

YOUNGSTOWN STATE UNIVERSITY

ORAL HISTORY PROGRAM

The Vietnam Veteran Project

Military and Personal Experiences

O.H 36

ROGER GOSSICK

Interviewed

by

Louis DiDonato

on

February 19, 1974

ROGER T. GOSSICK

Roger T. Gossick was born on October 3, 1949 in Youngstown, Ohio, the son of Walter and Martha Gossick. He attended Rayen High School from 1963 to 1967, then went to Youngstown State University. While attending the University, he was drafted and entered the Army on May 15, 1969. Before being sent to Vietnam, Roger completed basic training at Fort Campbell, Kentucky, and attended military intelligence school in Baltimore. While in Vietnam, he was stationed in Binh Loi. He received various medals, among them the Joint Service Commendation Medal. He was discharged from military service on December 8, 1971 and re-entered Youngstown State University where he received an AB in philosophy. Currently Roger enjoys camping and coin collecting.

SILVIA PALLOTTA
August 26, 1977

YOUNGSTOWN STATE UNIVERSITY

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INTERVIEWEE: ROGER GOSSICK

INTERVIEWER: Louis DiDonato

SUBJECT: Military and Personal Experiences

DATE: February 19, 1974

D: This is an interview for the Youngstown State University Oral History Project with Roger Gossick. The subject of the discussion is our involvement in Vietnam and specifically, Roger's involvement there. It's being conducted by Louis DiDonato on February 19, 1974, on the YSU campus.

D: Roger, I need a little bit of background on you. Where did you go to high school and where were you born?

G: I was born in Youngstown, Ohio. I went to school at Rayen High, Youngstown, Ohio and I was born on October 3, 1949

D: Approximately, when did you enter the Army?

G: I went into the Army in May of 1969.

D: Were you drafted?

G: Yes, I was drafted while I was in school. I was going to school full time but I was still drafted. I found out that, at that time, they were using an obscure draft law and they drafted a lot of people who were in school. I was called on some technicality, so, to try and get out of going infantry, which is what a lot of people went into then, I took an extra year of intelligence.

D: Was this option given to you?

- G: After the test and everything that I took, I scored high enough to take something, so I took an extra year of intelligence.
- D: What was your major in school?
- G: I was in accounting when I went to school before. Now I'm in philosophy.
- D: What was your initial reaction upon receiving the draft notice?
- G: My initial reaction was that I had gotten nailed and there wasn't really much thought in any given direction. I just sort of accepted it.
- D: Where did you take basic training?
- G: I took it down in Fort Campbell, Kentucky.
- D: That's a classic place, isn't it?
- G: Yes.
- D: When you first entered the Army, did you have any preconceived notions about the military?
- G: Not really preconceived. Sometimes I didn't really want to be in the Army, but I didn't have that strong of a feeling for or against the Army or the war or anything else. I didn't like the idea of the war. I had no set political feelings, really.
- D: I understand you went to military intelligence school.
- G: Right. Personnel in Baltimore.
- D: How long were you there?
- G: I was there for about two or three months.
- D: And then what happened?
- G: I immediately went to Vietnam.
- D: Did this training you received in Baltimore prepare you for what happened in Vietnam?
- G: Not really, no. Most of the stuff you learned was nice to know. You sort of had to pick up what you did when you got to Vietnam. When our people got there, they scattered all over the country and did a lot of things which they hadn't learned before. I did the same thing.

I didn't learn in Baltimore what I did when I was in Vietnam. My job in Vietnam was completely different from my training.

D: When you got to Vietnam, did you attempt to get out of the orders or did you just take them?

G: I didn't attempt to get out of them

D: Were you or are you married now?

G: No, I'm not.

D: Where were you stationed in Vietnam?

G: I was stationed in a little place called Binh Loi, three corps. It was between Saigon and Long Binh. There was an ammo dump and the only bridge crossing the river for twenty miles either way. The ammo dump was a Vietnamese ammo dump and the bridge was controlled by the South Vietnamese. I worked in a combined intelligence thing. Our situation was strange. Our main office was in what was called JGS Compound, Joint General Staff. This is the equivalent of the American Pentagon. We had our own building inside of the compound, completely fenced off, with machine gun towers. There was one road leading in and out, but it was lined with tanks and machine guns.

After TET of 1968, they moved it into a really secure place. It was a combined project with the Army, Navy, Air Force, Marines, and the South Vietnamese. It was unique that we worked in an office and had air conditioning and the whole thing. Our people ended up out in the field also. When information would drop down, our people would have to go out and straighten this stuff out. We'd have people all the way from the rice patties to the air conditioned office rooms and all through the chain of command down there. We were never stationed in one spot. We'd do our paper work there and then we'd have to go out.

D: Did you work both in the office and out in the field?

G: Yes. We lived in a hole. It was funny that we were one of the few places that USO shows refused to come to. Our place was horrible. We had no water for much of the time. We had to truck water in from Long Binh every now and then. Showers didn't work often. We were right on the river and when the river was affected by the tides and would go up and down or during the monsoons, our compound would get flooded. It was definitely a

hole. We had a lot of people. They used to try everything they could to get out of coming back to the compound. At work, they used to sleep right on the floor. They just didn't want to come back to the compound.

