

YOUNGSTOWN STATE UNIVERSITY

ORAL HISTORY PROGRAM

Vietnam Project

Personal Experience

O.H. 1075

RICHARD C. GINKINGER, JR.

Interviewed

by

Michael J. Lowry

on

January 15, 1983

YOUNGSTOWN STATE UNIVERSITY

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SUBJECT: Vietnam

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L: This is an interview with Richard C. Ginkinger for the Youngstown State University Oral History Program, on the Vietnam project, by Michael J. Lowry, on January 15, 1983.

G: When I went to 'Nam, I went in 1965, and I went over on a ship with guys like the old World War II movies. Guys got on a ship, and they go off to war. For me, I didn't have the training the other guys had, because when I went to this unit, I was only seventeen years old. It wasn't until the end of July, and I went there--I think it was in March--and they held me in a headquarters company passing out mail, which I didn't have any idea what I was doing.

By the end of July, they knew you had to be eighteen years old before you could go. The end of July, they told me that I would start training with what was the Second Battalion, Second Infantry of the Fifth Infantry Division. Soon after, I started in with the training there. They changed us over to the First Infantry Division.

L: Is this Marines or. . . .

G: Army.

L: Army.

L: Fort Devons, Massachusetts. Then, we hooked up with Fort Riley, Kansas, an outfit out of Fort Riley, Kansas. Our unit, which was second to second, and we had our sister company, which was the first to the second. All of us left Fort Devons and went to Vietnam. I think there was supposed to be 4200 guys on that ship that went to 'Nam.

L: Was this advisor status or. . . ?

G: No, our advisors had left the States in June.

L: You guys were going to be actual field combat troops?

G: Right. My training was limited. We were trained on World War II tactics and what was known as Korea tactics. They didn't know a whole lot about what kind of fighting we were going to be involved in. They had some idea as to what our basic training revolved around, what was known as post-Korean War and World War II.

Then as we were on the ship going to 'Nam, they trained on disarming grenades, what to look for in a long mine, and the pungee pits.

L: Booby traps?

G: Booby traps, yes. We looked at it--all the guys figured, "We're going to go there. We're going to kick their ass, and we're going to be out of there." It's a very small country, and with the sophistication that we had and everything that we had behind us, this was not going to last long at all. After we had arrived and we got into our base camp, settled down in our base camp, we were there about a month.

Well, we had barbed wire up the front, and Charlie, at night, would come in and mess with our wire to see how alert we were; and we'd shoot at him. I mean, the whole line would open up on one or two guys that were messing with the wire. They were just testing us. The place that we were set up at was inside a rubber tree plantation. Every time that we fired--and there were rubber trees, we were set up inside of them. Every time we fired, we hit one of those rubber trees. Every one of those rubber trees that we hit with M-79 round, or machine gun fire, or rifle fire, cost our government \$750. After a while, after that month or so, before we could fire upon anybody that was messing with that wire, we had to call CQ headquarters, which was in the rear, and ask them for permission to fire upon them. The only other time you could fire was if they were inside our wire. It was the only other time we could

fire, if they were actually inside the wire.

L: What they are telling you is that you can't do anything unless the rear echelon tell you that you can shoot?

G: That's right.

L: And they don't know what is going on to begin with!

G: That's right. We had our hands tied. There could have been ten of them out there playing with our wire. If we didn't get permission to fire on those ten, they are going to fire on us.

L: Even if visual contact wasn't. . . .

G: No, no. Same way with, when we would go on patrol or something--if we were to take trucks, go out on patrol, and then disembark from the trucks. In transporting, going to a certain area, if we would be fired upon from the village, we would dismount off the trucks, assault the village, and we would burn it down to the ground. That object wouldn't be there any longer for us to receive any fire from that, which was a good thing at first. Then, they got to the point where they told us we couldn't burn them down. No matter how much fire came out of them villages, we couldn't burn them down to the ground. We could not destroy those houses.

L: You had to leave the village?

G: We had to leave it.

L: Even though you knew you were getting enemy fire from the village, you had to let it stand?

G: Yes. It got to the point where it was very political. That was at the first part of the war.

L: What I understand from reading Fire In The Lake is the Vietcong would go into a village, set up a form of government, tell the people, "We need you to live." They get the government started with the village, and then, that village would be VC controlled. They would dig their tunnels out afterwards and have caches of food there. Still, after knowing that, they wouldn't allow you to take any action against that village.

G: There were times, whenever we found large caches, we weren't allowed to burn it down. They would let the Air Force know about it. They would have to make the decision whether or not they would bomb it.

L: Napalm?

G: Napalm bomb it, yes.

L: You guys were fighting a war where they are telling you that you can't take measures to protect yourself?

G: Yes.

L: Even if you find the enemy, you can't destroy his stronghold?

G: Yes. If we got fired, like I say, if we got fired on, we could return fire; but as far as total destruction of the village, we couldn't do it. Another real strong misconception they had was that we had a base camp we worked out of. Our base camp encompassed the village. The village was . . . , which was on Highway 13. The highway went right through the middle of our base camp. It was about five o'clock in the evening. They would shut the gates in there, and there was no traffic allowed. We would move on an operation. We'd move out from that point, from our village, out into the field on an operation. We made contact, whether it be a fire fight, you know?

Then, they'd bring other troops in to help us out if it be necessary. One of the misconceptions I have had, since I came home, was, "Well didn't your base camp move up and secure that area?" No, our base camp never moved up to secure that area. We never encompassed that area. We took that piece of ground to date, fought over it, lost lives over it. People got wounded and literally messed up over that piece of ground. We had moved back from that area into our base camp two days later. It was there for them to take over again. That was the way the war was fought. We never moved. We never secured an area. Like in Korea, they moved up, secured a line. Our defenses never moved from off of those base lines.

