

YOUNGSTOWN STATE UNIVERSITY

ORAL HISTORY PROGRAM

Vietnam

Personal Experience

O. H. 1068

CHRIS ADAMS

Interviewed

by

Jeffery Collier

on

June 3, 1975

YOUNGSTOWN STATE UNIVERSITY

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INTERVIEWEE: CHRIS ADAMS
INTERVIEWER: Jeffery Collier
SUBJECT: training, drugs, Vietnam, Mai Lie
DATE: June 3, 1975

C: This is Jeffery Collier from the Youngstown State University Oral History Program on the Vietnam Project. I am speaking with Christopher Adams. We are presently at the Kilcawley Student Center and the date today is June 3, 1975, and the time is 12:15 p.m.

Chris, would you tell me about your education, where you were born, how long you have lived in whatever area you are from, your high school education, and college? Just bring me up to present about yourself, if you would.

A: I was born June 28, 1947. I have lived in Warren all of my life. I went to Warren G. Harding High School. I graduated in 1965, went into the service in 1966, and served until 1969. I worked at Lordstown from 1969 to 1970. I started school in 1970 and I have been attending school more or less on a part-time basis ever since. I started at Packard in 1972. That's about it, I guess.

C: What branch of the service were you in?

A: The Army.

C: You go to Youngstown State University presently?

A: Yes.

C: What year are you in at YSU?

A: I am a senior.

C: You graduate next year?

A: Next June.

C: When you graduated from high school what made you decide to go into the service as opposed to going to college?

A: It wasn't very hard. My parents didn't have the money for me to go to college and they sent me a draft notice, so I decided to join rather than getting drafted. I don't know why I decided to go to the top.

C: When you joined, how long did you join for?

A: Three years.

C: Did you have anything specifically that you applied for in the Army as far as an MOS?

A: When I went in it was kind of weird. As a kid I had seen all of the war pictures and everything, so I decided that I wanted to be in an infantry of some sort, so that I could more or less experience what these people experienced in the movies and stuff. As it turned out, it was nothing like the movies.

With an infantry MOS, 11B4P, paratrooper, I went to Fort Benning for my basic training. I went to Fort Ord, California for AIT. Then I went back to Benning for jump school. Then I was assigned to JFK Special Warfare Center in Fort Bragg, North Carolina. I did sixteen weeks of training there. They assigned me to the six special forces group at Fort Bragg. After that they needed people for the 101st, so they infused a bunch of us to the 101st. We were assigned there right before they went over. That would be in 1967.

C: Could you give me some specifics as to the training that you went through after you were initially brought into the armed forces and the Army? You did your ten weeks of basic at Fort Benning and then after that you went to further training at Fort Ord in California. As far as the training goes in California, what did it entail? Did you start getting into the paratrooper end of it?

A: No. They basically just taught you how to read maps and compasses. There was nothing involved in it whatsoever. They would teach you how to shoot machine guns or how to shoot rifles. You had to qualify a lot with the weapons like light infantry weapons, machine guns,

rifles and pistols. I didn't have a mortar MOS 11BHP, so I never got into any of the heavy weapons or anything like that. Basically, I considered it more or less a waste of time, to tell you the truth.

C: That was more or less the infantry training, just a continuation after your basic?

A: There was nothing actually different than basic, it was just a little more involved. They just let you out in the woods by yourself a few times and you had to find your way back.

C: When you were out in California had you been notified or had you known that you were going to be in the paratroopers?

A: Yes. When I signed up, I signed up for the paratroopers.

C: A lot of times people put down on a dream sheet--somebody called it that--the three things that they wanted to do in the Army, and many times they didn't get that.

Then after you went to California and did your additional training there, you went back to Fort Bragg, is that correct?

A: Fort Benning.

C: Then you started jumping there.

A: Yes. It was a three week course. We went and had what we called zero week where all you did was KP and everything. The first week is basically physical conditioning and stuff. You do a lot of PT and a lot of exercises. They teach you the basic fundamentals of how to move inside an aircraft, how to fall and stuff like that. They just show you the basic things, how to fall, what you are expected to carry, but it was mostly physical training.

The second week there was not so much emphasis on physical training. It may be only two hours a day instead of four. There you get more involved in the the actual landing and stuff like that; how to make the landing, how to make contact with the ground, how to expose your body to the ground so that you won't get hurt. You got more training on how to move inside the

aircraft and what to expect. They had mock-ups on the premises right there and a tower. They would hoist you up on the tower and they would drop you; it was about 250 feet high. This was your first actual free fall, more or less, where you are not held down to the ground by something. The third week there was almost no emphasis on physical training and you moved into the aircraft. You had to make five jumps and that was about it.

C: After you did the five jumps, did you feel pretty well qualified as far as being a paratrooper? That doesn't seem like a whole lot of jumps to me.

A: No, you have no self-confidence whatsoever. The first ones are a real joke. They open the doors and you are so scared you don't know what is going on. You come out of the aircraft and you can say, "Well, here I am," and you come to the ground. My legs were shaking and I made contact with the ground and then I just collapsed. I felt no pain whatsoever. The second time is when you actually start to feel the fear a little bit. I tensed up. The first one you are really relaxed on and you don't know what to do. The second one you get a little bit more tense. When you hit the ground, you forget everything they told you and you more or less just crash and burn in a big pile down there. The third to the fifth jumps are about the same. You don't really feel qualified to jump or anything like that. I only made one jump at Fort Bragg and then I went to Fort Campbell and made about fifteen other jumps there. Even on the last jump--I think it was the 21st jump there--I didn't even feel qualified then. It was, more or less, that you stumbled out of the aircraft and you fell to the ground and that was it. I still didn't know the basic fundamentals of jumping at the time.

