

YOUNGSTOWN STATE UNIVERSITY

ORAL HISTORY PROGRAM

Vietnam Project

Some Events and Feelings
of the War

O.H. 64

MR. WILLIAM PRUSSIA

Interviewed

by

Mr. Louis DiDonato

on

February 26, 1974

MR. WILLIAM PRUSSIA

Mr. Prussia is a resident of Youngstown, Ohio and is presently living at 4204 Elm Street. After graduating from Hubbard High School, Bill was drafted into the United States Army. During the two years of May 1966 to May 1968, Bill spent his time fulfilling his duty as a citizen, and the greater portion of his tour was spent fighting in Vietnam. Upon returning home, Bill attended Youngstown State University for the Fall and Spring quarters of 1969. Presently, Bill is employed at GM Lordstown and he and his wife Patty are the proud parents of one child. Knowing the fact that Bill is an Army Veteran makes us proud and we say "Thank you Bill Prussia" for serving your country well.

BECKY PAGAC
January 12, 1978

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INTERVIEWEE: MR. WILLIAM PRUSSIA

INTERVIEWER: Mr. Louis DiDonato

SUBJECT: The Vietnam War

DATE: February 26, 1974

D: Bill, when did you enter the army?

P: In May of 1966.

D: Were you drafted?

P: Yes, I was drafted?

D: Did you have any thoughts about the army at the time you were drafted?

P: No, at the time I looked forward to it because it was going to be something different. It would be something that I'd never done before. In a way I didn't want to go and in a way I looked forward to it. It's kind of hard to explain.

D: Where did you go for basic training?

P: Fort Benning, Georgia.

D: And then you went on to what base?

P: Fort Polk, Louisiana for AIT, then to Vietnam, and for the last six months I was at Fort Sill, Oklahoma.

D: What kind of training did you receive at Fort Polk?

P: Advanced infantry training.

- D: How about the type of guys you were with at the time at Fort Polk? What type of guys were they?
- P: Well, you had guys from all over the country. I'd say most of them seemed like a pretty good bunch. Morale seemed to be pretty good at the time.
- D: What was your initial reaction to the army after you got settled in? What did you think about it then?
- P: Well, you hear a lot from everybody who's been there, about basic training, and one thing or another. Basic is a pain in the rear end to be honest with you. After your training, it's hard to go right overseas because depending where you are at, it's a whole differnt ball of wax. If you're with a stateside unit after the training, it's not bad. You get up in the morning and take care of your room or whatever. It's more or less a job throughout the day, unless you're assigned to one special duty, something like "KP".
- D: "KP" is not too nice, I remember pulling it a few times.
- P: No, it's not the greatest in the world.
- D: Did the type of training you received in this Advanced Infantry Training prepare you for the type of job you had in Vietnam?
- P: Well, when I went overseas, I had infantry training. When I got there, I ended up with an armored unit driving an ammunition truck. The training was good in helping me in what I did do, But had I been strictly infantry, I know it would have been more valuable.
- D: Was there much of this thing in Vietnam where guys were trained for one thing and ended up doing something else?
- P: There seemed to be a lot to me. We had one clerk that was trained as a mechanic. There was another guy who was trained for heavy weapons, howitzers and tanks, and he ended up driving a truck. There seemed to be alot of it.
- D: Who made the decisions in whether you stuck to your regular job?
- P: As far as I know when you got to the replacement battalion over there, wherever they happen to need people the most is where you go. I don't know how they go about picking the assignments. You see, I had orders for the first CAV, air mobile unit. They were diverted when I got there and went with the 11th Armour CAV.

D: So it's all based on what they needed at the time? -

P: That's the way it seemed.

D: When you received your orders for Vietnam were you married at the time?

P: No.

D: How did you react to receiving orders for Vietnam?

P: Scared, worried, because you don't know what you're going to do when you get there. I was nineteen and I suppose like most guys age eighteen to nineteen you've really never been away from home. Maybe a few weekends here and there or a week someplace, but not to the extent of going into a combat zone for a year.

D: How about most of the guys you were with, were they your age or older?

P: Yes, most of them ranged between I'd say, nineteen to twenty-five. There were a few older, but not that many.

