got rid of it, they burned it with diesel. That was everywhere you went. And a lot of little people with strange looking hats, and you didn't know, you didn't know if that guy with the strange looking hat, you know, had a gun or a rifle or whatever, you know, was going to pull it out. But, I mean, after you were there for a while you, I mean you knew what was what, but when you first got there you just didn't know. I mean, you had to kind of sort things out for yourself type of thing or someone else that had been there before.

JS: So what was daily life like?

WM: Well, let's see, we, we were, the guys that were going to build this base camp up, whoever was there before built all the, the, I guess what it was was a rubber tree plantation and they knocked down all the trees, of course someone had to pay for those trees, the government did to someone, but I think they were owned by some American company anyway the way it worked out. So we

were the guys that were going to kind of finish up what this other engineer people started, and our company, we had a cement plant, which was a big cement mixer, and we had dump trucks, and we were building concrete pads and also the buildings, the barracks for the guys that were there, which were, and we started with ourselves first, we started building everything. But, and we did it for the whole battalion. In other words, the company would go, split up and go out to other battalions because these other companies in the battalion were making what they called helicopter revetments which were a place to put the helicopters so they wouldn't get hit and shelled when they were on the ground. Another company made, they were doing some things with the airport runway, and we had all the wood in our company, we had plywood, we had two-by-fours, we had screening, we had cement, and we always seemed to have a little extra. And the other companies on the, on the base, they would want maybe a little concrete pad poured for something or they needed a board here, a plank there for something, so we'd trade. And we ended up trading like steaks, cases of beer. Every Saturday night that we were there, in the evening, we'd have a barbecue. And we'd have barbecued chicken, barbecued steaks or something that we'd traded for for some extra cement or some extra wood or whatever, and, or whatever they needed, even, we'd build things for them too. Another project that our company had, because we had some pretty good fellows that were wood workers, we built a, what do I want to say? Club, like it was an enlisted man's club, I, well I can get to the pictures at some point, but it was a, it had a stage, it had building-, rooms off this other, it was a big huge thing. We had cranes bringing in trusses....

End of Tape One, Side A

Tape One, Side B:

WM:OK.

JS:I always, I always have that paranoid feeling that it's....

WM:Yeah, I know, it's not working. Where were we? Oh yeah, we were building things. So we were building things and I was the jeep driver I think at that point for the company commander, I got transferred into the, the other, the company commander was a captain and I drove for him, and we'd go out and check all the projects all the way around the base camp. And at night, after hours, the officers had an officer club. They wanted someone to run it for them, they didn't want to run it themselves, so I volunteered to run it because I had experience from being up at Sugarloaf in the bar, and I wrote to my aunt in Connecticut and she would send me bartending implements like a shaker to mix drinks in, things I couldn't get like grenadine syrup and lemon syrup to make mixed drinks and things with it. But we could go down to the PX that was on base there, they had an actual PX, and we could buy beer and whiskey and whatever, and we would, and it was an old tent and once again, us, or we being the engineers, we poured a concrete pad and put the tent on and had a bar made and we had a refrigerator in there. And, I don't know, about four or five o'clock I'd get to leave and I'd go over and start getting things ready at the officers club. And I got to know, in the officers club it wasn't yes sir, no sir, it was, everybody was kind of on the same level. And these guys were somewhere in college, college grads, I had college and so, I got to know some of the officers and, you know, we were first name basis, we were in there but out on the street or during the job, you know, it's still salute and yes sir, no sir type thing. And then we'd, we also had movies at night sometimes, they were like big outdoor, outdoor movies, and I got the idea of making popcorn for the guys at the movies, so I sold popcorn on the side out of the officers club at night when they had movies, and that was once or twice a week we'd have, have movies out there, and that was, that was kind of neat.

JS:So did you guys make a lot of money doing this?

WM:I don't know if we made a lot of money but, you know, we, I think I used to just put it back into the officers club to buy more, buy more things for the officers club. And there was a hospital on base and there was nurses there, and there were the Red Cross women, the donut dollies we called them, and sometimes I'd get, because I was a jeep driver and had the key, I'd go down and pick up

the ladies at the hospital or wherever they were and bring them over to the officers club. And we had some nice ladies at the officers club and, you know, dancing and just being able to talk to women was something over there at that point. And, there was a little bit of rivalry between some co-, some battalion, I think there was the other battalion on the other side and they had a club too, there was a rivalry to see who would get the most women at their club *[unintelligible word]*, you know, what they were doing and it was, it was just kind of neat. And that was one of the things that kind of kept me, you know, out of the day to day. I mean, it was something to look forward to at night I guess, go over and do the officers club and just kind of get out of the, the daily stuff. And also it got, it got me out of some of the other things that were going on. I mean, once again, there was a lot of gambling. In one of the, in one of the barracks that we had, the guys down at the end made a, made a beautiful poker table, covered it with felt and it had the pockets in it and they had a nice little room and the whole thing, and they'd, a lot of money changed hands, a lot of money changed hands down there. And they would go in way into, to late hours, I remember, at night sometimes. But, that was one of the things. The other thing that we were able to do, we had hot showers almost every night over there, which was neat, because once again, we were the engineers, we were able to get the wood to build a tower to put the tank on, and then we had one of those hot water heaters that you use to, it's like a gas thing, I can't remember how it worked, but one guy in the afternoon he'd be, I mean he was the guy, and if he didn't light that, light that thing for your shower for that night, I mean, he was mud, you know, his ass was out. So that was his job, to light that, to make sure that after, after dinner you could go out and take a shower and, I mean, that was nice. *[unintelligible phrase]*. I mean, it was, it was work, it was work, and you worked from, from in the morning when you got up which was early early and you went to the mess hall, and then you had your job and you went out and you spread the concrete or you built whatever you built or you did the concrete factory, and, I guess the worst thing that anybody really didn't like to do was the KP duty, and everybody had KP duty at one point during the week or the month or however the schedule ran. I guess it was worse to do KP duty than it was to, to go out and do your job.

