

YOUNGSTOWN STATE UNIVERSITY

ORAL HISTORY PROGRAM

YSU Veterans Project

Vietnam Experience

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DAVID LONGACRE

Interviewed

by

Emmett Shaffer

on

August 6, 1974

DAVID H. LONGACRE

David H. Longacre, the son of Henry E. and Vivian Herdon Longacre, was born August 4, 1931, in Summit County, Ohio.

He received his formal education at Manchester High School, near Akron, Ohio, the University of Akron--from which he obtained his Bachelor of Arts Degree in Industrial Management--and the University of Detroit, where he earned a Master of Arts Degree in Political Science and Economics.

In July 1955, David Longacre began a career of military service with the United States Army. During his years in the military, he achieved the rank of Lieutenant Colonel and served three tours of duty in Vietnam. The first of these tours was in 1964-65, followed by one in 1968, and a third in 1970. As a result of his actions while in service to his country, Colonel Longacre received the Silver Star, two Bronze Stars, an Air Medal, a Meritorious Service Medal, a Joint Service Commendation Medal, an Army Commendation Medal and a Combat Infantry Badge. On January 31, 1978, Colonel Longacre retired after twenty-three years of service.

He and his wife, Jean, are the parents of four children: Kathy, 25; David, Jr., 23; Lynn Cottman, 22; and Richard, 21.

The Colonel is presently employed as a Reserve Officer Candidate instructor at Youngstown State University and is an active member of the American Legion, the Veterans of Foreign Wars, and the Lion's Club.

Patty Rudawsky

YOUNGSTOWN STATE UNIVERSITY

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INTERVIEWEE: COLONEL DAVID LONGACRE

INTERVIEWER: Emmett Shaffer

SUBJECT: Vietnam War

DATE: August 6, 1974

S: This is a taped interview with Lieutenant Colonel David Longacre, conducted by Emmett C. Shaffer on August 6, 1974. The subject of the interview is Vietnam. Colonel Longacre is head of the ROTC department at Youngstown State University. The interviewer served with Colonel Longacre in Vietnam in 1964 and 1965. The views expressed are his own.

S: What were the dates of your tours in Vietnam?

L: Actually, I've been to Vietnam three times. In 1964 and 1965 I was in III Corps Region, which includes the Saigon area, with the Ranger Battalion and then in advisory headquarters. I went back in 1968 and 1969 at which time I was with the 24th Army Corps in Northern Vietnam and during this period was the relief of Khe Shan and probably the most intensive part of the fighting in the war. I returned to Vietnam for approximately three months in 1970. At that time, I visited all four corps areas.

S: What were your duties of 1964 and 1965?

L: Well, the first part of 1964, I was a unit advisor to the Vietnamese Ranger Battalion, which operated between the Viet Cong war zones, C and D. This is the same area which most of the fighting was accomplished in III Corps, it was the communications line between Cambodia and Vietnam. It served as supply areas, and operational areas for the Viet Cong and North Vietnamese Armies. The second part of the tour

was in the same general area; however, at that time, I was on a staff advising units rather than participating in the field operations.

S: And in the three months in 1970, what were your duties?

L: Well, in 1970, I was actually working out of Taiwan. At that time, I was only in the country to help remove damaged equipment. In fact, some of it was considered scrap. This equipment was transferred to the Republic of China as new equipment charged off against the military budget to Taiwan as new equipment. All of it was damaged and much of it was considered scrap as far as the U.S. was concerned.

S: As an advisor to the Vietnam unit, what was your impression of the Vietnamese Army?

L: I, personally, have great respect for the Vietnamese people and for the units with whom I served. The Ranger Battalion, particularly, was an outstanding unit. Later on in 1968 and 1969, I worked with the ARVN Division, which was probably the best division in Vietnam, U S. Marines, Army, or otherwise. The leadership of Vietnamese units varied considerably. When a Vietnamese soldier was properly led, he was very courageous and capable. However, if the unit was poorly led, there was a high degree of desertion, lack of desire, and motivation. I was impressed by the Vietnamese people and their soldiers. My counterpart, who was a captain in the Vietnamese Army, had fought in three wars. He fought initially against the Japanese, he then fought with the Vietmin against the French, and was then fighting for his country against the North Vietnamese. He'd been in combat approximately fifteen years, whereas, I'd never been shot at before. However, I felt we were of some value in the technical fields and definitely a morale factor to the Vietnamese people.

