Veteran:	**GILBERT, James H.**
Service Branch:	**ARMY**
Interviewer:	Gilbert, Matthew
Date of Interview:	February 4, 2004
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Transcriptionist:	Terry Moore
Highlights of Service:	**Served in Vietnam; E-5; 1st Airborne Cav, 82nd Airborne Division; Saw great deal of combat action; Great descriptions of actual combat and various weaponry used during the war**

Interviewer: Are you aware that this conversation will be recorded and that the tape and transcript will be placed in the Lee College? Do I have your permission to do that?

Veteran: Yes, I am, and yes, you do.

Interviewer: Were you drafted?

Veteran: No. I enlisted

Interviewer: How old were you?

Veteran: 22.

Interviewer: Who are you?

Veteran: I'm your dad. {Laughter} I was not drafted. I was in college at the time at East Texas State University. I decided to enlist, and the reason I did was because Vietnam was just coming into being. It was in 1965. I was going to school, but I didn't have any purpose or direction. I had been going to school for a number of years and working for a number of years, and didn't have any real goals. One of the things that kind of intrigued me was combat and war, because my dad had been a Ranger in World War II, and I had grown up with the stuff he had told me about World War II and the things he'd been involved in. The other thing was that being 22 years of age and not having any real goals or anything, I didn't really know who I was. I remember when I went to the Army recruitment sergeant in Sherman, Texas, and told him I wanted to join, he kind of looked

surprised at me. I had been reading about Special Forces at that time, and they were the ones that were most involved in Vietnam. The other thing is I was probably trying to prove something to myself as to how would I respond, how would I react, how would I measure up. So, I enlisted in the Army in the Special Forces in August 1965. I had been going to school full time except when I was in an automobile accident about a year before that, and had been out of school for awhile. I was able to go to school that fall, but I was only able to take two or three courses.

Interviewer: Did you talk to your parents before you went to enlist?

Veteran: You know, I really don't remember. I probably just told them what I was going to do, and they were OK with it. I can't remember them being upset or disappointed about it, because my parents always allowed me to be very independent, and I was. Whatever I did, I did. I can't remember that it bothered anybody that I was going in the Army.

Interviewer: So you told the guy you wanted to sign up, and he whisked you away?

Veteran: No, what happened was I signed up with the intent to go into the Special Forces, and that was what I was supposedly guaranteed. Like I said, that was in August of 1965, and Vietnam was really just coming onto the scene at the time. Actually that's when I went it. I probably started to process in July or June, because when they ran a security check on me, I had outstanding traffic warrants on me in Houston, Texas, for over $100, and so they wouldn't take me as an enlistee until I cleared those up. So I contacted an attorney on Telephone Road and paid him half the price of the tickets, and he cleaned them up—which he had done before for me. After that was cleared up, the Army took me in. I left out of Dallas Love Field on a DC-3 and flew to Fort Polk, Louisiana, outside of Leesville. I was there for eight weeks of basic training, and in August it was hotter than hell. While you're in basic, they train you in military discipline, and marching, and shooting, and that sort of stuff, and try to get you physically prepared and in better physical condition, which they do. They also do a lot of testing on you. They decided after my testing that I should be going to the Military Police, and I said, "Nope, I've signed up for the Special Forces, and that's where I'm supposed

to be going." So, they found that in my records and said, "OK," and tested me some more and said, "Alright, you can go in the Special Forces instead of the Military Police." I was supposed to be trained in two specialties in the Special Forces, and everybody was always cross-trained. In other words, two people would be trained in weapons, two people would be trained in medic, so you'd always have two primaries. Mine was to be weapons and code. At the beginning of Special Forces, you had to go to jump school, but before you went there you had to go to AIT, or Advanced Infantry Training. After I got out of basic, I had a couple of weeks off and went back to McKinney, where the folks were at. Then I went back to Fort Polk for AIT and spent ten weeks at that. Before they put me into that, they pulled me out and assigned me to a leadership training course, and then I went to AIT, and they made me a trainee platoon squad leader. All that was to learn advanced infantry techniques. I went through that and then it seems like it was about January when I got out and had about another week or so at home before I went to Fort Benning, Georgia, for jump school, which was supposed to be three weeks. The first jump I had, I twisted my ankle real bad. You had to have five jumps to graduate, and I was laid up for about a week, and so I got to get my four other jumps in with the next class. While I was at jump school, the 1st Cav got its ass shot off again in Vietnam. In October, prior to that, was when they'd gone through Ia Drang, which was the first major battle that the U.S. conditional force had been involved in in Vietnam. It's the one that Mel Gibson made the movie about called *Once We Were Soldiers*. Everybody that was supposed to be involved in Special Forces got their orders cancelled and got their orders to Vietnam. After I got out of jump school, I had thirty days before reporting to go to Vietnam.

Interviewer: So they just skipped the rest of the training?

Veteran: Well, I wasn't going to Special Forces anymore, even though I'd been guaranteed that I could, that's the military for you. Once they had you, they had you. I don't know why I didn't argue about it—probably didn't know who to argue with—but it was probably for the better anyway, because things worked out that if I'd gone to Special Forces, it would have been a whole different life than what turned out. By going to 1st Cav and then coming back to what I did after that, it gave me

opportunities and put me into the career that I'm retired from, which I wouldn't have had if I'd gone into Special Forces. I don't know what it would have been, but it wouldn't have been the same. Wouldn't even have known about it.

Interviewer: So, 1st Cav. Is that the horse with the bar?

Veteran: Yeah. I went to the 1st Air Cav at An Khe, Vietnam. The 82nd Airborne was stateside, and also the 101st Airborne was stateside. In Vietnam, I was with the 1st Air Cav. When I came back from Vietnam, I went to the 101st Airborne Division at Fort Campbell, Kentucky. From there I went to Keesler Air Force Base to aircraft control school. After I finished there, I went to the 82nd Airborne Division in North Carolina, and finished up my Army career there. After I got out of Vietnam, I had about eighteen months left.

Interviewer: In the spring of '66, you went to Vietnam.

Veteran: April. I went home from jump school. Your Mama flew down from New York.

Interviewer: How'd you know her?

Veteran: {Laughter} That's a different story. Your mom and I had known each other for about three and a half years. Had dated seriously and separated. She went off to New York to be a flight attendant, and I went off back up to Dallas, but at the same time, we'd always kept in touch and always cared about each other. While I was at Fort Polk, she came down once while I was in AIT, and I was confined to the company grounds because I had left the post when I wasn't supposed to, and was under an Article 15 charge. They made the day room—which was where the TV was—they made it off limits to everybody except me and your mom. They weren't going to let me out of the company area, because I needed to be disciplined for being off the post when I wasn't supposed to, but they did make that consideration. We'd meet in New Orleans one time, I think right after I got out of AIT. We spent the weekend there or something. I went to jump school then, still with the thought that I was going to go to Fort Bragg, North Carolina, for Special Forces, but then they changed my orders. Gave me thirty days leave after I got out of jump school to go home and then go to Vietnam. So I called her and told her what was taking place, and so she immediately got a leave of

absence from Eastern Air Lines and flew down to Dallas. So we were at Aunt Reedies(sic) at Sulphur Springs sitting outside the Dairy Barn talking about it. Like I said, she and I had been together for a lot of three and a half years. We talked about me going to Vietnam and what not, and I was going to be gone for a year, and that we wanted to be together after I got back, but then we also discussed the possibility that I wouldn't get back. I remember her saying, "Well, I want to get married, because if you don't get back, at least I can say you were mine," so we decided to get married there at Aunt Reedies in Sulphur Springs. I think a few days before I had to leave Dallas to go to Oakland to be shipped out, she had to fly back to New York and go back to work. So we had about three weeks there together before I went to Vietnam. Went to processing in Oakland, and this was in late March of '66.

Interviewer: And what rank are you here?

Veteran: Private—E2. Anyway, you go to Oakland, and you don't take anything with you except what they give you. You've got your basic issue of military clothing—boots and stuff like that. Oakland's just a processing center for sending people overseas—some going to Korea, some going to Japan, some going to Okinawa, and some going to Vietnam. I was going to Vietnam. The biggest part of us was going to Vietnam at that time. I spent about four or five days in Oakland. What I remember very specifically then was putting on the uniform and going down into San Francisco, and you couldn't buy a drink. This was in March of 1966. You could go into any bar you wanted to, and when people found out you were on your way to Vietnam, and you could not buy a drink. But they were spitting on you when you came back. It all changed in one year's time. Anyway, I got over to Vietnam the first part of April—the exact day was the second or third. Had left Oakland on an air carrier—I think it was a United, or something like that. I remember I came on a Braniff. It was just stuffed full of all military. We stopped in Portland, and then went to Japan and then to Saigon. Once getting into Saigon, you were in-country processing. I spent a couple of days in Saigon just in processing to find out who the hell you were and where the hell you ought to be going, and then to find you a military transport to that place. Saigon's in the southern part of Vietnam, they got me processed in two or three days and sent me

up to An Khe, which is in the central highlands of Vietnam. That's where the 1st Air Cav base of operations was at. Flew in there on a C-130. The tarmac was made up of just linked together steel. It was all just dirt and dust. Then you got in-division processing because of which company you were going to or what not. Then they also gave you repelling training and other things like that. I probably spent five or six days with division in-processing. From there they sent people to their units. At that particular time, it was mainly in Kontun. They sent me over to my unit and put me on a helicopter to Kontun—everything was by airlift—we did nothing by trucks. We were air cav, and so we did everything by airlift—either a CV-2, which was a Caribou—fixed wing aircraft made in Canada, C-130s or Huey helicopters, or Chinook helicopters. I caught up with my unit in Kontun. They were in a stand down because they had had their ass shot off…

Interviewer: And a stand down is…

Veteran: They're not combat ready, because they'd had their ass shot off.