JS:What's KP duty?

WM:Oh, kitchen police, you know, wash the pots and pans and the dishes and do whatever. But that was, that was, and then on the weekend like I guess you had maybe Saturday afternoon until, and all day Sunday off unless there was something special, so I mean you did have a day off. And I guess, sitting

around one day on a Sunday, we were kind of outside Sunday afternoon and I can remember putting on my radio in the jeep and, because we were seeing these jets fly over, and we got on their frequency somehow, on the radio, and we're there listening to them as they were talking to the observer dropping the bombs, and we'd hear the bombs go off, we knew that they were dropping them. And it was like, it was like listening to a ball game type of thing or something, but that was, that was our recreation for a while there we listened to, listened to that, and we'd listen to the helicopters and do whatever they did, listen to whatever they did.

JS: So what were you thinking about daily life, I mean how'd you feel about it?

WM: I don't know, it, it was a job that you did. It was, I guess I remember it, as far as like being there it, I mean, it was once again something you had to do, it was your job. You just did it every day, whatever you had to do?

JS: Did you stay in the same place the whole time you were there?

WM: No, let's see, we built that, the base camp up. We never did finish with that big club on base, I mean that thing was, it was huge, it was beautiful, too. A lot of lumber and everything went into that. We never d-, I never did see that finished. We transferred, we, we packed up all our stuff and we were transferred up to a place called Lai Khe and we stayed there for a while and built some, some more things up there at that base camp and were there for about, I don't know, a month or two, and then we were transferred to another place called Phuoc Vinh, I think that's where it was, and that was another rubber tree plantation. And the captain that I drove for got stationed down at battalion headquarters in Long Binh, and he said if, you know, a job came up down there, whatever, you know, and I was interested, and you know, maybe he'd get me transferred down. Well, I guess I was up at Phuoc Vinh for maybe two weeks and somehow he got a message to me that, you know, you want to come down, they need a jeep driver down here. OK, so I transferred down, got a speeding ticket from the MPs though so I had to work off the speeding ticket when I went down, cleaning offices or something at night after hours, that was my punishment for the speeding ticket, which I didn't deserve. So I got transferred down to Long Binh to battalion headquarters, and I was a jeep driver down there and kind of got sucked into some clerk type of work because they found out I could type, so I got, I got in to doing reports down there. And we had air conditioned offices down there, I had a nice jeep, and we, or the captain, was in charge of a rock crusher that crushed rocks in a quarry over by

Bien Hoa and we had to go out in the morning after breakfast and make sure that the guys were at the rock quarry and the thing was working, and then we would go to the places where they were dumping the rock, it was being used to build roads, and we'd measure the rock and make sure it was the right diameter or something, I don't know what he did. And then we'd go back and have the day to do reports or whatever, and in the afternoon we went back to the rock quarry to make sure it was closed down, the thing was running, get the totals for the day, whatever tonnage or truck loads or whatever they did. And that was, that was pretty neat, pretty neat duty. We went, down at, we went to check some, that's right, the other thing that we did, he got a special project to check bridges, we had to check bridges at one point, because we did a lot of flying in those little light observation helicopters. I got a lot of pictures of just aerial shots that mean nothing now but at the time they were neat. We had, we did some bridge inspections, and we also did a survey on well water, we went to a lot of little villages just everywhere in, around, around Long Binh, some, somewhere. Daily we were probably going to three or four different little Vietnamese villages that as far as we knew were secure, you know, during the day, and we'd go down and we'd, we'd go to their well, they had usually a community well or whatever at these places and we'd take samples of the well water and bring them back and analyze and say whether it was good water or bad water. I don't know if that was part of the pacification or whatever. So I got to fly in a helicopter, oh, I don't know, for two or three weeks I guess it was, maybe even a month almost on a daily basis going to different places either checking bridges or whatever. We also had, we'd drive to some of the, the closer ones, the bridges and things, so we got to go down to Saigon quite often. And, oh, the captain I drove for, his father was a doctor over in the States and he was, had something to do with these volunteer doctors to Vietnam, and when the five hundredth doctor came to Vietnam to volunteer there was a big thing through the American Medical Association and his father came over and we went to Saigon and stayed for like two or three days down there and met his father and he was able to see him, which was kind of neat. And I stayed in a real hotel and everything and that was really kind of neat, had some decent meals and things and got to see Saigon a little bit. So that, I mean day to day that was what, I get, there was only one, one time when they had I guess it was TET in '6-, let's see, '68, '69, right after their new year whenever that is, that they, that the North Vietnamese thought they were going to come into the Long Binh compound. I mean, this place was, it was like a city, I mean it was like, like, ringed with barbed wire but it was, it was probably as big as Portland. I mean, this place was huge, this Long Binh, and the Vietnamese thought, the North Vietnamese thought they were going to come in