L: You were fighting in reverse then, to what actually you were trained to do?

G: Right.

L: Now, did you volunteer to go to Nam, or were you just sent there?

G: I was just sent. I was enlisted in 1964. I had heard about Vietnam, but I just never thought that I would end up going.

L: Did anybody you went with actually volunteer to. . . ?

G: No, we all went as a unit to Vietnam, which I feel, myself, I felt very lucky. Now, as the years run by, I

talk to guys who were sent as replacements. They didn't know who they were going to be involved with, what kind of people they were, you know, if you could trust them or if they could trust him. The biggest part, when you got into a valley, was [you asked yourself], "Can you depend on these two guys that are beside you? Can you depend on yourself, act in a manner that is going to save your life and theirs?"

L: Was there a comradeship between people in the unit? Did they get close to each other, or did they try to kind of keep that apart because they were afraid they were going to lose a friend?

G: Well, we tried to become a family. I was the youngest guy in there. Everybody in my squad kind of looked after me. They taught me as much as they possibly could. I had these two sergeants. They taught me as much as they possibly could train me or teach me. Without that, I wouldn't be here today, because those two guys taught me to survive. One of the sergeants was killed. They . . . him. The other sergeant, a fragmentation grenade went off in his face. It's a good thing all the fragments went down instead. He did get a concussion blast in his face. It cracked the bone under his eye.

I don't know. . . . My squad leader, these two guys, the two sergeants, I thought they were team leaders. My squad leader caught four bullets, killed him. The Platoon sergeant, he was in World War II and Korea. He'd been in both of them. I had heard about it; I wasn't there at the time when it happened. He had told this other guy, "I cannot let myself write home to another young man's mother or wife and tell them that they are gone. I can't stay here, this is ridiculous." He took an M-16, put it on his foot, and emptied a clip of twenty rounds on his foot; it broke his foot up.

L: Just to go home?

G: He knew once that was done he was going home. Here was a career man, took that, after all the pain I am sure he has been through, all the people that were lost.

L: I have heard that a lot of guys tried to bury, while they were in the country, tried to bury any feelings of closeness. For instance, one vet told me it was like your friend sitting right next to you and gets shot and you look at him and say, "Well it is better you than me." Then, when they got home, they had to deal with that guilt that, "It is better you than me." When they get home they say, "Why did I ever think that way?"

G: I can't say that I ever said that, "I am glad that it

was happening," when somebody that I lost was somebody that helped me. Like I said, we didn't try to be real close, didn't know much about their families or where they lived or anything. Sergeants were sergeants. They stayed pretty much alone. The other guys, there was that closeness that [said], "You have to depend on this guy, get to know a little about him." You don't want to know a whole lot about him. Just like I said, "Be here today, tomorrow you are gone."

L: The less you knew about him . . . it was all military?

G: Yes.

L: The less you knew about him as a person wouldn't affect you as much?

G: Right, because once you lose that person, you have lost a big support. The support was tremendous. Once you get into a fire fight, you know you can depend on this guy and this guy beside you. They know that they can depend on you. That was tremendous, knowing that you weren't going to freeze on the trigger and leave them holding the bag, or go berserk and shoot one of them.

L: Would you say it was more a sense of personal loss than. . . ?

G: Yes. I know when I lost, when the sergeant got his head blown off, I cried for about three or four days. I still cry. Just thinking about it at that point in time, and it has been almost seventeen years for me. It is more prevalent now since I have started to deal with it, you know, the feelings I had about the war at that time, the feelings that I have now and the people that I was with. I'm really angry at myself. It has been seventeen years, and I have often thought about [to myself], "Where are these guys at? Are they dead? Are they alive?" The guys I was with. I am really angry with myself, because I have never wondered, never really wondered about it.

L: Were you afraid to find out?

G: Yes, I think, yes. Are they wondering the same things that I am? Where is this guy? Where is he at? What is he doing?

L: Did you have a feeling that when you got to Vietnam, when your unit was sent that there was a reason for U.S. involvement in Vietnam?

G: Every time the U.S. has ever been involved in a war, or a conflict, or a police action, it has always been because of the communist take-over. Basically, that's

what I figured we were there for. Like I said, [I was] growing up in the era, where John Wayne went off to war and, you know, fought the battle, stayed until the thing was over. I didn't really have it in the back of my mind that, after a year it was over, that's when I'm going home. They figured it was going to take a year to get it over with, you know, and they were sending all these troops over. It's only going to take a year to get it over with. I had no idea it was going to last as long as it did.

L: But, you felt that we should have been there?

G: Yes, at the time, I did. Now, I am not sure. It's a question I can't answer. I am not really sure. I have mixed feelings about the whole thing. What we did, the United States, what we did to that country was a crime. We took areas that were so beautiful, I mean picture postcard, turned it into nothing, a desolate [place], literally. The people, we didn't help those people. We didn't help those people at all. When we left, when we finally left Vietnam, the common man paid the price.

L: All the American money and materials left with us.

G: Yes. We left and the North Vietnamese came in and took over. You don't have any idea how many people were massacred.

L: Do you think we would have been better off just leaving it alone, letting Ho have the free election instead of stopping him like we did in 1954, where we refused to support the elections.

G: I am not a political oriented person, you know. I had heard that one of the reasons we went in there was because Russia was starting to get involved. The Gulf of Tonkin incident, things were starting to happen. As far as political things, what was going on with the government. . . .