I'll give you a for instance. When you go out to jump, they take you over and right before the jump, they let you jump off a four foot platform and do various, they call them PLF's; parachute landing falls. You do a front, side, right and left, and rear. It gives you all the variations of hitting the ground. There are five points of contact. You are supposed to use the balls of your feet, the calf on the side, your thigh, your buttocks, and the fleshy muscles along the side of your back. When you are doing it most kids would come down and hit the balls of their feet and fall right over onto their side and bring their feet up over and around. Not very many people really understood it. It takes quite a bit of coordination to do it. You get out in the drop

zone and you see people coming down and it looks great coming down, everybody is doing the right thing. You have learned how to control the chute by that time. They are doing the right thing until they hit the ground. Then it is just a big cloud of dust when they hit the ground.

C: How many guys would jump at a time?

A: It depended on what type of aircraft you were in. We did helicopter jumps which would be approximately twenty people on the craft. A C130 with four sticks held about sixty people, I guess. A C141 is a jet and they held 120 in four sticks.

C: What do you mean by four sticks?

A: It depends upon the aircraft you are jumping. For instance, on a 130 you have two out four sticks. There are seats with a divider down the middle. There are four rows of seats, two are facing each other and there are two on the other side facing each other. When they tell you to get ready, you stand up, fold your seat up, and there will be four lines of people facing the rear of the aircraft with us four sticks. You try to divide the amount of people in the aircraft equally among the four sticks so that when you exit the aircraft, the out four sticks go first. As soon as the last person on the out four sticks goes, the in four sticks that first person follows him out the door. So you have two doors on the right and left side of the aircraft and people are exiting from the right and left side at the same time. There is supposed to be a one second variation between us, but in Fort Stewart, Georgia, we jumped 141's, 120 people in the aircraft, and got all 120 people out in eighteen seconds. So you know there couldn't have been a second between each one. When you do come out you are almost right on top of the guy right in front of you.

C: That doesn't vary. In other words, that second or half a second time doesn't give you enough time to be apart from them when you start falling?

A: Not really. We dropped a static line. You would hook up to the inside of the aircraft and it just pulls your canopy out. We were jumping T10's at the time. A T10 opens, it starts from the top and pulls out from the top. The chute comes out and the static lines come up and your risers come up so there is not very much jerk like on the old ones. They used to open the opposite

way. You would fall out and all of a sudden the thing would pop out and there would be a lot of jerking.

You don't have enough time to do all of the procedures that they tell you to do. Like how to stand in the door and how to exit the aircraft. It's more or less just a mass exit because they want as many people out the door as they can. Again, you forget everything that they tell you. There is not enough time, really, to do it because the majority of the drop zones are like . . . Well, Benning and Bragg are pretty good. You could probably fly and run thirty-five, forty second drop zones. So you do have enough time to do it, but you get to a lot of other bases and their drop zones are only, at the most, eighteen seconds long. If you come out after the drop zone, you will end up in the trees or whatever is off to the right or left of the drop zone itself.

C: Is that why they would take and show you how to fall five different ways? In case, you would come down . . .

A: The last year I was in, I was an instructor at Fort Benning Jump School. There are four basic variations in falling. You can fall to your front, right, left, or rear. They teach you how to do a right and left first, then they teach you how to do a front and a rear. So actually, you have the four variations, but if you are falling to your right front, you do something a little differently. Basically, there are only four ways that you can hit the ground when you orient yourself into the thing. Then, when you are falling down, you look down and you can determine the direction of the drift. If you are looking straight at the ground below you and you see you are moving to your left side, all you do is reach up and pull on your right risers. This tips the canopy and the air rushes over the canopy and it slows you down. If you slow down and hit the ground, all you do is rotate your elbows in front of your chest and bring your feet up and around so that your feet are planted, more or less, facing the canopy. In case it starts dragging you, this just pulls you up on your feet.

C: I guess that there is some consolation in the fact that after you landed and you sat and talked with the other people coming down and you found out that you had the same problems as everybody else.

A: Oh, yes. There are a lot of things that can happen.

Once, at Fort Campbell, I came out and when I came out . . . You are supposed to keep your eyes open, but I didn't. I don't know why I didn't; it's just a normal reflex, you know. After about twenty jumps, you do start keeping your eyes open. When I opened my eyes, I was laying on this big pillow and I couldn't figure out what it was. It was the guy's canopy below me. I looked up and my canopy was starting to collapse because the canopy beneath was stealing all of the air, so you have to run off the canopy as fast as you can. That was pretty scary. A lot of people run into stuff like this. You get too close to another person and the suspension lines get tangled up together and you have to come down together. In theory, they are supposed to give you the one second leeway between each person in the door. There was enough distance between you because the plane was flying about 130 knots, but they don't give you the one second leeway; they just shove everybody out at the same time. You are coming out right next to the other person.

C: So after you finished your 21st jump . . .

A: That was at Fort Campbell. Yes, it was the 21st.

C: Does everybody have to go through 21, did that, at that time, say you were accomplished?

A: No, it was nothing like that. It was kind of funny. They used it, more or less, like a punishment of some sort because you only had to make a jump once every three months to get your extra pay. If you did something wrong and you didn't like to jump, they put you on a jump all of the time, you just kept going; it took up a lot of your free time. You hardly ever jumped during duty hours; it was always in the evening when the wind was down or early in the morning when the wind was down. Usually the wind was down at dusk or dawn or sometime. So you either had to get up early or stay over duty hours to make the jump. They figured that if you were busy most of the time, you weren't going to get in trouble.

C: After you made your last jump, how long had you been in training then total?

A: Do you mean total Army training or airborne training?

C: Total Army training and then also total airborne training. We could break it down that way.

A: I went to jump school in March of 1976. I made my 21st jump in September of 1967. In between all of that, I went to Panama. They sent us to jungle warfare school down there, more or less, a survival school. That took three weeks. I had been in the Army about eleven months by that September.

C: In the schooling of jungle warfare in Panama, was that to train you for Vietnam or did everybody go to it?