D: Let me ask you this. I know when I was going through AIT I was being prepared for a war at the time. When you were in basic training and AIT, would you rather get orders for Vietnam than to get orders for someplace else and know you're going to be doing a lot of Mickey-Mouse stuff? Would you accept the orders for what you were trained to do?

P: I accepted them, but if I'd had a choice, I'd probably pick somewhere else. I don't have any regrets about going. I don't have any desire to go back.

D: That's understandable. Where were you stationed in Vietnam?

P: Base Camp was a place called SxuanLoc, it's sixty to sixty-five miles north of Saigon.

D: For those of us who haven't been there, we always wonder, what did you have to do there in your spare time, if you had spare time?

P: I had very little spare time. When we got there, the Base Camp consisted of about a dozen big tents and that was it. The rest was rubber trees and I guess what you'd call jungle bamboo thickets. Throughout the year in your spare time, when we weren't out on field operations,

once in a while you'd come in and be able to get a couple of beers. For about five or six months we didn't have a PX or didn't have any Enlisted Men's Club. It ended up we built most of that the year I was there. When I left, it was a pretty well established Base Camp.

When I got there, it was nothing but tents and mud. There was no barracks. We never did have a barracks. The closest thing we got to a barracks was wooden floors built about three or four feet off the ground with the tent fitted over the top of that and a small wooden frame to support the tent. But we never did have a regular wooden barracks.

D: We hear all the stories about the dope and stuff that was readily available in Vietnam. Did you experience this kind of stuff in your unit?

P: The only thing I ran into was marijuana. You couldn't buy it in Base Camp. If you could I didn't know about it. There wasn't that much around there but if you got anywhere near Saigon or Bien Hoa or any other town you could buy all the marijuana you wanted. I don't know about anything else. In fact, the marijuana was packed in a regular cigarette pack. They would just tear off the bottom and take the cigarettes out and refill them and stick them back in.

D: How about the attitude of your superiors towards dope. We hear stories that they just kind of ignored it.

P: A couple of the guys in the outfit smoked marijuana at times and that was about the extent of it. I didn't get into or see any of the guys in the outfit that really got onto it heavy or got onto anything else. We never talked about it that much. It didn't seem to be that big of a thing.

D: Of course this was in 1967.

P: Well, yes, in 1966 and 1967. But an outfit that was a support outfit close to Saigon or someplace that guys would have a lot of free time, you might run into a lot of it. I don't know for sure.

D: What was your job? Did you just drive the Army trucks?

P: Well, you had to go on most of the field operations, carry ammunition and supply ammunition during the ambushes or whenever it was needed, wherever it was needed.

D: What are field operations? What exactly do they consist of?

P: You'd get a mission that's anywhere from a week to maybe forty-five days. You don't know about it until a day or two before you're leaving. Eventually, they tell you what time, whether it's in the morning, night or what. You pack and load the trucks and get ready. All the line troops load the tanks and the personnel carriers. Half the time I didn't know where we were going, until we got there. Headquarters troop would usually be all set up in a rubber plantation or someplace similar after they'd sweep for mines. We just stayed there until somebody needed ammunition. For instance, speaking of the gas trucks, when a tank needed gas they went to them wherever they were. If the mud was too deep and you couldn't drive, they'd tow you there.

D: Did you have much contact with the South Vietnamese people at the time?

P: Yes, pretty much in the field. We didn't have that many around Base Camp other than when they came to pick up trash. In the field they were everywhere, no matter where you were. They would come around selling pop, beer, the women selling themselves. Invariably, no matter where you were, they'd find you. They would sell trinkets or beer, whatever you wanted.

D: What was your reaction to the people?

P: Well at first it was kind of funny. The first day I got there, I went into the men's room at the airport and I was standing at a urinal going to the bathroom and here comes this old woman cleaning up the place. That was kind of weird because you don't find it here. It was different to have her following everybody around with a mop, cleaning up the bathroom. After a while you sort of get used to it. It's nothing to see somebody pull off to the side of the road, put up a leg of their black pajamas and go to the bathroom. After a while you could even stand out in the middle of the rubber plantation and take a shower and wave at the people when they go past. That's the way they are, and you more or less become that way.