S: What was your impression of the Vietnamese people and their acceptance of you?

L: There was one village about a half mile from us. It had a government school but the VC had destroyed it. They also had some Vietnamese medical assistants and, of course, the VC stopped that. The first few times I went into the village, it was hard even to get the kids to come around us--when my counterpart had candy

and so on, and offered it. Later we were able to establish enough rapport where we could provide medical service. Several months later we were able to get the Vietnamese people to come to our compound to get medical aid. I think the attitude of the people towards Americans, or at least the group that moved with me, can best be explained by two incidents.

After we had visited the village about three or four times, an old man came up to me and presented me with a small melon. In Asia, older people are still extremely respected and honored. Once he did that, it appeared that the villagers were much more open to us and much more friendly.

The second incident, which is a little more personal, happened when I was moving through the same village in a vehicle and the people waved and insisted on me stopping. Once I stopped, they pointed to an area on the road which we later found was mined. I'm sure that those people warning us were aware of the consequences of their warnings as the VC were watching. So I believe that there was a great respect for the Americans, at least in the area that I served.

Later, in 1968 and 1969, when the NVA and the VC had their major offensive around TET, we heard a lot about the refugee problem, both in the newspapers and on TV. There was a great deal of criticism placed on the large number of refugees, but everybody failed to point out that the refugees went to the government of South Vietnam for protection rather than to go north to the NVA or to areas controlled by the VC.

In 1968 and 1969, these refugees were willing to go back and resettle their area and hope that the South Vietnamese government would provide them some protection, but they did go back to their villages. I feel this is a point that's been overlooked considerably. I think that the Vietnamese people were very worthwhile; they are hardworking, intelligent, and I believe that Vietnam was worth the effort we put in it.

- S: Do you believe that the South Vietnamese, with the help of the Americans, could have won the war in the TET offensive in 1968?
- L: I don't think the war could have been won then, but I think it was really the first time that the Vietnamese units stood up to the North Vietnam divisions and VC

units. It was the American appraisal, or at least what I was told that prior to TET, that if the NVA would have attacked, the American intelligence estimate was that the NVA forces would have succeeded in defeating any South Vietnam forces they faced. This is at full strength, both the NVA and South Vietnam. The actual offensive came during TET when most of the South Vietnamese units were at fifty percent strength. In a III Corps area, that's the areas surrounding Saigon, there wasn't a single company-size unit of the South Vietnamese overrun. All of them fought well. There were cases where South Vietnamese units came to the protection of American forces. There were cases where South Vietnamese units held under extreme pressure. Vietnamese people hid American soldiers and advisors until the North Vietnamese or Viet Cong units left the area or were driven out. The NVA and VC units around Saigon were substantially beaten and had tremendous casualties inflicted on them and pride in the South Vietnam Army was established for the first time.

In Hue, which is another area that I am familiar with because I went there shortly after the TET offensive, there was only one South Vietnamese division in the northern area. The citadel of Hue was held by the North Vietnamese for about twenty-five to twenty-eight days when finally two American divisions chased them out, but nobody has ever stated at the same time that this happened

The South Vietnamese division headquarters was in the citadel and the North Vietnamese couldn't beat them or dislodge them or destroy them and this was strictly a headquarters, not a division, not a fighting force. Approximately two hundred and fifty men held out against the North Vietnamese for twenty-eight days. So, during this particular period, I think there was a turning point as far as South Vietnam becoming a viable and professional army. Along the same lines, I think the Vietnamization of the war, in other words, more of the Vietnamese fighting and less Americans, was the right policy, for it was their country. We just provided them a little time to fight their battles, maybe more than should have been given. I believe the South Vietnamese people supported their government.

Another example of this was the first division troops who were on leave during TET, returned to the Hue

area, landed at a secure airport, loaded on trucks, then driven towards Hue without weapons. They went back to their units without weapons and picked them up there and continued to fight. So there was definitely a spirit and pride, a willingness to fight and possibly die for their country. Again, I've never really felt that this story was told.