A: No. They asked for volunteers who wanted to go.

C: To Panama?

A: Yes. Then they sent all of the squad leaders, all of the team leaders and then they picked one person out of each squad to go. They went on a rotating basis, like ten would go this time and then fifteen the next time. They didn't send everybody all at one time. I just volunteered to go; I don't know why. It sounded like a good idea at the time. You got out of KP and everything. We went down there and it was basically a survival school. If you got lost out in the middle of nowhere, you would know what to do or at least they assumed you knew what to do. It was no involved training to amount to anything. Again, you had more land navigation; you had four days out in the jungle. They just took you out and dropped you off. They gave you about three days of rations and they showed you what to eat and what not to eat and how to prepare the meat. They gave us one example, like, if you found a dead animal, you could eat the maggots out of the dead animal because they are still alive. Theoretically, you could eat the meat but they didn't know how hot you could cook the meat. If you didn't have a fire hot enough to kill all of the germs in the meat then you could eat poison and stuff, whereas the maggots are really fresh meat when you think about it, very high in protein and stuff and you can survive on it.

C: Did anybody eat them?

A: There were instructors down there just chowing down on them. I imagine that I could have eaten them if I would have gotten really hungry, I guess anybody could. But at the time, I knew that in three days this was going to end, so I didn't actually force myself to eat anything. They showed you how to get water from banana trees. You can cut them down and there is quite a bit of water in the center of the trees; it is like a cotton candy type

thing. It is a little bitter but there is a lot of water in it and it is fresh. They showed you different roots and stuff to eat.

- C: At the end of all the training then, I would say, that out of all the people that I have talked to, you had the more thorough amount of training in terms of both the jungle warfare and also eleven months of infantry and jump training. That's a pretty good amount considering the fact that you were in for three years, so you still had another two years, twenty-five months, to do. Right after you completed your eleven months and got through all of your training, did they notify you that you were going to Vietnam or was that something that you volunteered for? How did that come about?
- A: We knew we were going because they transferred us to Fort Bennett and Fort Campbell, Kentucky. So, you knew that you were going and there were rumors running around that the whole division was going. The 1st Brigade, the 101st, was already there. They had been there since 1965, I think, or something like that. There were two brigades left. They tried to build the remaining two brigades in the States up to strength. So they took people from the 82nd and everywhere else, from the 8th Airborne in Germany. Everything that was airborne qualified, and they stuck them all in the 101st to build it up to strength. So when you had orders to go over there, you knew you were going but you didn't quite know when. I was stuck in the 3rd Battalion 506 Infantry. We were, more or less, a vanguard group or something. We went over by ship approximately two months before the rest of the division came over. We set up the base camp for three weeks at Phan Rang. There was no doubt in our mind that we were going over there.
- C: How did you feel when you found out that you were going? I'm sure that there were people that didn't go, did that affect you at all, did you care one way or the other?
- A: The only thing I can think of, to tell you the truth, is that I was going to get killed; that was it, you know. It was really kind of strange. You worried about it for about a week and then you just forgot about it and figured what the heck there were a lot of guys who were in the same boat as you were, so it didn't bother you that much. When I signed up for the service, I knew if I signed up for airborne I was going to be over there before long anyway.
- C: Why is that?

- A: They had 173rd and the 1st Battalion, 1st Brigade, 101st over there, and if you get an infantry MOS you know that you are going to be over there before long. More or less, you knew that you were going, but you didn't know when. At the end of August, they told us the date that we were leaving and they gave you a weeks leave to go home. I went home for a week and came back and I was there for about three weeks before we left.
- C: How did you go to Vietnam?
- A: We flew commercial airlines from Nashville to Los Angeles to San Fransisco, then we took a bus to Oakland and went on the ship. We got on the ship in Oakland. The ship was a real treat, too. It was an old World War II troop carrying ship. The bunks were about eighteen inches apart, maybe twenty at the most, stacked right up to the ceiling.
- C: How many people were on the ship?
- A: I have no idea. There was one battalion for the 101st, 1st Battalion for the 173rd, and various support groups on the ship. I don't know. All I do know is that it was crowded; you couldn't move anywhere.
- C: How long did it take to get from Oakland to Vietnam? Did you make any stops to refuel or anything?
- A: We didn't have to refuel. But about eight days out, one of the engines didn't quite work right. They were going on only one of the engines so it, consequently, took us a longer time. We left on the 2nd of October and we got there the 26th, I think, but we stopped in Subic Bay for the engine repair for two days in the Phillipines.
- C: I can't believe it would take that long.
- A: Well, we didn't believe it either because it was only supposed to take nine days or something like that. It just kept dragging out because one of the engines didn't work and we were going, I think, the maximum speed was about nine knots.
- C: Where did you pull into in Vietnam, what port?
- A: They dropped everybody off, but I can't even remember the first port we pulled into because there were different units going to different areas of the country and we stopped in about four or five different ports

before our battalion got off. Our battalion got off in Can Ranh Bay and we were one of the last ones to get off. There were like four or five stops before that. I don't even remember the names.

C: What did you feel like when you got off at Can Ranh Bay? Was it what you expected? Did you have any impressions at all?

A: Yes. When I got off, I expected a jungle coming right out to the ocean. But they had big cranes and big docks like they do in the States. It didn't look a whole lot different than Oakland, except that it didn't have the city highrise in the background. Everything was, at the most, two stories. It was level and flat and you could see the mountains in the background. I couldn't believe this, when we went up they had curbs and sidewalks and lights. It was just like being in the States almost. They had beaches with umbrellas on them, pizza wagons, and ice cream trucks running around, people walking around in cut-offs. I just didn't believe it; I just thought that this didn't look like the place I had heard about.