and drag the Americans out and feast on C-rations is what they were going to, that was their mission. And I guess for three or four days everything was just locked up, I mean the, because they were trying to, they were sneaking in different places. And there was one place that, like two days before this happened that it started to get overgrown with some grass and some jungle things, and we were called out, this captain and myself, to kind of survey this area, see what, so we were walking in tall grass I remember and some short shrubbery and stuff and looking around, and we figured, well, you know, this, this place, something has to be done here, bulldoze or whatever to make it so they can't see you. So, it's like a couple days later this, this attack started on Long Binh, and that's where most of the Vietnamese came in was right where we were, and they may have already been in there because we went back and sprayed it with diesel after the attack was over, we sprayed the whole thing with diesel and light it with flares and after it burned off there were maybe forty or fifty bodies that were in this area, they were crawling back out of crawling in, they were shot in that area. So that was the only really type of thing that really happened on, at Long Binh, was that offensive. And at night when it was going on you'd see these big gun ships, they were called spookies, spookies, something like that, and they had the mini guns on them and the tracers would come out of the sky, out of this airplane and it would look like a, like a water hose, a hose squirting water, and it was amazing to watch how many rounds that would come out of that thing. And the sound was just something else, it was really amazing. Like I said, that was the only really hairy, hairy thing that happened to me when I was there.

JS:You never saw any other combat?

WM:No, not really. When we, when we were out in, a couple of times we got called out, going back before I went to Long Binh, we'd be called out to maybe repair a bridge or something that was blown up and when we were out there usually the infantry would come in and do all the security, you know, put a perimeter around us. Or, actually we had Koreans there, too, from South Korea, there were some other ones, Gurkhas I guess that were there too, and some Thai, some people from Thailand, and they would do most of the security for us. And maybe there might be some rockets that were trying to be fired in but they weren't, they weren't very accurate, and things like that when we were out in the field. But most of the time when we were out there, we were out there and we did a job, we'd build the bridges during the day and at night they'd come and blow them up, and then we'd go out another time and build them up again. We did quite a few brid-, we did some floating bridges and we did some

stationary bridges, putting culverts and things like that. But not, never, I don't ever remember firing my rifle at any, at anyone. Actually when I got there, when I first got there, I found a guy that was leaving, going back to the States and he had, I don't know, a couple of grease guns which was a WWII gun, a Thompson sub-machine gun and three carbines, and I bought them all for like fifty bucks. And he sold them to me and I ended up selling them to, I gave one of the carbines to the captain I was driving. We carried those, we carried the sub machine guns, I mean the grease guns, and we'd go out to the rifle range and we'd shoot those and practice with those but I don't ever remember shooting, being in actual combat shooting back and forth. There was a couple of ambush patrols that every once in a while you had to kind of semi volunteer for one of those, you'd go out at night and pick a spot along the road and you'd set up a, for ambush to see if any Vietcong were coming in. That was a little, a little hairy but I mean it never, nothing ever happened at one of those when I was there.

JS:What was it like sitting out on one of those at night though?

WM:It was scary, it was scary. You know, you put the, the, the Claymore mines out around you and you had the little clicker that would detonate them, and you went out after that and you put the strings out with the cans with a rock in the can for a, for a trip to, if anything or anybody came through. In the morning, early in the morning, they had wild jungle cocks out there so you'd hear it and it was, I mean, a perfect rooster, and you'd say wait a minute, that's too perfect, you know, you'd think it was somebody out there. And then there was the little lizards that were out there too and they were called, for anything else they were called the fuck you lizards, because it sounded like 'fuck you, fuck you.' You can bleep that out if you want. But that was the weirdest thing that ever, I mean that you heard out there, it was really strange to hear something like that early in the morning. And at that point, yeah, you say, yup, Charlie's out there, we're going to be in a fight or whatever. There was only maybe eight or ten guys, you know, in this little perimeter or bunker or whatever. But I think what happened was that, and I figured it out later, that everyone went to the same place every night, okay? So what are you going to do, all right? Charlie knows you're there, you know, you know that he's, he's going, he's not really wanting to get in, into, so he's not going to be there. So it was just kind of like a camp out type of thing after I figured out. Because, I mean, you, unless somebody actually just, just tripped over you, didn't know you were there, but they knew where you were all the time, so they didn't want to mess with you anyway. I don't remember any ambush patrol in our battalion going

out and getting into a fire fight. I don't, I don't remember that.

JS:What's it like to see the, when you burn the field down and all of a sudden there's fifty bodies lying there? I mean what's that like?

