

**Veteran:** GUTHRIE, Lewis R.  
**Service Branch:** MARINES  
**Interviewer:** Miller, Fawn  
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**Transcriptionist:** Terry Moore  
**Highlights of Service:** **Sergeant Major; Vietnam; Philippines; Desert Storm/Kuwait; Somalia—wounded in action in Vietnam**

Interviewer: This is Fawn Miller for History 1302, Lee College. I'm going to interview Lewis Robert Guthrie, and he was in the Marines for many years. We're in his house, and this July 5, 2002, at 9:00 p.m. Please state your name and highest rank you held.

Veteran: My name is Lewis Guthrie, and I was a sergeant major in the Marine Corps.

Interviewer: Your present address?

Veteran: It's 336 Country Road 432, Dayton, Texas.

Interviewer: The service that you served in?

Veteran: The Marine Corps.

Interviewer: Commanders were?

Veteran: Many generals.

Interviewer: And your battalion?

Veteran: The last battalion I was in was 2<sup>nd</sup> Battalion, 3<sup>rd</sup> Marines in Hawaii.

Interviewer: Regiment?

Veteran: The regiment was the 3<sup>rd</sup> Marines.

Interviewer: Division?

Veteran: Was the 3<sup>rd</sup> Marine Division.

Interviewer: The date that you enlisted?

Veteran: April 27, 1970.

Interviewer: Your age at that time?

Veteran: I was 19 years old.

Interviewer: Just out of high school?

Veteran: No, I'd had a year of college by then.

Interviewer: Your length of service?

Veteran: Twenty-seven and a half years.

Interviewer: Where did you enlist?

Veteran: I enlisted in San Antonio.

Interviewer: What was your occupation before that?

Veteran: Before that I was a mechanic at a Chevrolet dealership in a new and used car service area.

Interviewer: Was this helpful in the Marines?

Veteran: Not at all.

Interviewer: Why did you join the service?

Veteran: To get away from a little town in Texas that just wasn't changing and never would. I've been back since, and it hasn't changed a bit.

Interviewer: What were your initial reactions to entering military service?

Veteran: I remember flying into San Diego that night after we left San Antonio, and San Diego was a pretty big airport at that time. I remember walking down the hallway, I had a piece of gum in my mouth and my hand in my pocket, and I walked up to this guy that was a Marine. They had told me what to look for, because he had on a Smoky Bear hat. I walked up to him and said, "Hey, I'm

from Texas, and I've got these other guys with me, and we're here for boot camp." And for about the next five minutes, I was amazed because the guy cussed, talked as loud as he could right in the center of the airport, and people walked by and it didn't phase them a bit, because they were used to the routine down there. And I guess I was scared to death, too, because they always take Marines in at night so you have no bearings, you don't know what's going on. We got there and it sounded like there was about six or eight people yelling at us to get off the bus and get on some yellow footprints. As it turned out, there were only two, but they made a lot of racket there for two people.

Interviewer: What was it like leaving your family and friends?

Veteran: I'd only been married for about two months at that time, and so it was really kind of hard to leave Becky, but I'd already kind of made up my mind that I was going to going to be leaving Georgetown anyway, so it wasn't that bad.

Interviewer: And you didn't have any kids then?

Veteran: No.

Interviewer: Where did you train as a recruit?

Veteran: I trained in San Diego, California. We had thirteen weeks of boot camp, and we went to Camp Pendleton for four weeks to what was called the infantry training regiment.

Interviewer: And what was the training?

Veteran: We just kind of marched and learned a lot of Marine Corps history, because the Marine Corps is a very traditional service. While we were at Camp Pendleton, we actually got into live fire exercises and learned all the supporting arms—the weapons we would be using.

Interviewer: Were you trained in first aid and signaling and radio and in the use of special equipment?

Veteran: Not during boot camp. When we got to ITR, we got to play with the radios, but we didn't really know what we were doing. No special equipment until later.

Interviewer: What post were you stationed at during your stateside service?

Veteran: San Diego, of course. Camp Pendleton. Memphis, Tennessee. Cherrypoint, North Carolina. Pensacola, Florida. Charleston, South Carolina. Washington, D.C. San Diego, California, again, and Hawaii.

Interviewer: Each one had a different experience?

Veteran: Each one was different, yes.

Interviewer: What was your experience with the weapons you saw and used in the service?

Veteran: They were all hard to believe, because the most I'd ever dealt with was in deer hunting with a single shot rifle. And you get to shoot automatic and semi-automatic weapons, and the artillery that you work around you can hit something eighteen miles away, and it's just real hard to fathom how far you can reach out and touch somebody. It was pretty amazing.

Interviewer: What are your opinions of the equipment, clothing, and rations that you were issued? Did they treat you well?

Veteran: The equipment was good, but it was only as good as the maintainers. Each unit had a different level of expertise in maintaining equipment, so in some places it was very good, but in some places you were at it just wasn't very good. The clothing we got when I first got in was not very functional. Everything either wore out very fast or didn't do what it was supposed to. We had a poncho liner in a raincoat at that time that it rained more inside than it did outside. You couldn't keep dry wearing the thing. The equipment did get wet. I remember carrying a pack that, just for a day load, was about seventy-five pounds, and I even put on the same pack and carried the same load and it weighs about forty pounds.

Interviewer: Were the rations OK?

Veteran: We had the C-rations when I first came in. They were in little cans, and we had the John Wayne, a little can opener, that you opened it up with. Believe it or not, those were pretty good rations. Then we had MREs. They were pretty tough.

Interviewer: What's an MRE?

Veteran: Meals Ready to Eat. Everything's all sealed in a package and freeze-dried. Like the cakes that you get in there, it's almost like they're half-cooked. Then they started sticking M&Ms and other things in there, and finally Tabasco Sauce, and so it got a little bit better.

