YOUNGSTOWN STATE UNIVERSITY

ORAL HISTORY PROGRAM

Vietnam War

Personal Experience

O. H. 1474

JAMES J. ALTIERO

Interviewed

by

Darlene Pavlock

on

November 29, 1991

JAMES JOSEPH ALTIERO

James J. Altiero was born October 5, 1946 in Youngstown, Ohio to James and Lucille B. Altiero. He, his brother, and two sisters were raised in Girard, a small town outside Youngstown. As a child, he and his family did minimal traveling. However, in his sophomore year, he started playing guitar with a local rock and roll band, the Ron Dells. This gave him a more worldly exposure than most of the teens in the area. He graduated from Ursuline High School in 1964. After graduation, he attended St. Ambrose College in Davenport, Iowa for a year.

He was drafted in January 1966. At induction, he volunteered for the U.S. Marine Corps and was given the task of getting himself and twelve recruits to basic training in San Diego, California. By June, he was in Vietnam starting his eleven and a half month tour, assigned to a ranger battalion (a.k.a. grunts) under the Third Division, Ninth Regiment, Alpha Company, First Platoon. He and his combat group primarily saw front line action in DaNang, the Mekong Delta, and the Demilitarized Zone (DMZ). One May 16, 1967, he was shot and wounded in an operation in Quang Tri Province. The bullet passed through his left shoulder and lodged in the right side of his chest, where it remains today. He was flown to Phu Bai for surgery then to Japan for final treatment. With forty-three days left of his tour, Jim was sent home and discharged January 4, 1968 after spending six months as an enlisted instructor teaching general weapons at Marine Corps schools in Quantico, Virginia. He received the Purple Heart, Vietnam Service Medal, Vietnam Campaign Medal,

Expert Rifleman Badge, Unit Presidential Citation and Republic of Vietnam unit citation.

Upon his return, he entered Youngstown State University and eventually moved to Columbus, Ohio for twelve years. He has worked for the state of Ohio, Bureau of Employment Services since May 1988 and resides in Liberty Township, Ohio. He attends St. Columba Cathedral, enjoys tennis, water sports, and the guitar.

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INTERVIEWEE: JAMES J. ALTIERO

INTERVIEWER: Darlene Pavlock

SUBJECT: early travel, entering service (draft), Vietnam time and service, home images, adaptation to changes

DATE: November 29, 1991

PAVLOCK: This is an interview with James J. Altiero, for the Youngstown State University Oral History Program, on the Vietnam War Project by Darlene Pavlock, at South Avenue, Youngstown, Ohio on November 29, 1991, at 2:30 p.m.

Where were you born, and where were you raised?

ALTIERO: I was born in Youngstown, Ohio, at St. Elizabeth's Hospital. I was raised in Girard. That's where I spent most of my life.

P: Where in Girard?

A: Joan Avenue.

P: I was raised on Powers Avenue in Girard.

A: I had a good friend that lived on Powers. His name is Buddy Regalia.

P: I lived two doors up from him. What a small world.

A: As a matter of fact, I was living in Columbus for about twelve years; and buddy had just moved down, I think,

three years before I left. I haven't seen him for a few years. Small world.

P: I haven't either, since our high school days. So, you were brought up in Girard, and you lived there all your life?

A: Yes. Except the twelve years in Columbus and the time I spent in the service. I was away at school for one year.

P: When you were younger, did you take vacations and travel with your family?

A: From time to time. We went a few times, yes. But, we didn't do a lot of traveling.

P: So, you were basically a home-town boy?

A: Oh, yes. I didn't travel much. I went to Ursuline High School in Youngstown. It was a little bit more metropolitan compared to Girard.

P: What were your high school days like?

A: I guess average for the early 1960's. I was in a rock and roll band my sophomore year.

P: Which one?

A: The Ron Dell's. You don't remember the Ron Dell's?

P: Yes, I do.

A: Do you really? You don't look old enough to remember them.

P: Thank you.

A: Are you working on your master's or you doctorate?

P: My master's. So, we are probably the same age. Forty-four?

A: Forty-five. Alright. I didn't know that you were anywhere near that.

P: I didn't either. The only way I knew was that Ron said what years you were in Vietnam, so I sort of got an idea that we were around the same age. Tell me about your growing up years. Did you have any brothers or sisters?

A: I had two sisters and a brother. All younger. The youngest one is my brother. More or less, I guess

[that] I had a pretty average childhood. I was in that rock and roll band, and I was in the band most of the time. I did a few things. Instead of going to record hops, I used to go out and play on Friday nights and Saturday nights. It was a little different, because I was playing in night clubs at about fifteen. So, it gave me a little more exposure, I guess. I was from a pretty small town. I was naive growing up. I imagine that's what you're getting at.

I went to college right after high school in Davenport, Iowa, at St. Ambrose College. I went into the Marine Corps after that.

P: Now, were you drafted or did you enlist?

A: I was drafted.

P: In what year?

A: [In] 1966.

P: So, you dropped out of college?

A: I dropped out of school, and I was drafted within about three weeks. That's the way it was. First of all, I didn't want to go away to school. It was my parents' idea more than mine. I wanted to go to Youngstown State, and they wanted me to go away to get out of the band. It was that type of deal. I really wasn't ready for it at the time.

P: So, you were drafted into the army, and you went to Cleveland?

A: I was being drafted; and at that time, they had a Marine Corps draft. They took a certain percentage, like 14 percent of the draftees coming in at any specific time.

P: So, you went to Cleveland thinking you were going to the Army. . . .

A: Right, but I volunteered for the Marine Corps. My thoughts were at the time that I really didn't want to go anywhere. I wanted to stay. I wanted to go to Youngstown State and get back in the band and stay home with my girlfriend. But, that wasn't in the books. When I was younger, I had wanted to be a Marine. I figured, well, I'm going to be spending two years somewhere, [so] I might as well join the Marine Corps. At least, I wanted to do it once. I may not want to do it now, but at least it was something that might have been a little bit different.

P: Sounds like my first husband. He did the same thing. He went to Cleveland, and it was the same scenario. It's funny that the thinking was the same way, and yet in a way it was good because you survived.

A: Yes, that's true. I think with my naivete level at the time, the Marine Corps was a blessing. If I was going to go to Vietnam, it was definitely better with the Marine Corps, because you get a little extra training. They make sure you're ready before you go, so I think it was a good choice. I needed a rude awakening, and the Marines were happy to provide it for me.

P: Jim, did you think you would go to Vietnam when you were drafted?

A: I did when I volunteered for the Marine Corps, because at that time, that's where they were going. One of the differences in the Marine Corps is that, if there is war going on, you are going! I guess there was a chance, since I had one year of college, if I would have went into the Army, I could have went to Germany. I really didn't even consider that at the time.

P: You just assumed that that's where you would go?

A: Yes. My own perception of war was so immature, it didn't bother me one way or the other. I was real pro-American about our involvement there.

P: Those were your views at the time?

A: Yes. I remember the Gulf of Tonkin. I really didn't consider war that much before I went, but I kind of knew I was going when I went into the Marine Corps. I made it through Marine Corps basic infantry and ranger training, went to DaNang; then I went into the Mekong Delta and the DMZ. So, really, I was in all three. I spent most of my time in I Corps in the DMZ.

P: How long were you there?

A: I was there about eleven and a half months. I got shot about a month prior to the end of my tour of duty. The Marines normally spent thirteen months there.

P: That's what I was going to ask. How did you get out short-time?

A: I had spent three weeks in Okinawa and about two weeks in the Philippines for training during my tour. I started my tour in DaNang. I was there from June until October. Then in November, I went to Okinawa and the Philippines and came back right after Christmas. So, I was going for quite a while. Upon my return, I went to

the Mekong Delta. We did one operation in the Mekong Delta, and then, we went up to the DMZ. We spent the rest of our time in the DMZ at Dong Ha and Quang Tri province.

