

Veteran: **CARTER, Raymond D.**
Service Branch: **NAVY**
Interviewer: Bottoms, Aaron
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Highlights of Service: **Vietnam-Mecong Delta; LST Bosons Mate**

Interviewer: My name is Aaron Bottoms, and today's date is April 26, 2002. We're at the Baytown VFW, and I am interviewing Dewayne Carter. What's your full name?

Veteran: My full name is Raymond D. Carter.

Interviewer: Which war were you involved in?

Veteran: Vietnam.

Interviewer: Were you enlisted or were you drafted?

Veteran: I joined.

Interviewer: What made you decide to join?

Veteran: I wanted a choice of my own. I felt they would end up drafting me. I had a brother and several friends that had went in the Navy, and I felt that was what I wanted to do.

Interviewer: Were you in the Navy?

Veteran: Yes.

Interviewer: How old were you?

Veteran: I was seventeen when I joined. I graduated from high school when I was seventeen, so I felt the best thing to do was to go ahead and join the service, because I knew I couldn't get a job anywhere until I was eighteen, so I went ahead and enlisted.

Interviewer: What was it like in general?

Veteran: I was aboard an LST, and we hauled troops and ammunition throughout the Mecong Delta. In answer to that question about what it was like, it's hard to tell you. It was a long year, let's put it that way, but we did supply troops with food and ammunition. We hauled troops, and so on.

Interviewer: Where all were you stationed?

Veteran: I was home ported out of Sasibo, Japan. I went to San Diego Naval Training Center for my boot camp, but my ship was home ported out of Sasibo, Japan. We then left there and went to Calchung, Taiwan, we went to the Philippines, but the majority of the time was in the Vietnam delta area.

Interviewer: Did you have any special duties or tasks or assignments?

Veteran: I was a bosons mate, and a bosons mate is the one that maintains the ship. I want to explain what an LST is. An LST is approximately a hundred yards long—approximately the length of a football field. They are flat bottomed. They carry troops, supplies, tanks, jeeps, and so on. They have a very low draft, and what they do with them when they go into a beach area, they take them right onto the beach. They open the bow doors, they lower the truck ramp. So an LST can basically go anywhere that a small boat can go.

Interviewer: What kind of training did you do?

Veteran: Training basically was just a general boot camp training. I didn't have any special arms training or anything like that. I did man a fifty-caliber machine gun and a thirty-caliber machine gun when we were going up and down the rivers. Fortunately, I didn't have to fire it very often, but that's the way it was.

Interviewer: How long was your training?

Veteran: It was strictly a boot camp training. It was three months.

Interviewer: What was boot camp life like?

Veteran: I joined and we flew to San Diego. I'm actually from Illinois originally, and I could not believe they did not send me to Great Lakes, they sent me to San Diego, and I boarded a plane and flew out there. Again, I was seventeen years old at the time, and we got in about two o'clock in the morning. And when they came in beating on trash cans and everything, I thought I could not believe what I had done. I would not trade it all though.

Interviewer: What was the food like?

Veteran: The food in the Navy, believe me, it was much better than what the Army and Marines had. You got by with it, let's put it that way.

Interviewer: Did you get your rations when you were aboard your Navy ship?

Veteran: Yes, I did. We were traveling the Mecong River—we run the deltas up and down, so when we were manning our machine guns or whatever, we would eat the rations, and so on.

Interviewer: How often did you get the rations?

Veteran: Anytime we wanted them. They took care of us.

Interviewer: How did your commanding officers treat you?

Veteran: The commanding officers that I had I thought were very good. A lot of them weren't a whole lot older than what I was. They were in a learning experience, too. What any serviceman had to do was apply themselves. If they applied themselves, then you would pretty well get whatever you wanted. So, I applied myself, and they basically took care of me.

Interviewer: What was your troop called?

Veteran: In the Navy you really don't have a troop. We called the Duck Division.

Interviewer: Did you ever see combat?

