

YOUNGSTOWN STATE UNIVERSITY

ORAL HISTORY PROGRAM

Veterans Project

Vietnam Experience

O. H. 701

JAMES HOFFMAN

Interviewed

by

Dale Voitus

on

November 4, 1982

JAMES F. HOFFMAN

James F. Hoffman was born July 31, 1943. He is the son of John F. and Rita J. Hoffman. His early years were spent in the Wellsville area. From an early age he attended Catholic schools in anticipation of becoming a priest. This career choice ended in 1968 and resulted in his immediate drafting by the United States Army. His extensive education enabled him to attend the school of his choice within the Army. From here his career took him to Vietnam, a one year tour. He was assigned to an aviation unit, and was responsible for keeping the supply side of the house in order. This he did to the Army's complete satisfaction; witness his Army Commendation Medal with Oak leaf cluster. Jim's year in Vietnam was full of many experiences with the population and fellow soldiers.

After his discharge, Jim furthered his education obtaining a Master of Business Administration degree from Youngstown State University in 1978. He currently works in the Accounting Department of the Homes Savings & Loan Company and teaches limited service at Youngstown State University.

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INTERVIEWEE: JAMES HOFFMAN

INTERVIEWER: Dale Voitus

SUBJECT: schools, helicopters, Vietnamese people,
drugs, training, Army

DATE: November 4, 1982

V: This is an interview with James F. Hoffman for the Youngstown State University Oral History Program, by Dale J. Voitus, at the Home Savings & Loan Building, on November 4, 1982, at 7:50 p.m.

Tell me a little bit about your background and your family if you would.

H: I was born in Salem, Ohio on July 31, 1943. My parents were living in East Liverpool at the time. My mother was originally from Salem, so she had gone back there to have her children. I lived in East Liverpool until I was about five years old, and my parents moved to Wellsville. I was educated in a four room eight grade school, Immaculate Conception, which was the local Catholic school there. At the end of eighth grade I went away to St. Gregory's Seminary in Cincinnati, and I was studying for the Catholic priesthood. I was at St. Gregory's for six years--four years of high school, two years of college. I moved on to Mt. St. Mary's in Norwood which is another suburb of Cincinnati, and I was there for another four and a half years. I had completed college and two and a half years of theology.

I have a brother who is one year older and a sister who is twelve years younger. My brother is an engineer; he has an M. B. A. degree. My sister is a nurse in Washington, D. C. My brother lives in Annapolis, Maryland; he just moved there because of relocating for a job; he is in the steel industry. His mill closed, so he had to move.

My father died when I was approximately nineteen. Having

left home at such an early age it is hard to say that I'm a very close-knit family type person. I have deep family feelings, but I don't feel that tied to family. I'm more of an independent person which sometimes upsets my family. My father was a steelworker; my mother had been a bookkeeper until the time she was married. After my father's death she first went back to school for two years to brush up on business techniques because she had been out of the working field for about twenty-two years. She is now a head bookkeeper for a local automobile agency.

My brother is a graduate of the University of Cincinnati and has a Master's degree from Kent State. My sister graduated from Trumbull Memorial Hospital in Warren and got her R. N. degree; she graduated last year from American University in Washington, D. C. She now has a B. S. in nursing.

I did not receive any degrees while I was in the seminary, which is a long story in itself. After I got out of the army I did graduate from Youngstown State University in 1973 with a bachelor of science in business administration, accounting major. In 1979 I got my M. B. A. in accounting and presently do some part-time teaching in accounting/finance at Youngstown State University.

V: That pretty much covers your family background. What motivated you to become a soldier of the United States Army?

H: Right after I got out of the seminary the first thing I did was I talked with my draft board to find out what my draft status was. They told me that I would be 1A, which is eligible for the draft--I think that is what it meant. I asked if I could get a deferment since I still didn't have a college degree. When I was looking for a job, nobody wanted to hire me because I was 1A and I didn't have a degree. So I decided that I was going to have to get a part-time job and try to get through school. They told me that if I went back to school, I could get a deferment.

So I got back; I started at YSU (Youngstown State University) in the Spring quarter of that year, 1968. I was already in school when I got a notice from the draft board telling me that I had to report to Cleveland for my preinduction physical. I called the draft board and asked what was going on. They told me that if I got into school and applied for a deferment that it would be okay. Then I told them that I got this notice from the draft board. They said that I wasn't going to get a deferment because I was too old for an undergraduate deferment and that I was going to have to report to the preinduction physical.

That sort of bothered me. With my background I had no qualms about going into the army, but I could not see myself as somebody who was an infantry soldier. When you are hearing in the headlines on the news every night so many killed and body counts and this and that and the other thing, it really distressed me because I was just afraid to be a soldier. I decided that the only way I was going to solve this dilemma was to enlist and to try to get a better job than if I were drafted. I assumed that if I were drafted I would have to be in infantry.

I talked to the recruiters and got into the delay entry program and managed to postpone getting into the army until August of that year. I think it was like August 22 or something like that of 1968 I boarded the train at Youngstown and headed to Cleveland for the army. So that was my motivation; I didn't want to be an infantryman and figured I could get a better job if I enlisted. It was inevitable that I would go one way or the other, so I chose to go myself.

V: Did that accomplish your goal? Were you able to not become an infantryman?

H: Right. On the delay entry program they guaranteed me a choice of school. They told you what ones were available, and they didn't lie. There were some that I wanted that they just simply told me were closed that they had no openings in those fields. At the time I was playing with the idea of being an accountant, and they had a classification called stock control and accounting specialist. I didn't know what the term meant, and they really didn't give you too great of an idea of what it was getting into, but it sounded like something I might be interested in. So I signed up for it. Obviously, they weren't going to give you an accounting degree, but it seemed like something that would be compatible with my inclinations at the time.

The only part that bothered me was that the agreement that they had with you did state t h a t you had to complete basic training on time. If for any reason you didn't complete basic training in the allotted time the army did not have to fulfill its agreement with you. However, they would make all effort, if they could, to fulfill that agreement. At the time I signed that it didn't particularly bother me because I had no idea then that I wouldn't get out of basic training on time. As it turned out the army did still send me to stock control and accounting school even though I got out of basic training four weeks later than I was originally scheduled to be.

I had heard a lot of things. People told me not to enlist and not to sign up for anything with the army and not to make

an agreement because you never knew what you were going to get into. When I was recycled in basic training, that particular day in my life I thought I was going to be an infantry soldier. I just couldn't see myself doing that. But my big concern after that was just getting out of basic training and then worrying about what was going to happen after that later. It was a great relief when I actually got called in. I will never forget that day--the end of basic.

They called you in and the drill sergeant was sitting there with a clipboard. You had to stand in line in alphabetical order. You would go up and he would tell you where you were going. That was the first idea of what you knew was going to happen to you.