D: Those are really terrible conditions. What kind of barracks are those now? Are they regular-type barracks.

G: They were open-screen barracks that had slats on the sides for vents, so the rain wouldn't come through. We were on what was originally a French estate of some sort, and we were on the main compound where the estate was. The main house was the orderly room where the officers lived. They had converted some of the buildings, like the old stables, into barracks. Some of the people slept in the building they called "the barn" Our barracks was right in the back on the river by the fence, so we were at the very end of the compound. The compound was small; it would take me about a minute and a half to walk from one end to another. It was a small place, strictly for living.

D: Did they have any recreation facilities for you?

G: They had built a handball court there. They put up a basketball court, but it was made of gravel and concrete. That's as far as recreational stuff. They had their own club. They served warm beer and drinks, and they showed movies, but that was really an extra place to go. That was about it.

D: Were there separate places for the officers, too?

G: Yes. We only had one sergeant and about four or five officers. They ran the company there. We weren't broken up into the traditional companies or platoons. The compound was strictly a living arrangement. The only prominent people who were there all the time were the people who worked in the orderly room in the security force. They actually stayed and worked on the compound. Everyone else went out to the different centers and traveled around. So we were sort of apart from the structured Army thing.

D: When did you get to Vietnam?

G: I got to Vietnam on November 13, 1969.

D: Does it stay pretty well in your mind?

G: Yes.

- D: It stays pretty well in your mind. And then does your duty rotate back within twelve months or is it thirteen months?
- G: Yes. I got a two week drop and I was home on Halloween in 1970.
- D: What did you do on R and R [Rest and Relaxation]?
- G: I spent one week in Australia.
- D: Was that all?
- G: Yes, that was all. I got one week out of the country.
- D: When does this R and R take place?
- G: It takes place when you're on your first tour. It depends on where you want to go. If you want to go to Hawaii, you usually have to be married and your wife meets you there. It's hard to go to Hawaii any other way. Australia is the next most popular spot where people want to go. You usually have to be in a country for at least ten months. Getting R and R to Australia before ten months is almost impossible. It's done only on occasion. Someone who was actually working in the office, processing the papers could get their own papers in. Outside of that, you had to practically be out of Vietnam before you could get to Australia. Then there is Taipei or Bangkok. You could go there after about six or seven months if you wanted. You have the option on your first tour of taking seven days leave out of your extra time. If you extend it for six months, with each six months tour that you take, you have an additional R and R and a leave with it, if you want.
- D: What was your specific job?
- G: My specific job was keeping check of the names, the locations, the sizes, the last contact, and everything, about the North Vietnamese and Viet Cong units in South and North Vietnam. I also kept check of all the bordering units within fifteen kilometers of Cambodian Laos. I kept the commanders, the deputy commanders, and one other officer or a higher ranking, enlisted man posted on where all the units were, what they were doing, how they were acting, if they were on the move, and what their plans of attack were.
- D: How did you get the information? Did you call them?

G: No. The information came in from the field. It would be picked up by agents in the field, the local Vietnamese who were working for the Americans of the combat units. We never handled documents. We had a documents division in another part of the city. They'd get the documents, translate them and mail the information out to the different centers. Then if you needed the information, you'd have it.

D: You were over there then during the Cambodian invasion, right?

G: Yes. The Cambodia invasion was in March, I think I got there in November then in December, when I'd only been there a month, and was just starting to learn my job, the big flap came in that they wanted all information on Cambodia. I think we worked something like three solid days and nights around the clock. We never left the thing. We slept there and food was brought in. We knew in December that something was going to happen in Cambodia. And then, as we got closer, we knew that they were going into Cambodia.

About a month after Cambodia, a document was sent into our building. It was so long and had diagrams of our entire building, where all the officers were, where all the arms rooms were, what each office was like. On the inside of each office there were little squares where our desks, safes, and filing cabinets were. They had all the names from up to like about two weeks. At the most, there might have been one or two people who had left and somebody had come in to replace them. They had the whole inside of our intelligence operation mapped out and plotted. One of the reasons that they did go into Cambodia was to stop an invasion that was coming with the supplies. It would have probably been, at least another TET of 1968 or maybe even worse.

D: So, according to you and the information you had, you think that the Cambodian invasion was justified?

G: Not really. If you want to put it into practical Army terms, yes, but if you start digging into the whole involvement, then we shouldn't have been there in the first place. I have been able to get a division in my mind in which I can talk about something being right and wrong and also about being practical or impractical. Like, if I talk about something that the Army did, I can talk about it in their terms and understand why they did it, but I don't have to accept it, and I usually don't.

D: Have you had a lot of contact with the South Vietnamese?

G: Yes. In fact, we were the only American unit around. All of the other American units had pulled out and the whole area was left in the control of the South Vietnamese.

D: What was your reaction to them and what do you think was their reaction to you?

