

YOUNGSTOWN STATE UNIVERSITY

ORAL HISTORY PROGRAM

YSU Veterans Project

Military Experience in Vietnam

O. H. 34

DENNIS PERRY

Interviewed

by

Donald R. Bennett

on

December 12, 1974

DENNIS PERRY

Dennis M. Perry was born on October 6, 1949, in Salem, Ohio, the son of Michael and Wilma Perry. He attended Salem High School and in 1969 he entered the U.S. Army. After basic training, Mr. Perry was sent to Vietnam and was assigned to the Fourth Infantry Division stationed at Pleiku. During his three years in the Army, he earned a National Defense Medal, a Combat Infantry Badge, and a Vietnam Medal. He received an honorable discharge on October 20, 1972.

Mr. Perry attended Ohio State University for Fire School and Emergency Care courses. He is currently an emergency medical technician with Gold Cross ambulance and a custodian at Salem High School. He is also a fireman with the North Georgetown Volunteer Fire Department. Mr. Perry currently makes his home at 410 Benton Road, Salem, Ohio.

SILVIA PALLOTTA
JULY 13, 1977

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INTERVIEWEE: DENNIS PERRY
INTERVIEWER: Donald R. Bennett
SUBJECT: Military Experiences in Vietnam
DATE: December 12, 1974

B: This is an interview with Dennis Perry for the Youngstown State University Veterans Project by Donald R. Bennett at Salem High School at approximately 2:20 p.m. on December 12, 1974.

B: Denny, tell me a little about your background, schooling, family, where you grew up, and what you are presently doing.

P: Okay. I was born in Salem here. I attended elementary school at St. Paul's, so naturally I'm a Catholic. I went to Salem Senior High and graduated in 1968. My father and mother are still alive. They're separated. Right now, I'm an emergency medical technician with Gold Cross ambulance. Also I'm working for the Salem High School as a custodian and I'm a fireman for the North Georgetown Volunteer Fire Department and I'm vice commander of the American Legion Post 56, here in Salem.

B: Why did you enter the Army?

P: Well, I went into the Army first of all, because I had just graduated from school and I feared I was going to be drafted in the future anyhow. The way the calls were coming up I figured that I might as well go, and get it over with.

B: When did you enter the service?

P: I entered in about May of 1969. I was employed at that time, before going into the service, at Perskey's, and that was a dead end job, really. You know how that is.

B: Where did you go for basic training?

P: Well, I had basic training at Fort Campbell, Kentucky. That's the home of the One Hundred and First Airborne. They left for Vietnam in 1967. From there I went to Fort Polk, Louisiana, for what they call AIT, Advanced Individual Tactical training. I was going to school, at that time, to become an infantry soldier.

B: How did you feel about the Army and the War at this point?

P: Well, I'll answer the first question, what I felt about the Army. During my first few weeks there I thought I had entered hell itself. I thought the end of the world had come. I hated it with a passion. Then after I grew accustomed to military life and the discipline, which is a big change from being a civilian and doing anything you wanted, I accepted it.

The second question is about the war in Vietnam. I had kind of mixed feelings about it. I couldn't see the United States being over there. We went over with the right intentions--God and country--but we got bogged down in something that I think the United States just wasn't ready to get into at that time. It was a very touchy political situation. At that time, you know, we were having riots on campuses and that. I believe some of the protesting was justified. I couldn't see our people getting killed over there for something that we never gained winning in the end anyhow.

B: What happened to you after basic training?

P: After basic training I didn't get a chance to come home for leave. I could have taken a fifteen-day leave, but I ended up on the streets of Fort Polk. I really didn't get too much of a chance to figure out how I was thinking. I knew I wanted to go home and see how things had changed. I wanted to see if my feelings toward myself had changed, and I noticed that they did. I have changed mentally as well as physically, in thinking about a lot of things.

B: Where did you go after basic training?

P: Well, after basic training and after a leave in Fort Polk, Louisiana, then I did come home for leave. I had a thirty-day leave and then I left from Oakland, California, for Vietnam. I landed at a place called Cam Ranh Bay. From there, I was assigned to the Fourth Infantry Division.

B: What did you do?

P: Well, I was an infantry soldier. My job was with light weapons as a tactical observer. Basically, I was an infantry soldier. I was trained to find a target, and destroy it. That would be our mission. When we went somewhere, our job was to find the enemy, destroy the enemy, and try to secure the area. A lot of times this was virtually impossible. If the enemy was on the move, we were carrying not only our own weight, but about a hundred pounds of equipment in our rut sacks.

In the unit, we worked in a ten-man team and we'd have a radio telephone operator and a M60 machine gun. Each guy would have to carry a thousand rounds of ammunition for the M60 and we'd have to carry an extra battery for the radio telephone. These were two guys you didn't want to be around because when the shooting started, these were the first two things that the enemy always went after. They wanted to cut your communication off as soon as possible because without artillery support and without gunship support, you were in their backyard. Also, if they got rid of your M60, there was one hundred percent of your punch gone right there. Light weapons were no good under some of that terrain. You really needed fire power.

B: Did your training prepare you for this type of fighting?

P: Yes and no. Yes, they trained us in combat for fighting in the sense of fighting. But a lot of the techniques we had learned we never used. During basic training we used bayonets, but I never even had a bayonet when I was over in Vietnam. With the M14s in basic training you got a lot of bayonet training. You never really got that close to the enemy unless he was dead. I feared if he got that close, I was sure as hell not going to go up yup-yup with the bayonet. That just didn't make any sense to me.

Another thing was that they trained us in digging foxholes. Well, first of all, we never dug a foxhole in Vietnam unless we would be setting up a fire base somewhere. Nobody really had time, during a real battle, to dig a foxhole because as soon as you dropped your rut sack and hit the ground, you were shooting and trying to move, to get some cover. You really never had time. Even if we stayed overnight somewhere, the only hole we dug was for human waste.

B: This training, was it good?

- P: The training was good. The teacher can only teach the student if he wants to learn. Map reading, in the service, was about like my math in school. I just never did really catch on to reading a grid map, but I had the basics for doing it. I know that for a while, you'd think of home or anything else, so your mind was not on the training. But the training is good. It's just that there are a few things that need improvement. Basically, the training's good.
- B: When you did get your orders for Vietnam, did you volunteer or were you ordered?
- P: I was ordered. They give you a choice, but you know where you're going. I put in to go to Germany, but in the back of my mind, I knew I'd never see Germany. You expect the worst and hope for the best. I got orders to go directly to Vietnam after my leave and report to the fourth infantry division.
- B: What was your initial reaction to your orders to go to Vietnam?
- P: Well, I was scared. You know, you don't want to come home as a fifty-star general. That's when you are draped with a flag. I wasn't so much afraid of death as I was afraid of coming back home crippled. I could take being dead because death only hurts the people you leave behind, but if I had to lay in bed for the next twenty years or thirty years, I'd rather have been dead. I saw some of my friends in Vietnam come home after having lost one eye or some fingers. You could lose a finger and that isn't too bad, but when you lose your arm or your leg, you feel like half of you is dead. I couldn't take this. I don't think anybody can actually take that.
- B: Did you expect going to Vietnam?
- P: Oh, I did. When I entered the service, my dad and I talked and he was upset, at first. In a way, though, he was kind of glad that I was going into the service because he had tried to get in during the second world war and he was rejected. He was proud that I was going into the service but he was as scared as I was because we both knew that I would be going to Vietnam and that fate would have to play its part.
- B: How did your family and friends react to this?
- P: Well, I lost one friend, a girl that I was dating at that time. She got very upset about this. She was a really militant protester. She couldn't see killing in the sense

of killing, since it was against the commandment of God. I couldn't see killing either, but I couldn't see being shot at. She hasn't talked to me to this day. She won't talk to me.