D: Were they friendly to Americans?

P: All that I met were. I didn't meet any that were hostile. A lot of the kids that would be peddling trinkets, if you turned your back on them, they'd steal you blind. As far as any of them being hostile,

none that I met were of that nature.

D: Of course, they are pretty poor.

P: Oh yes, in fact a lot of the houses that are out in the country are one room and have dirt floors. The roofs on a lot of them are like corrugated aluminum and are made out of beer cans. Some say "Budwieser", some say "Schlitz." I don't know how they make it but it comes in sheets and still has the brand name on it. Maybe they got the metal before the cans were cut. I don't know.

D: How big are the villages?

P: They vary in size. You could go through some that might have only seven or eight huts. Then down the road a little ways there are seven or eight more. Then there might be some that have fifteen or twenty.

D: That's just about it?

P: Yes, out of the cities.

D: How about in the cities. How do they live there?

P: Well I guess you can compare Saigon with a lot of cities. You have what you'd consider a slum area and you have a nice area. I never spent much time in Saigon. I drove through it a few times, that was about all. You could go down some roads and it's the same bit. There are little huts with nothing and down the main streets there are big hotels and nice restaurants.

D: How about rest and relaxation(R&R) and leave and that type of thing. What was the policy on this?

P: You were entitled to a three day in-country R&R and a five day out-of-country. I don't know anybody, off-hand, who took the in-country R&R.

There was a place called Vung Tau, which was on the coast. We operated out of there for about ten days, which is really a nice place, that was popular for in-country R&R's. Out-of-country, there were a lot of places, but you had to put your name down for when you wanted to go. You had to have a least ninety days in-country before you could take it. Every month a certain amount of allocations would come down and if you didn't get what you wanted or when you wanted it, you could turn it down and try again the next month. Most of the guys, if they didn't get exactly what they wanted took it anyway. They figured it would be

something new anyhow.

D: Where did you go?

P: I went to, I put in for Bangkok, and went to Penang and Malaysia.

D: A little difference there isn't it?

P: Yes, it was nice. I really enjoyed it.

D: Did you go in groups?

P: Well, one or two of the other guys that I didn't know in our outfit went. You either flew or they drove you to Saigon. Whatever plane was going there, that's the one you got on. You know, guys from all over the country from all outfits were there. You had one plane going to Malaysia, and maybe this one's going to Bangkok, and this one to Thailand. Whoever had orders for that particular place, that's the plane you got.

D: How about combat. Did you have much combat experience?

P: Well, mostly we had to pull ambush patrols and go out and lay in the jungle all night. You'd get tangled up in a few daytime ambushes. Sometimes you would be going down the road and all of a sudden you'd hear firing, but when you have jungle on both sides you don't know where it's coming from. You just start firing back and keep right on moving.

D: When you were out on the patrol, how many men did you usually have with you?

P: We usually had roughly a dozen on ambush patrol.

D: Is that right. Is that all?

P: Yes. They take you out on these personnel carriers or tanks to a designated area and drop you off. You'd set up your patrol the way the lieutenant wanted it and that was your place until daylight.

D: What was your rank at that time?

P: Then, I was just a PFC. Yes, I was a PFC when I got over there and I was there four or five months when I was promoted to SPEC-4.

- D: That seems dangerous to me, only twelve people.
- P: But you don't think that much about it. It seems like the first thirty days, you're pretty scared, at least I was. You're thinking about home and you're wondering if you're ever going to get back. After a month or so, you get to the point where things just don't seem to be too important. You just take everyday as it comes and have your fun anywhere you can find it for the next ten months. Then that last month when you only have about twenty-five or thirty days left, you start to get pretty careful.
- D: Did you come up for this kind of duty every month or just every so often?
- P: Well, they took volunteers for them for one thing. A lot of times you would get enough volunteers because guys would get the next day off if they were out all night. They could sit around camp and do whatever they wanted to do all day. If they didn't get enough volunteers they would pick in alphabetical order. Sometimes they picked men by platoon or troop and once they went all the way through, they would start all over again.
- D: When you went to Vietnam did you have any idea why the United States was there?
- P: No. I didn't have any idea why we were there and I still don't. I don't know whether it was a good thing or not.
- D: How about what you saw there, did it influence you in any way?
- P: No, not really. All I saw was that we were tearing up the countryside. I don't know. It's hard to say. Like I say, I really don't know why we were there and I don't know whether we should have been there. Well you see a lot of poverty. And you see a lot of poverty stricken people getting rich off of servicemen. But their lifestyles didn't seem to change. I don't know what the ones that were making a buck did with their money. They still lived in little dirt shacks and wore the same old black pajamas.
- D: How about the Vietnamese government. Was there any feeling that they were ripping off the people or exploiting them in any way?