Interviewer: You had breakfast, lunch, and dinner?

Veteran: When you're out in the field, that was breakfast, lunch, and dinner.

Interviewer: How adequate for the climate and weather was the clothing?

Veteran: In cold weather, up until the last three or four years, we didn't have anything that would keep you warm. The equipment was really good for hot weather, and they protected you very well, but nothing for the cold.

Interviewer: How responsive were the supply services in your units?

Veteran: They tried their best to anticipate needs, but the supplies were never right. Besides, anytime you order bulk stuff—you need six thousand pair of boots. When I went to Saudi Arabia, we got twenty-seven hundred Marines out on the amphibious readiness group, so without going around and asking everybody for their size of boot and knowing that some of those aren't going to fit anyway, because boots run Small and Large, just like all shoes do, and they get what they call a basic order, and it's got some in size 15, and you work all the way down. There never seemed to be enough in the mid-range sized boots, like 9s or 12s, which is what most people wear, so you get saddled with a whole bunch of 7s and 8s and a whole bunch of 13s, 14s, and 15s that people can't wear, and so a lot of times we did without because of that.

Interviewer: And so you'd just wear them too small?

Veteran: No, you don't wear a boot that's too small.

Interviewer: What did you think of the quality of the leadership while you were in the service?

Veteran: It seemed to start off really good, and things were taken care of on a more basic level when I first went in. We used to call it “going behind the paint lockers,” or having a closed-door session, and when you were having a disciplinary problem with somebody, you’d have a closed-door session with them. It was usually a knock-down-drag-out fight, but what it did was build self-respect or respect between two people. The senior one representing the organization and the one you’re having trouble with was representing the one who’s just not getting it yet, and it had to develop respect that way. Then when it became politically correct, we couldn’t do that anymore. A painless punishment out on the field, that you can’t do anymore, was when somebody fell asleep on guard, or wasn’t walking their post, or wasn’t doing their job quite correctly, you’d just have them do their 50-drill with a 50-caliber machine gun. What it is is a horseshoe-shaped pit, seven feet long on each side and in a “U” shape, eight feet across the back, and it’s five feet deep. You set the machine gun in the part of the “U” that’s still up, but hasn’t been dug down. You’d build up a firewall to stop bullets and incoming, and they’d hit him into the dirt instead of coming and getting you, and it takes four or five hours to dig one of those. So, you had ‘em dig those or you’d have them dig fighting holes, which is a six foot deep hole and three feet wide in both directions, and you made ‘em work. People always seem to learn better by sweat and pain, and then we became politically correct, so you can’t do that any more. The leaders were trying to work with us, but we couldn’t get it. We were the ones that couldn’t get it. The young Marines coming in—it was almost like 70% was twenty years old or younger, so it’s a very young service. They were performing well, but a lot of us had higher expectations, and we wanted them to get along faster than they were getting along. But they proved over and over and over again that they were going to be just fine.

Interviewer: Was there any violence between the officers and soldiers?

Veteran: You’d see it in the field when things would get tense. You’d see one or the other make a butt out of themselves and overreact to a situation. You saw some of the senior people—really, you couldn’t believe what they’d do sometimes, and then they’d try to shove it off on somebody else that they didn’t do it and try to make

somebody else pay. You didn't see any violence between them, you just saw hurt feelings, and the old deal about "sticks and stones will never break my bones and words will never hurt me"? Well, that's not right. A word is like a bullet. As soon as it leaves, you can't ever bring it back, and it's never forgotten on the other end.

Interviewer: What forms of off-duty recreation went on?

Veteran: A lot of drinking; a lot of fighting at the local bars. Every time we was on a float, everybody would go shopping. After I started to become the more senior person out on a float, I would challenge them to buy something out there—something weird, like an ice tray. You didn't speak the language of the place you were going, so it was hard for the people to understand what you want, and I would challenge them first to buy an ice tray, and secondly we'd see who gets the best deal on the ice tray—who gets the cheapest one. They'd come back and we'd compare. The first night of liberty in a foreign country, our first liberty on a float, I would challenge them to do something like that, so it kind of tied them up so they would just go out there and get drunk. Just made a game out of it.

Interviewer: What was your opinion of the special services—USO shows, reading materials, movies?

Veteran: I saw one USO show the whole time I was in. I saw one in Vietnam while I was there and wasn't real impressed with it. It was some pretty low-grade comedians that they'd brought over there. I saw one on the deck of a ship in Abudabi—it's one of the Emirates over there, and they brought what was supposed to be some team's cheerleaders, and these big, old fat girls showed up. I mean everybody was expecting something else, and it was kind of hard to get a ticket. There was only so much room for everybody to go, so we gave all the tickets away and got everybody over there, and so everybody went up to the gangplank. Then you heard noise starting, and then you saw people start coming back down. It was like 110 degrees over there, you just didn't want to stand there. It was hotter than that on the deck of the ship, and it just wasn't worth it. When I first went in, special services was a real good deal. Every three months you could go to your special services officer, a non-commissioned officer, and they would give you

three golf balls, one pair of shorts, or you could get a board game, and that's where we got most of the games that we had—Monopoly, Scrabble, and all that kind of stuff.

Interviewer: Reading material?

Veteran: There was always a lot of books around—mostly Westerns. Just about everybody read Westerns, some people read science fiction, and a few people read mysteries, but I was surprised as far as off-color books, there wasn't that many out there—very few, which was kind of nice. There were enough books to go around that by the time you made a thirty-day exercise and got back all your books were worn out, pages were missing out of them, because everybody just passed them around. You read until you got tired, and then you passed it on to someone else.

Interviewer: Was there any personal education opportunities?

