

YOUNGSTOWN STATE UNIVERSITY

ORAL HISTORY PROGRAM

Vietnam Veterans Project

Vietnam Experience

O. H. 630

DONALD MALLEEN

Interviewed

by

Thomas Kirker

on

December 8, 1983

YOUNGSTOWN STATE UNIVERSITY

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INTERVIEWEE: DONALD MALLEN

INTERVIEWER: Thomas Kirker

SUBJECT: Vietnam life, people, customs, military life,  
injuries, coming home, life after the war

DATE: December 8, 1983

K: This is an interview with Don Mallen for the Youngstown State University Oral History Program on Vietnam Veterans of Lawrence County. He is being interviewed by Tom Kirker at the interviewer's house at 3015 Spring Garden Avenue, New Castle, Pennsylvania. The time is 7:36 p.m. on December 8, 1983.

Are you originally from around here?

M: No, I was born and raised pretty much in Pittsburgh. I have been here going on two years now. I moved up here because my job moved up here.

K: How did you get into the service?

M: I enlisted. I had gone to a year of school at Edinboro State College. I had gone right after high school. I went really before I was ready to go to school. By the end of the year I had decided that I wanted to go into the military. After thinking about it for awhile, I decided to go into the Marines. At the time, I thought that they were the best and I wanted to be with the best.

K: What year did you enlist?

M: I enlisted in 1968. I went in around the end of the school year. At the time I was thinking that Vietnam would be an inevitability although I really didn't know much about Vietnam at the time. I hadn't paid too much attention about current events. I was more into past events because I didn't watch TV that much and hear current

news reports and things like that.

A friend of mine from high school had gone into the Marines. He had died a couple of months before that. That was another thing that added to my decision to go into the Marine Corps. I was following in his footsteps a little bit. He was a really good friend of mine.

I went to Paris Island. After Paris Island I went to Camp La Jeune. My training wound up after roughly six months. I went for a short leave. I went out to Camp Pendleton in California. I left for Vietnam on Thanksgiving Day, 1968. I went to Okinawa first and stayed there about a day and got into Da Nang. I stayed in Da Nang for a day or a day and a half until I was sent out to my division which was the 1st Marine Division. There were headquarters there. Then I was sent to the Regimental Headquarters which was the 5th Marine Regiment. I filtered down until I got to the Battalion Headquarters, the 1st Battalion. I stayed with the 1st Battalion for about two weeks as a battalion clerk in headquarters with the 1st Battalion 5th Marines. At the time there was an organization called a CAP Unit, Combined Action Platoons. It was an organization made up of the Marine platoon and a platoon of South Vietnamese regional forces. They would man strong points and would be very close with the village. It would be more or less like village or small town defense. The idea was to work with the people, to maintain a good rapport with the people, and to protect them. In order to become part of that type of unit you had to have some field experience. After my second week as a clerk, and also because I really didn't want to be a clerk and join the Marine Corps for that, I asked to be transferred to a line company. I was transferred to Charlie Company 1st Battalion 5th Marines. I was with them in early December. I stayed with that company for the five months that I was in Vietnam. I was in Vietnam from November 1968 to about April 10, 1969 when I caught a bullet in my arm. It necessitated my med-evac back to the States.

K: What do you remember most about the Combined Action Platoons?

M: As it turned out although I didn't serve as a member of Combined Action Platoon, we did operate with them. Frankly, my best memories were when we would go with them on evening ambushes sometimes. We looked forward to it because we could get a little extra chow and things. Being in a permanent installation, we could kind of relax sometimes before we were going out. It was a way of getting away from the company. I had operated with them because when I got to Charlie Company, my MOS (Military Occupational Specialty) was anti-tank assault man. I had trained in rockets and the 106 recoilless rifle flame throwers and things. I did that with the company for the first couple of weeks of

being with Charlie Company.

After that there was a unit, a roving ambush team, called hunter-killer teams. I can remember filling sandbags. That was kind of a tedious job. It was hot in Vietnam. If you talk to a lot of Vietnamese veterans they seem to have the same impression upon getting off of the plane in Vietnam. It was just like walking into a wall of heat. After awhile, I guess you got used to it the best that you could. It was always hot, but you kind of dealt with it after awhile. I remember one afternoon filling sandbags and a call came over the radio that they needed another volunteer for Swamp Fox. That was the code name, radio call sign, for the hunter-killer team of our company. I told the radio operator that was with us to call them up and tell them that they had their's.

I went with them and stayed with Swamp Fox for the rest of the time. I liked being with Swamp Fox even more than being with a regular squad or rocket squad that I had been with, not that there had been any more camaraderie or rapport. As a member of the rocket team, part of the weapons section of my company, I had made a number of good friends, both other rocket men and machine gunners. I had some good friends. There was just a little more of a flare with Swamp Fox. We would operate a lot at night. We would operate in small units of four and six. The most we ever had were eight men. It seemed to be effective for what our purpose was. Our purpose was to find the enemy and pin them down with fire and call in artillery, air strikes, or call in the rest of the company. Moving in a small group like that you are less likely to be noticed or seen than say a larger group. A larger group may make more noise than a smaller group. It was a way of fighting guerrillas by being guerrillas. I liked that. I had joined the Marines because I had been impressed with them. I was young and relatively naive when I had gone into the service. I was still impressed with things like that and esprit de corps and to me, that was the best way of doing it.

We skated a lot also. I liked that also. I got out of a lot of tedious things. I didn't fill sandbags anymore. Then, again, there was more risk at times. If we had run into a larger force, we could have been very well wiped out. We did have to be careful. There were good points and bad points about being with the hunter-killer team. Being smaller, I felt that we were more effective.

After I had gone in with Swamp Fox, in a way, it might have even saved my life. The day after I had joined that particular unit of Swamp Fox . . . Part of our duties where I was stationed at during a good part of my time

in Vietnam was a place called An Hoi. An Hoi was about thirty-five miles southwest of Da Nang. It was more or less at the end of a valley. It has been a pretty contested area throughout the war ever since the Americans first got there and before the Americans were actively involved in that area. The South Vietnamese were always fighting the North Vietnamese and the Vietcong there. It was part of the infiltration group on the way to Da Nang. You just followed the valley to the end of the valley and you would reach Da Nang. You would reach the coast. With the mountains on either side of the broad valley, it was a natural access.

Part of our duties at An Hoi were to maintain our regimental headquarters and serve as protection for it and also to maintain a small landing strip, more like a helicopter landing pad, to maintain that presence in the valley, and to protect Da Nang also. Part of our daily duties in this area were to man observation posts along the road that led from An Hoi that would eventually go into Da Nang. It followed the valley until it came to a river. I believe it was called the Song Dei. There was a bridge at one time, but the bridge just kept getting blown up. They just really ended up having an operational ferry at the time. The place had a name. It was called Liberty Bridge. I found it funny in a way coming from Pittsburgh because there was a Liberty Bridge there also. It was an inside joke among the people from this area, "Hey, here we are at Liberty Bridge."

To get back to my point of how joining Swamp Fox almost saved my life, the day after I joined I should have been out on an observation post. I would have been out with a couple other of the machine gunners who were my friends. That day they got hit by some Vietcong with B-40 rockets. Two of my friends died and one was very badly wounded. In fact, I had thought he died. Later when I was in Bethesda Hospital recovering from my own wounds, I met him again. It was kind of strange seeing him wheel himself down the hall. He was in a wheelchair. I thought he was dead and to see him alive was a real pleasant surprise. That is one thing that I never forget about my images of Vietnam. If I hadn't joined Swamp Fox, I could have very well been one of those dead Marines. The radio operator that I told to call in to be a volunteer for Swamp Fox had tried to talk me out of it. He thought that I had a much better chance of dying in Swamp Fox. Ironically, he was dead the next day. His name was Zimmerman. I never forgot that because Dillon's original name was Zimmerman. In a way it saved my life. Like I said, I spent the rest of my time with Swamp Fox.