Interviewer: Do they take them out of the combat area?

Veteran: What you do is move back into an area where you're not actually actively trying to engage, and in a stand down, you're actually trying to lick your wounds and maybe get new people in, and just kind of regroup, think where you're at, and make sure everybody's OK. You may not even be combat-ready because you don't have the numbers that you need. So, all you're doing is defensive. You might be in a village, you might be around an artillery unit, you might be around a base unit, but you would just be more or less in a defensive unit. Or you might have been out in the jungle too long, and they'll bring you back into a stand down just to rest. So, anyway, they were in stand down mode in Kontun, which was a small Vietnamese unit.

Interviewer: Did they prepare you mentally? Did you have any idea what you were coming into?

Veteran: No.

Interviewer: It sounds like you were having fun in Oakland and went through a little processing, and then you showed up and saw a bunch of guys that got wiped out.

Veteran: The guys I saw weren't wiped out. The ones that had been wounded and killed weren't there. In fact, when I first got to Kontun, one of the guys that I became very close friends with and saw him after I got back from Vietnam, and then once we got out of the Army, we never saw each other again, but yet I know where he's at—but Tom Dehoney(sic) was from Tyler, Texas. He later was a canine handler for the police department in Fort Worth. I don't remember exactly where we went after Kontun—there were a lot places we were at. Seems like we went back to base camp for a couple of days and did some stuff around there, like patrolling and what not. There was some minor stuff, but never any large engagements.

Interviewer: How many people were in your, was it called a platoon?

Veteran: Well, you were assigned to a company, and from a company you're assigned to a platoon, and from a platoon you're assigned to a squad, and then there are two fire teams in a squad. I was in A-1st to 12th--A Company, 1st Company, 12th Cav.

Interviewer: So you were in there with about ten guys most of the time?

Veteran: No, a full company's supposed to have about 132 people in it. A full company in Vietnam was always short, so it was figured if you had anywhere from 100 to 110, you had a full company. Then a platoon had roughly around 30 people in it. You had three light weapons platoons and one heavy weapons platoon, which was the fourth platoon. I was in the first platoon, and I don't know what squad it was. Like I said, you had two fire teams in each squad, and a squad would have seven or eight people in it, and you'd have about four people in each team. Each platoon had a lieutenant and a platoon sergeant major, and then you'd have sergeants that were over each squad.

Interviewer: What was a fire team?

Veteran: A fire team would normally consist of a machine gunner and two or three riflemen, and someone with a grenade launcher. That was a fire team.

{END OF TAPE 1, SIDE A}

{BEGINNING OF TAPE 1, SIDE B}

Interviewer: You were telling me what a fire squad was. I guess my question is, how did you feel? What were you going through?

Veteran: Well, you get to a unit, and of course you're the new guy. Everybody else looks at you like you're a piece of meat. I can remember showing Tom Dehoney a picture of your Mama, and said, "Hey, this is my new bride." And I can remember Tom Dehoney saying after we came back stateside saying, "Yeah, I remember you showing that to me, and I hoped you got back home to her." They'd just been shot up pretty good.

Interviewer: Did you think you were coming home when you were going over there?

Veteran: I assumed that I was. I knew there was a chance that I wouldn't, but I assumed that I was coming back.

Interviewer: After you got into it a little bit, were you still confident?

Veteran: I'm sure there was times that I wasn't as confident. I can't remember his name, and he was a platoon sergeant that was Hispanic, and he was a 'lifer'—one that's gonna make the military his career—and I had him probably the first three months I was there, and his attitude was, "They're not gonna get my ass. I'll get theirs—they're not gonna get mine. I'm goin' home." I looked up to him and adapted his attitude. Of course, there was always times of question. It wasn't he was a "John Wayne" or anything like that—he was just smart. But going back to what you said earlier, first getting there I can remember not knowing anybody, and they didn't know me. You've got to establish a trust of who you're with, which is a whole lot easier for you to establish a trust than for them to establish a trust of you, who they don't know. It's brand new. My unit had been through Ia Drang, which was the one that took place in October, which was the first major battle that the conventional forces of the United States had been involved with the North Vietnamese. The Mel Gibson movie about that battle was an outstanding movie; it was extremely accurate. In fact, when Susie and I saw the movie, I kept pointing out pieces of it. They showed them in training on the helicopters back at

Fort Benning, Georgia, and they were the first Army unit to be an Air Mobile, which was the helicopter. They would come in with the helicopter, and they would all be inside the Huey with the doors wide open, and then the helicopter would set down, and they'd all jump out and run. And I said, "Well, they may have trained like that, but that's not the way we did it in Vietnam." In Vietnam, we were standing on the struts, and the helicopter never touched down in a hot LZ. When you got close to the ground, you jumped. Then later on in the movie, once they were in Vietnam, that's exactly what they were doing. They did it exactly right. I credit the brigade commander and also the reporter that the movie was centered around. Those two are the ones that wrote the book about Ia Drang, and are the ones that made it authentic. It was excellent. Another thing about that movie that was exactly correct, when Mel Gibson was stepping on that helicopter to leave Ia Drang Valley, there were about six or eight small trees, and there was dirt pile up on them five or six feet. Probably the rest of the world didn't notice that, but those were actually anthills. I've actually used those anthills for protection. Susie probably wouldn't have even notice them if I hadn't pointed them out in the movie, because it was coincidental, but they were very predominant in Vietnam. Big black ants about ¾ inch long, and I can remember them crawling all through my clothes all night long, but that anthill was good protection. They didn't sting at all. *Apocalypse Now* was a movie that was a bunch of crap, as far as I'm concerned. *Full Metal Jacket* wasn't any good either in relation to the experiences I had. I think I've seen most of the Vietnam movies. The only two that were credible were *Platoon* and *Once We Were Soldiers*—those two were real. *Platoon* was very real.

Interviewer: Did your mail find you?

Veteran: Oh, yeah. I forget how long it would take. Mail would take anywhere from ten days to two weeks for me to get it. And they wouldn't always get there in the order they were sent.

Interviewer: What about laundry? I mean, when you go out, you're out. Do you keep your stuff somewhere?

Veteran: Yeah. You had a base camp area, which was a tent. Before I left, they'd built permanent hooches that had a cement floor and were wooden and all screened in, but when I first got there, it was just a tent with cots. Of course, the hooches just had cots, too. Thing about it was, out of the year that I was in Vietnam, I probably didn't spend a full thirty days in An Khe—it just didn't happen. We were always somewhere else. That was just base camp. You'd come back in, spend a couple of day, and then you'd go off somewhere else.

Interviewer: Who decided where you went or how you got there?

Veteran: There's four companies to a battalion, and ours was the 1st to the 12th, and they were assigned to the 1st Brigade. The 1st Brigade had three battalions in it. The 1st Brigade, our brigade, was the only airborne brigade, which was paratroopers. The rest of the division was legs, which means non-paratroopers. Sometimes you had assignments to go out and search, other times you had assignments to guard—and that was normally a pull back to rest to guard an artillery or aviation unit or even base camp—and other times you were held in reserve until somebody else found something, and that's normally what the 1st Brigade was going to do, because we were considered more aggressive since we were paratroopers. For some reason, we were considered to be more aggressive. They would wait until somebody else found something, and then send us in. We wouldn't parachute in, we would actually make air assaults from a helicopter. I got the Air Medal while I was there, and to get an Air Medal you had to have a hundred or more combat air assaults in a year. If you were a non-aviation person, and of course ground units were non-aviation, I don't know what it took to get an Air Medal for helicopter pilots and door gunners, and stuff like that.

Interviewer: So a combat air assault, somebody has identified a hot spot, and you're going in?

Veteran: Yes, you're going in on a combat assault to an area. Sometimes it's under fire and sometimes it's not. We used to get in the bars in Vietnam, and you'd get with the door gunners and the helicopter pilots, and they'd always be bitching and griping about a hot LZ, or landing zone, and about how bad it was. We'd always look at them and say, "Oh, yeah, flying in and flying out is bad. Why don't you stay some day?" {Laughter} There was always competitiveness between the different

assignments over there. I guess it was about May 16th when I first got into the first bad s—t. It was called Operation Crazy Horse. That's the one I told you I had an article on. As I recall it, they had a new company commander, and they had sent him out into an area that wasn't supposed to have any VC or North Vietnamese there. They just sent him out into the highlands for him to learn how to maneuver his company in the jungle and the highlands. He made the mistake of coming across commun—or communication—wire and followed it.