P: I see. Where did you do your basic training?

A: At MCRD (Marine Corps Recruit Depot) in San Diego.

P: That's where Jimmy did his, too.

A: If he is around our age, he probably was.

P: He went in December of 1966, I think.

A: He went in eleven months after me. I went in January of 1966.

P: So, he went at the end of 1966.

A: At that time MCRD Paris Island was filled up. That's the reason they sent us to the West Coast. They only had two places. I was glad. At least, I went to California for a while and to DaNang in June. After Christmas, we went to the Mekong Delta. It was to the DMZ after that. I got shot May 16, so altogether, in that country, I guess I spent just over ten months in Vietnam itself. The rest of the time was in Okinawa and in the hospital in Yokosuka, Japan.

P: Then they sent you home after that?

A: Yes. I went from Vietnam, to the Philippines, and to Japan. I spent six weeks in Japan and went home after that. I didn't get a medical discharge. My time was almost up, so they didn't send me back to Vietnam. I got back home, I think, July 10 or something. I missed the cut off by three or four days where they had said we would have to go back over. I was kind of lucky there too, because a lot of guys went back over after getting wounded. I takes a lot out of you. I was weak for a long time. So, the guys that went back after getting wounded didn't stand too much of a chance a lot of times. I know a lot of guys who got killed right after that.

P: Do you know Joe Sicliano?

A: Joe Sicliano. I was one of the last people who saw him. I saw him in Okinawa in December. He was on his way over, and I was in Okinawa for ranger training. I saw Joe there. I knew him pretty well in school. I think he was a year behind me at St. Rose Elementary.

P: We went to grade school together.

A: What was your husband's name?

P: Jim Crane from Shannon Road.

A: Oh, yes. I remember the name real well. I knew him, but I didn't know him that well because he went to Girard. I went to Ursuline.

P: He saw Joe when he had gotten wounded again. He had been wounded two times.

A: Joe was the one I was thinking about when I just mentioned that.

P: They sent him back. When they did, Jimmy said that he should have not been sent back. He should have gone home. But, you know how the rules are. He was a small man, so was vital to then in the tunnels. That's why they sent him back.

A: That's a really tough job. He got killed right after that.

P: Yes, right after.

A: Yes. As a matter of fact, I was in the hospital when he got killed. In the Girard News, his picture was right behind mine. It was really weird. I was on one page and he was right behind me. The Marine that came to my house that told my mother I was wounded . . . his next stop was Joe's with a lot worse story.

P: What was your basic training like?

A: Pretty tough. Marine Basic Training was. . . . I'm sure your husband has probably told you some of the things that happen in Marine Boot Camp.

P: Was it a shock from Girard and being in a band?

A: Oh, sure it was. But, like I said, I was very naive and cocky at the time. So, boot camp to me. . . . I took it as a joke. It was hard a lot of times. I mean, not that it was so easy to get through it, because it wasn't. But, I tried to see the humor in it because it was so crazy.

I'll tell you a little quick story. Since I volunteered, they put me in charge of twelve Marines to get to San Diego. From Cleveland to San Diego, it took us two days. We were flying stand-by, and we had to spend a day in Chicago and a day in Los Angeles before we go to San Diego. That was fine. I was just a happy-go-lucky kid. Anything that happened was fine with me.

So, we go to the airport. I was supposed to be watching to make sure these guys stuck around me and I knew where they were and everything. I wasn't even thinking in those terms: giving orders or anything like that. That didn't even make any sense to me. I don't think I even read all my orders when I left. I still didn't feel like a Marine. I hadn't even been to boot camp.

When I got there, I had to call the base. They sent buses over to pick us up. I got pounced on quick because here I am, me and this other guy from Hubbard named Ed Arthur. We got to be friends real quick. We went into the Marines together and got drafted from Cleveland and all that. We're standing there talking to a couple girls and smoking a cigarette like nothing was happening. [We were] waiting for. . . . In fact, we were making a date to meet these girls later. We said, "Well, we got to go to boot camp. I don't know how long we're going to be our first day, but we'll try to meet you tonight around 8:00 or 9:00." We had no idea what we were in for, though.

This guy comes crashing through the door in his dress blue pants and khaki shirt, looking real mean with the Smoky the Bear hat on. He comes up, grabs the cigarettes out of our hands. He just crushed them in his hand and threw them down on the ground. We were wondering, "What the heck?" He saw me with all the files, so he knew I was the guy that was in charge. He asked me where my men were. I said, "My men?" By this time, I was being a little serious because this guy was serious. It was like I just broke the law and was getting ready to be arrested. That's what it seemed like. Ed and I had to go running all over the airport to find these guys and get them all back together. Then we get on the bus. I was thinking all of this time, "Boy, I never go treated like that in my whole life." That guy was totally disrespectful. He didn't care who I was or anything. I didn't even know the guy. Slowly it started sinking in. We got to the base and I saw the first couple guys get hit.

P: Did they take you by bus?

A: Yes. It's only about five miles from the airport. A couple guys who were overweight, and they wouldn't put up with guys being overweight at all. They started calling them "pigs" and started using the language and physical force on them. Instead of getting scared, I'm thinking, "Wow. I'm smart enough to know they are not going to kill me here. At least I don't think that that would, so I'll make it through. Eleven weeks and I'll be out of here." I took it like that and I made a joke out of it. Some of it. I got hit a few times for

smiling and goofing off and stuff like that. I was that type of kid at that time. But, I needed it. I really needed that type of boot camp. They did get to me. That's what they tried to do. If you can't handle it, they know it.

P: What do they do to you if you can't handle it?

A: They give you every shot in the world. They really try to help a guy make it through. Not only for them, but for his own sake. If you don't make it through, I'd imagine you would go the rest of your life kind of screwed up. There are different increments in the training where you have to pass certain physical and mental standards in order to keep on going. So, you could get put back. Most guys don't want to get put back. All but one guy in my platoon graduated boot camp on time.

P: Sure. That would be degrading.

A: I was prey successful in boot camp probably because of my attitude. There was part of it that I liked. I didn't want to go to war and kill anybody or anything like that. But, there was a lot of it that I liked.

P: Were you homesick?

A: Oh, yes. You would be homesick for hell in that place. The first couple nights, oh sure. It's the type of thing--the treatment you get there--they made us stay up the first twenty-four hours. We had been flying and sleeping at two airports two nights before that.

P: Plus the time difference.

A: Right. The jet lag coming all the way from Ohio to California. . . . The first two days they made us scrub floors with toothbrushes and just laid all this psychological stuff on us. They put mental stuff on us really hard. Then, finally, at the end of that twenty-four hours. . . . They didn't even let us eat, which was probably against the Congressional law on that, which they do a lot. But, they didn't let us eat for about the first fifteen hours. Finally, when we did eat, they made us eat everything. They just loaded our plates up. It was all psychological. They just purposely showed us that were going to eat everything on that plate, and they made sure.

P: Control.

A: Right. And of course, you get the haircuts down to the scalp. They give you uniforms that are too big. All that is true, because they know you are going to grow

into them, because you are going to be working your butt off. All in all, going through it, I didn't really understand what it was. A kid at nineteen years old, you're thinking, "Well, this is just another step up from high school: the control, the authority. This is what life is about, I guess." I had a little bit of insight so I was able to. . . .

P: Plus, you had Catholic School background.

