Veteran: WARREN, Richard Craig

Service Branch: ARMY

Interviewer: Meschede, Robert

Date of Interview: April 26, 2002

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Transcriptionist: Terry Moore

Highlights of Service: Vietnam War; Saw tremendous amount of combat action; Wounded in action several times; Received 3 Silver Stars, 3 Bronze Stars, 3 Purple Hearts

Interviewer: Mr. Warren, do you understand that you’re being recorded right now, and this will go into the Lee College archives.

Veteran: Absolutely.

Interviewer: Please state your full name and your nickname, what branch of service you served in, and what war?

Veteran: My name is Richard Craig Warren. A preacher friend of mine gave me the nickname C. W., so that’s what most people call me. I was drafted into the United States Army in April of 1970, and I ended up in the war in Vietnam in the jungles of Southeast Asia for thirteen months.

Interviewer: You were drafted?

Veteran: Yes, and actually I was hoping that I was going to be drafted by a major league baseball team, but in this case it was for our country—Uncle Sam. I was what they called a “U.S.,” which means drafted. If you were “R.A.,” that means you enlisted. Myself, I was a U.S.—drafted.

Interviewer: How old were you when you were drafted.

Veteran: I was 19 years old.

Interviewer: What year were you drafted, and did you go into the infantry?

Veteran: I was drafted in April of 1970, and myself being Caucasian, it seemed like most of your blacks and your Mexicans or Puerto Ricans, and more or less your lower
income whites were the ones that were drafted and, therefore, became what they called your M.O.S., which was 11 Bravo 10, which is light infantry weapons. In other words, a ‘grunt.’ Those were the ones that spent all their time in the jungles.

Interviewer: Tell me a little bit about your basic training and where you did your basic training—how long it took, whether it was hard.

Veteran: I reported to the recruiting office in downtown Houston, and they put us on a Trailways bus for Ft. Polk, Louisiana, which is in Leesville, Louisiana. I went through basic training there for eight weeks. After that, I received my M.O.S., which is more or less your job. Your military occupation specialty is your M.O.S. There again, they put me as 11 Bravo in the infantry. After that I went to the other side of Ft. Polk, which was called Tiger Land, and that was nine weeks of training through the swamps and jungles of East Louisiana. Upon completing that, I went to a two week leadership school where I could more or less be first in line to become corporal, which I did, and became a squad leader. Preceding that, I volunteered for airborne, where I went to Ft. Benning, Georgia, for three weeks where I made five jumps and was scared to death on every one of them—especially the night jump. But I got through that, and then afterward came home for thirty days to Houston, where we lived. After that I ended up catching a 747 for San Francisco and stayed there for a few days. Then I boarded a bus with about 150 other GIs. We were all dressed in fatigues and headed for Benhua, South Vietnam.

Interviewer: At this time, I imagine you had extreme adrenaline rush thinking it’s really happening. This is the real deal. I’m going. Tell me what was going through your mind at that time?

Veteran: Thinking back, I must have been awfully gullible, because it was almost like it really wasn’t happening. I really had no reservations or was anxious about it. I just thought nothing was ever gonna happen to me anyway, which I imagine a lot of guys did, but that turned out not to be the case.
Interviewer: A lot of guys probably thought they were the ones that were gonna be coming home.

Veteran: Exactly, but I learned within a matter of weeks that that wasn’t gonna be the case. The life expectancy of a grunt—especially a ‘newbie,’ which that was the nickname for guys that had just got in country—was about four to six weeks.

Interviewer: So the war had been going on already for a little while.

Veteran: Right. I got there in December of ’70, and I guess the war had started in the early 60s. I had a brother that had been there in ’68. There again, though, I’d like to emphasize I never really paid attention to the news, anything about the war. Back then, they had the lottery on your draft notices, and most of my friends got exemptions from either being in school, or would get doctors, or if their daddy knew people, would end up going in the National Guard or the Army Reserve where they wouldn’t have to go to Nam. Being drafted, you didn’t have a lot of say-so.

Interviewer: In your basic training, what kind of guns were you trained with?

Veteran: I was marksman with an M-1—which I only fired that one time—a 45 pistol, and an M-16, an M-79 grenade launcher, your M-60 machine guns, and a variety of different kinds of explosives involving C-4s whether through Claymoore mines or making little Willy Peaks or Bouncing Betties, or whatever.

Interviewer: So your training was pretty widespread.

Veteran: Right. Going through Tiger Land for my training, they pretty much taught us to use every kind of light weapon from pistols to your M-16 machine gun, through your grenades. Also, they taught you a lot of medical. They spent a lot of time teaching us firsthand about what to do in certain situations, whether using morphine or putting on tourniquets. That was a part of it, too. More or less take your buddy to help him out.