Veteran: In some places you were stationed at there were, but for the normal infantryman or air winger that's in the Marine Corps now, the money is there, the colleges are there, but the time is not, because two weeks every month for an infantryman is going to be spent in the field. You can talk professors into a lot of things, but if it's missing half of your courses, they're not going to go for that. People in the air wing, it was real hard for them because they would come in at 7:30 every morning, but most of the time they didn't want to leave, because depending on the missions you performed during the day and whatever you had going the next day, you had to have enough aircraft the next morning to fill and supply those missions. So sometimes you worked off of the plane, and you'd catch them sleeping on top of this, and somebody'd wake you up at 8:30 or 9:00 in the morning and say it's time to go back to work. Most people in the Marine Corps were never able to get an education just because of the time factor and their job. It was funny, because they didn't begrudge that at all. They knew they had come in to do a job, and almost all of them enjoyed the job. They'd complain about it every once in awhile, but that was their way of dealing with things.



Interviewer: How did ya'll get along with the civilians where ya'll were at?

Veteran: Again, it depends on where you are. In D.C., it was nice. In California, they couldn't stand us—they didn't want us around. You really felt like a second class citizen. In Memphis, it was the same. You never felt like you belonged. You were never a part of the community. A lot of overseas places—the first time I went to Korea, it was great—they loved us. And in Thailand, they thought we were just the neatest thing in the world. Then the last few times I was in there, their thinking had changed.

Interviewer: How adequate was the healthcare?

Veteran: I really can't say, because I was very lucky. The times that I needed to get taken care of, I was. I don't remember Becky or any of the kids having any problem with getting treated.

Interviewer: So, it covered your whole family.

Veteran: Yeah, while I was in.

Interviewer: Describe the health of your unit?

Veteran: The health in my unit was extremely good, and that's because you get so much exercise. When you're an infantryman, every morning about 6:00, you're going to be on the road running. At 7:30, you'll be going to work. {Voice trails off and can't understand what is said} And so you're really active. You get some strained muscles, sprained ankles, you get tired and sore, but as far as health, there wasn't any serious problem.

Interviewer: So that hard work paid off.

Veteran: I'd say so.

Interviewer: For what did the soldiers use their pay?

Veteran: When I first went in, everybody used it for drinking or maybe buying a car or putting a lot of money into making it faster or prettier or something like that. In maybe the last ten or twelve years, people were turning more towards domestic things. They were looking at buying a house, they were looking at making

investments, they were going to buy them a decent car and make it last. They weren't as frivolous with their money, I don't think.

Interviewer: Is that because they're getting older?

Veteran: No, this is the young ones. When we go on floats (and while you're out on a float, they don't want to spend money) the younger ones out there, the nineteen and twenty year olds, would save their money. They might allow themselves \$50 a payday, because you're on a ship, you've got a place to sleep, a place to eat, so if you're a smoker or like candy or something like that, that's what they spent their money on. Every time we came back from a float, there'd be six or seven of them within two weeks they'd be driving a new car. They actually saved their money the whole time they're on a float, they came back and bought something.

Interviewer: Was drinking a problem?

Veteran: Drinking's always a problem, and I think the reason is because a lot of the old guys like me, when you did something well you were rewarded with a beer-bust—a day off and a beer-bust. We used to go out on PFT each quarter—a three-mile run, pull-ups, and sit-ups. When you came across the finish line at 9:00 in the morning, they handed you a beer, and that's what they gave you for doing something good, and that was the easiest and cheapest way to keep morale up. That's a terrible thing to say. If you didn't watch them close enough or really keep track of the people like you were supposed to, then you wouldn't notice that they were getting out of hand and it was becoming a habit. Or we would turn our heads to the other way, whichever. Then it became a problem when they got into trouble or got a DUI, and the when that happened you had to take action. I saw a lot of people go to a Level 3 alcohol abuse, which is in-patient care where you're in treatment for six weeks, and then they'd bring them back and assign them to the same job, same place, and all that. They're forgiven, and I think they say that the recovery rate is only like twenty percent. It's way down there, and I wonder sometimes if it's worth spending all that money on it, but then you see that twenty percent that does come back and make it, and so it is worthwhile.

Interviewer: Have you had any instances of ethnic, racial, or religious discrimination?

Veteran: Again, when I first went in there was, but you've got to remember integration had just happened in the South. In 1950, the Marine Corps closed down a place called Motsford(?) Point, and that's where black people had to go to boot camp, and then we had the boot camps at Paris Island in San Diego for everybody else. I think it was in 1950 they closed it down, but those of us that were coming in off the street at that time, we were still used to a segregated school. I remember I had to go see a recruiter over at the court house, and I can remember walking in from the south side of the courthouse square, and on the right hand wall was a water fountain built into the wall and it said "Whites Only." When you went down to the basement, it had water fountains for coloreds with an arrow pointing down, and bathrooms had an arrow pointing down.

Interviewer: So they had to go down to a different floor.

Veteran: Yeah. So, that was a lot of thinking that was coming into the service right at that time. It's funny, though, because for those that had been in, there wasn't a dividing line. And the drill instructors had a lot to do with that. The drill instructors, and I was firmly convinced, they didn't like nobody. They had pet names for everybody, and none of them were any good, but any way they could slam you because of your color or your religious belief or anything else, they hit you with it for thirty days. I guess it's like getting an inoculation for something—you become immune to it, and it gets to where it doesn't bother year. And the blacks would hear the word against them, "Hey, nigger," and they'd turn around and look, but you didn't see the anger come out on their face. They just kind of put their arms up and walked away.

Interviewer: When you first learned that you would go overseas, what was your reaction?

