

YOUNGSTOWN STATE UNIVERSITY

ORAL HISTORY PROGRAM

Vietnam Veterans Project

Naval Experience

O. H. 405

WILLIAM HITCHCOCK

Interviewed

by

Jeffery Collier

on

June 11, 1975

YOUNGSTOWN STATE UNIVERSITY

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INTERVIEWEE: WILLIAM HITCHCOCK
INTERVIEWER: Jeffery Collier
SUBJECT: South Vietnamese People, Viet Cong, Drugs,
Morale, Training
DATE: June 11, 1975

C: This is Jeffery Collier and I'm with the Youngstown State University Oral History Program working on the Vietnam Veteran Project. Today I am speaking with William Hitchcock. We are at the United States Naval Reserve Training Center up at LaClede Avenue in Youngstown, Ohio. The date today is June 11, 1975, and the time is approximately 2:00 p.m.

Mr. Hitchcock, could you tell me a little bit about yourself up to the present time, your education, your tenure in the service, what you are doing presently, and a little bit about your family?

H: I entered the Navy in 1956 and I've been on continuous active duty ever since. Originally, I am from Parkersburg, West Virginia. I attended Parkersburg High School. I left school before I graduated and went into the Navy. Since then I have finished high school through a GED test. I'm married; I was married in 1967, and I have one son who is five years old.

C: In terms of the active duty that you are on right now, could you tell us what you do presently?

H: Presently, I am assigned as leading chief or senior petty officer of the men in Youngstown at the reserve center.

C: How many people do you have under you?

H: Approximately ten, but it varies sometimes to twelve or thirteen. Sometimes we have temporary people here.

- C: When you entered the Navy right out of high school, where were you assigned to at that time?
- H: My first base was USNTC Bainbridge. That's where I went through boot camp in 1956. Then I was retained in Bainbridge for a year of shore duty, more or less. After that I was transferred to the USS Galveston, COD 3, where I headed my first tour. I got out of the Navy for a couple of months, then came back in, and went to Roosevelt Rhoades, Puerto Rico, for two years. From there I went to USS Tidewater, AD31. I was north of Virginia, pulled a couple of Mediterranean cruises, then I transferred back to Roosevelt Rhoades, Puerto Rico, for two more years of overseas shore duty. From there I volunteered for duty in Vietnam, the first time. In less than thirty days I had my orders. I was sent to Coronado, California, where I went through weapons training, counterinsurgency school, survival school, and small boat training. I was transferred to Vietnam. I landed in Da Nang, Vietnam, in 1966, July the 2nd. I was transferred a week later from Da Nang to Phu Ly and I spent a year there. There I was leading petty officer of the security division in charge of all security for the area of Phu Ly, for supplier in Phu Ly, for the Navy.
- C: Was the security that you had in Vietnam, or that you are presently in right now, as far as you being in Vietnam in 1966, was that the MOS that you entered in?
- H: My job in the Navy is really chief gunner's mate.
- C: Could you describe what a chief gunner's mate does?
- H: I worked on any type of ordnance in the Navy that we had, anything from a .22 pistol to the latest and most modern gun or missile systems. I have worked on all small arms; I've worked on 5-inch 38, rocket launchers, 3-inch fifties, and several other pieces of ordnance. I can't remember them all now.
- C: When you say work on, does that mean you physically take them apart, do anything that is necessary to keep them in workable condition?
- H: Yes. My rate consists of electricity, electronics, hydraulics and mechanical. Anything to do with inside the gun mouth, it is my job to take care of it, to physically take them apart if you have to or if the job is too big to get the shipyard assistance and more technical advice from shore if you can't handle the job.
- C: Upon being in Vietnam then in 1966, on your first tour

of duty there, you would be practicing your MOS over there?