Interviewer: That way you had a better chance of survival.

Veteran: Exactly.
Interviewer: Did they ever teach you how to use your enemy’s weapon?
Veteran: Yeah, they taught us all the AK-47s. They drilled us and drilled us about learning the sounds and distinguishing the difference between an M-16 and an AK-47, different RPGs, their mortars, and it was helpful. I have to admit, though, that the drill sergeants that trained us through our infantry training were awfully dedicated, because they had been there. I think that was pretty much the norm for drill sergeants. The had to be ex-combat veterans, and they did lay it on us about how important it was not to be sleeping through classes at this part here or the other part could save your butt one day. My hat goes off to them, because it was down to earth. They wanted us to learn, and we did learn. At first through basic, it was sort of just getting by and joking, but once we got to Tiger Land it became clear that Chuck and the boys were there for real.

Interviewer: When in Vietnam, who were you assigned to, and what was your first mission?
Veteran: As soon as I landed in Benhua, South Vietnam, which was just a mile or so from Saigon, they took us to a big terminal, and they pretty much lined us up and pointed at and said, “You’re going to the first camp, you’re going to the 101st Airborne, you’re going to Mericao,” and it turned out that I ended up going to the 1st Cav Division, which was Custer’s old unit, so that shows you how long that unit’s been around. After a week or so of orientation and getting used to the weather and the surroundings, I was assigned to the 1st Cav., the 5th and 7th Infantry, and I ended up in Delta Platoon. That was a week after I landed in Benhua. Upon arriving, they chopped me and another guy out to our unit in the field in the jungle at the time, and they had three days left on this particular mission, and then they were going in for five days. They had been out for over twenty days. As soon as me and this other guy got off the chopper, the sergeant came up to us—which turns out to be my best friend…his name was John Hubbard. He was in the Canadian Army and had already did a tour in Vietnam, and he joined the United States Army where he could come back to Vietnam, so he automatically asked me if I would rather carry the M-60 machine gun, the RTO radio, or walk in slack, which was second man in the line or in the squad. Point man was first, second man was slack. I knew I didn’t want to carry the
radio or the big gun, so I jumped on slack, and it turned out that that’s where I ended up staying—either slack or point, but mostly point—for my whole tour.

Interviewer: What rifle did you carry?
Veteran: To start off with, I carried an M-16, and Hubbard showed me how to duct tape two thirty-round banana clips, and that’s pretty much what I carried about the first month, and after that I went to a shorter version of the M-16, which was called a Car-15. It didn’t jam as much as the 16.

Interviewer: Did the 16s jam a lot?
Veteran: They would tend to when they got wet, and I found the trick was to just keep that baby greased and oiled as much as you can.

Interviewer: You were running slack then?
Veteran: Yeah. The plane man broke me in—I can’t remember his name, but he was a Mexican guy from California. I guess I walked slack for three weeks. The following week, I was going to take over slack, because he was getting short anyway. Getting short means his tour is almost over. The day before that I was going to take over and he was going to drop back off point, a sniper got him.

Interviewer: How short was he?
Veteran: He probably had about three weeks to go, and he really didn’t have to be on point, but he was sort of like me, I guess. Some guys were like that, and I was one of them. They liked to be up front to know what was going on, because a lot of time when you were walking in a platoon, you might be seventh, eighth, or fifteenth—sometimes there was about twenty people—and if a firefight would break out, you just wouldn’t know what was going on, and so I preferred to be up front.

Interviewer: How long were you in Vietnam before you got into your first firefight?
Veteran: I guess it was about two to three weeks. I was walking point at that time, and they started dropping mortars in. I think there was about eighteen in our platoon. Some were out for either malaria or had been hit and were out of action, and so
we were sort of short. I guess it was about two or three weeks when I had officially earned my CIB, which is a combat infantry badge, which you receive only if you have been in a firefight—more or less that somebody had been shooting at you.

Interviewer: You told me a percentage of how many actual people actually saw action in Vietnam in the Army. Would you like to elaborate on that, too?

Veteran: That is unsettling for a lot of combat veterans. I think it’s like nine to eleven percent of Vietnam veterans were actually grunts that actually saw action. I know that most people that Vietnam veterans believe that if they’re a Vietnam veteran, unlike World War II where a lot more than fifty percent saw action, but in this war—or police action, as some people call it, but believe me, it was a war—that it was a low percentage of Vietnam veterans that actually saw combat. Of that, the majority also were drafted.

Interviewer: You said that the government at that time called it a police action. Does that anger you, because like you said, that was nothing but a war?