L: This was stuff they were telling you that Russia was becoming involved in it?

G: Yes, yes.

L: Does it make you angry now, that since some evidence is coming out that Russia wasn't involved and that Vietnam did not want China to become involved because they had a long-term hatred of China to begin with? Does that make you angry that they told you, the "commies" are going to come down from Russia, sweep over Vietnam, and take all of Southeast Asia along with it? Does that make you mad that they told you this, [that] they kind of fabricated it?

- G: Yes, I keep thinking back to the people that I knew that were killed. Those people would be alive today if it wasn't for that. It was a waste. It was a total waste. One person, for one person that died in Vietnam, it was a waste. It was a crime. We still have, most of them, 2400 and some guys still there, missing in action or killed there.
- L: They don't want to do anything about that either?
- G: Well, supposedly Reagan is a big supporter for POW-MIA's. He is supposed to be starting something this year. What we have heard from Lyle Williams is that there is supposed to be public announcement speakers [such as]: Bob Hope, Larry Wilcox, people like that, television personalities. Big stars are supposed to start public awareness about the POW-MIA's, asking for support to help the POW-MIA's in Vietnam. Plus, I understand that the Pentagon is going to start releasing. . . . But, you know what is really strange, that it starts now, in year of an election.
- L: Yes, it has taken them all this time. Then, he is going to do it during election year, just to get votes?
- G: That is the only thing I can say is behind it.
- L: Have you lost trust in the government?
- G: I would say, yes. The only person I really, I would say that I looked up to in the government, as far as presidents go, is Kennedy. Everybody else since that time, they are more like puppets. My own feeling, [it's] big business, and it's monopolizing. As far as I am concerned, it is the Presidents, whatever they say goes.
- L: When you were in Nam and you left there in 1965, did your year's duty and went back in 1966, you came home. Did you have any kind of cooling off period? Maybe a week in Japan or something so you could key yourself down before you came home?
- G: I left, we were in a place called. . . . We were doing what they called pacifying the village. We went into the village, and we secured the village, gave them food and medicine. The idea was to convert them over to our way of thinking, to help us locate Vietcong or North Vietnamese and point out cache areas and stuff like that. That was our program, to win them over. I was pulled from there to our base camp which was in, I think they called it Dion or Zion, First Infantry Division. They told me there that I was going to be going home. I was one of the oldest, I think I was.

There were four others that were after me, to go home. I was one of the last five guys. I hadn't actually spent a year there, because they figured when we left the States, which was September 26th. . . . We got home on October 16th. I left there, it was September 5th. Like I say, I went down there and they gave me my orders. They told me, you have to have a uniform. The only thing I had was my, you know, field uniform. I did not have any clothing whatsoever. I had to buy a khaki uniform from a guy. We glued the patches on, he told me I had to have brass, U.S. and infantry type brass. I didn't have any brass; I didn't have anything. He said, "Before you leave here, you have to have a complete uniform." Low quarters, some shoes, khaki uniform. They meant it. I bought a pair of loafers-- they were two sizes too big for me--from a Vietnamese boy who was selling what they called bottle-cap brass. It was made out of bottle-caps. I bought a U.S. and a. . . . I didn't even have a belt. I used an M-16 sling for my belt. I got on the airplane, and I was taking off the runway, and we got up off the ground and the guy made the bank, started out. We must have went out over the ocean. He said, "Well that was a trial run. We are going to go down and touch down, and we are going to do it again," because we didn't get shot at going up. I thought there was going to be complete chaos; I thought they were going to kill that guy. They started to yell and scream, the guys were up out of their seat going for the cockpit.

L: Was this Air Force?

G: No, this was regular airlines. They had Vietnamese or Hawaiian stewardesses, but it was an American tanker. After the commotion calmed down he said, "I'm just joking, you know, have to have some fun and games sometimes." It was no fun for the guys who were there.

L: No.

G: We went to Okinawa. We landed, then I remember we had a layover for a couple of hours. We went into the PX, and it had a snack bar. It was really strange. Everybody was on guard for anything that was going on. Everybody was jumpy. Went through the line and had hamburgers and milk. We couldn't get milk. We had a powdered milk or milkshake, or anything you wanted. I remember paying the clerk. I'd get paid before I left Nam. It was no longer MPC. It was hard, green money. I remember giving the girl the money, and she handed me something I hadn't had for a long time. It was change in my hand. I can remember almost every guy in that mess had change in his hand. They knew then that they had left Nam. Change, take something as simple as a buck, and I think will change them. I think those

guys, I don't think anybody in that line had a dry eye. We went ahead, ate, and got on the plane again; and went to Travis Air Force Base. I think this is that part that really hurt. We got off the plane there in Travis, and they walked us across the field to awaiting buses. There were four little old ladies there waving flags. That was our homecoming. Nobody there, and I felt lucky. Now I feel lucky. I have talked to guys who have come in at midnight, who took back roads. They took back roads, so that nobody would know that they were coming home. We went to a big warehouse, down on the docks, and got a shower. Most of us who came out of the field had no showers or shaves or anything. We got cleaned up. They issued us a new uniform. Everything was just taken off of us. We could keep our brass and our borders, and everything else was taken off of us and thrown away. We got a complete new uniform.

L: It took you maybe a day to get home?

G: Yes, anywhere from twelve hours, it seems like, twelve hours to forty-eight hours at the most.

L: Did that effect you, I mean coming, as soon as you. . . . Like you said and I've heard other guys say, "You come out of the jungle. You have lived almost like an animal; you don't get any hot meals, no showers, there are . . . frills or anything. You have lived there for a year in the jungle, and lived with the leeches; and then, you come home." Like you said, "Nobody meets you at the airport, and you are pushed right back out into society." Are you still edgy?