They stuck us on some trucks and took us down to the countryside. It looked more like I had imagined it as we were moving down. I thought it was all jungle, I didn't know what a jungle was. I didn't realize that there were different types of jungles and everything. There was a lot of vegetation around. I remember the smell. It smelled really bad because they didn't have any sanitary facilities whatsoever. All they had were like little outhouses. They had 55 gallon drums underneath and they cut it approximately in thirds and all they did was burn the waste. They just poured gasoline on top and burned it and there was this constant smell around the Army bases, this burning refuse. The smell was terrible. That's the first thing I remember when I got off of the boat, the smell. The same smell was in Phan Rang.

C: After you got down from the truck convoy and you pulled into Phan Rang, was that where you were stationed?

A: That's where our base camp was.

C: Is that a pretty good size base?

A: Yes. There was an Air Force base there. I don't have any idea how many square miles it was or anything, but it was a fairly good size. It would take you probably two hours to walk across it, I would imagine.

C: When you got there, you went through processing? What happened when you got to Phan Rang?

A: No. We had been processed in the States so when we got there, we spent a week just adjusting to the climate and stuff. We went out and practiced repelling for awhile.

C: Practice what?

A: Repelling

C: What's that?

A: You know, where you have a rope hanging off a cliff and you bounce down the cliff. You practiced viewing weapons everyday and there was about two hours of practice training, I guess, a day to get you adjusted to the climate. We were there about a week until we did something.

C: Was it pretty hot there?

A: It didn't seem that hot. I don't know, it might have been hot but it didn't seem really hot to me. In the daytime, it would probably go up to over a hundred degrees. But it just didn't seem to be as hot as what it was, really. I don't think there was very much humidity in the air.

C: After that ten days then did you start getting into going out on missions and things like that, or did you remain at camp?

A: The first one was more or less a joke. They sent us out outside of the perimeter. We did like a recon at nighttime. They didn't tell us that, basically, there was nothing out there. We walked around by the railroad tracks for awhile and walked back in. It was just getting you used to moving around in the nighttime and stuff.

The first mission we went on was just south of Phan Rang. There were some small hills down there that at the time seemed pretty big, but they were just small hills. We spent about a month to six weeks down there just wondering around these hills doing a whole lot of nothing. I just couldn't believe it. There had been a lot of Army guys there before us, good guys or whatever you want to call it. I don't know whether they were Vietnamese or Koreans or who they were. We could see the rations cans all over the place and we could see all kinds of signs of people being there.

I remember when we landed the first time, coming in on Hueys, there was like the LZ (landing zone) we were supposed to sit down on, which was, more or less, just a bombed out area where there were a lot of trees standing up about fifteen feet tall. The helicopters couldn't quite sit to the ground, so you had to jump off. Anyhow, ours moved down pretty close; it looked about six feet to the ground. Well, the grass was about eight feet tall, which you didn't realize at the time and when you jumped out, it was a long ways down. I was lucky because I was the last one out so I landed on top of everyone else. My one friend in the ship broke his leg getting out of the ship so his whole career was shot right there.

C: Too bad. (Laughter)

A: Yes, too bad. Everyone was wishing that it was their leg. I remember we had to carry rucksacks on our backs. We didn't like that a whole lot. It was a lot of weight. Mine probably went over a hundred pounds easy because I had to carry five days rations with me. I had seven canteens of water which weighed about two pounds apiece. I had twenty clips of ammo and I had to carry claymore mines, a trenching tool. Everybody carried two hundred rounds of ammo for the machine gun which weighed eight pounds for every hundred rounds. It just got heavier and heavier the more you put on. Consequently, for the first three weeks all you did was walk in a hunched over position; you didn't care what was in front of you or anything; you just wanted to get this rucksack off of your back. You learned really fast that you ate everything that you could, like when they had resupply so that the rucksack wouldn't be as heavy as it was. You more or less, starved to death for the rest of the time.

C: When you went out on this one month mission, was this in the south or in the north?

A: It was right along the coast about a hundred miles northeast of Saigon approximately.

C: So anyone that you would be running into as far as the enemy of Vietnamese, would be Viet Cong?

A: Yes.

C: You wouldn't run into the North Vietnamese Army?

A: Well, there was nothing there to amount to anything, to tell you the truth. I think we got shot at maybe two times in a month or the six weeks that we were out and it was sniper rounds.

C: Was that at night or in the daytime?

A: In the daytime. We would be walking down for a rally or something and you would hear the crack, you wouldn't even hear the bullet, but then you would hear the bullet go over top, the crack over top of you. But there was no big thing about it. Basically, we just walked up and down hills, I think it was just to get us conditioned, I swear. Just to get you really used to carrying the rucksack because it was, more or less, a secured area. There was a free fire zone; there were no civilians there whatsoever, so we didn't run into anybody. In fact, I didn't see anybody the whole time that we were there. When we were out, Thanksgiving came. I remember we got Stars & Stripes supplies and there was all this propaganda that everybody had a hot meal and stuff. We didn't see a hot meal. We were supposed to sit down for a day for Thanksgiving and there was nothing, no hot meal or anything like that. There was a big thing with Johnson in the paper, all our boys are getting turkey for Thanksgiving. The only turkey I got was in the can. It doesn't do a whole lot for your morale when you see these people telling that everybody is getting a hot meal and you're dying for something nice to eat and you don't have it.

C: Were you out in the field at Thanksgiving then?

A: Yes.

C: After the six week operation that you were in, in terms of going around the secured area, what happened then? Did you go to a different area or did you stay in the same area?

A: They picked us up by chopper and they moved us west inland a bit more. I have a hard time making relations to this because they just gave you maps of the area that you were in so that you could tell. This was out by the Song Ba River and it was moving towards Da Lat over towards the Cambodian Border itself. There were a lot more mountains over there and there were Vietcong and they did have some NVA advisors because one of the body counts was an NVA colonel. Mostly, there were local yokels again; there were no hardcore units or anything

like that. We walked around and we spent until Christmas over there.