At the time everybody was going to Fort Polk, Louisiana and there was one out in Fort Ord, California I think. I heard that with so many of the guys in front of me. When I got up there, he said Fort Lee, Virginia. I just about went nuts. I knew I had my school because my school was in Fort Lee, Virginia. Truthfully, I can't say that I ever heard of anybody that the army didn't honor their agreement. I never met anybody at the time I was in the army that said that the army didn't honor their agreement either.

V: That's good to know. Explain or tell us how and when you were sent to Vietnam. For what reason? Was your unit shipped out? What were the circumstances surrounding your going to Vietnam?

H: This is like a continuation of the last question. When I got to Fort Lee, Virginia, I was there for stock control and accounting school. I finished stock control and accounting school first in my class. In fact they were somewhat amazed, and I'm still quite proud of what I did. It really wasn't that hard considering the educational background I had been exposed to, but I had gotten through school. I had scored 100 on every test. I think I got a 99 on the final or something like that. Anyhow, at the graduation ceremonies the colonel or general or whoever was there--I was still awed by all of these high-ranking officers at that time--he made about a five minute speech about how this had never happened in the history of stock control and accounting and that this was really tremendous to have somebody in this class to finish with such high marks.

It was really a pretty good class. Most of the people who I was in AIT with--advanced infantry training, I think they called it or advanced individual training or whatever it stood for--were pretty sharp. Most of them had been in college at one point or another; so they weren't slouches. It was a pretty good group.

Most of us then got sent on to a second school. The stock control and accounting specialists trained you in general how to operate a stock control system in the army. Then what they did they sent us on to a second school. You learned how to do it in a particular field. I went from stock control school to automotive repair parts school at Fort Lee. What they did was they just shipped us from one company to the next company; we did another school.

After that we got our orders. They had been telling us all along--they being rumors by people who worked in the orderly room or whatever, no high-powered source--that most of our class would be going to Germany. They said there was a shortage over in Germany and we were just graduating at the right time and that we would basically all be going to Germany. We all believed it. The day that the orders came down they were posted on the bulletin board outside of the orderly room of our company. Two people got sent to Germany and everyone else got sent to Vietnam.

If your orders were that you were going to be at Vietnam, when we finished our school, we then had to go through some sort of Vietnam something or other training. In that training basically what they did was teach you as a supply person what you might have to encounter in Vietnam in procuring or shipping out repair parts. So we had to go to this place that they had set up. It was called the Vietnam Village. We went over somewhere not too far from Fort Lee where they had this set-up. We had to learn how to convoy, what to look for in the way of ambush, what to do in case we were; then they showed you how to go through jungles and all that good stuff. I have to admit that I was a disaster.

In fact toward the end of the training we had to qualify then with the M-16 because in basic we had only used the M-14's. Knowing that they were using the M-16's it was nice that they introduced us to the M-16 before we got over there; so we had to requalify with that. I had qualified expert with the M-14, but for some unknown reason I couldn't hit the broad side of the barn with the M-16. But I did manage to score high enough that I qualified with the weapon. What they thought I was trying to do was get out of going to Vietnam.

At that time this sergeant was telling me that he hoped I would get a good assignment when I went to Vietnam because he said that I would get myself killed unless I would wake up. Everything you could do wrong in that Vietnam training, I did it. I would have killed myself five times a day, I think, if I had actually been in the situation that they had presented for us. They gave you clues as to what to expect.

You knew what you were going into; you knew it wasn't the real thing, but you also knew that something could happen. It was out there to be seen; it was up to us to protect ourselves instead of getting a bomb or a smoke grenade, any little thing like that just to shake you up a little bit. I'm telling you; I was the world's worst.

After that--I think it was either a week or two weeks; it wasn't much longer than that--we had thirty days at home, and I had to go to Fort Lewis, Washington, and then they shipped us over.

V: Where were you sent? Tell us about your first experiences when you got there. Where were you sent? Where was your station? What did you actually do? How did your training relate to your actual job?

H: I landed at Camranh Bay. From Camranh Bay they processed me to Dong Tam. That was headquarters for the 1st aviation group. In Dong Tam they cut my orders and they sent me to Vung Tau which was on the South China Sea and happened to be in the in-country R & R center. I was attached or assigned to the AH1G training team which was a unique company that was directly under orders of USARV, which stood for United States Army Republic of Vietnam which was at that time headed by General Westmoreland. We were pretty much of an elite unit although I didn't understand this at the time until I got there.

As I was being processed in the country all these clerks would say, "Going to Vung Tau. Oh, my God." I was getting one snide remark after the other. I thought I was going into the hotbed of action. When I got there that night, they flew me out on a chinook helicopter to Vung Tau. I learned about tracer bullets in the army, but that was my first experience at seeing them. By the time I landed there having seen all of those tracer bullets coming up toward the helicopter I was almost a basket case before they ever got me on the ground.

I got to Vung Tau. I got to my unit. My orders were that I was to be a stock control and accounting specialist in an aviation unit. It was a helicopter training school where pilots who were already qualified to fly H-models, C-models, and D-model Bell helicopters--Bell is the name of the company that manufactured these helicopters--were sent to our unit to learn how to fly the Cobra helicopter which was the attack helicopter.

It was a small unit. We probably had no more than thirty or forty enlisted men and probably twelve or fifteen officers in the unit. The officers were the instructors, and most of the enlisted men were either helicopter repair specialists,

first sergeant, clerk in the orderly room, clerk in the maintenance hanger, and the rest of them were all maintenance people that worked on the helicopters.

My specific job was to account for the repair parts being used and to keep the authorized amount on hand so that no time was lost due to a lack of repair parts. There should have been two people working in what they called the slot, but the unit never did in the time that I was there, except for a very brief time, have two people working in the slot. When I first got there, I was trained by the guy who was leaving. So while I was there and he was there, there were two people working as aviation repair parts specialists and stock control specialists.

When Myers left, that left me by myself; I was busy, but it had its advantages that I didn't have to pull any duties because I was actually doing the work of two people. The CP told me that whatever I had to do to do it and just keep those helicopters flying. I didn't have to stand formation in the mornings. Whatever time I got up--which was always before the time that I was supposed to be up-- I would go to the mess hall and eat and immediately walk over to the hanger which was about a half of a mile away, and I would start working.

I would sometimes work a lot longer than the rest of the other people. We had two shifts of repair people who were always doing the PM's or any repairs that had to be made to the helicopters. I didn't always have to be there because they knew how to get a part if I wasn't there, but I basically felt and preferred being there because they didn't get a chance to mess up my records. I worked long, hard hours, but I loved it. It wasn't tough.