- P: I never even thought of anything like that.
- D: Before you went to Vietnam did you have any pre-conceived notions about the place?
- P: I had the notion, I guess, that if you were in the infantry you just did nothing but fight all the time. That's not true. You could spend a couple of months and be on patrols or one thing or another. You might not see any action and then you might get some every day for a few weeks.
- D: These guys that you knew in the infantry outfits, did they have any reaction to the war?
- P: Well, I never met any that were real bitter. It just seemed most of the guys did whatever job they had and when they were done, did what they wanted. If they could get any beer or anything, they'd just sit around and get loaded. That was about it.
- D: Did you have any knowledge of the protest movements or anything of that nature going on back here?
- P: Towards the end I did, yes. It made me kind of mad. I don't hold any grudges against anybody protesting or anything and it doesn't bother me that much now. But at the time, though, I don't really know why, it just irritated the hell out of me.
- D: Did it effect the morale of the men you were with and you yourself?
- P: No, I don't think so. Most of the guys I knew at that time weren't really aware of what was going on over here. Sometimes you might read something in the "Stars and Stripes" or a two-week old newspaper. Most of the guys I was with seemed to feel the same way, that a protester was just a long-haired hippie. I'm sure most of them have changed their opinion. I mean, if anyguys want to protest that's their right I suppose. I suppose they've got a good point, but I never got involved in it one way or another. Like I said, when I was over there I was kind of bitter because I had to be there. When I came home it was different, there could be a protest march going on here and I could come walking down the street and it wouldn't bother me. When I got home, it was an attitude of that's their business. I never stuck with it one way or the other.
- D: How about your feeling about draft dogers and that kind of thing? There has been some talk about amnesty.

P: I have sort of mixed feelings about that. In my mind I don't whether they should get amnesty. I don't know their views, I just know how I think. When I got drafted, that just seemed to me, well, everybody gets drafted. Everybody who is physically able is sooner or later going to go to the army, unless you're in school or have family problems. You are going to go and that was it and I accepted it. At that time, the thought of draft dodging never really entered my mind. At that time you didn't hear that much about draft dodgers and people taking off to Canada. As far as giving them amnesty, I guess I sort of feel that they shouldn't get it. I guess because I had to go and if they're physically able and have no problems or anything, then why shouldn't they? I don't know if that's the right way to think or not, but that just seems to be the way I feel about it.

D: How about, if they were to come back and put them in the army for two years. Do you think that would be a satisfactory arrangement?

P: That's a hard question. I mean, I suppose if they came back and nothing happened to them, it wouldn't bother me an awful lot. I wouldn't much care if they got put in the army or not. I don't know what you should do with them. I'm sure they are not all bums, I don't think of them that way. They are doing something that they believe in. I don't think you'd just pack up and leave your home if you didn't believe in what you're doing. So, on one hand, maybe they had good reasons for what they are doing, or they think they have good reasons. What they are I don't know. On the other hand, maybe there are some that just take off to get out of it, and don't have any real reasons for it, just to get out of the service.

That's hard to answer, I mean, what you should do with somebody. I'm sure there were a lot of very intelligent people who took off. In their minds, they must have had very good reasons. Maybe if I sat down and talked to some of those people, maybe I'd change my mind. I don't think the idea of just throwing them in the army for a couple of years will make that much difference. If that were the alternative, some of them who wanted to come into the country would probably take it. Others who were just totally against the military probably wouldn't.

D: How about the MyLai incident, when you heard about that,

what was your reaction to it?

