

YOUNGSTOWN STATE UNIVERSITY

ORAL HISTORY PROGRAM

Vietnam War Experiences

Personal Experience

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DANIEL G. BREWSTER

Interviewed

by

Douglas C. Senseman

on

February 24, 1987

DANIEL GLENN BREWSTER

Dan Brewster was born August 3, 1945 in Akron, Ohio the son of Jack and Helen Brewster. Dan received a GED certificate from Stow High School. Dan served in both the U.S. Navy and the U.S. Army. His military experience in Vietnam stems from his service in the Army where he was a member of the infantry and the military police. He served in the Army from 1968 until 1971. Since his discharge, he has been employed by the Las Vegas Canine Patrol, the Ravenna Arsenal, and most recently, by Kenmore Research.

Dan is an active member of the Vietnam Veterans of America, Veterans of Foreign Wars, American Legion, and Disabled American Veterans. Dan's picture is to be found in a recent book called The Wall after the Vietnam Veteran's Memorial. Dan has been a frequent lecturer to schools in the Trumbull and Portage County area.

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INTERVIEWEE: DANIEL G. BREWSTER

INTERVIEWER: Douglas C. Senseman

SUBJECT: Navy, Army perspective of Vietnam; South  
Vietnamese Army; Vietnam Veterans; Vietnam  
Veteran's Memorial in Washington, D.C.

DATE: February 24, 1987

S: This is an interview with Daniel Brewster for the Youngstown State University Oral History Program, on Vietnam War Experiences, by Douglas Senseman, at Brown Middle School, Ravenna, Ohio, on February 24, 1987.

S: Dan, could you tell me what you were doing prior to the war in Vietnam?

B: In 1963 I was in school.

S: What had you heard about the war?

B: In 1963, nothing. It was just getting started. There wasn't anything about it to speak of in the newspapers. It wasn't any big deal then.

S: So, in 1963 you were in what grade?

B: The day I left to go into Navy boot camp was the day I was to start 12th grade.

S: So you dropped out.

B: Right.

S: What were the feelings of your family and friends when you dropped out and entered the service?

B: They thought it was a pretty good idea because I was getting into a lot of trouble then. It completely changed me around.

S: So you had no idea when you entered the service that you'd be going to Vietnam?

B: No. Never even heard of it.

S: What was the actual date then, that you entered the armed services?

B: September 4, 1963.

S: What kind of training did you receive and where?

B: I had Navy boot camp at Great Lakes, Illinois, then I went to electrician's mate school in Great Lakes, Illinois, then I was on a destroyer and a guided missile, heavy cruiser. When I got out of the Navy, I was out a little over a year and I joined the Army and went to Vietnam. That was in 1968. I had basic training at Fort Ord, California and advanced infantry training at Fort Lewis, Washington.

S: What kind of training did they give you in the advanced infantry training?

B: Basically more of what you had in basic training only this was particularly for infantry, they called it advanced individual training for guys who were going to be cooks and medics and things like that. This was a little bit more detailed on how to set up ambushes. At that time, Vietnam was going strong. As a matter of fact, at that time the TET Offensive was just over. That is the reason why I joined the Army and they even had a little Vietnamese village set up and they showed you the different kind of booby traps that they used and the different kinds of booby traps that we used. They ambushed us in the village.

S: What exactly was the TET Offensive?

B: That was the...I think it was February of 1968 when the communists had a major offensive. TET is the Vietnamese Lunar New Year. The TET Offensive when the communists had a major offensive against the friendly forces in Southern Vietnam and the United States always thought they were not capable of doing anything like that and they really proved the United States wrong. They took over the U.S. Embassy for a while, the Marines really got into some bad stuff.

S: When you were in training what had you heard about Vietnam?

B: In the Army?

S: Yes.

B: In the Navy, nothing. Vietnam was just a little skirmish line on the other side of the world at that time. In the Army, everything was geared for Vietnam. Especially for me going into the infantry, I volunteered for the infantry, and our drill sergeants were all Vietnam Veterans. They had been there and had actually been through it. They told us what it was really like and that. The thing that impressed me most of all was my last day of training when I was to graduate from basic training at Fort Ord, California one of the instructors told us that something like three-fourths of the wounds in Vietnam are from the knees down. That kind of made me feel good. Strange that I never got wounded.

S: How did you happen to sign up for the infantry?