G: The reaction, in general, was that the South Vietnamese are mixed up. That's all I can say. You had no respect for them as fighting men. Like I said, I should have tried to see it from their point of view. They had a whole new system of technology thrown on them. They would dig a ditch to lay a pipe or something and they would fill it over, then the ditch would cave in when the heavy equipment went over it and they'd lose their stuff. The shacks that they would put up in the area would be lopsided and they'd fall down. It just seemed like a very backward country and I always had the feeling that they weren't originally like that, but they were being forced to enter a new way of life. It would be like being thrown out into the street and building a house with anything you could get on your own, but you couldn't buy anything because you didn't have any money and no supplies were available. So the people would collect beer cans, cut them open, lay them flat and build houses out of them or they used crates. It seems like they could never quite master the technical aspects of anything. This is just an observation. I don't know why they couldn't master anything.

I tried to see them in light of a strange environment--the war and everything--I always had the feeling that they were dumb really. As much as I hate to say it, I always saw them as human beings, and I tried never to lose that perspective, but they always seemed to me to be very slow in learning anything. Of course, that might have just been a protective thing that they used for their own way of life, I don't know.

D: Do you think they liked Americans?

G: Not really, no. It seemed that they were always out to get what they could from the Americans. They had you buy things from them if they owned shops or have you use your ration cards to get the stuff they couldn't get like beer, whiskey, cigarettes, food, refrigerators, stereos, and TVs. Anything that you had you could sell in Vietnam easily.

You could make money on the black market. You could buy a carton of cigarettes say for \$1.15 in the PX and you could easily go out and sell it for 7800 piasters which

was, at that time, the exchange rate. The exchange rate that was set up between the United States government and the South Vietnamese, was one hundred and eighteen piasters to one American dollar. On the world market, I think the exchange rate was three hundred and fifty piasters to one dollar. The United States had a false exchange rate to bolster the South Vietnamese money. On some stuff, you could make seven or eight times your money if you sold on the market.

D: When the United States first entered Vietnam, did you understand why we were there?

G: No, I didn't. I changed radically during the time I spent in Vietnam and after Vietnam it was even worse. Well, not worse. It was extreme as far as the change went. I was what right now I would call typical, apathetic college student. I was going to school and that was it. I was getting a degree to get a job somewhere when I got out and I never really questioned much of anything. I'd say a good example would be that I went from being sympathetic with Wallace's ideas, when he was running for president, to a complete reversal, almost believing that the whole concept of government isn't any good at all. People would be a lot better off to try it on their own. Vietnam just started me thinking so much, that I just changed completely.

D: When did you start noticing this change?

G: Okay. Well, I'd say I noticed it when I got into basic training. I ran into this guy who was in the SDS. I don't know how they drafted him or caught him, but anyway, he was in basic training and it would seem that everyday they would haul him away for an hour or two to question him. We'd talk a little bit, but never more than just normal Army talk. I mean we just talked about the training and everything and just kidded around. We never got into anything really serious.

One day after about two weeks of basic training, we had a bunch of National Guardsmen training with us. They were on their active duty for training and had come from Mississippi, Florida, all the way down there and they were talking about coloreds. On a magic click between me and the guy that was on the SDS and without even saying anything to each other, we started pimping these guys that they were colored, too. They couldn't understand that when we were talking about colored we meant skin pigmentation. They kept saying that they weren't colored. We were trying to convince them that they said their skin had no color in it at all, that they were white and this just wasn't true, they had color. It just completely blew

their minds. I saw a lot of prejudice and bigotry there and I didn't have a big revelation of how change can be that way. It just seemed that from then on, I always started pimping people a little more, learning to read the regulations and stuff. I really didn't give a damn about the training from then on.

We had a bayonet drill. At that time, it was still Army policy to go through the whole thing, like the purpose of the bayonet is "to kill" and all that. This has stopped since then, but we used to yell things out like, "What's the purpose of the bayonet" and before the whole crowd would yell out, a couple of us would yell out, "to love" and then everybody would just freak out all over. All the lifers would be running around and nobody knew where it came from. So, you know, every now and then, we just kept pimping away. It was something that we could do to get back at the discipline, the training, and the way everyone was driving us.

After I had gone through intelligence school, saw the whole country and started learning more things, I found out that the army and the military were sort of paranoid. When I got back to Baltimore, I found out a lot more about civilians spying. It just kept snowballing.

D: This paranoia that you talk about in the military intelligence probably exists a lot in government, too. Is it something to do with their demand for so many details?

G: No, no, no. There was a lot more contact between officers and enlisted men and high ranking officers and enlisted men. It was nothing to sit down in an office like this and talk with the general for about an hour or so. When I got back to Maryland, from Vietnam, I became somewhat closer acquainted with a certain lieutenant colonel. He was sort of like the hand-picked boy of the general of the fort there and before I left, he had made full bird colonel. Talking to him, I found he was more explicit, but I found his attitude to be prevalent among higher ranking officers whom I had run into. He was under the impression that the whole country was going down the drain and that the people in Washington, even the President, Congress, and the whole civilian government didn't know what they were doing. They were saying that we should have tried to control Vietnam. They had a big resentment against the government and he, at times, actually came out and said that the country would be a lot better off if the military would take over the government and run it.