B: Did you try to get out of it?

P: I thought of ways. I think everybody toys with ideas to get out. I toyed with some ways. But after seeing some stupid things happen, I figured it wasn't worth it. There was a funny incident with one guy at basic training. He thought he'd commit suicide and to show you how comical this got, he jumped out of the upstairs window and fell on a drill sergeant that was just coming into the building. About the only injuries sustained there were the drill sergeant's dislocated shoulder and the soldier's broken ankle.

I wouldn't have done something drastic like slicing my wrists. No, I wouldn't have done that. I thought of trying to get out with a hardship discharge, but your family almost has to be so poor that even the Salvation Army wouldn't help them.

B: Were you prepared for your Vietnam experience by Army training?

P: Combat-wise, yes I was. I pictured it as torn up jungles, bodies laying everywhere, people hanging from trees. Everywhere you turned, the enemy would come out and slice you up. I was surprised when I did get over there. The countryside's beautiful. It's a shame some of it has to be ravaged by war. The people, basically, were friendly, but you were always scared. A kid could pull a grenade on an old lady because her husband was being held somewhere by the Viet Cong.

The people treated you nice, especially the kids. My heart went out to the kids because they had nobody. This was it for them. Their parents and their grandparents would go out and leave them. A lot of the kids just roamed. Brothers took care of their sisters. This was tragic. When we used to go through the towns, we used to throw out C rations and these people would go after these C rations like animals because this was all they got to eat sometimes.

B: What happened when you arrived in Vietnam?

P: Well, when we arrived in Vietnam, we did our in process in the country. They tell you where you're going. They issue you your clothing and rifles and that. I remember we were going from the airport to our barracks and the air raid sounded off and we got shelled. That was the

first time I ever, actually went through shelling. It didn't come anywhere near us, but some of the compound was shelled. Nobody was hit, I guess.

We left there and landed at the home of the fourth infantry division, which was Pleiku at that time. About three days before we got there, some enemy snipers-- what we called "sappers"--had infiltrated the barbed wire and had blown up the ammunition dump. I guess they killed quite a few people because they had a tendency to cause havoc so the guys would run out of the barracks. As soon as the guys ran out the "sappers" were out there waiting for them. They got a lot of guys.

The security was very tight at that time. The PX's were closed. The USO couldn't open up. It was just a red alert all the time, even though nothing was happening. This was a big build-up on it at that time.

B: What was your first impression of the place?

P: The camp itself is about the size of Salem, Ohio. It's a huge place. It was the home of the fourth infantry division; this was the heart and body and mind. Anything that the fourth division did came from this place. It was a huge compound and it was surrounded by barbed wire. The enemy kept bombing us all the time, and they'd snipe at us. I can't think of the fourth division's camp name there, but when we moved from Pleiku, it was Camp Radcliff. That was our second home. It was originally nothing but a fire base at that time and the home of the first cav.

The first cav had a fire base and this was used for the support of their infantry units out in the field. There's this huge mountain in the middle of the fire base, which took them [U.S. troops] a couple of weeks to take in 1966 because the enemy, almost like the Nazis, built concrete block bunkers up in these mountains and tunnels leading out into the bushes. The engineers blew them up the best they could to close them up, but somehow these seemed to be re-openers.

When the fourth division moved from Pleiku to An Khe, this base hadn't been used that much, so about fifty percent out of one hundred percent of the base was in operation. The security was very, very lax because you couldn't secure the whole place; it was really coming down. One night, the enemy got in. I happened to be up on watch duty that night up in the town. They blew up the ammunition dump and they got out onto the helicopter pad. They did a lot of destruction to the helicopters.

The policies of Vietnam were that no medivac [a helicopter for transporting the sick and wounded to the hospital] could

fly with any kind of weapons on it, or any kind of machine guns. If the medics wanted to, they could carry a pistol, but that isn't any good when you're trying to take care of somebody, so the medivacs had gun ships flying with them. These medivacs were just big sitting targets, especially out on the air fields. The enemy usually went after the medivacs, the gun ships and the cobras [helicopters with great fire power potential]. The enemy knew what they wanted and they got in and out of camp better than the general himself did. They had ways of getting in and out. Well, this was their backyard. This was their country.

B: What did you think about your first week or so there?

P: Well, during my first week, I felt just like I was at basic training. I was homesick. I wanted to go home. I wanted to make it home, but when I looked around and saw the other guys there who were in the same boat I was, I didn't feel as lonely as I did when I first went over.

I made a lot of friends. You make friendships just like with guys that you've known all your life. When you leave to come home and when they leave to go home, you feel that friendship get a lot stronger. I've got one or two people I can still write to. I haven't written to them for a while. I know a gentleman named Noble Lovejoy who lives in Canton. He and I are really good friends. He was in the same unit I was in over in Vietnam.

B: Were you scared?

P: Oh, I was scared. Oh, there was no doubt. There was a lot of times I was scared, especially when I heard a crack or a pop. If you heard a crack go to your head when you were out in the woods, the bullet missed you by about a foot; if you heard a pop, it just missed you by a few inches.

We had an incident, one time, when we were out in the field. This was the mechanized unit this time and we took over a deserted fire base. We could just sense that this fire base had something strange about it. The enemy had it zeroed in. We had a new lieutenant at that time, I believe his name was Rice. At about two o'clock in the morning we got shelled and they had us pinpointed so accurately that they were able to drop rounds with mortars right into the tank hatches. They killed Lieutenant Rice and they killed our Kit Carson scout, who was also interpreter. They ruined quite a few GIs in that battle and they destroyed a lot of United States army equipment.

B: What was your rank then?

P: Well when I went over, I was an E-1. I made private first class after I got a CIB, that's a Combat Infantry Badge. You get that by being in one or two hostile fire fights or contacts, as they call them, lasting fifteen minutes or longer. When I was discharged from the service, I was a specialist fourth class. That would be almost equal to a corporal.

B: Where were you stationed after the initial base?

P: You mean in Vietnam or back in the States?

B: In Vietnam.

P: In Vietnam. Well, I was only in Pleiku a couple of weeks when the fourth division moved out, so I'd have to say Camp Radcliff was my home at that time. We'd get our assignments and then we'd go out into the field. We'd be out in the field thirty days sometimes. If you received a lot of resistance, then you'd stay out longer because they wanted to find out how big these forces were that were resisting and try to push them back.

There were no battle lines. You couldn't say, "The enemy's right over the hill." They were everywhere. The main things they were after, when you were out in the field, were your radio-telephone operator and your sixty gunner, because if they got these, they had you. The only thing we had was fire support. In some places there were no artillery zones. I don't know why. They would only allow you to call for mortars.

Some of these maps we had were a little outdated, too. We got a map one time and it wasn't even for where we were at, and you couldn't have used the thing. If you lost what we called the "funny paper" [the map], you were sort of lost until the helicopters went by and got somebody to come to your assistance.

B: Did you remain there the whole time?