B: I remember now because I was living in San Diego after I got out of the Navy and they had an article in the newspaper, the title was something like, "Heroes are Born and Dying in Hue during the TET Offensive," and it was all about the Marines fighting in Hue and being overrun and the heroism. I read that and got all patriotic and "gung ho" and went out the next day and joined the Army and volunteered for Vietnam.

S: Did you feel that the training you received was adequate for Vietnam?

B: After being in Vietnam, no. Of course, it's hard in places like Fort Ord, California and Fort Lewis, Washington where there is no jungle and rice paddies to train you like that. I think the only way that they could train somebody really super good like that is to send them to Fort Polk, Louisiana, or down in canal zone. Training was going on down there. But actually, without getting into the jungles and rice paddies and that, I thought it was pretty good.

S: How did you get to Vietnam the first time you went over?

B: The first time I went over, I was on a ship in the Navy in a guided missile heavy cruiser. I went there three times on it and we just ran up and down the coast of North Vietnam and South Vietnam shooting at them all day and all night long. My ship was the first ship to fire on North Vietnam and the first ship to get hit by

fire from North Vietnam. That made life interesting. When I went over in the Army, after I graduated from advanced infantry training in Fort Lewis, Washington, I came home to Stow, Ohio for about three weeks and then my parents drove me to Fort Dix, New Jersey and we caught a commercial flight from Fort Dix, New Jersey and then it went to Alaska, Japan and then down to Vietnam.

S: You mentioned the ship that you were on was the first to get hit by the North Vietnamese?

B: Right.

S: Could you elaborate on that incident a little bit?

B: Oh, we were firing on them and they started shooting back at us. It wasn't any major deal. We had one air burst on our starboard side and it just put a bunch of shrapnel in the ship in one spot and one guy got a little bit of shrapnel in his arm and got a Purple Heart for it. That really wasn't any big deal. Right after that one of our destroyers got hit and they really got messed up. It killed a whole bunch of guys and did a number on a whole bunch of others.

S: When you were going over there in the Army, what was going through your head on the way over?

B: That's a good question. I think what was going through my head was, "Why am I doing this?" Then the thing that I was worried about most of all, about going to Vietnam, after the instructor told us about being wounded from the knees down, that made me feel pretty good. Because you see war movies where a guy gets wounded in the stomach and lays there and dies for a long time and stuff like that. The thing I was worried about most of all about going to Vietnam was snakes. I heard about the snakes over there, all kinds of nasty snakes and the whole time I was there I kept worrying about the snakes and I never saw one the whole time I was there. So I worried for nothing.

S: Would you say you were optimistic or pessimistic on the way over?

B: On the way over, I was very optimistic. I heard how we were fighting then. That was in 1968 and how we were really kicking butts over there and doing stuff like that. Then, it was after I got there that I learned a lot.

S: What were some of your first thoughts when you got off the plane in Vietnam?

B: When we got off the plane, it was in the middle of the night at Bien Hoa Air Base. As the airplanes came in, you could see these illumination rounds, they're flares underneath parachutes, and you could see these floating down through the sky. As the airplane taxied up the little rinky dink terminal they had there, they had these rows upon rows of boxes. Being in the Navy I knew what they were, they were recyclable boxes that they put rockets in, made out of aluminum or something. They put a couple rockets in them and shipped them overseas then they shipped the empty boxes back. But man, they looked like coffins. We pulled up to that terminal and there were rows upon rows of these boxes and that plane got so quiet. I started laughing because I knew everybody was thinking these were boxes of our guys coming home. After that, it was just going into the terminal and standing around.

I had seen war movies and stuff. When I was in Vietnam in the Navy, I never stepped foot on land there. But seeing World War II war movies, you see the wars going on and that, I was expecting to jump off the airplane and have bullets flying around and everything. For about the first week I was there, I never heard one bullet fire, fortunately. When I got there, even after I got there, it was nothing like I was expecting. I was expecting full blown wars and stuff and it just wasn't that way.

S: When some of the new arrivals got to Vietnam, were they treated differently?

B: Oh, yes. In Vietnam, you got a short-timers attitude and a survivor's attitude. The older guys tried to help the newer guys and tried to teach them. But it still boiled down to--if you screw up, you're not taking me with you--type attitude. After you were there, especially depending on where you were at, if you got into some really bad stuff like up in the jungles and that, you really had a survivor's attitude and all you cared about was putting in your twelve months and getting out of there and getting home all in one piece. The thing that worried us most of all was getting killed, or especially wounded where you would lose a part of your body, like an arm or a leg, or something like that your last few days in Vietnam... You spent your twelve months there, fourteen months in my case, and if it was going to happen, you wanted it to happen when you got there, not when it was time to go home. The worst thing that could happen to somebody was to get killed or seriously wounded their last day of Vietnam. That was a real bummer for the guy but it was really a bummer for the other guys that had to stay there and wait and wonder what's going to happen their last day in Vietnam.