Then there were other things like military training. They actually have operations going on and they train every

month on a theoretical basis. People go out in the streets and start taking over the government and the military has to come in and take control of the country again. It's really freaky when you tie that in with the spying apparatus that the military has on civilians. They were supposed to stop this but they never did. They were supposed to destroy the files, but all they did was put them on computerized tape and move them. I don't know where they moved them to.

It was the same thing with the draftees. The lieutenant colonel's view was that the draft should be abolished. This came from a high ranking career officer, who felt that when you draft men, you took them by lot, and were bringing in too many highly educated people. This is what happened in Vietnam. He didn't want men like me who could sit down and argue ideas with him. He wanted someone who wouldn't question his orders. He wanted the type of person who really didn't have a home, or a job; a man who was having a hard time making it out on the street and came into the Army to get a place to sleep, some clothing, and some food. He'd be willing just to follow orders. The first thing they wanted was to get rid of the draft. In fact, I'd say there was probably an anti-draft movement among the Army officers long before it came out in the civilian population, especially after they started drafting more people. They just feared the draftee completely. I couldn't blame them at all.

By that time, I had formed the opinion that while the draft wasn't good, it was almost a necessity for survival of the people and the country. Now that they have the volunteer Army I see more and more of a chance of the military actually trying to take over. Maybe not right now because it hasn't been in long enough and they haven't trained enough, but there's a big chance that the military may try something when things get worse.

D: Was this paranoia that you were talking about evident in Vietnam among your officers?

G: No, I'll tell you. In Vietnam, nobody was ever given an order for what they were doing, but nobody ever bothered the enlisted man. With the whole situation about fraggings and shootings they still never drilled you. It was more like a half request, if they ever said anything, but they never really wanted to take a chance of pushing someone. In the United States the guns are locked up and they could always drive you more. Over in Vietnam, they never knew who would crack so long as you did your job, nobody ever really bothered you that much. When you were off duty you would run into officers or sergeants

who complained about the movement and Congress not letting them run the war the way they wanted. It never went much past the complaining stage or anything. They were just normal gripes, like maybe we'd have a gripe against the lifers or they'd have a gripe against the draft resisters.

- D: When you talk about the anti-war movement, were you that much aware of what was going on back here?
- G: Yes, people knew what was happening. Our mail was never censored coming in, but we were personally censored in outgoing mail. I had it lucky because my cousin came over to Vietnam about five or six months after I was there so I could have taken a letter up to him and have him mail it from Long Binh. Since he was just in a medical outfit, they never censored his mail. If I wanted to tell anybody something back home, I could always have him mail it.
- D: I didn't realize that they went there.
- G: Oh, yes. I had a camera, but I wasn't going to develop any pictures over there. If I really wanted some pictures developed and was willing to lose some of the quality of the pictures I'd take them to a Vietnamese photography studio. I forget exactly when it happened, but one time the Vietnamese secret police and the police force stormed their parliament building--or whatever their representative building was called--took out about ten officials, and threw them in jail. They were never heard from since. That was while their Congress was in session. At that time, the North Vietnamese were offering the peace plan and the South Vietnamese government just said, "We don't even want to hear it." These people who were arrested were saying, "Well, let's at least hear what they have to say." A lot of them were even strong anti-Communists. The arrested officials wanted to hear what the proposals were so they could at least say no to the proposals instead of just saying no to nothing. That's why they were arrested.
- I had been downtown at the time. I had a day off, so I went into town and took pictures of their storming the building. When my pictures came back from the developer, all those pictures were gone, so I stopped using the American facilities and used the South Vietnamese facilities.
- D: What did you think of the anti-war movement led by the college students especially after the Cambodian invasion?

G: A lot of us were wearing black arm bands after the people at Kent State got shot. I had a friend who was a history major down at Kent. He's teaching Shop now at one of the local junior high schools. Anyway, he's good at making things with his hands and he'd go through phases in making crafts. Like he'll find something to do and he'll make a whole bunch of them, then he'll find another concept to use. He was making peace signs out of shoe leather. He'd get old shoe leather shearing and all this stuff and soak it and then he'd cut out peace signs in it.

He gave me one of these before I left for Vietnam. The only time that I ever took it off my neck, at all, was to take a shower and it stayed right there with me until I got done, then I put it back on. Some of the officers used to get kind of hairy when they saw it, but I never took it off. I had it until I got back to the States then I lost it somewhere. For some reason, I never wanted to take it off and I would never take it off. If anyone would threaten me by saying, "I can always order you to take it off," I knew that they weren't able to do it. If they were able to, they would have just ordered me to. I'd always ask what regulation says that I have to take it off. I just never took it off and I sort of became attached to it. Half of what it stood for was a peace symbol and half as a personal gift from a friend. I don't know if you want to count that as a part of the movement in Vietnam.