I worked for warrant officers. Most of those officers-- I said we had fifteen--were warrant officers, and that was something that was a new experience to me. I didn't even know what a warrant officer was until suddenly I was in this unit where they had all of these warrant officers. I had to learn what a CW-1, CW-2, CW-3 was.

I worked for CW-3 Herb Sidel. He had been born in Germany, came to this country, and joined the army. He was a marvelous man. If I could adopt a father after my own father had died, I would have adopted him; he just treated me like I was his son. You could do no wrong in his eyes. He backed me up whenever there were any problems and told me that I couldn't work sixteen or eighteen hours a day. He told me that I could take time off in the middle of the afternoon to take a break and then come back and work some more. He told me

that I couldn't work the hours that I was trying to work.

For the rest of my time there I had a pretty good time. My family never believed it when I was over there and a lot of people still don't believe it when I tell them today, but I would get up early, go to the hanger, and I would go to work. About the middle of the afternoon when it was really hot, I usually could bum one of the jeeps off one of the warrant officers who was out teaching flying. I knew what time they would be flying in. I would take one of the jeeps, and I would drive out to the army beach out on the seacoast on the South China Sea. There was a beach specifically for American personnel assigned in Vung Tau and for the army personnel. If I couldn't get a jeep, there were army buses that ran from the airfield through downtown Vung Tau and out to the beaches. In the afternoon I usually took a jeep; I drove out to the beach, changed into my swimming suit out there, went swimming in the afternoon, ate some fresh pineapple, would get back in my jeep, drive back to the hanger, go back to work, and I would have the jeep back to the flight line in time for whatever warrant officer it was to get back.

My family couldn't believe that I really had that good of an assignment as I kept trying to tell them that I had. I guess when your family is hearing on the news every night about how bad things are over there and they see what some of the people were exposed to they kind of felt that I was trying not to tell them the truth for fear that they would be worrying. In reality, I was telling them the truth. That is not to say it wasn't dangerous where I was because I don't think that there was anyplace in Vietnam that you could be that it wasn't dangerous.

V: Did at any time your job at this marvelous place require that you had to go up into the helicopters themselves for whatever reason? Did you have to fly, or were you exposed to flying in any way?

H: Not a whole lot, but, yes, I did have to fly. Our headquarters were in Dong Tam as I mentioned. They moved later on to Vinh Long, but while I was there, basically they were in Vung Tau. If I had to fly over to headquarters for anything, we would go over there. It wasn't until almost the end of my time in the unit that we actually got a H-model helicopter which has a seating capacity, I think, of eight; that included the gunner seats. But the Cobras that we had when we had to go someplace to fly were two seat helicopters because they weren't attack helicopters.

One of my favorite television shows is "M*A*S*H". I always get a big kick out of Radar and what he would go through swapping parts or items to get whatever the medics needed.

It wasn't too far-fetched. A lot of times we needed something to get a helicopter up and get it up fast. So what you did was you called around to other places to find out who had an extra one of whatever, who could spare something. You ordered the one that you needed; you went to their place, got their part, used it, and when yours came in, you got it back to them. It wasn't really the swap system that you see Radar use, but there was a thing like--I will give you this one and when yours comes in, you get it back to me; so the people could keep the helicopters flying.

Consequently, we had to fly around different places to get those. I would have to go with Sidel. He said to me one day when we were flying, "You know, Jim, you are going to have to learn to fly this." I thought it was really neat. I said, "I can't fly, but I would like to try." He said, "I'm telling you; you are going to have to fly because there is only the two of us. If something ever happens that we get hit and, for instance, I would get hit, you have got to be able to at least land the damn thing and get help for us." He taught me the basics of flying the helicopter. He did teach me how to fly. I never took off; I never landed from the airfield, but he did teach me landing out in the marshes or swamps or whatever you want it call it. Just in case anything did happen I would be prepared to do it.

There were occasions that I did have to go out with him to go pick up repair parts, and we would not be fully loaded. The ammo doors underneath would not be filled; that was where we would put the parts. We would go pick up these parts we needed and fly back and do business as usual.

That is probably an experience in the army that I didn't anticipate I would ever get near. It is one that I will always enjoy, and unfortunately, it has made me a disastrous flyer.

Until I started flying helicopters I was a very comfortable flyer in a fixed wing aircraft. I think Mr. Sidel did a psych job on me. He got me so convinced that the only way to fly was in a rotary helicopter, rotary winged aircraft, that when I get into a fixed winged aircraft now I wonder what is going to happen. I knew as long as I was up in that other one if you had your tail rotor going and your main rotor blades going, even if you lost your engine, the force of the air would keep them going and that you could get down.

I guess when you are flying, you shouldn't worry about what is going to happen or not. That is something that is still with me. Every time I think of the times I was flying with him I think I became so adjusted to the helicopter and I enjoyed it so much that I'm not that comfortable on a jet

flyer at this point.

V: What was your exposure to or did you meet any of the civilians that were there and how do you think they felt about the United States' presence in Vietnam?

H: The civilians that I met first were the ones who actually worked on the air base. They supposedly were government cleared; local nationals I think they called them. They all had their identification cards; they came on post, and they surrendered their Vietnamese identification card. They had to wear outside on their clothing their base identification card. That's how they could control how many civilians were on the post because their local cards were at the gate. Those were the first ones who I met. They worked in the PX; they worked in the barbershop, at the EM clubs, all the facilities that we had at the air base. There was also a medivac hospital at Vung Tau, so they worked in the hospital; so consequently, they were all over the base.

We had mamasans who came in, and they cleaned up our hootches as they were called or barracks--whatever you want to call them--washed our clothes, and that was unique. They washed your clothes every day. Every day you had clean, pressed, starched fatigues overseas. They shined your shoes. I forget what we paid them. I think we paid them \$10 of MPC. We weren't allowed to use American currency; we had military script; they called it MPC, and you paid them \$10 of MPC a month. I think it was \$10; I'm sure it was. It always bothered me. I felt like I was really ripping them off to only pay them \$10 to work for me for a whole month, but you had to supply your own shoe polish and soap powder and starch. You supplied everything that they needed, but you paid them.

You did not pay them direct. You had to pay the first sergeant, and the first sergeant paid them. Whether they got the money or not, I don't know. That was to control those who were working there. If one guy didn't like one mamasan and he got another mamasan, she had all the business and she was making all the money and the others weren't; there was going to be some sort of a problem. In the interest of fairness and equity, everybody paid the first sergeant and then the first sergeant paid the mamasans who worked in our unit. How it was divided up and whatever, I don't know. I didn't work in the orderly room, so I didn't know anything about that.