G: All the time. Jumpy. I jump at any noise, any sound. We left there, and we went--there were I think six of us--we got in a cab and went to San Francisco to get on a plane. . . . It might have been LA. I don't know. I know we went to the airport, and I am sitting in a window. The warmth was coming through the window, and I was sitting there. I was talking to this other guy, and I was waiting for my plane to come in to go to Chicago.

I see this blonde, long, blonde hair flowing. I said, "Gee, look at that! Boy, I haven't seen a good looking blonde in so long!" Whatever I said, the person turned around, and it was a guy with this real long, blonde hair. I couldn't believe it! In the back of my mind, when I looked, I was looking, I was preparing for, to see Vietcong, to hear the sound of gunshot. Even walking through the crowds, we made sure we weren't bunched together, that we were all spread out. In talking, we never talked with more than two guys at the most, because of the crowd situation. We were always

still prepared for battle.

L: This happens, probably to anybody that has had combat time, no matter what war you are in. How long did that readjustment take, or is it even still going on?

G: I'm not jumpy any more to the sound of loud noises. I do get paranoid when I hear gunshots. I have a tendency--I can hear a helicopter five miles away. I can hear the wind of the helicopter blades. Up until two or three months ago, I never took a walk in the woods. I was scared to death in the woods. Dry pastures always made my skin just crawl.

L: Open field?

G: Open field never really bothered me. Woods just terrified me. I could not deal with them. I had a dream--and I still have it periodically, not as often as I did before--but the whole squad was wiped out; and I was left in the woods by myself. I keep reflecting--not as a thirty-five year old man. I keep reflecting back to that eighteen year old kid, stuck in the woods, really not knowing what the hell you do. How do you survive? Out of ammunition, I don't have any water. The only thing I have is a knife. What do I do? Take my life? It leaves me at that point. I always wake up before I find out exactly what happened. Do I actually kill myself, or do I actually try to get from that point, out of there? Sweat just pours off of me.

L: And this is still going on?

G: Not as often as it has in the past, since I am able to get out with other guys and sit down and talk. It has been tremendous just to be able to sit down and talk to someone.

L: What one thing sticks out in your mind on your experiences in Nam that has an effect on your life?

G: I guess the way I work. I have always been in work. Get a job, that is the most important thing to you, my family. I went to work. I didn't think anything of my family, no matter if there were problems at home, any kind of problems at all, sickness or anything. When I went to work, it was everything. All I thought about was work. I used to go to work as much as an hour or two early. I was so consumed about my job, the job that I had, or any job that I had. I was so consumed in that the thing that really bothers me the most is when I don't have anything to do. I don't have anything to do with my time off. Saturday and Sunday off, if there is nothing going on to occupy my time I go bananas.

- L: Is that because, I have heard that the Vietcong would lull you. They'd wait and wait and wait and make you wait. Is that part of why this is going on?
- G: I really don't know. It's just, when I was a kid, I would do anything to get out of work, anything at all, you know, to get out of work. Now, if there is no work, I just go a little bit, go off the deep end. I have to be doing something. I have to be working. I have to be doing something all the time.
- L: Besides the nightmares that you say you still have occasionally, are there any other adverse effects that you have since you've come back?
- G: Yes, I've got kidney problems. When I first came home, I had migraine headaches all the time. I had them up until 1975. There was times that I felt, if I had a gun, I would kill myself. The pain was tremendous. I couldn't see. I couldn't sleep. I used to go down in the basement, with just my shorts on and lean up against the wall because the wall was cold. Lean up against the wall and brush my head up against the wall.
- L: Can you relate that to what happened in Nam?
- G: I just assumed, you know, I just never thought about the problems that I was starting to have. Just before that, I was always healthy. Even while I was in the service, I was healthy. I got home from Vietnam, and I put on forty pounds. I always assumed it was a change in the food and the diet. I can't break a 200 pound mark, can't get past that mark. No matter how much I diet, I get down to 200 pounds and that is it. That is all the farther it goes.
- L: Would that be maybe because you didn't have enough when you were there?
- G: No, we always seemed to have, we ate, a lot of time off of the land. Two sergeants that we had, they were both jungle trained. Ranger trained in jungle survival. We learned an awful lot from those two guys. They showed us what to look for, as far as fruits and things to eat, ripe fruit. A young palm tree, [you] cut it off, cut so much out of it, and take the bark off of it; and on the inside, it is like a leaf. We'd take [it], cut it up and boil it. It was like cabbage. Little did we know that the chemicals they were spraying. . . .
- L: Do you think it was Agent Orange?
- G: Your guess is as good as mine. I have in the back of my mind, yes. The things we ate off the land and stuff

which were treated with chemicals, sprayed. We used a lot of DDT spray and powders. As of 1967, they no longer used it.

L: Do you think the government is trying to cover up this Agent Orange, or do you think they are just afraid to pay?

G: I think they are trying to cover it up. The way the economy is now and their deficits and everything, you are figuring a million or two Vietnam veterans and their families. It comes out that Agent Orange has an effect on the birth rate. You ask them, "What affects a man?" I got married as soon as I got home from Vietnam. I got married in 1967. My wife and I tried very hard to have a child. Then, after six months, she wasn't getting pregnant and went and had a test done. At that time, I was found sterile. I'm sterile now. At the time, it really, really hurt me, because I couldn't have a family, you know. A man's function in life is to work, to provide a home for his family. A family consists of his wife and children.

L: It was like they stole something from you?