- H: On my first tour of duty in Vietnam, I was assigned to a security division. We set up a defense perimeter of Phu Ly, built bunkers, built motor bunkers for just regular guard posts and set up the overall security of the supply depot there.
- C: How long were you over there on your first tour?
- H: I was there a year right to the day.
- C: Did you spend the whole time in Phu Ly?
- H: Except for two R&R's I took to Bangkok. I was in Phu Ly or in Da Nang sometime. Most of the time I was in Phu Ly.
- C: Can you tell me what Phu Ly was like in 1966 as far as the military that was there and also as far as the activity? Was there a lot of fighting going on there at that time? Were there any major offenses?
- H: Where I was at we were back behind the line, so to speak. We had an outer guard which were of Marines and Army, so very seldom did we get any action close to us. We knew of action; it was heavy like fifteen miles away. I didn't see that much of it. We had been mortared frequently, mostly at night or early in the morning. There were Marines there, Army, ARVN's [Army of The Republic of Vietnam], and the Koreans had two divisions there, the Whitehorse Division and the Tiger Division. The Koreans saw more of the action than anybody else.
- C: Did you have a lot of interaction with the other branches of the service whether it be social or at some club or anything like that?
- H: They used our clubs all of the time. Our clubs consisted of two tents and that was it. You drank your beer out in a mudhole somewhere. Beer cost fifteen cents a can. The Koreans came in all of the time. It was a Hong Kong hilt to them to see a place like that. They were used to drinking their beer out in the woods at a hundred degrees.
- C: When you would sit and speak with these Koreans, would they tell you what was happening out in the field at that time?
- H: Sure, they told us what was going on. The Koreans, I think, were some of the finest fighters that they had over there at the time that I know of. I think every one of them had a black belt or something. They were mean; they were good fighters.

- C: Was the fighting that these people were doing around Phu Ly against the Vietnamese Army or the Viet Cong?
- H: The NVA.
- C: I heard that the NVA was a much more organized and better fighting force than the Viet Cong. Of course, the Viet Cong were, more or less, the night fighters down there. Did you hear anything to that effect?
- H: The NVA were well-organized and were just like a regular regulation army. They had to be better. The Viet Cong was more of a guerilla outfit. There were a lot of younger people in there, plus there were a lot of women in the Viet Cong.
- C: When you would be shelled--you said in the evening or the morning--did you ever anticipate that you would be attacked after being shelled, or were you ever attacked?
- H: No, we were never attacked with a ground assault. A watchman would set up on the beach and tell us . . . it was like a little code. We were out on Rosemary Point. We could see them over on the beach after they fired the first round. We could see them over there shooting. They had to come out to the beach area to shoot at us when they used the recoilless rifle.
- C: Why is that?
- H: Because the jungle and everything was about ten feet back from the beach and the trees were so heavy that they couldn't have fired through it. You could see the flash of the rifle when they fired.
- C: After they fired at you, upon locating their position, did you have anything to fire back at them with?
- H: We weren't allowed to fire back at them.
- C: Why not?
- H: The position was they would come out on this beach and fire at us and we couldn't fire back because we could fire and actually hit them. If any of the rounds would go five feet over their heads, they would go through the jungle and into the village right behind them. So we never were allowed to fire back at them unless we had a sure shot and they were close enough for a .50 caliber or something. We had to be sure that we got them.
- C: So they were pretty smart then in their positioning of firing at you. Was there ever a time that you could take

a sure shot and you fired back at them?

H: No.

C: Why is it that the outer forces, the Marines or the Korean Army or the United States Army, wouldn't go out to them and just actually take and kill them right there?

H: The Marines were mainly on the outer brim. They took care of everything out there. They very seldom did anything on the inside. They had a camp not so far away. The Vietnamese junk boat came in one evening, I think it was July of 1966. They had seen some suspected movement on the beach and they opened up with .50 calibers. Some of the rounds were going up toward the Marine camp, and one of the Marines up there got hit. All of the Marines started returning fire on them and pretty soon they brought a tank attachment up there and brought out tanks which fired a couple spotter rounds with a .50 caliber. They ceased fire and everybody pulled out. The Navy got in on that. The Navy guy stuck his head up over a LCBP and emptied thirty rounds out of a cliff. You never saw anything but the gun and his hand. If they were farther than from this place on the beach, the Marins would make an attempt to go over there, or the Army, whoever was closest. The ARVN's would also try to get over there. The ARVN's never tried too fast; they were always the last to go anywhere.