Veteran: You’re exactly right, and I guess I have as much bitch as I guess the Korean veterans do, because they still refer to that as a police action. Believe me, if this was a police action and not a war, then I guess I’d hate to see a war, because it couldn’t get any worse in any other war.

Interviewer: It was extremely hard.

Veteran: Exactly. So just take it to the bank that this was a war. What did it last—ten years?

Interviewer: What do you think the major differences were between the Vietnam War and World War II? Do you think it was disorganization by the top officials?

Veteran: Yeah, I believe that this war, more than any other, was more of a political war—more of a strategy war between either brass, politicians, or people on the Hill. I guess really the main thing and the biggest bitch that Vietnam veterans would have is that a lot of people referred to them as ‘baby killers’ or whatever, and that just really wasn’t the case. This, to me, was just as bad as World War II or any
other. I know a lot of veterans feel like they got no respect, didn’t have no tickertape parades, and so forth, and that sort of burns me up in a way. I just feel like if your country calls you, then you do what they say. That’s why we’re the greatest nation in the world.

Interviewer: You were talking about the parades and stuff like that. I agree with you a hundred percent. I think, hell, you know, later is better than never. They ought to honor the Vietnam veterans, especially the stuff that they went through. Do you believe that maybe one day they should develop a holiday or a specific Vietnam veterans’ holiday.

Veteran: I would think so. I guess April 30th would be a good day, that being, unfortunately, a sad day because that’s the same day the North Vietnamese rode into Saigon and was, you might say, declared the winner because they did take over the country. I don’t know. I don’t think the fathers, mothers, brothers, and sisters who lost their sons in Vietnam didn’t hurt any more than the families World War II soldiers. War is hell, and people get killed. That’s a tough call.

Interviewer: I love my World War II veterans from my family, but talking with you from a previous interview, which people should note on this interview didn’t come out right, I think that war is not as glorious as people think it is. This war in particular. I think C. W. would agree that this was not a romantic war but one of the toughest wars ever fought. Here’s my other question. Which government was the most corrupt in the Vietnam War? Do you think it was the North Vietnamese, South Vietnamese, or maybe the U.S. government at the time?

Veteran: I’d have to throw the ball in everybody’s court. The North Vietnamese did some things—we won’t get into the detail about the pathetic things they would do—and I have even have to admit some G.I.s followed in the same kind of sadistic things, but I think that first of all the South Vietnamese and the parliament and all of their government officials were more or less a puppet with the U.S., but I think they all fell short of playing by the rules. I think they were all wrong, to tell you the truth.
Interviewer: I heard this and maybe you can confirm it, were there certain rules of war, like you couldn’t fire on somebody unless they fired on you first, or was that an actual rule?

Veteran: That did take place, but not very often in my situation where there would be ‘no fire zones’ due to the fact that supposedly it had come over the air that there were loggers in the area (meaning civilian Vietnamese men and women cutting trees, etc.), but that happened very few times. Pretty much the way went, if it moved—especially in the jungles—we opened fire. We paid little attention to that really. I mean, you’ve gotta understand that I saw it happen before with even kids chunking grenades at a deuce and a half—a truck—and so it was hard to be able to really trust any of the Vietnamese. Maybe we should pass on that question right there.

Interviewer: Was there a lot of racist tension in your platoon or unit?

Veteran: To be real honest, there wasn’t that much. The blacks did stay together, that’s for sure. They were bonded pretty tight, and I never did see a black fella in Vietnam that wasn’t wearing a black shoestring type bracelet, and I never saw one black to another that didn’t shake hands, do the dap, or whatever, but when it came to racial tensions, that just never occurred in the bush. In the bush, you relied on each other, I don’t care if you were pink. That was just the rule of the land. You watched out for your brother. Your brother meaning black, brown, or whatever.

Interviewer: So, ya’ll looked out for each other?

Veteran: Exactly.

Interviewer: That period in the states had high racial tensions.

Veteran: Exactly, and there were a lot of blacks that tried to get other blacks that were good soldiers to try to get out on different types of medical excuses for getting out of the bush. They believed, especially coming from home, like Muhammad Ali, why should I come ten thousand miles to fight a little yellow man that has never done nothing to me. When you’re called on, you might question it but you still do it. There was great and good soldiers red, yellow, black, and brown, but I never did really experience that. I witnessed it a few times, but in my case and in
my squad, and platoon, and recon teams it was never there. And in the bush it was never an issue.

Interviewer: When you’re at the camp it might be different than when you’re in the bush?
Veteran: It was all business when you were in the bush. There was no smoking dope in the woods. That was the number one no-no, because you weren’t going to risk not being 100% by smoking a joint or whatever. You just didn’t do that. Not just because of yourself, but especially because of your fellow brothers.

