

YOUNGSTOWN STATE UNIVERSITY
ORAL HISTORY PROGRAM

Vietnam Veterans

Personal Experience

O.H. 910

DAVID R. MORRIS

Interviewed

by

Tom W. Kirker

on

November 23, 1983

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YOUNGSTOWN STATE UNIVERSITY

ORAL HISTORY PROGRAM

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INTERVIEWEE: David R. Morris

INTERVIEWER: Tom W. Kirker

SUBJECT: Vietnam Veterans of Lawrence County

DATE: November 23, 1983

K: This is an interview with David Morris for the Youngstown State University Oral History Program, on Vietnam Veterans, by Tom Kirker, on November 23, 1983, 423 E. Meyer Avenue, New Castle, Pennsylvania, at 7 p.m.

Are you from the local area? Did you go to school here?

M: Yes.

K: What year did you graduate?

M: 1967.

K: How did you find your way into the service?

M: I was drafted.

K: What year was that?

M: 1970.

K: What branch of the service were you in?

M: [The] U.S. Army.

K: Where did you do your basic training?

M: Ft. Dix, New Jersey.

K: What field did you go into after?

M: I was infantry.

K: Rifleman?

M: Yes.

K: What grade were you when you got out of basic training?

M: E-1.

K: Is that the rank that you went over with?

M: No, I was PV2.

K: Did they give you another stripe when you went over?

M: They gave me two stripes after I went over, E-4 and E-5.

K: When did you go over to Vietnam?

M: I went October, 8, 1970.

K: What unit were you with?

M: [The] 25th Infantry Division.

K: What area were you stationed in?

M: We were a little bit everywhere. We were at Long Bien, Bien Hoa, Qui, Nhon, Katum, Xuam Loc. We moved quite a bit.

- K:** What was your impression of Vietnam the first time you got there?
- M:** I was shocked. I had expected something different. It was polluted. It was very primitive. I expected it to be something like, not necessarily exactly like, the United States and the people to live the same way we did. It was completely different. It wasn't what I expected.
- K:** When you went over, had you pretty much followed the war?
- M:** A little bit. I had a brother-in-law that was there before me. He was in the Navy. I followed where he was at, but not real, real close.
- K:** What types of operations did you go on?
- M:** We were in the bush all of the time. We would go out on a mission for 30 to 90 days. We would come back for three [days]. The day you got in would count as one, the next day would be two, and then the third day you would leave and be out again. We would be in the jungle.
- K:** If you were going to tell somebody what it was like on patrol in jungle warfare, what would you say?
- M:** You would just check out the jungle and go through it all day long. In the early evening you would set up AP's [ambush positions], which is an area that they chose that you would stay at. You went into an area when it got dark and that is where you bushed during the night. You would get up in the morning and you would start combing the area again and do the same thing all over again. You would be out there from 30 to 90 days.
- K:** Didn't it sort of start to get to you after awhile?
- M:** Yes. Sleeping on the ground, wearing the same clothes, and eating C-rations all of the time got to me.
- K:** Did you think that it was doing the job that we intended?
- M:** We were there to do a job. We were there to train people to fight their own war. That was our only reason to do that. We did that job. When we pulled out, we left them on their own. They didn't do their job, but we did ours.
- K:** What was it like to train the South Vietnamese?

M: Difficult. Since I was there in the later years, it was my estimation that they wanted you to fight their war for them and not fight their war for themselves. When you worked with them, they wanted you to do the dirty work instead of them doing it. They wanted you to fight the war for them.

K: Did they go with you on patrols?

M: Yes.

K: When you went out to patrol, was it a platoon or a company?

M: You went as a squadron. Companies would break up into platoons and then squads.

K: That is 10 men?

M: You had a platoon in which you had two squads. One would go one way, the other would go the other. You always bushed separately at night. You didn't work together. I would say there were about ten, maybe a little less.

K: You were a rifleman?

M: Yes. I carried the M-16 and the M-79.

K: You had heavy weapons or an M-60?

M: We had M-79s and M-60s.

K: Obviously it was hard there. Did you ever meet the NVA (North Vietnamese Army)?