G: Yes, they have stole a part of my life.

L: On the news the other night, on CBS, they had Times Beach incident with dioxin. They were saying how dangerous dioxin is and everything, and then right after that, they said 2,000 Vietnam vets are taking the United States Government to court over Agent Orange. Yet, they don't want to connect the two. From what I understand, dioxin is Agent Orange. Do you think that's just one more hype the media has pulled on the Vietnam vets?

G: Last Sunday, I was at a meeting with our veterans group. My wife called me and said that near Times Beach, there was a farmer who, up until that day had been selling his milk to Kraft, for their products Kraft then told him they weren't buying any more of his milk. They didn't give any explanation as to why, but for years they had been buying his milk. Mysteriously his cows started dying off. One cow had three tumors, the other cow had cancer. There was a company there who had made dioxin.

L: Dow Chemicals.

G: Right. They would dump the waste material into the creek, which his cows fed off of. In this thing, it said that his cows were taken by a university and studied. You know there was never, after that story came out, on a Sunday, Monday, nothing was mentioned

about it. Nothing in any of the papers. It was completely clammed up. If the government doesn't have anything to do with that, I'm not smoking a cigarette right now.

L: So you think that the media is controlled by the government?

G: I think the media, the government has a handle on it.

L: On what is released?

G: Yes.

L: Yes, I did. . . .

G: Not all commentators, and not all newsmen are governed by the government. They will stick their neck out. I think it will come out.

L: Eventually?

G: Yes and I think the government is going to have. . . .

L: How much good did Agent Orange really do, I mean defoliating the area?

G: On the first application, like in a heavy jungle, there is the Iron Triangle, which was probably around three to four canopies, layers of vegetation. The Orange would come in, and they would spread [it]; and it might wipe out one canopy. There was one canopy leveled. They'd spray again, maybe a month, three months later, and take out another canopy level. The jungle consistently grew rapidly, because there was a lot of rainfall. In an area that we cut a path through, in a week, we would come back and that path would start to be already grown over. That is how rapidly the areas grew.

L: To consistently keep the canopies down, they would have to spray it every day?

G: Yes, or at least once a week.

L: It really wasn't doing them that much good?

G: No, but like in an open area, an area where there were crops, it would. You could spray that, and it would totally just wipe it out, turn to brown, powder. It would be like a dust bowl, is what it reminded me of. Everything was dust and all the weeds just dying over. You knew that those little weeds at one time were a full-grown healthy tree or a bush or grass.

L: Do you think they should have sprayed?

G: No.

L: It didn't really aid the war effort?

G: They said it did. It cut down on their hiding places, and it wiped out their food supply. It didn't gain anything. No, we didn't gain anything from it.

L: Would you go along with the idea that the heavy spraying, that there was nobody really, because of the defoliant would get in the water system, there was nobody that actually escaped the Agent Orange poisoning that was in the country? They had to drink the water, and the water was contaminated.

G: I drank the water, the animals drank the water. People drank the water. It was in the clothing material; it was in everything.

L: There was no way to escape if you were in Vietnam?

G: No, no way whatsoever. I know that. As much as I think, and I am a very patriotic person, I would not leave this country and go someplace else because I know the freedoms on things we have. What the government did, and what we did in Vietnam was a crime. We have an obligation not only to ourselves, but we have an obligation to other countries, those people.

L: What do you think about the media representation of the war?

G: The six o'clock news.

L: Yes. The stuff they highlighted, for instance, the casualty report. Okay there are 1,000 VC, and we used 20 men; and then, they press it later on in the My Ija. They just blow that all out of proportion to what would have happened. Do you think that hurt the American GI when he came home?

G: I would say so. When I came home, I remember, I refused to talk about the war. People would say, "Were you in the service?" I would say, "Yes." "Did you go to Vietnam?" I'd say, "Yes." "What was it like? How many people did you kill?" I'd just say, "I'm not going to tell you." First think, "How many people did you kill?" "How many of your buddies got killed?" "Who in the hell do you think you are?" "How could you take somebody else's life?" "And all the kids that you guys murdered!" "And all the women you guys murdered!" It was no longer enemy against enemy, army against army. It was the United States Army against children

and women.

- L: Do you think the media played that up too much?
- G: Well, they used to; they used it to the benefit of their story. I think if they had not used that, used the women and children, which there were a lot of children killed.
- L: But, then there were a lot that were actually Fifth Column.
- G: Right, they were involved in a lot too. That's as I told a lady one time, who was a journalist, the same things happened during World War II and Korea as happened in Vietnam. They didn't have the six o'clock news, they didn't have the satellites that televised it. What happened that day in Vietnam was on the news that night. The status of the World War II vets and Korean veterans would have been changed drastically, too, if they would have had the news then and the telecommunications that they have now.
- L: What about the idea of Korea? You have a line. The North crossed that line, and they made, you know, a war. They actually crossed a line and started a war. Germany and Japan as aggressive nations in World War II, started a war whose justifications go to that war. Do you think in Vietnam, since it was more of a civil conflict of trying to unite the two into the country, did that affect the opinion of the people in the United States? They couldn't see a justification for it.
- G: As a young man going to Vietnam, I really didn't know a lot about government workings and stuff. When I was in school, I quit school and went into the service. Every time you sat in a classroom and you would say something to the teachers or the people who were teaching would say, "You listen to my opinions. I am the teacher in this classroom, and what you say has nothing to do with what is going on." You weren't able to speak your opinion or voice your opinions. You had to learn what they were telling you. Now that has changed. If you have an opinion of something you can speak it. Then, you weren't able to. I got to the point where history and government, I chose not to learn those things. I was being very rebellious. I didn't do well at all in school. I'm really surprised that I lived through Vietnam. The one thing that helped me tremendously-- and I had it and there was a lot of guys that didn't-- was common sense. A lot of guys didn't have common sense. I must have had it, because I am here. Guys that didn't have common sense died.
- L: What do you mean by common sense?