Interviewer: Is that like a telephone line?

Veteran: It's on the ground. This is the way I remember it and the way it was told to me later. After he found it, he directed his company or scouts or what not to follow the commun wire, and they walked into a Viet Cong training battalion. I don't know what time of the day this was. We were back in camp training to do a combat job.

Interviewer: How far away?

Veteran: Less than an hour by flight. All of a sudden, they came out to us after we'd jumped towers and everything and brought us extra loads of ammunition. Helicopters came in landed on the training grounds, and they put us on helicopters and took us to the sight. We got in on the LZ and it was hot, got out, and I can remember one guy wounded by a pungee stake jumping off of the helicopter.

Interviewer: What's a pungee stake?

Veteran: It's just a bamboo stake that's normally put into traps, and they'll put human feces on them to make them poisonous to you. They're as sharp as razors—they'll go right through you. Whenever he jumped, he fell on one on his butt. Also, if you're going into a hot LZ with door gunners, and you're jumping off anywhere from about six to at the most eight feet off of the ground, you learn after awhile that the gunners get excited and start kicking you off of the struts.

Interviewer: You're in their way.

Veteran: No, you're not in their way, they want to get out of there, and they can't get out of there until they get everybody off of those struts. After you go in on one or two of those, you turn around and look at the door gunner and you say, "Look, you son of a bitch, if you kick one of us off of here, we'll turn around and shoot you." And you make believers out of them. Never shot one—never shot at one—don't know of anybody that would, but we made believers out of them anyway. Anyway, we went in there late in the afternoon. I can't remember there being a whole lot of resistance, but we got to where the company was pinned down, and they were shot up pretty good. We got to the top of the field above the LZ, and we just laid down in a circle—two companies. One company was supposed to have, I think, 132 men, and our two companies had less than that combined, because they were just out there practicing and our company had been picked up off of the training field. I know the medics were giving aid to the ones that were wounded. There wasn't any contact with the enemy during the night. We just laid shoulder-to-shoulder with our wounded behind us in the circle all night. As soon as it came daylight the next morning, set off the "mad minute," where we each used up one full magazine. You didn't know what might be out there, and you didn't care.

Interviewer: How big is a magazine?

Veteran: Twenty rounds—actually nineteen. So after we set off the mad minute, and I can remember people hollering, "Cease fire." They thought that the mad minute didn't stop, because we got incoming. When we did that, they did the same thing firing back. That was the first large action I had been in. It just kept going on and on and on. Actually, I was carrying an M-79 with a grenade launcher at the time, plus a .45. Have you seen that .45 round I've got with the nose clipped on it? That is a .45 caliber bullet with the nose shot off of it, and that's where I took a round in the ammo pouch. I also took a round in the helmet, and I also took raspberry across my britches leg. Out of ten people laying shoulder to shoulder that I was with, I was the only one that wasn't really wounded. We called in artillery, but it didn't come in close enough, and then finally we called in "Puff," and Puff was a DC-3 with many gattling guns up and down the fuselage. This was my first experience with Puff, and I thought the whole world had come to an

end. I really did. I didn't know what the hell had happened. But we threw smoke to mark our position so that Puff could shoot on the other side of these positions. It was assumed later that they thought we were trying to retreat behind our smoke, but we didn't have any place to retreat to, because we were on top, but they came charging through the smoke towards us and it was just chaos. But anyway, each of Puff's guns puts out 660 rounds per second, and I think a ten second burst covers one square. It just covers everything. Puff was the one that broke their back and got them off of us. It turned out later that they assumed it was a training battalion of around 800 of them, and of course there was less than 200 of us. We counted over 300 of them killed, and had 33 KIAs and 110 wounded. And it went on for days.

Interviewer: With all of their dead people and all of your dead people, and when things finally cooled down, you gathered up your people. Did you also stack up theirs?

Veteran: Yes and no. Sometimes you did. Sometimes you didn't. We had other reinforcements coming in that day, so they pulled us off of the hill. There were stretchers being lowered by helicopters, and we'd put a guy on it when we could. The guy I was carrying out, we just thought he had a side wound, and then once we moved him, we found out he also had part of his skull missing, but he was alive. I heard later that he did live, but I don't know who he was. We went back to the LZ where we originally came in and set up perimeter there and stayed for I'm going to say seven to ten days—I really don't know exactly. But there were other units coming in, and what they would do is come in and land there, and then they would go out and search the rest of the mountains and hills there and force out the VC.

Interviewer: So you were just protecting the LZ.

Veteran: Yes. We were shot up. There wasn't enough left of us to go out and do anything. I was made a team leader after that, because I was one of the few standing.

Interviewer: Congratulations!

Veteran: Like I said, I was hit three times that particular morning, but I wasn't really bleeding. Every night, we'd get probed while we were on that LZ.

Interviewer: What does that mean?

Veteran: The VC trying to test our strength…trying to get our machine guns to commit, so they'd know where they were at and try take 'em out. We'd set up our trip flares and our Claymoore mines out in front of us, and try not to fire an M-16 or machine gun unless you were really getting attacked. If you were just getting probed, you just messed with them by throwing grenades, or shooting M-79 grenade launchers, or setting off Claymoore mines so they couldn't tell where we were at. I had a prone shelter on the side of the hill which was about twelve inches deep at the most that was body length, and that's what you slept in and what you fought from and everything else. I remember one night one of the trip flares set the elephant grass on fire, and the whole place was just lit up. I was laying there and was watching this snake—and it was poisonous (a bamboo viper)—and it came right on into my prone shelter, came on out the other side, and right on down the hill. I just laid there and watched him come across me. The day that we left there, the operation was winding down, and we got on the helicopters and left.

{END OF TAPE 1, SIDE B}

{BEGINNING OF TAPE 2, SIDE A}

Veteran: The last day that we were there, the helicopters had been bringing people out of the jungle and out of the highlands, and I think it was the heavy weapons platoon out of C-Company, maybe D-Company, anyway—they're not regular combat. They don't go out and do the actual combat. They sit back and do mortar firing, rocket propel, and stuff like that. Well, we left them on the LZ sitting there, and they were supposed to get picked up some time after us, and had assumed that we had taken care of everything in the area. There was hardly anything left—nothing organized.

Interviewer: So, they didn't have any close-range protection.

Veteran: None. We left and got about half way back to An Khe. They turned us around and were sending us back—there were maybe seven or eight helicopters—

because after we left and their protection was gone, the VC came off that mountain and overran 'em, and wiped the whole damn platoon out—everyone of them, and did it before we could get back in there. After it was observed from the air as to what had occurred and how many there were that we hadn't gotten—we thought when we left the place was practically void of VC—they didn't put us back down in there, because there was too few of us. After we got back over the area, they turned us back around and sent us back on to base camp.

Interviewer: So this was like your initiation?

Veteran: I had been in-country about six weeks. I remember the next place we went, we slept in water that was four to six inches deep. There wasn't any place to get out of it. You had to sleep on your sides. I remember the leeches and the centipedes and stuff like that. I can remember before or after that, we were between Pleiku and An Khe and my fire team was guarding a bridge. There was a little Mountain Yard village—Mountain Yard's were the native Vietnamese. They're the mountain people—they're like the Indians to us. We were keeping the VC from blowing up the bridge—there were a whole bunch of bridges up and down this road—and we were again in kind of a stand down platoon. The chief came in one day, and he was just limping like hell, and had a couple of people helping him, and he had all of this red mud on his leg. He started peeling it off, and he had laid his whole leg open with a machete. It was an enormous gash, and he had stuffed it full of mud to keep it from bleeding. So we called a medic, and finally we got a helicopter to evacuate him out to Pleiku. We stayed there for about five or six days. It was an interesting place. That was where we'd just to go up in the village, and they had these clay bowls that were eight to ten inches tall and filled with rice, then filled full of water. Straight across the bowl was a stick, and then in the middle of the stick sticking down would be one branch, and then the little branch coming off the middle of that would probably be about a half inch long, or maybe an inch. You would take these clay bowls—and they had lots of them—and you would drink until it got to the bottom, until the liquid cleared that little branch. Then you'd stop drinking it and get another one. What that did was keep all the liquid in there fermented with that rice, and this was a rice wine. And it was potent, too. They always wanted us to drink with them, and we always felt

obligated to do that. Then also, there was one night when I was under a bridge sleeping on a concrete abutment. Our fire team was there. Had some of them on one side of the water, and the rest of us were on the other. I was on fire, and I ran out from under the bridge, and pulled down the pants of the guy that was on guard duty, and it was when a centipede got me. Bit my left cheek, and I mean it got me good. Seems like he was about six or eight inches long, and that wasn't the biggest one I ever got off of me over there, but he was the only one that ever bit me. The poison from that settled in my left groin, and I remember I had that for about six or eight weeks. It was just always there, just nagging. Then another thing that happened one time, we were coming down the river and I thought it was a stick coming at us. It must have been a snake ten or twelve foot long, just coming down the river and going by. You looked at that, and it was amazing. I remember one other time back in base camp seeing the company clerk watching him walk by with just a towel in front of him and wearing flip flops coming from the company shower dragging what I thought was a hose. I looked back and thought, "Wait a minute, the company clerk never does any work. What's he doing dragging a hose?" I looked back again, and it was a snake that was eleven or twelve feet long. Another time what was real funny, there was this Puerto Rican, I don't remember his name, but we were on this bank that was pretty high above this water, and it was at night, and he rolled off the embankment and rolled in the water. It was hilarious. {Laughter} All the Hispanic cussing and everything else, and everybody else coming awake not knowing what's going on and where to shoot.