I started out in Swamp Fox being a new guy on tail end Charlie for being last position in our column when we

moved out. We would usually move out in a single column. Being a small unit, it was really the only way that we would move. Larger units would have flankers and things like that. They would get a little more elaborate for protection. Just being spread out in a single line or in a staggered line in sort of a staggered rectangle shape to the column would usually be the way that we moved. I started out being at the end.

The next position that I had was radio operator. I only did that for about a week. I didn't like being a radio operator because one, it was a lot of extra weight to carry. I was really a glorified porter. I was carrying our radio. The team leader of our team would utilize the radio and contact our company headquarters for any reason. All that I was really doing was carrying the radio. As I found out later on at the end of the week, the radio was a real target. I had the antennae shot off of my radio and I didn't think that was too interesting. The next new guy that came into the team got the radio and I took another job that nobody really minded me taking, and that was point.

A lot of people didn't like the point. People felt that it was a very exposed position. A lot of pointmen died. They would maybe trip up a booby trap or something. I always felt that I was safer there. For one thing, I was out front. I had to totally rely on myself. It was almost like the James Bond kind of "licensed to kill" thing. If something happened, I was expected to react fast. I had to react fast not only to save my own life, but to save many of the men on my team. I was expected to have quick reaction. I never did make any mistakes in killing any civilians and things like that. If I had an accident, it would have been easier to get out of it being the pointman. It was my job to react quick. I kept the point for Swamp Fox for the rest of the time that I was there. I had to put myself into this situation. I was walking in this place that was totally foreign. It is country, but not like country that we know around here. It is a totally different environment and you are armed to the teeth. It was primitive probably in a way. There was this pride that the job you were doing was worth something. I never really had that kind of feeling about any kind of job that I had in civilian life. The responsibility just wasn't there as it was with the Swamp Fox. I was part of a team that functioned well. I liked being with Swamp Fox.

K: How far out in front were you walking?

M: Anywhere from ten yards to fifty yards and sometimes more. A lot of our activity was at night so we wouldn't want to bunch up too much. If we were doing a daytime patrol, then we would spread out a little more. We would be less likely

to be seen. If we would be moving at night we would be a little bit closer, but then again, we would not carry some of the usual equipment. We would not wear a helmet or a flapjacket at night. We would just wear a soft cover hood to break up the outline of your head. We didn't wear things that would make noise or grenades or things that we would carry and tie us down. We tried to make as little noise as possible. We blackened our faces. Not having the luxury of camo paint, the Army would use mud. We would use smudge from smudge pots. When we were at a base camp and they were moving out, we would have these emersion heater kind of things. After you were done eating, you would dip your mess kit into the boiling water. After these had been done, you would have smudge build up along the heater. It worked pretty well as far as blackening up your face. The only problem with it was at night you also had to use bug juice. It was a mosquito repellent. It was absolutely necessary because of the heat, but at night they would be out. They would be pretty bothersome. The mosquito repellent we had worked pretty well, but it also washed off your smudge or mud. It was kind of a trade-off. You didn't want to gleam whether it be in the moonlight or flarelight. A lot of flares would be dropped maybe from planes from another outfit operating in some other area or from around the area around An Hoi where the rest of the people were back at the base camp.

We usually operated out of a base camp in the role of being protection to the regimental headquarters and to Da Nang. It was like being a blocking force. The other part of the time we would be out on an operation where we would be really roaming around. You would dig in and set up a company perimeter. We would operate patrols from the company perimeter then. On occasion we would stay instead of going out on a patrol or ambush. We would be a part of the security for our company headquarter unit.

K: How many days between patrol did you have off?

M: We never really had off. That is another thing that made the war a really tedious kind of thing. It wasn't a kind of thing that you could turn off and go into town and have a few beers. If you were to base camp, you might get a night off every once in awhile.

By this time in 1968 and 1969, for whatever reason they would just keep you out there until you were on what they called your R & R (rest and relaxation). You would get five days in Japan, Thailand, or somewhere. It is something that you looked forward to. As it turned out, I never did go on an R & R. I was kind of saving it up until I had been in the country for about seven or eight months

and I had some money saved up to have one hell of a good time. As it turned out, I got hit before I had my R & R.

It would be a constant kind of a thing. You would have on the average maybe four hours of sleep. Sometimes during the day you would catch naps if you could. When you weren't napping or out on patrol, you might be playing cards. We played a game called Back Alley a lot. You would clean your weapons sometime. You would do things like that. There was a lot of time especially at a base camp where it just dragged and you were just there.

When you were out on an operation, you would be out moving and be away from the base camp. You would walk a lot. You did a hell of a lot of walking. I never did go on any helicopter type of operations. The only time that I was choppered was when I was choppered in and ~~madu-vao~~ I was choppered out. We were supposed to go, but it always ended up that we walked where we were going. We did a lot of walking up and down the valley. Later, the year I got hit, we crossed over a mountain range into another valley called Khe Sanh, valley of mountains.

When I first got there, it was the end of the monsoon season. It was winding down, but I was still there for a good bit of that. Monsoons at night would be cold, wet, and damp a lot. When it would rain, sometimes it would just rain for days. That could be really devastating to your spirits just being wet all of the time. Then when that ended it was pretty much dry all of the time. The days would be almost unbearably hot especially in the direct sunlight. Humping close to 100 pounds of equipment when you were out on an operation carrying your personal gear and a lot of ammunition, food for a couple of days, all of this weight would add up. The fatigue and tediousness were some of the worst enemies that we had. Sometimes you would actually pray that they would hit so you could go back to the rear to rest for awhile. When I got shot, that is all that I thought would happen. I was joking with some of the guys while I was waiting for the helicopter. I would get a week of clean sheets in Da Nang. As it turned out, the bullet that hit me damaged the nerve, the only nerve in my right arm. I had to go to Japan and then back to the States. That was basically as far as our activity . . . It was just pretty much routine moving from here to there, moving from either a base camp near An Hoi or pulling guard at Liberty Bridge that I had mentioned earlier guarding the ferry and things.

We were into a number of fire fights. It was nothing that I call really big, but a lot of the attrition kind of warfare that sniped at us. We would snipe at them.



Operating in Swamp Fox we were affected to the point where we did pull off some ambushes that were effective. I can remember one in particular. The first one was really good. In a sense it was almost as a vengeance for my friends that had died at the observation post. It was Observation Post #6 where they had died.

There was sort of a bend in the road from An Hoi to Liberty Bridge and onto Da Nang. Just about halfway between An Hoi and Liberty Bridge, keep in mind that this is a wide dirt road; the observation posts were there so during the day you would make sure that they weren't digging any booby traps, although they would place them at night. Every morning an engineering team would have to go down. They were usually protected by a couple of tanks to sweep the road. We would pull security detail for the sweeps on occasion also. This first ambush that was really effective, we had gone down the night before or two nights before to OP #5 overlooking Observation Post #6. There were four of us. We were hoping that we could see some activity. Evidentially, they had spotted us first because we were spread out into a square. We stayed there for awhile. We really weren't making any noise we thought. Around 11:00 p.m. or 11:30 p.m. a grenade went off right in the middle of us. It was kind of uncanny because if they were trying to get one of us, they missed. We just busted a lot of castle. We threw a couple of magazines in the 360° circle around us and then moved to another position and then moved to another position so that we could shake whoever was trying to get us. We did because we weren't bothered the rest of the night. We were kind of pissed at that. We were kind of pissed that our friends were killed we knew earlier.