M: Alive, no. Dead, yes. If the Americans captured the enemy they were not put in concentration camps and be a POW like ours were. They worked with the Americans. We had two working with us. Those were the only live ones that I saw, and they were paid by the USA.

K: What did they do?

M: The same thing that we did. They would go with us. They would be our translators. They would look for booby traps. They knew the area. They knew the country and how the NV worked. That was their purpose, to let us know.

K: Did you come across a lot of booby traps?

M: No. I was down south. The booby traps were more up north. We saw some, but not a great deal.

K: How far out of Saigon were you?

M: We were close to Saigon, I would say a 15 minute flight, if that far.

K: Was there a lot of action down there? Was there a lot of enemy activity?

M: Yes.

K: Did you think that you were getting the full support of the Army when you were in the field?

M: Definitely. We had air support, medo-vac support, resupply. I would say that they did a good job.

K: When you were in, did you think that the war was going to end up the way it did?

M: No, definitely not. It was kind of a shock. When you came back and saw the fall of Saigon on the TV, it was a little bit of a shock. I didn't think that it would end up that way.

K: What do you think led to the fall of Saigon?

M: The [NVA] marched into Saigon and the people welcomed them. That is what they wanted. As far as I was concerned, we showed them how to fight their war. We were there for 10 years. They just let them come in, they welcomed them. It was their downfall, not ours.

K: What do you remember most about Vietnam?

M: We had to sleep out on the ground and in the rain. We remember good stuff and bad stuff. You remember it all, you never forget it. It is part of your life. There have been good things and there have been bad things. I remember them all.

K: What were some of the good times?

M: When we came back out of the field after 30 to 90 days, they would have what they called a stand down. They would have strippers, bands, steak dinners, and all the beer you could drink. Those were good times. And seeing former Miss America, Phyllis George.

K: Was she there?

M: Yes, I saw her in person. I saw Sebastian Cabbet. The wasn't a USO show, it was just people who came into the area that I saw.

K: Did you have vacation to get to Saigon?

M: No. When I was there, Saigon was off limits to us. As close as I got to Saigon was Ton Son Nut Air Base. We weren't allowed into Saigon. It was off limits.

K: The camp that you stayed at, how big was it for the three and four day stop over?

M: Some of them were big and some of them were small. Sometimes we were just at a fire base, and they were really small. It was just a holding place for us. When we went back, there was no place to sleep or anything. You just found somewhere to lay down and you just slept, you didn't have a bed or anything. They would have clean clothes for you and you would take a shower. That was it.

K: You pushed on from base to base then?

M: Yes, base to base. We would go out for whatever. Usually half of the time you would come back to a different place. You didn't always go back to the same place.

K: Did they do a lot of search-and-destroy missions?

M: Yes.

K: Do you think that those worked?

M: Yes. We would come along to bunker complexes where they were hiding out. We destroyed them. We were looking for them, that was our job. We would find bunker complexes and destroy them, we would blow them up.

K: Where there a lot of bunkers?

M: You wouldn't believe them people. They live primitively, but they can sure build a place. They had picnic tables made out of just wood off of a tree. They had tunnels. They would take the trunk of the tree and dig a hole in the space between two roots coming out of the ground and use that as their toilet. It was remarkable how they lived out in the jungle.

K: Was there anyway that you could maybe identify those tunnels before you got to them?

M: No.

K: They were pretty well camouflaged?

M: Yes, very well camouflaged. They would have one opening that you would go into and the exit was somewhere else where you didn't expect their outlet to escape would be.

K: Did you find many of those tunnels in the villages?

M: We didn't work a lot in the villages. We worked mainly in the jungle. We didn't work in a village, but in a rubber plantation owned by a Frenchman. It had a built-in swimming pool, tennis court, and service quarters. That was more or less the only village or whatever you want to call it [that we worked in]. We were in the jungle. I never was in the villages.

K: Did you have a lot of trouble with trench foot or jungle rot and things like that?

M: I don't know if I had it, but I had something in which the skin just peeled right off the bottom of my feet. I don't know. I never got it checked. I never knew of anybody having it.

K: When did you come out of Vietnam?

M: October 8, 1971.

K: You were in for a full tour?

M: Yes, one full year.

K: When you came out, what grade were you?

M: E-5.