C: That's about another month then in that area?

A: That was another hot turkey meal, we never got a hot turkey meal at Christmas time. They sent all of our mail out too at one time. We had been there since the 26th of October and they sent all of our mail and all of our Christmas packages at one time. I hadn't had a letter from home since we left for the field. I got about seven or eight letters and sat there trying to put them in order by the postal mark so that I wouldn't read the last one first and ruin all of the rest of them. I remember I got fifteen packages and everyone of them had a fruitcake in them just about and I hate fruit cake! There is part of Vietnam that will never grow again because everybody just dumped fruitcakes in the fox hole. You had fruitcakes in the C rations and you didn't want to see any dumb fruitcake; you wanted a piece of candy or something like that. I told my mom, I wrote her a letter, not to send me any fruitcake, anyhow she sent a little piece. Well, I said that the fruitcake was heavy--I didn't want to hurt her fellys or anything--and I didn't want to carry it around. So she cut it in smaller pieces, so I had to write and tell her no more fruitcake; I don't want any of that stuff. I think everybody got at least one fruit cake, you know. And they weren't small ones; the smallest one I got was two pounds.

We hadn't had a change of clothes the whole time that we had been out. It didn't do a whole lot for us because by this time mine were all raggedy and I had cutoffs on. I didn't have any socks because I had worn the socks out, so all I had were boots and cutoffs and my jacket, the sleeves were all torn out of it. So I was wearing a T-shirt at the time, so you really didn't have much of a uniform. I remember one person did send me some socks in a Christmas package and I was really happy to get those. I think that was the best thing that anybody every sent me. The Red Cross sent us a care package or whatever you want to call it. It came in a bright red baggage that you could see about a mile away. The Red Cross was throwing these bright red bags out of the helicopter to us. We opened it up and it was really stupid. They had some dusting powder, and then they had High Karate which you could smell if the wind was right, I swear . . . Around here you don't realize what your senses are like, but you got in a jungle and you could

smell High Karate for about five hundred feet away and everybody was throwing the junk in the thing; they didn't send you anything useful either. As far as the powder, we used it to an extent because you get chafed and everything. But the aftershave and all of this stuff, we hadn't shaved or taken a bath for two months. You are not worried about what you smell like because you don't have any clean clothes to change into or any soap. There was no toothpaste in the sundry packages. You were just a real grub the whole time.

C: After this operation that they put you in for a couple of months, did you go back into the base?

A: We were out a little over three months, three months and a week, I think, before we went back to a base. It wasn't exactly a base. We went to a fire base, like up on the mountain. They're small; this one only had 105's on it. We were there for a week; that was our stand now. We started to get some beer out in the field at about that time, I remember that, and Coke. I just used to lay there and think about Cokes. You could see the bottle sweating and everything in your mind. You could see this picture and all you had was this crummy water with all kinds of junk in it, iodine tablets in all of the water. About this time you started to really get pissed off; you hadn't seen anything; you hadn't done anything the whole time, you just walked around.

C: You never, up to this point, ever really had any conflict as far as Viet Cong or the North Vietnamese Army against you, you were just, more or less, out there in secured areas?

A: Yes, it wasn't bad, but you could see signs that there had been fighting around maybe two or three years before, probably in 1965 there was a lot going on over there. But there was nothing like . . . We went back--this is hard to retract--we left the field in November, I take that back, we did come back to the rear area and our rear area had changed from Phan Rang to Phan Thiet, it's right on the coast, south of Phan Rang whereas Phan Rang sits in a little bit from the coast. We did come back for three days and they had the TET Offensive. It came out in the end of January or sometime.

C: Of 1967 right?

A: Yes. I remember we were sitting on the bunkers at the

fire base and they told us not to worry because it was the New Year's and there would be celebrating in town. You could see the town down the hill; it was about four or five miles away and we were sitting up on this hill and we could see stuff going up and I thought boy, these people really party hard. You had no idea in the world what was going on, you know. We were sitting on this bunker all night on just looking around. Everybody was pretty drunk by that time because they brought a whole truckload of beer in.

C: Was it cold or warm?

A: The beer?

C: Yes.

A: It was ice cold. You couldn't even put your hand down in it. They had a big flatbed truck with these barrels that they had arranged and there was all of this ice and water in it; it was ice cold. The next morning, it was right before sunrise, they came up and told us to be ready for an attack. Well, every sunrise they tell you to be ready for an attack, you know, you don't care, you're still sleeping. I think about 3:00 everybody passed out in the bunker and there was nobody watching anything. So naturally, somebody has to get up and sit there. There was one sergeant in our bunker, but he had been a private with everybody else so nobody cared about anything; it was, more or less, you were just all good friends. He sat up and he looked down and they were telling us about that there was an NVA force in town. We had heard this twenty million times before and we didn't really want to hear it now, but when sunrise came, they came by and were yelling and screaming for everybody to get out.

C: To get out of the bunkers you mean?

A: To get out of the bunkers and get ready to move. We couldn't figure out where we were moving because it was New Year's and the people down in the town had been celebrating all night and we figured why even move into town. Well, we went to town--we had been through it a couple of times on trucks and stuff--and the whole place was just demolished. There were buildings down all over the place.

C: That was the next day?