The next night we pulled something that worked really well. At the end of the day, a truck would go down. The truck would have a .50 caliber machine gun mounted on it. It was a twin fifty so that it had protection. We drove down with the truck while they were picking up the observation posts. At Observation Post #5 when it stopped, we slid out the back. Because the road was dry at that time, there was a lot of dust. It was a big cloud of dust. You couldn't see the truck. We slid off of the back and got into the bushes, the high grass, to the left side of the road. The truck went down and picked up the people and it came back. We went very slowly and crawled on our bellies for 200, 250, or 300 yards to a clump of trees opposite OP #6. We just dug in there for awhile. About twenty minutes after the truck left and it was still light, we saw three Vietcong come out of one tree line. They started probing around the observation posts. They probably wanted to set a booby trap. They would do something like that on occasion. There were two

adults and maybe one teen-ager. One had a rifle. I believe it was an SKS. We had just wanted to blow them away because we had them dead in our sights. There was no way that if we all just opened up on them that they would get out of it. The team leader called back to the headquarters. They said, "Oh, we will take them alive as prisoners to get some information." Although that may have been sound at the time, we just knew that we weren't going to get them. As soon as we jumped up to tell them to halt or freeze, they took off. We had to cross the road and chase them for awhile. Fortunately, the way the terrain was, OP #6 was a little bit high and away from OP #6 it sloped up. It would very gradually drop. You had a good shot at them. They were making for a tree line. They split. Two went towards one tree line and the other went off to another tree line. Myself and another guy chased the one. The other guys went over chasing the others. We brought the one down although it wasn't easy. Usually when you watch TV you hit a guy once and he falls down. It isn't like that in real life. The M-16 is a fairly good weapon if it is high velocity. We had to hit this guy several times. His adrenaline was up. He got hit several times. He knew he was hit because you could see the impact of the bullets. You could see some splatter of blood or flesh. You knew you hit him, but he didn't fall down. That was the first time. It was such a clear shot that I was taken back at first. This isn't the way that it is supposed to be. I finished off a magazine and finally brought him down. We were headed towards where the body had fallen when we had started receiving a bunch of fire from the tree line both from the left and to our front. We were pinned down. I believe that the same thing happened to the guys that were following the other two. They had just sent off the three and there were a bunch of other people in the tree line which is smart enough. The one guy off to our left, since I, at the point, was on the left, I started dealing a rifle exchange with him. I went through a couple magazines doing this. I would pop up and fire off a bunch of rounds. I would pop down and a bunch of rounds would go over my head. I was over what you could barely call cover, but when the bullets start flying, it is unbelievable how you can find even the barest cover. The single little rise in the ground will offer you cover. I did this for a little while. I got tired of this. It could go on forever. I was carrying a couple laws. These were portable rockets. They were the replacement for the bazooka. They were a single shot weapon fiberglass tube. The advantage was that each of them weighed slightly less than the individual round for a bazooka and you didn't have to hump the heavy tube for the bazooka which would get bent up usually after awhile. I fired off a rocket into the tree line. I doubt if I hit that one. We never did check that particular tree

line. The firing stopped from there. At that point, the guys that had moved off to the other side were pinned down and called. They needed some help. I moved up towards where they were. I fired off a couple of laws in that tree line direction. At that time, a platoon from the company had come up as reinforcement and they swept the tree line. They never did find the one guy that I had shot although they found a blood trail. In the tree line where I fired the two laws in support of my friends who were pinned down, they did find a foot or something. I figured that it was KIL. If he had lost his foot, he probably was pretty shot up to the point where he wasn't going to survive long either. That is just pure speculation. The platoon from the company went back to the base camp and moved to a different position that night. We moved around a little bit.

That really is about the only time where I had such a clear view of the enemy. I saw the enemy again on several occasions, but usually from a starlight scope which was like a big tube that you would mount on the rifle. You would look through it and it was almost like looking through a TV. It was like a greenish cast. The slightest light, moonlight, starlight, would illuminate the terrain enough where you could see things almost as bright as day. If you had a halfway decent moon, it looked like high noon. It was a really good weapon to have. You could see them. Usually if you didn't have that, it was as dark as hell with the bushes, high grass, and tree line. You just couldn't see. You would hear them, but you couldn't see them. In a way you developed sights and senses other than your eyes. You developed your hearing. The slightest sound would wake you up.

There were other times that we were hit when I was with the company and we were successful. They would try to infiltrate and get up close to your perimeter to do whatever. We would have trip flares set out. They would set the trip flare off and it would blow a claymore, which is a mine that is sort of a flat, rectangle slab of plastic slightly bent outwards that had a high explosive in it. It was called C-4. In front of the explosive were several thousand BB sized shots. It was a very effective perimeter defense weapon. We stopped a couple of probes with that weapon.

There was another time that I can remember when we were at the base camp in a village. There was a little village right across the road from where our base camp was. We went into that village both during the day and night. In fact, we even had some friends there. This one family we would stay with on occasion, we would bring the C-rations,

extra C-rations. They would keep most of it and cook us up some rice and a little bit of the C-rations or something else. You could feel pretty secure there. We didn't stay there all of the time, but you could feel pretty secure there. We didn't stay there all of the time, but on occasion we did. If you felt it was a waste of time, you would stay there. Their house was situated at one end of the village so it did offer a pretty good advantage point. This one time we had moved and stayed with these people. At the other end of the village there was an ambush group at the other end of the village. They also got hit. When the shit hit the fan, we were up and ready to deal. Nothing was hitting us. The little kids came in and told us that the one platoon was getting hit. They told us about the strong point getting hit. They were a good source of information for us. We moved off to this one empty house. We had movement in front of us that was probing around the strong point where the CAP was. At that point, one of our guys was watching our rear security noticed that there were some people in between us and the base camp. In a sense we were cut off. Since that became the more dangerous of our targets, I switched instead of using the law on the one that was probing around the strong point, we blew the law where the people had set up in between us and the company. At that point we figured that we would pull out and let the company take care of it. There was no more sense in the four or five of us sticking around that night, especially if they were starting to infiltrate in between us. The way the village was the main street was just open dirt. It wasn't really a road. It was just in the village and at one end it was the bush aging and at the other there was bush again. It was really what you would call an elongated town square. We were on the opposite side of it. If they were infiltrating or getting ready for an assault, we would have been in a very bad position. I fired off a law and probably eliminated that threat. We didn't go over to find out. What we did was myself and the team leader rushed down into the street and covered both sides of the street. We started busting caps while the rest of the team crossed the road and got back over to another strong point that our company manned on the other side of the road. We did manage to get back to the strong point. We didn't lose anybody. We almost did. One guy got caught up in some barbed wire that was alongside of the road. He just sort of lost it. We got him and brought him back. We stayed the rest of the night at that strong point.

When we had got there, I had borrowed an M-14 with a starlight mounted on it from one of the guys there. I

was just sitting back and sort of watching the flares and the rounds from the company base camp. There were really no defined targets although when I started sweeping this village with this starlight, I could see a couple of people. It was interesting. It was almost a forerunner of a video game. The M-14 and the magazine had all tracers loaded. In firing the tracers, they would just . . . A vivid line would stay and it would almost make an impression for a little while in the starlight thing because of the light. The tracer rounds had a little phosphorous. It had red phosphorous at the end that would burn so you could follow the path. In a sense, I could just walk these bullets right in up on these people. They hid inside buildings in these little hooches out of what they thought was the light, but I could see them. I am sure that I put some surprise into them.

A lot of times this was kind of a thing where there would be a probe and they try to get us and we would try to get them. About the worst was probably when we had been out on operation for awhile in April. We had been away from base camp. We were moving toward the Kwei Sons to partake in some operation. I don't even know what it was called, probably Namburg Thrust I think, in reading things later on about that particular time and what my regiment was doing. We were moving towards this area. It was a fairly vivid point in my mind. Before we made that one move, we were operating in the area south of where Liberty Bridge was. We were sort of moving around in random patterns to try to pick something up. It was almost like you were fishing.