G: It was like a feeling. Rounding the corner, to be on the ready. Those guys that were so relaxed, they just, like they didn't care. They didn't care about the people around them. They didn't care about themselves. They went into areas not prepared to do battle. They walked through the jungles with their magazines inside their pistol holders, because they just assumed that nothing was going to happen. They walked through the woods and ended up getting killed. They didn't care about themselves or the guys around them.

L: That preparation to do battle, to have to constantly be under stress when you came home, we talked a little about this before, does that stress still haunt you, at all?

G: Tremendously. Sometimes at work, now--we are going through a transformation at work--we'll be getting a new foreman. This guy comes in to the department and figures we are all against him. Now, when I go into work, I am prepared for battle. I don't go in with the feeling that I am going to have a good time, and be able to talk to this guy in a civil manner. I go in prepared to have a battle with this guy, and I am geared up on it.

L: The idea of the training the Army gives you, they train you on, you know, a whole different set of values. You learn to accept discipline, and they train you to go out and kill people. When you come back to civilian life, especially after having been in combat situations, how does that affect your adjustment? Can you break away from those rules?

G: I have, I have found that I can sense when people, I can just about tell, just by a few words from a person, if that person and I are going to be able to get along. I can almost tell in a small conversation with this person if I can trust this person. If I can trust this person, then there is nothing I can say or do that will offend this person. If I can't trust this person, I avoid this person.

L: Do you think that is the Army training?

G: Yes.

L: Would you combine that with the Vietnam experience, of having to trust whoever you are with? And life, your life depends on that person.

G: Yes.

L: So, would you say that makes you more choosy now?

G: Yes. The people I work with, I classify them as friends. They are not really friends, the people I deal with every day. I have a very small group of friends, and up until I joined the Vietnam veterans group, I had, literally no friends.

L: So, it hurts your interpersonal relationships?

G: Tremendously. You just feel like an outsider all the time. When I first came home, when I first got married, like I said, there were people I worked with that I classified as friends, but they were actually just associates. They were not friends. A friend, to me, is a person that you can call at two-o'clock in the morning if your car is broke down, or vice-versa, somebody you can really depend on. That's what the guys in Nam [were]. Somebody when something drastically was wrong, I could count on them for support.

L: Do you think you would have been the same if you wouldn't have went? Or would you, let me see how I am trying to tell you this, are you more, are you harder on people? Is it harder for a person to become your friend now than it would have been maybe even before you went to Nam, because you know how much you have to depend on a person? And what, more or less, true friendship is?

G: I'd say, before I went to Vietnam, people I practically lived with, I had two or three other families that I could go and spend the whole day and evening with. Many times I stayed overnight. I ate with them; it was like, I was part of their family. There were four or five families that I was like part of their family. Since that time, when I came home, that relationship stopped. All the guys that I grew up with, that were my friends for life, are no longer my friends.

L: Your attitude changed?

G: Yes, I just could not, I don't know, I felt like an outsider all the time, lost. There was guys who didn't go to Vietnam. They stayed here in the States. They got good jobs, and they had homes. Every time I go to talk to them, "Oh, I just put \$25,000 into my house. I got this new and everything." If I said to you, "We just went out and bought this used car." "Yes," he'd say, "It's just a used car." They were always a higher class than I was, once I got home.

L: They made you feel like you had wasted your time?

G: Yes.

L: Going into the service?

G: Yes. I would have been more accepted if I would have went AWOL or if I would have ran off to Canada.

L: But because you wanted to fight, you were some kind of idiot?

G: Yes.

L: The anti-war movement started around 1966. Did that hurt the adjust problem of the vet, coming home?

G: I think so. There were a lot of vets who joined the anti-war movement. Myself, I didn't join. I didn't join anything. I was just lucky that I survived Vietnam. For the last seventeen years, I have never belonged to any organization. I've never, like the bowling leagues and things like that. I've never done any of that. My only outlet was work.

L: I've talked to some guys who said they came home and all they could do was drink, was that your escape? Work was your escape from facing it?

G: Yes, I went to work, and I became a totally different person. It was like I put this mask on, and I became somebody else.

L: Was that suppressing the feelings you had?

G: Oh, I think that a lot of the guys--I work with a lot of guys from the Vietnam Vets, and you would never know it. They never told me. I was really surprised at some of the guys that come in a talked to me, because I wear this hat every day to work. I wear this hat practically everywhere I go, because I am a Vietnam veteran; and I am damn proud of it. For a long time, I wasn't proud of being in the military, and surely, I wasn't proud of being a vet.

L: Is that because of what the public did to the vet? They blamed the war on the vet?

G: Yes, and that didn't have a damn thing to do with it. The vet was no different than they were, no different. Except, here he was. He was put into a situation where either he did what he was told or he would' be court-martialled for it and put in prison, or he ended up getting killed, or he survived.

L: You just consider yourself a survivor?

G: Yes, I. . . .

L: Do you think that is how most of us look at it, that they are just survivors?

G: Yes. A lot of guys I did talk to, they say, "Honest to God, I wish I would have went over there and would have never came home." Those guys who died in Vietnam were lucky, because they do not have to put up with this. Those guys who got killed in Vietnam are down in the ground. They no longer to worry about what was going on here. Now a lot of guys . . . actually I tell you; I've talked to guys. They would like another Vietnam to start. They'd go back. They would honestly go back. No matter how many kids they have, what their responsibility is, they would go back, just hoping on the chance that they wouldn't return.

