YOUNGSTOWN STATE UNIVERSITY

ORAL HISTORY PROGRAM

YSU Veterans Project

Vietnam Experience

O. H. 93

RICHARD N. COX

Interviewed

by

James E. Duffey

on

May 20, 1975

RICHARD N. COX

Richard Nathan Cox was born March 8, 1948, in Youngstown, Ohio, the son of Gerald and Elsie Cox. He attended a variety of schools, including parochial schools, Howland Junior High School and graduated from Rayen High School in 1967.

After graduation, Cox had intended on enlisting in the Air Force but because of an injured hand, he could not join. Consequently, on January 8, 1968, he was drafted into the United States Army and was sent to Fort Knox for his basic training. After basic training, Cox was sent to Fort Sill, Oklahoma, for Advanced Individual Training in artillery.

Upon completing this training, Cox received orders that he was being sent to Vietnam. He expected the worst in Vietnam and said that dying was foremost in his thoughts. On August 13, 1969, Cox was discharged from the service and returned home.

Presently employed by the Kurtz Tool and Die Company, Richard and his wife, Marsha, have two children, Christine and Matthew. For his participation in the war effort, Cox was awarded the Army Commendation Medal.

Julie Di Sibio

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INTERVIEWEE. RICHARD N. COX

INTERVIEWER: James E. Duffey

SUBJECT: Vietnam Experience

DATE: May 20, 1975

D: This is an interview with Richard N. Cox for Youngstown State University, Vietnam Project by James Duffey at 285 Sexton Street in Struthers, on May 20, 1975. The time is approximately 7:30 p.m.

Rick, could you give us a little biographical information about yourself?

C: Well, I was born March 8, 1948, in Youngstown, grew up on the east side and north side. I went to a couple of Catholic schools and elementary schools. Then I went to Covington. And I moved to Warren, went to Howland Junior High School and moved back to Youngstown and went to Rayen High, graduated from Rayen in 1967.

While I was in high school I worked part-time at North Side Hospital. I was intending on, after graduating, enlisting in the Air Force, but I hurt my hand and couldn't go in. So in the meantime I was drafted [January 8, 1968] and spent nineteen months in the Army and was discharged in August [1969], was married in September and started working that year in September, and I've been there for six years. And that's about it.

D: You're now employed at?

C: Kurtz Tool and Die [Shop] in Struthers, and like I say, I've been here for six years; and been going to school to complete an apprenticeship through the VA [Veterans Administration] and I might add, which is very helpful, if anything.

D: You mentioned, you were in two Catholic schools. What were they?

C: Saint Anne's and Saint Casimir's. They were both in Youngstown.

D: Okay. Now you say you went into the service as a draftee. Did you feel anything at the time? Did you know that you'd be going to Vietnam?

C: I wanted to go to Vietnam.

D: You wanted to go to Vietnam?

C: I volunteered for Vietnam.

D: Why did you volunteer?

C: I thought it was a duty at the time. I really did. I always grew up thinking that I wanted to go in the service. And I always wanted to go in the Marines. A friend of mine--we're real close--and he was going into the Air Force and I figured, well, I'll go in the Air Force with him. But then I hurt my hand and then I had a hernia operation, and I couldn't go into the Air Force the same time he did. So in the meantime, two days before Christmas, in 1967, I got my draft notice to report to Cleveland, January 8.

When I was drafted then, I went to Cleveland, and I went through the physical. And they check you all over and they ask if you had anything wrong with you. I told them I hurt my hand which I cut real bad when I worked in North Side Hospital by opening a box. I cut my tendons in my thumb. And I couldn't move it; matter of fact, I still can't.

I couldn't bend it too good, so they said, "Well, you can't go." Well then I told them I wanted to go, and they said, "Well you can't go," and I said I wanted to go, so finally the guy, he just erased a few lines on there and put there was nothing wrong with me. If they want you bad enough, you know they're going to get you anyway, regardless if my

hand was bad then or later they would have taken me anyway, regardless. And I wanted to go, I wanted to go real bad. And when I found out I was going to the Army, I was happy to go in the Army. I wanted to go to Vietnam, and I asked to go. And that's about it.

D: Okay. Where did you go for your training? Can you take us from the time that you were inducted all the way through your basic training?

C: I went to Fort Knox, Kentucky, for basic training. I forget what it was, eight weeks. Do you want me to go into anything in basic training?

D: Yes. What type of training did you actually get? What kind of things did you do?

C: Physical. Just physical training. And learn to qualify with the M-14 rifle. And went through a little bit of jungle-type warfare. It didn't go into excess because for your A.I.T. [Advanced Individual Training] if you were going to be sent to an infantry unit, you would go to Fort Polk, Louisiana. So they didn't go into that in basic too much. They just showed you what to look out for, you know, you had to go off some kind of obstacle courses. They had make-up Vietnamese villages. It just got you familiar what it's actually like over there, which was true. They had it right down to the tee what it was like, you know.

You'd crawl your barbed wire fences and you'd have your mock fighting, and mainly they'd just try to inform, you know, have your mind ready for what it's going to be like over there, regardless if you were going to be sent there or not.

So I enjoyed basic. I think I was about the only one that ever did. I mean I was in poor physical shape in the beginning and I just looked at it, well, I looked at the weakest guy there, and I figured well if he can do it, I can do it. It was tough, but I liked it.

Well then after basic we went on to A.I.T. I got orders.

D: Before you go on to your next thing, what do you think was the toughest thing in basic training?

Was there anything that was physically the hardest for you?

C: No.

D: Nothing was really?

C: You have to pass a PT test.

D: What's that?

C: Your physical training test where you have to do so many sit-ups, so many push-ups.

D: Do you recall how rigorous that was? How many sit-ups, how many push-ups?

C: You had to do at least like twenty push-ups and maybe seventy-five sit-ups, something like that, which I couldn't even do them. Matter of fact, it'd kill me today to do twenty of them push-ups. But they work with you. You have like two weeks before the main test, or halfway between basic they'll test you and they'll pick out the guys that need the work. They'll tell you to do it on your own and if you don't do it on your own, they'll make you do it.

We learned hand-to-hand combat in basic. We learned bayonet fighting in basic; it was a big joke, to tell you the truth.

D: Why?

C: I don't think there's a man that's going to go up and fight somebody hand-to-hand when you got a gun or, he's going to take off actually; he will. He'll take off before he'll fight hand-to-hand. Because when you're fighting hand-to-hand that's too close, because you know you're going to get killed. You really are. Because there's always more of them than there is of you. Anyway, they pass you, regardless. They say if you don't pass they're going to recycle you. That means you have to start basic training all over again. They say they [are going to recycle you and] they'll take you from one unit and put you in another unit the same week. The guys at the unit would think that you went some place and started all over again, which you didn't.

D: You were just shipped out with somebody else.

C: You shipped out with somebody else, that's all. It wasn't hard, I mean, while you were there it was hard and you had to go through the different types of gas chambers where they used the different types of gases. I don't know what kind they are, but you walk in with a gas mask, then you take it off when you're in there, and you walk out and you're throwing up by the time you get out the door, because you can't breathe. If you would not panic, you could just walk right out, but just the idea there's gas in there and you start to see that door and you want to get out you know because then you take a few breaths of air and then by the time you get out the door, you're throwing up. There wasn't anything that hard about it.

D: Do you think most of the training you got was pretty valuable once you got to Vietnam? Did you get most of it to use?

C: No.

D: No?

C: I didn't put any of it to use.

D: Really?

C: I don't think. Just the rifle, that's about it.

D: Did they use any psychology on you when you were in basic, did they try to indoctrinate you in any way or any type of thinking?

C: I don't think so. I kind of think they let you think more on your own. I mean they want you to stand up and fight. But see that's different. Now you're in basic, but if you're going to be an infantryman in Vietnam, you have a whole different type of training. You have to go to another camp.

D: Then basic training, psychologically, wasn't too rough on the guys. They didn't try to browbeat you?

C: No, no. I'll tell you, it was the nicest time I ever had in the Army, was basic training. I mean other guys had it rough where they had to get up three o'clock in the morning and some sergeant'd make them

put on gas masks and boots and field pack with no other clothes; and they're in their underwear and they're running around the building outside you know, just for harassment. We didn't have that. It was pretty nice. I enjoyed it.

D: That's good. Okay. After your basic training, where did you go from there?

C: Fort Sill, Oklahoma, for artillery.

D: Fort Sill? Is that S-I-L-L?

C: Yes.