Veteran: Dreaded leaving my family. When I went overseas it was to Vietnam, and so I wondered if I was going to make it back or not. All kinds of strange things go through your mind: "How's my wife gonna make it without me?" "How's she going to take care of the kids?" "What if the car breaks down?" And you worried about all those things, and then kind of in the back of my mind wondering if I was gonna be killed over there, but then you land there and you get so busy and you get so mission-oriented—you get a focus on what you're doing, and that's

where your whole focus goes, and everything on both sides of you disappears after you get there. But it gets to where you turn it on and off. You've got to keep your focus. The Marine Corps stresses two things: mission orientation and the welfare of the people, and the mission will always be first. So you have to understand that if you worry about everybody else around you, you're not worrying about what you're supposed to be doing. And then you kind of understand that if you're worried about everybody else around you, then you're not worried about what you're supposed to be doing. And then you understand that by taking care of what I'm supposed to be taking care of I'm taking care of everybody around me, too.

Interviewer: What difficulties, if any, did your unit experience getting ready to go overseas?

Veteran: There was a myriad of problems. Everybody's got to be Class 2 dental, which means no cavities and their teeth have been cleaned

Interviewer: Why is that important?

Veteran: Because out on the ship you've got one dentist for seven or eight hundred people, and I guess it was during Korea or Vietnam, I'm not sure which, but people would actually come out of the combat zone because their teeth were so bad, so instead of having twelve people out there shooting bullets you only had eleven people out there shooting bullets. Then you had to get everybody's shots up to date. Everybody had to have a physical, and had to have all their training requirements, which was rifle, pistol, {voice trails off again}, and you've got to make sure everybody's got all their uniforms. Then you had to merge in with another unit, and then you've got to go down and meet the ship and figure out how you're going to get along on the ship—where you're going to load all your stuff on there. And then the wives are calling because they're worried, and the husbands, they hurt. You feel all kinds of problems when you go overseas. Some people wonder if they're going to get a divorce, and it just goes and goes. Some people would come up a few days before we were to leave and say they were alcoholics as an excuse, and you can't take them. If they say they're an alcoholic, that's an opportunity for them to go into treatment.

Interviewer: You said there were different units on your ship. How many?

{TAPE #1: END OF SIDE 1---START OF SIDE 2}

Veteran: You usually take a battalion of infantry, you take a battery of artillery (which is at least six howsers), you take a squad of tanks (which is four tanks), you take a company of amtraks (which is eighteen amtraks), you have what's called a new service support group (that's all your beans, bandages and bullets—they bring all the supplies with them). We also had a standard detachment of thirteen Marines. We had the air combat on with us, which is a mixture of helicopters—the CH-46, the CH-53E, and we had some Harriers on one of them. You got Hueys and Cobras, usually four of each of those on there, and then you've got a Commando that finishes it all. You've got a Navy guy that commands it, and he's got his only little staff on board ship, so it's a merging of a whole bunch of units on the four ships. The rank always had a go-between, and that was the L-craft people, the air efficient landing craft people. They came out of Camp Pendleton, and they wore the old green utilities, where we wore the camouflage utilities. They were in the Navy, and the Navy always wears the whites, so the L-craft people were kind of like a buffer between the Navy and Marine Corps. We could talk to them and they would be able to tell us what to do, but when you'd go to the Navy, a lot of times they just didn't know.

Interviewer: And ya'll got along OK?

Veteran: Yeah. There were some fights among the enlisted men aboard the ship, and we tried to keep that down below officer's country. We'd break 'em up, or we'd take care of the problems, or whatever. After a couple of weeks it usually got a whole lot better. For the Marines it was boredom, for the sailors it was a lot of hard work.

Interviewer: What were your first impressions of service abroad?

Veteran: Scared. You wonder about running into a problem. One of my tours was in Japan, and a unisex bathroom was something real strange to me. I went to railroad station and I had to go the bathroom, and I walked in there and there was a lady standing there, and she was going to the bathroom. So I figured I was in

the wrong place and I went out and I went to the one that was right next to it, and there was a lady in there, too, and so somebody told me it was a unisex bathroom. People were real nice, and after awhile you enjoyed it. As you'd come up on the end of your time (usually thirteen months), and the last two months were hard to take, because the hate just starts to come out in you. You don't want to be here anymore, you don't like these people, and you don't try to get along with 'em anymore. So, most of us recognized that, and just stayed on the base after that until we left.

Interviewer: Did ya'll get along with civilians the same before, during, and after hostilities?

Veteran: In the hostilities in Vietnam, though, when I got there they had been fighting forever, and when I left there they were still fighting. They didn't trust us and we didn't trust them—it was a two-way street there. We went to Kuwait for Desert Storm, and I really felt let down by the people, because there was no gratitude. It was like we hadn't done nothing good for them at all, and that kind of bothered me, but you just have to let it kind of roll off your skin, because it's not worth the effort to get mad at them. They were very rude, but maybe that's just their way. Maybe they are just a rude people. I never had to go back there, so that was good. In Somalia, I was on the first load that went in and we had a lot of problems with the populace, for it wasn't the normal people on the street. It was like the ten percent that you always hear about that were the troublemakers, and we had a lot of trouble with them. But most of the people you'd meet on the street were just happy as they could be that you were there because they were getting food on a regular basis, so they were very happy. When we left, the night before was a quiet night and nobody came out. Everybody just stayed in their house, and I think they were all scared as to what was going to happen if they got out on the street, and if they were seen talking to an American tonight, then tomorrow after we left they would probably get shot.

Interviewer: What was the morale of the unit? Consider mail from home, living conditions, general homesickness.