This one night, I think it was Easter, we were on perimeter. We didn't go out on ambush that night. This one guy I think was with the mortar team or the platoon. He and I ended up sharing a foxhole. We stayed up during both of our watches to keep each other awake. I had talked to him a lot. I had known him before. We were friendly. I got to be really good friends with him that night. He was going to join our team that next day. The next day we had to move out. We had to move over towards Kwei Sons. We were following an old rail line. The ties and everything were gone. They were pulled up and used by whoever. They were probably used by the locals for their own bunkers. Every house in that area had their own personal family bunker usually made out of railroad ties and dirt and things to protect them against random artillery. We received one sniper round. It caught him in his arm and through his chest. It seemed ironic. You spent the whole night with the guy talking to him and getting to know him pretty well. If we hadn't moved out, he would have been with our team. He might not have gotten hit, but because he was in that

particular position for no real reason there wasn't anything that made him more of a target than the rest of us. He got it and died. It pissed me off. It was always one of my friends who would get it.

It was about at that point that it ended up to where a lot of guys just wanted to serve their time and get out. There were other guys, like myself, at that time that really wanted to "kick ass and take names" as we called it. It was just pay backs. You got tired of the attrition kind of thing. Attrition warfare gets really nasty. When you have combat, a lot of the tension that is built up is released. When you have this attrition, you never have this total release. It just gets down to a real dog-eat-dog type of thing.

We crossed over and the first night we had walked for a long time. For awhile we had carried his body until late in the night when a helicopter picked him up. Further on in the night we climbed this hill. It was a real son-of-a-bitch to do in the middle of the dark. When we reached this ridge line, the company set up. We went out, Swamp Fox did, to retrace some of our steps and to set up towards the bottom of the hill that we had just climbed for security. We didn't run into anything further that night.

The next day the company went down into this valley of the Kwei Sons. They sent us back up the ridge with two snipers added to our team to kind of just scope things out. First before they did eight legs, they sent us back over the ridge and they sent some lieutenant with us. I think he might have even been a forward air patroller. While we were moseying along on the opposite side of this ridge down this one little road, we saw this coming with a water buffalo. He had some stuff on the water buffalo. After having my one friend killed and it being in what you call a free fire zone, which meant that nobody was supposed to be there anyway, there were no friendlies down there, I knew and the guys with my team knew that he wasn't just a farmer. We wanted to blow him away. The lieutenant said, "No," which really pissed me off. He said, "No, we are going to have the snipers do it." He might have even called out to the guy. Of course, as soon as you called out to the guy, the dude just zipped off of his buffalo. The buffalo went one direction and he headed toward the trees. With only two snipers firing even though they were relatively good, they were firing at a moving target over a couple of hundred yards away. They couldn't bring him down. I was really mad. I really wanted to shoot the damn lieutenant for just being an idiot. If we had all opened up fire with everything that we had, we would have dinged the dude. I guess it is partial compensation for how I felt. I wanted to pop off a law towards this one pagoda type of little

place, like a temple or something. It had been shot up anyway. I figured quite possibly that he could have gone there, but then again, he could have gone anywhere. I wanted to hit the pagoda. My one team leader said that my law wasn't going to reach that far. It was almost like a bet between him and I said, "It will." What I did was open a law. You had to extend it a little bit and cock it. I put it on this guy's shoulder. I put it up at a 45° angle. A 45° angle would be the furthest projectory that we could fire at to get the maximum distance. As it turned out, it overshot the pagoda. In a sense, I felt vindicated that my estimation of the weapon's worth was right. It was useless. It still didn't get that guy. We went back to the ridge and the lieutenant and his people went back to the company. We stayed up there.

The next day we were still up there. We decided that we were going to have a party. At the bottom of the ridge and off to the right of way from where the company had been was a little village. We figured that we could get some beer and some sodas there. My team leader and I climbed down this ridge face. We walked into this village. We found a dude that had a case of beer and a case of sodas. He was haggling for that and I was kind of keeping watch. As it turned out, I saw this one guy walking down the street. He was civilian type. He had just pants and a white shirt kind of opened up. Looking at this guy I saw two grenades in his belt. I just aimed in on him and he totally stopped. This caused a furor. He was chattering away and I didn't know Vietnamese. I still don't know Vietnamese although I still have quite a number of Vietnamese friends that I made among the refugees here. My team got up and in the course of the discussion it turned out that this guy was a Korean. He wasn't even Vietnamese. He was from a base further up. He was probably coming down to buy some of the same stuff that we were purchasing at the time. My team leader was a little upset because he didn't want me to kill any Koreans because that would have been some bad blood. The Korean could perfectly well understand how I felt. He said that he would have shot at him too seeing somebody walking down with two grenades. We got along and everybody was happy then. We bought a case of Coke and a case of beer for \$24. The black market was a bitch. It was \$12 a case. It was wet and it was better than well water or patty water.

If you wrote to your folks back home, you got people to send you pre-sweetened Kool-Aid because it would cut the taste of it. A lot of times you would have to put iodine pills in the water and that just made it taste all the worse.

We put this on our backs and we humped up that mountain again. Sometimes it was hand over fist but we got the cases

up there and we had a good time. Later that night towards dinnertime, they called us back down off of the mountain. The night before that we had stayed up there; there was a lot of activity in this valley. It was a bad place. Talking to somebody that I met from my company later, I found out that there had been a lot of shit there before. We got called down and they wanted us to go on patrol, an ambush, that night. I was a little leery because we hadn't even seen this place up close even during the day. We couldn't really loiter it well. We went out maybe 150 yards away from the company. I just knew it was a bad place. There were a lot of fighting holes all over the place. You weren't sure even if they were empty fighting holes or spider holes or maybe somebody would be in it or be in it later on or whatever. There was a lot of activity in this valley. We found this one place. It must have been a temple at one time. It was strange because it was among the only time that I had seen something that was just more than just a glorified grass shack kind of thing. It was made out of cement blocks. It had a cement floor. We moved away from that and set up some trip flares and we set up in the building. We figured that it would be relatively safe and we would move out later on after the night rolled on. We would see if anything happened. The first watch I slept. I slept for maybe an hour or so from maybe 9:00 to 10:00. Maybe it was from 8:00 to 10:00; I don't remember which. I had slept at this one end of the hall. It was near a little window, although out in front of the place we put a trip flare. The second watch was my turn and another guy's turn. I left my poncho liner which was what you laid on down there. I went towards the other end of the hall where there was this doorway. We watched out the doorway. About a half hour into our watch around 10:30, I heard a low whistle. It was like a dog whistle. I knew the shit was going to hit the fan. I started to get up to wake everybody. Right then a grenade came through the window down near where I had been sleeping. It was right near my poncho and blew up. It was pretty much concussion type of thing. The blast just picked me right up off my feet and slammed me into the wall. Then I fell on my ass. I was kind of stunned. I felt like--Damn, my face must have been ripped off. As it turned out, I only caught a little tiny piece of shrapnel in my forehead. My whole face just stung. I felt blood and ripped to shreds. I was stunned for a couple of seconds. The guy with me on watch had the foresight to start busting a lot of caps. He almost sounded like a machine gun. It almost went on automatic. It was like he loaded magazine after magazine. He was busting caps all over the place. In fact the company told us later on that they thought they were under attack because this guy kept pouring out so many rounds in all kinds of directions. Hell, the enemy may have even thought that