Interviewer: Tell me about the drugs in Vietnam.
Veteran: Drugs were awfully plentiful—from heroin, to hash, to opium, and certainly marijuana.

Interviewer: Did pot grow wild out there?
Veteran: No, but you could buy a pound of marijuana for $2 or $3, things like that. Granted, it was used frequently, but it was always used on the fire base. In other words, after we came off our missions, we’d have three and sometimes five days to just sit around the fire base. We’d pull guard of course, but more or less just relax, write home, drink a few beers if you drank, and in other cases, if you smoked, then you smoked.

Interviewer: If you don’t mind me asking this question, and of course I know you were young and a lot of people experimented, did you ever experiment with drugs in Vietnam?
Veteran: Absolutely, I sure did. But, there again, I never did smoke in the bush. You didn’t do that.

Interviewer: Did you feel like you had to get away from reality once you got back to the camp?
Veteran: Yeah. I can remember that my mindset and my mentality was that I thought nobody was going to kill me, but after being there awhile I realized pretty quick that after these three or five days on this fire base and we go out on our next mission, I could be the next one, so you enjoyed yourself. You caught buzzes,
and you got high or drunk, because you didn’t know if you were going to be able to do it again. Everybody sort of freelanced about that. Even the lieutenants understood that and didn’t hassle you or get on your butt about it. As a matter of fact, we even had some officers that I used to get high with.

Interviewer: What was the main drug?
Veteran: The main drug was really smoking weed, you know. It does seem like the majority of the people that did heroin, though, were black. I don’t mean that to sound prejudiced, but that’s the case.

{END OF TAPE I, SIDE A}
{SIDE B BEGINS}

Interviewer: This is the second side of the tape, and we’re talking about the drugs. I want to say that C. W. is by no means a racist at all. He’s just telling it how it was. My next question is this. Were you ever wounded, C. W.?
Veteran: Yeah, I was wounded. I’ve received three Purple Hearts, but actually I was probably wounded seven or eight times. Officially, on my DD 214 form you can see I was awarded three Purple Hearts.

Interviewer: But you were wounded seven times.
Veteran: At least, and I still carry shrapnel, and I will, I guess, until the day I die. Matter of fact, I was issued but never got a card from the Veterans Administration showing that I don’t have to go through metal detectors at airports because of the metal that I have in my body.

Interviewer: Whenever you pass on, are you gonna be buried in a military graveyard?
Veteran: I have filled out the papers with the Veterans Administration where I will be buried at Arlington Cemetery in Washington, D.C. I don’t know if was through my decorations that they approved that, because I am a 100% disabled vet.

Interviewer: When you say disabled, what do you mean by that?
Veteran: I was diagnosed, and they gave me a disability for all the shrapnel in the times I was shot and the mortar rounds I received. I ended up spending a good amount of time in the hospital, so that’s how I ended up being up 100% disabled.
Interviewer: Does the government take care of you right now?
Veteran: Yeah, they do take care of me. Since 1972, I officially have become a 100% disabled vet. Now they have more or less excluded the shrapnel and malaria from my disability, and they have diagnosed me with PDSD—Post Traumatic Stress Syndrome—and the government and Social Security pay me around $4,200 a month.

Interviewer: Can you tell me, if you don’t mind, about confirmed kills and ambushes—stuff like that?
Veteran: When I was on point, to be honest I can’t say because I can’t remember how many confirmed kills I had while I was working in the platoon. I stopped counting all my confirms at 26, but there were probably more than that, and the majority of them was when I went to recon in five-man teams through ambushes. That’s how I succeeded in getting that many. Those that were ambushed didn’t have a chance, because I was more or less like the deer hunter in a blind waiting for the buck to come out.

Interviewer: Would you like to tell me about one of them?
Veteran: I got awfully good at running ambushes, because when John Hubbard, who was my Canadian friend and mentor, when I left he had just re-upped for six years in the Army where he would be able to spend his third tour in Vietnam, and I sort of got like him in a way. I got cold hearted and began to enjoy waking up in the morning and setting up ambushes, and just waiting for that ‘buck’ to come out, but in this case, the Vietnamese. One particular time that I will never forget, you know how it gets real pink-ish in the morning right before it really gets light? Here comes a couple of soldiers down the trail, and I knew that they were dead meat, but it turned out I blew my clackers, and I guess I was in sort of a decent mood, because it depended on how mad we were. If we faced our Claymoors up where we knew that if it hit ‘em it would pretty much just instantly kill ‘em; if you faced ‘em down it would pretty much blow their legs off. My attitude or mentality doesn’t matter, but they were facing down, and I ended up blowing their legs off. It turned out it was two women, and one of them was pregnant.
The other one was carrying a little kid on her back, and they both had AK-47s and a lot of ammunition on one of their backpacks, but that was the most significant and hard for me, but I didn’t cry, and I haven’t cried since my first kill anyway. That was one of my confirms that I certainly will never forget was killing them women and them kids. To ask me if I would have known one was pregnant and one had a kid, which I didn’t know, would I have done it again, and I guess the answer would be yes, because there was no doubt that if the shoe was on the other foot that they would have killed me, too. I guess I’m sorry to say that feeling bad didn’t hurt or last too long, and I know that sounds kind of sick.