C: In realtion to the people of Vietnam, did you have any interaction with them whether it be in town or on the base?

H: While I was in Phu Ly, I was also in charge of hiring the first Vietnamese civilians, processing and fingerprinting them, getting the papers put out on them, and hiring them actually for the civil service jobs that they paid for. It was like a civil service job, but the pay was really small. I don't remember what it was then, but I was in charge of hiring these people.

C: Do you remember anything specific about the people that sort of set them apart from any other people?

H: The only thing that really sets them apart as far as I'm concerned is that they are lazy. Let's put it this way, if you have a sixty pound box sitting on the floor and the Vietnamese has got it stenciled in his head somewhere that he can only pick up fifty-nine pounds, he wouldn't even attempt to pick up that sixty pound box.

C: Did you go into town, Phu Ly, at all?

H: The town was not known as Phu Ly it was known as Tamky. There was another town there that I don't remember the name of. We had security patrols in there. It was just a feeler, just to let them know that we were there. We had two Navy men to block the screens there eight hours a day. We took them out at dusk. They actually were in on killing one and wounding another in an attempt to throw a grenade in the city compound or the village chief's compound.

C: These would be Viet Cong?

H: Just Vietnamese. He could have been a good friend of the South Vietnamese but just made at the village chief. One of the ARVN's killed or claimed credit for killing this guy. I'll never forget it. It was the first one that I had seen killed in Vietnam the first tour that I was over there. The left them set out in the middle of the square from about eight o'clock in the morning when they killed them to until after eight o'clock that night in about 110 degree heat. They just left them set there cross-legged in the middle of the square.

C: Sort of as a warning to other people?

H: Yes.

C: Do you think that people took notice of things like that over there or was war such a common thing that they didn't care?

H: I really don't think that it bothered them. I think it was just a big show.

C: How did you find the morale of the service people that were over there at that time? Did it run pretty high?

H: The first time I was there?

C: Yes.

H: It couldn't have been better. I think when I went into the country that time, there were probably no more than 100,000 people there and before I left a year later, it was close to 400,000 or something like that. It had more than tripled the year that I was there.

C: All branches of the service felt pretty confident of victory or at least of . . .

H: At the time, in 1966 and 1967, we really thought that we

were helping the Vietnamese. We thought that we should be there. The living conditions were rough, but they improved and by the time I left there, I had a fairly nice place to live, wooden barracks. When we first went there, we slept on the ground in a tent. We really thought we were doing something; we thought we were helping them.

- C: You made mention of them being pretty lazy; that didn't seem to sway your opinion? They were lazy people, but you still felt that they really wanted the Americans to be there and that they wanted our help?
- H: I wouldn't say that they wanted our help or that they were just using us as a way to make a living. When I first got there we didn't have lockers or anything. We went out to a water buffalo and poured it in a water bowl and poured it over our head and that was our shower. We went to town and bought lockers, ten dollar foot lockers made out of beer cans and old orange crates. They looked good; they were good lockers with a lock and hinges and everything and it served the purpose, but for ten dollars it really wasn't worth it. But ten dollars . . . making all of that money, ten dollars really wasn't anything to buy a foot locker to lock up your valuables.
- C: I've heard that the Vietnamese were pretty industrious.
- H: They could make anything out of anything. I've heard stories or seen pictures of how the Japanese made houses and everything out of beer cans and put them together. The Vietnamese did the same thing. They would go through our garbage dump where we burned wood. If it was already burnt they would take the nails out of the ground or they would come and take the crates before they were burned and go make a foot locker out of it and sell it back to us.
- C: That sounds rather industrious, always out to make a buck.
- H: They would take nails, grind them up into little pieces, wrap them up with CY and they would make Claymore mines out of them. That's when we stopped them from collecting nails.
- C: I'll bet they killed some people with those.
- H: They could have.
- C: What experience stands out most in your first tour of duty when you were in Vietnam, was there any one specific thing?