we had a machine gun. As it turned out, nobody else was really hurt bad. It was just a concussion and some schrapnel. After a couple of second, I started adding to the fire. Then a bullet came in from somewhere and ricocheted around the walls and hit me in the arm. It felt like a birthday punch, a good birthday punch. I realized that I had been shot. I grabbed my arm right away and it was soaked. This kind of woke me up out of the initial shock that I was in. I had been shot. It was always something that happened to somebody else. It was me that had gotten shot. The fact that I was obviously bleeding so fast that my arm was soaked already woke me up a little bit to take care of this. We carried what were called battle dressings. I started fumbling around getting this thing out of the package. By this time, everybody else is moving around and "What the hell is going on?" and things. We weren't being overrun or anything so some other people came over and helped to bandage up my arm. I found out later that the rifle that I had had, I hadn't had it in the offhand position which would have been up over my shoulder. I had it kind of cradled under my arm into a spray because there weren't any defined targets. We just wanted to put out a volume of fire. The rifle stalk, the plastic M-16 stalk, had absorbed the last shock of this bullet. The ricocheting and bouncing around the walls absorbed most of it also. Otherwise, it would have gone through me like my friend who had died a couple of days before. They bandaged me up and managed to break out of there and get back to the company. The medic, the corpsman, had checked me out. He kind of thought by the nature of the wound that I got hit by schrapnels. It was a bullet. I knew it wasn't schrapnels because there wasn't any explosion. It was more of a defined kind of thing. I knew it had to have been a bullet. I was probably more in shock than I was in pain. My arm went numb like it would if you hit your crazy bone and my fist had clenched up and I kept my arm close to my body. As it turned out, I kept it like that for about a month. It took about a month for my hand to unclench. The body just had medical defense mechanisms that take over in cases like that. I asked the medic to give me some morphine. It wasn't that I so much needed it, but I figured that if anybody deserved it, I had paid my dues. I went the whole trip here. He finally gave me one shot. If anything, that helped me to relax a little so that I just didn't freak out or things like that. I guess I got a little hot. I got very relaxed. It didn't matter then. I felt--Hey, I am going to Da Nang. I am going to have some slack time, but I will be back. We will kick ass and take names again. I will pay them back for the arm. I never did.

I remember waiting for my helicopter. Somebody came up with a can of Coke. That kind of impressed me because I don't think it was from when we were up in the hills. Somebody was obviously hording this Coke and laid it on me. That was just an example of the tightness; it was like a family. In fact, you got even closer than your family in the States. You were all facing the same death. You all depended upon each other. There was a camaraderie that I will never know again. I had a Coke and sat back and drank that. The captain came over to me and asked me, "Babyson, what happened?" That was my nickname. I look young now, but I looked about twelve when I was over there. Even the Vietnamese were surprised. They thought I was twelve years old or something and running around the bush. He asked, "Babyson, what happened?" I told him what happened to the best of my knowledge. I said, "Yes, Captain, I will be back. We'll get them." I kind of got the impression that he didn't think that I would be.

In talking to some people that I met later on in the hospital, they thought that I was going to lose the arm. I didn't, although I did lose a good bit of the function and the feeling. The lower half of my arm here is still pretty numb. I have a lot of pain all of the time. I carry my Vietnam souvenir with me always.

Some of my immediate gear, my bowie knife that my father had sent over to me. . . It is more of a weapon than just a regular K-bar or something. It could hack through the weeds and bush pretty good. I gave it to one of the guys on my team. I told them to watch my stuff, still thinking that I would be back, but I never did get back.

The helicopter came in and it started receiving some ground fire. I was getting really mad. That was my chopper. You can't be firing at that. I wasn't alone. There was a gun ship with it too. Those gun ships ripped up the ground where this fire was coming from and we didn't get anymore fire. The helicopter came in. Myself and a couple of the guys from my team that had some schrapnel wounds got on. At that time I was sitting up. I was sort of walking. When the helicopter had picked up and gone into the cold air, I started getting really bad shakes. I guess it was from the amount of blood that I had lost. They put me on a stretcher. The helicopter flew into Da Nang. I can remember seeing light. It was the first time in five months that I had seen lights like that at night. It looked like a city. It may have just been the airstrip. I don't know, but just seeing those lights blew me away. Even before that helicopter was fully down on that runway, some people ran on and grabbed that stretcher and whisked me into a receiving area. They sat the stretcher down. Somebody started snipping off my clothes while another

guy threw an IV into my arm. Another guy was taking down information on a thing. They had their procedure down unbelievably well. I was really impressed with it. I am sure because of their professionalism, they saved a lot of lives. They just had it really together. Even though I wasn't facing death at that point, I was just really impressed how fast they got things together. They put me out. They cleaned up the wound a little bit. They had to be careful of gangrene. Being we were out being dirty all of the time there was a really good chance of infection. I had stayed in Da Nang the next day. When they had checked out my arm, they realized that there was nerve damage.

The day following I got on a plane and I flew to Japan. I stayed in Japan for about a week. They operated on me again. They sewed me up pretty much. The way the bullet had hit me, it had been flat. It tore up a lot of the muscle and skin so they couldn't close the wound entirely. They had to keep a wet dressing on it.

They flew me to Bethesda by way of Alaska on a med-evac plane. At Bethesda I had a skin graft. They took a little piece of skin from my thigh and put it over. The graft took. Then after that operation--I recovered from that--I was operated on again. They had to do what they call a nerve resection. They try to get some of the function. It took a number of years before I really could straighten out my hand. As it is now, I still have what they call a little bit of a claw where the little finger has a tendency to bend. I can't bring it together. It has a tendency to crook off to the side. I can't control it. It is pretty much dead. At times, I can't feel it. Right now my hand is pretty warm. This side of the hand is ice cold. It is a weird feeling. It is something that I just got used to. I don't have constant pain, but it comes and goes. It bothers me all of the time on a daily basis. That is pretty much it.

K: Did they treat you pretty good? I mean when you got out. Did the VA try to help you as much as possible?

M: I haven't had real problems with the VA. On occasion through bureaucratic mistakes and things they have messed with some of my benefits like getting a GI bill or something like that. There were a couple of times that I was overpaid when I was in school. It seemed that when I got back, I thought that I did what was expected of me. I was wounded. I expected a certain something. I felt that I should have had a position as such. Coming back to the States in 1969, it was pretty much close to the height of the anti-war fervor. The reception I got was strange. After I got away from Bethesda, when I came home from Bethesda, I flew home in my Marine

uniform. My arm was in a sling. I had my ribbons all showing that I was in Vietnam. I got off at Pittsburgh Airport and took the bus down to Pittsburgh. I didn't call my parents. They would have come to get me. Being a Marine, you are very self-reliant. I was walking over to take the bus home. I knew I could take a bus near to where I lived and my father could pick me up from there. People would look at you, but not look at you, across the street away from you. I kind of had in the back of my mind that I was lugging a C-bag and things and I have my arm in a sling and maybe somebody would help me out here a little bit. I was not going to ask anybody, but if I was offered I would grudgingly oblige; but that didn't happen at all. I was crossing the street and nobody talked to me. The bus was crowded when I got on except for where I was sitting. Nobody sat around me, not even the same seat or the seats near me. I thought--Gee, do I stink? What is the matter?

In a way, it wasn't as bad as a lot of people had it when they came home. They were spat on and things. They were told that they deserved losing that way. A lot of people had a hatred for the war that was passed on to the veteran. That was the only tangible aspect of the war that they could touch. After awhile, it just sort of pissed me off. It just didn't piss me off, but alienated me where I went to school and let my hair grow long. I fit in in a way that was like camouflage. I made friends. When people found out that I was in Vietnam, they just couldn't believe it because my pattern was such like I wasn't there. It was something that I knew had happened, but it was like a dream. It was like, did it really happen? I could grab my arm and I knew that it did. I didn't keep in touch with any of my people from my company; that is my greatest regret, that I didn't. That bothers me all of the time. I wish I would have kept in touch with those people. Like I said, they were a family of mine. For some reason, I just let it drop. I put it away. I had been hit in April. During that summer I would go home and back to the hospital in Bethesda until I was discharged around November. In January, I went to school. I went to Edinboro again. I wasn't a real bang-up student. I just hung out. I got high and got drunk. That was my own way of dealing with it I guess. Like I said, I was acting like it was just something that hadn't happened at all, until April 1975 when Saigon fell.