Interviewer: People haven’t been in your shoes.
Veteran: Yeah, that’s true. But I have seven kids—four boys and three girls from the same mother—no Brady Bunch. I was married for twenty-three years, and I am a kid-lover, but I don’t tell anybody about it, I don’t brag about it certainly, but there again, it sort of shows you that how can they say this is a police action whenever, not just this, but a thousand other occasions on different situations that things occurred. Don’t let anybody fool you. This wasn’t a police action—this was as much of a war as the Civil War or World War I, World War II, or Korea.

Interviewer: Not to get off the subject, but I noticed you’ve got your gold plated dog tags on your necklace. Would you like to explain that?
Veteran: My kids got together and bought these for me, which was sort of a shock, but it has just my name, serial number, social security number, my time of service, and states that I’m a 100% disabled vet, my blood type. It was just a gift from my kids, but I cherish them. I never take them off. I guess I’ll wear them until I die. I promised my kids that one of them gets my Vietnam ring, one gets my recon ring. But this is just my way of sort of never forgetting, which I never would anyway.

Interviewer: I think it’s a good idea that you’ve got them on. I’ve been knowing for about a year now, and I seen that right off the bat, and that’s why I wanted to interview you. I think that’s a good deal. A lot of people want to forget about it, and you can’t forget about it.
Veteran: That’s true. Like I’ve stated before, this is something that combat veterans, especially ones have ended up venturing out and seeing the eyes and the faces that minute before were alive and then you were the one that was responsible for killing, you don’t forget them things. Like World War II veterans that I’ve talked to, you learn to live with it, but it’s always there. You accept it, and you go on.

Interviewer: Did you ever make any real good friends there besides John Hubbard?
Veteran: Yes, I had several good friends. It got to the point that I almost didn’t want to get too close, because it’s sort of like love, I guess. You don’t want to end up getting hurt, but I ended up getting hurt several times with a lot of good friends. I carried one fella across and creek, up a hill, and I didn’t know he was dead but he was. But I lost a lot of good friends. One in particular, we called him Newbie, and he had about a week left. He was married and had a kid. I never really knew his name—he just had the nickname Newbie, which you call guys that just got in country. Like I said, he was real short meaning he was about to go back to the world. He ended up getting killed, and that was real hard for me, because he was the first real good friend that I had. Thinking back, that was my first sort of step towards getting that cold heart and that unfeelingness about the enemy’s life. It just didn’t seem to matter much, you know? Even though they’re just as human as we are, and has a mother and family that loved them just as much as we did, but just speaking for myself, I didn’t feel they were near as equal as me or my buddies—which is wrong.

Interviewer: Since this is going in the archives, would you like to mention any of your friends that didn’t make it in Vietnam?
Veteran: I don’t want to get into those.

Interviewer: That’s fine. If you saw someone today who had been an enemy soldier, how would you feel towards them? Would you feel hatred?
Veteran: When I got out of Vietnam, I ended up going into the Veterans Hospital thinking it would be maybe a week or maybe two at the most, but I ended up staying for four years and nine months. As ironic as it might sound, it turned out that my psychiatrist was Oriental—not Vietnamese, but Chinese—Dr. Si—a really great
I can remember the first five or six months—and I met with him every
day—but we had to have at least one or two orderlies in there, because the first
time or two I ended up going over the desk trying to get at him, because I hated
Orientals. I didn’t care if they were Korean, Chinese, Japanese, or Vietnamese. I
just hated all of them. I’d go in the malls or the store with my wife and embarrass
the hell out of her because I’d see an Oriental walking out of Foleys or Monkey
Wards, and I’d just blurt out, “You stinking, dink!” I was belligerent, but I
couldn’t help it. I still hated the Orientals.

Interviewer: At that time in America, I can understand, because nobody knew what you had
been through.