S: Were you aware of any corruption in the Vietnamese Army or the Vietnamese officials in the province area?

L: Well, let me answer it this way. I've read Colonel Herbert's book, Soldier, in which he points out some atrocities that he either viewed or heard about. In my roughly twenty-seven months in Vietnam, and half that time I would say was with Vietnamese units, I never saw or experienced or heard about any such atrocities. There were possibly atrocities in other units, other areas, et cetera, but nothing that I could either attribute to first-hand or second-hand information. I might say that I was aware of atrocities perpetrated on Americans and South Vietnamese.

One case, a contemporary of mine--in fact, I was supposed to take his assignment--was disemboweled and tortured before he died. I know in the Hue area we had two Marines escape being buried alive; they were actually being buried by VC. A United States aircraft came over and started firing at the VC enabling the two Marines to escape.

I know in a village right outside our base, that a North Vietnamese recruiting team came in and tried to recruit two sisters. They refused to go with them. The next day the NVA came back and chopped off the heads of the two girls as an example to the village. I have seen pictures of the people of Hue with their arms tied behind them and shot for no apparent reason. In fact, we were amazed that the North Vietnamese were so brutal to the people of Hue as Hue was not a very strong supporter of the government of South Vietnam. They were always thought of as a little better or a little above the people of Saigon.

S: What was your impression of the reaction of the South Vietnamese people to these atrocities by the North Vietnamese and the Viet Cong?

- L: That's a very difficult question to answer. The [types of] people I was close to, of course, were military or political village chiefs, et cetera. We didn't talk about the atrocities. We usually expressed concern about any death; we tried to help, but really I can't answer that question.
- S: What was your impression of the Viet Cong?
- L: A very capable soldier, a well-disciplined person, he believed in what he was doing. He was well indoctrinated, both politically and militarily, had tremendous amounts of patience, and was willing to die for what he believed in. I have great respect for him. I don't agree with his attitudes; I don't agree with some of the techniques they use. They ruled by threat, but they were very, if you are talking about the Viet Cong soldier, very disciplined, tenacious fighters.
- S: What was the major difference between the Viet Cong and the North Vietnamese soldier?
- L: Well, there were reports of dissention between the Viet Cong and the North Vietnamese soldiers. Basically, the Viet Cong were native of the area. They were South Vietnamese who didn't want the Republic of South Vietnam to represent them. The North Vietnamese were not as dedicated. They also felt superior. Actually, there is a difference in the dialects spoken, much more severe than what we have between our North and South. The words are different although both sides can understand each other, but there was a feeling of superiority among the North. There were more drafted people in the North serving in the NVA, the North Vietnam Army. These people were supplemented into some of the VC units. They weren't as well received and there were some indications of conflict. If we had to take a choice of whom we wanted to face, definitely we'd rather face a North Vietnamese unit versus a VC unit.
- S: The North Vietnamese were considered more as a national army versus the Viet Cong being considered a guerilla army
- L: I think the term "guerilla" army is misused. When you can put up divisions and regiments and battalions, you're no longer a "guerilla" army. You are an army in the truest sense of the word. Their equipment

may not have been as modernized as ours, but they were, in most cases, as well supplied as the North Vietnamese. They were knowledgeable of the area, more willing to fight, and I would say probably better disciplined than the North Vietnam soldier. The North Vietnamese Army was drafted. We found the North Vietnamese soldiers to be anywhere from fourteen to forty years old, fifty years old. Now this was also true in the Viet Cong, but these people were fighting for what they believed was right for their Homeland. The most tenacious VC were the women and they were active in the military as fighting soldiers.

S: Would you discuss the so-called phases of the war in Vietnam?

L: The first part of the war was the advisory role, you might say the captain's war because this is where the American officer was sent out in the field to work directly with the Vietnamese units. In 1964 and 1965 when I was there, we were part of the last major buildup in the advisory war, a very extensive program to get down at the lowest level both in the military and in the county governments. Part of the program was to ensure that the American aide did get down to where he was supposed to be. At that time, it was too little and too late. The Vietnamese Army had been mauled for five years. The political situation during 1964 and 1965 was extremely unstable. I think in the year I was there, there were approximately seven coups or attempted coups. The only reason I knew about one would be when my counterpart would come in and with his weapon want to protect me. I really don't think he was there to protect me, but that he was not sure about his own security.