H: No.

C: One day or one event?

H: I couldn't say any one day. They were all exciting to me. I enjoyed the first year I was there, but I couldn't say that one thing or day really stood out.

C: Did you run into anything that you didn't expect there in the first year?

H: The living conditions were bad. One of the things that I probably remember most about the whole country is the monsoon seasons where I was at. The rains came in October and stayed until March in the northern part. In the southern part, they came from March to October. If you wanted to, you could stay in water up to your waist the whole year in that country. You wouldn't believe how hard it rains when it starts to monsoon over there. It just comes down for days and never stops.

C: Was there a lot of Army activity during the monsoon on either side?

H: Everything slows down in monsoon season. You can't move equipment and tanks. You can move them, but you have to stay to the road. You couldn't go into a rice paddy with a tank in monsoon season. You would still be there if you tried it.

C: Were there a lot of drugs over in Vietnam in 1966 and 1967?

H: When I was there, I never heard of any drug related cases. Nobody was ever suspected of or even thought of having drugs or grass, nothing like that.

C: Let's turn now to you leaving Vietnam in 1967, do you have any regrets? Were you glad to be leaving at that time?

H: Sure, I was glad to be leaving. I was single at the time and I was going to come home and get married. I left in July of 1967. One night after I left Da Nang, the field, the Da Nang Air Base, was rocketed. It was one of the first times it was rocketed. Of course, that is where I would have been if I had stayed there another night. I probably wouldn't have been here today.

C: It was destroyed?

H: The whole area that I had spent one night in was destroyed. I was kind of glad to get here. I left on a C1-30 and flew to Guam. That is one thing that really bugged me about

when I left. I was turned loose in this town with about twenty other people and they said, "Okay, here's your orders; go back to the States." Other people were given transportation and assigned flights and seats on 707's. This particular group was just told to shove off.

C: Why were you different?

H: The carrier was having a contract problem with the United States, the government. They weren't renewing the contract or something like that. We wanted to go and it was our time to go so they said, "Here are your orders; make it." And we did. We hitchhiked back more or less.

C: When you said the contract, do you mean the airline contract, commercial airlines?

H: Right. The commercial airline contract had run out and wasn't renewed. It was renewed probably a month later, after we got out of the country.

C: You hitchhiked from Phu Ly to Da Nang?

H: Yes. They put about 125 of us on a C1-30; they were sitting on the floor like cattle.

C: That's a pretty good flight from there to Guam.

H: We flew from Phu Ly to Da Nang, from Da Nang we got a C1-30 to Okinawa. We stayed overnight in Okinawa and a couple of us went out to the Air Force Base Kubina and asked if they had anything going east. They said that they had one plane going to Charleston, South Carolina, via Alaska, so we took it; two of us took it. In seventeen hours from Okinawa, we were in Charleston, South Carolina.

C: Did you get married when you were home on that leave?

H: No, I got married two months later. I came home in July and got married in September of 1967. I was stationed at the naval hospital in Philadelphia for two years. From there I went right back to Vietnam.

C: Did you volunteer the second time also?

H: There was a catch to that. In the Navy, once you volunteer for something they put you on a list, a volunteer list, and the only way that you will ever get your name off of that list is to write them and request that your name be dropped from the volunteer list. Like a fool, I didn't know this rule and I didn't do it.

It also states that after spending a year in the country Vietnam, they will not send you back to a combat area unless it is an emergency and they need your job there. They won't send you back to Vietnam for three years. I had been out of the country two years when I went back.

