

YOUNGSTOWN STATE UNIVERSITY

ORAL HISTORY PROGRAM

Vietnam Veterans Project

Personal Experience

O. H. 419

FRANK GRAZIANI

Interviewed

by

Thomas Kirker

on

November 4, 1983

YOUNGSTOWN STATE UNIVERSITY

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Vietnam Veterans Project

INTERVIEWEE: FRANK GRAZIANI

INTERVIEWER: Thomas Kirker

SUBJECT: Training, Role of Engineers, Booby Traps,  
Guard Duty, Patrols, Da Nang, People and  
Children of Vietnam

DATE: November 4, 1983

K: This is an interview with Frank Graziani for the Youngstown State Oral History Program on Vietnam Veterans of Lawrence County. The interviewer is Tom Kirker and it is being conducted at Mr. Graziani's residence in Wampum, Pennsylvania, on November 4, 1983, at approximately 3:00 p.m.

I would first like to question you on after you graduated from high school and how you got in the Marines? Did you graduate from New Castle?

G: No, I quit after my eleventh year; I never went back for twelfth. The reason I quit school was because I was having a lot of family problems, so I went into the service thinking that I would continue my education. One of the major things I did when I got back from Vietnam was get my GED. I really had planned on going farther than that, but I never did until just recently.

K: You're going back to school now?

G: Yes.

K: That's good. Where are you going to school at?

G: I go to Community College of Beaver County.

K: What are you studying?

G: Electronics.

K: When did you enlist in the Marines?

G: The year was 1966.

K: Where did you do your basic training?

G: Parris Island, North Carolina.

K: For six weeks?

G: I think it was eight weeks. It was longer than it is now, I think. We went right outside of Camp Lejeune, North Carolina, to a place called Camp Geiger for what they call ITR, which was infantry training more or less.

K: What special training did you have?

G: I was a combat engineer. We worked with explosives; we blew up anything that the infantry wanted blown up. We used mine detectors on roads for convoys, and things like that.

K: What was your specialty?

G: I've done both. I was stationed in an area in Vietnam at one time where we swept a twelve mile section of road day in and day out. Every morning we did it.

K: When did you go to Vietnam?

G: September of 1966.

K: Did you know at that time what Vietnam was and what was really going on?

G: No, not really. I was a naive kid that thought what I was doing was right. I still think as far as fighting for my country I was right. I had no idea what war really was. You really don't have the feel for war unless you're in it . . . being in a situation where you know somebody is out to get you and knowing that if you meet that person face to face you have to do to them what they are going to do to you. You can't conceive that until that exact instance develops; it's unconceivable to think about it.

K: Where were you stationed when you went to Vietnam?

G: I was outside of Da Nang for awhile and I was at Phu Cao for awhile. I had a couple of operations with the infantry where we were just one in the bush. I was moved around quite a bit.

K: What was your rank and your grade?

G: When I went over, I was a private first class.

K: When you went to base camp, how many Marines were there?  
Is it a large installation at Da Nang?

G: Yes, we were outside of Da Nang and what we did was sweep the road. We were about twenty-four miles outside of Da Nang and we swept halfway towards Da Nang and another crew swept the other half and we would meet . . .

K: Was there much activity?

G: No, no activity as far as daylight activity. Daylight was relatively safe; we went out and swept the road, did what we had to do. Naturally, we found mines and several times we found equipment that had been abandoned because it wouldn't run, couldn't be fixed, or for several different reasons. You may find a military pick up or what they call PC's which was basically a pick up, sitting along the road. After that piece of equipment sat on the road all night there wasn't a feasible way of retrieving it because you knew it was booby trapped. The idea was sometimes you could disarm them, but I never remember them asking us to disarm one. We normally just blew it to pieces so that they couldn't use it against us.

K: Were there a lot of booby traps?

G: Yes, quite a bit.

K: Did you, as engineers, try to specialize in identifying it?

G: Well, that was one of the things we did specialize in. As far as booby traps go, with explosives, one of our main functions was to either disarm it, or blow it up in place if feasible. Obviously, you couldn't take a large-sized mine and blow it up in the middle of the road because you are going to blow the road up at the same time. That wasn't feasible because you needed the road. So you would have to dig it out and get it up and carry it out into the rice paddy somewhere and then blow it there.

K: Was it nervous type work?