K: You flew back to the States?

M: Yes.

K: Was your time up then?

M: When I was getting out, they gave you a four month drop. I came home on leave and then I went to Fort Carson, Colorado for 30 days, then I came home for good. I got out on December 16, 1971, but I wasn't supposed to get out until April. They gave me a four month drop, so I got out early.

K: In Vietnam, what did you expect when you got out?

M: How would we be treated when we got home?

K: Yes.

M: Not a hero, but respected. I served my honorably, but you didn't get that at all. The news media destroyed us. We got one story when we were there and you got one story when you were here. I didn't think that we would be put down when we came back. You were really downgraded if you were a Vietnam Veteran. It was unfair. Your World War I and World War II [veterans] were all heroes. When we came back, we were something less than a hero. It was a disappointment. I was very disappointed.

K: Do you think it is starting to change?

M: Yes, very, very slowly, but it's changing.

K: If somebody asked you to tell them about Vietnam, what would you tell them?

M: I don't know if I would really say anything. There are so many people, especially younger people, that ask you and then kind of make it out like they wouldn't have done this or that, or would have refused orders, or wouldn't have even gone. That kind of attitude makes you not want to talk. If they had to be put in the same situation, they aren't going to tell anybody that they aren't going to do it. You are government property and they tell you what to do.

K: Did you have a lot of animosity towards the draft deserters and dodgers?

M: Yes, I was really bitter. I didn't think it was fair. They knew what they were getting into when they did it. They knew the consequences and for them to get renounced after, I was really bitter. It was always that bumper sticker going around, "Love it or leave it". They knew the consequences and what they were doing when they did it. To get complete amnesty. . . If another Vietnam would happen, the same thing is going to happen. They just have to wait until some president come along and gives them amnesty. It was very unfair. It is a slap in the face for the ones the went. It wasn't that I didn't want to, it was just that our history is made up of wars from way back. My father was in World War II. I am not better than anybody else. I had to serve my time and I served it. I am not saying that I really wanted to do it, but I live in this country and I reap its freedom and its benefits. I should serve my country.

K: From your point of view as an infantry man, what was the biggest problem over there?

M: Not being able to fight a war your way. I was in the infantry. If you were in a free fire zone, you could be fired at for an hour or whatever. If you weren't in a free fire zone, you couldn't fire back. That was a big problem. If a civilian got hurt, it was a big rigmarole. They were ready to get some lieutenant in trouble. It wasn't fought like a war, yet they could fire at you or do whatever they wanted. If you weren't in a free fire zone, you couldn't fire back because they were afraid of civilians getting hurt. If the government destroyed crops, they had to replace them. If they destroyed a rubber tree, they had to replace it. It just wasn't done in a way that you could protect yourself. If they shoot, you should shoot back. That was a big problem, a very big problem. There were certain areas that you could fire and some area that you couldn't.

K: The certain areas that you couldn't fire in, were they villages?

M: No, it didn't have to be a in village. It could be like farmland where the civilians worked the land. It could be an orchard with fruit trees or something where they worked the land. I saw a lieutenant get killed that way. It wasn't a free fire zone because there were people working in the trees with ladders and that. He made his platoon get down, but he was standing up looking at what was going on, and he was shot. It was just that they had the advantage of it where you didn't. That made it a little bit unfair.

K: Did the fire come from the orchard?

M: Yes.

K: Some people said that you would meet people in the day, like locals, and then at night some of the people that you never expected would come out and try to harm you and things like that.

M: That is true. We had a man who gave us rice during the day and he was killed on an ambush that night. They were friend by day and enemy by night. It was very true. You didn't know who your enemy was. They all looked the same. It was true.

K: Did they have a lot of weapons?

M: Yes. They had AK-47s, they were communist weapons. [They had] pistols. They weren't armed as well as we were, but they had weapons.

K: Did your squad discover a big cache of weapons when pushing through the jungle?

M: No, we found food like rice. It was thrown in the river and then they wanted us to retrieve it. No, not weapons.

K: Did your platoon ever take part in ambushes?

M: We ambushed every night.

K: You were ready in case anything happened?

M: Yes. You put on your claymores and trip flares. You bushed every night.

K: Who carried the stuff like claymores?