In my unit after I made SPEC-5, which wasn't too long after I was over there . . . By the way, I made SPEC-4 when I graduated from my first school in Fort Lee, Virginia, which was part of the agreement that I made with the army or they made with me when I enlisted that if I completed my school, I would be made a SPEC-4. Here I was an E-4 or a SPEC-4

when I got to Vietnam having only been in the army for six months or a little more than that. I forget whatever the minimum was to make SPEC-5 at the time. The minute I came up for it--my unit put me up for it--I went before the promotion board and I made SPEC-5. As soon as I did that I had my pass on me twenty-four hours a day.

This was a sort of unique unit as I said before. Things weren't all probably what the army would have liked (done by the book), but it was a morale booster to our unit because the guys were dedicated and they worked long and they worked hard as I did. The CO felt that we were responsible enough that if we had the time and we wanted to go downtown for something, we should have our passes so that we didn't have to do all the finagling around signing out for a pass and all that stuff. The only thing we did do was that we signed out at the orderly room that we were going into town so that they knew in case anything happened they could find out where you were. You did not have to sign if you were going to the beaches; as long as you were in a military vehicle, you did not have to sign that you were leaving post.

Consequently, the times after that when I made SPEC-5 I would start going downtown. I met some of the local people down there. What did they think of the Americans? I really never knew. The mamasans were obviously glad that we were there. They did not speak a whole lot of English, but they appeared to be not dumb people. I considered them to be very bright people. I learned less of their language than they did of mine.

The mamasans would talk to me about their brothers, fathers, husbands who were fighting in the Vietnamese army. I never really got a clear idea from any of them if they knew why they were at war, who they were at war with. I think they had been at war for so long that war was a way of life to them, and it just maybe only seemed that if was part of life; they never communicated to me how they felt about it other than they felt they should be winning. They wanted us there for that.

I also got the impression that they liked us over there for our money because there was a lot of black market activity. I truthfully have to say that we would go . . . I mentioned early that you had to supply your mamasan with your own soap powder and boot polish or whatever it took for her to do your clothes. She would leave . . . Most of the time we would come back to the company for lunch or she would see you in the morning before you left for the hanger. She would say what she needed, and you would go get it.

On my few trips that I made downtown it was incredible to see all this Tide on the shelves of all these stores and

Esquire Boot Polish and various items that they were taking with them out the gate. Who was to say that somebody didn't give it to them to take or whatever. They were never stopped; they didn't take things of great value, but they were taking these little things. It was a source of extra money to them. So I'm really kind of confused even now as to what they felt of my being there, whether I was more of an economic boost to them or whether they really wanted us over there.

They could not understand Americans at all. The mamasans couldn't; I know that. I remember I was there when the astronauts first landed on the moon. I can remember my own excitement; it was during the night there that they landed on the moon. I didn't sleep at all that night. I had the radio on and was listening to it on our armed forces radio. It wasn't a very good reception but we were probably getting as much as you were getting back here. It was just incredibly exciting for me.

I can remember mamasan came in the next morning. We were getting ready to go to work. I said, "Mamasan, what do you think? Americans have landed on the moon." She said, "No Bik; no bik." That meant she didn't understand. I said, "GI." She shook her head yes. I said, "On the moon." She shook her head no and said, "No bik; no bik; no bik." The moon was still out. We were pointing to the moon. We said, "Mamasan, do you see up in the sky?" She would shake her head yes and say, "Bik, bik, bik." We would say, "Moon," and she would give us the Vietnam word for moon. She said that she understood. We said, "Mamasan, GI on the moon." She said, "No bik, no bik, no bik, no bik." She just couldn't understand what we were talking about, that we had GI's--which was the only thing she could understand--that American GI's were on the moon. She used to tease us about that for months afterwards and laugh like crazy that we had done this. Now it was in their papers; you could see it downtown where you were walking. They just had a hard time grasping that these crazy Americans could do something like that.

The Vietnamese locals who you dealt with downtown in Vung Tau were glad to get your money. We were allowed to go to restaurants, but there were lists of those that you had to stay away from. You were cautioned as to not to eat uncooked vegetables over there because of dysentery problems. Those locals who you dealt with downtown, my definite feelings were that they were only glad that I was there because I was a source of money. I was an economic source to them. If it weren't for that, probably most of them wouldn't have tolerated us.

V: How about you and your fellow soldiers? How did you feel about your presence there? Did you feel you were doing anything good for the Vietnamese as far as helping them to advance their economy and their knowledge of democracy or what was going on in the rest of the world? Did you feel that they were learning anything by our presence there?

H: Not really that way. I just think that those who worked on base were probably the loyal ones. That is probably how they got to be on base in the first place. Their families had been connected with the war, and they looked at us as being there with their brothers, fathers, uncles, whatever. I didn't feel that we were doing that much for them.

I myself tried to get involved. There was a Catholic orphanage across the street from the airfield. On some of my free time on weekends I would go over there and try to play with the kids and help the local priest who ran the orphanage. There was also another Catholic orphanage downtown right on the South China Sea. It was run by a group of sisters. I never really knew what their affiliation was or just what order they were or whatever, but they were a good group of women who really had their hands full. A lot of the children seemed to be diseased, with what I don't know. They had skin diseases or whatever. Sometimes you almost wondered when you were down there playing with them if you weren't going to come up with some sort of a disease or something. But on the other hand, you just felt that these kids needed something because they just clung to you the whole time you were there.

We did things for them at Christmas time. I remember one Christmas I played Santa Claus. Santa Claus came in the back of a truck. We had taken the kids out to the American beaches. We were cooking hot dogs and hamburgers for them. We had gotten potato salad made at the various mess halls; they donated what they had. We had like a little picnic for them for Christmas. We had gone to the PX, and we had bought all of the comic books that we could get our hands on, toothbrushes, toothpaste, chewing gum, stuff like that, and we made up little bags. Then Santa Claus came with a great, big bag over his shoulder. I did my "HO, HO, HO" routine. Some of them didn't know what in the world it was all about, but they thought it was really neat. Santa Claus gave them their little bag.

So I was involved in little things like that where I tried to do my own little thing. Maybe those kids today will think back and remember that the American GI's were really good people and that we were doing something more than just over there ruining their country or whatever they

may feel about that war themselves.

V: Before you said that there was an orphanage across the street and that you helped the Catholic priest.

H: I'm not sure of the affiliation. I think he was responsible to the bishop of Saigon. Whether this was an orphanage that was as we would look at it as an official orphanage as the one downtown run by the group of sisters, or whether he just more or less ended up adopting or taking in these kids . . . He had local people from his parish there helping him cook for these kids. They slept in a great, big room and so forth. It was just a Catholic priest who actually had like a church across the street that developed into an orphanage.

V: This question relates to how you felt about what was going on at home at the time you were over there. How did you feel about the protests that were going on at home while you were over there in Vietnam?

H: It is funny you asked that, and I get choked up. I remember the first war demonstration. I will never forget it. I had been trying to convince my family that I was safe over there. The first demonstration that took place against the war on a massive scale back in this country coincided with the first time while I was stationed in Vung Tau that our air base was bombed by the Vietcong or whomever. I will never forget it. I had such hate in my heart for the people who were demonstrating back here who didn't understand what it was like over there.