P: I remained the whole time in Vietnam, yes. I caught malaria twice. I ended up going to Cam Ranh Bay once. The first time I had malaria, I thought it was just the flu. You know, it came and it kind of went. Then when I came down with it again, I ended up going to the Seventh Field Vac [hospital] and they sent me down to Cam Ranh Bay. There's a military hospital down there. They get a lot of the badly injured people. This is the transporting station. Saigon and Beinh Hoa are where the Red Cross

planes come in and take the seriously injured back to Japan, also that's where a lot of the deceased go.

B: Did you think about death?

P: When you were in a contact, you never thought of it. I don't know why. After everything was over and you saw the trees splintered around you and somebody said somebody was killed, then you thought of it. You said, "Well, why wasn't it me? I was there. Why didn't I step on the damn land mine or why didn't I trip the booby trap? I walked the same place the guy behind me walked." It was kind of eerie. It was like putting a gun up to your head in the dark and seeing if it was loaded.

There were times when we'd get rocketed, when we were back at the base, and the sirens would go off and of course, you just got to the point of saying, "The hell with it. I'm staying in bed." One guy did one night and what was very odd was that a round hit him right where he was at and killed him. At any other time, it might never have happened.

B: Did you do what you were trained for in Vietnam?

P: I think I did. We went on a mission to destroy everything that we came upon. The job of the civil affairs team was to take care of the villagers. Their job was very closely joined with ours. If you went into a village and there were only babies and old men and old women, then one of two things had happened to the young men. They had either run off and had been captured by the Viet Cong or the North Vietnamese Army and been automatically drafted into the service, or the village chief had been threatened with saying, "Well, treat GI Joe such and such a way, but if you get too friendly, the VC will be back." They didn't want this.

This was a problem the ARVNs-- the Army of the Republic of Vietnam--were having, too. Here you had a soldier who was supposed to be fighting for his country. How can he defend his country if he can't even defend his own home and his wife and children? The NVA would say, "Hey, if you go out there and fight for GI Joe, we're going to slice your old lady's throat." Well, this soldier can't do his job right if he is pressured like that. I think that was a big reason why a lot of times they had to kick them out of the helicopters. It's interferred to know that you're trying to defend the whole country, and yet you can't defend your own little home.

B: What did you do when you were out in the field?

P: Well, we made the best of it. The weather was against you; the terrain was definitely against you. You went up and down these huge mountains. You took one step forward and about ten backwards. Monsoon rains would come in and rain so hard and so loud that you couldn't even hear.

The leeches were enough to make Dracula turn into a saint. These things would get on you in the middle of the night or even during the day and you couldn't light up anything because everything was soaked. You had to rip these leeches off of you and it was like putting a nail in your skin and trying to dig it out. If you had these on you at night, you had to get them off you the best you could because if you lit a match or something, you might as well have turned on a light.

The enemy watched you everywhere you went. You knew they were watching you and about the only time they'd hit you was early in the morning when it was foggy or in the middle of the afternoon. They would try to position themselves so that they had the sun to their backs and the sun to our face, because actually, you couldn't see during the sunset or at high noon. This was awkward.

Sometimes they'd hit you as soon as the helicopters came in because here you had a huge helicopter trying to land and so you just made the best of everything that you could. A lot of times you went without drinking water because you'd run out of it. You ate C rations dry because you didn't have the time to cook and you just laid in the mud because you were just so tired that anything was comfortable. Yet, you never really were asleep. If something moved your eyes were open.

B: Did you like your job?

P: No. I really didn't like it. I was proud of being with the group of guys that I was with. I wasn't proud, after a while, of seeing real estate that a lot of my friends suffered and died for, given back to the people that we originally took it from.

If somebody would have told me, as I told you at one time Mr. Bennett, that the Chinese Republican Band would be playing the "Star Spangled Banner," I would have said you were nuts. But they were playing it and it was televised by satellite to the United States. Also, if somebody would have told me that the President of the United States would be passing out pens to draft

resisters and draft dodgers, I would have said, "you are crazy. It'll never happen." But it has happened.

The country over there has really gone back to the way it was before we went over. The war has been going on for two thousand years, so how can you be proud of fighting for something that you know you're not going to be able to get or keep? We're still in Korea, you know, we haven't gone beyond a certain parallel, but we're still there. It's nice to say "Well, I was in the Army and I did what I thought I had to do." Then you look back and you say, "Well, there's a hunk of real estate where Charlie Brown died and Fred So and So, who never got to see his kid and there's a communist flag there, so what do you do?"

B: What did you do after you were through work?

P: After you were through work you pulled out your girl friend's picture or some guys pulled out the pictures of their wives. You really didn't write any letters out in the field but you could if you wanted to. The problem was that if you would lose them and the enemy was lucky enough to get a hold of them, they'd write letters back to your family saying you were captured or killed. They were good at this.

Another thing was that if we got mail out in the field, we had to burn it right after we read it, so there wasn't really keeping any kind of souvenirs. Now some guys did. The problem was that if you'd lose something, they could tell. This could be a psychological advantage. If the enemy would know that somebody in an outfit is maybe on the verge of having a divorce or something, and they could, through some kind of means, put it to their advantage.

This was something you always had to watch out for. That's why we never carried too much identification except for our dog tags. If you did get captured, they could write to your people and tell them all kinds of gruesome things. This is how protests might get started.

B: Did you have much time off?

P: Over there, yes and no. When we came in, out of the field, it was called a stand down. What you do is get your equipment cleaned up and that and you really get a good bath and you shave. Then the USOs are mostly open and you can go up and watch shows and that. They have bars and you could get beer there. But hot beer doesn't taste too good, at least it never did to me. They have bands that come around and play.

It brings back a lot of feelings of home and a lot of guys get a lot more homesick than they would otherwise. That made it kind of sad. It was nice to know that there was some place you could go and relax when you came back. I'm glad that there were places like the USO and the Red Cross because that really gave people places to go.

B: Were you ever bored?

P: Oh yes. During my last four months in Vietnam I was stuck up in a watch tower. This was a real drag. I worked sixteen hours a day. I couldn't have a radio or a TV up there. All you did was look at the countryside. All kinds of things go through your mind like, "What's it going to be like when I come home? Have I changed? Have people changed? Have attitudes changed?" When I had just been in Vietnam about six months, they had the Kent State killings. I wondered how this would affect me coming home. You think about so many things that you just can't put down on paper.

I thought when I got out of the service, I might get married. I have been out of the service for a while now and I'm not married. I feel like I'm in the same rut that I was in before I went into the service.

B: What did the other guys do?

P: Well, they played cards or some of them had cassette recorders and they'd tape letters back home. They would talk about their children. They would talk about the girl that they were going with that somebody else had tried to go with when they were gone. It was just general small talk about what they'd like to do when they get out of the service.

We had some bad incidents. We had a couple of guys who got into a fight one night playing cards and one drew a pistol on the other one and shot him. I think he shot him in the leg with a 45 caliber, that could do enough damage. After that, the provost marshal talked to the general of the fourth infantry division to have us put our rifles away when we came back in out of the field. Everything was locked up.

B: Did you make any friendships that you have retained?

P: Oh yes, sir. I made one friend who lives really close to here. He lives in Canton, Ohio. His name is Noble Lovejoy. He and I served in the same unit in Vietnam, second batallion eighth mechanized infantry. That was an armory unit, stationed at Camp Radcliff.

B: Did you lose any of your friends over there?