- P: I think if it's true that Lieutenant Calley and whoever else was involved actually did just plain murder those people, I think they should be punished for it. I don't know the whole story and probably nobody, besides those who were there, really does. It's hard, you really can't tell who you're fighting, because most of the enemy would dress the same way as everybody else. You might walk down the street and the guy walking beside you is carrying a couple bags of rice during the day and a gun at night. You don't know. It's hard to say what goes through a guy's mind. I don't know what happened to that outfit, say a couple of days before that incident. There could have been something that happened that made them so bitter, they were about ready to kill anything. You could be completely aware of what you were doing and just shoot a bunch of innocent people. Then, I would say he or they should be punished for it. If that's the way the situation was. Other than that, I really don't know.
- D: It must be kind of an eerie feeling to be walking along and not be able to tell, who is who.
- P: Well you can't really. You know, he's a farmer in the daytime and maybe out on a patrol at night.
- D: When you went on these ambushes at night, how did you distinguish who was who.
- P: You wouldn't. You see, if you were on an ambush at night, and saw someone carrying a weapon and they're not American, automatically they were the enemy. That would seem to be pretty obvious. If it were someone in a distance, certain members of the patrol had what you would call a "starlight scope", are you familiar with that?
- D: No.
- P: Well, with a "starlight scope" you can see at night. You can't make out faces but you can make out a silhouette and everything looks green except the silhouette which has a gray cast to it. If we saw a bunch of people that were going away from us, we'd never fire on them. We would call in to headquarters that an "X" amount of people are heading in such and such a direction. If you could tell it was the enemy, say they were going away from you, you wouldn't open fire, you'd get a hold of headquarters and they'd call in mortars or artillery, and drop them in whatever grid coordinates you gave them.

D: Were you ever in on the capture of any enemies?

P: Well, we always had somebody who had been captured around the camp, but I never went out and captured anybody myself. They would bring them in with their hands tied and sandbags over their heads. It was like a burlap sack over their heads so they couldn't see where they were going. If we were on a field operation, they'd put them in a little compound, and they were kept there until they could get a helicopter in and fly them back to base camp, back to the stockade.

D: The interrogation wasn't done out there in the field?

P: Some of it might have been, but you didn't get in on it. If they were interrogated, they were taken in back of a personnel carrier and whoever was doing the interrogation was there. That was behind a closed door, more or less.

D: How many people would you estimate most of the Viet Cong units have in them?

P: I wouldn't even know how to make a guess. Their ambush patrol, or whatever you want to call it, would be about the same size as one of ours, 12 or 15 people. Any time that I got involved in any shooting was going down a road with jungle here and jungle there. The bullets are just firing and you don't know how many or who, because like I said, you could never see them. If somebody opened up a machine gun, you might see some tree limbs falling and have an idea where they're at. How many, I wouldn't even know what to guess.

D: Now that it's over, what is your attitude toward the military?

P: I don't have a bad attitude toward the military. At the time, I didn't like it and I didn't want to be there. It was an experience that I'm not anxious to do again, but I don't think it hurt me, as far as that goes.

D: How about for other people?

P: Well, it's going to effect different people different ways. For some it'll probably do good and for some it'll probably do some harm, I mean attitude-wise and mentally. I don't know, I'd never consider enlisting, but I was glad when it was over. I was glad that nothing happened to me.

D: Were you glad that you served?

P: In a way, yes. Not so much at the time but when you come home, parents and relatives seem to be sort of proud of you. It just gave me a good feeling, as far as that goes. But I was awful glad when it was over.

D: It's one of those things.

P: It made for a great homecoming. I had good times in the army and I had bad times. You know, like anything else you have good days and bad. That's about the way I took it, more or less.

D: How about the war's effect on the United States? Obviously, the military's image has been hurt and the country has been kind of divided, but do you feel that it hurt the country that badly that we can't recover?

P: No, I don't think it hurt it that bad. Other than the fact that, well like you said, the people were divided on the issue. I think that the war could have ended long ago. I think the country spent too much time and too much money for what little seemed to be accomplished. I think now, Vietnam has a lot of problems without so much American money floating around. I think they might be worse off now than when we were there. It doesn't seem to me that there was anything great accomplished, in all the time that was spent there, and the billions of dollars that were dumped into that country. And all the lives that were lost...I don't know whether it was worth it.