Sitting there watching the news and seeing the way we left just really tore me up. I thought back at how many people died and how many people made it, and countless Americans that made the sacrifice, and the blood of the Vietnamese. It just tore me right up. I don't think a day has gone by since the fall of Saigon that I don't think about it. I think

about it all of the time. My wife said that it is an obsession with me. It is something that you have been there and participated in this piece of history; you can't really understand the terrible ways.

After that I started being involved with the Vietnam Veterans. At that time by 1975, I had stopped going to school. I had been working off and on. I regret that I left college life. Maybe at that time I think I was in trade school. I could get the GI bill benefits. It was just a way of keeping me until I found a job later

After Saigon, it started bothering me a lot. As a matter of fact, I was married April 1975. It was the beginning of the month when Saigon fell at the end. Even though I was happily married, I started thinking about a pay back. I wanted to go back to Vietnam and change it. I had thoughts of going to Rhodesia when the war was on there fighting the communists there or going to see a Premier or going somewhere. I wanted that camaraderie again. I wanted that professionalism. I tried to get back into the service several times. I told them, "You could have the money, the disability payments I get. I am experienced. You can use me. I can still use my trigger fingers." I spent five months, but it a way it was like five years worth of experience type participation. I had participated in Swamp Fox. By that time I was starting to get good at what I was doing. The war wasn't on. The Service had new uniforms.

I started getting involved with veteran activities. I went to what was called a "rap group" in Pittsburgh. It was just a bunch of other guys talking. I really didn't feel that I had any specific problems, but I wanted to talk to somebody. I wanted to be with Vietnam Veterans. In going and talking, I realized that I wasn't the only one having some of the feelings in the way that we would come home feeling it wasn't all worth it to our friends. Not all Vietnam veterans feel like I did that the war was just. There are some that feel it was a total waste. - Just being around other Vietnam veterans and talking to them and things made a big difference. I started getting a pride in myself back. To that point it was something you put in the back file cabinets of the mind. Even though I started thinking consciously more about wanting to get back into the service, it wasn't so much in thinking about Vietnam. It was, but not in the way of getting my pride back. I did in rap groups.

I helped form and served as first president of the Vietnam Veterans Organization in Pittsburgh. When I moved to New Castle, I tried to carry on with the same thing here and helped form the Pennsylvania Veterans of Vietnam, a local veteran organization here. Also at that time I started

getting involved with a lot of the Vietnamese refugees in the Vietnamese community of Pittsburgh. I was talking to them. Because of my feelings that the war was just and I feel very strongly that the war isn't over because it is still being fought there . . . There is still resistance to the communists. The Cambodians are still fighting to get the Vietnamese colonists out of their country. The war still goes on. The Paris Accords required that we maintain a status quo there. That status quo was changed. We would go back for the Nixon vote. It guaranteed to two South Vietnamese presidents that we would respond with full force if the North Vietnamese invaded. It did overwhelmingly, starting in December of 1974 and ending with the spring offensive that finally led to the fall of Saigon. By that time in the war, after the TET Offensive in 1967 until the Spring Offensive in 1972, the Vietcong themselves were not going to give up. During the war, it took a full-scale invasion of ten to thirteen divisions of the North Vietnamese Army to topple Saigon. Just because we turned our backs on these people and ignored our commitment doesn't mean that that war isn't over.

I formed a political group that is separate from the veterans thing. It is a support of the continuing fight for freedom there although it is almost a Don Quixote type of crusade. It is hard to convince our Americans that the war is still on or even to get them to support your idea. It is not a very popular concept.

Central America has moved into the forefront. Vietnam is something that is ancient history to a lot of people. I have talked to Vietnamese. As a matter of fact, one of my friends just had his brother-in-law come over to this country. He was a former major in the South Vietnamese Army. He was kept in prison for about five years after the fall of Saigon. After his prison sentence he was sent to a reeducation camp which is another form of prison. It took him about nine tries, but he finally managed to escape from Vietnam. There is still continued resistance. I have talked to people who plan to go back and carry on. I met with Huong Ko Minh. He was a formal Vietnamese admiral who is leaving there because of the resistance. I have talked to supporters of the resistance movement in this country. I try to explain to them that not all Americans feel that they have abandoned them. I feel ashamed sometimes in talking with them. Here is a people that we had made a commitment to and they had trusted us. Now they have lost everything. They have lost their homes, family, positions, material goods. They are in a country that I am sure is as alien to them as Vietnam was to us. Because their attitudes are successful to a degree, they are making it here. They never forget their homelands. It is something

that is sad, really sad, to see how much they miss it until you talk to them. I would say that I am now more concerned about that than the Vietnam veterans' problems.

A lot of attitudes have changed. Not all, there are still people who are giving you a hard time. Some of the older veterans act like it wasn't a big thing; it wasn't a war or something. They were in France and places that were relatively civilized countries. They just don't understand. I think that some of the veterans that fought in the Pacific against the Japanese do. It was very similar to that. It was even more so because the guerrilla nature warfare was very much like cowboys and Indians. It was like fighting Geronimo or something. They were on an island and instead of being wide open in the Southwest you were on some green hill.

K: Did you think the war was going to end up the way it did?

M: No, I didn't. When I was there, I was a Marine. I felt hampered. I felt the politicians were holding us back. I felt that they should have let us go. We would have killed them all. Let's drive them back to Hanoi and sack Hanoi. I wanted to go to Hanoi. I felt that we could do it; I really did. If they would have just let us go and put our heart into it instead of just playing around like our lieutenant not wanting us to shoot the guy . . . Finally, as a compromise, he had the snipers shoot at him. When I was over there, it was when they had the bombing halt. It just seemed stupid to be fighting a war and seeing people die. Knowing there was a war and there were people here millions of miles away running the water, it was frustrating. I thought that sooner or later that they would realize how ridiculous this is and they will just end it. They ended it, their commitment, but I didn't think that they would end it that way. I was still naive. I didn't think the American people would tolerate it. It wasn't surrender. It was just like we picked up our marbles and went home and just ignored it like an ostrich or something. It was like we gave it to them by default. The enemy never really won anything while we were there. They tried their best in the TET of 1967. They took Hue and some cities. We pounded the hell out of them and they lost a lot of people. They didn't get the popular uprising that they thought. Even after we left, we still gave them support like in 1972 and 1973. The Vietnamese more or less held their own. It wasn't until we really started cutting back and Congress started cutting back on the aid while Russia was increasing their aid that they did win.

K: What do you remember most about Vietnam, one thing?

M: How beautiful the country was. I was beautiful. Even

though the war was going on, I thought--Boy, if the bullets weren't flying, I would like to have a little place over here to sit back. It was beautiful. The trees were greener than any green that you have ever seen. They had flat, little rice paddies and flat land and mountains right next to it that just shot up. It was like looking at an old Chinese print maybe, except maybe a psychedelic Chinese print. The colors were so vivid and the smells were just so strong. It was a very beautiful place. That is what I remember most about it. Like I said, I think a lot about it, so I remember a lot of different things. That is if I had to get one thing.

K: Is there anything that you would want to add?

M: Just that I still entertain a pipe dream or whatever that some day I will go back. If I could have a genie pop up to give me one wish, I would like to go back and finish it. We had been trained so well and we were expected to move in. We were denied that victory. For the sake of all the Americans that died and all the Vietnamese that died, it was just like a nightmare.

K: If your kids ask you to tell them about the Vietnam War, what would you tell them, what we told them here tonight?