D: Okay. Oh, before we go on to that, you mentioned A.I.T. What is A.I.T.?

C: Advanced Individual Training.

D: What is that, exactly?

C: All right, I'm in the Army. And they want me to be an infantryman, out in fields, fighting, what you would do in infantry school, where they teach you. If you're going to be an artilleryman they'd send you to an artillery school where they'd teach you; or if you're going to be in armor, they'll send you to an armor school and just like that. If you're going to be a typist, they'll send you to a typing school, anything like that. So I went to Fort Sill, and this is what got me: I went to Fort Sill for artillery training, which is an MOS of the 13-A-10, number thirteen, A-10. That's your MOS they give you. Now MOS, I'm not sure what it exactly stands for, but that's the number you got. All right, so I went through that for eight or nine weeks. Everybody was going to Vietnam. I don't know how many guys were in those batteries. In the regular Army it's companies, but when you get in the Artillery, they're batteries. There's six guns to a battery, so they call it a battery.

We went through all the training, firing the howitzers, the 105 howitzers, the 155 howitzers, and 102 howitzers. They're not the real big guns but they're World War II artillery pieces. So we went and did that. We went out in the fields and we shot live rounds and learned how to work the guns and

went to school. Just basically learning how to fire this gun and setting up the aiming station, your panoramic telescope and your quadrants and your elevations and setting them up. If you're not set up right and you're not on your aim in space, you can kill a lot of [innocent] people if you're off just a little bit.

D: The distance is magnified by the distance you're off?

C: Yes. Like if you're off one degree on your telescope well you could be off a hundred to two hundred yards. An artillery piece can, the big ones can fire twenty-seven miles away. They can hit a car at that distance. Take it out and hit it.

D: At how far?

C: Twenty-seven miles. That's how close they get. Well anyway, we went through their A.I.T., right. And so I was a cannoneer on a gun. Well, I was a gun-bunny, actually, an artilleryman. We had orders for Vietnam. Everybody was going to Vietnam. So then all of a sudden, they come up and they called a meeting and said, "All right, everybody's going to Germany." Ours is the first unit that didn't go to Vietnam in a couple of years. So everybody got orders for Germany. I had orders for Germany, the 25th AG, somewhere in Germany.

We were all ready to go home for a leave, you know. They called everybody outside and got in formation and they called out these names. There were I think twelve names from our company, which consists of maybe a hundred and fifty guys. And I was one of the twelve. "You twelve," or whatever the number was, "You twelve are going to artillery mechanic school. But your orders for Germany still hold." Okay so we go, no leave, we go, same fort; we can go up the street to mechanic's school, which they needed real bad. It was the fourth class that was going through. They wanted a field mechanic to go out in the field and fix guns. They needed this. They really did need it. We were the fourth school. It was a light medium towed field artillery and maintenance course number four. You went to this course for nine weeks. Tear the guns down, replace parts, do anything to the gun, you know. Like we can tear a howitzer down, put a new tube in, and have a round in the air in five minutes. And site them and everything like that.

We got real good at this because they needed these guys and well, you'll hear as it goes on, but they needed these artillery mechanics. But they still said we had orders for Germany. All right, so I couldn't figure out why they're training you for this for Vietnam. So anyway, we didn't go to Germany, of course, you know. I spent nine weeks at that school. I was held over for two weeks because they didn't have orders. So when I finally got orders it was for Vietnam and I got a seventeen-day leave. That's the only leave I ever had when I was in the service.

D: How long was your day when you were working with the artillery? Did they take you out early in the morning and keep you there all day working with it?

C: You get up at six, you eat, and seven-thirty, eight o'clock you have formation; you march to school, or you'd get on a truck and you go out in the field and fire the guns. You'd either eat out in the field, or get back in by four or five. The rest of the time's yours. Unless you're on guard duty or something like that. But they were pretty good about it. I mean none of this stuff you hear, they're on you all night They're not. Unless you got some sergeant that wants to be on you all night. It really wasn't as bad as I thought it would be. I was really surprised because I knew that they had to get your mind right to go to Vietnam. They had to have a fighting man there. I didn't see where they were doing anything wrong, you know. Most people think, well, they're harassing me, they're trying to get me to do what I don't want to do, but I didn't feel that way at all. So, I got the orders for Vietnam, I'd come home and I went to Vietnam, right.

D: When you had your leave now, when you came back, what did your folks think about you going to Vietnam? Did you talk much about it with them?

C: No, the only time we talked about it was the day before I left. I went in, my mother was sleeping, and I went in one night and I told her I was scared. Well we both started crying, of course, because my mother raised three boys by herself and my real father died when I was three so I think it was about twelve or fifteen years later, she remarried. Anyway, I didn't talk too much to my stepfather but I was real close to my mother, which I still am; and I was scared, I was really scared. And she was

crying and all this stuff, but I had that urge to go, I really wanted to go. If they'd have told me not to go, I'd have felt worse, I think.

D: How about your friends? Didn't you talk much with your friends? Were they for it or did they say much?

C: Well, I really didn't have time because most of my friends were in, you know, as soon as they get out of high school, they were going in, either joining, or being drafted or something like that. And I really didn't have a chance to talk to anybody. All the guys I knew wanted to go. There wasn't one guy that didn't want to go.

D: Where did you leave then from your leave? Where did you have to report to?

C: It was Fort Lewis, Washington. We flew there and then stayed there for a few days and they shipped you over to Vietnam.

D: Did they give you any last minute advice or training when you're en route when you're at Fort Lewis or on the plane over?

C: Not that I can recall, no. They ask you if you want to go to jump school, paratrooper school, which I signed up to go but I never went, it wasn't mandatory; if you sign up you can just erase your name off if you didn't want to go. They'd pay you more money if you were a paratrooper, if you were a type that wanted to be a paratrooper and go to school.

D: Is that why you signed up for it, for more money?

C: Well then I found out when you go to Vietnam you had to make jumps, so I said, "Forget it!" (laughter) In order to get the pay you had to make so many jumps a month. So I couldn't see myself doing that. I couldn't see myself jumping out of a perfectly good airplane anyway.

D: On your way over then, now you went from Fort Lewis, Washington. Where did you land? Did you go directly to Vietnam from there?

C: I can't remember. I came home from Vietnam on emergency leave and went back again so I can't remember. I think I went to Alaska. I think we

stopped at Alaska on the way over and then we flew down to Hawaii, we flew over to Clark Air Force Base, that's in the Philippines, then we flew to oh, I know, from Hawaii we went to Japan and then from Japan the Clark Air Force Base in the Philippines and from the Philippines we landed in Cam Ranh Bay. I'm pretty sure that's the way it went.

D: What did you think about Vietnam? In going there, anticipating going there, what did you expect?

C: I expected to die.

D: Did you?

C: Yes. I really did. I thought for sure I was going to die. I was scared. I really, I was scared stiff, but yet I wanted to go. There was no way they could have told me not to go.

D: What did you think about the country in terms of, now you said in basic they had it down to a tee, but did you really expect things to be like when you landed and got off the plane and you looked around, was it like you thought it was going to be?

C: More like a paradise I thought it looked like. Like sandy beaches, because Cam Ranh Bay was an in-country R and R center. That was one of the first places; I think the Air Force had that. That place there was better than Kennedy Airport.

D: Is that right?

C: For planes and landing, you know, it was really built up, it was so advanced. I got off that plane and I opened the door and we got out, and I felt that heat hit me. So I thought it was the heat from the engines. And it was that way all the time. (laughter) In a few days, you got used to it. It wasn't like I expected. Matter of fact, it was kind of rinky-dink. You expect when you go to a war zone, they don't march in a formation, I guess they're pretty secure in that area so they go ahead and do stateside stuff which we call stateside duty, that's like everything done in a formation, everything is done to the tee, spit-shine boots; but when you're in Vietnam, you don't do that.

When we get what we call harassed, which really wasn't I think, we call that stateside. Nobody liked stateside, because you know, spit-shine boots and all that stuff.

D: Yes. Well what did you do then once you got there?

C: Once I got to?

D: Yes, who did you report to and what did they do?

C: You had orders cut for you, they'd cut orders of where you're going to go once you get to Vietnam. So say I landed in Cam Ranh Bay, you had a order to go to the 90th Replacement in Bien Hoa. Then you go to 90th Replacement. That's where they dispersed men all over. I landed there and a bunch of guys, everybody had the 90th Replacement. That was in Long Bien. That was supposed to have been the world's largest army compound at one time.