D: When you say, you think it could have been ended long ago, do you think militarily or that we could have just went in and worked it out?

P: Well, I don't think you could just go in and wipe out the whole country. I suppose we had reasons why we didn't, but I do think we could have moved a bit faster and a bit harder. There was no excuse for half a million troops to be over there at any one time when 400,000 or so of them are hanging around Saigon getting drunk. I think they could have made a good push and then cleared the whole thing up a lot faster. They could have accomplished as much as has been, which as I said, doesn't seem to be much to me.

For a long time you weren't allowed to go into Cambodia,

If the enemy went into Cambodia that was like the safety zone. Well why? If I'm chasing him here and he runs into Cambodia, I'm not going to stop. One time we did end up in Cambodia, chasing a bunch. Why should that be a line, where on one side you're fighting and on the other side it's the safety zone?

D: Especially when they know it.

P: Yes, things like that just don't seem to make a lot of sense to me.

D: That does seem like a shame. You said 400,000 troops in Saigon, was there any resentment towards the people in the rear that obviously weren't fighting and were more or less enjoying themselves compared to what you were doing?

P: I don't know about resentment but there was a lot of envy. I know I envied some of them, some of them really had good duty. You were doing well to live in an airconditioned barracks, with people to come in and shine your shoes, to make the beds and clean the place. The airbase in Bien Hoa had one street with a barbershop, a couple of restaurants, and a couple bars. There was a beautiful enlisted men's club that was as nice as any night club you would want to see. They had their laundry done and they worked from about 8 to 5. Every night they could go downtown, if they wanted to. When they are in that position and you're out in the boonedocks, you are bound to envy them.

D: You didn't get back to these places very often, did you?

P: No, not very often at all. In fact, I never got into Saigon, to the point where I could run around or go anywhere. Bien Hoa, I went there once or twice. The only time we got down there was if we had to go back to Bien Hoa. That's where the main ammunition dump was for supplies. If we were there over night and you got everything loaded fast enough, then we'd go out for a while. But that was really the extent of it.

D: That must have been pretty hard to take, watching those other people having a pretty good time when you're fighting.

P: No. Like I said, if I was out there in that hole in

the ground and it was raining and I'm getting soaked, or if it's muddy and cold, then I sort of envied the guys.

D: When you were there, did you lose many of your buddies?

P: Killed you mean?

D: Yes.

P: No. There was only about 4 or 5 guys that I was real, real close friends with and one of them nearly died. This kid is about 5' 4" and a bullet came through the truck and hit him. He was supposed to be riding shotgun and there was a kid about 6 foot something who was supposed to be driving. Well, they had switched, you know, which is common, you switch back and forth. Well, a bullet came through the windshield and if the tall one had been in the shotgun seat, he would have been killed. But instead it went through my friend's helmet and just put a scratch on his forehead, and then creased out the back. He got so mad and so shook up because this was right in the middle of an ambush. For some unknown reason, the convoy stopped, which is something you're never supposed to do. I don't know, something might have happened to the lead tank, but when it stops, you get out and take whatever cover there is. I didn't get out, I'm waiting trying to get moved from there. I just squeezed down in the seat and layed on the floor. This kid jumped out of the truck. I can't imagine what it must have been like to have a bullet hit your helmet, and scratch your head just like you'd get scratched with a finger nail. We were around some rice patties and there was wooded area and all he could see was two water buffalo. He shot both of them and just kept right on shooting until it was over with. At the time it wasn't funny, but I know a couple weeks later, sitting around, it seemed to be sort of amusing because he was all right.

One friend of mine had his leg blown off. A RPG-2 rocket went through part of the cab of the truck and took his leg. I never saw him after that, I mean, they flew him to a hospital and sent him home. I lent another guy that I wasn't good friends with, \$5.00 and he said, "I'll pay you back on payday." Two paydays rolled by and I never got the \$5.00. Well, \$5.00 is nothing, but it was just the idea, you know. He was hurting for the money, and he was going to pay me come the next payday. I waited for him outside the pay tent and when he came out all he had was two dollars. He'd been fined for something or

other. The next day, we were on a convoy and when we stopped, his truck happened to stop over a railroad track. There was a howitzer planted in between the tracks and it was set off from there by hand detonation. They found the lead wire and it just blew the truck all apart. All they ever found of him was a boot with his foot in it. There wasn't enough left for anything else.