A: That had a lot to do with it. When it came to the killing and stuff like that. . . . Because you never say, "I'm sorry." You never say all the things that you are taught, especially in a Catholic School. Manners, politeness . . . all that's out. They want you to become an animal. That is what you are. All you are going to do from now on for the next eleven weeks is learn how to become a better animal than you already are, because you are already nothing. It seemed really severe, of course, afterwards, when I had a lot of chances to think about it, especially after I got out. When we went to Vietnam, we look at boot camp as being home. You talk about homesickness. We were homesick for boot camp and our D.I.'s (Drill Instructors). We thought we had it bad then, and now there's people that are really trying to kill us.

P: When did you get orders for Vietnam?

A: I went in January 4, 1966. I don't know the exact date, but I got my orders in mid-June. I think we arrived in Vietnam itself July 3. I'm not sure of those dates. Some time close to that. It was eleven weeks of boot camp . . . ITR (Individual Training Regiment). We went thirty days leave, came back to the staging battalion where you went for more training, Individual Combat Training), and then you are shipped or flown right over.

P: Tell me about a typical day there. It had to be a shock to go from Ohio to California to Vietnam.

A: Yes. Yes it was. It was a shock in one sense, thinking back. you go through a lot of emotional things after that. you're never quite sure how you felt. When I think about it, just trying to put myself back there; going over and over and all that. . . . If you had been brought up the Catholic thing, they were teaching you all your life not to kill. I didn't want to kill anybody. In fact, you think of stupid things. You are so naive on war. Even being a boy and watching a lot of war movies, you still have no idea what it's really like. I was an avid John Wayne fan. I would watch all those war flicks. But, until you actually get there, you still don't know. I was on my way over

thinking, "Well, I can get around killing somebody. I'll just shoot them in the leg or wound them." you are not even thinking about the emotion and the hate and the fear and all the other stuff that's going to be playing on you when you get into it. You're not even thinking about where you're shooting somebody. That's how naive I was on the way over.

One thing about the discipline in Marine Corps boot camp like I started to talk about before is that, after a while, I understood why they were doing it. They were doing it for our own good. They knew if we weren't toughened up to the quick that we weren't going to last long, which was true. We found that out after we got over there, really.

P: When you flew in, what were your impressions? Did you fly in United?

A: To Vietnam?

P: Yes.

A: No, it was Northeast Orient. It was another trip. It was a 707. Like I said, everything. . . . It was almost cruel they way young kids were kind of like. . . . It was like sheep being led to slaughter because nobody really knew. We were having a good time. We knew about the casualties and all that, but it just didn't sink in until you got there.

P: Statistics are different.

A: The first time we knew that things had changed and when we started thinking was when we were in a dive in that 707. Well, coming into DaNang, there was a crippled jet trying to land. So, we had to circle out in the ocean for about twenty or thirty minutes until they brought that jet in. It was a fighter jet. So, we're circling and I'm against the window like this. We're not putting two and two together why we're circling so tight. The reason was because of the ground fire. The planes were afraid of being shot down so they went out about seven miles and just circled real tight. Finally, when we came in, the pilot dove at the airstrip. This was a civilian pilot. They were probably mititary-civilian pilots that had been in the military and knew how to fly like that, because they had to come in totally different. When they take off, they take off like that too. Straight up, because they can't go over land at low altitudes.

The plane lands and we get out on the tarmac. The first thing you see is a bunch of guys all full of mud, blood, and everything else getting ready to get on the

planes taking them home. Because, when you left Vietnam, it was like that. You left the fields with mud, blood, and all.

P: They just came and got you.

A: Right. When your orders come through, because of the secretiveness of everything, you have twenty minutes to saddle up and you're gone. You know you're leaving sometime in the near future, but when your orders do come through, it's real quick. It all depends on how it works. If you are a field soldier. . . . Like when we went to Okinawa, we heard rumors that we were getting out of here. We were just running patrols around DaNang, which is really the lightest duty that I had all the time I was over there. I was lucky there, too. I got to increase in difficulty from the bottom up instead of the top down like some guys had to. There were just mines and Vietcong there which wasn't too bad. In the DMZ and the Mekong Delta were the NVA (North Vietnamese Army). Of course, I hated mines more than anything. DaNang was a lot of sniper fire and a lot of mines. It wasn't really that bad. Still, we hated it. You are part of the vegetation.

We hadn't bathed in probably five or six days. I remember I had a sore on the side of my neck, since we had been in the field for about a month. I had no idea how bad it was until I got on ship. They just came out and told us. These rumors were going around for a couple of weeks. How they got out, I don't know. All of a sudden it was, "Saddle up! We're going!" We were elated! All of a sudden, at 6:00 p.m., we're out in the field and ready to dig in for the night. [We were] dirty, with no hopes of anything. We didn't even know if we were going to live the next minute.

Next thing you know, within two hours, we're in DaNang harbor getting on a ship and going to Okinawa. You head into the shower. It was the first time I looked at myself in a mirror for a month, at least. I looked in the mirror and I had this big boil on my neck. I don't know what it was. It was just a big infection. I didn't even know. It was like coming out of a nightmare and looking at yourself. You just looked different. I was way darker than I had ever been, because of the sun. I just looked totally different. I looked like death. I scared myself. It really was like that. You just looked at yourself and. . . .

P: You said,"Who is that?"

A: Yes. It was shocking.

P: Boy, are you bringing back the memories. I hadn't thought about that stuff for a long time. What did you do about that [infection] on your neck?

A: I had it lanced.

P: What were your living conditions like? Did you live in a tent?

A: We were very seldom in the rear. I was in a Marine Ranger Battalion. We were out in the field most of the time. When we did come to the rear, we had tents with cots. There were regular tents. The C.P.'s (command posts) were set up with tents similar to what you would see on "M.A.S.H."

P: I've seen some pictures from the others that I've interviewed that almost look like a little house, or a tent that didn't have any sides in it.

A: That was it exactly. We used to keep the sides up because of the air. In fact, my dad was in World War II. He spent three years in the Pacific. He couldn't believe that we didn't even have blankets. The only thing we had for comfort . . . well, sometimes guys would have what they called "rubber ladies." Whey they were just swimming air mats. you would blow them up, and they would last bout two days. They'd get pinched on a rock and that was it. The grunts--guys out in the field--only had ponchos. You were lucky if you had a poncho liner.

One of the things that used to make me so mad over there, as a matter of fact, was the poncho liners. [They] were kind of made of that silky nylon material. [They] were the only source of comfort that a grunt would have. They were the hardest things in the world to get because of the black market. Good equipment was so hard to get for the grunts in the field. We were young and dumb at the time. I would have been so mad over there if I would have thought about this crummy rifle I was using. [It was] inferior to the one I had in training. It was the first one I got. After being there for awhile, you "find" things. But, the first rifle I had was terrible. They gave us all this junk, this garbage. Some of the equipment had blood on it and everything else. We didn't really put two and two together. We knew that the Marine Corps ran on a low budget. But, it didn't take too much thinking, after we were there for awhile, to realize that the black market was getting a lot of the equipment that was meant for us.

P: So, all your equipment was being sold to someone else.

A: Yes, right. They'd hand everything down. They would use their equipment until. . . . Well, the Marine Corps does that anyhow, but the black market even made it worse.

P: I know a couple of the guys that I was talking to that were in supply explained that. [He explained] how they would check in things, but then they conveniently disappeared and were sold to the black market.

A: That's where the black market originates: at the supply station. A lot of those guys made a lot of money. Then, there are the guys out in the field with bad equipment. This is what used to really anger me afterwards. I think a lot about how that used to be.

P: When you needed something and it wasn't there.

A: A lot of times, yes, such as those poncho liners. It was just that, after a while, you get used to the poncho. The poncho itself was a comfort item, and all that was was a big piece of vinyl. But at night, you'd wrap yourself up in it if it was raining or cold during the monsoon, and you'd stay dry. It would keep you dry. If you had a poncho liner, it was like a soft lining on the inside. That was like a big thing over there. You would like to have had a poncho liner a lot of times.