L: Do you think that the American public is changing that opinion now? Is it slowly starting to evolve into, "We were wrong. It wasn't their fault."

G: Yes. Last year, well I had been in the Vietnam veterans for a little over a year now, and when I started doing it, I talked to my parents about it. My dad has never been--I've never been able to tell my dad or my mother what I did in Vietnam. They chose not to listen--or they didn't want to hear about it, but they knew that there was a problem. My mom just told me, about two or three months ago, about something that happened to me the first night I was home. That I had walked out, and I never remember--I didn't even know I did it, but I was--I came home, and I was laying in bed asleep; but I must not have been asleep, and my brother who I hadn't seen, came home a night later. He walked through the bedroom door. My mom said I was out of the bed, and I had him by the throat. He was down on his knees, and I was choking him to death. I was still in the war.

L: It is hard to escape the war? Even now?

G: Yes.

L: Did you think that if the vet would have come home and the people would've been willing to listen, even with the anti-war movement, if the people would have been willing to listen to what the vet had to say and how he felt, could that have changed the problems that we are having today? Like delayed stress and. . . .

G: The suicide rate might not be so tremendously high. Or even when we came home, if they would have said, "We know you want to go home, but we want to sit you down for two or three weeks and have a deprogramming. I don't think the guys would have minded that a bit, knowing what they know now. When I got home, I was

anxious to get home, be with my family, my mom, my dad, and my brothers and sisters, and my friends, and leave that behind me, but it has never left.

L: There has been a lot of movies now. We have The Deerhunter, we have Coming Home, and Apocalypse Now, movies about Nam. How much does that affect the readjustment of the vet? Like for instance in Coming Home, they show one guy that couldn't deal with his problems, killing himself to escape his anguish. Is this a true portrayal of. . . .

G: I would say a percentage.

L: A percentage of these guys are suffering these problems?

G: Yes. I have not seen that movie. I didn't see The Deerhunter: I refuse to watch The Deerhunter. I did go and see Apocalypse Now. There see parts in that movie that are hilarious, that are just dramatized. There is a part in the movie where the guys are going down the river on a boat and they are all laid back and relaxed and all of a sudden Charlie opens up on them. Now, that is about as true of what it was like, that short little piece. That was about as true as what it was like. There were times where total relaxing, carrying your weapon on your shoulder, walking around with your rifle on your back, walking through like this; and it happened to you, just like that. Although I was never on a boat, that incident, where the pilot just snapped and they were starting to fire on them, that happened, I would say about a hundred times. That was true. A lot of it was dramatized.

L: What would you say was dramatized about it?

G: The one guy that switched over to the mount-yard, the big headings and that part of it all. Some of it happened. I'm not saying it didn't. Some of it, in the mass they showed on the screen. . . .

L: Was over-dramatic?

G: Yes.

L: What about the assault by Air Mobile on that village?

G: I had heard that they actually used papers and stuff like that to scare the villagers. The assault on the village, that was real, the air assault. Those choppers could lay down a field of fire that you just would not believe. Throw rockets off the ships.

L: Do you think this effected the vets? I mean in The

Deerhunter they showed guys sitting around with a rifle or a pistol playing Russian roulette because of what went on in Nam. You said a small percentage of the guys are like that. Do you think maybe they should show the other side of the guys that come home and adjusted well to it?

G: Well, let me give you a figure. There is a figure out, that approximately 80 percent of the guys are coping, are coping with their problems. We go to work, pay our taxes; we do our job and we do our job well. We don't have arrest records, little or none. It's only about 20 percent to 25 percent who cannot cope, and that's a far cry of what the media and people think of us. They think over half of us are just loonies, that you cannot turn your back on them or they will take your life or steal you blind. We're all drug addicts, we are all alcoholics. This is not the truth.

L: Do you think the vet is trying to cope with his problems by suppressing a lot of this anxiety and guilt feelings?

G: Yes.

L: Will that eventually. . . .

G: Oh, it will eventually come out. It will be violence. Violence. Me, I've always flowed along, on the surface, as a even keeled person. There are times in my life where I have just totally lost control. Thank God I have never hurt anybody. I tell stories of me. I built a workbench in my basement, and I like to do a little work down in the basement. I had this old door, and I put legs on it. I made this . . . and put it on the bench. I was really happy of what I did and proud of this. Finally, I got it all done and everything. Two days later, I don't know what it was, something set me off. Instead of taking my violence out on my family, I went down in the basement and took a claw hammer, turned it over to the claw part of the hammer, and I beat that damn bench to death. I'd just beat it and left holes in it, and beat it and beat it, and beat it. I took that \$42 vise, and I beat it to death. There was nothing left of it. Just total anger. I'd lost control of the situation. I just beat it and beat it until there was nothing left. Splinters. I stood in the corner, and I cried.

L: All this could have been prevented if somebody would have listened to you when you first got back? You could have let that out?

G: I have won a claim to the VA hospital for disability for delayed stress. I have what they call neurological

damage. Now what it means is that nerves or something in my head are not right. Sometimes, like now, I am trying to think, and the whole train of thoughts is just wiped out. Just like that. My mind is going a thousand miles an hour, and I can't, I can't pick up one thing. That I can say, and it happens to me quite often. I'll be talking to somebody and just a big space, nothing there. I feel like this person probably thinks I am losing my marbles. I just have this big block in there.