I have just been telling you how good it was, but you have to understand what I was really saying was that I was not out in the boonies as they called it going through the jungles of Vietnam carrying a weapon and fighting for my own survival.

No place in Vietnam is like the good, old U.S.A. It was cultural shock when you got there. It took a while to adjust to being in that kind of a climate, with those kind of people, with people with those kind of values; they were uneducated, not stupid people, but they were uneducated. I thought they were extremely bright, but one can be bright and be uneducated. That is what I felt about a lot of them. They were very bright people, but just had not been exposed to education. So it was a real cultural shock.

It was hard being away from family and friends. Having just been out of the seminary and gone through basic training and ending up in a whole new world with some danger . . . I can't say that I lived in fear for my life over there because I really didn't, but that morning when we were shelled, no one from my unit was in the guard post that was hit. I

remember it vividly. We were standing in morning formation. I had slept in that morning and had not gotten to the hanger as early as I did. If I was ever in the company area while they were having a formation, I was required to attend, so I did. We all just got into formation. The first sergeant said whatever he had to say about what was happening that day or any duties or whatever. We were standing there waiting for the first sergeant to come out of the orderly room. We were almost out in the street, and we heard some shells. The sergeant who was standing there with us while we were waiting for the first sergeant to come out said, "Is that in-coming or is that out-going?" Everybody said, "Well, I don't know." We hadn't been exposed to it on a grand scale. We would hear it over on the other side of the airfield more than over on the side where our barracks were. All of a sudden the sergeant yelled, "It is in-coming!" And we all hit the dirt--the sand really; it wasn't dirt; it was all sandy where our barracks were. We were all crawling for cover like crazy. It managed to hit the guard post which would have been maybe 500 feet up the road. It took a direct hit. I happened to look up, I guess just out of curiosity, and I saw two of the guys flying right out of the tower that was hit. I knew one of them.

Our unit was attached to another unit. I even forget the designation of it, but it was an aviation unit of some sort too. We didn't have to pull any of the duties, but they provided us with a mess hall. We shared their kitchen, and we didn't have to do KP or any of that stuff; they more or less hated it, not really, but we weren't that liked in that we didn't pull any duties or anything, but we shared all of the facilities, their arms room, their supply room, whatever. It was one of their men who I knew who died that morning. It was hard. We saw the ambulances go up the street and take him. They took him right to the hospital, but they couldn't save him. It just seemed to me that it was a response of the Vietcong for telling us what they thought of these people who were demonstrating. The demonstrators back here didn't want us over there, and they definitely didn't feel that we belonged there. It really hurt. Every time my mother sent me a paper--she usually sent me the Sunday papers--I would be reading about all of these protests going on back in this country. I just couldn't understand it.

I can remember Cardinal Spellman. He said one time during the Vietnam War, "My country, right or wrong?" He was the official church tie, but he was the military vicar; he was the bishop in charge of all the military chaplains, although they reported into military. He was their bishop; he was our bishop. When I would go to church services occasionally there would be a letter; just as here in our diocese there would be a letter from our local bishop, there might be some

letter written by Cardinal Spellman. Then later it was by whoever replaced him; it has usually been the bishop of New York.

I sort of felt that myself. When I was in the seminary, we studied about the morality of war and specifically talked about the Vietnam War. No actual conclusions were drawn as to whether the Vietnam War was a moral war or an immoral war. In my own mind I pretty much concluded at that time there was no such thing as a moral war; there may be a just war or an unjust side of the war, but there in nothing moral about war. It may be a fact of life that we can never forget, but there is certainly nothing moral about it. That doesn't mean to be a part of the war that you are immoral.

How our country got there and whether we should have been there, I felt that was an issue that as an individual was beyond my control. Certainly there was reason for us to be there. We had been asked by that government to be there. These people had been waging war for years and years. I personally didn't understand the beginnings of it back when the French were there or whatever, but I knew that they had been at war. If you talked to them, that was all they knew was war. It seemed to me that we had a responsibility as a free nation when asked, to come to defend the freedom of other people.

That hurt me; that bothered me. It was something that I never quite did get over or understand. I understand the American system that everybody has the right to protest, but I also believe that individuals have a duty to act responsibly. If they want to protest to their government, I feel they have every right to protest to their government; but I also felt that the protests that were made in this country were the cause of some lives being shed themselves. I feel that those demonstrators today ought to examine their conscience as to how many lives they may have caused being lost in that war. That was exactly what they were protesting. I think, to me, that is one of the biggest ironies of the Vietnam protests.

V: This relates to what you mentioned before about the government. How did you feel about whether the United States was trying to win or was it a delaying action? Maybe you could see this or couldn't see this from what you were doing, but how did you feel about what the United States was doing as far as do you think they were trying to win there, or do you think it was very much a political war where they were just involved in a holding action? How did you feel about the commitment there? Did you feel it was sincere?

H: That's interesting. I was far away from all of the activity that was going on. There was an in-country R & R center; so consequently there was the opportunity to talk with the guys serving in the boonies, who were actually out fighting

in the front lines. They were allowed so many weeks of going away from their unit for rest and recuperation or relaxation, whatever the R & R stood for. All soldiers over there were entitled to one out of country R & R. If you were married, most people chose to go to Hawaii, and their wife would fly over from the mainland, and they would meet. If you were single as I was, you were not entitled to go to Hawaii. You could go to Qualampore or Australia or some other exotic places. Mine, by the way, was cancelled; I never did make it to Australia because my replacement had never come in on time, and when he did come in, I didn't have enough time to train him, so I never got out of there.

But those people in the front lines were--I don't know how many they got--but there were times where they were allowed to come back to the in country R & R center, so there were a lot of those people flying into and out of the air base. We would get to talk to these guys about what was going on out there and what they had to do. They would say how lucky we were, and we realized how lucky we were. But you heard so many conflicting stories about what they were allowed to do, what they weren't allowed to do, and some guys said that they could wipe those guys out in two months if they would let them and all that other kind of stuff. I don't know, you would hear it from one, and you would hear another story from somebody else, and you really didn't know. I don't know whether we will ever really know the truth of what was going on. I don't know if we will ever get access to that information.

On a personal level, in a very limited way, I really don't know whether we had a real strong goal. I don't think that America's goal was that we would win the war. What we were there for was to allow them to win the war. I think probably that was for when we left; they felt they won the war and that they could hold their own. I think that was really the way it was being fought whether they say that's the truth of it or not. It was just before the TET offensive. Regardless of your status over there, everybody had to, at that one particular time of the year, take guard duty and get ready. You didn't know what was going to happen. You heard TET offensive back here, and when you got over there you realized that there was total preparation because no one knew exactly what was going to happen.