- A: Yes. We went "Wow", because we still didn't have any idea what was going on. The whole time they were telling us but they told you this everyday, you know, be ready for an attack, be ready for this, be ready for that, and after two months or three months you get really lackadaisical about the whole thing and you just don't care. I remember walking across the river leading into town; there was like a shallow place there, and we walked across it there and we moved out to the other side and that was the first time I ever saw any actual combat whatsoever. It wasn't exactly what you want to call combat because we just walked into an ambush. I guess I was lucky because we were point squad as we moved across the river. We had been point squad for about three hours and they took us off point squad and put a squad from the 4th Platoon up. They walked out across this rice patty and they were waiting there.
- C: The Viet Cong?
- A: They assume it was; they didn't find any proof it was the NVA. But that was the first time I ever saw any conflict.
- C: How did you feel?
- A: Sick. It looked like more guys were killed than what were because guys that were in the rice patty, you could see that they dropped their rucksacks and got down and crawled and you could see rucksacks all across there. The other guys were laying down and the rucksacks were on their back and there looked like there was about thirty guys out there. Most of the guys you knew pretty good because you had been with them every since you got to Fort Campbell, and they were all pretty good friends. You felt really bad about it. I didn't quite understand what was going on; I don't think anybody did, to tell you the truth, when we were over there.
- C: Did any of the training that you had up to that point prepare you for anything like that, do you think?
- A: You know what to do. You knew to get back and form a line; you knew to watch your fronts and watch your rear; you knew how to move. The psychological effect of it, well, everybody was in a shock for about a half hour. You didn't know what to do; you knew to get the machine guns up front and to put down a heavy fire. The rice patty was about one hundred meters wide, I would say. We were in a small tree line on this side and it was

across an open field, one hundred meters, and ran out as far to the right as we could see and to the left was the river that we had just crossed. So there was no way that you could move up on the side without going across the rice patty. They called in air strikes and everything like that. Jets came in and I just couldn't believe the noise and stuff. It was actually the first time I had been that close to an air strike. Most of the time you were back about 2000 meters. The jets were coming in and were dropping 500, 750 pound bombs a 100 meters away from you. The dirt was falling down and getting in everything, big chunks of dirt. I was just sitting there shaking all over; I didn't know what to do. I talked to guys afterwards and they felt about the same way I did. Nobody had any idea of the psychological impact and stuff like that.

C: How long would you say there was between the time that you were initially fired upon and the time that they had an "all clear" or whatever it would be?

A: They were going across with jets; they were F-104 Phantoms and they called in about six strikes, I guess. There were two planes to a strike, so I don't know how many pounds of bombs these planes carry or anything like that. I know that they got the 20 mm cannons on them. These planes came in and in between each wave of planes, they called artillery in. Everytime we tried to get up, they were still there; I couldn't believe this. They had moved and finally it was starting to get dark . . . They had napom and everything and most of the wood line had been burnt out, and there were a few little grass shacks that were all burnt down. It became dark and we weren't going to move in the dark so we set in for the night. We went up the next morning, and they found one body count.

C: So you had no idea as to how many people were over there firing at you or anything? There could have been 100 or 500.

A: Yes. You had no idea. They had machine guns and they had RTG's, the Chinese Communist light infantry machine gun. They had AK's but you had no idea how many of them were over there.

C: Was it just a peasant that they found or Viet Cong person?

A: I really don't know; it was in another platoon. They were sneaking across the line and they found it way on

the left side toward the river, so I have no idea who it was. We moved off through there up toward the compound that we were in about three miles away and we were sweeping and there was like a huge graveyard there. It was unbelievable, from the French War.

C: Vietnames or French?

A: French, Vietnamese, both, anything you want; it was huge. It went from miles to miles, from the compound to town and then for a good six miles out. It was not solid graves, but there was like maybe fifty feet in between graves and there was another one a hundred feet away but it was a huge graveyard. They have rice patties around all of the graves and there are houses all in between everything. We swept up to the compound and when we were getting toward our compound, our platoon was on point again. I remember us walking right flank and I saw this guy laying down behind this grave with a point gun that stands out about fifteen feet in front of us. He couldn't see him because he was walking directly up on the grave; he couldn't see him hiding down behind it, so I yelled out something, I don't know what it was, and everybody stopped. This guy had been wounded. He was laying there and got up, dropped his 9mm pistol, and they took him prisoner. We walked about another fifteen feet and there was a whole bunch of them hiding in the woods, I guess. My buddy was right behind me and he got shot through the arm and through the chest. We killed five or six that afternoon right there.

C: They were pretty close to the compound that you were at?

A: No more than, at the most, 500 meters away. They were between the compound and us. They were setting up a mortar, a 60mm mortar, which is not a whole lot. They were just setting up a mortar and we happened to run into it.

C: Do you think that they were going to be firing into the compound then?

A: That night probably. Then we went back to the compound and the TET offensive went on in that area for approximately, I would say, about ten days or something like that. They moved towards the mountains and we moved back with them and it became more or less a little game after that. It went back to more or less like it was before. I have no idea how many were killed.

C: What is the TET over there to them?

A: It's the New Year's. That 's the way that I understood it; I never got into a lot of their beliefs or anything like that as far as their holidays were concerned. We never had any contact with them; we were in the woods most of the time and the times that we weren't out in the field we were back in the base camp and weren't allowed in town. You never had a lot of contact with any of these people. You ran into mountain yards out in the woods a lot more than you did the regular population in town. The only Vietnamese person that I did know was the interpreter that we had with us. He was with us for about six months, I guess. Other than that, he was the only one that I ever had any great deal of contact with.

C: Why is it that you weren't allowed in town?

A: It started out that when we did come back to the rear we were only back like two or three days. When you got back to the rear, the first thing that you did was clean all of your weapons. You resupplied yourself and everything, which took about a day. The second day, you more or less just wanted to relax and stuff. They didn't let you in town and I never did really realize why they didn't let you in town or anything like that.

C: Which town is this?

A: Phan Thiet. The third day, we were getting ready to go back to the field and we would be gone again. Every area I ever worked in was a free fire zone, so there were no civilians out there or supposedly no civilians, so you never ran into any locals.

C: When you would come back, you would get resupplied and go out into the field, how long would a mission usually last for you?