- S: Going over a typical day in Vietnam, what kind of food did they give you?
- B: First of all, there was no such thing as a typical day. When I was in the infantry and we were out in the rice paddies, out in the paddies is what we called them, our food was C-rations, which I liked myself. When we were in base camp, especially when I was in the military police, I'd eat breakfast in the chow hall, we used the dehydrated eggs, powdered milk, bacon. The bacon was usually either a little on the raw side or almost burned and the toast was usually not toasted enough or it was almost burned. They had lots of coffee. So I'd eat breakfast in the chow hall and then the rest of the time I ate C-rations. I liked C-rations.
- S: How about sleeping when you were out in the field. Did you get enough sleep?
- B: Oh, no. You tried to sleep. This one night, we were out in the middle of the rice paddies and the dikes around this one rice paddy was only a couple inches wide so I ended up squatting down and wrapping my poncho around me just squatting in the rice paddy trying to sleep. Another night I slept on a dike that was about six inches wide and I had to cross my ankles and cross my arms and straddle the dike and lay there like that and try not to move one way or the other because you were going to end up getting a bath in some really funky water.
- S: What about the weather. What was the weather like in Vietnam?
- B: Hot and dry and hot and wet. That's one of our favorite sayings. When monsoon season hit and it started raining, it rained twenty-four hours a day for sometimes weeks on end. Everything got wet and muddy it stayed that way. Nothing was dry, even your food.
- S: What kind of insects did you have to put up with when you were out in the field?
- B: The thing that bothered me most of all was mosquitoes. We had to take Malaria pills every week. Malaria was really bad over there. The mosquitoes would drive you crazy. They built up an immunity to the insect repellent that we had, some really bad stuff. That repellent stinks and you put it on your arms or your face, especially if you got it on your lips it would burn and it smelled bad. You could put that on your arms and it's still wet and the mosquitoes would land on you and bit you right through it. It was kind of a losing situation. But in the rice paddies, there were all



kinds of creepy crawly bugs and leaches and all kind of nasty little things.

S: What about the civilians. What were some of your impressions on the Vietnamese civilians?

B: I was in the infantry and then I was in the military police. When I was in the infantry, we had civilians that worked on the base camps and they worked in our barracks, they did our laundry, cleaned up around the base barracks and were barbers. They worked in the PX, if our base camp was fortunate enough to have a PX. The people are hooch people. We paid them, I don't remember how much it was, but it was something like \$3 or \$4 a week, if I remember right, to do this stuff around our hooch and pick up and stuff like that. They were nice and friendly towards us. But it was after I got out of the infantry and got into the military police, well we searched these people coming on the base camp everyday and when they left the base camp, and we started finding this stuff that they were stealing from the G.I.'s and that. We'd catch it on them and they'd laugh like it was a big joke. Everything to them got to be a big joke. The longer I was in Vietnam, the more I got to hate the people and I'm still not too crazy about them.

S: When did you make the transformation from the infantryman to the military police?

B: In about two or three months after I was in Vietnam.

S: What about your first encounter in the Army with the enemy?

B: Well the very first time was the first night I got to my infantry unit. We had some snipers. They'd shoot at us, no matter where you were at, at nighttime, and we'd shoot at them at nighttime. It was harassment fire. You'd just shoot off a couple artillery rounds and they'd shoot a couple sniper rounds at you and just harass you. The first time I actually got in contact with the enemy we got ambushed one day, it wasn't actually an ambush but we were out pounding the paddies and two snipers shot at us and messed up our radio operator really bad and they yelled that there was one crawling along this dike on the other side, two rice paddies away from me, and I took a couple pot shots at him. After all the excitement died down we went over and looked and I hit him right in the head.

S: You had mentioned before the booby traps and the mines. What were the so called "Bouncing Betty" mines?

B: That was a little trick the United States had too. As a matter of fact they even had them during World War II. They are little mines, well they weren't little but they were mines that were underground. You'd step on one, this thing would spring up in the air about three feet off the ground and it would blow up and it would get you right in the mid section and that. Really nasty little thing. We weren't the only ones that had them.