P: We lost Lieutenant Rice and our Kit Carson scout when we got shelled one night in a deserted fire base where we set up for that evening. That's where we'd move out for the next day. He was only with us for about two or three weeks and he became very friendly with the troops and with the people in our company. He was an officer, but he acted more as though he was one of us. He didn't set himself apart and you knew you had somebody that you could talk to if you had any problems.

B: How did it affect you, losing these friends?

P: Well, when we started to get shelled, there was so much going on at the time that I didn't know that he was hurt or even dead. We heard people call out for medics and everybody was running around. You were really watching over your own backside, and therefore you watched for your friend. This is just natural instinct, self survival and the like. First I found out that the Kit Carson scout had been killed and I felt kind of bad, but when I found out that Lieutenant Rice had been killed, it kind of hit home. You wondered, again, why it wasn't you; why it was him.

B: What were the living conditions like?

P: The soldier out in the field lived out of a rut sack. You carried your basic food. We had what were known as lurp meals. They are dinners that you add hot water to and mix up. Oh, they taste awful, but they're not too bad, and they're edible. You ate fruits out of your C ration cans. You just tried to make yourself comfortable for a night, but actually you weren't very comfortable in the sense of being relaxed.

At night, you tried to blow up your air mattress, which you carried. It was like a mattress that you lay on while swimming. You knew darn well that they were so ripped up that you could blow your lungs out, it wouldn't do any good. You just tried to make yourself generally comfortable.

It was sad, especially during monsoon rains because you just lay in the mud and mud would run down your neck and you would be soaked and you were miserable. You looked miserable. You felt miserable. When we had Lieutenant Rice among us, he used to be able to cheer people up and it would be nice. We would try to cheer each other up, too.

B: What were the living conditions like at your home base?

P: Well, back at base we had it pretty nice. I will give the fourth division credit for that, especially our company. Our cooks had really good hot meals for us when we got back. We had hot showers. There were a few units over there in the fourth division that didn't have some of the conveniences that we had. We had hot water. We had our own showers. We got three good meals a day, breakfast, lunch, and dinner.

We had a nice PX. You could buy cars over there and have them waiting for you when you came back to the United States. They had salesmen there. You could buy cameras and tape recorders, and have them sent home. We were lucky enough to get our hands on an electrical generator, so we had lights. We had our own electricity.

Our company commander allowed us--if we wanted to take the chance--to buy a recorder of good size, or a stereo outfit with the tapes and everything, and play them. The problem was that you never knew when you were going out on the field. You could come back and this stuff would be gone. Out on the black market--if you were lucky enough to get outside of base--you could sell this stuff for a fortune.

B: How was your troop morale?

P: The troop morale in our platoon, after we lost Lieutenant Rice, was kind of down. You felt like you lost a part of yourself. In general, the troop morale, throughout the fourth division, was good. I believe, in a way, that our division was better off than most divisions because we were able to get USO shows and that which kept the morale going, but it still made you homesick, because at night, you dreamed about being home. The morale was good. You were able to adjust a little, at least, but you really don't adjust completely.

B: Were there any racial problems?

P: Yes. Oh definitely there were. I'd say out of five brothers, pertaining to the colored, you'd always get one that had some kind of problem. He didn't like whites. Sometimes, he didn't even like his own race.

We had one incident at Camp Radcliff right after we came in for a stand down. We had one guy among us who was a real character. He pulled jokes and you didn't know if he was joking or not because he had a poker face. He was harassing this brother one day, and the brother just had had it. The brother was a supply helper and a specialist. He jumped across that counter and that wasn't half bad, but he had a rifle in his hands. He

called him a Hunky. He said, "Hey, Hunky, you keep it up and I'm going to shoot you." Old Poker face had to edge it on a little bit more and the officer came out. He stopped it. But it could have been some real trouble.

At another time in a little bar that we had back at base, the brothers would stay to one side and the whites would stay together. On occasion, you would get them together. After a couple of drinks sometimes you got that friction, especially when somebody would say "Hey, boy, you go out and pick cotton." Then sometimes, trouble would start.

B: What kind of unit were you in?

P: Well, when I first went over to Vietnam, I was with a complete ground unit. They're called bush beaters or hill stompers. They're a straight leg infantry unit. You walked everywhere you went. They let you fly out in a helicopter to a landing zone and go way out in the bushes and then drop you off. The helicopters would never land; they would hover maybe about five or six feet from the ground. You were hanging onto the skid or the ski underneath the helicopter. The crew chief who was in charge of the helicopter would point and you'd jump.

You were really a sitting target there until you were actually able to get into the woodline and the enemy knew this. If they were going to hit you, they'd hit you at about this time because there was confusion and you got mixed up. The helicopter was just a big sitting target. At other times, when our infantry units would go out, the helicopters would not stop. They would be on the move. They'd probably go five or six knots and when you hit that ground, it really hurt.

The dangerous thing that you had to watch out for was that they would pepper the area with artillery before you went in to land. Many times, they might be around the landing zone or the enemy was lucky enough, after the showering had stopped, to be able to put up pungy stakes. These are stakes about a foot out of the ground and you could step on one of these and get it run into you. They could do a lot of damage.

B: Did you see any action?

P: Oh yes sir, I've seen action. I've seen it quite a few times. The first time I was ever in combat, we were out on a mission. This was my first mission and it was a search and destroy mission. We were told that there

was a large VC force working around Camp Radcliff and that they were going to get us, so they sent us out.

We had been out in the bush only about two or three days. We were walking down a path and when we were about as close to the enemy as I am to this window--about twenty feet--the point man yelled "gooks." From where I was I didn't hear it right away and all of a sudden, there was shooting. The next thing I knew people were going left and right and I was firing too. When it was over, they must have dragged the dead away, because there was blood on the ground. We definitely had hit something, but the contact was only for about five minutes and it broke off as soon as the artillery came.

We thought, at that time, that what we hit was an advance group because they were coming the other way. The enemy had a tendency, if they were moving a large group of people, to send five or six men ahead for about three or four hundred yards. If they hit anything, of course, the other unit would go in the other direction. You had to watch out for this.

At night, the enemy moved around with flashlights and they could move anywhere they wanted. They could turn a flashlight on, walk a few feet, and turn it off. If you were new in the country, this caught you off guard. You really couldn't believe these things were happening.

The first time I saw this happen, I woke up the guy beside me and said, "Hey, you aren't going to believe this but there's a flashlight looking at me." This guy was getting ready to ETS--Expiration Term of Service--out of the country and he didn't want any more trouble than he had. He said, "If you see anything, don't say anything. Just keep calm. Now, you don't want to blow our claim because if you shoot maybe you'd only hit one and there might be a hundred of them out there and they could just bring all God's creation down on you."

B: What were the conditions surrounding the engagements?

P: You mean what were the conditions before the battles? Well, where we were at, basically, you never took the paths because they would booby trap them. Well, we figured we'd be making a little bit more time taking the path than staying off to the side, which was just as dangerous. As we went up this huge hill, the path turned a ninety degree angle, and we ran right into the enemy.

Actually you couldn't see who you were shooting at. You probably could if you looked up but it was a good way of losing your head. I'm not proud to admit the way I shot. I laid completely with my head to the side and I put my rifle up over my head and fired because too many guys, a lot of times, got up to take a look and got rounds in them.

The jungle was thick. It's double canopied in some places. You go in there and it's like a tunnel; you could see the light way at the other end. These are dangerous spots because they could set up booby traps.