Interviewer: Did he fall asleep?

Veteran: Yeah! We were all asleep. You kept one or two guys awake, and everybody else was sleeping. And then the other thing that happened while we were there, it was the next bridge up and I went up to see if I could be of any help. We had an Indian that got drunk on the rice wine—I mean, just out of his mind drunk—and he had his whole fire team pinned down. {Laughter} And nobody wanted to shoot him, but nobody could move either, and so finally he passed out, and they subdued him. It caused a big stir, because everybody all up and down the company battalion knew about it, because it was a serious situation. Nobody got

wounded or anything, but they took him off, and probably threw him in the brig for 30 days or something like that.

I was hospitalized four times over there with malaria. I had two different types. Vivax and falciparum—there's only three types of malaria that was over there…I don't know how many types there are in the world. The other kind was black water. Once you got black water, you were dead. The best I recall, it was just falciparium gone untreated too long.

Interviewer: How do you get malaria?

Veteran: Mosquitoes. The first two or three times that they hospitalized me, they'd just break your fever, give you a week or so, and then they'd send you back. Malaria is in your liver, so fatigue or alcohol triggers the malaria, so by the time I got my fourth hospitalization over with, they figured out that they needed to give me convalescence to get me physically rehabilitated—not just get my fever broke. So the last time, I spent about 30 days. I was in a hospital in An Khe, another one in Quin Yon, one in Ia Drang, and then I was in the 6th Convalescent Center in Kamron Bay.

Interviewer: What kind of a hospital was it? I mean, was it just a tent?

Veteran: Some of them were tents, and some of them were wooden hooches. The first time I had it we were down in Tu Dewa. It was either right at the end of June or the first of July, and the temperature was 120 or 130 degrees. People were dropping with heat exhaustion like flies—just bad. I can remember that water was at a premium. We were somewhere in the vicinity of Tu Dewa, and were trying to get to a well in a village, and we had a couple of people that were wounded because the VC or North Vietnamese, whichever ones, had mined the place. What we wound up doing was we found a pineapple patch, and the pineapples were still green, but since we were out of water anyway, we were splitting open the pineapples, drink the pineapple juice, and all it did was just shrivel your mouth.

Interviewer: Like a lemon?

Veteran: Aw, bad! But we were looking for any kind of liquid. But, anyway, that's when I got it, and I first thought I had heat exhaustion. When they medivacked me out and brought me into La Trang, I'd been in the field for quite some time and was just nasty. You were talking about laundry and stuff like that, in the field all you have is the uniform that's on you and I carried one extra pair of socks, and I changed those daily. I would wash the pair of socks that I didn't have on and tie them to my webbing and let them dry during the day, if it wasn't raining, and then the next morning I'd put on another pair of socks. That was the only change you had. Also, the military issued little powder cans, and it was Desenex powder. I used to get that stuff and just fill my boots and pants full of it, and I never got jungle rot, but I saw guys that would take off there boots, and they wouldn't have any skin. I saw jungle rot go all the way to their ass, because guys didn't take care of themselves. I did take care of myself. I got as many cans of that as I could get from supply, and every day I filled my boots and my pants full of that powder. Anyway, I got to that hospital, and I was running—I didn't know it at the time, but I was delirious with fever. They told me where to go, and I walked in and I was just right out of the jungle—I don't know how long I'd been out there—and the guy looked at me and asked me what I wanted. I told him I was supposed to be checking in, and he said, "The showers are that way." They handed me some blue pajamas. Even though I was delirious at the time, they weren't even going to look at me until I got a shower. When I got back, they said, "What do you want?" I said, "You told me to get a shower," and he said, "Go find you a bed down there." Instead, I went outside the hooch, and I was on my 'all fours' just heaving—just blowing my guts out—and this lady lieutenant colonel came by, and she saw how sick I was and she started reaming out people. {Laughter} The next thing I knew, they had me in an air conditioned ward and took my temperature. They stripped me down and poured ice over me. Then they gave me an alcohol bath and put fans on me. I had 105.6 to 105.8 for three days in a row. I was fried. That's when I got delirious and I actually saw Aunt Reedie walking through, and she was in Sulphur Springs. I can still remember her walking through the big double doors wearing and black and white checked dress, which she had, and just sitting down beside me—didn't say nothing—just

sat there. She and I talked about that after I was back. The other thing was that I also remember a good looking woman coming in, and it turned out a few days later while I was still in that ward, that she was real. She was a lieutenant nurse, and I guess after I came out of my delirium she came about two or three days later, and I couldn't believe it. I thought it was someone I had just dreamed of—kind of like Aunt Reedie, but it wasn't. That was my first bout with malaria. I didn't stay there long, because once they got me on my feet a week or two later, they sent me back in, and then it turned up again because of fatigue or what not.

Interviewer: Is that in your blood?

Veteran: Yeah. That's the reason I can't give blood. When you had your fever of unknown origins that you used to have as a kid, I always used to ask them, "Check that s—t." I was hospitalized once after I came back from Vietnam with malaria in Fort Campbell, Kentucky. I had your mom take me into the emergency room, and I told them what I had, and they looked at me like they didn't know, and I said, "I do!" Of course, I was one of the first ones they had seen with malaria. They came back and said, "Yeah, that's what you've got," and I said, "Yeah, I know damn well what I've got; this is my fifth time to be hospitalized with it." It's supposed to be something that stays dormant in your liver.

I also had worms real bad once, too. I went in and told the medics, "I have worms." They asked me how I knew, and I said, "Well you can see 'em whenever I take a crap." They gave me about an eight ounce bottle of a dark liquid that tasted like crud and said, "Take two tablespoons of this twice daily until it's all gone," so I walked out of the med hooch and drank about three-fourths of it as soon as I walked out, and then the very next morning I drank the rest of it, and I didn't have any more worms. {Laughter} The heck with trying to kill 'em slow, cause they were really bad.

Another time, we were guarding an artillery unit, and we were trying to clear a bunker, and a rat ran out. I was stomping the rat at the same time another guy

was throwing a bayonet at it, and my foot was first, and the bayonet stuck up in the top of my foot. It wasn't bad—it just left a scar.

There was the time that we were enroute to one place and they changed us. They took a whole battalion and pushed us against a little village that was right against the South China Sea, and we had a North Vietnamese unit blocked against the sea. We only had three KIAs out of that, and there was over 800 of them. We got a Presidential Unit Citation for that.

Interviewer: What is that?

Veteran: It's for whenever a unit does an outstanding job.

Interviewer: Is it a star, a medal, or a rope?

Veteran: It's a blue ribbon that you wear over your right pocket inside a gold frame. That's the Presidential Unit Citation.

Interviewer: How did that happen?

Veteran: We got in position and had them pinned against the South China Sea, and they couldn't go anywhere, and we just pounded the crap out of 'em. It wasn't all rifle fire. There was artillery, air power—we just had 'em pinned. Wasn't anything great about it. It was just one of their mistakes getting pinned like that on the coast.

The last six months I was there, what time I wasn't in the hospital, when I was running "LERPS" for battalion, which is long-range recon patrols, and I'd take myself and three other guys and we'd go out on long-range recon by helicopter, and they'd always put us in. We were supposed to stay out anywhere from three to five days, but we always wound up staying anywhere from seven to ten days. All you're doing is setting up observation along trails and things like that, and then reporting back any type of movement. They left it strictly up to you as to whether you engaged. If you wanted to engage, that was your call. If you didn't want to engage, that was your call, too. So it was a pretty independent operation.

Interviewer: So you had four guys. How did you report?

Veteran: You had a radio. You're visually observing any movement night and day along these jungle trails. You would catch small squads moving, supplies moving, large units moving, and stuff like that. Normally, all you'd ever do is call in artillery or air strikes. We didn't get on the trails. We'd just get into position where we could see trails. Sometimes we'd find elephants on the trails and we shot them.

Interviewer: Real elephants?

Veteran: Yeah. I never did shoot one. They used real elephants to transport weapons.

Interviewer: Huh? I'd never heard that.

Veteran: Yeah, Indonesian elephants were used for that.

Interviewer: So, a trail is noticeable. It's not like a deer or cow trail.

Veteran: Well, but the thing about it is you've got a jungle canopy over most of it, too, so it's not seen from the air as easily. But, they're just like regular highways. They were big huge trails coming out of North Vietnam and Cambodia and Laos.