G: Yes it was. In the monsoon season, it rained day after day after day. It didn't matter whether it was pouring down rain or not you had to go and do what you had to do. The roads were dirt roads and a dirt road that is rained on and traveled on constantly just gets muddy. The higher parts of the road are the outside where the mud gets pushed to the outside. When you have to check the road not only do you have to check every bit of the road traveled, you have to check all the culverts underneath the road which

means you literally have to get down off of the side of the road and crawl through the culvert. The majority of them were big enough that you could crawl on your hands and knees without any problems, but you literally had to go from one end to the other and make sure that there wasn't anything in there that if a vehicle or anyone got in the middle of, that they could blow it up. Pulling off the side of the road was the hardest part because when you stepped off that road the mud was deep. More than once I've seen people have to be literally pulled out with a cable around their waist. It was like quicksand: Once you get down in it the more you tried to get out the deeper you got in. It would get to the point where you would get down to your waist and there was no way to get out except to be drug out. They would throw you a rope or cable off a wench and you tied it around your waist and they would drag you out, just like a cow stuck in the mud. It was unbelievable.

K: How many guys worked on that road?

G: There was a whole platoon. There were three pieces of detecting equipment and you had three men operating them. Behind each operator there was what they called a probe man. His basic job was if you found a piece of metal and had picked it up with this piece of equipment you could hear it. You wore a set of headphones and had a battery pack on your side. When you picked it up you would stop the detector right on top of it and the guy behind you would walk right up in your footsteps and start looking for it. In the meantime, you would have to keep going; you couldn't stop. One couldn't stop and the other two keep going; you would lose track of where you were going and you had to overlap on that sweep. After about twenty minutes to a half hour, you get to a point where listening to this constant hum of the mine detector makes you . . . you just can't detect a difference in sound; it's like a whistle but it's a higher pitch whistle when you hit a piece of metal. After awhile you get to the point where you couldn't tell the difference between the higher and lower sounds. So approximately every twenty minutes to a half hour you would change with your probe man and he would run the detector and you would probe. That's the way we did it the whole twelve miles.

K: If you were out in the bush, what did you do different?

G: When we were out in the bush, we would go with the infantry on operations. If they found a tunnel where they suspected the North Vietnamese were dug in, they would throw a grenade in to try and blow somebody out, but those tunnels were so deep . . . You wouldn't believe the way they were built, just miles and miles of them. If nobody would come out

after the smoke would clear, they figured it was safe and sent us in with the explosives. We would go in, set out explosives, come back out, and blow the tunnel until it collapsed. I think that was the scariest part of it all. That was one of the things we did on operations. Occasionally they would find a live round that hadn't exploded and we would blow that up before the North Vietnamese or Viet Cong could get a hold of it and use it against us; we would just blow it right where it was at.

Booby traps, we would either try to disarm them or blow them up. Normally in a case like that, where there wasn't anything around them that had to be salvaged, we would blow them in place. It wasn't worth taking the chance because even if you find one booby trap there's nothing to say that there is nothing booby trapping that, especially the very obvious ones. You know they made them obvious because they wanted you to see them.

K: They booby trapped the booby trap.

G: Right. There was more than once that we thought that. Some were set to look like traps, but they really weren't; the actual booby trap was underneath. We found that many times with mines we found in roads. They would put a grenade down, put on a wood top and pull the pin. You would dig that mine out, find it, feel it all out, pick it up and the grenade would go off, setting the mine off and you would be standing there holding it. Of course, that would be the end of it. You had to be very careful.

K: How would you extract that type of mine? You would have to treat everything with kid gloves.

G: You did. I'll never forget one time a friend of mine, as a matter of fact I see him every once in awhile . . . I found something on the road, he came up and started to dig it out. I took a couple of steps ahead of him, stopped and asked him if he found anything. He said, "Yes," so I continued to go ahead. He dug around it and we were just about at the end of the sweep, far enough that when I got to the end and hadn't found anything I turned around and came back. During the process of doing this we had the infantry with us to protect us; obviously we couldn't watch the road and protect our flanks at the same time. I went back and he said that he had something but couldn't get it out. I told him to stay there. I went to the truck to leave my equipment and came back. The reason he couldn't get it out was because the mud was probably sixteen to eighteen inches deep and the more he tried to shovel the mud out, the more it ran in because it was sloppy mud. He got on one side, I got on the other, and we started digging and digging. We probably had a hole three feet round by the time we got to