M: You carried it on your back. Everybody had their own.

K: Everybody had their own claymore?

M: Everybody had their own claymores, trip flares, ammo, food, and water. The only one that carried XOM (extra ammunition) would be somebody that was carrying the M-60 machine gun. They designated two or three people to carry extra ammo. They were called ammo bearers because they couldn't carry it all. Everybody carried their own equipment.

K: Did you have a radio man?

M: Yes, RTO [Radio Transmission Operator]. We had two radios. One radio was for getting in touch with each platoon, each squad, and the other one was to radio to get higher-ups back in the rear, the big shots. If there was something, we had to radio in.

K: Were there many occasions where you had to call in air strikes and things like that?

M: Yes. You would call in air strikes from your artillery or mortar platoon. Every company had their own mortar platoon. You could either use them or use artillery. They were used quite a bit.

K: How long would it take for them to get there?

M: It took them no time at all.

K: Was it pretty much over by then when they got there?

M: It depended. If you hit NVA, they would stay and fight you. If it was VC (Viet Cong), it was hit and run. You always knew who you were fighting. The NVA wouldn't back off. The VC would take advantage of you, hit, do their damage, and leave.

K: Would you go back and fight again?

M: I have been asked this question before. I don't know if I would go back, so to speak, but I guess I would go back if it was plotted in a different way than it was when I was there. If my country needed me or whatever, I think I would go back. It would have to be done a lot differently then it was, though.

K: What would you change?

M: [I would] go in and get it over with. I would fight it like a war and get it over instead of more or less a police action. That is what they called it. That is the way it was a long time ago. I would just go in and get it over with.

K: Do you think now that TV and everything is doing it justice? Do you think they are portraying true pictures?

M: Do you mean the news media?

K: Books, Vietnam specials, movies.

M: Certain ones do and certain ones don't. I have read some that I agree with and I read some that I didn't agree with. It just depends. I have seen movies on TV that were biggest farce going. *Apocalypse Now* was about the closest one that I have seen that I have liked. Some of them are and some of them aren't. Some of them are very big farces. I don't even know the name of the one that John Wayne was in.

K: *The Green Berets*.

M: That was the biggest farce going. That was untrue. If you would have fought the war the way they fought it, you would have lost.

K: Did you get a lot of mail and stuff like that?

M: Yes, we got mail every resupply. We got resupplied every three days.

K: By air?

M: It came in by chopper.

K: Did you have to clear a landing zone?

M: We would go to an area that was pretty open and pretty flat. They would come in and resupply us with water and food and mail. They would give us soap, writing paper, and cigarettes every three days on the button.

K: When you got up in the morning, would you just start your patrol then?

M: Yes. You would get up in the morning at the crack of dawn. You would eat and off you went. You would gear up and be on the move.

K: You would stop at dark again?

M: Yes.

K: Were you ever attacked at night?

M: One time. We had sporadic attacks. We had one when we were working with the mech (mechanized) unit. It was artillery. We got into some heavy stuff. The mech unit had .60 caliber. It lasted quite awhile. I can remember putting my poncho liner over my head so I wouldn't have to see the flashes, as if it were going to help. It was some heavy stuff. The killed three gooks (Vietnamese). We had to bury them the next day. That was about the worst I had seen. It lasted for quite awhile.

K: How long?

M: I would say a good half an hour. Usually it was just hit and miss and it was over. This lasted quite awhile. They had air strikes. They had everything. This was at night. It was about the heaviest one I had seen.

K: Is there anything that you would like to add?

M: If you would have asked me for this interview 10 years ago, I would have denied it. I went down to [Washington] D.C. for the welcome home parade and the dedication of the Vietnam Memorial. It wasn't until then that I wasn't ashamed that I was a Vietnam Vet. Before, I wouldn't have told you that I was. Now, I am proud that I served my country in Vietnam. I would like to see the American people understand why we were there, what we went through, and what it was like. [I'd like them] not to look down on us. We are trying to, more or less, educate the public. The news media did such a bad job on us that they go us kind of martyred. I would like to see that label cleared and lifted. I don't look at myself as a war hero. I served my country and I have an honorable discharge. I would like the American people to look at the Vietnam veteran as he served his country and not as a baby killer and stuff like that, like [William] Calley. As far as I'm concerned, he got a raw deal. I would like to see the American people look at the Vietnam veteran with a little more respect.