L: I talked to a couple of guys, and one of them told me [what] the hardest thing that he had to live with [was]. Besides the fact of coming home again, being dropped off and left on his own to go home to his family and work his problems out, was the fact that when you are in a fire fight and there are twenty persons firing on one bush and you kill somebody, you can rationalize and say, "Well it wasn't me who did it." When you are face to face and you know that you've killed somebody, you have to deal with that on its own; it's the hardest part of the adjustment, is learning to cope with the fact that you killed somebody. Do you have that feeling?

G: I did. I killed a guy. I was on patrol, and I was a rear guard. There were about 18 to 20 of us. We were walking through a heavy wooded area, and it was coming to a clearing. There was a bend just before we got into the clearing. I felt scared. I couldn't go in there. The hair was beginning to stand up. I knew somebody was there. Somebody was waiting. Exactly what it was I wasn't sure. It was just an eerie feeling that I was being watched. Something was there that was really going to hurt.

We entered the clearing around the bend, and we stood on the bend. It was about 25 to 30 yards, and then, the guys went back into the woods. I told myself, "I don't want to be out here by myself." If somebody is there, he is just liable to take me out. I pulled these guys out of the woods and into the clearing. As they entered and the foliage started pulling in behind them, I picked up the pace to catch up to them. It seems like I was halfway between the entrance of the wood-line and the clearing. I heard something. It was Charlie, he opened up on me with a carbine, and launched rounds. It went "zip," past my head. His carbine jammed, or I wouldn't be here today. My senses were simply, to turn, flip my M-16 on full automatic, and as I turned, I was firing. Just from the hip, I just brought it around. I just emptied twenty rounds all over the area. I caught this guy four times in the chest. The guys came back, and I'm standing there, staring. I could still see this guy, the expression on

his face, him dying. I stood there. They are all gathered around him, deploying in case there's Charlies in the wood-line. They are deploying it, checking this guy out. They came down and got me, literally dragged me to him. Looking down he didn't look to be sixteen, seventeen, or so. He was fourteen years old. I actually went out and killed this guy, this kid.

L: Does that still scare you?

G: Yeah it does. In the rap group, it was the first that I had brought it up.

L: The VA, are they doing enough to help guys with problems? With coping with their problems?

G: They are beginning to now. Trumbull County and Mahoning County have a grant for veterans and their families. The problems that I have lived with the last seventeen years my wife has lived with me. It's not only the Vietnam veterans the guys fear, it is the hell we put our families through.

L: Are they still suffering with you?

G: Yes.

L: Do you think that is causing, I don't know what the divorce rate is among Vietnam veterans, but do you think that it increases the divorce rate?

G: I would say that I know there are four of us that are still married. A lot of the guys have been divorced and remarried as many as three, four, five times.

L: Because they can't cope with what went on there, and they take it out on their family and. . . .

G: Yeah, they have a captive audience in their families. Families may want to, you know, think they are going to run out on it. It has just been in the last year that I have actually told my wife, where she has been actually interested in hearing what I did in Vietnam. She never pressured me, when I was, when we were married, "What did you do?" She knew I was . . . , but she never asked, "What did you do?" "Well I was a combat infantry man in the fields," and we left it at that.

L: How long is it going to take, or what is it going to take, for the Vietnam vet to become adjusted, fully adjusted?

G: People say to me that I am fully adjusted. I have to say that I don't think I will ever be fully adjusted, maybe 80 percent or 90 percent, maybe 99 percent ad-

justed. I think there will always be a percentage where I will not be adjusted.

L: There will always be something to come back and. . . .

G: Yes. I was working at night in music, at school playing music, rock music, roll music. A song came on, it was a taped show; a song came up, "Abraham, Martin, and John," and I was listening, and the more I listened to it, that was my time in Vietnam, and that came out. Some of the other songs were, and I was standing there and I was crying. I couldn't ask for her to turn it off, because I was afraid she would notice that I was crying. I kept my head down, and I kept my head down, I was crying, listening to this music. It was hurting, the memories.

L: Would you call them flashbacks?

G: Yes.

L: What about the idea of jobs for the vets? Do you think the vets are still getting screwed as far as job opportunities?

G: Well, let me put it this way, I got hired at Packard in 1972. I was hired a Vietnam veteran employed. I am lucky because I have ten years seniority, and I am not laid off. I am near the bottom of the deck, and I have 200 people below me right now, whereas there used to be 2000 people below me. In that 2000 people there were a lot of Vietnam vets out of 2000 people.

L: Do you think they should give the vet the job first? Does the country owe him that much?

G: My own personal opinion is that they should have the opportunity. I'm not saying that somebody should, who went to college and who has got the degree, be pushed off aside, and give a job to a person who is not skilled to do that job. I don't think the veteran is actually looking for a handout. I think all he is looking for is an opportunity to show what he can do. In military life, you came to work and you did your job. You did it to the best of your ability. You were basically on call 24 hours a day. You learned a skill, whatever it may be, and you learned that discipline goes right along with it. Most of these guys can and are willing to, you know take whatever, whatever comes. As far as the government saying, "Okay, we are going to give you, have a million Vietnam veterans," or how many of us there are, "we are going to give you a job at \$40,000 a year, to appease you." No, I don't think they will buy that.

L: Last question, this class that we are having now, do you believe they should have done this before, teach a class at a college level about the Vietnam War?

G: Yes, because what we went through in Vietnam, and part of our group we have a scripture, we would like to go to churches, schools. We would like to be able to speak about Vietnam, so later on in life, yet another Vietnam does not happen to generations to come.

L: Prevent it?

G: Prevent it.

L: Would you go again?

G: Probably. I think so.

END OF INTERVIEW