So then, you go there, and then you stay there for a couple of days; then they find out where you're going to go from. When you're in the States all they know in the States is you're one of the 90th Replacement, I'm pretty sure. Once you get to the 90th Replacement, nobody knows where you're going until they find out where you're needed.

D: That's 90th?

C: The 90th Replacement. That's Bien Hoa, Long Bien. They have a place where they cut orders for you and you're shipped out to your unit. They said, well, I was going in the second of thirteenth artillery in Phu Loi. So, I don't know what that was. And I'm scared, you know, an artillery unit, they're out in the field. It was a service battery, which serviced the firing batteries. And they in turn put you where they want you.

I get to the service battery. Now I'm an artillery mechanic, right? And they needed us real bad. I mean, they had these special classes, spent all this money to train these guys. So, I get there and I'm waiting around for them to put me in a firing battery and all this time I'm hearing all this stuff about these . . . like second and thirteenth artillery has A, B, C, and D Battery, and Headquarter

Battery, and Service Battery; well I'm hearing that these batteries are getting shelled all the time and getting overrun and losing these guys and getting killed and I'm getting--the more I think about it the scareder I'm getting. And I knew I had to go to a firing battery. I was trained to go to a firing battery.

So that captain, he comes up and he says, "Well," he says, "I don't know what we're going to do with you." [He put me] in a motor pool for I think two months, a PLL clerk; I didn't know anything about it. And they'd train me. And I'm saying, "Hey, I'm supposed to be an artillery mechanic."

The guy who ran the Enlisted Man's Club, he went home. So they needed some guy to [take his place]. They asked me to do it. So I did that.

D: How long did you do that?

C: Couple months. Then I drove ammo trucks, hauling ammo. Wasn't that a big waste of money! The biggest waste of money I've seen in my . . . I couldn't believe it. And here I am, they spent all this time and all this money to send me to two A.I.T.'s, basic training, and I wind up driving an ammo truck; which I didn't mind because the guys out in the field were getting killed, and I wasn't. I felt it that way. I don't know. I was in a firing battery a couple of times, then I was on guard duty for a month at a time pulling guard duty, and they'd have fire fights off our perimeter. You'd hear them.

[One night] I went out on guard duty and sitting there, about twelve o'clock I heard this, whew, whew, just like a bee flying by. It stopped for a while and I heard it again. Here somebody's out in the field, outside the perimeter firing at us. And we're in bunkers, they're like 4 by 5 steel, a cage, like a locker, but big and corrugated steel. They're put in the ground and they're sandbagged all in with five feet down in the sandbags and they have a little hole made so you can look out. And all of a sudden the big fire fight's starting. There's infantry out there and the Vietnamese are out there, the Viet Cong or the North Vietnamese, whoever they were fighting with. That really scared me, because when you hear bullets that close, they're close. You can hear them whizzing by you.

D: In this fire fight that you're in, are we going to explore this a little bit. You were in what you might call a bunker?

C: Yes.

D: And how many people were out there? Did you have any idea who was out there?

C: I would say about a dozen on each side. Phu Loi has it's own Phu Loi patrol.

D: These are Viet Cong?

C: These are ours.

D: Oh, these are your . . . ?

C: These American soldiers who patrol our perimeter at night. So I guess they ran into some Viet Cong or North Vietnamese, whatever. We're in that bunker and they're spaced about, I'd say, a hundred yards apart, all the way around the post. And every five or six bunkers, there's a tower. It has a starlight scope. I guess you're allowed to talk about that now, I don't know. Anyway, it's a thing you can look through and see at night. I mean, just like looking outside but it's all green.

D: Yes. Like an infrared . . .

C: Well, it's not infrared at all. The light, it reflects from the moon and the stars through this scope; it magnifies and brightens the area you're looking through and you can pick out an object, just as plain as day. We looked through them all the time. We'd see cows walking around. Pitch black.

D: How wide of an area in looking through one of these could you actually see?

C: I would say like a pair of binoculars; I don't know what's the range, three hundred yards, somewhere like that. I don't know, I'm not sure. We were looking through them, we were watching the tracers going. The Americans have the red tracers and the Viet Cong had the green tracers or vice versa. Yes, they had the green.

D: What were the tracers?

C: Every fifth round in a clip is a tracer, so you can tell where you're firing. And that's how you see. So every red tracer you see there's four bullets behind it and four in front of it. So the fifth one will be the red tracer round. If it's night, you can just fire, they don't aim. They just fire, just to put down a wall of protection, actually, they just start firing away.

D: People just get out of the way when they hear the firing?

C: Yes. I don't know if they follow the Viet Cong green tracers but in this particular instance they did. But we weren't allowed to fire.

D: Why not?

C: They told us not to. I don't know why. To this day I don't know why. We were getting shot at. We went out the next morning and there were about six holes right around our windows there even in the bunkers.

D: How many people were in the bunkers when you were there?

C: Two, there were two on guard duty.

D: Did you talk about anything while this was happening?

C: No, I was normally just hitting him in the head trying to keep him awake.

D: Keep him awake?

C: Keep him awake. The other guy. Because I never fell asleep on guard duty. Most of the guys will fall asleep on guard duty.

D: Is that right?

C: Yes.

D: Did that ever cause any problems that you know of?

C: Oh, yes. In Chu Chi there [were a few men found dead in their bunker]. Fell asleep and got overrun. They went in and blew up the airfield. Falling asleep.

D: Does it have anything to do with the type of discipline that they might have had in basic training do you suppose? Maybe they didn't impress on them how important it was?

C: Before I was assigned to my base camp, it was a pretty hairy area. For quite a while there was nothing going on. The guys got relaxed. They'd start relaxing, taking it easy, you know, grouping together out in the areas, which you're not supposed to do. They'd go out [in their bunker] and they'd sleep. And I wouldn't let them sleep. No way would I let them sleep. And I didn't have too many friends because of that because like I'd pull guard duty for a month at a time; or we used to pull it three days at a time, we'd pull it a week at a time, then we'd pull it a month at a time. You usually pull guard duty with just about everybody you're with. And I can honestly, truly say--and I think there's not too many who can say this--I never fell asleep on guard duty.

D: In the war in Vietnam, the Viet Cong have been known to use a lot of different booby-trapping devices. When did they give you training for this or what kind of training did you get?

C: It's supposed to be, as soon as you get to your unit, where you're going to be stationed, they have this thing called an in-country training where you go for two weeks. You could either go and stay for two weeks but if you're close enough you go back and forth to your unit. It's mandatory that you do that within the first month that you're there, I'm pretty sure. But you have to go through it. And most of the guys didn't go through until they went home. Which was the truth.

D: Why do you suppose that was?

C: I guess, when I went there was quite a few guys and I guess they were just full up or didn't have enough people to instruct you or totally just didn't care to send you, that's all Most guys didn't want to go anyway.

They didn't care. I didn't want to go. I mean I'm glad I did but I didn't come across any of this stuff. But they take you and like you go every day. You go in the morning and they're supposed to come pick you up for lunch but they never did. So we didn't eat till noon

But they take you and they give you classes on different types of weapons used by the Viet Cong or North Vietnamese like their AK-47s, which were Russian built rifles. And they show you the different type of traps you can run into. They had trip flares where if you're walking in the jungle and you hit a wire and a flare goes up then they know you're there.

We had the same thing, too. Then they had what they called the pungi sticks, which are usually embedded in a hole in the ground or on a spring that if you hit a rope or something it'll swing out and hit you, something like that. Which usually have a poisonous substance on the end of it which would kill you. If the spear itself didn't kill you, the poison will.

And most of them, pungi sticks, they're made out of bamboo and dunked in some type of animal urine or something like that to get the poison on it. They're set in the ground, while you're walking along, you step through this hole and they grasped you. They're like this (shows), then when you step on them they go in *[*to your*]* foot.

D: In other words, like a trap.

C: You're there.

D: Like a bear trap.

C: Yes, and they got you that way. I imagine a lot of guys lost a foot over that. But normally you're not alone so there's always somebody there to get you out. But that injures one man. He's not able to do his job. One guy at a time, they can do a lot of work. And then they have a few sticks in a hole. When you walk along, you step in them, they'll go up through the bottom of your shoes. So then the Army got smart--they made steel shanks.

D: Were there some things you could actually do to save your life?

C: When I was in basic training, they showed you first aid for stuff like that. But normally they just showed you what to watch out for when you're walking. And they have all these things set up, these different type of traps. And they'd have a hand grenade laying, you could trip it, pull the pin.