K: Did that stuff happen a lot with babies?

- M:** I had seen one civilian get killed when I was there. The lieutenant in charge got into trouble for it and he was relieved of his duty. The civilian was in the wrong place at the wrong time. Usually the civilians are the first ones to know where we were at. If we came into the area, they would take off. I didn't see a lot of civilians being killed. I only saw one.
- K:** What are some ways that your group can change that attitude? It seems that most people want to picture you as baby killers and drug addicts and things like that.
- M:** Community involvement where the Vietnam veteran gets involved with community affairs. They volunteer their services for the telethon or something like that. We have to get into the community to get involved with its affairs in order to show them that we are not what they think we are. We are human beings just like them, and we want to help our community and we want them to understand us. I think that is the biggest thing. I think that if you are involved with the community, where the people are seeing what the Vietnam Veteran is doing and what he is really like, they are going to help him.
- K:** Are you making headway towards that?
- M:** It is very slow. It is like somebody who is hardheaded and can't change their mind. It is hard. We are looked down upon. We use our post, 315 VFW (Veterans of Foreign Wars). There are some people in there that would like to see us out. It was just not accepted by everybody. There are a lot of them that will back us. A lot of them feel that if the Vietnam Veteran doesn't come into the VFW, then eventually the VFW will fold. Other ones are diehard and don't want to see us in there.
- K:** Some of the World War II veterans?
- M:** Yes. It was just like the Korean veterans. They were looked down upon. It took them how many years? We are going to have the same battle, and we are going to win.
- K:** Do you have any pictures or anything from when you were in Vietnam?
- M:** Sure. We were going to go to D.C. to see my friend Steven Duffey's name on The Wall next month. He was killed in Qui Nhon right after I left. The story make *Life Magazine*. He was the only American soldier killed in Vietnam that day. I had talked to a friend of mine that was stationed with me. We went down to D.C. for the parade. I had talked to him on the telephone a couple of says before I left. He was telling me about it [the story in *Life*] because I didn't know. I went down to the library, got the magazine, and read the article. I knew him and contacted his family 10 years later. I didn't know whether to do it or not. It was a little bit difficult. His parents had gotten a divorce and had split in different directions. His brother's

name was in the article, so I called directory assistance for him. He wasn't home, but his wife said he would love to talk to me. I said that I would call back. I called back and his brother, sister, and father were there. I sent him a year book type thing with both our pictures in it. His belongings came back with him, but there was no book. I got a thank you letter from his brother. I just got a letter from his sister. It will be over a year next month that I sent that book. She is just writing now because it has been difficult for her to do. I just got a letter thanking me. He was the only American soldier killed in Vietnam that day. His name was Steven Duffey.

K: Where was he from?

M: Michigan.

K: Was it common to print these types of books?

M: Yes. I have another one, but I don't know where it is. It is a 25th Infantry Division Yearbook. It is like a history of each division with pictures.

K: Is your picture in here?

M: Yes.

K: Where at?

M: I am in there two or three times. This is the kid that was killed.

K: What the Hill 131?

M: That is where he was killed. It was around Qui Nhon Harbor and it was like a small mountain he was on top of. It overlooked the harbor. They kept an eye on the harbor. The story in *Life Magazine* was that they were slowly but surely pulling everyone out. They were at a lack of manpower. They [the VC or NVA] took advantage of it and overran Hill 131.

K: What are HPs?

M: Harbor Police.

K: Were you right on it?

M: We were right on the Qui Nhon port. I saw two Merchant Marine ships get sunk while I was there.

K: By the Viet Cong?

M: Yes.

K: From what?

M: Satchel charges. The Merchant Marine ships were docked at the pier. The sappers went swimming and put a charge on the boat and sank it. The Navy would have to come in and get up out of the water enough to take it to a dry dock and repair it.

K: Were there a lot of U.S. Naval ships?

M: No. It was mostly Merchant Marines. We had small Navy ships, but nothing big, at least not while I was there.

K: Did you come over on a ship transport.