S: Did you hear or know of any Americans who were killed by so called "friendly fire"?

B: No, not really. We heard of incidents where our artillery rounds, something went wrong and they landed too close and that, but nothing was ever confirmed that our artillery did anything like that. Still, I have no doubt that it did happen. But this happened in every war. I know when I was in the Navy, they'd fire big guns off the ship. Every once in a while, as soon as the projectile would leave the barrel of the gun, you could hear it flutter, and it's tumbling end over end, there's something wrong there and that thing doesn't go anywhere near the target. So mistakes happen. Especially when humans are involved, there are always mistakes.

S: One thing we hear a lot about is that there were often times bad relations between the officers and the enlisted men. How did you get along with your superior officers?

B: First of all, I don't like the word superior. Senior officers, maybe. But I hate to think anybody is superior to me. With the exception of one guy, as a matter of fact, he was a warrant officer, and as a matter of fact, the country music singer, Bobby Bare is his brother, Jack Bare, I got along with him super. We were good drinking buddies. The rest of the officers I tolerated. Most of the time, the officers got a survivor's attitude and a short timer's attitude and towards the end of their tour, they started being... Just kind of a transformation would come over them where they were nice, they had been through all the bad stuff and what was going on was bad and that.

But when they first got there, they were real jerks. Most of them had just come out of officer's candidate school and they had this training. They got to Vietnam usually as a 2nd Lieutenant and they thought they knew everything there was to fighting a war and that and they had no idea about fighting a war. They tried to do it by the text book and it just didn't work that way. Usually the best thing they could do is get ahold of a sergeant that had been in Vietnam going on close

to his twelve months, close to the time for him to get home. He's the one that knows what's going on, about the booby traps, the trip wires, how the people are acting.

S: Was it common for men sometimes to disobey orders from these officers?

B: Not common, but it happened. Sometimes, especially again, your newer officers and that, they would tell you something like going through this area that you knew was mined, you could see looking out through it, you knew there was something wrong. Maybe not necessarily mined, booby trapped, where the enemy might have had it zeroed in with their mortars, or artillery rounds, or rockets, or whatever and you knew there was something wrong about it and this idiot would tell you to go through there. I couldn't blame anybody at all for saying "no", especially if there wasn't any big reason to go through that area when you could go around it.

S: What does the term fragging mean?

B: That's taking a hand grenade and throwing it at somebody. Usually that's where the enlisted men will throw a hand grenade in an officer's or a senior NCO's hooch to kill them. I never saw that happen even when I was in the military police, I never had instances or known about it happening, but I heard about it and have read books that that's happened that were supposedly accurate books and I wouldn't doubt it.

S: Blacks maintain that there was a different experience in Vietnam for blacks than whites. Could you relate anything to that?

B: That has been that way all through time. They even had it during World War II. They had companies of strictly black people. Yes, we had a Race Riot in one of the base camps I was on when I was in Vietnam. As a matter of fact, it was the 1st Infantry Division's Headquarters base camp. We had a Race Riot one night, blacks against whites. They were out there beating the hell out of one another with clubs and stuff. They didn't get into any shooting or stabbings and stuff. We never did find out what caused it. Probably just the tension. That is probably one of the things that is still affecting Vietnam Veterans today is the tension. Twenty-four hours a day you are scared there. You don't know what's going to happen and the shorter you get, the closer to the time you come home, the more scared you get. Especially at such a young age, too. To me, your mind can't handle something like that. It's hard to sit here and explain how scared a person

can really be, especially twenty-four hours a day. It really does a number on you. That's why a lot of the guys, I won't say a lot of the guys because that is a misconception that goes around... Well, I will say a lot of the guys because thirty-some million went to Vietnam, but a lot of the guys did drugs there. Myself, when I was in Vietnam, I never did drugs, I never took a hit off a joint. My whole thing was whenever we got to base camp it was getting drunk every night. Passing out on my bunk, getting up the next morning and going out and fighting the war all over again.

S: How did people happen to acquire the drugs?

B: Well we were told, and I wouldn't doubt it, the oriental people are very smart people. They don't throw anything away. We were told that the enemy supplied the drugs. They grew a lot of the stuff right there and forced the South Vietnamese to sell them or got the South Vietnamese to sell them on their own. They'd sell anything you could think of, marijuana, cocaine, whatever. The South Vietnamese could sell it to the soldiers at ridiculously low prices compared to the prices around here.

S: Was it hard forming friendships in Vietnam? Or did you?