The leadership of the Vietnamese Army during that phase, was not the best and when I returned in 1968, three years later, apparently there had been a tremendous evolution in the leadership. If the U.S. had not intervened in 1964 and 1965, it's my opinion that the country would have been lost within a year. When I departed in 1969, we were already starting to talk about our phase backs.

You might say the third phase of the Vietnamese involvement without American soldiers is going on now. You definitely can see that the North Vietnamese did not honor their treaties. In the particular areas

where I served, Hue and Da Nang, are under tremendous pressure. In fact, Khe Shan now has a concrete air strip, control tower, and so on. Khe Shan is in South Vietnam, yet the airstrip was built by North Vietnam, not South Vietnam. They're attempting today to cut off Da Nang and annex the two northern provinces. The South Vietnamese are fighting; whether they can survive, I don't know. It is their decision and their war to fight as far as I am concerned.

S: Would you discuss the performance of the American soldier in Vietnam?

L: I really don't feel qualified to discuss this. I will briefly touch on it. On my second tour over there, I was in American headquarters and planning their operations and was not a member of a combat unit, per se. I was very high up in the headquarters in the planning. The divisions that I worked with were the Third Marine Division, the First Cavalry Division, and the Hundred and First Airborne Division, the First ARVN Division, and a Brigade of First of Fifth Mech. In the initial period of 1968, March to July, probably the fiercest fighting of the war took place. We took tremendous casualties. The units, as far as I know, performed extremely well. The American soldier was a very fine soldier and in many cases paid the ultimate price--his life. I think at that time he at least saw an enemy to fight. After July of 1968, when they stopped the bombing of the North, they couldn't fire into the DMZ, which was a VC stronghold. We had to control the area. Most of the contact was by our patrols at night catching infiltrators and things like that.

Once this phase passed, the pressure reduced and the tendency was to relax. With the rotation system, you lost your combat veterans. At once you realized you had to be on your toes. The drug scene increased; I think morale dropped considerably. There was a tendency for the commanders to feel that the war was over and we'd hate to lose a man. This, I think, went all the way through the Army, from the lieutenant through the general. You had a job to do, but you never knew whether this was going to be the last patrol. Of course, as we phased out our units, it got even more important: "Now am I going to get it on the last operation or the last day in the country?"

I think that was a tremendous problem that faced the soldiers, the NCOs, and the officers. Again, I was not a unit commander nor did I know the capacity of the infantry soldier. So I leave the comments as stated.

Well, when you say "typical", in this war there was no "typical" anywhere, anyplace. The country varied, the enemy varied, the situation varied. Let me briefly describe some of my observations when I first arrived in the country and some of the different things that might answer your question.

When I arrived in Vietnam, I was assigned to the Third Advisory, U.S. Advisory Corps, which was around Saigon. From there I was sent to the province, or III province headquarters. It was PBT special zone and I was further assigned to a Ranger Battalion which functioned in, you might say, a county seat. In Saigon, where the corps headquarters was, people had officers' clubs, movies, restaurants--the normal night life you find in any major city in the world with very little personal danger. Occasionally, you would hear a shot, but it was more or less a pistol shot and not somebody trying to kill you.

The PBT special zone, which you might say is something like a state level, existed. You had American food and were surrounded by other Americans, maybe thirty or forty, both enlisted and officers, a bed in which to sleep, sheets on the bed, a clean uniform everyday. You had movies at night, a very comfortable life. You moved from there down to the battalions, or to the first regimental headquarters and then to the battalions. The life style changed immediately. Your diet was Vietnamese. You, if you were lucky, slept on a cot, sometimes in a hammock, and most of the time on the ground. You looked forward to receiving mail, which sometimes was once a week or longer.

Initially there was myself and a sergeant, later a lieutenant and a second lieutenant. So the team was basically, a captain, a lieutenant, two NCOs, a radio operator who was E3 or E4, lower grade enlisted men, and you lived together. Five of us lived, when we were fortunate enough, in a room about ten feet by ten feet; that can be awfully cramped, but you were thankful for the room because some of your friends, contemporaries didn't have a room. You shared

in their joys. Your food was at best, very bland and routine.