WM:Well that, that was a little spooky because like two days before I was standing there and, I mean, in this grass and vegetation these guys could have been an arm's length away from me and not know. And then you go back and see those bodies there and know that that's where they were coming through and you were there. And, you know, I mean if you, it might of, I mean if you'd tripped over a guy, I mean you might have been in a fire fight right there with him, but, I mean, it was just, it was strange to see that, with those guys, I mean. And then I guess it was, at that point it was, I guess really the first bodies or any, any action that, you know, you'd seen. I mean, I wasn't involved in anything. We were kind of back away from where they, where this was and we went over, I remember kind of being on a hill of something and watching, there was a big tower and it was an observation tower and there was machine guns and things in it, and the MPs were the guys who were the ones that was kind of taking the brunt of where they were coming through. And I can remember being back quite a ways and hiding behind the jeep and watching these, watch a kind of a fire fight going on. And I saw a North Vietnamese get killed. It's the first time I've ever seen anybody hit by a, by a bullet, and it's really weird to watch. I mean that's, that's a strange thing to see someone, I mean, you don't just fall down and go *haaw*, you know, I mean they, they, I mean you actually get thrown. I don't know if it was because they were so small or whatever but, I mean, you actually get thrown and you crumble and you fall, and I guess I'd never really seen that. I mean you see it all right in the movies and everything, you know, but that's not the way it is. And so when you see movies and things happening now, I, they're getting more realistic unfortunately, in the movies, but that's, I guess that was the first that I had ever seen of any combat like that or anything happening that was, you know, that was, you know, deemed bad I guess.

JS:So was it, had things gone how you expected them to go?

WM:Well, yeah I guess, I mean I, we were the engineers, we got over there, I guess after we got going and we started building things and we didn't see a lot of combat, we didn't see, I mean it was kind of, I mean it was decent duty, I mean. And, and as you got going, saying well, you know, this isn't really so bad. We did have some casualties at that Black Horse, in the battalion, at that

Black Horse base camp. We were sending convoys out with dump trucks almost daily at the same time to go to a gravel pit to get gravel and sand for the cement plant, and that's something that you just aren't supposed to do. And the Vietnamese, the North Vietnamese found our sch-, you know, looked at the schedule and, here they come, so they, they put some of the Claymore mines on trees and when the guys in the dump trucks went riding by they exploded some and we had three, three killed, dump truck guys. I mean, you knew that something could happen to you. And we had, we had a, like a funeral type of thing for them. We had their rifles with their bayonets upside down and their helmets on the bayonets and their boots all shined up and the chaplain came along and, I don't know how it came about but they had a, a little organ that was there, and I w-, I had played in the band before and I knew some chords and things and I, I actually played The Old Rugged Cross that we sang, I remember at that, and then I just played some other things at the beginning and the end of the, of this, but I was there pumping the organ with my feet and playing, and playing this organ at a funeral service for these guys, with the whole battalion there, which was a little strange. So that was, that was, I mean there was, the duty wasn't bad. There was problems because you were there, I mean, you know, in a hostile environment. Long Binh was like being back in the States, though. We had, believe it or not, an ice cream truck come around daily. We had a tennis court with lights out in back of the, and we played, we played tennis. Over in Bien Hoa there was a golf course, and also there was a pool at the officers club over there that we went to. And the captain got me a lieutenant's bar and I would put on the lieutenant's bar and we'd go into, into the officers club so I could go in and use the pool, we used to swim at the pool in the afternoon. I mean that was a, that was kind of a big no-no actually, but, I mean if you were caught being, you know, impersonating an officer. But, I mean I had been around in the officers club, I'd been around the officers and everything and so I mean I knew, you know, kind of how to, to carry it off. Didn't get caught. And we didn't do it that much, maybe a couple, three times, but anyway. And you just had a regular green fatigues on, I mean there wasn't any other things to denote you as a, anything else.

JS:You mentioned that with the helicopters and you testing the water in the villages?

WM:Yup.

JS:What was it, what, what did you think of the Vietnamese people, or your relationship with them?

WM: I guess, I mean, I didn't really hold any grudges against, against them at all, the actual people. We had, we went out to these villages and we had an interpreter with us to go to these villages, to tell them what we were there for and what we were doing. I never really, I just kind of kept records as I recall of where we were and that was my job there, so I really didn't talk to them that much. I mean, there was always little kids running around and, you know, I mean they always seemed to shy away from you, I mean, except for the kids. I mean, the kids were always, always coming around and wanting things. But the older people, they would kind of shy away a little bit from you. You know, I mean the kids were always, hey GI you want this, you want that or whatever. I can remember one time, well we were coming back from Saigon, that time we went to Saigon, and we were actually at a stop light somewhere and all these kids came up to the passenger side and started to try and sell stuff to the captain, and I was driving, and they, you know, they, they kind of started to really shout and, you know, I, there's something going on, and for some reason, I don't know why, I turned around and there's another kid in back of me and he's slowly lifting out my camera case or my suitcase or something out of the back. You know, like they, I mean this was all planned, I mean this is what they were doing. These other kids were distracting while this kid tried to make of with something that he would, you know, they'd probably try and sell to the next guy in the next jeep. I turned around and grabbed his arm and he dropped whatever he had. And I guess, you know, that kind of thing, I mean, you know here we are trying to help them in their country, you know, and then they're, they're, they're doing this. I mean I, I suppose it was a way for them, you didn't know what their circumstances or anything so you didn't know what they were doing, but it was just kind of a little disappointing I guess at that point to think that they would, they would try and do something, you know, I don't know. But I guess that was, I, I didn't really get to know too many people, I mean Vietnamese. We had a couple that worked in the office in Long Binh, there was another lady who was a bartender at the officers club in Long Binh, and I got a job as a bartender there because I was a bartender at the other place and I got to know her. And she was a bar maid there, too, and we worked together. And at night myself and another lieutenant would have to take her home, she lived in Bien Hoa, and we'd drive her back in the jeep at night. And her mother was Vietnamese, her father was French, and they owned most of the laundries on the base, so you'd bring your laundry to one of these Vietnamese laundries and you come back and your clothes would be all done. And they drove a '57 De Soto that they had, a great car, great old car. Anyway, they had that in the driveway at their, at their home, when we drove *[unintelligible word]*. You know, just, I'm remembering things now, you