B: I never really thought of that. I'd say, yes. Because basically when you go there as a new guy and you're there by yourself, until you can prove yourself in battle, basically, the guys are leery of you because the new guy doesn't know what's going on. He's had the training here in the United States and is reasonably good but until you can get over there and really get into it, everybody is a little leery of him that he's going to do something stupid and get somebody else killed, too. Usually it's after (I'm talking about the infantry) you've proven yourself in battle, everything seems to go pretty good. I guess Vietnam is the same as any other war. I know my father told me about World War II and Vietnam was the same in the sense that you tried not to build up one really strong friendship with one person because you can really go crazy if something happens to him. Vietnam, the only good thing I have to say about Vietnam, is that I went there and back four times and all in one piece. You try to live in your own world and get back home.

S: What did you find when you were in Vietnam to be the basic skills of survival?

B: Kill the enemy before they killed you. That's about it. Never set up a pattern. I did that and it almost got me killed, or a routine, and always, always be

leery of something different. If there is something different there, watch it, there is something wrong. It ended up working that way all the time. The enemy would take a pop can or a beer can, cut the bottom out of it and put a hand grenade inside of it and lay it along side of a road and it looked like it had fallen off a truck or somebody had dropped it. You walked up there and picked it up and the hand grenade fell out at your foot. So anything out of the "normal", stay away from it because there is usually something wrong with it. Booby trap or a sniper might be in the trees, like you've got a pop can laying along side the road and has that zeroed in so when you walk over to it, he's got you.

S: One man I spoke to said that when he was in Vietnam he formed a primitive state of mind. Does that statement mean anything to you?

B: I heard of it and I had no doubt that it happened. I never did. Well, I take that back. Actually I think just about all your infantrymen would, in a sense, that when you go out it's kill the enemy before they kill me- type thing. Of course, that's not a very primitive way of thinking. They are doing it all over their world right now.

S: How did you react to the vast change in culture when you got to Vietnam?

B: It didn't really bother me so much...Well, I was the exception because being there in the Navy, not being in Vietnam on land itself, but more importantly when I was in the Navy going to places like Hong Kong and Japan and Australia and that and seeing the different cultures. Vietnam, especially after being in Hong Kong and seeing how the people lived and their idea of living is below, way below our poverty standards so it really didn't affect me. The thing that affected me most of all in the changes was coming back to the United States. That's where the big change was.

S: Do you want to elaborate on what you mean by the big change?

B: When I went to Vietnam in the Army I didn't need to go. I had already been there three times in the Navy and I was proud, I was under the impression that we were going to go over and at that time the big terminology was "Stem the tide of communism" we were going to kick the communists out of South Vietnam and let the South Vietnamese people be free. Then I got into Vietnam and found out it didn't work that way. They really started working on my mind. When you came home, normally the first thing you'd do, as soon as you left Oakland,

California you got in your civilian clothes and the first thing you didn't do was tell everybody you'd just been in Vietnam because they really didn't care and some people got down right hostile about it. Very negative feelings and that. A lot of Vietnam veterans even today, they have been back twenty maybe even thirty years, their families and friends don't know that they were in Vietnam.

S: What about your opinions of the South Vietnamese Army?

B: Not very good. When I was in the infantry we went out a couple times with some ARVNs, South Vietnamese Army. The first thing they liked to do is if anything happens, we get a sniper who takes one pot shot at us, the first thing they like to do is fire their M-16 on automatic and throw out about twenty bullets in a matter of a few seconds. The second they've done that the sniper knows where you're at. They're not very reliable. A lot of times, if the enemy sniper shoots at you, one or two shots, you turn around and look and the South Vietnamese soldiers are gone. I read a story about an infantry outfit in Vietnam and they got ambushed and the ARVNs, the South Vietnamese soldiers, took off. Their outfit got overrun. This one guy laid there, he was wounded and the VC's thought that he was dead so he laid there and pretended to be dead and here some of the South Vietnamese soldiers that were just with this American was with the Viet Cong, our enemy, and they were searching him. One second they were fighting with us. You can't generalize anything in Vietnam because a lot of times it depends on who the winning side is and who the South Vietnamese soldiers are fighting with.