M: No, I flew in on Pan Am. I flew home on Flying Tigers, it was a big orange and black plane. The stewardesses were old ladies.

K: What do you think of the monument in Washington?

M: I like it. It was really a special day. It really make you feel good and welcomed. It was really nice.

K: I think it is just 10 years too late.

M: People do look at it that way. Whether it was 10 years too late or not, we were recognized. That is all that counts.

K: Did you march in the parade?

M: I marched in the one down in D.C. and I have marched in a couple around here. Before I marched in the one down in D.C., I marched in one in Youngstown. The people there were taking their hats off and putting it over their hears while you were marching by or saluting you or something. It made you feel really good.

K: How did you know the Vietnamese working with you were on the level?

M: You didn't. You had to trust them. Ours were good. The other platoon had their claymores turned around on them. they took them away and we never saw them again. We knew what happened to them. We never had any trouble with ours.

K: Did you travel a lot by helicopter?

M: Helicopter or chopper, yes.

K: Was there an observation tower on top of Hill 131?

M: There was no tower. There was just some observation from the hill. You can see the whole harbor.

K: Were you ever wounded?

M: Yes. There were three of us hit. They came in after us by medo-vac chopper. When we got to the 24th evac, there were three doctors and a nurse right there on the chopper pad waiting for us. They were really fantastic. I had malaria, too, so I was in the hospital twice. Anything they can do for you, they do. If they can't do anything, they sent you to Japan. The medical team was fantastic, I thought. They really did a great job.

K: Did you get hit when you were on an operation?

M: Yes. We came onto a bunker complex down a stream. They went down to destroy it. Instead of sending everyone down and making them all go through the stream, they left five of us back with everybody's ruck sacks. While they were gone they hit us. By the time they got back to help us, the chopper was there to take us out. I got hit with shrapnel from a grenade.

K: How long were you in the hospital?

M: It was just a superficial wound, it wasn't anything bad. I was there for two or three days, that was all. It wasn't bad. It looked like somebody punched me and gave me a black eye. I was lucky.

K: Scared?

M: Shitless.

K: I would imagine.

M: Yes, I was scared. I was scared the first day I went over, too. Going over there, you don't sleep on the plane. It is an 18 hour flight, but you don't sleep all the way over when your thinking about when you get to Vietnam and they throw a weapon in your hand and you run to a ditch. It wasn't like that. Coming home I slept the whole way. It was all over.

K: Did the other guys who got hit make it all right?

M: Yes. They patched us up and sent us back. Unless you got a million dollar wound, they wouldn't send you back to the States. If you weren't that bad off they would send you back and you would start all over again.

K: Same unit and everything?

M: Yes.

K: How long were you out with malaria?

M: I was out for maybe two or three weeks. For some people it was longer. Some people had it and couldn't break their fever. They would have to be sent to Japan. Mine broke. Once I was okay they sent me back to my unit again.

K: Do you get recurrences of it?

M: I have never had one. I thought I had it one time. I went to the doctor, but it wasn't malaria. Knock on wood, I haven't had a relapse of it. That will make you really sick.

K: Was there a lot of disease in you squad?

M: Malaria was like a common cold. I think almost everybody got it. I don't think there were too many that got through it without getting it. I even took the pills that they gave you religiously. the white pill you took everyday and the orange pill you took on Monday. I still got it. I would say that lots and lots of them got it. It was just like a common cold, everybody had it.

K: Were there lots of drugs?

M: Yes, there was a lot. It wasn't so much in the field. I never saw anybody take it when we were out in the field, but back in the rear there was a lot. There was heroin. I never saw them shoot it, but I saw them take the tobacco out of the cigarette, put the powder in, twist it, and light up. They would smoke it that way. I never saw anybody inject it. I saw them buy it over the fence. There was coke (cocaine).

When I got out, I had to take a test to see if I was on drugs. If you were, you didn't go home. They would send you to a hospital there and send you State side. They would put you through a drug and alcohol abuse program and that type of thing before you got out. The first day when you were getting out you had to go

clear everything. The first thing you did when you got there was to take this test. That was the very first thing. It didn't matter what rank you were, you had to take it. The next day they would read off this manifest of who flunked it. There were a lot of people who flunked it. They just didn't go home.