Veteran: I recall another time way after I’d gotten out of the hospital. I went in a Stop ‘N
Go store, and I really didn’t go ballistic or freak out, but I had a hard time coping
with the Vietnamese guy behind the counter. I knew I had killed this guy before I
left there. You’ve always heard ever since you were little, “They all look alike to
me,” and I don’t know what it was, but that really tore me up for about a week.
As this is now 2002, I no longer have that perspective of Orientals. I have no
problem with them. Through prayer and other people’s prayers and through
growing wiser with my age, I’ve succeeded and overcome feeling hatred for
Orientals, because that was different people at a different time. I’m happy to say
that I don’t dislike anybody.

Interviewer: That’s good to hear. Like I said, nobody’s walked in your shoes, and haven’t
been through or seen the stuff that you did. In my opinion, you fought for your
country and have freedom of speech to feel the way that you feel.

Veteran: When I got wounded for the third time, I think, and I came down with malaria for
the second or third time—I ended up having malaria four times—but I was shot
up and had malaria, so they put me on a C141 Air Force jet out of Saigon and
flew me to Tokyo to a hospital, and I was there for forty days. But the point is
that I was on a stretcher in that plane, and I felt so bad because the other guys that
were on stretchers around me were so messed up—burned up, shot up, half their
face…--I don’t know, I felt guilty about even being with them, because I just felt
like I didn’t belong. I know that I was messed up, too, but that was one time that I felt guilty.

Interviewer: Let’s go on to a little lighter question. Have you kept in touch with your buddy, John Hubbard?

Veteran: No, I haven’t. I had my oldest son get on the internet, and he lives in New Jersey—I believe it’s Trenton. His name is Bob Greer, the one that lives in Trenton. John Hubbard, I presume may still be in Canada. One of my boys has checked on the internet in Canada, because there’s a website for people looking for relatives or past buddies, but I have had no luck. But him and Bob Greer, who was another friend of mine that I went to basic with who carried an M-60. We made it through the jungles together. I went to recon and he stayed with the platoon. He was an M-60 gunner. Real big guy. He was about six-eight or so and about 250, but a great guy. I went to R&R with him. I’d love to hear from him and see him, but I’ve had no luck in being able to locate either one of them. There’s a few more that I’d love to see, too, but to answer you question, I would love to, but have not.

Interviewer: What was your most dangerous mission?

Veteran: I guess that would be June 12, 13, 14, of 1971, when I was in recon. Me and four other Americans, a Vietnamese Kit Carson, and a Korean ranger went in right at the tip of Cambodia, and ended up that evening with five of them getting killed, and me and John Hubbard the only ones that was still alive. We had both received wounds and was both hurting, and ended up for a night and a day hiding out, being surrounded by MVA soldiers.

Interviewer: Where were you wounded?

Veteran: That was my knees and my back shoulder, and Hubbard had caught an AK through the lower part of his leg where he really had to hop, but I tourniqueted that and stopped the bleeding. Mine was more or less superficial, because I wasn’t bleeding real bad. We did have some morphine, so we got through the night, as far as the pain. We slept about an inch apart the whole night. Actually, we got up in a tree to begin with and were going to try to hide there, but we were
so damned tired that I guess we dozed off immediately. He almost fell out of the tree, so that wasn’t gonna work. So, we climbed down and ended up sort of hiding in some kind of hollow tree or mound there, and could hear the North Vietnamese walking around us all night. It got to the point that we decided that we’d put his gun to my neck and my gun to his neck, and we weren’t gonna be caught. We were actually going to end up shooting each other, which sounds stupid, but the fright that we had, we just figured that we weren’t gonna be tortured and killed by them.

Interviewer: The Vietnamese were known for torturing their prisoners.
Veteran: Yes. We knew full well and had seen their handiwork on what they had done to other GIs that they had caught, from cutting ones penises off and sticking them in their mouth, to cutting off their ears, to cutting out their eyes, and we weren’t gonna have that. When he hit the ship that evening before, whenever the other five got killed, we had radioed our location, and it turned out that the radio was on one of the dead soldiers, and he was at least fifty yards from us, at least, and we wouldn’t attempt to make it towards him to get the radio. So with the information we had given them the night before, they sent in an alert team and they got us that next evening. There were so many frightening times. But that was the most, as far as thinking that there wasn’t going to be any tomorrow.

Interviewer: For the record, which I already know this, what caliber was bigger? The AK or the M-16.
Veteran: I believe the AK was. I think the 16s were 223s, but I’ll tell you the AK was a much better weapon than the M-16, and John Hubbard carried an AK all the time.