We had what we called tiger scouts, which were captured soldiers, maybe not captured, maybe they surrendered to the Americans. Tiger scouts were the enemy soldiers that came over to us. They were either captured or surrendered. We would retrain them over to our military way of life to some extent and brainwash them over to our way of thinking, and the tiger scouts, the ones that I operated with, you could trust them with your life, especially in comparison with a South Vietnamese soldier. This would be a former enemy that I'm talking about. Where as the South Vietnamese soldier was a guy that we were there helping his country. There's no way, especially when I got closer to leaving Vietnam, there was no way I'd trust a South Vietnamese soldier. Where our tiger scouts, they were really good people. Especially they were the ones that made all these booby traps and everything and they'd show you how they were made and how to find them and that.

- S: How would you rate the medical attention given to the G.I.'s during the war?
- B: Super. Especially because of the helicopter. I read statistics once on the survival rate in Vietnam in comparison to Korea and World War II and it was just so tremendously different. Because in Vietnam or like the time that our radio operator, a sniper got him, I would say in less than one half hour he was in the hospital. A M.A.S.H. unit in Vietnam. Our medic patched him up as the best as he could right then and as soon as it happened, choppers were called for. When everything was cleared the medical evacuation chopper came in, picked him up and I'd say probably within less than one half hour he was in the hospital. He survived it alright, physically, at least.
- S: How good were the medics?
- B: Pretty good for what kind of training they had. They were basically just first aid people. You've seen war movies where a guy's done an appendectomy or something like that. I've never seen anything like that in Vietnam. But these guys, they did a good job, especially with the environment and the mental factors. I know I could never do anything like that. It's really a bummer seeing somebody messed up like that and then working on him all the time.
- S: When you were about half way through your tour of duty, did you think you were going to make it out?
- B: I never had any doubts about making it out. I came six inches from running over a fifty pound mine in a jeep once and that made me a firm believer. But I never had any doubts that I was going to make it out.
- S: What kept you going?
- B: You ask a lot of things I never even thought about before. Basically what kept me going at nighttime was when we got back to the base camp, back to our company area, getting drunk and plastered out of my mind. During the day, most of the time you didn't have time to think about things like going home and that. You knew how many days it was for you to get home and that, but you didn't like to think about it a lot because it was really a bummer.
- S: Did you receive a lot of mail when you were in Vietnam?
- B: Oh, yes. I think it took something like four to six days from when it was mailed here in Ohio that it got to me in Vietnam. Most of our mail was shipped to, in the case of the Army in Vietnam, was shipped to San

Francisco and here in the United States, normally by airplane. It was flown to Vietnam in commercial jets and then most of the time, they flew it out to you in helicopters. Even if you were out there "pounding the paddies" out in the rice paddies, they'd bring your mail out to you because they knew that was a real mental factor, a real morale builder for you and they'd bring it in by choppers or by convoys to the base camp.

S: Mail was delivered daily?

B: Most of the time, yes. Also, they had Armed Forces Radios Vietnam. It was a radio system actually that was run by the United States military. I don't remember where their base station was but they had transmitters in four different locations in Vietnam. We would get the current music and the current news. The news was censored to some extent, like for instance, I was back in the United States when the Kent State shootings happened but stuff like that would just gradually filter into Vietnam usually by your parents or your next of kin would write you and tell you about it. The United States tried to keep the really bad things like the demonstrations and the riots here, they tried to keep that out of their news to some extent. They would really make it low key if they did have it. But we got to listen to the current music and that and that really helped, especially at that age where music was a big thing.

S: Although this might sound kind of odd, what you're saying is that you did have some good times in Vietnam?

B: I never could remember any. Sitting around and talking with Bobby Bare's brother about Bobby... Jack was in Vietnam and Bobby Bare's wife was pregnant and Bobby had written Jack a letter and told him... We also had Armed Forces Television Stations in Vietnam and they would show a lot of the current things, Bonanza and something like that. Bobby told Jack that when the baby was born he would tell him on television at the Grand Ole Opry and he did. One night, he got up performing and when he was done, he said something like, "To my brother, Jack in Vietnam, it's a boy!" That was pretty neat. But as far as having any fun there, not really. I never took any R & R (rest and relaxation) while I was there but I saved up most of my money to buy a car when I got back. I didn't have any money to--I'm talking about when I was there in the Army--to go to someplace like Hong Kong or even what we call in-country R & R (rest and relaxation) to Cam Rahn Bay. I never got a chance to go there either.

S: What does it mean when people in Vietnam say they're short?