The movement was fairly strong in Vietnam. A lot of people purposely screwed up things in Vietnam or back in Baltimore or anywhere, just because the Army was doing it. I could relate to some of it, to all the other sabotage that they had a year or so ago on the Navy ships. A lot of that happens that never gets out into the papers anyway. In fact, a lot of stuff happened that I know of that never got out into the papers.

D: What kind of rapport was there between the officers and the enlisted men?

G: A lot depended on who the officer was. I'd say about eighty percent or so would have the attitude, "I'm the officer, you're the enlisted man." There was a major in the office who wasn't this kind of officer. He used to come in and say, "I need a driver to take me up to headquarters over to Macv." Everybody would always volunteer because whenever he was going over there, he'd drive himself. Maybe you'd drive out to Ton Son Nhut Air Base and his hobby was airplanes. He liked to sit there and watch the planes come in and he'd identify them. He could tell you all this stuff about history and some of the capabilities.

I'd guess you'd call him an anti-war officer because when Vietnam broke out, like in the early 1960's, he had been out of the service and they called him back. He had just set up a business and had finally settled down. He still resented the fact that the military called him back in, which made me glad that I turned down Officers Training School when it was offered to me. I didn't want to take it because once you become an officer, they can bring you back in any time they want if it's deemed necessary. So, he was a fairly nice guy. As far as I know, he was the only guy who never ordered anybody to do anything and he never had the tone of voice that seemed like he was giving an order. He was the only one who had everything that he wanted done. He had the idea that it was a job and since you were both stuck there, you might as well make the best of it. He had no false ideas about rank or anything. It would be like sitting down and talking to a professor who's a good friend of yours. Even though he's the professor and you're the student, there's really no division at all.

Basically, every now and then, you'd run into a few. You'd be walking down the road somewhere and you'd walk past an officer without saluting him and he'd call you back and give you a five minute lecture about saluting. When it was over with, you just turned around and walked away without saluting again. Some of them were serious about the saluting thing but you could always come back saying, you didn't salute him because there was a sniper around. You know that if a sniper saw you saluting the other guy, he might shoot him, so you actually saved his life by not saluting. They'd go nuts when you started pulling stuff like that. Well, it's just a big joke.

D: It was a means of helping you pass your time, then.

G: Yes, and you always found ways to harass them.

D: How about the time you spent in the field? How was this?

G: We'd usually know ahead of time if something was coming. What would happen is that the longer someone was there, the quicker he'd disappear. When it was time to go out on the field, everyone would just sort of move away. The person who stuck around would get to go, so they'd try to stay out of the field.

If you were going close by, you had to get into the helicopter. If you went further away, you'd get into a transporter to take you up. Then you'd just try to get the information you needed or fix up whatever was going wrong

in the flow of information and get out quick. You never wanted to stay in an area where the information was coming in from because it was in the combat zones. You were always at a disadvantage because you never knew the area, the people or anything that was going on there. You wouldn't know how the VC or the NVA would work their ambushes or when they'd attack. You'd land and then go into the compound by jeep. You might be coming in at the time of day in which they always have a rocket attack. You wouldn't know that so you were always at a disadvantage when you went out there. The field work was done as quickly as possible so the man could get out.

D: Do you mean they'd only send one man out on this field work?

G: They'd send one or two guys out, yes, depending on what the information was. Say from one source, you had something that had to do with image interpretation and order of battle. Well, you'd send out one guy from each section. But if it only had to do with, say, the section you were in, you could go out and get it done yourself. You'd always try to find ways to get out of it. You could always come up with a reason why you shouldn't go and it was usually a game of whoever had the worst reason for staying, had to go. But it was a lot easier just to disappear when it came time to pick someone to go.

D: Were there any set positions?

G: No, there wasn't really any set thing. Many of our people were interchangeable. If one guy was out in the field or running around someplace someone else would have to do his job for a day or so. We could do a number of things.

D: A kind of Jack-of-all-trades, right?

G: Yes. Actually, where we worked, we had to be a master of what we were doing, plus being Jacks-of-all-trades. That's basically what our training was intended to be in Baltimore. They sort of exposed you to everything. You knew what was happening, but the actual work was done when you got to Vietnam because nobody in Baltimore knew where you were going, so they couldn't really train you in one specific area. You could get an MOS. You would train in your MOS field and you'd become what you were in the field, but you weren't trained totally in that field. You had to know everything else or at least be aware of it. Say you trained on nothing but learning how to read battle maps and keeping and plotting all the moves. If they'd shift you to a place where you had to interpret photography, you'd be in a complete loss. At

least in training, you had had a little bit of an idea how to interpret photography, so that when you came, you weren't completely blind and would have an idea of what you were doing.

D: Did you have the feeling that you knew what was going on in Vietnam at all times?

G: Yes, because of the security plans, I felt that I knew what was going on. They always left a lot of top-secret documents lying around, so you could always read up on what we were doing in Laos, what was happening in Cambodia and on different defoliation projects. We'd read the reports on My Lai before they even came out. After the big Calley flap came out, they sent people out to compile the reports, and we read them before they left Vietnam to go back to Washington. So, we had a fair idea of what was going on in Vietnam.