Veteran: Morale was good anytime we had something to do. If you're out aboard ship, you're going to get mail about once every two weeks, and you make up your

mind that when you get it you're going to get a slew of letters—you're going to get just a whole lot of stuff. What most of us did was we'd arrange them in postmark date, and we might read one per day. Then in a couple of days you might read one or two more, and so that way you kept yourself going. They did the best they could to get the mail out. Everybody complained about it, but they did the best they could. Even when you're overseas, like in Okinawa or anyplace else and actually get your feet on dry ground, it's still a week before you get your mail. Becky's mail was always a week old getting here, and it was hard because she needed an answer the day she wrote it down, and it might be two weeks at least before she got an answer, and it was the same way for me, and that bothers you a lot. If we had something to do, something to look at, then our morale was great. I remember going to the Straits of Morocco on the way to Saudi Arabia, and we had this steel beach party, and we bar-b-que'd out on the deck of the ship on the landing area, and we'd wrap a volleyball with tape and parachute cord, and that way you could have a volleyball game without losing your ball over the side, and it's called a steel beach party. Watching them out there, they were just happy as could be. I remember the captain of the ship saying, "Boy, it's a shame old Saddam doesn't have a satellite up there to take a picture of this, because he should be scared to death," with morale that high. Also, we had a bad float. We were on a bad ship, and we had a lot of trouble in '87 when we were headed back from the Philippines and headed towards Hawaii, because that's the last stop before you get back here. We were two days out of Hawaii and one of worst Marines I've ever had—we held mustering day out on the flight deck, and I walked out there with my clipboard, and he was standing over at the railing. So I walked over to talk to him, and he said, "Why aren't you telling us?", and I said, "What are you talking about?" He said, "Look where the sun is." I said, "What do you mean?" He said, "Look at the sun." And we should have been headed east, which means we should have been headed into the sun. We're on the back end of the ship, the fantail of the ship, and we're looking at the sun, and so that means we're headed west, and I said, "You know, Leroy, I don't know, but I'll go find out." So I started walking forward, and the famous words that always come over a ship, and this was on the *Anchorage*, and it said, "Attention, *Anchorage*, this is the captain." And that always meant you were going to get some real bad

news. And that was when Han-san had sold a bunch of ammo and was trying to take over the Philippines again, so they turned us around and we headed back there. Now we're supposed to be home in ten days, and now we're headed back to the Philippines. So you tell everybody that at muster, and everybody comes running out on deck, and they're all out there at muster asking questions and everything, and you get muster taken care of say, "Hey, since we're not going home now, we need to do our weapons check, we need to look at our gear," and so you're trying to think of things that will take up ten or twelve hours and keep them out of trouble during that time, and it takes like two or three hours to get that done. The next thing you know they're down in the hold of the ship and they're taking care of the howitzers and all the equipment and everything, and if they had something to look forward to or if they had a direction or a mission, then they were great and the morale was always good, but it was when we were sitting around with nothing to do and bored out of their skulls, then morale was really bad.

Interviewer: And the living conditions?

Veteran: Living conditions aboard ship are bad—period—just for everybody. I mean, they do the best they can. Air conditioners break and you're half way across the Pacific Ocean, and there's no air conditioners around except what the ship has and they do a tremendous job. But if there's a part that they didn't anticipate, it shoots that air conditioning. If one of the food stores goes down where they keep all the frozen food, then we had to bring everything out of that chiller and cook it all up, and so you eat like a hog for a day and then you're on real lean rations until you get to the next port, because you can't let the food go to waste. You'd run out of toilet paper—just simple things, and they really get to you. There's no place to go when you tear out your utilities. You start catching them on all the little metal bars you had on the ship. There's always I-bolts and screws and valves hanging out, so you're always ripping your utilities, and the first thing you know you don't have a set of utilities that doesn't have holes in them. And so you're always in trouble with somebody and doing pushups because you've got holes in your utilities. The ship's store, they do the best they can, but the candy is all gone within a week of being out, because everybody's been out before and



they know if they don't get it now there ain't going to be none in a week, so they go down and stock up once, and the next thing you know they're out. Anything that should be crunchy—crackers, potato chips, and things like that—they're not crunchy, they're soggy. A lot of things get to you after awhile.

Interviewer: Do you get used to it?

Veteran: You overlook it, I think. You take it for granted that it's going to happen. I know we are taking on stores today, so I'm going to buy me two cans of Pringles Potato Chips, and they'll be good for three days, so I'll have to eat 'em before the three days is up, and then it's OK, so you learn to adjust like that.

Interviewer: Makes you appreciate being home.

Veteran: Makes you appreciate very much being home.

Interviewer: And homesickness?

Veteran: Not one of them "manly" things. Every time that I went overseas on a ship, the fantail of the ship the first night out would be very crowded, and it's everybody out there looking because you're sailing away from the United States. Everybody's on the fantail looking, and there's a lot of tears shed that night—a whole lot of tears. Every time I went out, it was on ships where I told people about the Amnesia Line, and the Amnesia Line is the International Dateline, and as soon as you cross the International Dateline you have to forget what's back home and you've got to concentrate on what you're going to do now. What's going to happen back there you've got to give it to God, you've got to give it to somebody else, because you've got nothing to do with it anymore. We used to call it the Amnesia Line, and the first time I heard that was a guy said he was leaving his family to go see the world.

Interviewer: What factors helped morale?