Interviewer: What was it like when you got back to the states?
Veteran: I know a lot of veterans experienced being spit on and being called ‘baby killers,’ but personally I didn’t. I tried to hide the fact and never told anybody but my immediate friends and family where I’d been. It wasn’t that I wasn’t proud of it, I guess, or was trying to hide it, it’s just that the attitude of the American people back then, unlike World War II, they just didn’t seem to care, so I didn’t let it be known that I was a Vietnam veteran, and I still won’t to this day. But it’s
certainly nothing that I’m ashamed of. I’ve got to say that if I had it to do all over again, even through all the years that I spent in Veterans Hospital, which was four years and nine months, that whole experience changed my life forever, and I have to say bottom line, I wouldn’t change a thing. The medals were great. My parents were proud of me. I received the Silver Star, being the third highest medal. In the Vietnam War, the only people that did receive the Silver Star were the ones that killed in action, and the ones that weren’t killed it was definitely the valor that you got it for, but I didn’t consider myself a hero. I also received three Bronze Stars, three Purple Hearts, several air medals, and whatever, but if you ask me if I’m proud of them, years ago I’d say no, but today I am, and I guess I wouldn’t change a thing.

Interviewer: C. W., I do think of you as a hero. I think of you as a man that was put in a situation that you probably shouldn’t have been in and you made the best of it. You excelled, and I do believe that you are a hero, whether you think so or not. You did what you had to do, and you did it good. You got your confirmed kills in the military, and in a lot of people’s opinion, for every one of them that you killed you probably saved so many American lives, so you’ve also got to think of yourself as somebody who saved lives. You took lives, but in the process you saved lives. You told me once that you had shot a sniper.

Veteran: Yeah, in the back of the head.

Interviewer: So under the circumstances, you did save lives. I believe that 100%.

{END OF TAPE 1, SIDE B}

{TAPE 2, SIDE A BEGINS}

Interviewer: We are making the conclusion of C. W.’s interview, and there’s a few more things that we’d like to talk about. We were talking about how we’re proud of him for what he did for his country and the situation he was in. But we wanted to discuss a few more things that we thought were really necessary to put on this tape so that people will understand exactly what went on during the war. So, C. W., if you don’t mind, go ahead and tell us about that incident.
Veteran: I can’t remember the month—it was 1971—but we were on the fire base. My recon team had just come in off a mission. At that time I was a sergeant, and I was called to the C.O. Me and the lieutenant had got a mission that was six rangers that had been missing for two days on top of this hill, probably three miles from the fire base. As I recall, the last report they had got from them was that they were surrounded and didn’t think they were gonna be able to get out. It was getting dark and there was no time for choppers to come in. It was too dangerous. But to make a long story short, they had been missing for a couple of days, so my team’s objective was to go up and try to rescue or find out what happened to these six rangers. It turned out that it took us a good day and a half to get up this mountain. Probably more than three hundred yards from the top of the hill, we began smelling the scent of dead people. We finally made our way up there, and upon getting to the top of the hill we found six dead Army rangers, and all six had had their heads and their penises cut off, and a few had them sticking in their ear or their mouth. I recall that maybe one or two of them had their nose cut out, their eyes plucked out. We radioed back in the situation. They got back to us and said to hold, and since we were probably talking to a lieutenant, they had to get with their major or colonel, but it came back to us on the horn to put the bodies together, put them in body bags, and there would be a chopper in there to pick them up. The fact is that we just simply put heads with the bodies, and I am certain, as sad as it is, six of them boys went home with different bodies that weren’t their own. Meaning, there was no way we could fulfill or understand what head went with bodies. It turned out that some families will never know, and probably for the best. Those six fellas ended up going home not the way they came.

Interviewer: How did that make you feel? Were you just outraged? Were you saddened?
Veteran: That was one of the things that brought me to the point that if it was a possibility for me to get any colder, or harder, or meaner, or revengeful than I was already, well, this just sort of topped the cake. I do remember from that time on until the day I came home my sole desire was that I wanted to kill, not only the people that did this, certainly, but as pathetic as it may sound, I enjoyed it and I got awfully good at it, and very revengeful, and rather sadistic, but it turned my stomach, I
think of that very, very often. I had reservations about throwing this out, but the truth’s the truth, and again I want to emphasize that war is hell and hell is war, but this here was a war, and let’s hope that in the future that we would never have anything like this happen again.

Interviewer: That must have been really hard. When you fought the North Vietnamese, were there a lot of younger people fighting for them?

Veteran: Exactly. I’ve seen them and killed them from 10 to 60, but there again, it was their land. It would be the same if it was Norfolk, Virginia, or Little Rock, Arkansas. If it’s your homeland, young, old, or whatever… So, I didn’t criticize, distinguish—age had nothing to do with it. I retreated several wallets from soldiers I had killed that had pictures of families, kids, whatever, so it varied from very, very young, to very, very old.