D: Did any of these things like My Lai shock you or did you have some idea that they were going on?

G: If you take a thing like My Lai and what I said before, you have to decide what is right and what's wrong and what's practical in the Army. As far as Vietnam went, I could understand completely why Calley and his people did what they did at My Lai. Anybody would do it in the situation they were in, but that still doesn't make it right. I knew what was wrong, and I knew that more than one My Lai happened. While I didn't like the idea of it happening, I could understand why they did it.

D: From the military view.

G: Well, not from the military viewpoint but from the personal viewpoint of the people who were there, even though I don't know them. The area of My Lai where Calley's people were was not at all strong in their VC unit, so they relied almost entirely on booby traps. Let's say you take thirty people whom you know very closely and who may even be your friends. They are the only people in the area whom you know. Everyday you have to go out and you know that you are going to run into booby traps. Almost everyday someone gets shot with a bullet from a booby trap or gets his leg blown off. No matter what you do, you know you are never going to see the Viet Cong. They just aren't there and they can't patrol the whole area. After you do this month after month, it really gets to you. The only thing you start thinking about is your chance to fight and shoot at them. At least then you would have more of a chance than against these booby traps.

The booby traps were a great psychological thing. The pressure really built up on Calley and his people, so when the chance popped up that they did run into the VC--I think they just ran into one or two of them--they just started shooting. I happen to think that the VC were walking one way and Calley and his people sort of came upon them. Here was the chance, so, they just started shooting. It just so happened that Calley and his people were walking towards My Lai. Naturally, when you see someone shooting at you, you're going to run the other way and wait for them. So, they ran towards My Lai. Now, whether they were actually based in My Lai or what, I don't know. I never found that out. But they just ran into that area and Calley and his people went charging in after them.

It might have been known throughout the whole command of Calley's people that he just told them to shoot because these people were really tearing up the outfit. So Calley would have been mistaken in thinking that he was under orders to wipe out the village or to find out where they were and wipe them out. They evidently thought that My Lai was where the VC were based, so they just went in, guns a'blazing. They weren't going to take the chance. You are finally at the people who have been killing and maiming your buddies for months on end, so you aren't going to take the chance. You know, the VC aren't human. It was just a combination of all the psychological factors building up and they went in rather than stayed back. From that aspect, I could see why they did it. But then you'd really have to start with the United States government all the way down to the military in Vietnam and question our involvement and our reason for being there.

The men who were there were forced to survive in any way they could and while Calley and his people should have been tried and found guilty, I think higher officials should have been tried and found guilty, too. It should have gone back into the government of the United States. All of them should have been nailed for My Lai and all of the other things that happened there. It shouldn't have stopped with Calley, but they should have nailed everybody all the way up. At the same time, I think I was wrong, too, for going and I shouldn't have gone.

D: Why was that?

G: I should have gone to Canada, I should have just refused to go to Vietnam. That would have been the right thing for me to do. If it would happen again it would be hard to say who could try you. I would have to be morally willing to stand trial, for anything I did, which would

be considered a war crime. I never really did anything I consider a war crime. In fact, I purposely tried to do as little as possible in the work that I did and in any actions that I took. You know, I realized that my enemy wasn't the people of South Vietnam--I should say the people of Vietnam because I don't really recognize a division between North and South Vietnam. North and South Vietnam is a political division that's being created by western influence. It's strictly an arbitrary line drawn by some people who are ten thousand miles away. I just can't justify anything that happened over there and I still can't justify any aid that they may be sending over now.

D: Do you think the people of Vietnam want us there?

G: No, they don't. As I said, I read a lot of material that was never published. The Army was going to do a really nice survey for the South Vietnamese government and they sent people out into the fields all over the country to poll the people for the support of Thieu and the Saigon government. They found out that about eighty five percent of the people interviewed, who were supposedly in the South Vietnamese-controlled territory, did not support the South Vietnamese government. They thought it was corrupt and they wanted the United States out. They wanted the government out, and all they really wanted was to farm their lands.

D: They're just more concerned with peace.

G: Yes, they were more concerned with peace and getting rid of all of these white people who were hanging around, bombing their villages and ruining their crops.

D: How did the Vietnamese view Ho Chi Minh? How did you view him?

G: I don't know how they view him. I view Ho Chi Minh on the same level that I view at Mao and others. They were people who felt that they were doing what they could for their country. If there was an invasion of foreign powers, whether it was France or the United States, or anyone who was in China, Cuba, or Vietnam, there was this western influence which oppressed their people. That was using their own people to fight against their own people, policing their people, and destroying their own country. They felt that they had to go out and do something about it and try to free their people, but they just couldn't passively sit back and let a foreign power take them over. So I look at them as patriots of their own country.

D: How about Thieu?