know, as I go along, that's really kind of strange. But, a '57 De Soto, they were really a great car back here. Anyway, but as far as the people, I don't know, they were, they were just there, I mean, they did their thing and you tried not to cause too many problems with them.

JS:What about the North Vietnamese, I mean, I know you had, didn't have a lot of combat against them, what was your feeling towards them?

WM:Well, I mean, they were, as I, as I went along and started to kind of, and I knew a little bit of history of Vietnam, I figured that, you know, probably Communism really wasn't so bad if people weren't fighting. I mean, you look at it now and you look at, at modern day Bosnia and Kosovo and all that, when the Communists were in charge there wasn't any fighting over there. Yeah, it was Communism, but they weren't fighting, you know? So now, now there's no Communism and they're fighting, there's civil wars. So that, that was my idea, I mean, I was over there and I was thinking well, you know, at least people are getting killed on a whole sale, on a whole scale, wholesale scale like they were, you know, doing in battle and things. I mean was Communist such a bad thing at that point and were we, I mean, if we didn't stop, the big thing was if we didn't stop it in Vietnam, they were going to be in San Francisco next week, you know. I never believed that, I really didn't.

JS:So did you believe in the cause of why you were over there?

WM:Well, yes and no. I mean, I mean I was told to go over and I did what I had to do and I didn't, you know, some people were really against going over but they were there and they, I was there, I, I had a job to do and I made the best of it. I got transferred to a couple of different places, got some pretty good duty. Someone had to do it. If I didn't do it, someone else was going to do it. If I didn't do it I was going to be out in the field doing the engineer work and stuff that these other guys were doing. So, you know, I mean we had decent barracks and things like that and I, I don't remember ever really, you know, it was just tough being away from home and I don't really remember having any real hard feelings about it I guess. I came away with the experience I guess of being there but knowing that I had to go, whether I believed in, I, I guess I didn't believe that they were going to be in San Francisco, I mean I never thought that Communism was going to, I mean that's why we had to be over there was to stop it. And that's what, who was there, that Johnson was, was president then I guess and, you know, that was his big thing. I never, I never really believed it.

JS:Did you guys hear a lot of news from home, what was going on at home?

WM:Not really, no. I mean, it wasn't until after I got back that, I mean we knew about a lot of the, a lot of the, some of the protests that were going on. And then I guess at some point I, I remember big San Francisco things and some of the college take overs that, after I was back, that I remember.

JS:What'd you think about the protests?

WM:Oh, I don't know. I guess, I mean I, I guess I was very passive. The whole, the whole, even in, during the war, after the war, I mean, and people were doing their own thing and I guess that was, you know, if that's what they wanted to do, then go ahead and protest. I didn't, I went over because I was told to and I did what I had to do. I guess, that protest, I don't know if I knew anyone that actually went and protested or anything at any point. When I came back, I, I mean I was back in Maine and there wasn't a lot of that here as I recall, I mean, we weren't a big hub of that. I mean, there were some things and, you know, you'd see come vehicles going around with peace stickers and the peace sign, were flashing the peace sign and things like. And, you know, people would ask me, you know, what'd you do? Oh, I went to Vietnam. Oh, you did? Oh, was it really bad? You know, you'd relate things that I've told you about what I did there and, yeah, I can believe that there was a lot of shooting and dying and killing and some real bad things that happened, I believe that, I mean, I know that there were because I, I mean, I talked to people over there. But I wasn't really involved with that. And, I don't know, maybe this isn't the story that you want to hear but this is what I did, you know? So, I don't really recall ever having any, any problems with any, anybody who was a protestor or anything like that.

JS:What do you think about some of the stories you heard from the guys over there of the...?

WM:Well, some of it, I think some of it was, was true, but I think a lot of it, also I think they, I think there was a lot of it was made up, too. I mean, I really do. I think, and I think a lot of people, I think a lot of people, some guys are using it still as a crutch, I really do. I mean, yeah, it was bad and you saw some bad things maybe, but I really think that some of the guys that, you know, you see different things with them, if something happens to somebody, well, he was a Vietnam veteran you know, and, yeah, okay, well jeez, you know, get on with

it, you know? I know some other guy, you know, people were wounded in the head, some things happened to them, but other people, I don't know, I, I just, you know when you're talking to a veteran that been to Vietnam, I mean, and you've seen this stuff, whether he's telling you what really went on over there. I don't know, there's something about it.