the bottom because you had to dig it out at an angle to keep the mud from coming back in. We dug it out and it was an artillery round that had been a dud. What they had done was set it up as a mine to go off when a piece of equipment ran over it. We couldn't find the detonator on it, so we kept digging and finally we got underneath it and there was another little mine underneath it. What it was was, the little mine was set under the big mine in such a way that when the truck went over the big mine it would kick it off the little one, a butt would come up, the little one would blow off and then the big one would blow off. What would have happened if he would have lifted that up, the little one would have gone off and the big one in his hand would have gone off also. What we ended up doing when we found it and got it dug out was, I held the little mine so that the plunger wouldn't go up or down because we weren't sure which way it had to go, and he took the big mine off. Then we had to disarm the little one while I was holding it. Scared the hell out of me; I swore I was dead that day.

K: Did you know how to disarm, did they teach you?

G: They taught you how to disarm the basic type of mine used, but I can't remember how many times you ran across mines that weren't the basic type. They were something that they just put together. I would say ninety percent of the mines that we came across we had no idea how to disarm them. We could take a chance and try, but I didn't and still don't believe that my life or anyone else's life was worth taking the chance. That was the only time that we had to disarm a mine in the road.

K: Were a lot of guys killed by the mines that you worked with?

G: No, not a lot. We lost about three or four to the mines, actual mines on the road. The majority of the ones we lost were from the booby traps on the sides of the roads; a lot of infantry got that. We had one guy, a young kid probably 24 or 25 years old and I don't even remember his name anymore, although I can picture him; he had gray hair, all gray even though he was only 25 years old. We called him Pappy; he was a nice kid. He was married and had two kids. His wife had the one baby while he was in Vietnam. We lost him to a booby trap.

K: What unit were you in? What platoon, regiment, division, or whatever?

G: It was third Marine division.

K: Did you help set off face mines in it?

G: No.

K: You strictly dealt with mines and explosives?

G: Basically, yes. One of the things that we were training for was construction and destruction, more or less. We were trained to build buildings, flooding bridges, whatever. We did do some construction while I was over there. For a couple of months I was attached to a unit where we built a division headquarters. It got completely blown up shortly after it was done. (Laughing)

K: Did you live in a base camp?

G: Yes.

K: When you were at camp you just got up in the morning and swept the road?

G: Yes.

K: What was it like in camp? Was there a lot of comradery? Did you have to stay pretty much on your toes?

G: Yes. At that time the North Vietnamese and the Viet Cong endured. We don't know which one . . . they used to fire a lot of rockets. There were very few nights that you slept the whole night without having to get up at least once and go out to your bunker and sit and wait until they got done firing the rockets. You could go back to bed if there was a reasonable amount of time left. Many nights we just stayed out in the bunker all night because you couldn't take the chance of coming in. It originally started out once every so often they would do it and they constantly built it up until it was almost an every night affair.

Fire whistles drive me crazy because we had a siren set up at the post and when they had incoming rounds that was the first thing that went off. So when the fire whistle goes off at night, so do I; I climb right out of bed.

K: Were you ever attacked? Was the camp ever attacked?

G: No, not that camp. The most that we had there were the incoming rockets quite often. I was at another camp. We were sent out on to this one camp which was outside of Phu By where we went out on operations with the infantry. It was on a hill. They were all numbered but I can't remember the number. We would go out on operations with the infantry from that hill. They would come out of Phu By and pick us up on their way and we would go.



They had artillery on that hill. We got there quite a few times. Never with the force large enough to overrun the hill, but you would be on one end of the camp and hear all kinds of fire and the sergeant or guard would tell you we were being hit by whatever side, so to be on our toes. I don't think they ever had a big enough force to overrun because you never really got close enough that you could see them. You could see the mussel flash in the dark or once in awhile you could see a shadow around the fence. We were far enough away from the fence. You knew they were out there, but the only thing you could do would be to try and scare them off.

K: You had the M-16?

G: Yes.

K: Didn't they use a lot of air strikes in Vietnam?

G: Yes. When we were up on the hill, we weren't very far from the fire fights; a lot of them were real close. They would call in the air strikes and we could sit right on the hill and watch them. You couldn't tell what or if they were hitting anything because you couldn't see that much of the jungle, but you could see the napom going off and you could see the jets just coming down and dropping it. It was a different experience; it really was.