I know that one day at the base camp, the person who prepared my food brought in pork chops, very small ones. I told him, "Very good!" And for the next sixty meals I had pork chops. So that was the last time I ever said that.

I enjoyed life, looked forward to little luxuries. When you did go back to the American compounds, you usually got sick because American food was so rich. It's a life that, I think, is extremely hard for anybody to discuss or project as you have to live it. The little conveniences, like a toilet, or a shower, or a bed, are luxuries. Your only contact with the outside world was a radio on which you got news and music. It made you very close. It makes you appreciate life.

Now each of us thought that maybe we have it a little better than the other guy and at my base camp there was a district headquarters equivalent to a little county seat with maybe a hundred families in the area. We had a roof over our heads when we came back, so our equipment could dry and I did have a cot. The guy to my south had a bunker he lived in and he felt very fortunate that he had that and a little stream to wash in and he felt very fortunate because the man to his south had to share a pagoda, an open building with a roof over it, with a VC.

So each in turn appreciated the other guy's life style and really felt glad that you had it so good.

S: Would the Vietnamese commanders take your advice as an advisor and if so, under what conditions?

L: Well, I had three counterparts in the seven months I was with the Ranger Battalion. I was probably one of the few advisors to ever get their counterpart relieved. The first man I served with would not accept his duty, his responsibilities, and would not go out in the field.

I don't want to call him a coward because I don't know what circumstances were behind his motivation. I know he'd been involved in the war something like fifteen years and maybe just ran out of courage or felt he was running out of time. He was so

inefficient and failed to obey the orders of the Vietnamese commanders he had, that it was a question of whether we pull the American advisory team out or they replace him. They removed him and I worked with the XO, his executive officer, for a month. The executive officer was willing to go out and conduct operations. They weren't really effective, but he was willing to try. The third counterpart with whom I spent most of my time--about four months--was an extremely capable man. When he came in, I wouldn't say that we had the best rapport; I was, in effect, the reason another Vietnamese officer was relieved. We had somewhat of a conflict to begin with; however, he knew his business and he started training his unit and conducting the operations, then we were told to go on. After a couple of weeks of operations, we began to establish a rapport to the point that I could say that someday I'd like to operate in his area, and he would say, "Why not?" And the next thing I knew, we were an operation. His unit had become very effective.

There were certain things that I could recommend and he would do and there were other things that he wouldn't do. If I was trying to push him in an area that was extremely dangerous and he knew he couldn't handle that size force, we didn't go.

It wasn't that he was a coward; he had to account for his losses. He couldn't go out and have his unit torn up because of a recommendation. When we did have contact with the enemy, you just didn't run over and say, "What are your actions and orders?" He's got a unit to fight and he's issuing his commands; my Vietnamese or French is very limited. After he issued his orders, we discussed what he did and I told him I had tactical air support on the way to support him and we worked as a team. I believe that we were extremely successful.

As I was pulled out of the unit on a normal rotation --against my will about three days later--the unit was hit by a force three or four times larger and I think they were trying to destroy an effective force.

In my later experience with more senior officers, lieutenant colonels, colonels, and generals, I found them extremely competent. It wasn't a case of advising as much as it was a case of communicating, each giving their ideas and expressing them and working

at a common objective. As I said earlier in the statement, I thought that the best unit in Vietnam was the First Arvn Division, that's including Korean, U.S. Marine, Army, what have you. They were well led, well trained, and motivated. They were fighting for their country. I have great respect for these people.

S: What was the rank of the man that you had leave?

L: He was a Captain of the single force.

S: What was the rank of the man with whom you finally established a good rapport?

L: He was the same, a Captain.

S: What area was this in Vietnam?

L: It was north of Saigon and War Zone D. There are areas of War Zone D where the French and the Vietnamese and even some of the American units never got into. This is the area of the rubber plantation, the parrot's beak--all these names of battles were fought in this general area which was northeast of Saigon.

S: Did you notice any political and religious differences between the various South Vietnamese forces and the officials?

L: Yes, I believe it's common knowledge that many of the leaders of South Vietnam were actually northerners who moved south after the Geneva convention. President Dhiem was Catholic and during his regime, many of the high officials were Catholic, although they were a very small percentage of the country. You have numerous religious groups in the country--very, very strong-minded and closely-knit groups.