JS: So when did you find out you were coming home? Or you already knew the date?

WM: Oh yeah, I mean everybody had a calendar, everybody had a calendar. And there were different kinds, there was all kinds of different calendars over there. You had an outline of a naked lady and you'd fill in all the days as you were going on and then as you, you know, you get down to the last few days, oh yeah, you knew when your, when your date to be out was. And then you went to some pla-, I don't know, oh we went to Bien Hoa, and at that point, I mean everybody that went over at that point, unless they had different discharge dates because they were in early or whatever, some guys actually went home, you know, you'd say goodbye to them and I'm heading home, I've only got, you know, thirty days left and you had maybe six months. They went over with you but because of their enlistment they were going home sooner, whatever. But a lot of the guys who we all went over together were all coming back at the same time because you only had to spend a year over there. So I had gone from the battalion down to Long Binh and so there was a lot of people that, I mean we all, we all had gone through basic and AIT together and, down in Texas, and you'd see them, *[unintelligible phrase]* he man, what happened to you, you know. All the stories and the, and the, I mean you had all your belongings with you at that point so you had pictures and everything and you'd show things and, you know, you'd see guys that, you know, and oh what happened to this guy, oh, you know, he didn't make it or whatever, something happened, or oh he's gone, he's discharged, he went home. And so you saw a lot of the guys there and you f-, you got on the plane and, I mean you, at that point you had your duffel bag and you, and you walked up that, those stairs, and when that plane took off, oh, I mean that was something, you know, everybody, yaaaa, big cheer went up you know, like, I, it was just, it was just something to be off, to be off the ground and heading back.

JS: So, you got back into the United States.

WM: Yeah we, let's see, we flew out of Vietnam, went to Japan, had a stop in Japan where everybody kind of got out, I don't know where we landed in Japan. From Japan we went up to Alaska and, and another, another, must have been

refueling stops or whatever, and we got out of the plane in Alaska and it was April and it was so cold and snow up there. And then we flew down, down the west coast. I remember, jeez, looking at those, those mountains all the way back underneath the plane. Miles and miles and miles and miles of these huge mountains. And we flew back into someplace on the west coast, I can't remember. It was, it was up around San Francisco again, it was some base up there that we went to and we stayed there maybe a day or two, and were discharged. And a couple of the guys who, I can remember in, [*unintelligible phrase*], befriended them ag-, we were in, in the battalion, the engineer battalion and we just kind of hung out together as we were going home. One guy lived in Massachusetts and the other guy lived in Cincinnati I guess, and the guy from Massachusetts had a sister in Los Angeles and he wanted to see her so he said, come on down, we'll fly down to Los Angeles for a couple days before we go home. I said, oh, okay, so I called my folks and told them I was back in San Francisco and everything was okay, and called my girlfriend and let her know I was home and I'd be home in a few days. Then we went down to Los Angeles and spent some time down there, went down to Hollywood and his, his sister lived in a condo and there was an empty apartment in the condo and the owners knew that we were back from Vietnam and war and everything, they, stay as long as you want, the condo's yours. She lent us her car, he drove, we went all over Los Angeles and Hollywood and everywhere you could think. I went out at night to the bars and people were buying us drinks at that point. And we went to a strip show one night and a woman dedicated a dance to us because, you know, they knew we were veterans or something come back from the war, so at some point, I mean, there wasn't, you know, I mean, coming back wasn't too bad I guess at that point. And, I don't know, we stayed there three or four days and then we flew back, he and I flew back to Boston together and we saw each other a couple of times after that and that was kind of neat. And then I'm waiting at home, or, and I'm waiting in Boston so I call my girlfriend's house at that point. Come to find out, she had flown out to Los Angeles, she was out there the same time I was and I didn't know this. So I, I, I got a, I came up back to Maine and she was like three or four days getting, getting home from Los Angeles. I, I, I don't know, she didn't know that I was there at the time or when I was coming in, she had planned a trip out there with a friend of hers. I mean that was weird, to have ran into her out there, you know, that would have been a strange thing. So that was, that was what we did there. And I guess I, I got into Boston and I called my sister who was living in New Hampshire and she came down and picked me up and brought me home.

JS: Did you get a pretty, you felt like you got a pretty good reception from everybody when you came back to the States?

WM: Yeah, I can remember, I came back, stayed home for a while and I went back up the Sugarloaf and that was the year they had the incredible snow, it was, it was like 1969, we skied like into May that year up in the snow fields. And there were a couple of guys, one was a pilot and he had flown over in Vietnam, he was up there. And I guess, you know, I mean, you come back and you're all tanned from like your neck up and your arms, and everybody, hey, where'd you get that tan, out West skiing? Oh, no, I've been over in Vietnam. Oh, yeah, what was it like? And you'd relate some stories and people would listen. I mean, I don't think I ever got any, any real negative, I don't think. I know, you know, other people in different places, you know, ah, you're baby killers and you're, you know, you kill people and all this, but I don't know, I guess up here for some reason, or in this area, it was a lot different reception with people. And I guess there was a little respect for, you know, you being in the Army and going to Vietnam.