G: He was a power-mad dictator. I mean South Vietnam is a military dictatorship, where people are arrested in the streets, shot in the streets, clubbed in the streets. People don't speak out against the government. A couple of meters away from the front gate of our compound where we worked in JGS, there were some wounded Vietnamese war veterans. A lot of them had their legs and arms blown off. There was an empty track of land where they wanted to build shacks and live on. Nobody was using the land; it was a squatter's village. They just wanted to put up their stuff so that when they were in Saigon they could try to get jobs and do whatever they want. The riot police and the military were sent in and the veterans were gassed, clubbed, shot, and arrested and it was nothing to have people come back into the center at lunch time coughing with tear gas because they were gassed in the riot.

It's a pure, hard core police state, and no one's going to tell me any different. They aren't just using their military power because of emergency conditions. Thieu is a dictator and he controls the country. He controls the elections so that no force is allowed to run against him and the elections are rigged. That made me think more about the United States government and I started looking at things, like the Phillipines. They declared martial law, suspended the constitution, and the United States supported them. South Korea has been under martial law since the 1950's, there's really not that much feeling there for the people. They're supported by the United States. The Greek government is a military dictatorship. They're supported by the United States, too. It seems that a lot of countries which the United States supports militarily are all dictatorships.

Then I turn back and look at this country and I see the same thing. I've talked to people from Russia and people from Greece. There were these two old people from Greece who worked for the McGovern campaign. I didn't work in the McGovern campaign or in any other campaign. Their main job was to cook elaborate meals for the people who worked on the South Side, at the Market Street headquarters or some place by the Uptown. They cooked these big Greek meals for the people and some friends of mine were always talking about going over to dinner at the headquarters because they were having all this stuff. These Greek people were working for McGovern in this way because they saw that under Nixon, the country was turning into the same thing that they had escaped from in Greece and they were really scared. My girl friend's Russian teacher says the same thing. They're doing the same things here that she saw done in Russia and she's very paranoid about it.

This plus what I learned about the military's attitude towards civilians and the spying operations, makes the government seem to be run by paranoid, insane people. I've seen it written that the people are to be viewed as an enemy of the government; that they're to be suspected, and that there are military spies still out in the area. I know that the military keeps a running list of a hundred thousand people who are considered the top hundred thousand subversives. Whenever martial law--whatever they decide to declare in an emergency--comes into effect, these people are supposed to be picked up within six hours and eventually transported to the Japanese prison-of-war and relocation camps, which have been renovated and are kept waiting right now.

I also found out that the government and the military viewed as a potential enemy the Vietnam veteran who is out and back on the street. If there are two people making the same political speech, and one happens to be a Vietnam veteran, his chances of being moved into a position on that list of a hundred thousand people are a lot better than those of anyone else. They know that the Vietnam veteran has been trained. He knows the same tricks that the military knows, he knows all the stuff about booby traps. When I was in Vietnam and had nothing to do, I got a chance to read the VC handbook on booby traps. When I got into it I saw that I knew a lot of the booby traps which the Viet Cong use. I know how to set them and make them but I'd never use them. They realized that the veteran knows all of this and that there is a big dissatisfaction in this country.

Nothing Nixon does surprises me, but when he vetoed this disabled veteran bill and when he wanted to veto the G.I. Bill I began wondering what the hell he was doing. He knew damned well that there's a big difference between the Korean veteran or the World War II veteran and the Vietnam veteran. The Vietnam veteran doesn't have, I believe, this loyal feeling towards the government. The Vietnam vets just say, "We finally served our time. Why don't they leave us alone and give us what we're supposed to get from the G.I. Bill? We want to go back to our way of life and we just don't want to be bothered with you anymore." I think the Vietnam veteran would react against the government a lot quicker than anybody else would and the government and the military realizes this, too.

D: So you think this is one of the reasons he cut the bill?

- G: Well no. He started to cut the bill, but it wasn't cut. Congress stopped it. But Nixon does crazy things so that you don't know what's happening. But that's just another example of the paranoia in the government. When I was at Holabird where the files were, we'd look through the information just to see what we could pick up. They had Congressmen on their files, prominent people in the country, all the biggies were kept on them. When Congress found out about the files the Army was keeping on civilians, we were told that if anyone came nosing around the fort, asking about the files that, even if they identified themselves as Congressmen, we were to tell them either that we just worked in maintenance or that we were part of the garrison at the fort and we didn't have any access to the files and didn't know what was happening. But, while that was going on, they were taking all the files and computerizing them and putting them on tape and moving them. Where they moved them to, we don't know. The records were never destroyed and the operations were never stopped. The military is spying on the civilian population and nobody is excluded from it. I found information about my parents, my relatives, my friends, people who have never been in the military and there were actual records on them.
- D: You mean just by sending their names through the computer you could find information on them?
- G: Yes, we could just go to the card files and take a name and hit the diebold button and come up to the cards. You shovel through until you find one on the person you're looking for and I always found cards on whom I was looking for. It was the other way around with the people who worked there. A lot of them destroyed their own cards or cards of their friends. Without this card it was hard to get the information from the tape because you had to run the card through to get the information. They could tell their friends about their names being in the Army files and in the event that anything did happen, they could see that these people didn't get picked up. There would be a slight snag and they could split if they had to. If anything would happen, I'd know enough to leave if I had to, you know, just to be on the safe side.
- D: You mean you would leave the country?
- G: Well, I'd either leave the country or just leave the area if I had to. I don't know where my name is. I've written a few letters to the Jambar. I've run for student council and said a few things on campus and stuff, that's it. You don't know who the military informants are. It could be you; it could be anybody. I don't live in fear but I'm aware that they're there. They're still functioning. Or