The living conditions. . . . We lived like a tree. We normally had a platoon C.P. somewhere. We ran a lot of squad patrols. We would be out four or five days at a time. As a Ranger Battalion, we would run a lot of squad patrols. There would be twelve of us at the most. We had a machine gun attachment or somebody with us. We would just crash anywhere. Sometimes, we'd come across a village. We used to have pretty good relationships with the people, even in the bad areas. We understood that, when we moved out, they had to worry about the Cong moving in. Not that we trusted them totally, but in some areas you could. Around Hue, at one time when I was there, they were the Catholic areas. [They were] usually pro-American. I remember guarding a convent one time. The nuns made us cookies and stuff.

There were some good things that happened even out in the field. Most of the guys had a lot of empathy for the people, but there were some that didn't. The hate level wasn't that high. Not against the people. Not as much as you might hear from a lot of vets. There were guys that did. I didn't respect them then, and I don't respect them now. The way I look at it is all of us had experiences. If you lose friends and stuff, you are not in the best mood. But, not that many guys

really took it out on civilians, but there were guys that did it. They took advantage of them. There are idiots in civilian life, and there are idiots in the military. There are a lot of Vietnam Vets that don't condone what they hear on television as quotations from "so called" combat vet the "liberal media" plays up. They had all these poor attitudes and did all these things they are so guilty about. As far as I'm concerned, they deserve to feel guilty. I don't have too much empathy for that. Everybody had a tough time, and to take it out on an innocent person is not cool!

P: That was having a tough time, too.

A: That's right, or even a tougher time. At least you're going to be out of there in a year, dead or alive. These people had to stay there. There were times when the anger would get to the point . . . especially in the Marine Corps where they wouldn't send supply chopper in a lot of times if we were in heavy fighting. They wouldn't send choppers in with food, or they would at least wait as long as they possible could before they'd get us something. It was kind of like that. [They did it] to save equipment and stuff. I remember once we went three days without food. Things were really getting bad. You started seeing guys almost turning into animals.

P: What did you eat, then?

A: A couple guys grabbed chickens. One guys killed a pig. It was a big fat pig when he killed him, but after he got done skinning it, it had about two pounds of meat on it. I wasn't that hungry yet. The worst part was when they dropped oranges. They had two choppers come in. One had water and one had food. The one with food couldn't get down. It got shot up and had to leave. The one with the water and the oranges got through. They threw out the cans of water and the oranges from about forty or fifty feet in the air. They just kind of passed over us. That chopper also had ammunition on it. They made sure that one got through, then they took off. Here, when we counted these oranges, there was one for every three guys. It was really something. Everybody was on the brink of. . . . Nobody was starving, but everybody was hungry after three days of just sucking on bamboo.

P: That's what I was going to ask you. What did you eat when they didn't give you anything to eat?

A: That very seldom happened. That was one of the worst times it happened. We survived on one C-ration a day out in the field. That's all we had. We were lucky to have one box of C-rations per day in the field

when we were engaged in combat. The battalion I was in . . . the 1st Battalion, 9th Marines was engaged most of the time. In fact, we were called the "Walking Dead." We had that name because we were like a "sparrow hawk." [We were] the battalion that they put out anytime something was going on. If we were back in the rear and we were resting, they would send us out to assist other units in battle. It was that type of thing. They kind of sacrificed us or something. It must have been something in our birth records or something. I don't know. That's what we used to think, because they did use us a lot. [We were called the] "Walking Dead" or "Walking Death."

P: How many operations were you in? Did you count them?

A: I was in six or seven. I have them written down. I can remember most of them.

P: That's a lot. That's a lot of energy too . . . and not having food. If you work out for an hour how, you have to go and eat a whole banquet. Back then, [you had] all that energy, and you had to wait until who knows when to eat.

A: You learned the relativity of things back then, too. A can of beans could taste just as good as a steak. You start understanding how some people could be happy who were living out there in the villages, where they just don't have anything. How could they even laugh and be happy in war? That's one thing you learn. A steak could be a can of beans. A warm house with a fireplace could be a pitched tent. Sometimes if we were going to stay at the same place out in the field for any amount of time, we'd get our ponchos, put them together and make like little huts. Lean-to's, we used to call them. If you had a carpet liner, you would put that carpet liner down on the floor. If you had some crackers and cheese that somebody got in a care package from home, you were in Heaven. It was really great, relatively speaking.

P: Did you get mail out in the field?

A: Yes.

P: Did they bring it in to you or drop it down with the oranges?

A: Usually, out in the field, if we did get mail, a lot of times, [it wouldn't be delivered.] A lot of times, we'd go a week or two weeks without getting any in the field. It depended on what was happening. If we weren't running in there, they'd get it our to us. All those things were put on an "as needed" basis when we

were in combat. We didn't think about getting mail or anything, at least for an extended period. They'd come out sometimes on tanks or choppers. The way they used to do it, they had set systems on how to get the mail to you. Other times, say a platoon of tanks was going out to meet a company of Marines somewhere, they'd load up some mail and bring it out to you. So we'd get it that way, too. We had to burn all our letters after we read them.

P: What major events stand out?

A: What major event . . . of all the time I was over there?

P: Yes.

A: Well, the day I got shot would be the major one.

P: I would really like you to tell me about that, if you will.

A: There were other ones too. Do you want to hear the other ones first?

P: Sure. We'll do those first.

A: I guess maybe the two. . . . There were a lot of really bad days over there. Two of the really bad periods were both in the DMZ.

P: You were up there by then?

A: Yes. DaNang and the Mekong Delta were bad. We were getting shot at. A lot of guys were getting hit with mines, but it wasn't anything like the DMZ. The DMZ was all mortars and firefights. It was more of a conventional-type of warfare. Where we weren't fighting the Viet Cong up there, we were fighting North Vietnamese Army regulars. They had just about everything with the exception of tanks. When they didn't have things like that, they used other things to make up for it. They were really good. Everybody respected the North Vietnamese Army. They knew exactly what they were doing and how to do it. They had a lot of courage and stamina. They would fight to the death.

There is a place in I Corps called the Street of No Joy. As a matter of fact, there is an interesting story to this one. A guy by the name of Bernard Fall, who was a French writer, wrote a book called <u>The Street of No Joy</u> about this area of Vietnam, which is up near the DMZ around Hue. All it is, is a grass road that moves from the northern province in the DMZ down to Hue and further. It was a market route where people would

load up with their produce during peace-time. They also used it as a Ho Chi Mihn-type trail too. But they called it the Street of No Joy. The French named it that because a whole French Battalion I think back in 1948 or 1950 was totally wiped out. They never found anything: tanks, men. They just kind of disappeared off the face of the earth. They did know what happened. They got overrun, and the North Vietnamese Army just took everything and everybody back up to North Vietnam. There were a few guys that got away.

Bernard Fall wrote a book on the Street of No Joy, which was a bestseller. He was a pretty well-known novelist at the time. He went with us on this one operation called "Hastings." He had never been there. He had never been to the Street of No Joy, and he wanted to see it. This was going to be the first time American Troops had gone up into that area, so he wanted to go with us on our patrol. He was the first man killed.

P: Are you serious?

A: As a matter of fact, I helped put his body on the helicopter. What happened was we hit a mine field. We got contact with the enemy, they fired at us, and we started chasing them. They were far enough ahead of us to set up a mine field. The street itself was like grass and sand. It wasn't within sight of the ocean, but the ocean was close enough that it was all sand, sand dunes, and this real thick crabgrass. That's all there was: crabgrass, sand, and very few trees. There was a cleared area between two tree lines that just went on for miles.