JS: Did you keep in touch with anybody else from Vietnam, or veterans in general?

WM: Not really. This, this one guy that I flew, we went to Los Angeles with, he came up to, up the mountain in the spring and we skied a little bit and then I went out, he lived in Amherst, Mass and I went out to Amherst and stayed with him a couple of days out there and I think we may have either called each other a couple of times, but no, there's really no one that I've really stayed in touch with. Since we got a computer here the last few years I've gone on line and looked up some names and things like that. I've been down to the Wall in D.C., and there was, there was all those guys that were killed in that, and we had another sergeant that was killed, and I looked for other names, but it's hard to look for names. They go, they're not in alphabetical order, they're more in chronological order, although I guess there was a listing that did have. I looked up some other names just to see because some of the people, you just didn't know what happened to them, you were interested. But I didn't find anybody other than that one sergeant that I knew was killed and those other three guys, but that was kind of sobering kind of walk around the, around the Wall. It brought back, you know, some memories, only I didn't have any, you know, gruesome or have no close buddies killed or anything like that, so I didn't have any real bad memories.

JS: I'm interested in the surroundings that you had in Vietnam seem pretty plush

compared to others that I've heard from other people. Have you ever talked about that with anybody else that was there that maybe didn't have those kind of surroundings and how they felt about it?

WM:I haven't really talked with a lot of, a lot of other veterans. I didn't join any veterans groups or American Legions or anything. I, I don't know, I never was much into that I guess. So, I mean, I've known, you know, you run into a couple guys or something or somebody's got a bumper sticker or something on their car or whatever and, you know, *[unintelligible word]* where were you stationed and things, up north or down south or wherever, where were you, Long Binh, yeah, yeah, you know. I mean, we never really, I never go into a fairly deep conversation, lengthy conversation about what they really did over there. And none of my close friends, I mean, that were, that were close to me went to Vietnam so I didn't have anyone, you know, any real buddies from around, you know, my group or my age that I knew that went to Vietnam that I could really talk with about it, so I never, I never really did, I never have done that.

JS:What did you think about the war when you came back? I mean, when you had come back, what did you think about our role in it then?

WM:Oh, I guess I watched it like everybody did, you know, from the living room. You'd see things going on and you'd, and you'd wonder about the body counts that, you know, how many, jeez they coming, they keep coming, we keep them *[unintelligible word]*, I mean, you know. And I know a couple of times that, you know, when we were going into Laos and, and places like that because some of our guys had to go build landing strips for helicopters in Laos, I mean it was big top secret, and when the guys come back, oh yeah, we were in Laos, or we were over in wherever else they were there, and, I can't even think now what the other ones were. So, you know, and they, and these guys, oh no, we're not, we're not doing any covert, we're not in Laos or anything, we're just in Vietnam. Yeah, you'd just say, yeah, get out of here, you know, these, whoever was the spokesman for, you know, some general or something, you know. I mean, they, they, I mean they were covering up. I mean, you kind of knew things were going on. And you, you know, and some of these guys that were in the ambush patrols and going out on patrols and things like that, they, they didn't get into some of the combat that they were, I don't think some of the body counts they were getting over there of the enemy killed were, were right, I really don't think so.

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JS:What's it like to compare actually being over there and then comparing the news when you know that some of the news isn't true, truthful, and...?

WM:Well, I mean there's not a lot you can do about it, I mean, you just take it with, you know, a grain of salt and say yeah, great. I don't remember, I guess when I got back I had, I did some things around here and then I, I, I don't know, I w-, I didn't really pay a lot of attention to it. And then I, I got married and I mean I think we were still watching some of it when I was married and things. And I don't know, I mean, my wife asked me about it but I told her basically what, you know, I did so it wasn't, wasn't anything controversial I guess. I'm rambling now.

JS:Married to the girl who waited for you?

WM:No. She didn't wait.

JS:She didn't?

WM:No, some, she was going out with some guy that she met at some point and she ended up marrying him. Although when we got back, she was working over in New Hampshire at a place and when she got back from Los Angeles we, we drove over there and I spent the day I guess with her and she gave me a bottle of Jack Daniels Black Label and the ring back, and I took the ring and the Jack Daniels and I left and I went back over to Sugarloaf, the Red Stallion, and I think I saw her maybe one or two times after that and that was the end of it. But it wasn't, no, it was another woman that I met a couple years later I guess. A couple years later? No, maybe a year or two later actually, like '69 or '70, it was only like a year or two later I guess, yeah.

JS:I'm interested, earlier you mentioned you thought that some of the veterans were using Vietnam as a crutch. Why do you think that?

WM:I don't know, I, sometimes you'll see, see some of these guys on like a sixty minute show or, or one of those, those shows, and they're, they're drugged out, living in homes or on the str-, they'll interview them on the street or whatever, and I, I th-, I, I don't know, I think that when you create your own, what do I want to say....