B: It means it's getting close to the time for you to come home, to come back to the world. We call the United States the world because to us, Vietnam was nowhere. It was below the bottom and the shorter you got, which meant that the closer it was time to come home, you started building up a short-timer's attitude. You knew... Well, today is February the 24 you get to Vietnam today, February 24 and next February 24 if you survive, you're going home. Each day that goes by, you start ticking it off and the closer you got to your time to come home the more scared you got because like I said before, you were afraid something was going to happen to you when it got time to come home so you got a short-timer's attitude.

S: What was your last day like?

B: Actually my last day in Vietnam was very boring. It was on the Long Bihn base camp and we just sat around, processed out, signed some papers, took our military payment certificates and they traded them in for green back dollars, and we waited for our plane to come home. But it was scary because you heard about Long Bihn and Bien Hoa, a couple of our big bases, getting rockets and mortars. I don't ever remember hearing of any of our commercial jets that took us back and forth to Vietnam, what we called Freedom Birds, I never remember hearing of any of them being shot down, but boy, you thought about it. You thought about rockets and mortars dropping in on you while you were there waiting to come home. It was a very nervous time for us.

S: So you did have time to say some goodbyes, then?

B: I didn't really have any goodbyes for anybody to say it to. Just a few guys in my outfit that were friends and they knew you were leaving because believe me, every morning you got up, you'd say, "Hey, I got six more days to go and then tomorrow I got five more days!" See your last day in your unit is normally not your last day in Vietnam because normally you'll leave your unit and then they'll ship you down to Bien Hoa and you process out there. It was either Long Bihn or Bien Hoa and you process out there. So you're there a day or two, maybe even three or four, depending on if they screwed up, which had been known to happen. So most of the time when you got there, your last day in Vietnam, you weren't with your friends, the guys you had just spent twelve months with. You were there with strangers, just like when you went over to Vietnam, with an airplane load of strangers.

S: Do you remember the exact date you left Vietnam?

- B: No. It was in December of 1969. I extended two months over there so I could have my thirty day leave over Christmas time. I have no idea when it was. I think it was about the second week...No, I think it was closer to Christmas, the third week of December.
- S: When you were leaving the country did you have any regrets about leaving?
- B: No way. Not at all. And I tell you what, when I came back, I talked to my father about Vietnam, he's a World War II soldier and when I came back and told him about Vietnam, he's just now coming around to believing some of the things that I've told him. Especially after seeing some of these movies that are out now. But when I came back, I told him that I would not go back to Vietnam and I meant it. I would have deserted and I would have split and had gone to Australia or Canada or somewhere but there was no way they were getting me back there again.
- S: The last person I interviewed said that they went to Vietnam basically a kid and came back an old man. Does that mean anything?
- B: Oh, yes. I just showed a movie to my nephew last night, it was called "Cease Fire", Don Johnson made it. An excellent movie about Post Traumatic Stress Disorder, flashbacks and that. One of the guys in the Vet Center was telling Don Johnson's wife that this woman went to Vietnam and she was telling him after she came back that she wanted to go back to Vietnam. He said, "What for?" And she said, "To find what she left there." Basically what she left there was her youth. So nobody can imagine how hard it is. Nobody can explain a war. Even seeing actual footage on television and that. When you hear the mortars, the bombs and rockets and whatever, exploding, and the bullets, popping, going over your head and stuff like that, you have no idea how loud it is and the mass confusion. From what I understand, the average firefight in Vietnam was just a matter of minutes long, but it seemed like hours to a half a day long, even longer than that, sometimes. It just seemed like time went so slow. It was really, really, a screwy situation. When you went to Vietnam, especially the age, the average age was nineteen. To me, nineteen, you're mentally not grown up enough, well I don't think at any age you're grown up enough or you're mentally capable of handling a war. But at nineteen, I think you're still mentally growing and you go to Vietnam and kill people and see your friends killed, or lose parts of their bodies and stuff, believe me, you've changed. The rest of your life will never be the same.

S: What was the trip home like?

B: It was really nothing much. We got on an airplane and from Vietnam it went to Japan, we got off the airplane in Japan, they refueled. They had a store where you could buy booze and it was tax exempt. You were allowed to have, I think it was one gallon of whatever you wanted. They had Canadian Club, all the big name bottles of booze over there. I got me five fifths I think it was. They had them in a cardboard carrying box and you weren't allowed to open them up or anything until you got home. But you better believe, we opened them up when we got back on that airplane and headed home. It wasn't sitting around getting drunk on the airplane. We drank some and we got a little happy and that. When we took off from Vietnam, it was so quiet on that airplane. I had my face stuck to the window. I'm taking movies as we're flying out of Vietnam and that. It got so quiet on that airplane and I was expecting everybody to yell and scream and shout and be happy and excited and that, but it never really happened until we touched down right outside of Oakland California, Travis Air Force Base. That's when the yelling started.