In my own case I did have to pull guard duty at that one particular time. I recall that I heard some noise outside of the perimeter. You couldn't see. Our perimeter was nothing but barbed wire. It would take a Houdini to get through it without cutting himself up so badly that he wouldn't be in any kind of good shape when he got through it; he would have to be cutting his way through. I could hear

all of this noise out there, but you didn't know whether that was an animal or what it was, but I was scared. Not being a great fighter anyhow I'm sure that maybe my fear was exaggerated.

Nevertheless, I heard noise. We did have prowlers. I called to the next guard post and I asked them if they heard anything outside of the perimeter. They said that they thought they had heard movement too. We did not have permission to fire; you weren't even allowed to seat your magazine into your weapon. There you are in this foxhole or tower or whatever you happened to be in. Mine was more or less a foxhole in the top of a hill right inside the perimeter. So I called the officer of the day which was the requirement. I told him that I heard noise outside the perimeter, and I wanted to know if I had permission to fire which was what you were told you had to do. He said that I didn't have permission to fire but that he would come out. He did; he came out. He got up into my guard post with me, and he told me that he didn't know whether there was anyone out there or not but that he had heard these noises. I still didn't have permission to fire. I said, "Sir, what if they come through?" He said, "Well, you will have to call me again." I said, "In the meantime I can be killed." He said, "Well, you don't have permission to fire, " and left.

So I loaded a magazine into my weapon. I had it on automatic, which, by the way, we were using M-14's not M-16's, which was ironic I thought. I thought everybody in Vietnam had an M-16, but we had M-14's. So I moved it to automatic. I got myself pretty well covered with sandbags in front and around me. I sort of felt like I was dug in, and I was ready. I would have opened fire even without permission because I felt that I would rather face a court-martial for protecting my own life even though I didn't have permission to fire than to die because I was so stupid to think that this guy could come back later and say, "Sorry, I made an error in judgment." I decided that if there was going to be an error in judgment made, I would make that error by firing without permission. Luckily, nothing came through the perimeter. I didn't fire every time I heard a noise out there, but I was prepared to do whatever was necessary.

What bothered me then, what bothers me now, was the idea that we didn't have permission to fire. I understand that you can't just let everybody cut loose, but where we were stationed I don't think anybody would have opened fire unless in truth they really felt that there was somebody coming through. I just felt that if you were on guard duty and at that particular time of year that you ought to be able to fire. That should have been standard operating procedure. It wasn't. That leaves some question in my mind as to the intent of our government to win the war for itself. It just

seemed to me that we were there to hold on hoping that they would do something or become strong. I don't know if that was their realistic thing or not.

V: Let's kind of wrap all of your feelings up about your time spent there as it relates to how you feel it helped you to be possibly a better person. Maybe not a better person or how it affected your life in the sense that you can say you have tangible benefits for being there or not being there.

H: Do you mean just in Vietnam or army?

V: In Vietnam.

H: It is hard to say. I left home when I was thirteen. Being away from home I was in a structured environment in the seminary but still, away from family and had to be a survivor. So I didn't have those problems when I was in the army or when I was in Vietnam. In a way it was good. Having just left the seminary environment to go into the army to be sent over there into a different culture under the circumstances of the war or conflict or whatever you want to call it was a personal growth experience for me. I always felt that the army was pretty much what the individual wanted to make it as experience. I liked it over there regardless of cultural shock or whatever.

There was a service club on the air base. It was run by some army special service people, but they were civilians. I forget the exact title of them, but they were two gals who did a marvelous job of entertaining the troops over there. I got very close to them. I helped out the service club. I got to realize that there was somewhat of a sense in my own life of being a failure having not made it to the priesthood after so many years, a view that I didn't express openly to anybody but one which I nonetheless was trying to live with. I think being over there in the circumstances that I found myself--when I made the best of the situation and became active in the service club, did things for other soldiers, got involved with the orphans, did my job the best way I could, could go out to the beach by myself, relax, come back feeling refreshed and ready to dive into more work--was a real growth experience for me as a person.

I think it could have been a real growth experience for a lot of other people over there, but I don't think they were old enough to meet that challenge as a person. I was a lot older than the people I was serving with, people of the same rank as myself because I was older when I went in 1968; so that made me twenty-five years old when I went into the army. By the time I got to Vietnam and while I was there I celebrated my twenty-sixth birthday. Most of these

kids I were with were nineteen, twenty years old. I think the six years I had enabled me to deal with that situation better.

I came back feeling that Jim Hoffman was a pretty good person. When Jim Hoffman went to Vietnam, I don't think he knew whether he was that good of a person. He was confused, didn't know what he wanted, didn't know where he was going, wasn't really sure of anything. I really find that ironic that I went to Vietnam, came back feeling pretty good about myself, felt that I had grown as a person, and what I hear from other people is that they felt they were destroyed while they were over there. Admittedly, I wasn't out in the field. But I was aware of a lot of stuff that was going on, and I heard the stories of what was going on over there.

For me it was a good experience. In fact I wanted to extend my tour over there. My family, when I wrote that letter to them telling them that I was thinking about staying over there, I got this letter from my mother. It was like words that still burn in my heart. It was the most impassioned plea that my mother ever made in my whole life. It came back and she said, "Oh, son, what are you trying to do to me? Here you have gone this far, and you have managed to survive. Now you are talking about staying there longer. Why are you doing this to me?" It wasn't until I heard those words burning out of that letter that I for the first time really realized how much fear was in my mother's heart on a daily basis while I was over there doing my work and having a pretty good time.

I don't look back at my Vietnam experience with regret. I look back on it as a good time in my life. Maybe it sounds terrible to say I was over there in a war and was having a good time, but it's what you make of life. I'm not ashamed of what I did over there. I felt the work that our unit did was important.

You asked a question earlier about whether I thought our presence over there did much for the Vietnamese people. I don't know about that. I have already made those remarks, but I felt that the unit that I was with was a marvelous unit, was remarkable in what we accomplished. I felt that we were responsible for saving so many lives over there. You hear about all that were lost, but I often wondered how many would have been lost if they didn't have Cobra attack helicopters who could go in and attack while we were under attack and drive back the enemy so that people could regroup, fall back, be rescued, may have backed out, whatever. They needed Cobra pilots; we trained the pilots. I personally never had any down time; no pilot ever lost any training hours of time while I was the supply clerk in that unit for

failure to have a part to keep the helicopters flying. I may have had some helicopters that were down that we were waiting for parts, but I always had enough parts that I kept helicopters that they needed in the air they they never lost any time in the school. We turned out all of these pilots like every two or three weeks, whatever it was that they were turning over. It was hard to keep track of how many students there were because we never really got to know them. They were always just driven out to the flight line, went in with the warrant officer, went flying, came back; they lived downtown in headquarters; they didn't stay with us. I feel that the unit I was with had a great mission and that we accomplished it with honor. I am very proud of what I did.