Veteran: A lot of time just finding something out of the ordinary to do to break up a routine. To come in one morning, and we would do this as often as possible—if you're in the air wing, it's kind of tough to do but it can be done—in the infantry you come in in the morning and take a muster, and you tell 'em to go back to

their rooms, and you to get on their PT gear, so they think they're going for a run. Then you send the staff NCOs, the officers, the senior enlisted people to take up a collection and they each chip in \$5, and we'd go get hot dogs and potato chips and charcoal and beer and sodas, and we'd go down and pitch horseshoes or play volleyball or something. It was just something they didn't expect, something out of the ordinary. Mondays you take muster, you make sure everybody's back, send 'em all to sickbay that's gotten sick or hurt during the weekend, and you get your gear together. On Tuesday, you go to the field. On Wednesday, Thursday, and Friday, you're in the field. Friday night, you clean up your stuff so you can turn it in on Saturday. And then the next week back, you're doing wetland maintenance, you're doing training classes, and you get used to this if you're an infantryman. It's kind of a two-week schedule. So, you take a day out of there somehow, and you do something completely unexpected, and it is so well-received that it's unbelievable. That's how you work on morale. The high dollar stuff—it just don't happen. We're not going to be able to get Lea Ann Rhimes over there to sing for us. You can't do anything high-dollar, so it's the simple things. We'd take 'em out swimming every once in awhile, and we'd run down to the beach and have them strip down to their shorts, and we'd all swim out about a hundred yards offshore, and then we'd all swim back, and it would fill up a day, and it's a simple thing, but it works.

Interviewer: Let's talk a little bit about combat service. Did you take part in any combat action?

Veteran: Yes.

Interviewer: Where and when and against who?

Veteran: In Vietnam, Laos, and Cambodia, and I was against whoever was shooting against me. I'd like to say it was the North Vietnamese, but I don't know that was the case. After that, in the Philippines, the rebel forces there, and we fought against them a few times and chased them for almost ninety days one time. Never saw 'em. We had a number of people injured, and we would have some of our outposts that would get in contact with them. In Somalia, of course, we had a number there, but it was only, like I said before, the ten percent of the people that

were a pain in the butt. The technicals, the ones who wanted to elevate their little station in life and they didn't care who they had to roll over to do that. Back in the Philippines again, against the rebel forces. Of course the Saudis, and that was with the Iraqis, and back to Somalia the last time. There was some sniping and shooting going on over there, so we had a couple of fire fights the last time I was there. Then down south, we did some drug interdiction work in South America, and it was the drug lords and their protectors.

Interviewer: How would you characterize your units combat performance? Did they work well as a team?

Veteran: I was always very surprised and very pleased at what they did. It seemed like the biggest group of individuals you could have, actually when the first round went down range, we became a very good and cohesive team. They worked well together. They were people that you wanted to trust. This was like a trust blanket that falls over you. All of a sudden somebody shoots, and everybody seems to know what to do, and leaders emerged at that time. It's funny that the guy while we were training with that always seemed to be asleep or didn't know what he was doing, all of a sudden he became the leader. He knew it all, and he knew how to react to things. It's a funny thing, and it's a tremendous to see happen.

Interviewer: Were you ever wounded in action?

Veteran: Got shot in Vietnam and also a booby-trap went off and I got wounded in the leg. Who shot me and where and when, I haven't got a clue.

Interviewer: Where were you shot at?

Veteran: I was shot in the right shoulder. Funny thing was, I couldn't tell you when it happened, because you're in a fire fight, and I felt the bullet and it hurt, but you're just focused on what you're doing that it doesn't register with you until after it's over, and then it hurts like hell. It really hurt. I got evac'd out and was back a few days later, so I was real lucky. It was a clean shot.

Interviewer: So the medical care at the front and behind the lines was effective and what they should have been?

Veteran: Very much so. They were really good, and you always felt comfortable with their care. In the rear a lot of times, you'd think of them as a bunch of quacks, and they didn't know what they were doing, but again when you actually see them doing what their supposed to do, having a mission, they're very good. That's the way they were all the time. With the Marines that I talked with, they would always admire the way they were treated by the doctors.

Interviewer: Do you still suffer from those wounds?

Veteran: Nah.

Interviewer: Did you ever work with or alongside the allied or foreign auxiliaries?

Veteran: We did a couple of U.N. operations, and I worked with the Turks and the French. I guess the organized resistance down south, too, on some of the drug interdiction missions, because they had people that would go out with us who were actually from the country we were in.

Interviewer: Please describe a typical day in which your unit wasn't committed to the frontlines.

Veteran: You were either completely down, sleeping or just getting all the relaxation you could, or you were training, and most of the time you were training. Weapons were changing all the time, and your weapons were your weapons when you were out in the field, which means you had to get it checked when you came in from the field to make sure it was going to shoot again. When I was in Vietnam, they discovered a new strain of scorpion, and so they taught us the first aid for this scorpion by which you had to make sure it was a clear scorpion instead of a black scorpion. They would teach your peculiarities in the training, things that people had been running up against. You'd run into an ambush, a new booby-trap that was out there, things to look for and it wasn't like normal training.

Interviewer: Every place you went was different?

Veteran: Very different.

Interviewer: With all this experience you got a lot of intelligence?

Veteran: In Vietnam you got almost nothing out of anybody you were lucky enough to capture, and you almost never captured anybody. In Somalia, yeah, we got a lot of intel out of those people, because they were so hungry that for two bags of rice they would tell you just about anything they knew, and it was all very good information. All you had to do was feed them and take care of them, give them something new to wear, give them twenty bucks, give them some 556s so they had bullets. You improved their station just by doing those things. In Kuwait, you didn't get nothin' on those guys. They were tired, they were mad at their leadership because they had just been stuck them out there and given no food, very few bullets, didn't tell them what to expect. They didn't have any intelligence at all, and that's why they were surrendering by the truckloads. We saw sixty five foot trailers, ten feet wide hooked up behind semi's filled with prisoners standing—just full of prisoners. They were out of bullets, they had been bombed, and just wanted it to be over, and as far as useful intelligence, they had none, because they hadn't talked to anybody that was in control.

Interviewer: Do you think they were trained?