A: It depended. We would move to some action. If there would be action in some other area, they would pick us up by helicopter and move us to another place. It's hard to say, you could be in an area for three days and another area for three weeks. Right around Phan Thiet it got to the point where we had been in almost every area so it was pretty nice because you knew what to expect; it wasn't like walking up on a blind spot. We had swept back and forth across this area, they had this forest to the south of us, and going back in there were mountains and stuff. We had been in almost all of those

areas up until about April, the end of April, from when we had been Phau Thiet ever since. We got transferred to Phan Rang and we stayed in that one area, it might have been, 120 clicks from the ocean back in, maybe 100 clicks long. Our company just swept that whole area back and forth constantly, so you knew the area really well. They just kept moving us here and there and everywhere like that.

C: Is that the way most of the things would be done over there as far as company? You had a specific area that you would be located in and you would take and sweep that area continually.

A: I can't speak for the entire Army over there, but that is the way our battalion worked. They had four companies and they spread them out in a line more or less. Then you would have platoons, what they call cloverleaves, and you would move into a centrally located point and would sweep four clicks on either side in a big cloverleaf fashion, come back and move to another point and sweep. We never ran into a whole lot right after the TET Offensive affair. In May they had a lot of losses with the division up north, the 1st Brigade was up north and they had a lot of heavy losses. They infused all of the 3rd Battalion, I guess, up there.

C: They took your battalion and moved it up there?

A: No, they didn't take our battalion, they took people out of our battalion. Almost every private and anyone from E5 down went. They brought in new people to the 506. I went to the 1st 327 out at Camp Abel, it's right outside the lake and we got up there. I wasn't too excited about that because mostly when we had been down south it was the Viet Cong with a few advisors. Well, up there they were using tanks and serviced air missiles and everything; I wasn't too excited about moving up there.

C: Was there a lot of action going on when you went up there?

A: Yes. I remember we got off of the helicopter and they assigned us to a platoon and we met the rest of the people that were there. The platoon strength was way down. I think the most in our platoon when I got to the 327 was, at the most, fifteen guys. The company was very low; it would run about sixty guys all together. We got there and we moved out of the ELZ area and it

couldn't have been more than five hundred meters, I guess, when we made contact, you laid down and called artillery and air raids. Nobody wanted to be a hero, so you called artillery and air raid. You get a real nice feeling when you see the air come in because they have so much power; artillery you can't see anything but with air you can watch the airplanes go over. I was laying there watching the airplanes and a 104 came over--it came right over top of us. We have a smoke out so they knew where we were. They have a spotter plane going around and the spotter plane is firing smoke markets to where you think the enemy is. The plane came down and then I saw it go up and the next thing I know I saw it blow up and I thought, "Oh no, our stuff is really weak up here."

C: Was it a serviced air missiles that probably got it?

A: I don't know, that, or an anti-aircraft gun because the day after that, we found six replacement anti-aircraft guns. They were radar controlled and everything. We weren't quite used to this stuff.

C: This was the North Vietnamese Army then?

A: Yes.

C: As far as your missions and things when did you start running into combat on a daily basis or weekly basis, almost every mission or was it back to the point like when you were down in the southern region where you would sweep an area and you wouldn't find that much and it calmed down?

A: By the time that we got there it actually calmed down, I guess, from what it was in January. Everyday it seemed like we would find something, whether it would be just one rifle or something like that. We found a few caches of weapons; they were still wrapped, and you never had to hold stuff on them. We found a lot of heavy equipment like the anticraft guns.

C: Would those all be Russia made or Chinese?

A: I really don't know. I think they were Chigongs, but I really don't even know. As soon as we found them, the next thing there was a whole mess of people from the rear out there looking at them and taking them back to the rear.

C: What would they do with them, just destroy them?

A: There were a few of them sitting on brigade headquarters yard for decoration and stuff like that. I never did figure out what they did with all of the stuff. We found a disabled tank. About five days after I was there, we did find a garage, I guess you would call it, and a few nice hooches built and there were sixty trucks parked all the way through the jungle. They dug out a hole in the ground that they had a covering over top of them so you couldn't see them from the air. There were about sixty trucks there and the engines had all been removed and buried to the right rear of the truck. So we had to dig up all of the engines and then they threw incinerate grenades in the engine. Then we wired all of the trucks together, moved back, and blew everything up and left. There was quite a bit more combat than there was up there than there was down south but it wasn't on a daily basis. I never ran into anybody who ran into combat except during the TET Offensive on a daily basis. You could go for three weeks before you could see anything and then you would have contact for maybe three of four hours and that would be it.

C: What was the most heroing experience that you can remember having in Vietnam?

A: I think we did an air assault off of Mass Thon there was a fire base up there. We were going to bypass the eagle and there was a forces camp in the Osh Sha valley in 1966 got over ran. We were landing just outside of it. I was on the first wave of choppers coming in, we landed and we started receiving fire and we received fire a few times. They had the gun ships up there and they were straight from the side and everything. I didn't think much about it, you know, we got out of the chopper and we ran to either side the ELZ and everything and secured the ELZ; I didn't think much about it. When the second wave came in and they put more fire on them. We had a few rounds and stuff. They received a couple of hundred of rounds of fire. The third wave came in and there were seven ships in the wave. They got five of the seven ships before they even hit the ground.

C: Destroyed them?

A: Yes, just wiped them out of the air. The other two ships that were left took off; they wouldn't attempt to land. A few of the guys on the two ships that were starting to leave managed to get out and jump to the

ground and run to cover and stuff like that. I don't know why they got out or anything; I don't know what was going on inside their heads. Maybe they thought they were safer on the ground than in the ship. The first five lead ships got hit and there was a pilot, co-pilot, and two door gunners, about four or five guys on each ship. That really shook me up. I think that was probably the scariest I ever had.

C: As far as your reflections back on fighting somebody like the Vietnamese people, first of all, do you think that they were well trained? Secondly, how would you compare them with what you expected, if you expected anything?

A: In the South Vietnamese?