So, we're chasing them up through there and we hit a mine field. It was so bad that twelve went off at the same time. Twelve guys within about ten seconds hit mines. Then we lost all of our corpsmen, because they were the only ones that couldn't "freeze." Some of us moved. I moved about twenty feet to this one guy who had his foot blown off. I was trying to help him. Then the word was "just freeze," so everybody froze except for corpsmen who have to run from one casualty to another. These are Navy guys. A lot of them never even thought they would be around the Marine Corps. We lost almost every one of them. It was a company operation. We lost six or seven corpsmen. Most of them were killed. There were two that lived to leave it.

I wasn't near Bernard Fall when he got hit. We didn't even get to his body until the next day. He was in the first contingent of men and one of the first ones that got killed. What he did was he tripped one of our own 155 artillery rounds which, a lot of times, would be a

dud. At night you would hear these things all night long. All you would hear was these artillery pop off. Every once in a while, you'd hear one pop off and never hear it hit. You would never hear an explosion. I think they figured like one out of every fifteen or something was a dud. That's how bad it was with some of the 155's, anyhow. In any case, the Viet Cong or the North Vietnamese Army would take them, rig them, and make a mine out of them. That's what this guy hit. When I got to him, there was only half of him laying there. We put him on the helicopter. One of the guys from Pennsylvania, his name is Tom Christen [who is] a good friend of mine. . . . We got to be real good friends over there, because he was from Sharon. He and I put his body on the helicopter. He told me that this was Bernard Fall. Tom was four or five years older than I. He had already been to college. I think he graduated college at the time. He got his first degree. He knew a little bit more about that type of thing. He knew of the guy.

P: What a shock that would be.

A: That was one of the most memorable time periods. That was around Easter. That specific day was about two weeks before Easter. On Good Friday and Easter, we were in the same area. We just ran into a lot of. . . . Everyday, guys were getting it. All we were doing was piling up bodies and sending them out for like three or four weeks. That was one of the biggest battles that I was in. It lasted a long time. I got hit on May 16.

For two weeks before that. . . . This was up around Khe Sanh, near Quang Tri. We were fighting for quite a while then, too. We lost a lot of guys in my company. At that time, we were down from the original platoon that we went in there with. This was another repeat too, because we had been in this area before. [We had been] right down the same road and we got hit real bad. When we went down the second time, it was really scary, because we knew what happened the first time. It was just at the base of the DMZ which at one time, had been a real rich estate. [It was] a wine-growing estate. They made wine and sake and all that. It was in a beautiful area, but you could just smell the evil. We were walking down the road. It was this real narrow road through a jungle. [It was] a trail. There were bandages and stuff left from the last battle just laying all over the place. We're walking through there, and it was frightening. It was really frightening. We had to take turns at point. I had point twice walking up the road. We were only supposed to have it once. The second time, we had just gotten our M-16's about four weeks before that. We were having a lot of

trouble with them jamming and everything. So I had point, and I was just getting up to the area where we got hit the last time, and I'm thinking, "Boy am I lucky. I'm getting the. . . ." I was a squad leader at the time, and I got to drop my squad back. Another squad came up to take point. When they came up, they stood at the river and fired across the river just into the bushes and the river banks where sometimes snipers or ambushers would be hiding there. The squad started firing into there, and two of the rifles jammed. My squad had to take back the point. (Tape Ends, side one.)

P: This isn't what I thought. I didn't think there were two people in the world that went through the same thing.

A: As your ex-husband?

P: Yes. He had told me. . . .

A: Marines, especially if they're there around the same time, [they'll tell] the same stories.

P: Really?. He had told me he was in twenty-seven operations. I could never imagine anybody being in anything that much, but he was there for about a year.

A: A lot of times when you are in operations, you are in parts of operations too. When I say six or seven big operations, like Hastings, Prairie Dog, and Deckhouse Five, I can remember the names of them, but really everything you're doing. . . . You can be part of blocking forces and you can be part of an operation that the Army was doing. The Marines . . . see, they didn't have that many of us. That's why we had to be there an extra month to begin with. So they just keep using. The more experienced you got, or thought you were, the more they used you.

P: As long as you stayed alive, then they figured you would stay alive for the next one.

A: Exactly.

P: Through all of this, what did you think of? What images of home did you carry? Did you think about home when you were going through all of this?

A: All the time. It was probably relatively comparable to when you are going through a bad time of life. All that hits you, and sometimes it seems like it's too much to really cope with. You just keep going. It's like from day to day. You get homesick if you block it out. You try not to be. You kind of get a cynical

attitude toward a lot of things, like everything is bullshit. That's the only way to really survive. You have to desensitize yourself to a lot of things. The feelings are there. You know the feelings are there, but a lot of times, you can't let yourself think about it, especially when things are real bad.

Probably the least stress on your emotions is during the worst times, because you have so many other things to think about. You are just walking in the jungle three or four days in a row and not hitting anything, there's nothing to think about except the mosquitoes, the flies, and the heat. That's when it bothers you. Once things get bad, it's kind of like your mind, more or less, clears. Then you just get down to business. It makes it easier. That time went faster, and you were less tense and less stressed out.

The worst times I can remember. . . . Well, I can remember some really bad times counting bodies and stuff where I felt really bad too, but the worst times I can remember in terms of emotional strife was when I was just laid up in the hospital after I got shot. Emotionally, that was the worst time for me. The first few days laying there in the hospital. . . . [There was] all that time to think. All of a sudden, horrific replays flashed through my mind.

P: It started coming. [It started] rushing in.

A: Emotionally, that was really bad. I remember by then, I wanted to go home. I still thought about my family and stuff, and none of that really mattered that much at that point. It really didn't. I remember really being depressed in the hospital. It was the first time I ever remember being really depressed over things. I was depressed in boot camp and I was depressed in Vietnam, but being depressed and having nothing to be depressed about. . . . I should have been happy. It was like a mixture of the guilt that you probably heard before. It might be kind of hard to understand how you feel guilty leaving. Even if you are shot out of the place, you feel kind of guilty. I was hearing a lot about what was happening with my company and my battalion which were still in that battle that we had started that went on and on up through Khe Sanh and Hue. That really was the beginning of the North Vietnamese Offensive which started around April of 1967, continued into 1968, and eventually led to Hue and the Tet Offensive.

P: Tell me about when you were shot. That is a big event, needless to say.

A: That was an operation in Con Thien. Now, that is an operation that I don't remember. There was an airfield near Khe Sanh called Con Thien. We had tried to move in. It was a North Vietnamese stronghold. They had been there for months, and we couldn't get them out of there. The N.V.A. had been mortaring for weeks. Choppers took us out. We landed and walked for about ten miles (about a day's walking). We got to this first valley. We sat there for three hours and watched F-111's come in and just blow the whole area up. We were thinking, "God, nothing could be living there." [They used] napalm and the whole bit. They wiped out just about the whole area. We went in and they were still there. They were just so strongly dug in. It was all underground, for one thing. There were mounds in which the Buddhists would bury their dead on top of the ground. [They would] just dig up the earth and pile it around them. So, there were a lot of grave yards up around there. I got shot in what probably was a graveyard. I only saw one mound there when I got shot. There was a big treeline. That would be the best way to explain it.

We were on what you would call an assault. What we had was our platoon, a tank, another platoon, and another tank. It was a battalion-size operation. Everyone was just lining up along the treeline. Intelligence told us that the enemy was supposed to be 300 or 400 meters ahead of us on the other side of this treeline, and they were wrong. They were sitting right there, waiting for us.