The Vietnamese Army, while I was there, was basically a draft army and my experience with the units and particularly the counterpart that I ended up with--we attempted to celebrate all religious holidays. That doesn't mean we took off because it was the holidays, Buddha's birthday or the Chinese New Year. We did try to celebrate, when possible, all of the holidays. We went to great effort, not for me, but for the unit, for Christmas. They had a nativity scene and fireworks and presents for the children.

The same was true for other holidays and so forth. Religious conflict was not prevalent at small unit level.

There were also ethnic groups, the Mountyards, the Cambodians, the Chinese, and, of course, you had the North and South Vietnamese. Not necessarily ethnic groups, but [they had] different backgrounds, different cultures, all living together. As far as I could tell, there was no conflict in these areas.

S: Would you describe the American Civic Action Program in South Vietnam?

L: We were somewhat limited to what we could do with the Ranger Battalion because we were never supposed to be in one place very long, but the Civic Action Program has varying levels of response. Our efforts were mainly along the medical lines. I always had a U.S. medic with me and whenever we went into an area, we would first give medical assistance, but more important, the medics I had with me tried to train the Vietnamese medics on how to use the medicines. You know, we sent medicines to these countries. One instance, we found that they were using eye drops on open wounds because the people did not read English. There were no instructions in Vietnamese for the medics and there was a great sense of --if it was American and it was medicine, fine, take it.

So there was a lot of poor medical practice in these areas. We attempted to improve this. The sores, the infections, and so on, were really shocking to see on the average Vietnamese.

The more complex programs, I'm of course, aware of, and have seen--the improvement of the wheat harvest in the North because of the delta area being under so much contention against both sides. We brought in hybrid rice; we tried to rebuild schools; we tried to educate teachers and establish some semblance and order and to allow the kids to go to school; [we] allowed religious practices, at least during the day time.

It's a quite extensive thing. I think people get the wrong impression of the war. I was somewhat shocked when I got back to the cities and, of course, on the three different tours, each time I saw something

else. If you were assigned to Saigon in late 1969, 1970, and 1971 period, you could despise the Vietnamese--the bars, the crime. I don't want to say "black market" because that was blown out of proportion, but you could get disgusted with the city. Yet, when you got out in the villages, and out where the people were, you found they were hard-working, friendly, and happy-going people. You also had to be impressed by the nation building that was going on. Imagine trying to fight a war and conducting the political and industrialization of a country. It wasn't a two-party system, which causes a lot of conflict. There are probably thirteen parties or groups that voted in blocs and then they could be broken down into probably another twenty or thirty groups. So you really had something like the French Republic before DeGaulle took over. They had a new government every couple of months or would have if you didn't have some of the strong-man efforts.

But no matter what we say about the corrupt political practices and so on during the elections--the fact that you even had elections, even tried to elect people except to get a dissent--when you're fighting a war, it's kind of hard to believe. Trying to maintain a civilian economy and building an economy while you're fighting a war at the same time, has never been done before. In fact, we even attempted it, and were in some ways successful. It's utterly amazing and I think, attributes to the American soldier and advisors, civilian and military. You really have to see it, it was unbelievable--all the paved roads, all the areas that were in small businesses and farming and life going on in somewhat a norm--but you could be overrun any day. It was strictly amazing to me.

- S: Was the language barrier a major obstacle to accomplishing your mission in Vietnam?
- L: No, not really. We all tried to pick up the little niceties: "Hello," "How are you?" You could converse with a limited social ability between Vietnamese and French and pidgin English. A couple of times I had interpreters with me and I found that they were not telling me the truth and I ended up getting rid of them and dealing directly. It was difficult at times because you weren't sure you were always understood and the Oriental has a tendency not to say, "I didn't understand that." So you weren't

always sure they understood what you were talking about, but I did not find it a major difficulty. It would have been nice to have been more fluent in either Vietnamese or French, but they did appreciate any efforts you took to learn their language.

You could get a great big smile because I imagine most of the time we would be mispronouncing the words or the words are so similar that the wrong emphasis on a vowel or consonant could cause great laughter. But they were laughing with you and not at you and they would always try to help. I think that was part of the more enjoyable tour or life there.