C: No, the North Vietnamese; the people that you would fight.

A: I don't know. I don't think they knew any more what they were doing down there than we did. The ones that we ran into took a couple of prisoners. They had no more idea of what they were doing than we did. The interpreter who was there with us would talk to them. We never knew where we were going from day to day or what we were going to do. Even when we were in movement, we had no idea where we were going or anything like that. I guess the captain received orders through this hill, and I don't know why we went there but we went there. They seemed to be in the same boat. They didn't know what was going on. Like I said, I don't think I ever saw two prisoners up north.

C: How do you feel about its final collapse? Just recently South Vietnam is going communist as well as Cambodia now and I would assume Laos if not now then within a short amount of time, did you think that was evident when you were there? Did you get that feeling?

A: I knew that if the United States left with the troops, I had a pretty good feeling, that they weren't going to last that long. I didn't know how long it would take. The South Vietnamese people we fought with were pretty close to us. The special forces fought with a group called light force and they were pretty good. As far as the ARVN forces, in general, they didn't strike me as being well trained or having any great initiative or anything like that. I didn't care to have them anywhere around me. They would stay up at night-time and make all kinds of noise, clanging pots, killing

chickens--they carried chickens around. I just wanted to stay away from them as far as I could.

I didn't understand why we were over there to start out with. When I went into the service, I had no great adversity to the war; I really didn't care a whole lot about it. When I was there I honestly believe that I could have become a conscientious objector. It wouldn't have gotten me out of the service, but I didn't agree with what was going on or anything like that. I don't know, I just had mixed feelings about it. One day you were strictly against the war and the next day you would see one of your buddies get killed or something like that and you would be so mad. The whole time that you had been in the service before the dehumanized the enemy from basic training all of the way up. Everytime that you sat down in basic training it was "Win in Vietnam." Everytime that you stood up it was "Win in Vietnam." Everytime that you would go to the rifle range the silhouettes would have pictures painted on them. I didn't really realize what was going on until I started to look back on it. It was more like they weren't human, they were just something to be killed. The first time that I had ever seen anybody killed, I got sick to my stomach; I didn't know what to do. It was really strange. As far as the fall of Vietnam or whatever you want to call it, I don't think the people are any worse off now. In fact, they may be better off under Communism than they were before. I know the provinanse chiefs, they made them great big houses and the majority of the other people had little shacks all over the place.

C: How did the people feel about Lieutenant Calley in My Lai, or was that a pretty common occurrence over there?

A: I really don't know. Liek I said, you were in the free fire zone, so you never ran into any civilians whatsoever, or any civilians that were supposed to be there because they had evacuated them. Anybody that was there and was walking around was not on our side more or less. They were free to be shot. We never ran into any technical things like he ran into, but I imagine, it did happen more than once.

It's hard to imagine. You are out there everyday and you are walking around and everything builds up; you're dirty. I had jungle rot. Your hair is falling out; you can just grab it and pull it out. You had ringworm all over you and that was uncomfortable as heck. A lot of

times you can't eat very much, I went over and weighed 191 pounds and came back weighing 130. You get mad at food, you get mad at this, you get mad at that, and you see a couple of your friends get killed or something. It is not hard to imagine when somebody really gets mad and is shooting somebody just for the hell of it. As far as that goes we never ran into that. We never had any contact with the civilians in the country. When I went over, I knew all of the guys in the company. As the guys got wounded and sent home or killed, the new guys coming into the company, you didn't get as close to. You were real plastic about everything, your feelings. I knew guys, when we went over, where they were from; I knew how many kids were in their family. You knew everything about them. The guys who came in later . . . When I left there was me and two other guys who were being infused to the company up north that were still there. I don't think I knew more than five other guys in the whole place. I just ignored everything and became real plastic with my feelings. You didn't care and you didn't want to get involved, you didn't want to do anything. It was really strange. Even when you came back to the States, you didn't want to get involved with anything or anybody. You didn't want to get close to anything.

C: How long were you totally over there?

A: It would be twelve months, thirteen days, I guess.

C: Pretty glad to leave?

A: I was really happy when I saw the plane coming in that I knew I was going to be on. There was no way that they were going to keep me off of that plane. I was glad to leave. There were a couple of guys who I knew pretty well who were still there. There were four or five of them. I felt bad about them still being there, but there was no way that I was going to extend my time to be on the line. I tried to extend once for a rear area job and they said that I could have it for six months if I went back out on the line. There was no way that I was going back to the line again. I think above all I just remember how dirty it was, what you had to eat.

C: Did the student activists on college campuses and things have any affect on you when you were over there? Did you get aggravated about that, did that hurt the morale of the fighting people that were Americans over there or anything like that?

A: It's hard to say. I remember Kennedy was shot when we were over there. I can't remember what month or where it was.

C: Robert Kennedy?

A: Yes, it was in 1968. I remember it was like two months before we even heard about it. As far as activist news and stuff like that, you didn't get anything like that. You got Stars & Stripes and they printed all of the stuff that they wanted to print. They had a division paper and you got this company has so many body counts, this company has so many, they found so many weapons, and stuff like that. You didn't get a whole lot of news and you weren't allowed to carry around a radio. There was one in every platoon, a regular radio to listen to music on. Everyone had one, you weren't supposed to have one. As far as that, it was controlled by the government too. There was no armed forces radio over there. They did play a few of the top songs I guess, but as far as news goes, you didn't hear that much news. Two of the guys that I was with, one had a master's degree in chemical engineering and one was a teacher, I don't know what, elementary or high school. They came over and they told us a few things that were going on. It had no great impact on you because you knew that it didn't make any difference really. Everybody had big hopes for the Paris Peace Talks, I know that, maybe you would get home early. After about two months you realized that nothing was going to happen. As far as the activist stuff, it didn't make much difference, at least to me, I don't know about other people.

END OF INTERVIEW