K: How long were you over there?

G: Twelve months and twenty-two days.

K: When you left, did they just fly you right out of Vietnam?

G: Yes.

K: You left your base and where did they fly you to?

G: I left my base and went to Da Nang, flew out of Da Nang to Guam, from Guam I was in California. In California they gave me my orders; I came home on leave, and then went down to Camp Lejeune, N.C.

K: Then you were done with the Marines?

G: No. I had two more years to do after that.

K: You didn't have anymore Vietnam though?

G: No. When I got out of the Marine Corps, I got out without another stripe and another trip to Vietnam. When I was going through my discharge they said, "Just stay in and we'll send you to Vietnam and give you another stripe."

K: When you were on R&R, what was the city of Da Nang like?

G: I went to Hawaii for R&R. We never really had a lot of time in Da Nang. We went there occasionally, before the Tet Offensive. Da Nang was a quiet city. You felt relatively safe, not as safe as I feel waking in the streets at home, but safe enough that you didn't have to turn around and see what every noise you heard behind you was. It was a nice city. There were a lot of beautiful cities over there, a lot of beautiful buildings and scenery at one time. I imagine the majority of it is not there or is in the process of being rebuilt now. I liked Da Nang.

K: What do you remember most about Vietnam?

G: The kids. No matter where you went, if you were riding down the road in the back of a truck, kids were running beside you and behind you. They would want money, candy, food; anything they could get off you they would try to get. If you stopped on the road fifteen kids would gather beside you and you couldn't keep anything in your pockets because they were trying to steal it out of your pockets as soon as you got out of the truck. Anything they could get their hands on they would take. I imagine it was just the poverty-stricken state that they were in.

K: Do you think that our American military was doing good in Vietnam?

G: I think we did the best that we could do. I think that the Vietnamese people had a lot of injustices shown against them, but then so did we. I would say that we had more than they did. It's hard to fight a battle when you don't know who your enemy is. If you can't decide who your enemy is between a man, woman, child, or several men, women and children, you don't know who to fight. You know that you've got enemies and you know that they're there, but you just can't say, "That guy's in a different color uniform than me, so he's the enemy or this line's ours and on the other side there's the enemy." There was no designation of who was the enemy. You had to decide that . . . most of the time on a quick decision because if you didn't it might be your last. More than once there were enemies that showed up that you wouldn't have believed it. Kids, young kids, carrying ammunition, grenades, explosives, things that you wouldn't believe a young kid would do.

One of the jobs I had while I was over there was a guard in a pass. Between these mountains the only road was through this pass. We went out there on duty, I think a week at a time. During that week you searched every civilian who came through there. Every civilian was supposed to have a legitimate identification card. You searched every civilian

who came through there; that's what you were there for, you were looking for illegal weapons or whatever you could find that they weren't supposed to have. A true civilian . . . you would see farmers coming through with stacks of hay on their wagon, and you would have to check them; you didn't know what was underneath them. Women coming through with big baskets full of rice or whatever, you had to check them.

We had a kid from New Jersey whose name was Bob; I don't remember his last name. There were three or four of us on guard this one afternoon and a woman came through with a basketful of grain or rice or something. One kid checked it out and there was a grenade in it so he pulled the grenade out. We radioed in and told them that we had this woman and they said to bring her in for questioning. At the end of tour that day, we had her in the back of the truck. Military trucks had benches down the sides and she was sitting right next to the tailgate. Bob was sitting next to her, and I was sitting straight across from Bob. We were going down the road which was muddy and rough; it was raining. I'll never forget the truck bouncing up and down. The next thing I knew, I saw this woman just fly off the back of the truck into the mud. We yelled to stop, we did, and I really thought he (Bob) was going to shoot her. He had his rifle pointed at her, and I figured she was dead. He didn't; he jumped out of the truck and grabbed her. Somehow, somewhere, she had come up with a knife. He was the only one who had seen it and instead of trying to take the knife off of her, he pushed her off the back of the truck. Of course, when she hit the ground, she dropped the knife. She didn't get hurt or killed, just scratched up a little. She was a young girl. I can't tell you what her age was, twenties or something. She was an enemy and you would not have known it. It just happened that we found her. You could have passed her on the street and she could have put that knife in your back without anybody knowing. That is the kind of thing you worried about . . . you just didn't know. If you were going to buy it, how, when, or in what way, it just kept you on your toes at all times. It made you nervous; it made you wonder.