And they'd have your explosive devices [such as] claymore mines that were ours, they stole or captured and stuff like that that they used. Most of the explosive devices they used were mainly our stuff which they captured.

D: What was a claymore mine?

C: It's hard to explain. It stands about this high. (shows)

D: About six inches or so?

C: Oh, maybe four. It's about an inch and a half thick and it's kind of bent like in a half circle maybe, well not even that much, and it sits on legs. You stick it in the ground. They have a hand detonator and it had an electrical charge in it, and you run a wire or a trip device and you squeeze this and this claymore mine goes off. It consists of C-4, which is an explosive. It's like all packaged in there with all these little B-B's in this explosive device and then you hit the thing and it'll explode. So they aim this thing toward you, you trip it, or they detonate it and it'll do a good job on you; it'd kill you.

D: More or less like a big shotgun? Would that be the effect?

C: Yes. That's just what it is. Almost like a shotgun. The B-B's are about three-sixteen in diameter, some of them, if I'm not mistaken. And even the artillery has a thing they call a beehive round.

D: Beehive?

C: Beehive round. It's a shell, a 105 shell with darts in it. All these little darts. They look like the darts you have in dart board, which are real small and they're black and they're in these shells. If you're getting overrun and you have to fire direct fire, you just lower that gun and you let it go.

I think there's quite a few thousand of them in there. You can set that down, aim it through a wheat field, and it'd cut a path I think fifty feet wide.

D: No kidding.

C: Thousands and thousands of little darts. We've got them and they've got them. We want to hurt them just as bad as they hurt us.

D: Who was the enemy in Vietnam? Did people have difficulty identifying them?

C: You couldn't tell. You didn't know who it was. You didn't know at all. You couldn't tell by looking. You could be staring one right in the face and not know it. Most of the time they <u>are</u> staring them in the face. The Viet Cong are like civilians. They're just fighting for their own cause. They have nothing to do with the North Vietnamese Army, which I think are supposed to be uniformed people but, you can't tell.

Usually the Viet Cong wore a black pajama-type deal, you know, which they changed that as soon as the Americans told everybody they wore black pajama-type. But you wouldn't know who they are because there were so many Viet Cong in Saigon. And like on television when they were showing the take-over of Da Nang, quite a few people came out and said they were Viet Cong. They were supposed to be working for the American government. One time on our base we had almost 75 percent Vietnamese working on our base.

D: In other words, Vietnamese civilians that were working for the Army?

C: Yes. Quite a few of them.

D: Did you run any security clearance on them?

C: Oh, yes, they check them all out. Of course, they can easily change once they're checked out. But I think most of them were just men, women, and children that needed jobs, make some money and come to the military post and get jobs. And they're checked out, and they're checked when they come in

in the morning and they're checked when they go out at night. They're searched. The Army military police check the men and the Vietnamese military policewomen check the women.

They're usually nice people. Like there's "hooch" girls that come in. They come in and clean your barracks. Like where we were at we had barracks, one floor. But we didn't sleep in them. We slept underground off to the sides [in bunkers]. We slept there. Like up at Long Bien everybody slept on top of it, [ground level]. But we had to sleep underneath. And they would come in [hooch girls] and they would clean them; and your shoes would be muddy and they'd come in, they'd clean your shoes, spit-shine them every day. And clean the place up, and make your beds, change your sheets, and everything like that. Really, a bunch of nice people.

But then you get the women that come in that are the prostitutes and they have the steam baths on post. You go take a steam bath for a couple dollars and a few dollars more you can get your social liberty or whatever you want to call it. And they tried to put a stop to this stuff and they could never do it.

There was more VD [venereal disease] going around than anything else. I mean it was really, it was really bad. These guys would come in, now like when I worked in a motor pool for a while, they made out trip tickets. Every time a truck goes out, you'd have to have a trip ticket to go. Or we're supposed to have their prophylactics to go with the trip ticket. They wouldn't take them. They'd go into town or go out in the field and meet up with some jungle queen and come back with bad cases of the clap or something like that. I would say most of the people that worked on the base were [there] just to make some money.

D: Who was running these on-post massage parlors?

C: The Vietnamese women.

D: The women were?

C: They get a permit to run them. Or they're owned by a man who . . . I know the military American officers had a lot to do when they get a kickback from

it. They'd have to. Because they say none of this stuff's allowed on base but it is. So some officer's not doing his job and he's getting a little bit of money out of it, which I imagine everybody's doing a little bit of getting some money somewhere.

D: I had heard where a lot of the officer's clubs had conducted a lot of illegal activity and you mentioned before that you worked for an officer's club. Were you aware of anything like that?

C: No. I worked for the Enlisted Man's Club.

D: Enlisted Man's Club.

C: I ran the Enlisted Man's Club. I don't know anything about what the officers did. I ran this club for a few months and my job was to keep this place open, keep it stocked with just beer and pop. We didn't serve whiskey or anything like that; just beer and pop and pretzels, potato chips and stuff like this.

Well, I'd have to go down to Saigon, take a truck, get my guns and set them up and take somebody with me to go down there to get the stuff. We had a thing called a free day, and it's supposed to be authorized by headquarters, authorizes free day, right. So he would never authorize, I'd authorize my own. I wouldn't sign anybody's name, I would just go ahead and have it. And at the end of the month he'd check the books and he was supposed to tell me whether I had too many free days or not.

It's supposed to have been once or twice a month a free day, but I was having free days every Sunday. I was giving the stuff away. I think it was ten cents or fifteen cents for a can of pop, something like this. So on Sundays, I would bring out twenty cases of beer, twenty cases of pop. And we'd usually have some sort of a cookout, somebody will go sell something down in Saigon and trade something, bring back some steaks, which was illegal, too. And then we'd have a cookout. Then when I come over in base camp or something they would have a cookout and all this free stuff.

The guy who did it before me always put down twenty cases of each and then they'd authorize it. So I did the same thing. It got to the point where I was

only giving away ten cases. So I figured since I'm only giving away ten, why don't I just put ten back in and sell it. That's what I did. I put out twenty cases, marked off twenty cases, and gave [ten cases] away.

And the books had to come right out to the penny. But one thing about the books, you can make the books come out to the penny but if they don't come and check your stock, how are they going to know? So what I was doing was, I would have these free days, and I would give away ten cases of each, which was supposed to have been twenty, and I'd put ten back at the end of the day and I would sell it. What else am I going to do with it? He wouldn't authorize it for any other day. So I would sell it during the week. Sometimes NCO's would come over and want a case and this so I'd sell it to them at whatever it cost me to buy it. And I'd make a profit. And so what I would do, I would buy stuff for the club. I bought bar stools, I bought booths, and I bought records every month; you'd send out in California for records for the jukebox. We had a jukebox. We'd sent for that. All the money went [to the club] but I could have pocketed that money. Matter of fact, I did pocket a few bucks.

D: Yes. Not too difficult.

C: No. It was, matter of fact, about the easiest thing you want to do. I imagine I got about a hundred and a half out of it. But what there was, I was running that, and there was supposed to have been an NCO running the Enlisted Man's Club, E-5 slot. They wouldn't make me E-5. I wasn't supposed to be running that club.

D: What was your rank at that time?

C: E-4. I went over as PFC and made E-4. I don't think I did anything wrong [at the club]. Everybody knew about it. Except the officers. I would just make out the books, the books had to balance right to the cent. But as long as they balance is all they cared about. They never came over and checked. They all do it. Every one of them do it.

D: Did you have any trouble, we were talking about the Vietnamese working on base before, there's a lot of stories that you hear about Vietnam, the Viet Cong

or the North Vietnamese using kids to help fight their wars. Did you have any experience with children?

C: The only experience I had with children is most of them are a bunch of crooks.

D: Really?

C: But they had to be because they didn't have nothing. But they would come along and they would come up and they would steal stuff out of your trucks.

D: What kind of things would they get?

C: Anything they can get their hands on. You name it, they got it. You go down to Saigon, they'd pimp off their mothers. Three- or four-year-old kids. And they'd sell you anything. You want to buy an Army jeep, they'll sell you one. You want to buy an Army 45 or an Army M-16, they'd sell you one. Anything you want to buy, you can buy it. And I mean anything. They probably had battleships they'd sell you! (laughter) I believe they would. They could. This is the way the black market was--most of these little kids worked for the black market.

D: Yes, that's what I was wondering about--the black market. How much was there of that, quite a bit?

C: Yes, there was quite a bit.

D: Were there a lot of enlisted men involved in that or was it pretty much the South Vietnamese?