Interviewer: Were they mapped out for you?

Veteran: No. Quite frankly, the ones that were known in Cambodia, Laos, and Vietnam we used to carpet bomb with B-52s at night, because they were trying to move stuff up and down. If they weren't moving them by machinery, they were moving them by animals or on their own backs. Also, we were in Cambodia long before Nixon ever authorized it. We'd go into Cambodia at night and set up an ambush, and then come back during the daylight—long before it was authorized. I'm sure that everybody except maybe the president knew we were there—maybe even the president. Ain't no doubt in my mind we knew where we were at, and everybody else knew where we were at, but we'd just always say we weren't there. I don't know how many times we were in Cambodia.

Interviewer: Did you ever feel like you were getting somewhere, or just shooting things down that weren't making a drop in the bucket?

Veteran: Not making a drop in the bucket. Of course I was early-on. It actually got worse after I left. I was there ’66-’67. Out of the year I was there, my company took something like either 60 or 80 something KIAs.

{END OF TAPE 2, SIDE A}

{BEGINNING OF TAPE 2, SIDE B}

Veteran: There was always people rotating in, rotating out, and what not. Out of the twelve months I was there, we never had a full company. I think if we ever had 110 people in the company at one time, we considered ourselves at full strength. As best I can remember, we took about 80 KIAs in the twelve months I was there.

Interviewer: Is that the kind of action that all the companies saw, or did ya’ll see more than the average?

Veteran: No, some of them probably saw more, but they wouldn’t send us out independent any more so much as to search and destroy. They would wait until something was found by somebody else and then send us in.

Interviewer: Then you were always seeing action.

Veteran: That was the point of it. Since we were an airborne unit, we were considered more aggressive, so they’d send out the others on boring day-in-day-out humping through all the villages. We did some of that, too, but not so much of it. They’d just wait until they found something, and then send us to help or do whatever. The last six months I was there, because everybody else had been shot away—not necessarily dead, but wounded and gone—I was a squad leader (Sergeant E-5; I went from a E-1 to an E-5 in less than a year, and you don’t get that kind of promotion except in combat).

Interviewer: So, tell me about some of the combat. I see movies, I read books, I see TV shows.

Veteran: Like I said, *Full Metal Jacket* was nothing. I couldn’t relate to that. I think *Apocalypse Now* was a bunch of crap, but *Platoon* was real and so was *Once We Were Soldiers*.

Interviewer: I don’t really remember *Platoon* that well.

Veteran: It was just Vietnam-real. It was about jungle combat. Also, things that went on between people within it.

Interviewer: Did you experience that the enemy was your friend by day and your enemy by night?

Veteran: No.

Interviewer: So, you weren’t in a position to do that?

Veteran: We had Vietnamese interpreters sometimes assigned to us, and we suspected some of them of being VC sympathizers, so we either trusted them or didn’t trust them. I remember when the Rock Marines, that’s the South Korean Marines—they had military troops in there, and they were absolutely vicious. The North Vietnamese, the VC, us—nobody wanted anything to do with them. They were vicious.

Interviewer: What do you mean?

Veteran: Atrocities. You didn’t want to be around them.

Interviewer: Some of the questions that come to mind are, you’re out there on long-range patrol for seven to ten days—where did you get your food?

Veteran: You carried it with you. I came back from Vietnam weighing 140 pounds. I could barely eat a meal when I got back. There was very few K-rations back then, which was the dry stuff. They’d give you three boxes of C-rations per day, and a box was oblong, about eight inches. You couldn’t carry enough of those on your back for three meals a day, so what you’d do is you’d go through ‘em and pick out the good stuff that you liked and when you’d break it down, you’d have about one meal a day is all you would eat.

Interviewer: Did you find water, carry water, boil water?

Veteran: We found our own water in the streams. We carried two canteens in with us, and you also had halezon tablets that you could put in the water to purify it. But like I

said, there was times when you didn't have water like when we sucked on them green pineapples.

Interviewer: There's so many things that don't add up in my head like you're laying on this hill in a circle, and it doesn't seem like you could carry enough ammunition, and that you would run out eventually and be in trouble.

Veteran: The thing about it is we had airlifts—helicopters. But your basic load was 180 or 120 rounds of ammunition. Everybody I knew that carried an M-16 carried about 300 rounds of ammunition, all loaded into magazines already. You slap a magazine up into your M-16 where there's about half of it hanging out, and you'd take another magazine, stick it up next to it, tape it together, so that all you have to do is on your first magazine, as soon as you run out, you pull it out, turn it around, and stick it back in there, and so you've got about 38 rounds of ammunition right there in your weapon. Everybody carried more ammunition than what a basic load was. By the time you ran out of your basic ammunition, there was somebody laying around that didn't need theirs. I can never remember ammunition being a problem for us. We had the helicopters and what not, and so we were always supplied. It wasn't that way on recon, because you didn't want any helicopters near you.

Interviewer: What's recon?

Veteran: Long-range recon patrol.

Interviewer: Because there was too few of you to be known where you were?

Veteran: Right. Because what they would do is whenever you'd go in on recon, the helicopter would be taking you and the three others in, they'd sweep down, and then they'd go back up. Then they'd go a little ways and sweep down and go back up. They'd do that five or six times, and that way anybody observing would not know where we got off. When they came back to get us it was a different story. They'd come in, pick us up, and out we'd go. We were sometimes so far out that we'd have to relay our radio signal to a recon that was closer in than us. We'd also go out and set up automatic ambushes, and that was different. There was a sergeant in my company that invented it, and then we started training other

companies and divisions how to do it. They're also very dangerous, because we blew away one of our own recon teams one time with it. An automatic ambush is when you have a trail that's going through the jungle and is a highly used trail. You'd set up two ends of a Claymoore mine—and they're normally set off by an electric charge that you squeezed from a sixty foot cord. We'd take that blasting cap out of it, put in a regular blasting cap and stick in it a det cord, and det cord doesn't burn. It explodes at 660 feet per second. You'd run this det cord all up and down that trail, and every so often you'd put a little ball of C-4 (which is explosive) on the det cord, stick a blasting cap in it, and then you'd run more of the det cord to the side of the trail. Then you'd pull the pin out of a grenade and put a blasting cap in it and stick the det cord in it. Then you'd do that all up and down the trail. Then you would take the trip flare, and you would put the trip flare across the trail on both ends, or whichever end you expect them to come in from, and on the trip flare, instead of making it shoot straight up where it would give light, you would turn it upside down. It was white phosphorous. Under the trip flare, you would take a wad of C-4 plastic explosive and put blasting caps in it, and run the det cord out of it, and run it to the Claymoores and the grenades and all that. Once somebody hit that trip cord, it explodes all up and down that trail in both directions. Like I said, the det cord goes off at 660 feet per second, so it's an instantaneous devastation. We'd set those things up in areas that we weren't patrolling in and just leave them. We never went off and left them—at least we didn't—but if we were gonna move out of an area that we were reconning, then we would go back and pick 'em up, and they were dangerous to pick up. Sometimes you'd have one recon team to come in and relieve another recon team, and we'd tell them, "We've done this is this area; we've looked at this area and this is what's going on there; we're watching this area, because of movement; we've set up automatic ambushes in this area." You'd always ask them if they wanted us to take the automatic ambushes down or leave them. It wasn't mine, but somebody else's in the battalion, and they said to just leave it. The ones that relieved us that blew themselves away, I don't know if they stumbled into it or whether they were trying to pick it up to take it away after they were pulling out, but it wiped them all out. They were highly dangerous, but they

were nice to have. They took care of themselves. Of course, water buffalo could set ‘em off, other animals, too.

Interviewer: It seems like mines and booby traps were everywhere. They had them—you had ‘em. Ya’ll are all in each other’s face. To me, it’s just kind of strange that you had so few mishaps stumbling into that kind of stuff.

Veteran: It did happen, but not a whole lot. We had people injured with those pungee stakes, which were pretty crude but very effective. We had our own mortar shell rounds that blew our own people away—that’s where a mortar round or artillery round wasn’t fused properly, and only traveled a little ways and fell on us instead of falling beyond us. We had a medic that was blown away because he was relatively new, and we’d set up in a defensive position somewhere in the jungle. He went out before dark to take a crap after we’d already had all our positions set up. He went in front of the lines instead behind, and he got blown away by one of the mines coming back in. When you’re using that kind of stuff and you’re around all that kind of stuff and all your weapons are loaded, accidents just happen. Out of all those that are killed in Iraq, I’m sure there are a number of them that are accidents.

Interviewer: How did you get home?

Veteran: I got on a plane in Pleiku.

Interviewer: Were you there a year from the day you got there until the day you left?

Veteran: One day short of one year.

Interviewer: Did you know that, or did somebody tell you?

Veteran: Somebody’s supposed to keep track of it, but I knew that. I got on a plane in Pleiku, and we made two stops—Philippines, Clark Air Force Base, and also stopped in Guam. The next stop was in Oakland, and they just patched us right through. We went on to San Francisco, got on an airplane to Vegas, and then on to Dallas. Your mom and my folks were there.