Veteran: A little. Yes, we did, but not a whole lot, thank God. Whenever we transported troops, ammunition, and so on in the Mecong Delta, we were generally covered by helicopter gunships which pretty well protected our fore, aft, and sides.

Interviewer: So, you weren't ever wounded?

Veteran: No, thank God.

Interviewer: Did you receive any medals?

Veteran: Just the normal Vietnam Service and Vietnam Campaign medals.

Interviewer: Did you meet any interesting people?

Veteran: I met a lot of interesting people. One of my best friends was from Chicago, Illinois, and in those days in the early sixties—this is way before your time—the blacks and whites didn't get along real well, but one of the best friends I had was a black man from Chicago, Illinois, and we took care of each other.

Interviewer: Have you kept in touch with anyone from your time in the service?

Veteran: I lived in Illinois at the time, and I had moved to Texas in 1977. Being a member of the VFW, we get a magazine once a month, and I check the roster in there that has a lot of reunions throughout the service. I just recently came across one, and have talked with these people, but as far as associating with any people that I knew at that time, no I haven't.

Interviewer: What was your opinion of the enemy?

Veteran: My opinion was a very dedicated person to his cause. I believe he was probably one of the cruelest that there was by means of torture and so on. The American soldiers at that time were kind of brainwashed. They were told they couldn't be beaten. Personally, they weren't beaten, but the enemy is cruel, they really were. I don't want to talk any more about that.

Interviewer: What did you hate the most?

Veteran: I was married. My wife and I had went together since we were fifteen years old. When I came home on boot camp leave, we got married and then I was gone for a year, and that's probably what I hated most was being away from her, and we are still married to this day—that's over 35 years.

Interviewer: Do you have anything that you kept from the war?

Veteran: I've got a lot of pictures, and may medals, and just a couple of different ships I was on. I've got their emblems and things like that. It's mainly just pictures.

Interviewer: If you could go back and had a choice, would you enlist in the Navy again?

Veteran: Yes, I would.

Interviewer: You're the first person that said that.

Veteran I would do it again. If something broke out right now and they wanted me, I'd go right now. Although I know I'm too old, I'd go again. I would go again.

Interviewer: What were the after effects of war on your life?

Veteran: When I came back from Vietnam, of course I was only nineteen then—I went over when I was eighteen and came back when I was nineteen—it definitely affected me, because I really wasn't sure of what I wanted to do at that point in time. The war does strange things to people, and for a long time my wife and I didn't get along real well, but it was mainly because of me. And it's not her fault. It's what I had been through and the change in my life. To be honest with you, I've always tried to be a good person, but it changed me, and it took me a long time to get back to being a good person.

Interviewer: What's your most vivid memory of the war?

Veteran: The most vivid is when I came home {Laughter}. I really couldn't tell you one way or the other. There was some good times and there was a lot of bad times. But most vivid is when I boarded that airplane at Tonsenoot Airbase and flew home.

Interviewer: How were your feelings and emotions when the war ended?

Veteran: When it ended, I really thought we had sold ourselves out—I really did. A lot of people like Henry Kissinger—to me, I think he was sorry. He sold us out. The war was not a war—it was a conflict, just like Korea, and we were not allowed to do certain things. We were not allowed to go in and win that thing. It was a political war. There was too many people that lost their lives over absolutely nothing.

Interviewer: That's pretty much the way I feel about it, too.

Veteran: Yes. We were sold out. The war could have been won by us. It darned sure could, but they wouldn't allow us to do what we needed to do. It was all political—too much money being made. The Johnson family, they owned Bell Helicopter. You know, as long as the war was going on, they're selling helicopters. When the war ended and all these people died for nothing, all the jeeps, the tanks, the guns were left, and to me it was just a sad, sad statement when it ended like that.

Interviewer: Is there anything else you want to add before we finish?

Veteran: I just hope we never have another one like it.

Interviewer: One more thing—I forgot to say this earlier. Are you aware that our conversation was recorded, and that the tape and transcription will be placed in the Lee College library?

Veteran: Yes, I am.

Interviewer: Do I have permission to do that?

Veteran: Yes, you do.