D: How does something like that effect the morale of the troops?

P: Anybody who was a real close friend, naturally, it's going to effect them more, I'm sure. On the average, I would say, it just seemed like a hazardous job. Some guys get it and some guys don't. Death seems to have a different meaning. Like I said, you don't think that much about it. You know in your mind, if you go out there tonight, you might not be here tomorrow. So, if tonight you've got a chance to party, you'd party tonight and worry about tomorrow when it gets here. I don't know how else to put it.

D: This feeling kind of grows on you after you've been there a while?

P: I say about the first month, you're really pretty scared, but then death and injury just doesn't seem to bother you so much. I can remember in an ambush one time we had a death count of about 35 Viet Cong. I didn't help with the dragging in of the bodies, but we only lost one engineer sergeant and my buddy and I found him in a ditch, the next morning. It didn't seem to bother me at all, the guy still had his rifle clutched to his chest. He had been shot in the shoulder and I don't know if he bled to death or what, but he had his tongue half chewed off. I had only been over there a few months. The medics came along and they pulled him out of the ditch and threw him on a stretcher, threw a blanket over him and that was that. That day we dragged in about 135 dead Viet Cong. The road was at a fork and they took a VTR, which is like a big bulldozer and dug a big hole in the fort and dumped them in. Some of the ARVN troops were there and that is the Vietnamese troops. They'd be pulling off the rings that they wore and the gold teeth of the troops, things like that. If I was to see a real serious auto accident right now, with a lot of blood it would bother me, it would just about make me sick, but to see them dragging in those bodies at that time didn't seem to bother me at all. It gets to the point where that's not really a person, that's the

enemy and he's dead. What's the big deal?

D: What did you feel towards the South Vietnamese troops?

P: The ones I was associated with operated with us, I'd say three or four times through the year. They seemed like a pretty good bunch to me, especially the marines, or their version of the marines. They were called tiger troops or something, I don't remember. They were pretty rough, if they were in combat. They did what they set out to do, no holds barred.

D: Did you have much contact with the Korean troops?

P: No, none at all. Not with the Phillipines either, we'd pass them on the road. We had a little contact with the Australian troops and they are a rough bunch. When you see the personnel carrier going down the road with the skull mounted on each side, you knew they didn't play games. They seemed to be a crazy bunch. I mean, if you really talk about people who would really fight one day and party the next, there's nothing they wouldn't do for a laugh, any Australians I met.

D: I understand they were pretty rowdy.

P: They're rowdy, but they are a hell of a bunch of troopers.

D: What do you think the South Vietnamese soldier's reaction was to the United States Army? Do you think they felt that we were doing their job, or just helping?

P: No, the South Vietnamese, well the ones we worked with, seemed to be a pretty good bunch of soldiers. I got along well with them during operations. I didn't notice any resentment or any of the feeling that they thought that we shouldn't be there, fighting with them, or helping them. Then, it seemed like one army on the operations. After whatever operation we were on was over with, they went their way and we went ours. That was about it.

D: What was the relationship between officers and enlisted men in your unit?

P: Well, it varied just like it does in the States. A young second lieutenant for example, when he first got there, was fresh out of OCS. He had what they called "goldbar fever". We had one walk into the tent one day and he'd only been there about two days and he wanted everybody to jump up and salute. Well, everybody laid there and laughed, where in the States, you just don't do that. You had some

officers that wanted saluted and you had other ones that you called by their first name. If you went downtown, they went with you. Some were like a bunch of the guys and the others were separate, they were officers, you had a little bit of both. A lot of them, after they were there a couple of weeks, slacked off on a lot of the spit and polish business. It is nothing like stateside duty, with inspections and all that business. It sort of got that way towards the end of the year, when the base camp got established. It was pretty well built up where you had a MP unit and everything else there. When we first got there, we used to have drag races, with 5 ton cargo trucks. You didn't really have roads, you had big mud paths, but once the MP units got there you couldn't do anything. It sort of took the fun out of what you did have for a while. We just had to be pretty straight.