Interviewer: Did you get some kind of leave while you were in Vietnam?

Veteran: Yeah, your mom and I met in Hawaii on R&R the first of February before I came back in April. We were there for a week.

Interviewer: Just to rest?

Veteran: We were authorized to have one in-country R&R and one out-of-country R&R. I never did get one of the in-country R&Rs. In-country was three days, and out-of-country was a week. We met in Honolulu and spent a week there. I went back to Vietnam, and she went back to New York.

Interviewer: Boy, that's gotta stink.

Veteran: Yeah, it did. Like I said, my whole life was different when I came back. When I came back, I had 30 days leave. We stayed couple or three days at my folks house, and then we drove to Fort Campbell, Kentucky, where I was assigned. I saw Tom Dehoney there, and he was living off base with his wife. They were living in duplexes, and there were about three or four duplexes there, and there was a vacancy, so your mom and I rented one of those. I didn't want to come back and play soldier. I didn't want to come back and do all the crap that they did, and so Tom introduced me to another guy that lived in one of the duplexes, and he worked at the Headquarters Division. He told me about a staff position that was available there, so I went down to see the headquarters commandant. He said, "I've never had anybody walk into my office before and tell me they wanted a job." He was a really nice man, and I told him, "Look, I'm fresh out of Vietnam. I don't want to go over here in one of these infantry units and just play soldier. I've done my time with that. I've got some skills in offices. I was assistant head bookkeeper in a bank, I worked in another bank, and I've worked in an insurance company. I know my way around an office. I want a job." And he said, "I've got a job for you. When you get back from leave [we were driving on to New York] you come see me, and we'll check you in." And so, when I got back, I went to see Major Sherman, and he put me with another sergeant, and we went down and checked me in with a company that I was assigned to, and they put me on temporary duty to Headquarters Division, and so I spent the rest of my time with the 101st, which was about four months, as division reception NCO. I

took care of all VIP billoting: senators, foreign dignitaries, generals, and anything else. I took care of all of wherever they were to stay. We had some really nice quarters on post at Fort Campbell. I took care of what they wanted to drink, make sure they had a cook, make sure they had a staff driver and a car—just anything that they needed. I was the one that made sure they got what they needed by assigning other people to do it. I also took care of protocol for ceremonies, and the field officer of the day duty roster. While I was there, I kept going upstairs to G-3 schools and looking to see what the Army had to offer in schools, and I came up with two. One of them was computer programmer, which was brand new then—nobody knew what the hell it was, and the other one was air traffic control. A computer programmer for the Army, you had to go to school somewhere in Indiana. ATC, air traffic control, was in Buloxi, Mississippi, which was south and warm, and so I chose it. Being where I was at, I was able to get Major Sherman to sign off to send me to air traffic control school. I went down there, and while I was there, the 101st Airborne pulled up the whole division and went to Vietnam. I didn't have to go, because I had just gotten back. Once I got out of Keesler Air Force Base, air traffic control school, I was assigned to the 82nd Airborne Division at Fort Bragg, North Carolina, in the 82nd Aviation Battalion. Then I was temporary duty over to the Army airfield tower there. I spent my last eight months in the military—December to August—there in air traffic control. I was Trooper of the Year for the 82nd Aviation Battalion, and was up for Trooper of the Year for the 82nd Airborne Division. It was a pretty easy ride. Because of all that, I got to go to 82nd Airborne's annual reunion in Cleveland that year as a guest—didn't cost me anything. Remember the movie about D-Day? The 82nd Airborne jumped in on D-Day, and one of the guys in the movie, his parachute hung up on the town clock. Well, I got to meet that guy, and in fact I remember he had throat cancer, and he talked through a voice box.

Interviewer: So, you finished up with the 82nd in North Carolina, and then you were discharged?

Veteran: I got discharged, and you were supposed to be born while we were in the military, but I got discharged in August and you were born September 3. So instead of the military paying for it, I did in McKinney, Texas. Then, I went to work for

American Airlines for a couple of weeks. Then, I got an offer from the FAA in air traffic control, so I told American, "See ya." We put you in a chicken box in the backseat in a U-Haul, and you and your mom and I left for North Carolina again. Went back to Winston-Salem again, and started out there.

Interviewer: Where'd you get your training for that?

Veteran: Well, it started whenever I went to air traffic control school in the military.

Interviewer: But tell me the rest of the story. You worked your way up through the FAA and ended up how?

Veteran: I ended up as a manager of the Houston hub, which was the Houston Intercontinental tower, Beaumont, Hobby, and Hooks, and that's where I finished my career.

Interviewer: I remember when we were in Colorado one summer and they found us out at the campground.

Veteran: That was the 1981 air traffic controller's strike. We had to leave there and come back because the controllers went on strike. I was a supervisor in Lubbock at the time.

Interviewer: You have a belt buckle that has a hole in it that you showed me one time.

Veteran: No, you're thinking about the .45 round.

Interviewer: Justin showed me, I think it was a belt buckle.

Veteran: No, this is a .45 round that definitely has a big shot on the nose, and that was when was in my ammo pouch on my stomach.

Interviewer: Do you remember Richard Morgan? Richard was a dentist in Vietnam. I don't know if you knew that.

Veteran: I didn't know that.

Interviewer: Did you ever go to the dentist?

Veteran: Yeah, I only went to the dentist once in Vietnam. I was at the 6th Convalescent Center recovering from malaria. I went to the dentist, but I can't remember for what purpose.

{END OF TAPE 2, SIDE B}

{BEGINNING OF TAPE 3, SIDE A}

[Tape begins with Interviewer speaking]

Interviewer: …Yeah, like my kids at school. "Sorry, I can't fight today. I've gotta go to the dentist."

Veteran: Well, that wasn't much that occurred. You had to be incapacitated to get out of being in the field in some manner.

Interviewer: So, going to the dentist wasn't a routine thing. It was more like an emergency.

Veteran: I was already in the hospital, so it wasn't any big deal when I went. I think I got a filling or something.

Interviewer: Were you ever in the towns or the cities?

Veteran: Yeah.

Interviewer: What was that like? It's been a long time since I've seen a Vietnam movie, but you think of *Good Morning, Vietnam*, where you see the hustle and bustle.

Veteran: Yeah, but that was Saigon, and it was like that. La Trang was a little bit like that—not as much. It wasn't quite as large. Quinyon was even less. An Khe was mostly dirt streets…hooches and stuff. So was Pleiku, and Tu Dewa was just a bongsong village. Most of them was just villages, but as far as towns, Quinyon, La Trang, Camron were bigger, but not like Saigon. They did have their bars and B-girls and stuff like that. They were mostly just dusty and dirty.

Interviewer: From what I have been exposed to, which is all Hollywood and media, seems like you had a lot of down time to play cards, do drugs, write home, or take a shower, or whatever they'd do. What did you do?

Veteran: A lot of times there wasn't anything to do—depending on where you were at. If you were back in base camp, which we weren't very often, your whole unit

would be able to, but you'd take turns going into town. Certain squads or platoons would go one day and somebody would go another day. You never let everybody go at once. If we were in a guard position, you would take turns doing that, and then at night you'd be put out on the perimeter.

Interviewer: Does that mean sit out in the jungle with your gun?

Veteran: Yeah. One of the things that would happen is that they'd send you out on patrol at night. It would normally be yourself and three to six others, depending on what it is. If you were in An Khe, which set outside of base camp, at dusk you'd go hiking out, and as soon as it got dark, you'd make a 180 and go into town. Nobody'd ever know where you were at. You were still sending in your reports once an hour. About dawn, you'd come hiking back in from the same direction—at least generally. But it wasn't like you were leaving the 1st Air Cav Division undefended…you weren't. They never did really mount a strong offense against the 1st Cav. They might send in a probe or mostly it would just be mortar rounds at night. You're just taking care of yourself.

Interviewer: Did you understand that there were tunnels underground?

Veteran: Yeah. Joe Perry was our tunnel rat, because he was the smallest guy in the squad.

Interviewer: So you found tunnels and sent him in?

Veteran: Yeah. If we had to send somebody in, Joe Perry was it. Allan Fryberg was my front man, and that's where he wanted to be. Most other squads had everybody wanting to rotate that position, but Allan always wanted it. It would normally be a front man, a rifleman, then myself, then my radioman—this is when I was dealing with a squad, not LERPs—then there'd be an M-79 (40mm grenade launcher that explodes when it hits) carrier back of that, then whatever riflemen attached to me would be behind that. That's how we would move the squad.

Interviewer: I'm sure that you experienced every emotion there is to experience over there. Tell me about a humanitarian type thing that sticks out in your mind.

Veteran: I told you about the Mountain Yard chief with his leg nearly cut off that he packed it full of mud. We hauled him out. He was very well taken care of.

Wasn't bleeding or nothing else. Soon as our medics pulled the mud out, he was bleeding like he was stuck bad. We had to convince somebody higher up that he was important enough to put on an American helicopter and take to Quinyon.

Interviewer: So what about a horror story?

Veteran: A horror story?