M: Pretty much. I would try to be honest. I would try to tell them that. I would try to tell them that some people disagree with my view. I am subscribing to a book series called The Vietnam Experience. It is initiated by Boston Publishing Company. I think Time Life books are continuing it. Out of everything that I have seen on Vietnam, it is the most unbiased, accurate history of Vietnam. Even if I should die before my son gets to the point where he can ask these questions, I hope that he will have these books to look at. They don't share my total opinion, but they show all sides. They show what the soldier felt. They show the politicians. They show it all. They show the noble aspect and the unnoble. There were good and bad forms. There was a lot of corruption and graft in Vietnamese life and government. In a way, I think we expected them to try and pattern their society after the American society. We were just dumping tons of money without any controls. They show good points of the enemy and bad points. There was a lot to be respected about the tactics and some of the individuals. A lot of Vietcongs thought that they were patriots and that they were getting an oppressor. Since the fall of Saigon, I had listened to former Vietcong. I think the former Vietcong realized that maybe the Americans weren't all that bad, in a sense that they were duked by some of their North Vietnamese compatriots. I would tell him pretty much what we talked about tonight. I would try. I hope that the images would still be fresh when he is of that



age. He is only four months old now. I have to bring him up to respect the fact that he was born to a freedom that he didn't have to do anything to earn or deserve. Yet, there are a lot of people that never even know some of those basic freedoms and that freedom isn't really for nothing. You have to earn it. If you don't earn it, you are going to lose it. Even if you don't have to pay any price, always respect the fact that there are people who paid a price for freedom. It is something that should be cherished and protected rather than just taken for granted.

K: I have to bring this up. You mentioned this earlier. You mentioned Dylan. Did you listen to him over there and try to stay up with what was going on, Stones, Dylan?

M: I was what I felt was a rock and roller. I still am pretty much a rock and roller. At that time I liked to listen to a lot of oldies. I liked the Stones a lot. I liked some of Dylan's things. When I came back, I still listened to a lot of things. I didn't even think about Vietnam. Again, I wore things very much in vogue. A lot of music reflected that. I still like the music. To this day I still like some of the music, although I may disagree with its message. I kind of thought when I was there that I was keeping up with things. But when I came back, it was like I hadn't been gone that long, but I thought--Damn, everything has changed. Friends that I had grown up with were different. Just being gone for that time, short time, things had passed me by. I think if I had been there longer, I can maybe justify my mind such as--Maybe I did lose my childhood. There is a bit of truth to that. When I had gone over there, I was a naive kid. I felt the Marine Corps had toughened me, trained me, and got me ready. In a way, I became a man in Vietnam. The whole experience gave me a foundation that I can still rely on. I mean, no matter how bad things get, it isn't as bad as I have seen them. I feel that I can respond to the situation without losing it really. I can always, even when I feel that I have lost grasp with things, have a grasp of things.

K: What about James Bond movies?

M: We mentioned about some of the musicians and things. I liked the art. I liked the music, although I disagreed with some of the message. The only really anti-war type of person that I can't ever forget is Jane Fonda. At the height of the war she went to Hanoi and offered them support while Americans were being held prisoner and being tortured, and to me this is treason. She should have to pay the price for treason instead of taking advantage and making the most of the American society. She made success. She has continued to make success, enjoying

the freedom that others paid the price for. To me, she spat on that sacrifice that they made. There is just no forgiving her.

K: What about the movie "Apocalypse Now," does that pretty much portray the first half of it?

M: I liked the movie although it wasn't Vietnam at all. I haven't seen any movie that has come close to Vietnam. There may have been some glimpses. "Apocalypse Now" dealt with maybe one man. To me, it concentrated on the one vote. It concentrated on going to see Colonel Kirtz. It is almost some serialistic thing. There were snatches of "Apocalypse Now" that I thought were close. Colonel Kilgore I really liked. I would have liked to have served with him. He just seemed like the real gung-ho kind of dude. Go in and kick ass and take names; that is the way to do it.

I also liked the sequence at the Dunloe Bridge, although it wasn't quite like anything that I experienced that was in a sense Vietnam. It was bizarre that the night could be just as crazy as that was, scarier even, plus the dark, There weren't any lights.

Bob Hope never got out to where I was at. I have to hand it to the guy for going there and doing what he did, and what Martha Raye did. You have to really respect those people.

There was a section of the An Hoi basin called the Arizona. It was aptly put because it was like some badlands. The people that lived up there were dirt poor. The land was poor. I didn't see any reporters. I didn't see anybody. Not too many people gave a damn about there. I remember some of the Vietnam veterans that I know that weren't in the Marines, they still remember hearing about the Arizona. When I was there I didn't think I was in any place hairier than any other place. The Army experienced some places like Dak To and the central highlands. It was just as hairy maybe, but it was a place that was not so much as shot up and stuff. It wasn't like the Arizona. It was a bunch of cowboys and Indians maybe.

K: Today, do you find it hard to adjust to the fact that you don't have as much responsibility as you did then?

M: Yes, I do. There is a feeling; maybe it is a primitive feeling or something. You are armed to the teeth and you are as bad a dude as anything else that is going to come down that pipe. Maybe you aren't, but you think you are. If somebody messes with you, you are ready to deal. I carried a bandolier that had eleven magazines in it loaded. I carried another bandolier that was just ammunition in case

I ever ran out. The magazines, I could always reload them. I carried between two and three laws. I carried four to six grenades. I had a bowie knife. On occasion I would carry a .45. Being a small dude, I would check out tunnels and bunkers on occasion like a tunnel rat. I never ran into any extensive, long, complex, tunnel complexes, but there were things that had to be checked out.

I can remember going into one bunker. It was the hairiest bunker story experience that I can think of. I went into this bunker that was kind of like a squared-off S shape. It wasn't just straight. It had a couple of bends to it. It was a nice bunker. There was kind of a map on the floor. In a sense, it was paneled. There were these little bamboo slaps and things. All I had was my bowie knife and a cigarette lighter. I didn't have a flashlight or anything at that point or a .45. I did have the .45. I went in there flicking this little lighter. Before I go around this one bend, I hear this growl. I realized that it had to be a dog. I had to go through the bunker. I didn't know how big this dog was. I didn't want to hurt the dog, but I had to get the dog out of there. I knew the dog was around this one corner. I pointed the .45 at the wall and shot it into the wall. This dog came creeping out of there. He had his tail between his legs and his ears down. The reverberation just had to have shook this thing up something terrible. It was the only way I could get this dog out of there. The way he sounded, he was definitely going to chew my face off if I tried to poke my face around the corner. Fortunately, I made it out of the bunker.

There were other times when we were making a sweep through the villages when we didn't have a chance to check out bunkers and all we did was ask the villagers if there was anybody in them, especially from the family. They would say, "No." You hoped that they meant it because you would pull the pin on the grenade and toss it in there. You would just move on and it would blow off. If there was anybody in there, they would be dead or pretty battered up. A lot of times you didn't have the time. You had to make a sweep fast because you had to try to catch somebody. I didn't run into anything really hairy fortunately.

K: What booby traps?

M: I was lucky. We ran into a number of them. I remember this one time this guy sat down on a rock. It was booby trapped and it blew him up.

I mentioned strong points. That isn't a big base camp or something. It is really like a big bunker kind of thing. It is like a little wall. It is almost like

a little castle. You have a wall of sandbags with a ditch around it. Beyond the ditch there is a bunch of constituted barbed wire, booby traps, and things, claymores usually and bouncing Betties. These guys went to check the wire. They set off a mine. They told us later that it had probably been set up by the French when they were there. It was a bouncing Betty type. It killed three and wounded a couple of others. It was set years ago. Fortunately, for all of the moving through the bush that we did, we didn't set off too many. There were other places where booby traps were the main racket employed. We didn't run into too many of them.

K: Were the Vietcong good fighters?