V: Everybody hears so much of what South Vietnam did to our soldiers in the way of presence of narcotics and drugs. Were you aware of this problem with your unit? How prevalent do you think it was at that time?

H: I don't know how prevalent drugs were out in the field never having been there, but I know that where we were stationed if you wanted it, you could get it. People in my unit smoked it. They didn't ever invite me into the rooms where they were smoking because I was very vocal about my feeling of drugs and people who used drugs. I was very vocal about people who got drunk. I wasn't just on a drug kick; I didn't have much use for drunks either. I believe that anything that abuses the body was harmful and was wrong and that intelligent people, whether they had great moral training or not, should just on common sense grounds know they shouldn't do it. They called me the "Preach" in the unit. I don't know how much they liked or disliked me, and I never really worried about it, but they knew one thing for sure that they would never invite me into one of their little smoking parties or whatever. As long as I wasn't in on it or it wasn't around me or it didn't affect me, I wouldn't do anything. But they knew damn well that if it was around me, I would blow the whistle on them.

It was prevalent. These guys would go downtown; they would get this stuff, come back, and they would sit up in some of the rooms. If you were an E-5 in our unit, you had a room and you usually had to share it with someone else. So if an E-5 had a room and he wanted to have a grass party or whatever and some of the other guys wanted it, he had them up to the room, and they did their thing. It was quite common. Many of them used it as an excuse. It is still something that bothers me today when I hear all of these people say that they had to use drugs to forget about all of the stuff that was going on and they just couldn't survive without it; it was like a tranquilizer that without it they were going to go nuts. That may be true. I'm not saying that everybody

who uses that excuse or gives that excuse is a liar, but there are those who use that excuse just to justify using it that didn't have any reason to use it. People who were stationed with me had no reason to be using drugs. Sure, there was danger; there is danger every time you get into a car, every time you fly; every time you get up in the morning there is a chance that something can happen that you will die in this country as well as being over where we were in Vietnam.

To me it was just senseless and utter stupidity. It came from boredom; it came from a sense of maybe rebellion. I don't know, but it was around me. I just felt that if a person didn't want to be a part of it, he wasn't. There were many guys who were not a part of the drug scene; they were not vocal as I was, but they never used it. They didn't get involved in it. They didn't say too much to the people who did, but they had their own set of values and they lived quietly and did it.

I think that the government should have done more in the way of trying to stop it. We had shakedown inspections as they were called. It was amazing. They were such a sham. What they really looked for was did you have more things in your locker that you were entitled to but at the PX because you had a PX card. On the PX card you were entitled to buy so many cameras, so many tape recorders, sets of dishes, whatever; it was your limit. If you purchased an item like that at the PX, then they punched a hole through that part of the card. When they had the shakedown inspections, guys would laugh and say that they had all this grass in their shoes or wherever and they missed it. When they did these shakedown inspections, the only thing they did was check to see if you had more liquor than you were supposed to have or more items from the PX than you were supposed to have. As far as looking for drugs and stuff like that if they actually found it--I mean if it was sitting right there in front of them and they couldn't miss it--they found it. As far as actually looking for it, it was almost like "If you keep it out of sight guys, we are going to overlook it." That bugged me. That seemed like an official-nonofficial sanction of drug abuse. I saw so many sad cases of people who got hooked on that stuff and just became addicted to it like an alcoholic or something. That bothers me.

V: Let's go into the circumstances and your feelings about coming home. As far as circumstances was it just a normal rotation period? When you came home, what was it like?

H: I did my year. At that time everybody was to do a year tour. I think mine ended up like being 366 days or something like that. At that time the replacement guy finally came into my unit. I had to train him to take over my job. In

like two days I packed up and out processed the country. They flew us on charters, at least I did. They were like civilian charter aircrafts that I flew on the way over and on the way back.

I can remember the flight over. It was somber. I did know a few guys on the flight over because they had finished training with me at Fort Lee. We had all gotten our orders to report to Fort Lewis, Washington at the same time. So we had prearranged that we would all meet at the airport on the day prior to our order day. At Fort Lewis, we would have one night out on the town together and go to Fort Lewis the following day. Consequently reporting together, we ended up in the same unit together to out process this country. Our flight over was quiet; it was interesting. We went to Alaska; we landed in Japan; we stayed there for several hours and we finally got to Vietnam.

The flight back from Vietnam was entirely different. As soon as the wheels lifted off the airfield at Tan San Nut outside of Saigon there was a tremendous cheer that went up in the airplane. I felt quite elated, happy that we had finally gotten off the ground. I was on my way home, but it was the most quiet flight for having that many GI's in the airplane. The stewardesses were wonderful. It was unbelievable how grateful they made you feel that you had been over there. I mean, they couldn't do enough for you. Talk about just being absolutely babied. The stewardesses on that flight just catered to us like crazy, but it was a quiet, quiet flight. Everybody seemed to be thinking, I think. I did. I sat there. I thought about the year that I had just spent. I thought about the high moments, the low moments; I thought about the astronauts landing on the moon and wondering if I would ever forget that moment in my life and how funny it was that I was so many thousands of miles away from my family at that particular moment in history. We didn't stop on the way back for refueling or anything. It was a direct flight from Tan San Nut to Oakland.

It was daylight as we were approaching the California coast. Somebody spotted the land first, and they yelled out, "There's land!" There was such a cheer and screaming and happiness; I'll never forget it. I was happy about everything I did, but there was a feeling of coming home that it was behind me, that there was a lot ahead of me. Truthfully, going over I didn't know if I would make it back. You always asked yourself, I wonder if I will ever make it back. You couldn't not ask that question, but I wasn't more bitter. It didn't rule my thoughts, but you thought it.

Well, suddenly there it was, and I don't think this country ever looked as great and as beautiful. The water was blue and the earth looked brownish. We were so far away when

we saw it. It was getting dark. By the time we actually landed it was late afternoon. It was just a feeling that I would never forget. They treated us pretty well at Oakland. Out processing was a little rough at times. We didn't know how they were going to treat us when we got back. They really processed us quickly so that we could get home and get to our families. I appreciated that. I got in and I was out of there.

My grandmother was living at the time, and she was living in a suburb of Los Angeles. I had previously written to my aunt and I had told her that if I came through California-- I didn't know whether I would be or wouldn't be--I would definitely go to Los Angeles to see my grandmother. That night I managed to get on a flight and I called from Oakland. I got a flight out of San Francisco that night into Los Angeles and got to see my grandmother which was great because I hadn't seen her for like ten years. What I'm getting to is my reaction to coming back to this country. My aunt insisted as my grandmother insisted that I could not be there without going to Disneyland. I really wanted to spend the time with my grandmother, but my grandmother seemed to think that she was doing me an injustice if I didn't go with my aunt; so my aunt took me there. I really wasn't ready for the crowds of Disneyland after having been over in the culture of Vietnam where I wasn't around crowds of people, traffic going so fast as it seemed to me out here.