- C: I take it they needed your job.
- H: They didn't need it, but I didn't know the rule at the time. I found out about the rule after I was back in the country ten months.
- C: How did you feel when you found out that you were going back to Vietnam? Did it upset you?
- H: It upset me quite a bit because my wife was about seven months pregnant at the time. I had requested a different set of orders only I didn't tell them that I wasn't supposed to be going back to Vietnam; I requested a delay in my orders and a different set of orders for another two months so that I could be there when the baby was born. I didn't get this; I had to go back. I left in October of 1969 and the baby was born in December of 1969. I was in Mekong Delta when I got word. I didn't see my son for ten months. He was ten months old when I first saw him.
- C: When you flew back to Vietnam, did you not go to Phu Ly again?
- H: The second time I went back I was assigned to LST which was converted over to an ABP or something like that. I forget what AB stood for. It was a PBR tenure, ten PBR boats.
- C: Could you tell us what PBR boats are?
- H: PBR is a small, fast fiberglass boat. It's light, draws about twelve inches of water and will go about 40 or 45 miles an hour. It doesn't have any screws, no rudder.
- C: What are PBR's used for?
- H: They were used for patrolling the rivers in Mekong Delta area.
- C: How long were the boats?
- H: Forty foot, I think, they were.
- C: I thought that they would be shorter. I was going to say that that is a lot of firepower on a fiberglass boat. It

seems to me like it would really kick that thing around.

H: The seal team over there had a boat that was much, much lighter, but it had two, 427 Chevy engines in it. It would have a mini gun on the front of it, 250 calibers, and about four M-60 machine guns down on each side. If you really thought something was over on our arms, you should have seen that thing. That was an insertion boat they used to insert seals behind the lines and pick them up.

C: Could you tell us what a seal is?

H: A seal is probably the best fighter that the Americans had, the Navy and old World War II type frogman. He is trained in all types of warfare. Things operated in one's and two's and three's at the most. They would go behind mines and set up ambushes, Claymore mines, and stuff like that, wait and ambush Vietnamese in the Mekong Delta area.

C: Did you notice any vast difference in the morale of the people in 1967 and 1969?

H: My morale was definitely down the day that I went to the country. When I got to Saigon, again we were sent--five of us--to find a ship. Saigon couldn't tell me where my ship was at; they would tell me approximately where it was at. I was sent to three or four different towns in the Mekong Delta looking for it. I would go from PBR division to PBR division. The PBR people who lived with the Vietnamese . . . their conditions in 1969 were extremely backward, really bad.

C: Worse than when you came over in 1966?

H: I wouldn't even compare it to 1966. At the time, they were half Vietnamese and half Americans in these PBR divisions. They were in the process of turning the boats over to the Vietnamese because of President Nixon's Vietnamization program.

When I got there, the shower that they had at this one PBR base, Rockjaw--which was down off of the gulf of Thailand or close to the gulf and the Heman forest--was just a bucket and you poured it over your head for a shower. You had rocks on the floor that you walked on. The Vietnamese would stop up the drains of these showers and wash clothes from the water that the guy poured from his shower. They would go over in the corner and take a crap and it would be floating around, so you better stay on the rocks or you would step in something. I couldn't really hack that. Plus, again living with the Vietnamese, I don't think that I could really do it.

C: They weren't very clean?

H: No, not at all.

C: It's surprising that being that we were there a good ten years or so that some of it didn't rub off, being that they lived with the PBR people, half and half, I'm kind of surprised that that wouldn't rub off at all.

H: They kept a clean uniform and everything, but it was just their habits that were bad, liking stopping up the drains in the showers and using the extra water to wash their clothes. The water was actually dirty, but it was probably cleaner in that shower than washing your clothes in the river which you would see the other Vietnamese doing right off the back of a boat. You would send your greens out to get them laundered and they washed them in the river and they would come back smelling halfway clean if they were dry. One time I didn't notice and I stuffed them in my foot locker and they weren't dry. They were in there for about three days and when I brought them out I had to throw them away they stunk so bad, like the river because they had been in that heat. I don't believe that they really know how to be clean or try to be clean or don't care.

C: Getting back to the question that I asked about the morale, did you see a downgrading of the morale of the people as far as the fighting people of America over there?