M: Some were and some weren't. Guerrilla tactics are very effective because you can pick and choose where and when you are going to fight, how you are going to fight. To combat a guerrilla type strategy, you have to have a lot of people to try to cover everything. That is almost impossible. There were a lot of Vietcong that just snuck a few rounds in and booked, would leave. There were others that were very persistent.

Before I got to the company, about a month or so before, they ran into one guy, a sniper, that was deadly accurate. He killed about eight guys right between the eyes. They bombed where they thought he was. They did all kinds of shit and they couldn't get him out of there. They ended up having to flee and go somewhere else. They never did get him.

The North Vietnamese Army was trained much better than the Vietcong and they were fighters. They would, on numerous occasions, stand and fight because they were very tough. They were good and bad.

K: When you were out on patrol did you find any catch weapons or anything?

M: Yes, occasionally we did. We had these things that looked like a long T. You would poke into the ground especially if you were in a village ground. You would poke into the ground. By the resistance you met, you would try to find things or you would dig up under floor boards like in the bunkers or something. You would poke in between the slabs and try to find things. We found a lot of rice catches. Occasionally we would find small arms, but not a lot. Most of their catches, where we were at, were way back in the mountains where they didn't let us go.

K: When you came home, did you get a good reception from your

family, friends from the neighborhood?

M: My family always acted not like I had done something wrong, but done something that was beneath me maybe. When I had come home from college and I told them that I was thinking about going into the service, they thought I was crazy or fooling them or something. When I came home, I told them that I had joined the Marine Corps. They were flabbergasted. Before I left to go to the service, my relatives and in-laws came over and it was like I was at my own wake. They all acted as though I was dead already or something like I was going out to get myself killed. "Why in the world would you want to go into the Marine Corps?" They just couldn't comprehend it. I don't think that they ever can. Years later, sitting around with my dad, he had come close to understanding. He had been in the service, the Army, in World War II. He had never really talked about it. He never hunted or anything like that. He came close to opening up on one or two occasions, but it was years later. They just never understood why I did that.

K: Did people come to visit you while you were in the hospital at Bethesda?

M: Yes, when I first got in I called my parents. They came down with my aunt and uncle and visited me. After that, they didn't. Between operations I had a chance to go home. It was always like they were waiting for this to get over so I could get home and get a real job. My friends probably thought that I was a little crazy, but I was always a wild and crazy kid. That was just a part of that. There had been a change. I had missed something. They had changed and I had changed and there was a gap. I still see some of my friends on occasion. It is just rare that we happen to run into each other. I don't think they ever quite understood it. It was something that they wondered about, but could never grasp.

K: Was it tough to find a job when you came home?

M: At first, I went to school off and on. I didn't go seriously. I probably went because it was my way of readjusting. It was kind of a buffer because being in school wasn't like being in the real world. Edinboro is sort of out in the middle of nowhere. It was sheltered. It was its own reality. When I did try to find a job, I am sure there were jobs that I lost because I had been in Vietnam, not because I had been a veteran, but because I was in Vietnam. Some people were afraid that I would snap out and go crazy and things. They had to believe this because TV had promoted it so much. The Vietnam veterans were the crazed killers. Christ, we are still being used

as your typical villian, or as being slightly ready to snap like Sylvester Stallone in "First Blood" and things. By that time I kind of resigned myself to it. I used to get really mad seeing every detective show with a crazed Vietnam veteran and things. It isn't like that. When you are in the middle of a war there have been people who have snapped out, but I think it is mainly because they were so frustrated at the type of reception that they got when they came home. You get mad, and when you get mad, you want to do something about it. Having been in the position where you get mad and blow people away that are trying to kill you, you finalized sometimes and vented your frustrations. Being able to vent your frustrations, you were in a totally unreal situation as opposed to civil reality. Anymore, I see it and I just sit and laugh. It doesn't bother my anymore. If it is really below the belt, I will get mad. For instance, PBS has run a Vietnam series. I watched about the first five episodes. I didn't watch any more of it. I felt that it was slanted. They did an episode on the veteran himself. I felt that it was highly insulting. I guess in realizing that the French, British had a lot of input into that series, it is understandable. The French have always hated us for taking their place in Vietnam and this is how they feel. The British are always ready to throw in their two cents when they can. It is understandable and I just don't watch it. A lot of my Vietnamese friends hate that show too. They have been writing to Channel 13, the place in Boston that produced it, because they felt that it was very slanted towards South Vietnamese life and government. On the whole, like I said, I can laugh at it. I saw "First Blood" with my friends on HBO. It had its chuckles. It cracked me up.

K: The first time that you were shot at, did you feel like somebody was trying to kill you?

M: It is a release. You have been trained to do so much and have gotten ready for so long when you first get there; there is a lot of--Well, when is it going to happen? Is there somebody that is aiming their sights on me? Am I going to set off a booby trap? You just get a lot of things built up. When the bullets start flying, it is happening. You can affect it. When you are walking down the road and nothing is happening and you think that somebody is sighting in on you, there is nothing that you can do about that. You can try to be as low of a target as possible, but when the bullets start flying, you know where they are at. It is a real high. It is a real release. All of this build-up stuff is let go, especially when you know some people in your company that got dinged when you were involved in a big fire fight. You feel like you have to do something about that. When

the bullets start flying, that question isn't there anymore. It starts happening. It is time for all that training and everything that you have been ready for to happen. It was a real pleasure.

K: What about drinking and drugs? Was there a lot of that in 1968 and 1969?

M: No. Where we were at at the base camp, we would get maybe a beer or two beers a day when we were not doing something. There was marijuana on a very limited basis. It was kind of a strange thing. Granted, it was illegal and they didn't want you doing it, but I don't know if it was because of the camaraderie or because you wanted to keep thing it on your own, but in a sense it was overlooked. It wasn't pushed too much. Maybe they would do spot checks or something, although they never spot checked in our company. There weren't a lot of people that smoked pot. As long as you weren't smoking when you were out and doing something, it was more or less tolerated. I guess they felt that tomorrow you could be dead, and you felt--What could they do to me, send me to Vietnam? We were already in a situation where you could be dead in the next instant. You just didn't care.

Later in the war and the rear areas, there was a lot of heroin and all kinds of other drugs. At that point, I guess they had the time and they knew that they didn't want to win the war and they were just putting in time. I talked to people who were in situations like that. I find that even though we were in the same war, it was totally different times; it was a totally different war. It had been said that Vietnam wasn't like a ten or twenty year war; it was like ten or twenty long wars run together depending on where you were and what time you were there. It was a whole different ball game. There really weren't any problems.

I can remember one new guy who came to our company who had seen some people getting high. Instead of telling his platoon leader, the lieutenant, he went to the captain. It was laid on the captain and I think in front of witnesses, so the captain had to do something about it. The guy got really mad. The lieutenant got really mad at the platoon because they didn't really want to react to it this strongly. What happened to the guy was he got sent back to the rear in An Hoi and he was on trash cleanup for the rest of the . . . Damn, let's all get busted and high so we could get back to the rear and you know . . . He would come out once in a while to our company and fill some sandbags and things and then go back. At the most he was going to do perimeter in An Hoi, but he wasn't out on patrol; he wasn't out on ambush. He wasn't getting shot at. The guy that snitched

on him got transferred to another company. It was strange. Like I said, they didn't condone it. They realized that they didn't want to play with you too much. Some places did, especially later in the war. They tried to play military like they did back in the States, a lot of chicken shit. That was when people would end up getting fragged and things. We were ready. We didn't know if we were going to be dead the next day. When you are facing death, everything else becomes so trivial.

K: What about fragging? Do you know of any incidents?

M: Myself, no. It was talked about in a sense like it was a joke. "This dude pissed me off and I am going to frag his ass," or something. You didn't seriously consider doing that. It was always something that happened somewhere else. It could have happened without me being aware of it. I don't think that it happened in our company.

K: That is it for now.

END OF INTERVIEW