End of Tape One, Side B

Tape Two, Side A:

JS:*[Unintelligible phrase].*

WM:Someone, someone's going to read it and say, what's this guy talking about. Yeah, maybe they did have a hard time, but I just, I just think people use it as an excuse I guess, for their hard times when really, you know, it's other, it's other problems that they have, you know, drug, alcohol, whatever. Maybe they, maybe they got it over there, I don't know, but I think a lot of people are saying, yeah, I'm a Vietnam veteran, I didn't get anything for it and they called me names when I came back and, I mean, they just didn't know how to deal, deal with it and I think they, that's what I mean by the crutch, I mean they're using it as an excuse when, you know, I mean, you know, it's, what they did was what they did, they had to do it. I mean, a lot of things that had to do, they were, I mean, ordered to do. Yeah, I was ordered to build things and blow up things and, and do things like that. Other guys were ordered to kill and things like that, maybe, I don't know. But I think that, that they may have used it as, as, as an excuse more than they should have. I'm being like Forrest Gump, and that's all I want to say about that.

JS:So when you look back on it now, over all, what's it make you think, what's it make you feel when you look back on it now?

WM:Well, I mean it was an experience, it was part of my life. I actually ended up only spending twenty one months in the whole, in the Army the whole time, and, and that eleven months and whatever days I was there, I mean, looking back now, I mean I'm fifty two now, I mean that, that wasn't anything now, I mean that was a very short time. I guess I, I have the memories, I don't have any real bad memories like, you know, some people may have, and it's unfortunate they do, but I don't. Someone had to do the job that I had, it might as well have been me, and that's, that's the way I feel about it.

JS:You still thought it was justified that you got drafted and went over there?

WM:Oh yeah, yeah, I mean it was, it was something that you, that you just did. I mean I don't think I ever thought of, of going AWOL, I mean, I never thought, I mean because not only, I mean that would be not only me but my family would be, you know, or even going to Canada like some people did or whatever, the draft dodgers. It never, never really crossed my mind, and I don't think I even talked about, about it or anybody, you know, and say

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[unintelligible phrase], I don't, I don't think it ever came up, it never crossed my mind. It was something that you did, it was your duty, you know, it was part of being in the United States I guess.

JS:You think the military's the same way now? You think it's still people's duty?

WM:I think, I think to kind of be here you've got to kind of give something back. I don't know, I don't know what it is. You know, to live in the United States you should do something somehow, just, maybe by just being a good citizen or something, I don't know. Maybe that's *[unintelligible word]* thinking but that's, that the way I am. I kind of g-, I kind of gave my part to it and, I mean, I don't expect a whole lot. Though I did go down to Senator Collins' office the other day and asked her why Vietnam veterans can't use the commissaries.

JS:And the answer was?

WM:Not yet, I haven't got an answer back. The guy who was there, I didn't speak to her, but she, I expect an answer from her at some point, or I'll go back and ask again.

JS:Why did you ask it, I mean...?

WM:I don't know, I just thought it was something, I guess what it was is they, on the radio they were, there was an add for the new commissary in South Portland at the, at the Coast Guard station and if you were a, I don't know, retiree or a hundred percent disabled or active duty or whatever, you can use the commissary PX. But, you know, I mean we didn't get a lot when we came back, I mean, not like some of the Korean guys or WWII guys, I mean they got, they got a lot. We didn't get a whole lot. I don't think there's a lot of veterans that would use it, there would be some and they might be grateful for it, just to have an ID card and be able to go over, like a, this would probably be like a Sam's club or something like that.

JS:What do you think about that attitude, the difference between the attitude of the country generally toward WWII and the difference between that and Vietnam?

WM:Well, I mean, we didn't have a parade, we still haven't had a parade. I guess some veterans put one on like by themselves a few years ago, down there. You know, I mean we didn't get a whole lot for going over and doing what we did. Some guys, I mean, like myself, I only spent a year there and maybe I don't,

and looking back a year isn't a lot, you know, out of your life if you, you know, live. But we didn't, we didn't get a lot coming back. I guess there was a GI Bill and I used some of it for some education, at one point I guess I got some money for some education, benefits for going to college, although they tried to take some money back and I wrote to Jimmy Carter at the time and I got a letter back from one of his aides. That was fun, because I had, I had people calling from all over the place trying to square it away, it was really funny having people, you know, all these guys from the Veterans Administration up in Manchester and down in Boston, you know, apologizing and calling. Because I guess the, someone at the, you know, presidential level called these guys and find out whether they were trying to take the money back for schooling, and it was a big mistake on their part. That was fun.

JS:How do you think history should look at Vietnam?

WM:Oh boy, history as a whole?

JS:How do you wish history would look at Vietnam?

WM:I guess, I guess they should, it was, it was something I guess that some guys thought that, you know, should have been done. Unfortunately, once again it's old men sending young men to war like it always is, for something that they, that they believe in, not necessarily the people who are actually doing it believe in. Because I know there's a lot of guys that didn't believe in, and I didn't either, I didn't think that Communism was going to be knocking at our back door if we didn't stop it in Vietnam. And that was I think the whole premise that, why we were there, I really do, and I think it was a big waste of time, big waste of money.

End of Interview