Interviewer: Any kind. I want to know. I wasn't there. I've spent a whole lifetime wondering.

Veteran: Well, it was in our battalion—not in our company—and it was a roach(?) team. They went through a village, and they took a young girl out of the village and took her up in the mountains with them, and when they got ready to let her come out, they killed her instead. And sometime later, I can't remember now, one of the team got a conscience and told the chaplain about it, and so they all got court martialled and I think went to Korea.

Interviewer: Went to Korea?

Veteran: Went to prison in Korea.

Interviewer: Did the enemy have the same kind of moral standards of conscience?

Veteran: No. We had a VC interpreter named Howie, and we trusted Howie because his parents had been strung up in front of him and gutted. He didn't know if it was VC or North Vietnamese that did it. They were left upside down to die right in front of him. It seems to me, and this is stereotyping I know, that the Oriental has more atrocity in him that anyone else, but I could be wrong. The South Koreans—I didn't personally see it—but supposedly they did some pretty big atrocities themselves, and that's why the reason no Vietnamese from the North, South, or VC or whatever wanted to mess with them. The Vietnamese also did some atrocities undoubtedly, too. But I can also say I knew guys with ears.

Interviewer: What does that mean?

Veteran: They cut off ears and strung them together.

Interviewer: Almost like scalping.

Veteran: Yeah, but they scalped people when they were alive. Joe Perry, the tunnel rat, his first thing to do was to always check the left breast pocket, because that's where the Vietnamese carried their money, so that's what he always went for.

Interviewer: My impression is we didn't win.

Veteran: Your impression is correct.

Interviewer: But my impression is also that the enemy was under-equipped.

Veteran: I like what one of my friends who was over there had printed on his Harley. It has a Vietnam Buddha or something, and under it says, "We were winning when I left." There was a lot of politics. I think what Johnson and also Nixon were afraid of, they did not want China to enter the war. China entered the war with North Korea, and we got hurt bad.

Interviewer: From a numbers standpoint?

Veteran: Right. If China had entered that war, our only option was to use atomic weapons. There was a lot of politics involved. So, we were restrained from going into North Vietnam in anything more than covert action, and Laos, and Cambodia, for the fact that we didn't want the Chinese to enter the war, because if they did it was a whole different ballgame. The only thing we could have done to stop them was, again, using nuclear weapons, which we didn't use in North Korea. If we were to ever use it again, we would have gotten the threat of the Russians. We had our back against the wall to just go over there and shoot like a street gunfight. You couldn't go get 'em where they were at. You just had to just fight 'em in the streets. It was bad. Something we never should have done.

Interviewer: This is personal, but I don't even know why we were involved.

Veteran: We were involved to save the democracy of South Vietnam. Supposedly they had a democracy, and supposedly in the Gulf of Tonkin we were attacked by a North Vietnamese gunboat or something like that, and Johnson used some of this stuff to get us involved. We already had Special Forces in there helping the South Vietnamese do their own stuff, but for some reason he wanted to commit a

larger force, and it just kept growing, and growing, and growing. Nixon inherited it. Johnson backed out of it—didn't even run for reelection. Nixon didn't do any better. The field commanders over there were lying about how well we were doing. We were doing well, but we weren't doing as well as they were saying. We were getting our ass kicked. There was more of them dying than us—there's no doubt—but that's still not winning. It was rare if we came away from something if we didn't take more of them down, but at the same time, you can't say that's winning.

Interviewer: You've got a point. So you were 22 and 23 when you were there. What did you miss the most? I can imagine you missing TV. I can imagine you missing a good meal with your family.

Veteran: I missed milk. I missed your Mama. Your Mama and I were just fresh married. Even though we'd been seeing each other off and on for three and a half years. The one thing that I really missed was real, fresh milk.

Interviewer: Did you have warm food?

Veteran: Oh, yeah. We'd take C-4, the plastic explosive, and if you'd take a little pinch of it and strike a match to it, it burns so hot it will burn through metal. It'll eat your C-ration can just like that [sound of snapping fingers]. So, you had hot food. The only other time you'd have hot food is if you were stationed somewhere like guarding an artillery unit or back at base camp. They'd have a kitchen set up, or they would fly in cans of hot food. It wasn't any good. It was the only time I liked liver in my life. We'd been out and had been without much or all most nothing for several days, and we came back in and they had liver and onions. It wasn't even mealtime, and that's what they flew out there for us. It was good.

Interviewer: When you watch *60 Minutes* or one of those type shows and you see the old reporters, like Dan Rather, always out in Vietnam in the middle of a fight hunkered under a bush with a microphone. Were you around those kind of guys?

Veteran: Yeah. Every once in awhile we'd get a reporter stuck with us. I remember one time we were getting ready to go into, supposedly, a hot LZ, and we still hadn't been picked up by the helicopters. They always gave the reporters the option of

carrying a sidearm, but it was up to them. I went over and looked at this one reporter, and he was obviously brand new, and he had opted for grenades. When you take a grenade out of the cardboard canister, it's got a pin stuck through it, like a power cue. On his web belt, he had put it on there, pulled the pin, and he had the welding stuck to the pin, but you were supposed to bend the prongs back so it wouldn't slip out. Well, he hadn't bent the prongs back. He had no idea what he had, so somebody just told him, "Hey, stick your weapon through these rings." If he had picked it up, they'd all three have gone off. That's one of my most memorable reporters. They were just somebody that you had to watch out for.

Interviewer: Seems like such a burden to have an untrained guy there who might have a camera.

Veteran: Actually, if there was something going on, you just didn't worry about them. You always stuck them back at the rear so they could stay with the platoon leader and the radioman, and just stay out of the way. You just didn't really worry about 'em. We had more worries than that. Once you learned that they didn't know what the hell they were doing with weapons and everything else, you always looked to see what they had and what they were doing with them.

Interviewer: Obviously, it wasn't anything new, but I thought it was a great political move to send reporters in with almost everybody in Iraq to keep misinformation from happening, and also to keep the press biased toward pro-troops.

Veteran: I agree with you that that was good, but what was even different about it was because they had instant communications back to the United States, where the ones in Vietnam didn't.

Interviewer: They were just making tapes.

Veteran: Right. And film, and writing stories, and then trying to get them back on the wire. Their stuff would be weeks old by the time it got back. Also, I think they gave the ones in Iraq a lot of leeway. I think it was good.

Interviewer: You know, I'm a guy that's missed every opportunity to do that.

Veteran: That's good.

Interviewer: I don't even know if you know, but when I was a senior in high school, Mom had all the political signatures together for me to go to West Point, and like a lot of things in that period in my life, I didn't show up, just like I didn't show up to FAA school after I passed the test. As I'm a father, I'm sure you're glad none of your kids had to go through that.

Veteran: Exactly, because there's no assurances.

Interviewer: But, your dad was there. Mom's dad was there. Who else fought?

Veteran: Anybody that had to. My dad's dad did not, but I know Dad had an uncle that fought in World War I. I don't know if it was his dad's brother or if it was his mom's brother. That's all I know. One of the pocket watches that I have was his.

Interviewer: I'm a big supporter of our troops and our military, and I'm also a Monday morning quarterback like everybody else who hasn't seen the intelligence, but I think that our military is too small right now to be so spread out all over the world. What do you think about that?

Veteran: You may be correct. You and I don't really know, but there's a lot of people that think that. But it depends on what you ask the military to do, because they can do so much more now with fewer people than what they ever had in the past because of drones, because of technology, because of satellites, because of everything else. So, I'm assuming that the leadership of our country knows what size military that they need. I just have to have faith in that. We're scattered all over the world, but with the world situation the way it is right now, the terrorists are scattered all over the world, so we're gonna have to be, too. Do we have to match them man for man? Probably not. But at the same time, what's the correct number? I don't know. You'll find critics who will say it's too few, and they may be right. You'll find critics who say it's what we need and they're the ones that are doing it, so I'll put my faith in them.

Interviewer: Did you have your faith in them in Vietnam?

Veteran: You had to. You didn't have any choice. You believe in your country—not that you believe they're always 100% correct…

Interviewer: But you're not going to desert them. What did you take away from Vietnam?

Veteran: Self-confidence. Air traffic control is a stressful business—not all the time, but at times. I knew that I had the ability in a stressful situation to think and react appropriately for the best outcome. In other words, I came away with a clear head under fire.

{END OF TAPE 3, SIDE A}

{BEGINNING OF TAPE 3, SIDE B}

Interviewer: When I was a kid, you would be asleep and I would walk through the room, and you sleep with you eyes open, and you would watch me cross, and you would watch me cross back, and you would see me go over there. I could lay down on the floor, and you would sit up and look at me. No matter what I did, you knew with your eyes open and sound asleep exactly what was going on. Is that from Vietnam?

Veteran: I don't know. I really don't know.

Interviewer: Jeanie said she's never seen it.

Veteran: I don't know. I just don't know.

Interviewer: You don't know this because you were asleep. I would take Tom or Corey or Tim and say, "Come on. Check this out. I know you don't believe me." And we would go in there while you were asleep, and you didn't miss a thing. I had fatigues that I wore to school, and when I was a kid, it was a big deal. And I know it was to Justin and Lisa, too.