C: Most of the enlisted men that were involved in it were probably enlisted men who were stationed in Saigon where it was at anyway. Because there was a lot of military people stationed in Saigon.

Like you'd go down to Saigon, [a place in] the outskirts of Saigon. And they have a PX [Post Exchange] which is like right in the city. It was military guarded but you have to park maybe a quarter of a mile down the road and walk up. And you had the South Vietnamese police there slipping you money, telling you to buy them cigarettes. They wanted American cigarettes; well they in turn would sell it. And they'd make money or they'd do something with it.

Black market, actually. They'd want you to buy them radios, televisions, and everything. They'd give you the money for it but then they just sell them for a higher price. There was a lot of black market going on down there. I mean I don't know anything personally but, you can feel it. You can feel it in the air. Something isn't right when you can go and buy [just about anything].

Then they'd have all your pornography pictures. These little kids would come up and sell you these things. You'd have your prostitutes come up to you and you'd have the guy come to you selling you a watch that all the jewels have been taken out of. I got suckered into that one. Well, I had a twelve dollar Timex that I bought when I went in the Army so, I said, "What the hell, this watch looks nice," so I traded it in and gave him a buck--a military pay certificate. And he gave me this watch. I took it back [to camp] and it fell apart. (laughter)

D: You got your buck's worth!

C: Yes! You weren't allowed to have American money over there. You could sell a five dollar bill for twenty bucks over there.

D: Is that right?

C: You can sell that five dollar bill for twenty dollars that would total in the Vietnamese money that would total twenty dollars in American money. But it's Vietnamese. I don't know what it consists of; I forgot the change. But you can take that to the bank, military bank, and get twenty dollars in MPC's, which is Military Pay Certificates. Then when you go home, you can exchange that for twenty dollars American money.

D: In other words, if you were over there, you could sell American dollars, you could make yourself a fortune.

C: Sure you can. And they were doing that, too, because you had to get rid of all your American money. The only thing you were allowed to have are pennies. And you were supposed to deposit those in a box for the orphan kids and stuff like that. I know a lot of guys were doing that--having American money sent from home, they'd take it and sell it.

What they'd do with that is, they [the Vietnamese] would take this American money and they would take it up to North Vietnam and in turn, exchange that for gold and then have money to buy military supplies.

D: In other words, we were indirectly paying for some of their supplies.

C: We indirectly paid for everything, I think. Everything of theirs. Everything that they'd take, they'd use against us, of ours; guns and everything like that.

D: How were the South Vietnamese soldiers? Could you depend on them?

C: Cowards. All of them.

D: Really?

C: All the ones I know.

D: People that I've talked to said that they always had more Americans than Vietnamese because they couldn't depend on them.

C: Well you could always tell. You can see it like when we go out, and we're hauling ammo and you can see the infantry out there and the Vietnamese would be with them and the Vietnamese would always be in the back. I imagine there were quite a few brave ones, but there wasn't too many. They would always try to get out. They'd run. You can see the way they ran in Da Nang. How many ran? Tens of thousands of them ran. That's the way they always were.

D: Did you ever get to talk to any of them?

C: No. The only ones I've talked to is--they have post carpenters that build stuff. Each company has their carpenter unit. The Vietnamese people, they didn't talk about nothing like that. They didn't want to be bothered because they were tired of it

D: Pretty tired of it?

C: But they would build stuff. They'd build everything on base. All the Vietnamese people, the carpenters would build your barracks and everything like that.

But there's one instance where we got a letter signed by William Westmoreland. Somebody got it in my family, either my mother or Marsha got it somewhere, but I can't find it. It stated: "We wanted to thank you," and I think it put down, "the service battery of Second of Thirteenth Artillery, for helping rebuild the so-called village," they gave the name, I don't remember, and helping these people you know get back on their feet. But he failed to state that we're the ones that blew it up. It was a mistake. Some guy was off on his gun. And we just blew the shit right out of it. And he never said that. He thanked us: "We appreciate you doing this and the Vietnamese people appreciate you for doing this," but they never said that we blew it up. And I know we blew it up. The next day this guy come in, "You hear what Charlie Battery did? They dropped about twenty rounds in this village."

D: Were the people in the village?

C: Yes. Quite a few of them they killed. And he sends you a letter thanking you for rebuilding it. Somebody here's got it. I've got to find that.

D: I know there was probably a lot of pressure never knowing what's going to happen next in a lot of places in Vietnam. Did a lot of these guys try to escape by drugs, drinking?

C: Oh, yes. We have a guy that had been there for two years and was on drugs, marihuana. He would extend. I think he was a four-year RA. You got three-year RA where you sign up for three years; and you got a guy that'll sign up for four years.

You had to extend every six months in Vietnam. And you get a thirty-day leave in between. Well he would extend and never take a thirty-day leave. He was high on pot all the time. All the time. I even smoked, though very few times. Three times to be exact. And that's honestly. I have more fun being straight than drinking or smoking pot or anything like that.

D: Do most of the guys do it in rear areas, do they do it out in the field?

C: They showed them right on television the other night. Remember when Walter Cronkite had that thing on? Right out in the field, right out in the open. Away from officers, of course.

D: In other words, it wasn't something that they tolerated, or did they tolerate it?

C: They couldn't do nothing about it because there was so much going on. I would say 30 percent of the guys in my unit smoked it. And I would say 10 percent of the officers smoked it. Everybody smoked it. Everybody tried it once. It was so easy to get.

Like a baggy, like a regular sandwich bag, two bucks it would cost you; I don't know what it is now, but I think it's twenty, thirty, forty dollars, something like that. But it was so easy to get. You could go out and pick it, for that matter.

D: Really? Who supplied it? Where would a guy go to buy it?

C: The Vietnamese people.

D: The Vietnamese people?

C: South Vietnamese people. Or you could pick it yourself and dry it yourself. When I was there, there wasn't too much hard core, you know like no heroin, or anything like that. Not too much of that at all. Matter of fact, I don't know of any of it at all. But a lot of marihuana, a lot of pills. You can go to the medic and say you're sick and he'll give you . . . what's those strong headache pills they got? They're in a capsule.

D: A Darvon?

C: Darvon. Yes, he'll give you those. Take about four of those and there you go, you know. There was a lot of that. But not too much heroin or anything like that.

D: Was it mostly because of the boredom?

C: Boredom, that's it.

D: Was it boredom more than pressure?

C: Boredom. Most of those guys weren't scared. You don't worry about nothing. Well, I'd say the first month you're scared and your last month you're scared. And the rest of it you don't let it bother you.

D: The last month you're worried about getting out of there alive.

C: Yes. We had a guy that didn't make it either. He was there for three years and never made it. He was on a truck that was hauling ammo. He ran over a land mine. He was there three years; he kept signing up.

If you have less than five months to go in the service, you go home; or you can extend to get less than five months. Most of these guys would just stay until they have like four months to go then they go home. So I had extended. I stayed there thirteen months to get out. I extended for thirty-one days to get out five months early. I don't know. Everybody was doing it so I figured it was the thing to do. I should have stayed in. I really should have. I wish I was in the Army right now.

D: Stayed in the Army as a career?

C: When I got out, I went down to the recruiter about four or five times wanting to go back in, but I never got up enough nerve to do it. I wish I would have. It wasn't that bad at all. The thing was I was embarrassed. I was embarrassed to stay in the military.

I was even embarrassed to say that I was in Vietnam because people would call you baby-killer, and stuff like that. You got that. I was actually embarrassed to wear my uniform. Ashamed of it. I wouldn't be now because I know, it's not all what people think it is. It's a life. It's good money, too. I mean not that great, but it's competitive.

D: Yes. It's getting better. Over there, you mentioned venereal disease. How widespread would you say it was?

C: Pretty darn wide. I bet you seven out of ten guys got it.

D: Gonorrhea, syphilis?

C: The clap. I never had it. (laughter) Let's make that perfectly clear!

D: Tell me something. Is there any truth--or maybe you don't even know--is there any truth to the story that a lot of the Vietnamese women were actually infected with venereal disease to give it to the soldiers? Do you know if there's any truth to that at all?

C: No, I never heard that. I know there was a lot of it going around though. Quite a bit of it. These poor guys, they get, well, I don't want to explain how it is but, it's painful when you get the clap and you have to go to the bathroom. You just want to just rip things off the walls, that's how bad it gets. These guys were just sitting there screaming. That's how bad it gets.