Veteran: They were not trained at all. These are people that were drug off the streets and then were told this is a jihad, a holy war, and if you're lucky enough to die, then you're going to go and see Allah. Of course, when you get a new idea in your head or somebody like the president comes up and pounds you on the back and tells you that kind of thing, you think, "yeah, let's go do that." And then after two or three days and you've had one meal a day and you're out of water, you've only got twenty bullets, and you haven't seen anything happen except explosions going off all around you, it takes all the air out of your balloon real fast, and they were ready for this to be over.

Interviewer: Were you ever a prisoner of war?

Veteran: No.

Interviewer: And there wasn't anybody in your unit that was?

Veteran: I knew a couple of people that had been captured, but no one from our unit. Our units were able to capture, not be captured. I saw some pilots in Hawaii that had been captured, and I was really glad to see them. Capt. Jerry Marble, an A-6 pilot from Cherry Point, and I had known him for a year I guess when he got shot down, and I was really glad to see him.

Interviewer: Did you capture any prisoners?

Veteran: In Saudi, everybody captured prisoners. I saw some movie one time where some guy was trying to surrender to somebody, and they kept trying to leave him, and that's the way in was in Saudi. It got to where one day a helicopter flew over and dropped a bundle of sheets for beds from off the ship, and then they radioed down and told us that when we saw prisoners, we weren't to take them prisoners any more, we were to give them a white sheet so they could raise it above their head and point that way and tell them to go. Give some food, give them a sheet, and tell them to go, and that's what we did. In Vietnam you were always trying to catch prisoners, but it very seldom happened. In Somalia it wasn't too hard. When we first got there it was like the old Dodge City, Kansas, because we went busting into people's houses and we took prisoners actually out of the houses to be interrogated.

Interviewer: How were they treated by the U.S. soldiers?

Veteran: At first, everybody wants to be a cowboy, and if you can hit something you're not as scared, and it was hard to calm the Marines down and keep them from doing that. So you went over it again and again about how to capture a prisoner before you even got there, and still it happened. I honestly can't remember anybody that got hit, but you want to release your frustration and that's the easiest way to do it, but somebody has to take control of the situation. I saw a lot of prisoners grabbed and pulled, but I think we treated them well. I know we gave them good medical care, because after they searched them to make sure they didn't have anything on them they gave them a real thorough checkup before we brought them back. Some Marines gave them M&Ms out of their MREs...

{TAPE #1: END OF SIDE 2}

{TAPE #2: SIDE 1}

Interviewer: What was your occupation in the Marines?

Veteran: When I first went in, I was an infantryman. I spent two years as an infantryman, and when I came back from Vietnam they told me I could make a lateral move, and so I went to work on aircraft support equipment. It's everything you see at the airport that doesn't fly—the tow tractors, the air conditioning units, the electric units. I drove a tractor for about twelve or thirteen years, and then I got promoted to 1<sup>st</sup> Sergeant, and my first assignment was to go to an artillery battery. After that I went to a tank company, and then I went to an Amtrak company, and then I went back to the infantry as again as a infantry 1<sup>st</sup> Sergeant. Then I went down to North Island and I had a Marine detachment for special weapons guard duty. Then I made Sergeant Major, and I went to El Toro to a Siege 53 squadron. I was with them for a couple of years and then I went to Hawaii to the air station over there. Then I went to 2<sup>nd</sup> Battalion, 3<sup>rd</sup> Marines, and thought it was my last duty station, but it wasn't. Civilians who got in trouble on the base had to come and see me. But back to the support equipment, it was working with the gear and keeping it up. Squadrons would bring it back to us to fix it. When I made 1<sup>st</sup> Sergeant and then Sergeant Major, the job wasn't really a lot different. We'd deal with people most of the time. You're the senior enlisted person in the unit, and you're only responsible to the commanding officer as far as answering to anybody. All enlisted Marines, you're their advisor. You have to look after their pay, make sure their shots and teeth and everything else is up to date—all the administrative work. Sometimes you're a marriage counselor, sometimes you're their best friend, a lot of times you're their worst friend, and you've just got to decided on that. Being Sergeant Major was pretty much the same thing but on a larger basis. An artillery battery has 275 Marines and an infantry battalion has about 1700 or 1800 Marines in it.

Interviewer: And your last rank was...

Veteran: Sergeant Major.

Interviewer: Awards and decorations that you received?

Veteran: Strike Flight medal, for getting shot at and shooting back in a helicopter—a Nook, and then a Meritorious Service medal, which is pretty much what it says—for service out of the ordinary or that you don't normally expect from a person. I got a Navy Commendation medal, and that was for when I was down in North Island and we had problems out in the special weapons area. I spent a lot of time out there working with the Marines and their tactics. Navy Achievement medal with a "V" for valor on it, and that was for Saudi Arabia, and I was with a tank company over there. We had a little incident that we were able to take care of. Good Conduct medal, and we call that the "undetected crime" medal, and that was for not doing anything bad enough to have to get punished or court marshaled for. For every four years that you can do that you get an award, and I had the award with six stars on it, so seven actual awards. After that is the Marine Corps Expeditionary medal, and that was for the landing in Somalia, the first time. It's just a landing medal. One of the two awards that means a lot and that's the National Defense medal, and that's for being in an armed force during a time of war.

Interviewer: Which war?