We had time at night to relax. We would go to the club. They allowed us two beers a night. We would drink our two beers and relax, but it was never what you called relaxed. It was never like sitting here at home watching television or going to a bar down the street to have a couple of beers. There was always that fear that at any time or any moment you could be gone. You knew that it could happen at any time and there was nothing you could do about it.

K: Were there a lot of instances like that with the woman?

G: Yes, more than we were probably told. That has happened several times that I know of. We had that guard duty which was for only a short period and it happened several times. Not exactly in the same way every time, but you had instances where you found people with bamboo sticks cut with sharp points, and all kinds of things. It was almost an everyday occurrence that they would find somebody. You could not turn your back on anyone, kids or women; you just couldn't do it.

We ran an operation once with the infantry which seemed like a long operation. First couple of days all we did was walk. There was no resistance in the first couple of days, that I can recall, of any volume. Once in awhile you would hear shots, but we were so spread out; you couldn't tell whether it was ours or theirs, or if somebody fired at a tree that moved; you didn't know.

The first day, we found a mortar round halfway buried in the ground and we had to blow it up. That was the only thing the engineers did that day. The second day, I don't think there was any instance at all where we were needed.

The third day it was raining and cold. We traveled all day, settled down that evening, and the colonel said that we might as well dig in because it was going to rain all night. We dug holes and put ponchos over the holes and then laid down in the hole. We had laid it over top of the hole and then put dirt all around to keep the water out because we were on the side of the hill. During the night, it rained so hard it washed the dirt off and the hole filled up with water. Not completely; you could keep your head above water if you put it against the bank, the side of the hole. You had no choice but to lay there all night. We put our rifles across the top to keep them out of the water and left our gear outside. Flat jackets we didn't take off at all.

The fourth day we marched again all day. We weren't at the point where the colonel wanted us to be when it got dark, so we kept on going and kept on going. Pretty soon it got black, but we still kept on going. I mean it got dark; you couldn't see the man in front of you. The only way we stayed together was by holding on to the guy's pack in front of you. The terrain was really rough. I can remember and can still hear this to this day . . . we were going along, trying to be quiet and you could hear guys screaming. No one knew why they were screaming; we didn't understand what was going on. What happened was this colonel was leading us in a circle in the dark. We came to a gully and what happened was the guy in front of you just disappeared. You were holding on to his pack but he was just gone. It wasn't that deep, only four or five feet deep, but you were walking along and there was nothing

under you. These guys were falling off and they were piling up in there. Everyone was laying in the hole and it was so damn dark. They were trying to get out, but couldn't see which way to go. The noise and confusion started and it was just a mess. Finally the colonel said we better get organized, so he said to stop where we were . . . he delegated somebody to post the guards and they put the compounds--where the colonel stayed--in the middle, and posted guards all around. He told the engineers to stand at this certain point and to shoot anything that moved in front of us because we were on the outpost. That's where we stayed that night.

I was the next to the last guard before daylight. I woke up and stood on my post and woke the other guy. It was a couple of hours before daylight and I said that if anything happened to wake me up. The next morning we all woke up-- he was sleeping too. The only thing I can say about it . . . when we looked out as we woke up, we were surrounded by our own troops. We were surrounded by the infantry. If we would have shot anything in front of us, it would have been our own men. Thank God that guy fell asleep because who knows what would have happened. It was unbelievable. I don't know whether or not that has ever happened to anyone else, roaming around in the dark when you can't see three feet in front of you, but I'm sure it has. I'm sure things like that happen, but that was disturbing to say the least.

K: Did they do anything to the guy that fell asleep?

G: No, nobody knew it. I knew it and the others who were in the same hole with me knew it, but like I said, it was a damn good thing he did. He might have shot somebody. It's surprising that no one before him did, and I would have been our troops.

K: Did that happen a lot?

G: I don't know, that was the only time that it happened to me. I never went on an operation with that particular outfit until that day and it was the last one I ever went on with that outfit. I refused to go with that outfit. As a matter of fact, the sergeant that was with us wouldn't . . . when we came back and told our commander what had happened, he wouldn't send anymore engineers out with that particular outfit for that reason. He knew . . . you don't go running around in the middle of the night when you can't see anything. You can't see your enemy in the day let alone at night.