During the monsoon rains you can't hear anything, so somebody could be moving right beside you. It's gloomy and it's desolate in some spots. By desolate, I mean you feel that there are just you and those hundreds of trees around and high bushes. Elephant grass would grow about fifteen feet high and if you were walking through this stuff, it would cut you. It's sharp and you would get cut and there were mosquitoes around. You could always catch malaria. That was always a danger to you.

B: Was it a job to you or a matter of survival or what?

P: It was a little of both. I knew I had to do my job. If I didn't do my job and keep thinking, I'd get myself killed. If I didn't remember what I had learned, or if I'd become separated from my unit, I'd have to be able to survive off of the surroundings. My job wasn't really a matter of "if I didn't do it, I wouldn't make it," but in a way, it was.

B: Did you feel what you were doing was right?

P: When I first got over there, I believed that we were over there for a reason or we wouldn't be there. Some of the people that were in the service for twenty years were called lifers and they had their own opinion. They couldn't see what we were doing over there.

We had a first sergeant who we called Tot. He had been in Korea. He had been in the second world war and this was about his third or fourth time over in Vietnam. He said that each time he got a little bit more stateside. By stateside, he meant he believed in having the boots polished, saluting officers, or just dismounting a drill when you were back at base.

You just lost the meaning of war. You didn't seem like you were in a battle zone when you got back to your company area or back in the unit area. Some companies even practiced shooting wooden targets outside the

perimeter and they practiced dismounting and drilling the rifles. You kind of wondered why you were going through all this stuff you had back at basic training somewhere.

B: Did the bombing runs give you any sense of security?

P: The B52 bombing runs did give us a sense of security because when they dropped a payload, nothing survived unless you could work a miracle. There was one B52 bombing run made by the Air Force, or the Army Air Force, and they pulled us back for a couple of miles way off into the distance. You could see trees just being incinerated and blowing up almost to the sun. During the bombing, the ground would rumble and when it was over, nothing was out there. It was just naked, black, desolate ground. Now that gave you confidence.

Another thing that gave you confidence--if the bombing runs didn't give you confidence--was when you had a gun ship or a cobra come in to make a run for you. If you popped smoke and if the enemy was lucky enough to have the same color of smoke you had, you had a time on your hands. You would say to the helicopter, "This is Charlie One, popped smoke." They would say, "Charlie One, is it red?" and you'd say, "Positive." Then they'd say, "On what side of the river are you on?" You'd say, "We're on the west side or whiskey side." and he'd say, "Well, I've got it spotted on the eastern side." Well, here, the enemy was popping smoke themselves. So you wondered, what do you do now? If we popped smoke then they popped [smoke].

You just had to take a chance and say, "Fire a few rounds for marking" and you hoped to God this guy would fly low enough to see you. Some guy had to stand out there and wave. Then they'd pop a round and you'd say, "Yes. You're on the right side now. You can open up." But if these guys made a mistake, especially with the cobra, that mini gun would just chew you up.

There was no hiding from that gun. It would have been over with because this gun would put a hole in every inch, to the left, to the right, above and below, an area of three football fields in only one pass. Then you went "Ooohh" and it was all over. There was no crying. Every fifth round was a tracer round. That's a red round. This stuff would make a big bucket of lead. You knew that if this guy made a mistake, you could go home in a body bag. This is what the enemy wanted you to do.

Most of the enemy were doped up and they were high so there wasn't any sense of pain. If I tell some kid on the day he's born, "When you reach twelve years old, you're going to die," well then he is mentally ready to meet his maker. That's what they believe in. We know, man's not created like that. For heavens sakes, I wanted to go home. Death didn't scare me but being crippled did.

B: How did the men fight?

P: I have never seen a man lose his grip or in other words, fall apart. They were scared. I know I was scared. There were a lot of times I was praying so much underneath my breath that if I had died, I would have been a saint right there. I have never seen a guy drive his rifle down and say, "I'm not going out there to help that guy. I'm just not going. I never saw that guy get hurt." If a guy got hurt, I have never seen a guy who didn't try to go out and aid him. They would never say, "Well, I'm sorry, Charlie. I'm not coming out there to get you, you know, tough."

The guys would do something to help. If we had to get artillery supporters on top of us to save one life, we'd do it. We never left anybody. The guys I was around with, would never leave anybody. There were a few instances where the guys had to pull back. It would have just been suicide to go out there. I know a lot of guys cried inside their hearts because they couldn't go up there and save their friend. There was a guy you trained with for eight or nine months and all of a sudden, he was gone. He was not there anymore. His body was there, but spiritually he was somewhere else.

We never left the body. As soon as the fighting was over, the bodies were sent back with proper identification. The wounded were always taken care of. You could get a medivac, even if the sun didn't shine. This medivac pilot would come out and get you. This is all volunteer duty on a medivac ship. These guys would come out and get you. They didn't care if you were hanging up in a tree, these guys would get you.

There were a lot of guys that lost their lives in this medivac. You had to give those guys credit. I have never seen a man give up. Even if he was hurt and bleeding, he never gave up. They held their ground.

B: How was your leadership?

P: Leadership was good and yet it was bad. We had some of the first sergeants and some of the older officers

that had been in the army for twenty years. They knew how to handle people. They accepted some things. You know, sometimes a guy would do something and they'd let it slide. Sometimes though you'd get some new officer just out of OCS or ROTC school, and he went by the book. If you curse somebody, you aren't going to get much work out of them or cooperation.

If you don't have the team work, then when you get out on the field, you lack the communication and before you know it, you might be going in two separate directions. Nobody wants to take orders from somebody that isn't going to do the job himself. That was one thing about Lieutenant Rice; he would not have you do anything that he wouldn't do himself. If he came up to me and said, "Perry, I'd like to have you clean up the latrines today," then he'd be out there helping me. Now some of the other officers frowned on this. They thought, "Hey, boy this guy's a lieutenant and he's degrading us." Lieutenant Rice went by what he said. He said he wouldn't make anybody do anything that he wouldn't do himself.

B: Were the RVN--Republic of Vietnam--soldiers good allies?

P: I was told a story about our Kit Carson scout. Now, I don't know how true this is. When I was over there and when I met him, he did have scars on his body where he was almost assassinated in a village where he lived. I guess the NVA or the VC or somebody came in and recruited people. He said no and they shot him. I guess he knew God was with him because he didn't die, but they did shoot his family. Later, when he died, there wasn't much left of him, because he and Lieutenant Rice were almost right beside each other.

A lot of the ARVN's were bothered by this. It goes back to the old thing, "You cannot defend your country if you can't defend your home." This is what scared them. When you tried to explain something to them, they were lost. Some of them weren't mechanically inclined to start with. The guys were trying to show them how to operate these deuce and a half tractors and you know how big these tractors are. Some of the guys we had from Texas, their feet just hit the pedals. Here was this guy who was about five feet tall and he was trying to drive one of these things. It was like a little kid driving a car.

It was a real zoo sometimes. You'd see them back into each other. If they went somewhere, they'd take mamasan and papasan and they took the chickens and the cows. They went out to the field with the chicken and the cows and all. It was a real family affair. It was like

moving into a farm. The chickens would wake you up in the morning.

I remember being out in this one fire base, Hard Times. There were two villages beside us and the ARVNs didn't use the gate. To hell with the gate. They opened up the barbed wire, pressed it down, walked over it, got a chicken and wrung its neck and came back. I was thinking "This is like out of a movie. This isn't really happening."