Interviewer: But then again, ya’ll are on the opposite end of the bullets flying that way.

Veteran: I think the average of a grunt American soldier was 19 to 20 years old. That’s real young, too. The majority of the enemy was young like us, also.

Interviewer: And if the war had continued, a lot of the young ones would have grown up to be older soldiers.

Veteran: But I do want to say this. You’ve gotta give credit where credit is due, but the Vietnamese were masterful soldiers. I’ve gotta hand them that. They were real good.

Interviewer: Were you ever ambushed yourself by the Vietnamese dressed as farmers or something?

Veteran: Yes. Of course, the more seniority and the more you learned, you learned not to trust anybody. But I had seen a kid throwing a grenade at a deuce-and-a-half pickup going down the road, so you just didn’t turn your back on any of them. It was like you didn’t know who to trust. There again, it falls on that ‘they all look the same.’ I guess they had the same problem with the Germans. They looked American, because they were Caucasians.
Interviewer: When they gave you passes, what did ya’ll do?

Veteran: About every 90 days, they’d pull us out of the jungles and take us down to the China Sea, a little town called Bungtao where we could end up getting laid and messed up for three days or whatever. Just to keep us GIs, us grunts, human. You know, you can’t go too long without having a little play time, so they did do that. I’d hate to think if they wouldn’t have. Going three months, especially when your 19, 20, or whatever, that’s hard. Of course, the guys in the rear, they could get it anytime. They had bars that were air conditioned, and I was never in an air conditioned room the whole time I was there. I remember one time I had to go back to the rear and have some shrapnel cut out, and it seemed like for some reason those guys would never look you in the face. It was like we were looked on as being from the other side of the tracks. Instead of them showing us respect, they sort of looked on us as scumbags. So, therefore, we didn’t care much for them guys either. I guess it wasn’t their fault that they were typing all day while we were firing all day. Just me, personally, I wouldn’t have trade it for nothing, and I proved it after I had a medical profile when I got out of the hospital in Tokyo and they sent me back to Vietnam, I volunteered to go back to the bush.

Interviewer: Did you have a girl back home?

Veteran: Yeah, I did. And as a matter of fact, I was so stupid or gullible, that I even asked her to marry me, and sent her an engagement ring from California the day before I got on the plane to go to Vietnam. I wrote her for a few months, but she ended up finding somebody else. Her name was Donna Roberts.

Interviewer: That must have hurt.

Veteran: Yeah, it hurt, and a lot of guys it really tore them up, but it seemed like I laughed about it. That shows how much I was in love. The sad thing was that a lot of guys that already had wives that were getting ‘Dear John’ letters.

Interviewer: Was there ever any suicides in the Army because of that?

Veteran: The only suicide, and I always thought it was more of an accident, but this guy stepped up on a bunker, and a chopper was sitting there hovering, and it just whacked his head off. His head just rolled right down there right in front of me,
but I don’t recall any suicides. I do remember there was maybe three or four guys who ended up shooting themselves in the foot to get out of the bush because they were so scared. They weren’t going back, so they shot themselves in the foot, and we never saw them again, but that certainly never crossed my mind. I figured that if anybody was gonna shoot me, it was gonna be Chuck and the boys.

Interviewer: Since you got there a little bit later in the war, was there a lot of fragging?
Veteran: Fragging was more or less guys that would get pissed off at their lieutenants, and the lieutenant would go into the latrine, or the restroom, to take a dump, and the guy that would be mad would chunk a grenade in there and blow him up. That did happen. It never happened in my platoon, but it did happen once when I was on a fire base in somebody else’s platoon. You sort or walked softly as far as pissing off people, because everybody was loaded for bear, and they could make it look like an accident or the enemy did it.

Interviewer: Was there a lot of babies that were half white, or half Mexican, or half black, and the other half Vietnamese?
Veteran: I wouldn’t doubt if I could even have one over there myself, but that’s true. Like every war, GIs come over, and of course a lot of them girls wanted to get with the Americans. They wanted to be able to come back to the United States. Who could blame them—poverty, war, you know. Just struggling to survive. A lot of GIs ended up marrying them and bring them home.

Interviewer: Alright, we’re gonna wrap up the interview. C. W., I appreciate it.
Veteran: Bob, right back at you, fella.

Interviewer: You made history twice here. You served your time, and now it’s gonna be in the archives.
Veteran: Again, I’ll just state in closing that all I said today came from my heart, and is 100% accurate and truthful. God bless ya.

{TAPE STOPPED—END OF INTERVIEW}