The thing that I will never forget was that there was one of these cruise rides in Disneyland that had a pirate's gun on it or whatever. My aunt and I were walking along the concourse there, and it proceeded to let out a fire of something, a cannon shot or whatever. I just immediately dove down behind a trash container. There were all of these people around. I really felt like somewhat of a jerk, but it was just a normal reaction to take cover if you heard something like that. It was stupid in Vietnam to stand around and wait. You took cover immediately. When I got up, my aunt was in tears. That was the first time that I think she ever realized what it might have meant to a guy to be exposed to war to see just an instinctive reaction to take cover at something like that. It didn't take me long to adjust. That was like the second day I was back in this country. You adjust very quickly, but it really was a different culture over there, and it took some getting use to.

The other thing I remember when I got back was that my orders were to go to Fort Hood, Texas. I had bought a new car when I was back here. I was driving to Fort Hood, Texas, and I happened to get to Dallas right at rush hour traffic. My driving had been fine all the while I was home, but I was not up to rush hour traffic at Dallas. I wasn't due at Fort Hood until the following day so I pulled into the first

motel, stayed there that night, got up the next morning and finished my drive to Fort Hood. After I had been at Fort Hood for a while, I spent many weekends in Dallas and didn't have any problems with the traffic. But that rush hour that first month or so that I had been back was just almost like a different world.

V: Do you have any final comments based on something that I didn't talk about or something you feel you have to say concerning your experiences there?

H: In the army?

V: In the army and/or Vietnam.

H: I think I have pretty much said what I have to say about Vietnam. I don't regret being there; I don't regret being in the army. If I have any regrets at all, it's not that I regret being in the army. I always sort of felt that I was the type of individual who resisted social pressure, that I was my own man, that I always did what was best and right for me.

At the time that I was finishing my service at Fort Hood I was waiting to get out of the army. At that time it was standard procedure that if you were leaving the army the recruiting office or post managed to get to you somehow or other and talk to you about your reenlistment options. They asked me what I would want, what they called re-up bonuses and all this kind of stuff. I talked to them and I told them what I wanted in life--I wanted to get an accounting degree and that type of thing. They told me that was possible for me to do even if I stayed in the army.

I felt that it was a very attractive offer that they made me. I wanted, in a way, to do it, but I wrote home about it, and my brother put the pressure on me that he had been home and he had been taking care of my mother and had been around. He felt that I should come home and be there as well as he was there and help take some of the load off of his shoulder. Some of my friends in the army said, "If you stay in the army, I'll kick you in the butt. I won't have anything to do with you. You will have lost some respect in my eyes." There was a great deal of pressure from people who were there in this unit, which I have to admit was another pretty elite unit.

I worked in the ADMAN section of the first armor division at Fort Hood. It wasn't a, I don't think, stated requirement, but it was in fact a requirement that in order to get into that company when you got to Fort Hood, you had to have at least two years of college or nobody wanted you in their

section. There were some intelligent men in that group. They all more or less had a lot to say to me about my not staying in the army. With that and the pressures of my brother, in the end I decided that I would go home and start anew.

But they army made me an attractive offer eventually leading to commission. With my experience the promises that they made me at the time of my enlistment that even though as I said earlier that I didn't get through basic training in the allotted weeks that were assigned to me, the army in fact did keep its promise. They said that if it were at all possible, they would still assign you to your school if there was a school starting when you got out of basic, and they kept that promise. I had no reason to believe that anybody was lying to me at the enlistment office. Of course, that was the story I was getting from all of my friends like after you sign that paper, well, that ends that. Well, that wasn't my experience of the army. They had honored that initial agreement, and so I felt that any agreement I made with them to stay they would honor that as well as the first one. Maybe I made the right decision in leaving, and maybe I didn't. But it was a decision that was made and that I have lived with. I don't regret my army experience. Basic training was a little rough for a twenty-five year old, overweight, college type person especially in effect when I was competing with eighteen, nineteen year old physical specimens. I wasn't that popular with drill sergeants because of my age and my background. It was rough.

It was hilarious looking back on it; it was not hilarious living through it. It was hurtful; it was probably exactly what I needed at that particular time in my life. I didn't have any time to go into any deep regrets or worries about why I wasn't in the seminary, why I should have stayed in the seminary, or any of those questions. I just simply didn't have any time; I was worried about passing PT (Physical Training Test), getting out of basic training in time to make my school. It really helped me get that part of my life behind me and get on with another part of my life. So I don't ever consider myself a social case, but I certainly feel that the army helped me.

The slogan is that the army makes men or something like that. I don't know that it made a man out of me, but it certainly allowed me to develop as a man and as a person. If anyone says to me that they are considering going into the army or the armed forces, they don't get any bad talk from me. I don't think they ever will. The army is not a perfect society, and there just isn't one. It is made up of human beings who are trying to do a job and sometimes blindly led, but basically, I don't think that is a fault of the

army. There are some people who don't question anything. If you are going to have obedience, if you are going to have order, you have to have people who will respond. I was used to that all my life under seminary training. So that part of the army never bothered me.

I think that more people in today's society need that kind of background. As an instructor in college you see it over and over again. You have students right out of high school; you have men coming back who have been in the service or maybe have tried college as a high school graduate, ended up getting married, started a family, and realized that they weren't going to make it so they came back to college. But you see a lot of veterans-- that is really the thrust of my remarks--you have a lot of veterans. In fact I have even had a few women veterans in my class. In fact the first time I saw that on the roster . . . One of the things you see on your roster is that the person is there under the GI bill or is a veteran because it is marked on your roster. I called the name out. I forget the girl's name now, but it was one of those names where it could have been a woman or it could have been a man; it was a woman. I didn't say anything at first, and I didn't say anything the second night. Finally, I said to her, "Are you a veteran?" She said, "Oh, yes. I was in the army." I said, "Oh, really."

We started chitchatting and it was really amazing what better students people are who have been in their service as opposed to some of the other people who are there and maybe aren't t sure why they are there. I don't know why, but it does seem to me that those people who tried to go to college after having been in their service are used to discipline and can apply themselves. I see it and I'm sure others have seen it. To me I think that speaks highly of our army even though you hear so many comments against it at times. That is the only comment I feel I want to make. It has been good to me, and I've seen it has been good to others. I don't think anybody in the military service has to apologize to anyone.

V: Okay. That concludes my interview with James Hoffman. I want to thank you.

END OF INTERVIEW