Some of them would fight. A lot of them, as soon as you started getting shelled, boy, they were ready to ching lee or something. They didn't want to be anywhere around because they knew that if the NVA or VC got near, it was all over for them. There'd be no mercy. They could have been majors. It was all over for them.

B: Did you grow used to death?

P: I don't think anybody grows used to death. We accept it, but I don't think we grow used to it. I didn't grow used to it when I was in Vietnam and somebody told me that someone had died. I didn't grow used to it when I came home and was told my grandfather had died.

I'm in a medical field right now. I still find it very hard to believe when I lose a patient that I've worked on for a heart attack or something. I can't believe that in one minute they're alive and in the next minute they're gone. I don't think anybody accepts death. I don't think I do. I live with the fact that it's going to happen some day. I don't want to see it happen. Death only hurts the people it leaves behind. I don't believe it hurts the people it takes.

B: What was your overall feeling about the Vietnamese people?

P: The Vietnamese in general? Right now, I'd say they're the most disorganized group of people in the world. Their homes have been burned. Their relatives have been killed. Their families have been separated. Nobody has gained anything. The Vietnamese haven't gained. The United States hasn't gained. They try to bear with it. They try to smile in the face of death, but they don't have any use for the GIs. Some of them do, but, in general, they just don't want any more fighting. They don't care who takes them over now.

One guy told us one time, "All I want is my little hooch, my cattle, my family, and that's all." He figures it's easier to give some guy thirty bags of rice than

it is to watch his wife get her throat sliced. They just want peace of mind. That's never going to happen, I'm afraid. When the French lost it, in a way, we kind of lost it. We've gotten out of there with our heads above water and the Vietnamese know this. I think they knew all along when the Americans came, that they would never really stay. They're just people and people hate death and destruction. These people had two thousand years of it and they just can't take it any-more.

B: What was the U. S. soldiers' feeling about these people?

P: Well, my personal feeling of them was that they had absolutely nothing that would compare to what a person or a family has in the United States. They worked long and hard and how long would they be in one spot? Today, they'll be over here on the right side and tomorrow they'll be on the left side because our artillery has shelled the right side and they know that if they go to the left side, the NVA will get them. These poor people end up with nowhere to go. They're ignorant, and yet, they're not ignorant. All they want is this peace of mind.

B: What would you have done to improve relations with the people there?

P: If it had been up to me, personally, I would have just showed them that we're their friends. I would have tried to set up some decent housing projects. The job of the civil affairs people was to try to rebuild these houses that got destroyed either by us or by the VC and to get medical relief and food to the people. I think more of this would have done it. I think sometimes people do things in haste, and I know we did it a lot of times. There were times that I screamed and yelled.

We were lucky. We had a housemaid that used to come in and I think we paid her ten bucks for a whole day. She did a lot of work. She did the washing and provided dining like the old Chinese. I remember one time when I was dead tired and lying in bed. She didn't mean to do what she did, but somehow, my rifle fell over and hit me. I came out of that bed and I was ready to knock her through the wall, and I just stopped to think, "But now if I hit this girl, she's going to think I'm no more an animal than the kind of man she's going to get at home."

A lot of the people who came into the base to work, who were lucky enough to get a security pass to get in,

their families were harrassed. They got harrassed themselves by their own people and by outsiders. I think these thoughts flashed through my mind or I might have drilled her head through the wall. I would have just tried to show the people over there that we're not animals, but human nature is human nature.

B: Did your attitude change towards them as time went on?

P: My attitude changed, yes. After a while, about in the middle of my tour over there, I just felt disgusted. I figured if these people don't want to help themselves, then why should I want to help them? Then it kept going through my mind what the guy said, "All I want is my family, my little place, and I'm happy."

At times the old story came back, "What am I doing here? There is a guy who wants to tramp around in this mud and make this stupid rice; that's his business. All I want to do is go home." Then I would stop and think "Well, maybe in the end, everything's going to turn out right about this. The country will be able to have elections. People will be able to govern themselves." Now you pick up the newspaper and you read that the United Nations force over there had their helicopters shot out of the sky when there was supposed to be a cease fire in effect. You wonder if it was all worth it in the end?

B: Did you like anything about their way of life?

P: Yes. They're not hurried people like we are in the United States. You take the American boy, he wants to go everywhere right now. There they just putt along nice and slow. I think that if we had this back here in the United States, people wouldn't be so aggressive toward each other. There wouldn't be hostilities and we might be able to even communicate with each other.

The family ties are strong, but over the years, they've grown very weak. At one time, I would have said that theirs was a really ideal way of life--simple, no real headaches, no real tensions. There was just simplicity of life.

B: What about the food, their women, their culture?

P: When I first got over there, when we landed, the smell of the food made me sick. It was atrocious. I don't know what they were cooking when we came in. There was a little village right outside and they must have been cooking snails or something because it smelled like burned rubber. They make rice wine. I don't drink that much, but that stuff is good. It really is.

I think the women of Vietnam when they are dressed up are almost the most beautiful women I have ever seen.

The culture, religion-wise, is Buddhism and Catholicism. There's a lot of history, which we don't have time to go into. I enjoyed what I did get to see of that country.

B: What about the black market?

P: Anything you wanted you could get on the black market. You could get anything from tape recorders to pistols to any kind of souvenir. You could buy record players. You could buy two or three of them, let's say, for a hundred bucks. You could buy movie cameras that would put sound on the film for twenty-five bucks, or maybe even fifteen bucks.

When we went over there to Vietnam, they took all the American currency from us, and they gave us military money. I'm not sure how the checks and balances work, but from what I gathered the American one dollar currency was worth a lot more than Vietnamese money. If you were lucky enough to keep some of this American money, you could get a fortune back, in military money. Some guys would get away with this. It would have been my luck to have been some underground guy and end up in what they call "L.B.J.," Long Bin Jail. From there, you go to Fort Leavenworth, Kansas and I wasn't in the mood to be breaking rocks.

B: What about the drugs?

P: Now, the fourth division. I'd say, had a drug problem. I'd say it was about the same as in any major city. Well take this instance. We had a guy who was a hard junkie, but he kept it under control. If you didn't know that he was a head--a guy that took drugs--you would have never been able to tell.

One time, this guy was really stoned. He was very up there. He was in seventh heaven. He was in this bunkard with this other gentleman who was getting ready to be sent back to the States on a hardship discharge. They put this guy who was ready to be sent back to the States on guard duty with this head. Well, at about one or two in the morning, this guy was just floating right along. The other gentleman was sound asleep in bed, in the top bunk. The next thing we knew, this head was tripping so he pulled a pin on a grenade and watched the grenade go off.

That guy won't ever know what it was like. He not only killed himself but he killed the guy getting ready to be sent back home the next day on a hardship discharge. Also he sent another guy back to eighth Field Vac Hospital at Camp Radcliff because he just walked into the bunkard when the grenade went off. Here you had a situation where somebody who was feeling good killed somebody that was innocent.

We had a drinking problem, if you want to consider that, in a way, a drug problem. We had one guy who was so drunk one night that he passed out and when he threw up, he asphyxiated and drowned in his own puke. They found him dead.

If you wanted marijuana or what they called "Mary Jane" or "Happy weed" or "Marihucci", all you had to do was ask somebody along the road because it was easy to get, especially hard drugs. You could get those too. There was no problem there. With ten or fifteen bucks you could get what looked like a glass cylinder. We had guys who could drink this.