And then what they'd do, they'd go in to the medic, the medic gives them penicillin shots, gives them penicillin pills, all right, it goes away. And you're supposed to stay off your beer for a certain period of time; well they go over and start drinking again and it comes right back. I guess the beer has something to do with the penicillin or it has something to do with the disease itself. But you're supposed to stay off the beer or anything like that. I think even pop, too. There was quite a bit of it going around. Everybody had it I think, except me! (laughter)

D: How about the food? Was there good food over there?

C: If you weren't eating C rations you were eating cooked food which was pretty good. Both of them were good.

D: You had C rations?

C: Yes.

D: What kind of things did they offer you in C ration?

C: You name it, they had it. All canned, you know, cookies and soups and beans; but it was all good though. I can't remember all of what it was but it was all pretty good.

D: Was it dated? I heard that in Vietnam there was some stuff that was left over from World War II.

C: I don't know. I don't think so because there's certain foods that I don't think we even had back then. Certain things that are packaged. Unless they repackaged them and put different things in them, which they easily could have done, too. I mean, they'd have cake, and in World War II, I don't think they ever had that. They had different types of cookies and fruits and fruit cocktail. Well, maybe, they could have been; I really don't know.

You have American cooks, but you'd have Vietnamese cleaning up, helping serve the food, something like that.

D: How much time did you actually spend out in the field with your firing battery?

C: About a month, that's all.

D: What kind of action did you see when you were in the field?

C: Nothing. It was quiet then, a quiet time.

D: Really?

C: We'd just go out and they'd pick out a designation where you shoot from. You go shoot a few rounds, or a couple hundred rounds or whatever and take off and go someplace else. You just travel around.

D: How was the men's attitude?

C: They didn't care. Unless you just got there or unless you were going home, it was just a job to do.

D: Were they happy that there wasn't much action?

C: Oh, yes.

D: Were there some guys that were disappointed?

C: Some guys like action.

D: Yes.

C: I really don't know, Jimmy, because you forget how people act. But when it come time to pull together, everybody did. And when it come time to run, everybody did. Like Charlie Battery lost, I think there were ninety men in their unit and they lost three guns and twenty-five men one night when they got overrun. Everybody took off, left their guns and everything. What else can you do?

D: Where do they go when they run?

C: Just get in their trucks and take off.

D: Just try to keep ahead of the enemy. Did you have any close calls in your battery?

C: No. Just when I was on guard duty, we had the fire fight. That's all.

D: Yes. That's what you mentioned before.

C: Yes.

D: Did you read much in the papers or listen to the radio much about what was going on at home while you were in Vietnam?

C: Yes, I read the Stars and Stripes.

D: What kind of things did they say?

C: Well, they mentioned Youngstown, about the riots we had.

D: Did they?

C: Yes. I used to brag to this one colored kid. Well let me point this out. There's a lot of black and white, the blacks are sticking together now and the whites are sticking together now. Let me go back a little bit. When I was in fourth grade I was the only white boy in a class that had a black teacher and I was the only one that flunked.

So I got to the point where I didn't like colored people too much. I lived with them, and I got along with them, I never caused trouble with them, but I just didn't care. After a few years I started knowing what was happening back in third and fourth

grade and I started feeling hurt. I had a lot of colored friends. I had to, because I was the only white one.

But I dislike colored people. All right, I don't like them at all. But I got along with them. I wouldn't cause trouble, I wouldn't say nothing, but I just didn't like them. But when I was in the service, from basic training through Vietnam there just wasn't one colored person I did not like. They all were the nicest, and we got along just great, until I came back home. Then it started all over again. But they were real nice guys. Now what were you asking me?

D: Well, what I was kind of getting into was, did you read about the protesters and that? Did you know the people were protesting as much as they were back home?

C: No.

D: You weren't too aware of that?

C: No. I wasn't aware of it at all. I was aware of it before I went, a little bit, you know here and there but not too much.

D: Did the guys over there mention that at all and say anything, any reaction to all that protesting?

C: All they mentioned was the long hair.

D: Yes.

C: That's all. That's what bugged them the most. There's a couple guys that didn't like being there but there wasn't none that would ever desert or go to extremes.

We had one kid--he was from Pittsburgh--and he was, I don't know what the word you'd call him but he was against everybody, against the environment, and everything he was against because he just didn't like it. He was about 4 foot 10. I think he was about the smallest guy to ever be drafted.

I think he was avoiding registering for the draft so they finally took him. Then they had to have special clothes made for him and everything but they

took him. And he was against everything. He was a heavy pot smoker, and he was a protester, I'm pretty sure he was. Yes, he showed me pictures of him--big beard and long hair and a little short guy.

D: How about your commanding officers? Were they pretty good people? Did they seem to be able to handle their jobs?

C: Yes. Yes, they all did. One guy left just a few months after I got there. Then we had another, Captain Richards. He was a pretty nice guy. Then we had the colored guy, who was a real nice guy. I mean, he talked, he communicated with his men. He'd come out and talk to you where the other ones didn't too much but they were still nice guys.

D: That's what I was wondering, what kind of a relationship was there.

C: This colored guy, he kept a real good relationship. He tried. He really did. Because he knew he was black, and he had to, which was nice. He proved a point; he said what he meant and meant what he said.

D: The men liked him?

C: Yes, we all liked him. At first we didn't because he was black. Well, everybody'd say, "Here comes the nigger captain." But after awhile, we overdid it I think because he was a real nice guy.

D: How old were most of the commanding officers?

C: I think the average age was about 33 and 34.

D: Were most of those guys career men?

C: I don't think so.

D: No?

C: No.

D: How did they get to be that rank then?

C: Being drafted. Taking a choice of going to infantry or being in combat or going to officer's school. Just your choice.

D: Clarify a little bit now Is it the personal relationship with the men who'd been in the longest and sort of worked their way up got along better with the men?

C: Yes.

D: Than the guy who came in from college?

C: Not necessarily college. I mean it doesn't have to be college because a guy can come in and just go to officer's school and be an officer, you know go to school for it. He doesn't have to be a college man I don't think.

D: Okay. What I really want to get though is in the field does a guy who has worked his way up handle the job better?

C: Oh, yes. They always will. It's always proven that he will, I'm pretty sure. Because they usually called the captains or lieutenants "ninety-day wonders."

D: Yes.

C: Like this one thing I've seen on television where the captain wanted them to march down this road, and the men said, "We don't march down the roads. We go through the jungles. We don't walk on paths down the road."

The captain said, "Well you're going to walk down this road regardless if you want to or not." The guys said, "We're not going." The captain says, "I'm going down that road. You guys better follow." He took off down the road and they all sat there. They wouldn't go with him He didn't know what he was doing. You don't walk down the roads in Vietnam, because that's just where they want you to walk. You walk through the jungle and you search your way through. And find what you're looking for. Don't let them find you first by booby-trapping a road or path. This way you're going through the jungle, you can tell somebody's been there before you. Where on the road, you can't.

D: Do you find this to be pretty widespread among the men that they would pick and choose the orders they wanted to obey?

C: When it come to saving your life they would. See personally, I don't know, but from what I understand yes.

D: Have you heard any specific cases of where this might have happened?

C: I wish you'd have given me that question before because I know there's one. I've got to think about it; I forget now. It had nothing to do with combat. It had to do with . . . one of the main things, and people overlook, I think, if you're in a motor pool, you had to keep the trucks going because they can't break down. If you break down with a load of ammunition or a load of men, it's really bad news.

And you get these guys that come in and want you to fix the truck this way, want you to stay up all night and pull motor stables, get these trucks ready to go and stuff like that. And you have some clown that comes in there and says he wants it done this way and these guys have been doing it this way for nine months to a year, every time an inspection comes up. And they know how to do it. Well they'll stop. We stopped one time. I even forget what it was about. We refused to do anything because some guy wanted something done one way and we knew it was better to do it the other way. And he was [going by] the books. If you can't get parts, you just can't get them. There's no way to get them.

So all right, what we used to do is, like motor stables would come up. That's when you have to work on your truck, then they have inspection. You're up all night fixing these trucks. They had this team of sergeants, officers, come down and check your truck's list. And he'd give you gigs. And if certain things weren't on there like buckles and snaps, they'd give you a gig for it.

D: Is that like a demerit?

C: Yes. Well what we used to do is: we'd hear they'd been at this one company; when they're done, we [would go to the one they just finished with] and get all their stuff that we needed for our trucks and take it off of theirs and put it on ours because we couldn't get them. They're not coming through, what are you going to do? In order to pass without getting chewed out and bitched at and

getting to be the lowest motor pool in the outfit, you'll do this, just to get by. The trucks still run; they always ran good. It's just that they wanted you to have them in A1 shape; well, if you can't get the parts, you can't get the parts.