D: I'm just trying to imagine those...

P: Imagine 4 or 5 ton cargos abreast, slipping and sliding into the mud, banging into each other. It's times like that, that I remember were a lot of fun. Those are the things that I'll never get to do again. I know I'm not going to go down Gypsy Lane and race 5 tons and I won't be able to plow through rubber plantations and knock trees over. Of course, then I don't have to worry about land mines either. It's times like that that I like to remember. I remember the guys that I was with and that was fun, I enjoyed that. When you get into an ambush, you don't enjoy it so much. After it's all over and you see all your buddies are still around well, it didn't seem that bad then. Then you could go back to where you were, your camp, or whatever you were doing, pop open a beer and talk about what happened in the afternoon, or what you thought was going to happen tomorrow.

D: How about your buddies, do you stay in contact with them now?

P: No, I haven't at all. One of my best friends in the army was a fellow from Otsiego, Michigan. Patty and I were up around in Whitall, Michigan a couple of years ago, and I wanted to see him. Anyway, I didn't have time and we never did get there. As far as writing or anything, no, I never have.

D: At least when I was in the army, the race relations were beginning to be emphasized, because the army was having so many problems in that area. How about with you,

was there much racial trouble?

- P: No, there wasn't a lot. There were certain black people who were anti-white and certain white people who were just anti-black and no matter what you do, I don't think they're going to get along. Especially, some of the ones from the deep south, that were just anti-black. It seemed like the northern black person, was more anti-white than the southern black person. Some of them will never become friends and other ones seemed to learn while they were there. Some think, "that guy is black but he is just another man". Some of them became good friends and some of them are just bitter enemies because of their color.
- D: How about segregated facilities, you know when you bunked up in your tents and stuff, was there anything like that?
- P: No, you don't have segregated facilities anymore.
- D: I mean just naturally, did you have...
- P: Well...
- D: You know, the white guys tend to stick with the white guys and the black guys do the same?
- P: Well yes, to an extent they do. Say there is two black guys in a tent with ten guys, well the two black ones might sleep here. You're still all together, just scattered around, but they might sleep here, which I think in a way is only natural. Nobody knows anybody, it's only natural that if there is you and me and eight black fellows and none of us knew each other to start with, I'm going to talk to you before I talk to them. Not that I'm against them in any way, but it's only the natural thing to do.
- D: I don't know if we mentioned this question or not, but did you feel the war was worth the price we were paying for it?
- P: Like I said, I don't really know what we accomplished there, if anything, or if we ever should have been there. Maybe somebody knows, but I didn't know what I was doing there. All I knew was that I was sent there. I still don't know why I was there. I've never really pursued it, as far as taking that great of an interest in it. I went in and I did what I was supposed to and I came home. I still think it could have been wound

up a little faster than it was by maybe a military push.

D: Did the army make any effort to tell you why you were there or any kind of propaganda at all?

P: No, not really, nothing that I can recall. The biggest thing that was stressed was in advanced infantry training. everytime you made a mistake, the drill sergeant would say, "you're going to be the first one to get killed when you get there." This was more or less to make you pay attention to what's going on and realize that your life just might depend on it. As far as trying to explain exactly what this country was doing there and what we were trying to solve, there was nothing. If maybe they would have thrown in a couple classes in your training to try and explain why you were there, instead of the teacher just teaching you how to shoot and kill somebody, and keep yourself alive.

D: Maybe you're not supposed to know why, just do it?

P: Well, that could be too. You never got too many reasons why for anything you had to do, which was sort of strange. I would like to know why I have to do something, but they never said why so I never really asked.

D: Did you feel your experiences there benefited you in any way?

P: I don't really know if I benefited from it or not. Like I said, I had good times and I had bad times, but as far as really benefiting by it, I don't think so. In no specific way that I can say, anyhow.

D: Well that is about it. We're going to run out of tape anyhow. So thanks a lot Bill.

P: Sure.

END OF INTERVIEW