S: What is your reaction to the statement that Vietnam was a useless war?

L: Well, I think any war is useless. War is a last resort. If you are saying that we paid a tremendous price for nothing in Vietnam, I don't know whether we can determine that yet. We paid a tremendous price; anytime Americans die overseas or die anywhere, the armed services is terrible. I think the real answer to that will come in the next year or so.

We have established peace or a right of the country to choose its own things and I personally think it's worthwhile. Along the same line as a professional military person, I want to assure people that we are the last ones to look forward to war. Where the draftee only went once, I had three tours. You had three tours also, and I never volunteered once to go. So I don't think the military are so interested in war, as it was projected.

S: Do you believe that the American people supported the war to the best of their ability?

L: No, I don't believe the American people believed in the war. I don't think they were provided an accurate understanding of what the war was all about, and even if they were, I don't know if they would have fully supported it. I don't know how anybody could really support a war. If you go through from World War I and II, the people were propagandized or prepared for it, you know: "Beat the Axis," and so on. War lost some of its glamour in Korea and most of it in Vietnam. I think the American people or

any civilized country, the communication system, TV and so on, puts you right there. You can find there is no glory in war; it's not as projected in movies.

S: As a professional soldier, why did you believe the U.S. went to war in Vietnam?

L: As a professional soldier, we were at war because we were told to be, whether it was the Gulf of Tonkin resolution or so on. There's only one decision as a military man. That is to do your job the best you possibly can, to save as many lives as you possibly can, and get the damn thing over as soon as you can. You're asking, what do I believe we were there for, or why? I think we were there to provide the people [with] the opportunity to decide what they wanted to do, rightly or wrongly. We were committed to that program and it was their job, the Vietnamese people's final determination, what was going to happen to them. I believe that the last couple of years have shown that they did want to be independent. You didn't see a mass revolution after the Americans got out of there. You see that the Vietnamese army is willing to fight for its country. Whether we belonged there or not, I don't know and it wasn't my position to question.

S: In your opinion, did the American press adequately report the war?

L: No, emphatically no. Hell, no. I, at one time, had a correspondent with me and we discussed this, and he said that he shot his film and he sent it off to the United States. He had no say in what was being used or how it would be used. I am sure, Emmett, you are aware of and can discuss a lot of cases where you know that what they were projecting on the TV screen was not the true case. They would use the film on one area and talk about another. I know several friends that have seen photographs of operations that they were on and recognized themselves and found that they were in different areas of the battle than was actually talked about.

I am aware of one incident in Hue. I was in Hue, which is only about twenty miles from where I was stationed, drove all around the town, outside of town, discussed my business, and returned to base. The next day I found out that there was a major battle in Hue. I went down and asked our tactical

operations center what happened, how many casualties, and he said, "What do you mean?"

"Well, there was a battle in Hue yesterday," I said.

"Well, we didn't know about it," he said. But yet, it was reported by the press, and the people that were there didn't know anything about it.

I know when you went to Saigon and if you went to the different officers' clubs or bars, you always found that somebody wanted to talk to you about the war and it was a correspondent. I actually saw correspondents twice in my two and one-half years in Vietnam. No, I don't think the American press honestly projected the war. They presented one side and I think a lot of it was even edited again back here.

S: When you say, "one side," what do you mean?

L: When I said that they presented one side, maybe that wasn't a good word. I don't mean that they supported the Viet Cong or anything like that. I don't think they honestly projected what was going on in the two or three minutes or fifteen minutes within a newscast of the war. They didn't honestly show what the people were feeling. It had to be exciting, it had to be glamorous and if you remember watching any of the TV films--the way people were firing weapons--you know they weren't being fired at because no fool would stand up and fire the way they did, if they were being fired at. But you were led to believe that was combat--first hand. The credibility of a few rounds cracking over a guy's head made anything you said sound real or honest, and I doubt if many of those were I sure wouldn't stand up and let somebody shoot at me.

S: What is your reaction to the My Lai incident?