K: Would you go back to fight in Vietnam?

G: Yes, I would. I would go back with a different outlook on the war. I thought at that time that it was a senseless

war. The reason I thought it was senseless was because day in and day out, you saw bodies, not only ones that you knew, but of North Vietnamese, Vietnamese, and Viet Cong, and nobody could tell you why. Nobody could say what we were fighting for. We were fighting for a land that the people themselves didn't know if they wanted, as far as I'm concerned. I would go back. I went to Vietnam because I thought I was serving my country the best that I could. I felt and still feel that I did that. I would go back most definitely, but with a different attitude.

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

G: No, I never thought it would end that way. When I was in Vietnam, I really thought we would win that war or at some point they would say that we had won it and give up fighting. The ending of that war made what the 9.3 million men who served over there did, useless. I've got figures and can tell you how many were approximately killed. I really feel that it was wasted, the lives were really wasted, after the ending of the war.

K: What was the reaction of the people when you came home?

G: Very strange, at least I thought it was very strange. Of course, your relatives were glad to see you. Everyone wanted to know what you did, but they really didn't want to know. They asked but I don't believe that they really wanted to know. I don't think if you would have told them they could have handled what you did. I don't think you can tell anybody that you killed people and I don't think they can grasp the thought of it. They see on television where someone kills somebody and then walks away. At nineteen, if you shoot somebody and have any feelings whatsoever, you can't walk away. You might walk away then, but you are going to think about it. There is just no feasible way that you can hide it, sooner or later it's going to get to you. I've seen it get to a lot of guys and I suppose at one time it got to me too, because I had many years when I got back from Vietnam that my life was wasted. I don't know if that was from Vietnam, but I know a lot of my feelings were stipulated from there. A lot of my feelings were that when I came back to friends and family who were glad to see me . . . they want to know what you did and I can't tell them because they don't understand. I can't tell my wife now what I did because she doesn't understand. I can tell John, a guy who has been in Vietnam. He and I can sit and talk about it and I can tell him what I've done, he can tell me what he has done, and we understand it. Unless you have been there and through it you don't understand it.

You're walking through the brush and in front of you is a

North Vietnamese or the Viet Cong. You fire at them, but your rifle doesn't go off and you know you're dead. You never hear the shot and when you do hear it, you think you're dead, but it's the guy behind you that's shot. You never forget that feeling. I'll never forget it. I don't wake up at night thinking of it anymore, but I never forgot it. If I walk around the corner and somebody's there and it shocks me, then I think about it, because it brings it right back. I think about it a lot then, but I've tried to forget those feelings and the things I have done.

We used plastic explosives, like putty or clay more or less. It was white and you could do anything you wanted with it; you could throw it up in the air, shoot a rifle bullet into it--anything you wanted to do to it--because it wouldn't blow up unless you had a cap to set it off. We used to heat our food with it, put it underneath the food, light a match and it would burn like a torch and heat your food. The infantry would do anything for you if you gave them some explosives to heat their food. They were out in the middle of nowhere when it was raining like hell, and they were cold, tired, and wanted a hot cup of coffee; they would do anything for you. I had a guy in my unit who used to feed that to kids as candy over there. He just lost a grip on life; he knew that part of those kids and women were part of the enemy, but he didn't know which were which and he didn't care. He figured if they ate it and died, it was their tough luck. I saw him do that many times, but there was nothing you could do to stop him. It does happen. Things that you wouldn't believe happened.

K: Do you think that now we are beginning to help the Vietnam veterans, beginning to accept them more?

G: I think they are being accepted, but I think help is still a long way away from any of them. I can give you instances. I know a guy who has been on drugs for twelve years and every time he goes to the VA hospital all they do is put him in for three weeks and give him more drugs when he gets out. He has been on drugs for twelve years and doesn't do anything. He doesn't work; he sits around his house and about every three or four weeks he flips out and goes to the hospital. He just got out of the hospital last week and he's back in there today because he just can't face reality. I don't think that his problem is Vietnam after ten years, his problem is drugs as far as I'm concerned. But as far as helping the Vietnam veterans, I don't think the VA has done everything that they could feasibly do.

K: Was there a lot of use of drugs?