Veteran: Vietnam and then for Saudi, also, and it's got a star on it, so I had two awards on that. And then the Armed Forces Expeditionary medal, and that was for landings in the Philippines and also in Saudi Arabia, because we did an amphibious landing there. I have a Vietnam Campaign medal, and that's for actually participating in the war there. The Humanitarian Service medal, and that was for the Mayaguez incident, the evacuation of Saigon, and the first time in Somalia, so that's an award with two stars on it. I got the Southwest Asia Service medal, and that was for being in Desert Shield, Desert Storm, and Desert something else after it was all over. And then the U.N. medal for being a participant in a U.N. operation, and that's with two stars for Somalia twice and Kuwait once. The Kuwaiti Liberation medal, and I can't remember what the other one is. I know one is Saudi Arabia and the other one is Kuwait. The other award that I'm very fond of is the Combat Action Ribbon, for shooting and getting shot at. Some kind of meritorious medal, and I forget what it is, but it was for Somalia the second time, and also for the operations down south. And I got a Navy Unit



Commendation, and that's just an award to an outstanding Navy unit for something we did well. I got the Battle League for a ship that I was out on that the Marines participated in fire fighting, and we all got that because it's part of an exercise aboard ship. A Sea Service and Coordinate Ribbon, and I think that was with a silver star which is six awards, and that's when you've been gone more than 180 days at a time and you get one award. That didn't come out until 1980, and I'd already been at sea three times before that.

Interviewer: And you've got these award in a plaque explaining how you got them?

Veteran: When I left the last unit it was to retire, because I had two heat strokes with them over there, and rather than die I decided to go ahead and get out and find something else to do. It's traditional within the Marine Corps that you do what's called "folding your flag" when you get out, and that's why down in the bottom there's a folded flag, and it's got all my duty stations on it. They found out all my awards and did a very good job of putting them in there. It's also got a symbol for all of the ranks that I held in there, and it's a beautiful thing.

Interviewer: And you served for twenty-seven and half years?

Veteran: Yes.

Interviewer: Now let's talk about your post-war experiences. What did you experience after you were discharged?

Veteran: A real feeling of separation, I guess. I was used to being around a lot of people that were kind of going the same way in life, trying to accomplish one thing—whether it was taking care of the Marines or getting ready to do something else. A lot of camaraderie—there was always somebody to talk to that understood. That wasn't here when I got out.

Interviewer: Were your military skills transferable to civilian life?

Veteran: No, not a one other than being able to talk to people, but that's about it.

Interviewer: Describe the ease or difficulty that you had adjusting to civilian life and the influence of your overall military experience on that readjustment.

Veteran: I'm still adjusting.

Interviewer: You've been out for how long now?

Veteran: Five years this summer, and I'm still adjusting. There's a lot of times when I really miss talking to some people. There was always somebody you could go to on the down days and up days when you really wanted to share something with somebody who understood that even the little bitty things mean a whole lot to you, and you get a lot of joy out of some things like seeing people develop or something out of the ordinary, something extremely good or bad happened to you or somebody else. We were all fighting the same battles.

Interviewer: What were your expectations of civilian life?

Veteran: Didn't really know what to expect. I went in when I was nineteen years old and I was a mechanic before I went it with one semester of college at A&M, and all I knew at that time was I didn't want to go to college. I didn't know what I wanted to do, and I figured this was a great way to go find something else. I didn't want to be in the Army or Air Force because I lived half way between Dove Island and Austin and Bergstrom Air Force Base and Fort Hood, Texas, and I didn't like most types of people that I ran into, and I had no desire to go in the Navy, and I went ahead and joined the Marine Corps.

Interviewer: Are you happy with that choice?

Veteran: Yeah, very much so. I had a real good time.

Interviewer: Did you expect G.I. benefits?

Veteran: There are still benefits out there that I haven't used. I could go back to college, and it would be kind of fun. I love history, I like math, and I've taken variations of those courses, but it would just be wasting money and wasting time, because I don't have that desire. The retirement benefits, I can't really complain, because if I don't want to work I don't have to. I can just sit at home, and I'm happy about that.

Interviewer: How was your family life when you came back?

Veteran: I heard of so many people after they retired that they got divorces, and so I was really worry because Becky and I had been married twenty-seven and a half years, and I was really worried if we really loved each other or not, and this was going to be the way to find out, because we hadn't been together all the time and now I wouldn't be going somewhere, so I was kind of worried and I think she was, too, but she wouldn't say it. But it's worked out good.

Interviewer: And you have three kids?

Veteran: Three kids. Two are grown and gone, and one is still around.

Interviewer: With whom do you feel the most comfortable discussing wartime experiences? Soldiers you were with or family?

Veteran: I really don't discuss them with anybody. Tonight's more than I've ever said.

Interviewer: Does it feel good to talk about it?

Veteran: No, not really, because I always try to evaluate somebody when I listen to them about whether they're lying or telling the truth or not the whole truth, and I think that's where anybody would be looking at me and wondering, also, and I don't want that to happen.

Interviewer: But with telling, it's a neat experience for me to hear your experiences, so you're teaching me. It's neat to get a different perspective. It's one thing to teach it, but to hear somebody that's actually went through it all is neat. If you read any histories, articles, postwar writings, what's your opinion of their accuracy?

Veteran: I've read a few historical books, and they're probably very accurate from what I remember, but they're also very dry. I like reading history and I like learning about history, but it seemed like the more accurate they are the more dry they are, and maybe it has to be that way, but there's no levity thrown in. Like the battle for Hue, I read Schwartzkopf's book *It Doesn't Take a Hero*, and for the first half of his book he's patting himself on the back and telling everybody how he was made to be that commander on that day at that time, because that's what his

whole life led up to. It kind of reminded you of Patton. Patton thought God put him on this date to do this, and if he don't do this God just failed in His mission, and that's kind of the way Schwartzkopf's books is. The second half of the book is really good. I read a lot of fiction, and it's just nice to check out, and of course they're just as inaccurate as they can be, whether you watch it in a movie or read it in a book. I'd rather read books about the Battle of New Orleans—that's the kind of stuff that's really neat to read, and Civil War stuff. Books about today's wars are just not as much fun to read.

Interviewer: Well, thank you for your time. We'll have your tape on file, and it was neat to hear your experiences. Thank you.

{END OF INTERVIEW}