it's the same thing with Ray Horn, the guy from the McGovern campaign, who got on the enemies list from the White House. The only way he could get on the enemies list from this area was if someone sent in his name. Youngstown is basically a big area as far as representation in anything goes, but the people here try to keep up the appearance that they're doing their job. They have to find somebody whose name they could hand in even if they don't get on the list. McGovern was seen as an enemy of Nixon and the country, and from the reelection point of view, anybody who would run his campaigns had to be a subversive. I mean, the way the logic goes from Washington is that if you run a local McGovern campaign, you're eligible to be on the enemies list. So they sent his name in when they couldn't get anybody else's

D: What effect did Vietnam have on your coming back to school? When you were there, did you decide you'd better go back to school or anything?

G: Right now, the main reason I'm in school is to collect the money on the G.I. Bill, and to get whatever training and education I can so I can leave the country. I'm just interested in everything and I'm out for what I can get and then split. I have no desire to stay in this country at all, not because of Vietnam itself, but for what Vietnam did and the reasons behind it and what the government and the country has turned into. I see it as a decline of the empire and the whole thing is just getting more and more repressive every day. I've applied for citizenship to Canada and am hoping to go up there in about a week or two and start looking for promising employment up there. And I'm going to try and get out as soon as I can.

D: How about switching your major? Did it have anything to do with Vietnam?

G: Well, when I was over in Vietnam, I remembered what accounting was. I'd say I went anti-establishment and to be consistent, I'd naturally have to get out of business and get into something else. But I'm taking philosophy strictly for my own personal use. I have no intention of getting a job in it. I may at some time if I have to, but I have no intention except to use it strictly for my own use. My minor is Sociology. I would like to get something in Sociology. I'd like to do my graduate work in Sociology; I'd make up the hours in Sociology that I need to get a major and then finish it off to get a master's up there. Right now, I'm working at the Media Center and I'm fairly interested in video taping, so I wouldn't mind becoming a video tape camera-man either. But I have no desire to go back into the

economic system of the United States at all. I don't view myself as an American citizen. I sort of view myself as a person who's in this country right now, but is trying to get out. That's why I can live comfortably on what I do. I'm not giving a good job or making good money. I want to pay as little taxes as possible. I just want to leave as quickly as I can.

D: I could be way off base here, but do you regret, then, your military experience or do you think it was an enlightenment?

G: Okay. Again, there's this fine developing point that I have in my mind of almost everything. For what Vietnam represented and what it stood for, I 'm sort of against it. I'd say now that if I had to do it all over again, I definitely would leave. If the situation was the same and it was easier to get across the border I'd just go to Canada as quickly as I could.

D: But that's in light of what you know.

G: That's in light of what I know now. I realized very quickly after I got into the service, even before I got to Vietnam, that I shouldn't have gone. But I can't see this as a right move. You get experience from everything you do, and even if you make a mistake, you learn from it. I could see it in that respect, but I think it's a very bad mistake. I don't let it bother me and it doesn't keep me up at night, but I'm aware that I made a very bad mistake by going into the service. Ever since that day, I've tried to talk to people who were going into the National Guard and change their minds. If they were getting drafted, I would tell them to go to Canada. Don't be drafted, if you can avoid it. If they took my advice, that was fine. If they asked for my advice, I told them but I've never forced my opinions on anybody. I'm always willing to state them and I'm always willing to come right out and say what I think. But I never forced what I want on anybody.

D: It must have been pretty tough during the last year and a half of your military experience and then come back and adjust.

G: Yes. I came back to the States. It was strange; I think my main reaction came after I was out of the service. I got out December 8, 1971. I got an early out to come back to school. In fact, one of the reasons I took the extra year was because there was a chance of getting an early out. I actually spent an extra six or seven months in, instead of the extra whole year. Then I got out and went back to school. The day after I got out of school and I

finished my finals a friend and I headed up to Canada and we just went all the way north to Hudson's Bay. We had been planning it since winter and we had all of our camping equipment and stuff. We spent a while back-packing without coming to town. It was a pure wilderness and then we came into a small town, got a canoe there and took the canoe upriver to Hudson's Bay. It was sort of like a thousand miles north into Canada. We went through the whole summer only stopping in three or four towns and maybe talking to about twenty people. I just got away from everything completely.

- D: Well, that's about all I have to say. Do you have any other comments that you want to make about this?
- G: No. You never said what the main point of the interview was.
- D: It's just to get your reaction.

END OF INTERVIEW