D: Is there a lot of waste?

C: The biggest waste you ever want to see. Everything's wasted. Everything's wasted. The military's the biggest, wasteful thing I've ever seen in my entire life. And the most unorganized, and the most un-uniform I've ever seen. You can walk down through Fort Knox, Kentucky, on any certain day and you'll see ten different units in ten different uniforms.

Somebody'll have a round hat, somebody'll have a pointed hat, somebody'd have fatigues on; somebody would have khakis on, somebody would have dress blues on, somebody'd have winter blues on. Somebody'd have silver buttons, somebody'd have gold buttons; somebody'd have saucer caps, the other ones would have cunt caps. You'll have to bleep that one, but that's what they were called. And some of them have steel pots, some of them have helmets.

But in your own particular unit, your company, everybody wore the same. But if you put two different companies together, they're dressed different. You had these stupid looking baseball caps. They're about the ugliest thing that I ever seen in my life. And I'm going to write to Charles Carney and have him change them. I really am, because they're still wearing them.

You came to Vietnam, you got issued jungle fatigues. But then you turned around and they said you had to wear stateside fatigues. So then you had half the guys wearing stateside, half the guys wearing jungle; nobody knew which one they were supposed to be wearing.

You couldn't have your pants tapered, and you could have your pants tapered; and if you had them tapered, they'd fine you, you had to pay for them. Then they'd tell you go ahead and taper them. You don't know what to do. They were so goofed up and so disorganized. But they wasted, they wasted quite a bit of stuff. I mean I can't explain what they wasted.

D: Well, in your experience with the motor pool, for example, did you have difficulty getting parts? Did a lot of trucks not run because they didn't have parts or they couldn't get parts?

C: Trucks never stopped running.

D: Trucks never stopped.

C: Unless there was a major breakdown. But they'd work their ass off getting those trucks running.

D: Anything else that didn't work right?

C: The guns always worked. If they didn't work, they'd find some way to get one. And they'd go after it. If a truck needed to be going to haul some ammo out to a firing battery, which is like saving somebody's life, they'd go borrow it, they'd steal a truck. They do. They have stolen trucks. They do that, to get stuff out because it's your friends, it's the guys you work with. It's your buddies, you know, they have to do that.

There is a big waste. The government--I don't know how to explain this but--there's so many things they got that they don't need and so many things they need that they don't have. Well you can see, look at the stockpile of junk they've got. I think it's up in Vienna, [Ohio] they have machinery, machinery that's been sitting there from World War II never been used; never been used! They want ten cents on a dollar for it. That's what they're selling it for.

Look what they did to those helicopters. We paid for those helicopters that they pushed off those ships off of Saigon. They just shoved them overboard.

D: You're referring to the recent evacuation?

C: Yes. The Vietnamese pilots, South Vietnamese pilots, they'd be running scared and they'd take the helicopter and they'd land on a ship and they'd just push them overboard. Who paid for those? We did. Just the biggest waste of money. So many of my friends died for nothing over there, I just can't believe it. Just a big waste; it's just one big waste, lives and money, that's all it is.

D: Did you ever have an experience with prisoners? Were any prisoners ever kept near where you were?

C: No. They had the military prisoners up in Long Bien, the LBJ they called it, it was Long Bien Jail. I don't know if there were any Viet Cong or Vietnamese prisoners in there, or I should say NVA or Viet Cong prisoners in there, but there were a lot of military prisoners in there.

D: Our own?

C: Our own.

D: What kind of a thing would . . . ?

C: For drugs, stealing, killing. A lot of men are killed over there by each other.

D: In fights?

C: Fights, yes. A lot of men are killed in that prison fighting. They say that's the worst place to be was in LBJ. Either they're getting beat up or stabbed. This is from hearsay now, I don't know anything personal about it, but you do something wrong you know, drugs or stealing, anything like that, they'll put you there. That's all bad time, too. If you're sentence is six months, that's six months tacked on to your regular tour. That's all I know about the prison. I never saw any prisoners or anything like that.

D: Were the weapons you used all pretty good? Did they take good care of the weapons?

C: Well they were until they got the M-16. We used to have the M-14. Now for the guys out in the fields the M-16 would be the best because it's the lightest. The M-14 weighs about thirteen pounds and the M-16 weighs about five, at the most; that's loaded. Half way through my tour over there, we changed from the M-14 to the M-16s. They're both pretty good guns.

D: Did they have any difficulty?

C: No. At one time they did but, you always have to keep a gun clean no matter what kind of gun it is. But I guess they did have; I read about it that they

did have difficulties in those M-16s.

D: Did you have any difficulty adjusting to the climate, the water, the bugs, anything like that?

C: The bugs were about all. That's all. The climate, it was pretty hot, but in the rain, like in the monsoon season, where we were at between four and seven [o'clock] you could count on rain. It would come down, and it would flood the place. By noon the next day it was all dry.

D: When you were in the field, you're strictly with your artillery batteries?

C: Yes.

D: And were these pretty much permanent placements?

C: No. They traveled.

D: You traveled. How much did you travel?

C: I didn't travel too much in particular, just like from Qui Chi to Tay Ninh. Just right around the area. We had other batteries that constantly stayed out in the field, never came in. We organized a new one, it was D Battery, that stayed out in the field all the time.

And Charlie Battery, Second and Thirteen Artillery since it'd been in Vietnam, when I was there, they fired one million rounds. I don't know how long they'd been there, I think since 1965 till, this was in 1968, they fired a million rounds. They had six guns. Now if you ask if I ever killed anybody, no, and I hope to God I never do. I never even aimed my gun at anybody. I shot it, but I never aimed it. Picked out a person and shot at him, I never would do that. I don't want to kill nobody.

D: Did people over there who did kill people and knew they did--did it affect them in any way, do you think?

C: Oh, yes. For a while.

D: They harden to it.

C: Yes, you get used to it. I mean, just like anything else, just like a cop would have to get used to killing somebody.

D: Did you ever think in terms of when you shot that artillery if somebody out there was being killed?

C: As long as I didn't see it, it didn't bother me.

D: You didn't see it?

C: I was hoping all the time I didn't. I don't want to kill nobody. I think of when I was over there if I had the choice, I'd die before I'd kill somebody. I really think I would. They say kill or be killed. I'd die. I wouldn't want that on my conscience. I probably could have killed somebody; I have no idea of knowing. But I just hope I never did.

D: Was there anything over there that really, really frustrated you or really made you mad during the time that you were there that stands out in your mind?

C: Oh, I imagine there were a few. Let me think about it. I think there were quite a few things. People deserving rank that never got it. I mean we had people that, just because you don't know too much, like one guy was over here, he came over there PFC; and he had a PFC about a month before he left. There was no need for that. He was a good worker, an honest person; and he was the only one who stayed awake with me on guard duty. He was a real nice guy, he never caused trouble, never was loud, did everything he was told, and never got a rank.

I don't know why I got it. Matter of fact, I didn't care whether I got it or not. Just extra money that kid lost. He was married, too. That's just extra money he was out. There was no reason why he shouldn't have gotten it. That was about the only thing I believe.

It's just the idea that some of these guys think they're hot stuff and they try to force you around; and you get these guys that are called, they're acting sergeants, they're just the same rank as you, E4, but they're "acting Jacks." And they would try to boss you around. Nobody liked that. He'd been there a few months and they made him acting Jack just because he's a kiss-ass, which a kissing-ass

will get you anywhere in the service. It will.

Then they'd give him an "acting Jack" or they'd even make him a sergeant or something like that. Nobody liked that at all.

D: Well Rick, after spending thirteen months in Vietnam what's your general impression of the country itself and the people?

C: Well, the country was, I wouldn't say it was beautiful, I imagine it was before they bombed it. And they bombed it so much now probably nothing will ever even grow there. Downtown Saigon was about the nicest place that I ever seen. Cam Ranh Bay is a beautiful beach, would be a beautiful beach resort if it wasn't a military thing.

But the people, they were poor; they'd farm rice, some lived in shacks, some of them were made out of cardboard boxes and smashed tin cans nailed together. It's hard to give you an idea what I think of the people because I imagine there were some people that really hate, I know there's a lot of Vietnamese that hated the Americans and there's a lot of people that liked us being there. I think during the last few years of the war I imagine there were a lot of people that wished we were gone, you know.

I feel like, they're finally at rest now. They're just being mellowed. They're just done fighting and that's it, no matter what it is.