Veteran: I know there was times that I can remember when your mom and I were living outside of Fort Campbell, Kentucky, but there was a quarry. We were living in the duplexes where Tom Dehoney lived, and the first time there was an explosion, I came out of the bed and on the floor! And another time right after I

was back from Vietnam, before we ever even got to Tennessee, I can remember that I was taking a nap during the day. I was laying on the bed next to the wall, and I was dreaming that somebody had me—I can still remember. So I thought, "OK, I'm gonna relax." And so I relaxed, and then I exploded, and I kicked the wall and came out of the bed and out in the hall, and was looking around, you know, and I hurt my foot pretty bad. I don't think there's much left. I think that probably I came back from Vietnam about as well-adjusted as anybody could be. I have empathy for those that didn't, but at the same time I question some of the stuff that people want to blame on Vietnam. Not everybody had the same experience, I guess. Somebody else's experiences might have been a whole lot worse than mine, so they came back with a handicap or a crutch, or whatever you call it.

Interviewer: You have any problems now?

Veteran: Probably not.

Interviewer: Does it seem like forever ago?

Veteran: Yeah, it really does seem like a long time ago now. There's times in the last three years that Susie and I have been together, I've had dreams, but not very often. I don't think it's anything but dreams. I can't say what may or may not trigger 'em. If I have one tonight, I'll call you tomorrow and tell you. {Laughter} Linda said something, and I don't know if it's true or not. It may be. But she said that I dismissed people out of my life. In other words, I just dismiss them and move on. I never have forgot that. At the same time, it almost makes me think—and I know what she was talking about—and that may be from Vietnam. I didn't make close friends with anyone, because you never knew if they were going to be there tomorrow. You took care of each other, but outside of that small group and even in that group, you knew that it wasn't going to last. It wasn't always going to be there. That statement that she made, I had never thought about, but I understand it, and I often wonder if I am as bad as she seemed to think I was, but I think that's where it came from.

Interviewer: When we started, I probably should have said that this is February 4, 2004. I've been told that twice—verbatim. It might just be the way we are. Vietnam may have enhanced it.

Veteran: I don't try to blame things on Vietnam, and I guess that why I have some difficulty with some people blaming their lives on Vietnam. I don't like that.

Interviewer: I think that's a credit to your character, but on the other hand, there's a few people in your life that I think should have know the stories—the history. I can tell you that your three kids have always talked about it and wondered, but none of us ever had the guts to sit down and ask. All of us. Veterans Day is hard on us. I don't know if it's hard on you—or Memorial Day or whatever it is.

Veteran: It's something you just move on from, and I don't think anyone can ever really understand it unless you're exposed to it. You can hear about it, read about, you can see it on the news, but I don't think you can understand until you're exposed to the actual thing. And at the same time, I don't say that you shouldn't know about, hear about, and all of that, it's just something even when myself and someone else has been there, we don't talk about it a lot either. It's just something that's come and gone.

Interviewer: For my generation and everybody after me, this is definitely a point of pride. It may not have been when you got back.

Veteran: You know the country was so screwed up when I got back and for the next several years, and for many years even after that the country was screwed up about Vietnam, and it's only been since probably the early 90s that anybody's even cared about the Vietnam veteran and the veterans were all of a sudden seen as somebody that were socially OK people, too. It's sort of a recent thing where they even would say, "Yeah, I'm a Vietnam vet." It used to be there were so many hard feelings about it. You know, when you've got the National Guard shooting students at Kent State, that's going to divide the country, so there were a lot of raw feelings.

Interviewer: Well, you know I've worn that jacket with patches and stuff all over it. Medals—I don't know, stuff hanging off the front of it. There was a rope on the side of it.

I didn’t know what any of that meant, but I wore it all through junior high and high school. The older teachers and coaches indirectly had a big issue with it, and I wore it with pride every day of the year, and part of it was me wanting to be different than everybody else. But another part of it really made me feel alienated just because I had the jacket on. I can’t imagine how it was for somebody who had actually been through it—and that was the 80s. I think it took two or three decades.

Veteran: Well, look at now. I graduated from high school in ’61. Dad was in World War II in ’43-’44, and that’s less than 20 years. I was a graduate of high school and college, and I felt like World War II was ancient history. I felt like it was WAY back there, and we’d had the Korean War since then, but it just seemed like a hundred years ago. As a kid, that’s the way I felt. Now it’s been 30 some-odd years since Vietnam—a third again longer than what that was about, and so it’s just almost irrelevant to the kids of the country now.

Interviewer: Well, it is to my kids. I don’t know “jack” about Vietnam, but I’d be surprised if Boo’s ever heard of it.

Veteran: Dad was in World War II and I had all the stuff and looked at the stuff the same way that you do to the things I have from Vietnam, but at the same time, it was less than 20 years back, and it was like ancient history, and the world was moving on. That’s the way it is with Vietnam today. The world’s moving on.

Interviewer: The thing about it is the world is going in a big, bad circle. We’re just picking up new skirmishes as we move on.

Veteran: The country hopefully learned some lessons from Vietnam, and hopefully they’ll remember them, but as far as things to learn individually, I don’t see it in the world. I don’t think there’s anything for my grandchildren to learn. Yeah, it happened, like the American Indian wars happened, and they are things that shouldn’t have happened. Now, I can see you and Justin and Lisa being more interested because of my involvement, but I can’t see the grandkids being that interested. The world moves on. There’s going to be other things.

Interviewer: Vietnam wasn't even technically a war, which is stupid, but certain wars and events that were key to "American freedom," and a lot of them that weren't, and I don't think Vietnam was.

Veteran: It was a mistake from the get-go.

Interviewer: And, you're right. We have to trust those in charge, because they obviously know more than we do, but it seems like we have a tendency lately to commit to things that aren't key to American freedom and burn up a lot of lives and dollars, and police-ing. Probably with the nuclear threat, you could hit any location anywhere, anytime, but if you had died in Vietnam, it would have been really hard for me to take, because it didn't benefit the rest of us. I don't know enough about Vietnam if it benefited us, but I don't think it did. I mean, who did it benefit? Not you, and I don't think that it benefited me.

Veteran: I think history agrees with you that it was erroneously handled by the government, and no, I'm not sorry you went.

Interviewer: I don't think you're sorry, but what are you?

Veteran: I'm OK with it. It happened. It's back there, and we move on. That's the one thing—why keep looking back unless that's the way you want to go.

Interviewer: Some people argue you could learn from the past.

Veteran: Why keep looking back? Let's go to Linda. She kept dwelling on the past and never, never let go of what happened in the past. Well, if you don't want to go there, why keep looking at it. Let's dwell on what's out front. Vietnam shouldn't have happened. I was there; I'm not sorry I went. I made it through OK, and it's done something to shape myself and my future, but it's not overwhelming to what I do in the future.

Interviewer: I don't know how much you've been with your dad, but with Mom's dad, Papa Mario, I spent a lot of time at the V.A. If you see people who 40 or 50 years ago were kids and sent off to fight, and here they are older and needing medical attention, they go into supposedly one of the best hospitals in the country and don't come out. They go and cut on your leg, and you come out with one leg.

Veteran: Well, Dad got extremely good care at the V.A. hospital in Dallas—extremely good care for 30 years, because he had that brain tumor. He also had emphysema, and they gave him extremely good care.

Interviewer: So, you're retired from the government, but you're also a veteran. If you get sick, where do you go?

Veteran: I could probably go anyplace. I've got excellent insurance. If I needed to go the V.A. I probably could, but I don't need it. And Dad had good insurance and didn't have to go to the V.A. He went there because they could do some stuff that others couldn't. And as far as his emphysema was concerned, they were giving him drugs that kept his emphysema from killing him that other people that weren't veterans couldn't get. They were unapproved drugs, and we couldn't believe how well he could breathe. If he hadn't had those drugs that never were put on the market, he couldn't have breathed.

Interviewer: I spent at least four or five days a week for about eight months at the V.A. sitting with my granddad, and was really disappointed.

Veteran: I'm not saying everybody that does in there gets good care, but what Dad got from the V.A. in Dallas was good for his condition. It really was.

Interviewer: When you die, will you go to a veteran's cemetery, or do you have a private plot somewhere?

Veteran: I could be buried in a veteran's cemetery anywhere in the world, but more than likely I'll just be cremated and stuffed in a box, which is fine with me. I think that's probably the best way to do it. I don't have any particular place I want my ashes scattered. I told Susie, "Just stick me in a box, and put me up there next to Richard and Bill," and I didn't know that other cat.

Interviewer: That mantle's gonna get heavy. There may not be any room for you by that time.

Veteran: There's three cats up there already. I hope I outlive Calvin, and that'll probably our last cat.

Interviewer: I do have one more question. Are you willing to redo this on video?

Veteran: No. Let's don't do that.

Interviewer: You have to sign a release.

Veteran: I have no problem with that.

Interviewer: And, we really appreciate you participating.

{TAPE STOPPED—END OF INTERVIEW}