S: What was the first thing when you got back home?

B: Took off my uniform. It was no big deal for me since I had already spent four years in the Navy, being in the military and going to Vietnam, it was no big deal for me to come home. When I came home from Vietnam in the Army, I took an airport limousine, nothing but a van from the Cleveland Hopkins Airport to Stow and that let me off just a couple doors from my aunt's house. I walked up to my aunt's front door and we always walked right into her house like we walked into ours and I walked in her front door and she was in the kitchen doing something and I said, "Hi Aunt Clara." and she said, "Oh, hi, Dan, how are you doing?" like "Where were you yesterday? I didn't see you," and here I just spent fourteen months in Vietnam. She was the first one I saw when I came back and it was like nothing. It was like no big deal. Her son had been to Vietnam and he got home before I did. But it was really a strange reception to come home like that. You are expecting the people to fall all over you, glad to see you. Nobody was expecting me to come home then in the first place, because I told them that I had extended for a half a year and that I wasn't coming home until March or some time like that. I wanted to surprise them and be home for Christmas. To my aunt, it was no surprise. Now to my parents, they were surprised. I went walking in the front door and my mother was reading the newspaper and man, that newspaper went everywhere. She jumped up and started bawling right off the bat I

started bawling and she threw that newspaper and it just went when she jumped up. That was a good feeling.

S: Have you ever had the desire to go back to Vietnam?

B: I'd like to go back to Vietnam to try to get some of our POW's and MIA's out. I had no idea how you can do anything like that. First of all, I'm not physically in shape for it, I don't have the finances or the equipment or whatever, but to go back on like a vacation and see the places where I was at, no I have no desire to see it at all. Maybe one of these days, I will but I'm not that thrilled about seeing those people, first of all.

S: Have you been to the Vietnam Veteran's Memorial in Washington, D.C.?

B: I marched in the parade and attended all the ceremonies for the dedication of the memorial in 1983, I think it was. It was super. The reception was outstanding. When I march in parades, I wear a complete combat outfit; the steel pot, the pack, 200 rounds of M-60 machine gun bullets criss-crossed across my chest, jungle fatigues, the whole bit. I carry a Prisoner of War Missing in Action flag. I dress like this the day of the parade and the ceremonies of the memorial and I was really leery because basically, I was afraid of what the Vietnam Veterans were going to do; think I was crazy to dress like that or maybe some of them would get hostile and take me out or something like that. Everywhere I've gone and everything I've done with Vietnam Veterans has really surprised me and it did that day. Because I had hundreds and hundreds of Vietnam Vets come up and ask me if we could have our picture taken together. They'd hand somebody their camera and say, "Take a picture of us." We'd put our arms around one another and here I am standing with all this stuff on. It was really super.

S: What do you perceive to be the main feelings of today's Veterans?

B: Shafted, or still getting shafted by the government. We have a strong, you might even say hate for any type of government people, even your local government people, you just don't trust them because they lied to us when we went to Vietnam. They lied to us in Vietnam and they lied to us when we came back from Vietnam. There is a lot of Vietnam Veterans that are getting involved in politics and trying to change this image. But it is just such a big distrust for people like that. I imagine it will change one of these days for some of them but I don't know. I recently got shafted by the government where I work, the higher up and that.

It dawned on me then that I still had a distrust for....Especially people who are real high in authority and that. You always wonder what their motives are.

S: If someone were listening to this tape in 2087, what would you tell them to remember about the American involvement in Vietnam?

B: I don't even need to wait for that long. I'd go out with my POW and MIA display and set up at malls or wherever and talk to people and that. To think that I want everybody to remember. I had one guy, I was set up at the Eastwood Mall. This guy had come up, and usually Vietnam Veterans are pretty easy to spot. I knew he was a Vietnam Vet, and he was really mad at me. He told me, especially after he had seen my photo albums and some pictures I had of some dead Viet Cong in there and he says, "Why don't you forget this stuff?" I don't want anybody to forget Vietnam. You can see right now that the United States is forgetting Vietnam and they are playing the same kind of games down in South America that we played in Vietnam. So the thing I want everybody to remember is just plain war. You can't survive with it.

S: Dan, well thank you very much for doing the interview and coming in today. Thank you.

B: Sure.

END OF INTERVIEW