K: They had to wait until they detoxified?

M: Yes.

K: Did they get honorable discharges?

M: I don't know if they would prosecute you for it? Whether they did, I don't know. The only time I have seen anybody prosecuted was when a kid was buying it over the fence. Another kid was an innocent by-standard walking by the fence and he saw it happen. They wrote up a paper saying that he witnessed it and they wanted him to sign it. He wouldn't rat on another GI. He was prosecuted as an accomplice to the crime. That was a little unfair. That was the only time I saw anybody go to jail for it. There was a jail in Vietnam, too. LBJ was what we called it, Long Bien Jail. After they found that they were on it [the list], I don't know what they did to them. If they got caught buying it, they got in trouble.

K: Have you ever started reading more about the war?

M: I did at first. My interest was reading books on POWs. They give me nightmares, not the Vietnam War specifically, but just war in general. I fought my own private war in my sleep. I cut it out. I didn't do it. It was the only trouble that I had. Seeing a movie on TV might bother me. I used to like to read the books on the POWs, but I quit because it bothered me. I haven't read one in a long time, so I don't know if I would still be affected or not.

K: Did you read a lot in the service?

M: I didn't have the time. I read *Stars and Stripes*, but that was it. We didn't have access to any books. I read *Stars and Stripes* and my mail, that was it.

K: When you were out in the jungle, did you see a lot of animals?

M: Yes, the bamboo viper snake. It is very small and colorful. It's lime green and very deadly. There were peacocks, monkeys, and elephants. I never did see an elephant, but they were there. There were ants. That was a really big shock the first time I saw it. When you see an ant on the sidewalk and you put your finger down, the ant will run. This ant they call molegraters. I don't know if that is the correct name, but that's what the GIs called them. That ant would stand there and fight you. It was kind of a big ant. It was sort of a red color. Its front end would stand

up and it would fight you. They were usually on trees. I have seen them fall off trees on a GI going by. They didn't know they were there, and the next thing you know he would be ripping his clothes off because of they would bite bad. There were all kinds of little animals and spiders and stuff like that.

K: Were there a lot of insects?

M: Yes, there were a lot of ants and spiders.

K: When you were bedding down for the night, how did you make sure there weren't any animals around?

M: One time I didn't and slept on an ant hill. I couldn't figure out why I was scratching all night. I moved myself and the next morning I found the ant hill. Usually we slept pretty much on open ground. Where we bushed wasn't completely jungle, it was enough of an open area that you could check out. If you worked in the rubber plantation, that was easy because you could hide behind rubber trees. Elephant grass was really tall grass. You could lay back in the grass and never touch the ground. Sometimes you didn't have time, though. You would go in just as it was getting dark. You would have to set up your claymores and trip flares and everything. By the time you got done, it was dark. You didn't want to go in and let them know where you were at. That is why you were moving at almost dark. I took rocks out, laid down, and went to sleep.

K: Did you sleep pretty restlessly?

M: It depended on what operation and what intelligence report you were told before you left. If it was a little hairy, you slept a little restless. If nothing happened, you slept a little easier. It depended on what they told you. Their intelligence reports were blown way out of proportion half of the time. They were exaggerated quite a bit. They were never true. What you were supposed to find you never found.

K: When you came out of the jungle and went home, was it a hard transition?

M: No. The only thing when I came home was hunting. The only thing that bothered me was the first time someone fired a gun. I hit the ground. Other than that, compared to other people I have heard about who had trouble, I would say it was pretty easy for me. I never had that many problems.

K: Was there a lot of drinking?

M: Oh, yes.

K: All of the time?