G: No, not when I was over there in 1966 and 1967. There was a very minimal amount of drug usage, a lot of alcohol;

I will go along with that. We drank beer and used to buy rice wine from the Vietnamese. We would buy a bottle of wine, open it right on the spot, and make them take a drink, then we would take it back to the camp with us. We wouldn't drink it unless we had one of them drink it first. If they sold it to you they knew if it was bad, so if they would take a drink of it so would we. Of course, that was kind of foolish too because many of them killed themselves trying to kill Americans.

K: I don't have any more structured questions. Is there anything that you would like to add?

G: I think there were a lot of things done in Vietnam to civilians, intentional or not, because you just didn't know who you were fighting and you just didn't take the chance. You didn't ask questions to figure out that it was the enemy. You did what you had to do and then you asked the questions. I would do that again if I was in that circumstance because your life depends on it, or your buddy's life does. There were a lot of things done to the South Vietnamese people that weren't justified as far as they were concerned. The people who did them had no idea if they were their friends or their enemies. You could not designate them apart. That's the only thing I really feel bad about from the whole war, the injustice to some of the people who had it done to them.

I have some pictures of me and a guy from New Castle, but I don't know where my wife put them. They were taken in Vietnam. I was really, skinny, thin, and putrid looking.

K: Did you get a lot of mail from home? Did guys get packages?

G: Yes. I had a very supportive family when I was in Vietnam, at least I feel they were supportive. I received quite a bit of mail from my family and some friends wrote to me. That's probably one of the things that kept you going.

K: If guys didn't get any mail, did you try to share your mail with them?

G: Yes. Many times a guy would say, "Look at this letter I got," throw it to you, and let you read it. Maybe I got mail one day and another guy didn't. He would look at me and there I am reading my mail. He's feeling kind of down and out because he didn't get any mail, so what the hell. You live with a guy day in and day out and they know everything about you so you let him read it and maybe it brightened his day a little that day. It helped. Everything that you could do helped.

I don't know if there are going to be any women listening



to this or not, but I have to tell you this story. It was hot and we had cots with mosquito nets draped over top with a board up at the end of your bed, one at each end. We were living at the camp where we did the road sweep every day. It was so hot at night you would sleep with sometimes only your shorts on and sometimes you wouldn't put a stitch on. It would be so damn hot you didn't care who saw you. When the rockets started coming in the middle of the night, you didn't have time to get dressed. The rafters were low enough that you could reach all but the very peak, so we put nails up there and hung up our rifles in such a way that when you jumped out of the bed you had your belt right there with your canteen and as you were going for the door your rifle was right there. Everybody has theirs in a certain position and you just grabbed your rifle on your way out, your helmet, and your flat jacket. Ninety percent of the time when you got to the bunkers, which was right by the door, you may not have had all of this equipment on, but you had it in your hand so when you hit that bunker you could get it on. Several nights, almost every night toward the end, we were out in the bunkers.

One night we got out to the bunkers and I fell asleep. I was laying against the dirt bank. I had my rifle and my helmet, flat jacket, and shorts on. I woke up and it was daylight. I looked up and there was one of the guys who I knew real well, standing up on top with nothing on but his belt, helmet, and flat jacket, holding his rifle. I'll never forget that as long as I live. He was standing straight up above me and I thought to myself, "Is he going to piss on me or something?" That happened all the time and nobody paid attention to it.

We used to walk from our barracks across the hill over to the showers. All the showers were were pipes up in the air off a trailer full of water; there was no canvas around it. It was 100 yards away from the road. We stood there and took a shower. The road led right to the main village and there would be men, women, and children walking up and down that road and we would be standing in there taking our showers. There wasn't any modesty; nobody cared. It was nothing to see a woman walk out of the rice patty and do her business on the side of the road as we were walking past. It was just a common occurrence with the people and we didn't care because we weren't interested. We were over there to do what we had to do and tried to get the hell out of there alive; it just didn't bother us.

It was a strange time; it was different. I don't know how to explain it. It was educational in one sense and frightening in another. I think I went from nineteen to thirty; I grew real fast. Then I came back to the States and went

back to sixteen. I went crazy after I got back to the States. I was hostile; I didn't care what people thought of me; I didn't care what I thought of people; I had a very bitter attitude. I've learned to, I think, do away with that attitude or to either control it; it doesn't bother me anymore. I don't feel the way that I used to.