We had what were known as acid dyes, too. Instead of shooting the drugs into the vein, they'd drop it directly into the corner of the eyes and these guys would stay up there for weeks. When they came off or came down, they'd be straight, just as straight as you and I are. But they'd get flashbacks. I remember we were sitting at the dinner table one night and this guy got up and walked outside. He went into a convulsion. This was spooky because there was a guy that was drifting.

It was kind of funny sometimes to see these guys floating around in space. Then it got not to be so funny when it hit home one night. I had intestinal trouble. I had diarrhea really bad. At this time, we were allowed to keep our rifles beside our beds because the enemy had been lucky enough to get in on us at their location and cause a lot of havoc.

I got up at night. I had to go to the out house bath. I almost didn't make it but I got out there. The next thing I knew I heard gun shots go off. I thought, "Oh my God, we got gooks right here," because the gun shots were only a hundred feet away. My heart was beating so fast and I was sweating. I was so scared there for a second that I could feel myself sweat. So I went out and I loaded my M 16 and this guy came up to me and said, "One of the brothers has gone off the deep end, man. One of the brothers has gone off the deep end." I said, "What are you talking about?" He said, "The brother went off in the hooch."

The brother had been shooting up all day and he had been drinking. He just finally went like that, just like that. I had no more than got in and he had shot up my bunk. I would have been dead. He shot my bunk up. He shot the guy beside me right in the head. The guy didn't even know what hit him. He probably knew what hit him, but he didn't have time to do anything. He got another guy who was trying to get out of the hooch and shot him in the back.

We had this colored officer, I can't think of his name right now, but he was in charge of my unit or platoon, at that time. This guy was as white as I am because he ran up to the major and told him what the problem was. The MPs came down and I thought there would be a racial incident because they had a colored guy who had shot two whites. I thought, "Well, we're going to have troubles."

I think the lieutenant was more afraid of the racial incident than the brother going off the deep end. I really believe that if the MPs wouldn't have shown up when they did, the brother would have been dead. Some of the guys had gone back into the buildings to get their rifles and they would have just leveled him. Here you had a drug conflict. A lot of these guys were somehow so lucky that they never got caught when they would get high, so no one would be able to treat them. A lot of them are probably junkies now. That's sad, you know, because life's such a fragile thing and you have got to handle it with care.

B: What was the city life like at its truest?

P: The city life? Well, An Khe was off limits to us after dark, but we had our own city life within the fourth division. But a little about the outside. I was luckier than most soldiers because I ran convoys and I was able to get into town. Little stores were open. You could buy anything from a suit of clothes--you could get some nice clothes, if you had the money--to brand new shoes.

I bought the girl I was dating a nice dress. It was hand made. Back in the States, I'd say it would cost two or three hundred dollars. I bought it over there for about twenty-five bucks. It was made of beautiful blue silk. You could buy dishes, handmade pottery, and anything you wanted. You could get a girl to spend the night with you, if you had enough nerve and you didn't think you were going to get caught the next day or a gook was going to get you and slice your throat.

They had pimps, you know, that would come around and drag the women in the trioda. They'd ask the GI, "which

one do you want?" and they'd tell you what their specialty was. You could get anything you wanted. They'd come around with dinners, too. This was kind of funny in a way and yet it wasn't. You ate the food and got sick. If the food didn't kill you, the gooks were bound to pop out somewhere.

You couldn't ever leave your truck. If you went with one of these momasons somewhere to do your thing, the gooks or the enemy would get a grenade, take the pin out of the grenade, and put it underneath the truck seat, so the spoon was off. As soon as you sat down, somehow the grenade would turn and somewhere enroute, the spoon would come out and blow up. We were lucky. The other guys had no pride, right here in front of me, because you didn't dare leave the truck. We got shelled a couple of times going down the Mai Linh Pass and these mountains meet the road, but the town itself is nice. They live pretty good in town.

B: Where did you go? What cities did you visit?

P: Well, I was in Camp Benign, the home of the fourth division in Pleiku. That was the name that I was trying to remember before, Camp Benign. The little town there had been ravaged so much by war that there was nothing left. At one time, I'd say it was a beautiful little city, but when I was there, there was nothing but tin shacks.

Saigon was nice. I went down there with two mail carriers. We went there for the postal service for our platoon and battalion. They had lost twenty-five hundred pieces of mail, so we had to go down and retrieve them. What I got to see of Saigon looked just like Youngstown or some other city. It was a thriving metropolis with cars and businesses going on. If you didn't know better, you'd swear there wasn't any war. The hotels had air conditioning. You could get a nice bed and the bars were open. A lot of places were off limits to GIs, but if you had special passes, or if you knew somebody, you could go anyplace you wanted. The officers came and went anywhere they wanted.

B: How long were you there?

P: This sounds odd. I was there two times. During the whole time I was there for a whole year and I would have been there for about six months. I wanted to ETS out, but they wouldn't let me. I had to go to Fort Benning, Georgia, and finish time. I asked what I could do about getting out and they said I could go and see a jag officer. A jag officer is a military

lawyer and if you've ever done anything with the Army, you know it's all paper work. I just figured it was easier to finish six months at Fort Benning than to go through all this hassle.

B: What were your feelings about going home?

P: When I left to come home, the monsoon rains had just started. It was starting to rain pretty badly when the jet lifted off. When I left Nam, sir, I felt as though I was leaving my heart because I had made a lot of good friends that I knew were still back there. A lot of them had just come into the country.

I remember as I was boarding the plane, and watching the guys coming off. I saw the look in their eyes of uncertainty, doubt, fear, anxiety, tension and I had the same look when I went over. I felt this too when I was going back home because I knew I was leaving my friends. I was leaving something I got kind of accustomed to in Vietnam. In twenty-four hours, I would be back with people that are human in a way.

It was strange when we landed at Fort Lewis, Washington; it was damp and it was raining. When I left Vietnam it was a hundred and four degrees and when I got back to the States, it was fifty degrees and I thought I was going to die from the cold. It was strange to be able to walk down a street and not worry about some MP saying, "Hey. Where's your pass?"

Oh, this was wild. When I was at the Seattle airport in Washington, a truck backfired and I dove and hit my head on a garbage can. The security guard came over to me and said, "You okay son?" I said, "Yes sir." He said, "You just come back from Nam?" I said, "Yes sir. How can you tell?" He said, "Once a week, somebody hits the garbage cans." I didn't feel too bad then, but I felt kind of odd. There's a GI who goes all through Vietnam and he jumps in garbage cans. He can't be wrapped too tight. It was scary because you got so used to jumping. If something went pop or bang, you hit the ground. I still do this. If a car backfires, I'll jump a little.

When I got back home, my little nephew--he didn't mean to do what he did--popped a paper bag and I almost went through the roof of the trailer. It was kind of odd. You might be lying in bed and the fire siren would go off. When a siren went off over in Nam, you went to the bunker. I was home no more than a day or so and the fire truck went by the house and boom, I was out of bed. I didn't know where I was going, but I was out of bed.

It took my dad a while to get used to me doing these strange things. I had to reorient myself again. For a while, it was kind of creepy. I wouldn't go out of the house. When I landed at the Akron-Canton airport, it was night time. On the way home, I drove. I think I was watching the woods more than anything else. My girl friend said, "What's the matter?" I said, "I just got so used to looking at certain things, you know." I forgot what it was like to drive on a concrete road. I wanted to ride out in the field. I would feel better. To this day, I'm still getting used to things. Some times, something will happen to me and I feel like I had done the same thing in Nam.