We're lining up, and the tanks were supposed to fire off one canister round and start moving forward. Then everybody would just start moving forward, and they would just cut down everything in front of them until you get to where you are supposed to be going. The Army was laying a block on the tops of the mountain ranges on the other side, and we were waiting for the 101st Airborne. I was in 1st Battalion, 9th Marines, Alpha Company, 1st Platoon, and I had the 1st Squad. So I'm at the end. I'm really at the beginning of our assault of our line, and we're waiting for the 101st airborne. They got hit probably one mile or two miles up the road. We heard them get hit, and they never made it. So we didn't have any flanks. At that time, we had been hit so badly two days before that we had four new guys that had never even been in combat, getting ready to go on this operation. I had six guys from my original squad that had just been through so much two days before that.

All of the sudden, the tanks were waiting. We're thinking that we were just targets sitting there. They were just waiting for us to start moving. They were

watching us the whole time. So, the tanks fired a canister, and we started moving forward. We got about maybe fifty feet into this jungle treeline. There was really a lot of dense vegetation. We fought our way in about fifty yards. [It] took us about three hours to get that far. We were almost out of ammunition. We got to a knoll. It was kind of like a clearing. [There was] the treeline and all this vegetation, and all of a sudden, we came to this clearing. You wait before you pass that when you're going through jungle.

They were hitting us from all over. They were all over the place. [They had] spidertraps and everything. We were just firing like weedeaters. There was a mound right down in there. They were following us in. This tank went down to take the mounds. It just ran over it. We didn't know if it was a grave. A lot of times, they would have a tunnel, which this was. Then, they found a big room underneath this tunnel. The mound was just . . . who knows. They were using it as a bunker. I was right about here and I was firing grenades into this thing, an M-79, which was a grenade launcher. I was out of ammo. My M-16 was totally out of ammo. I picked up this M-79 that was just laying there from a guy that had gotten hit. In order to get any further. . . . We were getting crossfire coming in like this and across like this. This tank tried to get by. He tried to roll over it and they hit the tank. They blew the tank. I never found out how many got killed on the tank, but I know the driver was dead, because the tank just stopped right in front of the thing.

Then, these two guys, these two friends of mine, Sergeant Clark, the platoon sergeant from 2nd Squad and a guy named Ron Chapin from second squad started running across in front of us. I never knew why. I didn't know if they were going for the bunker, or if they saw something over here, but they never should have been coming this way. See, when something like that happens, bombs going off, people get confused, and you get your directions mixed up. I don't know if they were checking on the tank or if they saw something we didn't, but all of a sudden, this Chi-Com grenade comes out of this bunker, goes off and it hits Chapin and Clark. They were both down. I'm back here with three guys. We had two guys hit already. These guys were hit. They had grenade shrapnel in their legs, but at least they could move. They had one guy shot in the stomach, and another guy shot in the chest. Those two couldn't move. They were alright. We had a corpsman working on them already. I figured when Sergeant Clark was down on his stomach and Chapin was hunched over . . . he was a real big kid.

So, there were these two guys. I had to make a decision whether to stay there. Really, according to the Marine Corps you are supposed to stay there. But nobody does it when you see a couple friends out there. You got to at least see if they're alright. I knew they got hit with the grenade and the grenades were still coming. They were still throwing these Chi-Com grenades. They couldn't reach us. We were about fifty yards away from them at that point. [We were] right at the end of this clearing, and he couldn't throw them that far. We saw him. He just kept throwing these things out. So, I put about three grenades on the top of the bunker. I was a weapons expert. That was one of my best weapons. I figured if there was anything in there, unless it was what it turned out to be: a large bunker with a lot of guys in it, we would at least clear out whoever is throwing these grenades. [We would] at least have a shot at it.

I put three rounds off the bunker. No grenades came out for awhile, so I figured it would at least be okay to run over and check on Sergeant Clark who was the closest. I got just about maybe three feet away from him and I hit the deck. I was just getting back up to move further over toward him. These two guys were behind me; the two guys I had left. They ended up pulling me out because I had to get up to get closer to Clark, and I got shot. The bunker was right up here about twenty or thirty feet away from me at this point, and I just got pushed back about three or four feet. I got mud up my nose. It hit me here (motioning towards his neck) and the bullet went in this way. It's still in there. It went between my spine and my lungs and caused a lot of pressure. The concussion just knocked me back. It felt like my whole body was ripped off. [It felt like] my whole back came off and everything. In fact, I was thinking about these grenades.

P: Did you know that's what it was?

A: Well, I saw the guy shoot me, but when it happened, you just don't put two and two together. We were also getting grenades thrown at us right before that, but not at that point. But in my mind, it was these grenades. That's what I was thinking. You can't see the bullets. You hear them whistle past you, but you can't see the bullets. You don't sweat those as much as seeing a grenade come at you. It's kind of hard to get away from a grenade. Either a bullet is going to get you or it's not. A grenade, if it comes around you. . . . You are probably going to at least get wounded or something. The way it felt. . . . I had a flack jacket on, and it slowed the bullet down. It was at close range, so I felt every inch of it. It hurt so

bad that I just thought it couldn't have been a bullet. A bullet was the last thing I thought it was.

I felt the whole thing in my back, between my spine and my lungs. The bullet entered at the base of my neck. The pressure and the pain only lasted five seconds, and then I went into shock. I didn't feel anything. I was just conscious. I'm thinking that I have this big hole in my body. It was just a small entry wound maybe about that big (gestures with hands). It was a 7.62 millimeter round. That makes a pretty big hole, but compared to what I was thinking of, it was a small entry wound. The bullet was so hot going through there, there was very little blood.

We were getting hit really bad. We had lost a lot of guys. There were a lot of guys wounded, so they got all the wounded, dragged us back to a 500 pound bomb crater that they had dropped a couple days before . . . the F-14's and F-111's that I was talking about. They made these craters a little bit bigger than this room. So there was about twenty or thirty guys down in this crater, and we were getting mortared. We were there for an hour and a half waiting for the choppers, because they were under fire. So, we're laying there waiting. Finally, the choppers came in. Those guys I was telling you about that were wounded pulled me back, and they got me back to the point where I knew I was alright. I was able to stand up.

P: You stood up?

A: Oh, yes. I said, "It's time to leave this place." They helped me back.

P: You walked back?

A: Yes. I walked back about 500 yards to the rear. It was a battalion operation, so they had a doctor at the rear. The doctor just looked at me, and I'm thinking. . . . I couldn't move with my upper body. I said, "Am I going to be paralyzed?" I just remember the real concerned look on his face. He's looking at these guys with their arms missing and everything. It was just really terrible at this point. He didn't know what to say. In fact they never tell you anything, even when you're in the hospital. Finally, then they put me on the chopper, and I first landed in Dong Ha. They took us off the choppers. They told them to keep me on, because they couldn't handle me there. They sent me down to Phu Bai.

So, we had heard all these stories before. We had heard with our own ears how corpsmen would talk. Not

that they were being derogative toward us, but that was just the way they coped. They had to put up with that stuff too. They called the choppers and the ambulances "meatwagons." A lot of times [they'd say] in front of a guy, "this guy is not going to make it. This guy is. . . ." Guys hear that. I heard some things myself, because nobody knew how bad I was. The bullet didn't come out. I had the kind of wound where, normally, guys would die a couple hours later or a few minutes later. You would feel that you were alright but had a lot of internal damage. I knew guys who got shot in the arm, and when it went in and hit their lungs. We helped them to choppers and they'd radio back before they even got to the hospital that the guy died on the way. So, I had all this going through my mind.

I still didn't know if I was really alive. I could have been dying. That's what this doctor figured too. All they see is the hole. They don't know where that bullet is. So, I get back to Phu Bai now from Dong Ha, and they take me directly into the operating room. I thought they were going to cut out the bullet. What they did was they just cut a lot of the muscle out where it went in and sewed it up halfway. They had to leave it open because it was such a long wound. It had to heal from the inside and everything.