D: Are you talking about now?

C: Yes, because after thirty-five years of war it would be nice just to go to sleep. Just like working all day and tired and just wanting to lay down. Well, I hate to say it but I think that's about the nicest thing ever to happen to that country, just let them take them over, to stop them from fighting.

But the country, like our outskirts of town are really beautiful compared to our downtown in some cities. But their downtown is beautiful and their outsides are, like on the outskirts of Saigon, where the fish markets are I mean there's places there where you go by and you actually throw up. That's how bad it stinks. They have one river going through there, I forget what the name of it is but

it looks like it's full of oil. It's just black and their houses are built on top of it.

And I've been in a few of the homes in downtown and a few of the bars downtown Saigon and they're scrubby and they cheated the American serviceman, they charge him $1.80 for a can of his own beer. It was made in the United States. A pallet of beer would cost you $250 and like I would have been able to sell it, which I didn't do, for $600 and make that much profit, on the black market.

The people, they'll screw you, they'll kill you; or they can be very nice to you, they can love you. There's so many different types of people. Just like here. But, they're out to make a buck, because they don't have it. And we got it. And they figure they'd take us for it. I imagine if we were in their places, we'd do the same thing. It's just that they've been going through this so long that they just have to live that way. You imagine, 35 years ago, the guys that are 25 years old and 30 years old, that's all they ever seen, nothing but war. So how are they going to act? They can't be actually normal because what's normal to them--war.

D: Would you, if another war ever broke out there or if the Americans ever got involved again, could you go back there? Would you go back?

C: If I was drafted? Sure I would. That wouldn't stop me.

D: What is it that would make you go back?

C: If they wanted me back, I'd go. If the Vietnamese people wanted me back, I'd go. I really would. And I wouldn't take an artillery job. I wouldn't take a desk job. I would want to be there to stop somebody from doing something that they're not supposed to be doing to somebody else.

D: In other words, you feel that being in the artillery and doing the things you did over there, you really didn't contribute that much?

C: Yes, I know I did. But personally I don't think, like I said I wouldn't, at the time I hope I didn't kill nobody, but if those people actually, if they

took a vote and wanted us back, I'd go over there and I'd fight for them. I really would. I don't know if I should think that way or not. That's the way I think; people think different things.

D: Would you go as a tourist? Would you like to go back?

C: Sure, I would love to. I really would love to.

D: What areas?

C: Same area I was in.

D: The ones you were in?

C: Saigon, and about ten to twenty miles north, what I know, what I've seen before, and would like to see what it is now. And I probably will never be able to.

D: Is there anybody from your experience over there that stands out in your mind that you think in the future is a memorable character?

C: Well, we had this one "hooch girl." A nice girl. I mean the type of girl you wouldn't even want to mess around, just a nice, friendly girl that, she'd come in and she'd talk to you. Me and her got along real well. I mean I never made any passes at her or anything like that, just a nice girl. She lived down the road from the camp. She spoke very little English but you could understand her and she wanted us there. She didn't want Communism or anything like that.

I'd go and I'd buy stuff for her and in order for her to take it home I had to write out a note saying that she could take the stuff home, just candy and a little bit of cosmetics and stuff like that, they'd have never had and never would have you know, but she was a real nice girl and I really felt sorry for her. And I didn't get to say good-bye to her when I left, because I left in kind of a hurry and they weren't there in camp yet. But that's about the only one.

D: What's your opinion of what's been happening lately, you know with the take-over, Communist take-over? How do you feel about that, having served there and

taking the risks that you did?

C: I feel this way: Say you worked real hard to try and build something for your kids, say a little tree house or even a bicycle or a wooden wagon or something that you worked real hard on and these kids wanted real bad; and somebody came up to the kids and they took it. And there's no way in hell you can get it back. Nobody can help you get it back, the law. And he's just standing there and he has it. And the law won't help you.

Just the way I feel. Just like something took something away from me. There's nothing I can do; but I cried when I heard about that. I really did. I really felt bad. I really felt bad for the two kids I went to high school with and one kid I was in the service with and all three of them died for nothing. Larry Wagner and Dave Protane, two kids I went to high school with and Rick Bresh, the one that was in Vietnam, he was there for three years. It was my two closest friends, and they died for nothing.

We can't do nothing about it; we should have done something about it. We should have at least gave them the money to help. Or maybe stayed there, not get out. Or stuck up for our promises that we would help them in case the North Vietnamese would start again. I guess President Nixon signed a paper stating that he would help them or something like that. We should have done it. We shouldn't have let them down like that. We really shouldn't have.

You invest so much, so many lives and just leave it? I don't see where that's fair. Maybe the people over there wanted us out. It would be nice to take a vote and see how many that wanted us there and how many didn't want us there; how many wanted us to come back, how many don't want us to come back. Then they go from there. But there's no way we can take that now. I imagine a few months ago we could have. But soon as Thieu gave up that first province he was downhill all the way. I kind of blame him. He shouldn't have gave up nothing. He shouldn't have gave up a thing.

D: Were you aware at the time you were there of all the politics that was being played with the war?

C: Sure, that's all it was, is political.

D: Did you realize that at the time that you were there?

C: Before I went I didn't but when I got there I did. It was moneymaking. I figured it was that, politics, and the bankers, because the bankers control the money. And the bankers invest money. And what better place to invest than in the war? Right?

D: Right.

C: So, somebody gets their pockets full and somebody gets voted in. I figured that's all it was.

D: Well, is there anything else that you can think of at this point that you'd like to add that we may not have covered?

C: There shouldn't be. I just don't feel that we should give up like that. Let people take things that don't belong to them. I mean if the people in Vietnam wanted Communism, let them have it. If the majority don't, why should we let them do that? I'm starting to believe in that domino theory myself. They're all going, right down the line. And I do believe it's going to hit at our door one of these days. It already has, actually.

I've talked to many of the guys in the service, "Well this is a bunch of baloney, they're going to attack us." Well, Japan did it, they attacked us. Just because it's a little country doesn't mean they can't do something. Look how many men they killed. It's just that it's going to be here one of these days and I bet you that I'm going to see it. I'm going to see it come.

D: Do you mean in your lifetime you're going to have to face it?

C: In my lifetime, sure. Look at that, they took South Vietnam, they took Cambodia and Laos, in how long? A couple months.

D: Yes.

C: That's three countries. Thailand and Burma's next. And South Korea, eventually. And this is the way it's going. They're all going to go. There's nothing you can do about it. Well, there is plenty you can do about it but it's just the idea, that

people are getting so disgusted with it now that they don't want to fight; they're going to have to.

They're either going to fight over there or fight it right in their yard. And I would never have thought of that ever happening. You know, how could they have a war like that here? But it's going to happen. It really is. It's going to start somewhere small, some other place of ours like the Philippines, they're going to go in there and tamper with that.

And then you have like this clown that I read in the paper the other day giving secret information to the Soviets. All they did with him is put him in jail for five, ten years. They should have strung that guy up. Forty-four-year-old career Air Force sergeant or something like that. When you're in the service to protect your country, protect it, don't fool around with it.

D: How did you feel about the retaking of the Mia Guez? Do you think we handled it right?

C: Yes, but I don't even know now. How long has it been? I don't even know how many guys are gone? Fourteen, fifteen, three dead, five dead, one dead? They're so goddam confused they make me sick. Yes, I think we should have done it that way. I mean I'm glad they tried other ways first but if that's the only way he could have done it, hey, it's ours.

I don't like that happening to us but I don't want to get slapped in the face no more by countries that think they can just push us around now because we backed out of one war. I don't like killing, I don't like violence or anything like that but you got to stick up for what's yours; if you don't, you might as well not even have it to begin with.

D: It would be first time you back down that . . .

C: Sure, they slapped us right in the face with their shit, that's just what they tried to do. They figured well, we don't want to get involved with Cambodia, but we showed them. But we shouldn't have done it like that.

D: Did you have any experience with the Cambodians when you were over there?

C: We had some Cambodian refugees who were over there working for the American government. Just hooch girls and stuff like that. That's all.

D: You didn't gain any information from them as far as how they felt about Americans?

C: No. Most of the people that worked on the camp couldn't speak English and the ones that did speak English had something to do with the military anyway, so you never know. The average soldier would never know.

D: Well, I'd like to thank you for the interview.

C: I wish there was more to tell you.

D: Well if you think of anything else, you can always let me know or even when you get the transcript, you can add to it if you want. Okay, that'll mark the end of the interview.

END OF INTERVIEW