H: In the PBR division?

C: Yes.

H: Even on the LST I was on, and we were even out quite a ways from action most of the time, I noticed people would be caught smoking marijuana or something like that and they wouldn't really get punished for it. Their officers or chiefs would take it away from them and say that's it. If they sent the guy back, they couldn't get a replacement for him and he was better than nothing.

C: So drugs had come onto the scene then by 1969?

H: Grass did for sure. I saw that over there at that time.

C: It was my understanding that that was pretty common as far as . . . it was easy to get, there was a lot of it over there, and you could just trade any Vietnamese a pack of American cigarettes and you could get grass if you wanted it.

H: Sure. When the PBR boat would pull over for a search,

everyone would try to give the man on the PBR boat a cigarette, but grass is what it was.

C: Was this to keep the Americans from searching the boat?

H: Probably or to get favors from them or make friends with them. We gave them little toilet Kits for awhile: soap, toothpastes, toothbrushes, and stuff like that. We gave them that and they would give you fish or something like that. They would try to give you something; they were pretty friendly in that respect.

C: On your second tour of duty then as opposed to being in a central base, you were out actually on the rivers?

H: We were on the rivers of the Mekong Delta. I can't remember the names of half of them. We were on about three different ones down there.

C: What did you do, yourself, when you would be on the boat?

H: The only time that I actually rode the boat is when I volunteered to ride for somebody so that he could get an extra night of sleep. After about three months, we got a new commanding officer and he knocked that off because he didn't want any of his crew to get shot up or wounded or something like that or even killed when we were just out riding on the boat for somebody else who was supposed to be out. We were actually taking the guy's place; I would take the gunner's place so that he could get an extra night on the ship.

C: Were you actually based on a ship?

H: Well, I was actually on the converted LST. It was a motor ship of three PBR divisions.

C: If you wouldn't be out on a PBR or taking somebody's place, your normal duty would be to make sure that the guns and all of the fire power that they had on the boat was in good working condition?

H: I repaired the machine guns; we had 640 mm mounts on the ship; we had 81mm mortar mounts on the ship and various other weapons on there that I took care of. I was in charge of it; it was my division. We also armed two huey helicopters. We kept them armed and fueled and held flight quarters in and out.

C: The helicopter was used strictly for evacuation?

H: It was a gun ship; it was a fighting helicopter. It had nothing to do with medical evacuations of anything.

C: Were they manned by Navy or Marine people?

H: They were all Navy.

C: When you were out on the ship at any time filling in for anyone, did you ever run into a fire fight?

H: I remember one time I was out and the PBR homebase was mortared and when we came back in to try to find out where the mortars were coming from, we fired into the beach and tried to get some return fire. No one actually returned fire. The LST, I was on it, and they returned fire. We received two 101mm rockets, I think it was, one through the wardroom and one into the mast. We returned about five or six thousand rounds of fire on that.

C: Was it a common occurrence to run into much of a fight or was that uncommon?

H: Well, you put an LST so far up a river and you really can't turn it around. You put it up as far as you can go and then there is a bridge in front of you and you can't go any further, so you have to run the bow aground to turn it around. You are pretty much a sitting duck out there.

C: How big is an LST?

H: I couldn't tell you how long. It is a good-size ship; it's not a small ship.

C: It was long enough that you had a crew under you and also three PBR divisions? How many people were in each one of the divisions?

H: There were five boats and five men to a boat, about twenty-five and seventy-five men in three PBR divisions.

C: All of these people would all be assigned to one LST ship?

H: Right. That would be like their tender ship.

C: As far as in 1969, was the Vietnamization continuing at this time? Were they in the process of turning everything over to the South Vietnamese?

H: We were turning over boats. We would start out with one man on the boat and four Americans and it would be two Vietnamese and three Americans and so forth. The boat captain would be the last man to leave. As soon as that was turned over to the Vietnamese, they would put their flag on.