L: Well, it is one individual's personal opinion. I think that our contemporaries, that is, people who served over there who are professional military, thought it was terrible and that Calley was wrong. Calley should have been tried and convicted, as he was. He was convicted in a military court of committing crimes. The people who tried to blame those superior to him, possibly failed to report it if they knew the facts at the time. In no way can you

justify a situation like My Lai and I think you'll find that it was one person's actions because only one or two people were involved in the shooting of Vietnamese people.

In no way can I see how that happened or justify what happened unless Lieutenant Calley went out of his mind at the time--temporary insanity--that I question why somebody else didn't stop him, step in I think he was guilty. It's the job of the officer to control his people and not permit things like that to happen.

- S: What is your position on granting amnesty for the draft dodgers and deserters?
- L: I don't know. I say that honestly. I don't think it's fair that a certain segment of this country had to go and fight and die and those who were capable of leaving, did I feel that there should be a price paid for that. What the price is, I don't know, and I sure don't want them in the Army. I think the people who lost sons and the soldiers who had to fill in those spots would have to take their chances. The veterans who lost their legs, their arms, their eyesight, their wives, are the ones that have to determine that.
- S: Do you believe that there should be some type of amnesty given to them?
- L: Well, you can't go on hating forever and you can't go on barring. The problem has to be faced. What the solution is, I don't know.
- S: How did Vietnam affect the U.S. Army and in what manner?
- L: It had an effect on the Army. Part of the personnel problems that we faced in Vietnam were solved by a slower promotion policy for everybody. The tactics and concepts that were used in Vietnam will probably never be used again. I think we reaffirmed that it is difficult to fight a war in a jungle, that you must have clear objectives and so on. I think the most damaging part of the war or the Army was the later phases of drugs, the deterioration of discipline, both at home and in Vietnam. It will have a lasting effect. But I'm sure the country and the Army will survive, learn from its mistakes, try to

improve both the training and responsibilities to survive the environment of war and hope that we never have to face another one.

S: After having served three tours in Vietnam and being back in the United States, in your opinion, do you believe the South Vietnamese can win their fight against Communism?

L: I don't know. I hope, pray, that they do. I sure think it would be a tragic loss if after all the Americans who died over there, that all we did was prolong something that was inevitable. I think they've got the will. If their will is stronger than the North Vietnamese, then they're going to survive it. But we'll never see South Vietnam as it was prior to the war. The North Vietnamese are going to annex and annex and they're going to keep the pressure on.

S: If you had to do it again, Dave, would you recommend going back into Vietnam?

L: As a national policy?

S: Yes.

L: I would go back into Vietnam in the advisory category. I would go back into Vietnam earlier in the advisory category with a much more controlled program. It wouldn't be a major giveaway; we'd assist the Vietnamese in fighting for survival. I would not commit the American forces in any way the magnitude we did. I also would insist on longer tours and try to maintain continuity of thought and programs. I think the rotation policy, which was possibly good for morale, was costly to us, both in the advisory area and in the war.

S: Was there ever a shortage of beer or whiskey in Vietnam?

L: It depends on where you were and what you were doing. I did not tolerate a person taking beer or whiskey on an operation. When we were back in our area, I would not tolerate a person getting intoxicated. I did not want to lose somebody because we were trying to save some drunk. I just don't believe that was the place. I'm sure that if you wanted to drink, you could find it in Vietnam.

- S: Depending on where you were, the American soldiers had all the enjoyments at the PX, pubs, and sports facilities in Vietnam, just as they did in Korea and World War II. Is that correct?
- L: Well, I would say that they probably had more. In fact, I did not agree with some of the policies of having to feed a hot meal on every operation or getting ice cream into a battle area. I didn't agree on the large PXs and the R and Rs and things that were there. I think there was a lot manpower and money wasted. In some cases, a lot of lives were wasted because we tried to fight a war in a peacetime environment.
- S: May the Youngstown State University Oral History Program use this interview in their research program?
- L: They may use this interview in their research program as long as it is so stated at the beginning and end that these are personal opinions and not that of the United States Army.
- S: I repeat the request of Colonel Longacre that the comments on this tape, consisting of Side 1 and Side 2, Tape 1, that they are the expressed personal opinions of Lieutenant Colonel David Longacre and not the official position of the United States Army or any other military affiliate.

END OF INTERVIEW