I feel that Vietnam was created by old men, and young boys were sent there to do their job, to fight for the old men. I feel that way and still feel that way. I feel all wars are created by old men or politicians, however you want to classify them. I feel that a lot of wars are very useless. I don't know that Vietnam was a useless war, but I don't see where it did any good. There is no difference in real estate than when we got there, or even when the French got there as far as I know. I don't feel that it was good, but I don't feel that it was bad. I feel it was bad in the sense that we lost a lot of our boys or men, but I don't see where we really did any good over there. Showing the Vietnamese people what the Americans were like is the only thing I know of.

I think learning to cope with what happened in Vietnam, mentally, is the biggest thing I've learned since I've come back. I've learned to disregard my personal feelings as to what happened over there because I don't want to tell people the way I feel because they don't understand. I can sit with another veteran and tell him stories of what happened. We can sit down and probably cry over it, friends that we lost, people that we knew. You pick up a guy that's only there from the shoulder or the waist up because the rest of him was blown up in a mine, and put him in a plastic bag. At the time, you don't cry, you feel bad but you don't cry. Then you come back to the States, and people don't care.

They didn't worry about the guys who got killed. If it was their brother or son or something then they cried, but it was a number on the television. The television would tell how many people got killed there and that's all the people looked at; they never looked at the individual himself. I bet you could go to any family in any city and ask them if they ever went to a Vietnam veteran's funeral who wasn't related to them and they all would say no, because they didn't. I don't go; I go to very few funerals now. There was a funeral up in New Castle for a guy that died in Bierut; I didn't go. The Vietnam Veterans Organization that I belong to sent two representing members. I didn't go, not that I didn't want to, as a matter of fact, I was scheduled to go both days, but I went to school and had to work. People didn't care about us; they didn't care about us then and there are a majority that don't care about us now.

We are getting a lot done. The Vietnam Veteran Bridge

in Youngstown . . . we marched in that parade and received a very warm welcome. When we walked across that bridge in front of that reviewing stand, people clapped and cheered. It was great, but it was only ten years late. In regards to being a Vietnam veteran, that day was probably the best reception I ever had, but it was ten years late. I don't care if I ever have another one of them again because I know now what the feeling is like. I know what the guys from World War I and II felt like when they marched down the street and people cheered for them. I know what they felt like now; it was terrific. When we got done at the parade we went to the Vietnam Veteran Organization Center. I would say everybody said the same thing, that it was great. The way the people cheered and talked was great, but it was late.

How many people do you know now that talk about the POW's and MIA's? Very few. They're still there and we want to know what happened to them. We have a committee in our organization to keep us posted on what happened with them. You don't hear anyone talk about them anymore; they forgot about them. The people in this country tried to put us out of their minds as far as being Vietnam veterans, and they're doing the same with POW's and MIA's. I firmly believe that. Those are our men that are missing, that never came back, or that are POW's and still are. Not too many people think about it; we do because we still think of ourselves as comrades. In our organization, we have a POW-MIA flag that we carry; it will be in the parades this year.

I think the lack of recognition they got when they came home is what set most of the veterans off. There was no recognition for what we had done, what our country wanted us to do and what we had to do as far as we were concerned. Yet after we had done it, no one wanted to recognize that we did it. They didn't want to say thank you or anything. That's why you have a lot of hostile veterans out there, and you still have a lot.

I don't consider myself hostile; it doesn't bother me anymore. I've learned that I don't need that. I can walk down the street now and say that I am a Vietnam veteran where five years ago I wouldn't dare say that. I wouldn't tell anybody unless they came right up and asked me. I would tell anybody now, without them even asking me. I'm not ashamed of it anymore like I was at one time.

K: That's good that it's coming out.

G: It is. We are coming out of our shell and hopefully by doing that we can get our men the help that they need, and

get recognized. We already are being recognized: the big memorial down in Washington, D.C., the bridge in Youngstown, the dedication of the Beaver Memorial coming up on Veteran's Day. It is getting better. Mercer County is also getting a memorial. We are starting to get recognition, but besides recognition we want people to remember that there are still some of our guys missing; that's what we want. What we really want to know is what happened to the MIA's and POW's. I can't see where the government is doing a single thing about it. I think that's about all I've got unless you have some other questions.

K: No, that's about it.

END OF INTERVIEW