- C: How long would that process take?
- H: Breaking them in . . . two months probably at the most.
- C: Two months from the time it was four Americans to the time it was four Vietnamese?
- H: Five Americans to five Vietnamese. That's just an estimate. We did turn over full divisions to them all at once, just gave them the whole division.
- C: What would the Navy personnel who were on those boats do after they turned their ship over to the Vietnamese? Did they have another duty?
- H: Some of them were sent aboard some of those LST's that were tenders and some of them were sent back to the States.
- C: From the time of the second tour of duty when you were over there between arriving and leaving, was the number of people in the armed forces going down, were they starting to pull people out or not?
- H: I always liked to joke about it as I was part of President Nixon's withdrawal, when I got my airline ticket going back to Vietnam. You could notice it decreasing from 1969 until 1970 when I left. You knew that there were a lot more Vietnamese taking over the jobs. When I left . . . we turned over the ship that I was on, the Harey County, to the Vietnamese in Guam. We gave the whole ship to them, completely equipped.
- C: Were they pretty efficient at running it or not?
- H: No.
- C: Do you think they cared?
- H: I don't know. I just don't think that they were capable of . . . taking a guy out of a wooden boat that didn't even have a gasoline engine, at best a small engine in it to run it, and put them into a ship like the LST or a destroyer escort, especially an old one was just like taking a guy out of the stone age and putting him into a space program. They tried but they just didn't have the ability to run a ship like that.
- C: Is there anything that stands out in your mind as a major difference between the 1967 and the 1969 tour of duty? Was there any outstanding thing that you can think of in any area that you saw a major change in whether it be in our forces, in Vietnam forces, or in enemy forces?

- H: Just the morale at the end of the last tour. You could definitely see a big difference in the morale. It went down even further once we got orders from President Nixon to pull back and not to return fire unless absolutely necessary. I could see it on the boats then.
- C: When did that order come about?
- H: This came out somewhere in the early 1970's. Then people thought that they were there for nothing, just to get shot at. There were a lot of casualties then.
- C: Were there a lot of casualties when you were with the cruise that would go out on a daily basis on the PBR boats?
- H: On the PBR's, casualties were pretty heavy. PBR's were shot up two or three a week; some sunk; some returned to base. Out of the five people who went with me out of Saigon looking for my ship and looking for their PBR divisions two of them were killed and one wounded and only two of us got out of the country without a purple heart.
- C: Did they all have the same MOS as you?
- H: The one particular man was a gunner's mate by the name of Halloway. He was killed less than a month in the country. I used to ride the boats with him. It was right after that that our commanding officer stopped us from riding the boats because he didn't want us to get shot.
- C: did you ever think, when your tour of duty was coming to an end in 1970 and we were winding down the war, what it would be like to be the last person killed over there? Did that ever enter your thoughts at all?
- H: No, not really. As long as I was in that country, I never really thought about being killed. That part of it didn't bother me. After I came back and started thinking about it, what really bothered me, it still does, is the way that the Vietnamese were rotted out of their last defenses and when the country eventually fell. This is what really bothers me.
- C: Why is that?
- H: To think that I spent two years of my life in that country, trying to help them get along on their own--they definitely had the equipment to get along on their own--and to give it up just like they did. Really, deep down, I knew that it would happen sooner or later. I just didn't think that it would happen all that fast.
- C: Could you see that when you were leaving though?