I remember one time in the ambulance, I had a woman hold my hand. She said, "Please don't let me die," and I remember one of my friends telling me that in Vietnam, too.

B: What were your feelings about the war moratoriums?

P: Well, I don't know how to put it. I wasn't over here in the States when that was happening. I was in high school when some of them took place. I thought these people were right to protest something they didn't believe in. But, at the same time, I didn't think it was right for them to go around and rip up other people's property. I believe somebody has the right, if they don't think something's just, to go out there and protest and carry signs. If they want to boo, yes, but I don't think you should get vulgar or destructive. That's not justice. That's a mob and you never get anything changed by a mob.

B: Why did you get out of the service?

P: Well, I could have stayed in. The all-volunteer Army was coming into effect. We really had it made down at Fort Benning. We worked five days a week. We got Saturdays and Sundays off. You worked the day you were scheduled and until you were scheduled again, you could do anything you wanted.

The reason I didn't want to stay in the service was that back home, we were having our own family problems. I believed I had done as much as I could for Uncle Sam. I believed I had done as much as one person could do. I'm no pencil and paper man. I would have never made it through OCS--Officer Candidate School--so I know that if I would have stayed there, I would probably have gotten no higher than an E-5 or an E-6 and military life just wasn't really for me. I could have gotten probably ten thousand dollars in bonus if I would

have stayed in. It wasn't the money and it wasn't the thought of going somewhere again, it was just that I thought I had done what I had to do. There was really no more for me to do. My time had come to bow out.

B: Did Vietnam affect this decision to get out?

P: Yes and no. Yes, I didn't want to get back into somebody else's back yard again. At the same time, I didn't want them to get into my back yard.

No, Vietnam didn't affect my decision because I just wanted to do what I had to do and like I said, just bow out. There was no more I could do. If I would have stayed in, I know it would have been a routine, in a way, dismounting and drilling, and taking some National Guard people out. I think that's what it would mean.

Some of the National Guard people were in for good reasons but some of them just got beside me when we were on some training and said, "Hey, hey. We won't ever do that." Boy, you just wanted to go up and smack them because you knew that what you were showing them would save their lives, if something really did happen.

I had said the same thing a long time ago, back at Fort Campbell, Kentucky. I thought, "Boy, this is nuts. This guy's screaming and yelling. What is he, crazy?" But his screaming and yelling pays off. It was just the idea that somebody was laughing at me and I had already been through this. I knew what it was about. I was just trying to give the guy some pointers, even though he might never use them but if it ever happened, he would be ready. I figured it was better to know it and not need it than to need it and not know it.

B: What was your biggest fear?

P: Being crippled was my biggest fear but not dying. Nobody wants to die. I'm not going to go out and jump out of the window or hang myself. I believe that being crippled and having to just lay in bed and have everybody take care of you and even being able to tell somebody that you love them or you care about them is worse than dying.

B: What was the most demoralizing thing that you saw?

P: The most demoralizing thing I saw was what happened to me when I got back to the States. This incident really irked me. I had come back. We were at Fort Lewis, Washington

At some of the places they told us that when we got into the airport, to stay in a group, because some people would try to rip you off for your money and get most of your discharge money and travel money. They knew this. There would also be these funny men that would dress up like girls and try to rake you over.

I could take that. But the most demoralizing thing hit me while I was just sitting and waiting for my plane to come. It was eight o'clock in the morning. My plane didn't leave until three in the afternoon, and this girl came up and goes, "What's it like to kill innocent women and children?" You know, she didn't even give me a chance to say anything. Then she spit on me. I didn't do anything to this girl, and I'm no butcher. I was thinking, "This girl's been misled." I don't think that at that time this girl was any more than fourteen or fifteen years old. I just thought, "Well, boy, what's society turned into? I didn't want to kill anybody, but at the same time, I didn't want to die."

B: What was the funniest thing you saw?

P: Oh, I think the funniest thing I saw was when a guy was so excited about trying to do a good job, that he goofed it. We were out in the field one time for fifteen days and one guy was walking the point day after day after day. We decided we were going to take turns and break down weapons and clean them. We broke down his weapon. He didn't have any buffer spring and besides that, he didn't have a bolt. I don't know if this guy was going to go "Bang, bang, you're dead!" I thought he was going to pass out when he found out. This guy really had bad luck. When we got back to the base, they ribbed him about this. They said, "Hey, Killer, come here. Show us what this gun is like." The colonel couldn't believe this. How can you walk for fifteen days without having a gun that worked? But this happened.

Another funny thing is when a guy wanted a beer and could not find a can opener. So he gets the end of a rifle and smashes it and the suds fly everywhere. This guy is literally licking the beer off the wall. You could get a can of beer sometimes coming in from the field, when the women or the men would sell them along the road for ten bucks a can. They would sell even hot pop. Have you ever busted your thumbs opening a can that didn't have a tab? You know, these are some of the things that you got into.

At another time they dropped what we called a "water buffalo." We were out in the field and we ran out of water,

so we thought they'd drop us a water buffalo. It's a big rubbery innertube that holds about two or three hundred gallons of water. We were on the side of a mountain. Now this makes sense. They flew over and the helicopter dropped it and it rolled down the side of this damn cliff. We said "Hey. There it goes, gang. We don't need it now because it's ripped and it's watering the daisies."

These are just some of the things that happened. We used to play games with each other back at the base, to just break the tension and monotony and routine. There was the old trick of tying somebody's clothes in knots, then go out and ring the fire bell. This guy was trying to get his shoes on. He couldn't get his clothes on.

This happened to me once. I went in to take a shower, and there was no water. I was dirtier than anyone else and I couldn't go into the mess hall filthy. You would try to sneak into somebody else's washroom. You could sneak into the officers' washroom; as you were walking, here came the company commander. He'd say, "What are you doing, checking the laundry or something?" You know, you just had to think of an answer.

We had our good times; we had our bad times. We really had some good experiences, and then, like I said, we had some pretty tragic ones. I think if I had to do it all over again, I wouldn't change anything. I don't think it was meant to be changed. I think that what happened to me or to anybody else, was meant to happen. I think destiny leads us. I think that's the way to go.

B: Do you feel your being in the service was worthwhile?

P: Yes. I met people. I got new ideas. Some of the ideas I didn't like. I met one guy who really had a problem. He had murdered his wife. He told me about it, of all people. He was my sergeant, and I was nothing but a specialist fourth class. Through it all, you learned how to talk with people and this is what life's all about-- being able to talk with somebody. You meet people from the North and the South and Texas. You meet them from all over the place and you learn how they live. It's like a history lesson and you're not bored because it's really something.

B: What was your attitude about the Army?

P: Well, in all, I didn't like the Army. Some of the ways that we got treated were bad. I felt that the GI got the blunt end of everything. There were times that I just wanted to say the heck with it and just go somewhere, anywhere. But then it dawned on me that there were reasons

why you did things this way. I think it was okay. It didn't break me, but I believe it did make me a better person. Before I went into the service, I was kind of wishy-washy. If somebody said something, I'd go. But now, if I don't like something, I just say, "Hey. The hell with it. I'm not doing it. And that's it." It gives me a leadership in a way.

END OF INTERVIEW