While I was in the hospital for the first two weeks, everyday they'd come in with a rod, which looked like something you would clean a rifle out with. [They'd] stick this thing down inside me with this yellow antibiotic stuff that they used. That's more or less what it was like after that. I hated the hospital. They operated on me at Phu Bai. Then, from there, [they] flew me to Saigon, Tan Son Nhut airport. It was the first time I had ever seen Saigon. I flew out of Tan Son Nhut to the Philippines. I spent one night in the Philippines and then went to Yokasuka Naval Hospital in Japan.

P: Then they fixed you up from there?

A: Yes. They never removed the bullet. What they had to do was to watch for infection and just to see if they were going to have to take it out. They didn't want to take it out unless they had to. They tried to in Phu Bai and they couldn't do it without really ripping me up. Do you know what the doctor told me the next day after being operated on in Phu Bai? I spent the night in Phu Bai. When I woke up, I was in the recovery room. The corpsmen had apparently forgotten to give me pain medication. They had other things on their minds sometimes. But, I wake up in the recovery room and there is this bottle.

When I woke up, I didn't know where I was. I thought I was still in the field. I remember going to the hospital and everything, but waking up, I was in intense pain. [It was] like it had just happened. So, it had brought me right back to the field. I just felt this intense pain again. I just started yelling. I remember waking up and opening up my eyes. At the same time, I'm looking at this bottle, and I'm trying to figure out what this bottle is. It was like a door. [It was] half cracked open with a little bit of light coming in the door. It was all dark except for some red lights. I see these two white figures come up to me on either side. I kicked both of them, and I knocked them both over. I didn't know where I was. I was scared. All of a sudden, they came back up and dove on the bed. A guy had a needle in his hand, and I remember he hit me right in the middle of my thigh. It stung like crazy. As soon as I felt that sting, I went out.

The next morning I woke up and the anesthesiologist was standing there when I woke up. They were going through morning rounds, I guess. He and the doctor were walking through. I asked him, "Well, where's the bullet? Did it come out alright?" I'm still trying to get them to tell me if I'm going to live or die. They wouldn't tell me anything. He called the doctor over. They keep you in all this suspense. By this time, I was pretty clear as to what was going on and what had happened. The doctor came over and I said, "What about this bullet hole? Did you get the bullet out or what?" The doctor was a lieutenant colonel. He said, "The bullet? You're a Marine, digest it!" At the time, I didn't think it was funny. It's funny now when I think about it. That's the Marine Corps for you. But, I guess he was more or less doing it to keep it light. He knew I was worried, but he couldn't tell me anything, because he still didn't know. They didn't have the equipment to x-ray me to the point where they knew exactly where that bullet was, and how much damage it did. They did all that back in Japan.

P: So you knew where it was?

A: They never did tell me that I as going to be alright. It was like three weeks later that I felt some kind of relief.

P: What an experience.

A: It really was. I think that's why a lot of Vietnam Veterans have a hard time when they get back into civilian life. I know I did for a long time. I still do to this day. . . every once in a while. Although

you hate war, the excitement and the highs and lows were so intense, so diverse. There is nothing that really ever excites you. A lot of times I think people attribute psychological problems of combat veterans to things that are just normal. If you go through something like that, you are just not going to get all giddy and excited over things. Socially, in interacting with other people a lot of times. . . . They get the wrong idea about why you're like that. They feel you are disinterested because you don't like them, or because they think you're. . . .

P: That's a hard act to follow.

A: You can never be the same. It changes everybody. I feel sorry for guys who don't understand that. They get down on themselves a lot of times and they shouldn't. They should be proud of what they did and understand themselves, but it doesn't work that way all the time. It depends on how much insight they gain. Also, I think it depends on what they did while they were there. That has something to do with it. If you can justify . . . thank God. There were so many times I could have done something that I would have regretted for the rest of my life. There were times after I was back for about five years that I started having the dreams and going through PTSD. Nobody was complaining. Nobody knew. I just thought, "Well, I'm just goofy."

One day, I scared the heck out of my family. This was just about three years after I got home. I was going to YSU, and I was living at home. I had a dream, which was a recurring dream that I had started having. It ended up lasting about seven or eight years. Sometimes once a month, or sometimes a year would go by. It would never be the exact same dream, but in every dream I was in a situation just like when I got shot, where someone was trying to kill me and I had no cover, no nothing. I was just exposed. The first dream really was the only one I really moved in. There were a couple others, but it was really the first time I almost killed myself. I was sleeping in a second floor bedroom, and I had a dream that I was being fired at in the desert. In the desert . . . it wasn't in Vietnam. When the Persian Gulf War materialized, I started worrying. I thought, "Oh, my God. They're going to call me up."

Anyway, I'm in a desert, and there's a line of guys up around a ledge--like on the side of the mountain or a cliff--and they are firing down at me. I'm behind a rock, but all of a sudden, the rock disappears. When the rock disappears, I go to move. There was a bush on the side, which was no cover at all, but it was the only thing there. I went to dive into the bush in the

dream. In real life, I dove through my window. I got right up in bed and went right through. I didn't go through all the way. The screen stopped me. If it wasn't for the screen, I would have fallen two stories. I ripped the screen out of it, plus the window. Mom, Dad, and my brother were at the door. My dad was a medic during World War II, so he knew what was going on. He said, "Just leave him alone and go back to bed." I was just sitting there dazed. The window blind was really what kept me from cutting myself, and the screen kept me from going through the window. I went through PTSD.

The only thing I don't have out of my system, and I know it's something that will never be out, is what I alluded to before; the changes in attitude, and a high sensitivity for justice. You'd rather die than let anybody get anything over on you. Stuff like that.

P: When you were shot, you had mentioned about being depressed for awhile. Is that when you started thinking more about the things that you carried with you from home, because you were sitting there and you didn't have time in the field? So, now did you become more homesick?

A: When I was in the hospital, home was someplace I didn't feel like I belonged anymore. I was just drained. There was no more "I can't wait to see my girlfriend or my mother. . . ." Nothing. In fact, I went back to San Francisco, and I couldn't go home. I got off the plane at Travis Air Force Base and got my check. I took a cab to a hotel and just laid up in this hotel. I walked around all night long, going in these cafe's and looking at these people. I was just totally out of it. I got home . . . my parents were great. My family, friends, Buddy Regalia, who was a real close friend of mine. . . . They were all really great.

P: Did they all come to see you get off the plane?

A: Yes. My buddy was there. Mike Malito from Girard, he was there. Bill Briguglio was there. All my buddies were there. My parents were there also with my girlfriend. I was feeling like a foreigner. But up until landing at Youngstown Airport and meeting my family when I got home. . . . They tried to force all this food down on me which I couldn't eat. I went from 170 to 140 pounds in the hospital. I just didn't feel like eating. My stomach was like about this big. (Motions with hands.) I couldn't eat that much. My mother said, "I thought you'd be hungry." Other than that, those were the only things they couldn't understand.

They pulled me out of it almost immediately. As soon as I saw my friends. . . . They would keep telling me stuff like, "Watch your language." They brought me back to Earth. I had another buddy who had to be the weight coach, because they had cut a lot of muscle out of my shoulder. I had to stretch it back out again. I had this buddy who started working out with me with weights and stuff to help me out on that. Physically and mentally, I thought it was alright. I didn't have any problems that I knew of. I'd act bizarre sometimes with some of my friends. They'd tell me we'd go to a carnival and shoot targets, and my friends would be looking at me like really strange.

P: It's just a target!

A: Yes. I guess it was just showing through a lot at that point.

P: What seemed to change when you came home that maybe you didn't think would change while you were gone?