- H: When we turned over the ships, the PBR divisions, to them, it was just a joke that went around that we never thought that they would use the boats or ships for what they were intended for, that they would put chickens and pigs and everything else on them instead of them using them to fight with. This is what we thought; it was just a joke that the guys would be saying when they turned them over to them. I didn't really think that they would go as fast as they did. It actually made me mad. I think that if the United States would have let the military people fight that war the way they wanted to early enough, back in the 1960's . . .
- C: Would 1966 have been early enough or too late?
- H: They had the manpower there then. If they would have let the military go ahead and do it, I think by 1968 it would have been over or it would have had a cease fire and would have worked a hell of a lot better than the one they have now.
- C: It seems to me that with the fire power and the manpower that we had in the early 1960's, 1965 to 1966, that we certainly had the ability to win the war if we would have wanted to.
- H: I think so.
- C: Did anybody ever reflect in 1966 about that time, that they were being stifled, that they were not able to mount an offensive and defeat the North Vietnamese? Did that ever come up in a conversation or did people ever talk about that?
- H: No, I really can't say that back in that time they ever talked about it.
- C: Did they talk about it in 1969?
- H: In 1969 and 1970 everybody thought that things were going downhill then. Everybody thought that they were going to get out, and that was another bad part of it. People actually knew that they were going and knew the Vietnamization was working and they knew that they were leaving.
- C: In terms of the other countries that fell at the same time, Laos, Cambodia, hopefully not Thailand with the base that we had there, did you have any interaction with any of those other people and have the feeling that they would also fall?
- H: No. I never really even thought about Laos or Cambodia while I was there. I followed them a lot in the news when I came back and for the past two years. I never thought

all along that Cambodia would go, but I didn't think that the Vietnamese would fall with all of the equipment and training that they had. Well, they wouldn't have fell, but deep down I felt that they would go.

C: Do you think it was a wasted effort with 55,000 or 56,000 people killed and billions of dollars spent in money?

H: Yes, I do. I really do. If it had been a victory or something like that, then it would have been worth it. We really just handed it over to them, or the Vietnamese handed it over to them. That's why I think that the whole thing was a wasted effort.

C: One final question about victory, do you think that in 1966 the morale of the people and everything was there to get a victory?

H: Sure, I think so. I don't think the morale could have been better in the early 1960's, 1966 to 1968; after that they found out that they really could be waxed if they wanted to.

C: Who could be waxed, we could or they could?

H: The Vietnamese. Nothing was out of reach of the NVA or Viet Cong. Before we thought that Saigon was a safe city; we thought that Da Nang was a safe city. We thought that Camranh Bay was a safe city. Camranh Bay, Da Nang, and Saigon, all got a turned head. Then after that it made you stop and wonder. President Johnson was in Camranh Bay even while I was there. He was one of the first presidents ever to come in the country, the only one, unless President Nixon was there, but I don't think he was. That had to have been the safest place there or he wouldn't have ever come there.

C: Was there any single thing that our government did whether it be orders, student demonstrations, that you think hurt our cause over there more than any other thing?

H: No response.

C: You made mention of the fact that the orders came through that you couldn't fire at them unless it was a dire emergency. That would have to be a real morale downer to anybody.

H: That was definitely a morale downer, but as far as the students demonstrating and everything back here, you really never heard about it over there that much and never really cared. We heard of Kent State; we heard of that on the radio right away. Most of the people

didn't know where or what Kent State was. I'm from Ohio and didn't even know they had a Kent State. I think the main thing was not to fire back. That was one of the big downers. Student demonstrations . . . people sort of shrugged off.

Another thing too, we had a newspaper over there which was the only paper we got, Stars and Stripes. They didn't tell it like it was. You heard all of the combat information and all of that stuff, but everything was played up in that. It was a fairly good paper, but you never heard about the students' riots or anything like that. If you weren't in the United States, you just didn't know it. Nobody ever wrote and told you about it.

- C: Thank you very much for taking your time to talk to me about Vietnam. Do you have any last comments you would like to make?
- H: I don't think so except that I have right now over eighteen years in the Navy, close to nineteen. After this Vietnamese thing--after it fell and they gave it to the communists--this will be my last duty station; I won't stay in the military after this. They will never get the chance to send me back to another Vietnam for a year or two of my life, to hand it over to somebody else.
- C: Hopefully, we will never get into the situation again.
- H: I don't think. I think we learned our lesson there; I don't think we will get into another Vietnam.
- C: With all the power we have we should go in and win it, if we are going to be in any more.
- H: If you fight it, you are going to have to win it. If not, don't bother.

END OF INTERVIEW