- M:** When we had time off that is what you did, you ate and drank.
- K:** Did you try to follow the football scores and things like that?
- M:** If you were in the area where you could get to a radio to hear Armed Forces Network, you could get the scores. For us in the jungle it was a little difficult. You couldn't have a radio or anything like that. They had their own radio station. They played their music. As a matter of fact, I have tapes of the radio. For us in the jungle, we just talked and walked, that was about it. There wasn't much recreation that we could do in between time. When we had time off or if you were held up in an area for a short period of time, you usually wrote letters home. That was your time to do that. That is what I always did if we stopped for any length of time.
- K:** Did they do anything special for the holidays?
- M:** Yes, they brought us a hot meal at Christmas. Instead of eating C-rations, we ate a hot meal. We never did see the Bob Hope USO shows. That was either for the wounded in the hospital or the rear echelon.
- K:** Was there a lot of animosity towards the rear echelon guys?
- M:** Yes. If you were rear echelon, you were kind of looked down upon. I guess we were jealous. They were looked down upon quite a bit. They got to sleep in a bed at night. They had clean clothes, mattresses, sheets. Mama-son washed their clothes and shined their boots. We didn't have to shine our boots. They had clean clothes everyday. They didn't have war stories to tell.
- K:** If your son asked you about the war, what would you tell him?
- M:** The truth the way I saw it. I am sure by the time he is old enough, he will be studying it. He is only five. I am sure there is some history along the way in school that he will be studying Vietnam somewhere. I will just tell him how I felt about it. It is funny if you talk to John (Fisher) and then talk to me. He was there a lot earlier than I was. He will talk to me and I will talk to him and it is like two different wars. He was there in the earlier time and laid the format for what we had. He didn't have the swimming pools, the EM (enlisted mens') clubs. They built them for us. It was like two different wars. They didn't have all of the stuff that we had. We could call home on a short wave radio. It was called a "mars call". You would contact somebody in the United States and they would contact through the telephone the party you wanted. You would have to say "Hello, over" and that type of thing. The closest I got home was somewhere in Kentucky. We had a lot more advantages and benefits than they did earlier. It was just like two different wars.

K: Did you get any leaves?

M: Yes, I went to Hawaii. I loved it. Someday I want to go back.

K: Did the government pay for it all?

M: They flew me there for nothing, but my wife had to pay her own fare. When I got there I had to pay for the hotel bill myself. They just flew me there, that was all. It was really nice.

K: I could imagine. What was the pay that you were getting as an infantryman?

M: I couldn't tell you, it's been so long. I would say because we had some combat payment it was between \$200 and \$300 a month. It could have been more than that. I sent most of it home. You didn't have to buy anything. Your cigarettes and everything were given to you. If you were rear echelon, you had to buy all of that. It was given to us in the infantry. You were out in the boonies and there was no place to spend money anyways. You weren't allowed to keep a lot of money. If you came up with a lot of cash, they would want to know where you got it. If you were going to keep it, you had to put it in a safe with the company or in an area bank. They had banks. They kept track so they knew where your money was. If you had a large amount of money, they would think that you were in the black market or something like that.

K: Was the black market pretty bad?

M: Yes. The black market was getting American goods and they were selling them back to us. For instance, if we were out in the field we would call them "soda girls". They would come up with cans of Coke that were ice cold. They would sell it to you for a dollar a can. You would pay them with military payment, which we weren't allowed to do. They'd charge you a dollar a can, but you'd pay for it because it was cold. There was a lot of black market. I didn't do that. There were cigarettes and radios and stuff like that. Mama son came up to me with a ration card. You were allowed to buy so many cartons of cigarettes per month. She had this GI ration card. she wanted me to go buy her cigarettes. Where she got it, I don't know.

K: Was there evidence of agent orange use in any of the areas you were in?

M: I don't know. In area that were sprayed the heaviest, I was in. I didn't know what agent orange was to say that I have seen it. I never saw it sprayed or anything like that.

One time we needed a landing zone and they dropped a bomb by parachute. It just levelled everything into shreds. The choppers went in. I never did see agent orange used. It was used in areas that I was in, but I never saw it being done to what it was like.

K: Did you ever use tear gas?

M: No, we used smoke grenades for everything. If you would come to a bunker complex, you would just throw a smoke bomb in there. We never used tear gas. The only time that I saw tear gas was in training.

K: They made you run through with your [gas] masks?

M: Yes, you had to do it every six months.

K: When you hit any of those tunnels, were there ever enemies in there?

M: No. There probably have been but not when I was there. We didn't run into anybody that was in it. Usually when we got to a bunker complex, they were all gone.

K: Is there anything you'd like to talk about that we haven't covered?

M: No, I don't think so.

K: Well then, thank you for your time.

M: You're welcome.

END OF INTERVIEW