A: Everything. Before I left there was no such thing as a miniskirt. This was just two years in the Marine Corps, but just a year being gone in Vietnam. There was no such thing as protest that I heard of over the war or miniskirts. American people just looked foreign to me. I didn't feel like an American in that short amount of time. I almost felt that I wasn't so much a Vietnam vet, but a foreigner in my own country. I really did. I had no coming down at all. They had no debriefing or anything coming back at that point. That was pretty early in the war. . . 1967. So, it was more or less working through a lot of things.

[There were] a lot of things I didn't know happened to me that my friends pointed out to me. Sometimes they didn't catch on for a couple years. I remember my friends looking at me really strange sometimes when I would react a certain way or not react a certain way to something. All those things really took me a while to catch on to. Those were different. Some of those things, like I said, I know will never change. They just won't, because they were part of the learning process that happens in war. You just don't learn from the good situations, you also from earn terrible situations. It makes you different than other people because not all people go through war. Just like getting your graduate degree is going to do something to you. In order to understand something, you have to experience it. It's the same thing with that, only it's a little bit more gory. It changes you and you have to more or less learn how to work with that.

I went through a lot of periods. It was five years before I really started having problems. I went through a lot of periods between maybe five or six years ago and back then. I went through a lot of experiences where I knew I was changed forever. I was just this person, and I had to accept it and go on with my life the way I was and the way I felt. I tried to hold to things. You try to hold on to certain feelings, but they are just gone.

P: You can't get them back?

A: No. Some of them come back. I'm not the emotional wreck that I was then. I had a really hard time with relationships. Obviously, I've never been married. I know my situation right now, not that I don't like my situation, but I know I would have done things a lot different, probably, if that had never happened.

P: When you came home, did you go to school right away? Did you get a job? Both?

A: I got out on a school cut. I actually got discharged January 4, 1968. I got out December 15 on a school cut. I went right back to school. I thought that would. . . . I wanted to just forget everything and go right back to where I was. I thought I could. I did at first. After that initial thing coming home, and San Francisco, and after I saw that my friends were really there. . . . It's kind of strange. Because, I think after the first three years, I thought I was going back. You always think you're going back for some reason. Even though I was getting out of the Marine Corps in six months, I just thought I was. After they pulled me back to Earth, I was fine for about five years. Maybe a little wilder than normal, but no problems. I slept well. I was just a normal college kid.

P: You lived at home?

A: Yes. I lived at home for awhile, and then I moved out about three years. Then, I finally moved to Columbus. I went through a lot of very strange relationships with women. [They were] good relationships and good women. [There were] things that I should have been ready for at that age, but emotionally. . . . In one way, you grow up, and in another way. . . . I just wasn't ready to make a commitment. I was with women that I really cared about a lot, but I just couldn't. I remember thinking, "What's wrong?" I just wanted to be like a rolling stone, I guess. I just wanted to keep moving.

P: It wasn't like you didn't have any feelings, but you didn't have any feelings.

A: I couldn't control them. I guess, maybe, I had diverse feelings. On one side, I was trying to be the same guy I was; going steady all the way through high school and that type of thing. I went with the same girl all the way through high school. Just before I went in the Marine Corps, I had dated another girl. I mean, I had dated other girls, but I just had one girlfriend in high school. I was that kind of guy. I probably would have been married by the time I was twenty-one.

Then, that was just different. People looked at me different. People thought of me different. Eventually, I just gave into it. I just stopped wanting to be the other way, and now it's the way I am. I went through a pretty wild part of my life that I know I never would have if it wasn't for the service. I never really got in trouble. That was the one thing that probably stuck with me. My parents were probably tougher than the Marine Corps when it came to that and they made me a good person, basically. So, I never really got into trouble, though I could have gotten into a lot of trouble. I'd risk my life a lot doing things that I probably shouldn't have been doing. But I don't think. . . . In fact, I'm positive that I just never would have done a lot of stuff. It took a lot of years to reconcile that. I never really got. . . . Eventually, my parents did find out that I wasn't the same kid that left in 1967. I really felt rotten. I wasn't brought up to be like this. This stuff started registering, and I'm thinking, "Why am I doing this?"

P: Change is a shock.

A: Sure.

P: I think the military too, teaches that when you're there that nothing is going to change. It's like time stood still, but everything changed.

A: Everything changes around you, and you change and everything else changes. You come home and everybody's. . . .

P: Even your room was different. Was it?

A: No.

P: Did she leave it alone?

A: I shared a room with my brother. Well, my parents didn't change my room, but my brother did. He had his trophies and everything all over the place. He was only seven years old when I was sent to Vietnam. That

was a trip too. I used to think of him a lot. One of the biggest reasons I felt that I wanted to be there was that he'd never have to go through what I did. I used to think, "Boy, I'd hate to see my brother ever go through this." I think that's what pushed a lot of guys to go. Even though everybody said we weren't there fighting for anything, we were fighting for something. This wasn't going to happen at home. Whether you want to look at being right or wrong, the wrong timing, or whatever, it still exists whether you are going to be there or not. It's still going on. Turning your back on it. . . .

P: Doesn't make it go away.

A: Eventually, it could come to our own doorstep. A lot of people laugh at that thinking, but I truly believe it.

P: Is there anything that you'd like to add that I didn't cover in the interview? Is there anything you thought you would ask that I didn't?

A: Not really. I didn't do too much. . . .

P: Thinking about it?

A: Yes. I didn't prejudge what was going to be going on. Usually, when I talk about Vietnam, it's with somebody like my brother or someone that's really interested. The one thing I'd like to bring out, and I think that I've already mentioned to some degree is that Vietnam Vets become the heavies a lot of times. It really makes me mad. It really irritates me. There are guys that for the most part. . . .

First of all, I think you will hear a lot of things from a lot of people who know absolutely nothing about Vietnam like guys that have been there working in the rear or something. They are the ones that always tell the biggest stories. I've just heard so much garbage from so many people. They'll act like they speak for all Veterans. Nobody can speak for all Veterans . . . even the ones that are dead. Nobody can speak for them, especially people that hadn't even been there. I find that really despicable in terms of some organizations or some individuals that try to say stuff that kind of throws the American general public off in their thinking and their attitude towards Vets. I really don't believe that our combat Vets are the baby killer-type, or the hard atheistic-type of individuals that a lot of these guys try to create. That's just not the image. All the combat vets that I know, guys who have really seen something, are really basically good people. They abhor violence. You won't find too

many of them hunting. That's probably what bothers me more than anything else is the image that's out there about Vietnam Vets.

P: The negative stereotype is so poor.

A: My girlfriend is thirty-five years old, but she was totally afraid of Vietnam Vets until she met me. She had so many wrong ideas about the way we were.

P: Did you tell her right off that you were in Vietnam, or did you wait awhile?

A: She knew it before we went out. A friend of mine kind of fixed us up. She kind of knew it. She admitted to me, after I had known her for a while, how she had felt about Vietnam Vets before she met me. She was even leery about going out with me. These guys that walk around with the earrings in their ears--not that I don't have any empathy for some of them--some of them just said, "Screw it," but in a little bit stronger terms. That period kind of passed for me. I grew probably because of good parents, good friends, and just a little bit of luck. Maybe that's why I don't have that attitude. I've worked with Vets on a day to day basis. When I see them come in here with that attitude. . . . First of all, I don't find too many combat vets that do have that attitude. I think that's what people should really know. It's not the Combat Vets. It's not the guy that is in the field, necessarily, that is always crying about benefits, and crying about this, and crying about that. As a matter of fact, I think there are very few guys that were in all that, that are doing that type of complaining.

P: That they got handled and all that. . . . I have found that in my interviews. You are absolutely right. I was surprised at what I've found so far. There are a lot of connections with all of you. That's exactly what you just said. It's real commendable. That's what I felt and that's why I wanted to do this. Thank you.

A: Thanks.

END OF INTERVIEW