

YOUNGSTOWN STATE UNIVERSITY

ORAL HISTORY PROGRAM

Vietnam Veterans

Personal Experience

O. H. 895

EDEN O. JONES

Interviewed

by

Thomas W. Kirker

on

November 17, 1983

YOUNGSTOWN STATE UNIVERSITY

ORAL HISTORY PROGRAM

Vietnam Veterans

INTERVIEWEE: EDEN O. JONES

INTERVIEWER: Thomas W. Kirker

SUBJECT: Role of combat engineers; drugs; Vietnamese people

DATE: November 17, 1983

K: This is an interview with Mr. Eden Jones for the Youngstown State University on the Lawrence County Vietnam Veterans project. He is being interviewed by Thomas Kirker. The time is 7:40 p.m. on November 17, 1983. We are at Mr. Jones' residence in Princeton, Pennsylvania.

First, I would like to know where you went to school at?

J: Do you mean service school?

K: No. Around here; did you go to high school around here?

J: I went to Grove City High School.

K: You graduated from there?

J: No, I didn't.

K: How did you get into the service?

J: I quit school to join the Army.

K: What year was that?

J: 1969.

K: Where did you enlist at?

J: Through Pittsburgh. I saw a recruiter in Grove City who transferred me to Pittsburgh.

- K: Where did you go to camp at for your basic training?
- J: I went to Fort Jackson, South Carolina for basic training. Then I went to Fort Leonard Wood for ALT.
- K: What was your specialty in the Army?
- J: Heavy equipment operation and maintenance 62E20.
- K: Bulldozers and things like that. When did you first go over to Vietnam?
- J: 1970, the early part of 1970.
- K: You had not been in the Army quite a year then?
- J: No.
- K: At that time, did you know what Vietnam was?
- J: Just from watching the news and through the high school and what they said about basic training and what they taught us in basic training. I didn't have any idea or any specifics.
- K: When you went over there, where were you first stationed?
- J: I was with the 19th Engineers Combat Engineers just a little bit south of Binh Ho. The name of the camp was Camp Swampy. It was a swamp.
- K: What did you do? Did you help build base camps and clear roads and things like that?
- J: Yes. Combat engineers did a little bit of everything. As a dozer operator, I would cut out rifle ranges for the South Vietnamese Army, do road work, retrieving equipment, and just about anything that would come up.
- K: Did you ever get fired on while operating a bulldozer?
- J: Not so much on the dozer, but later I got shot at on trucks, planes, I was pretty lucky as far as being on a dozer being shot at. There isn't much cover. The engineers, the two outfits that I was in, would get a little bit of sniper fire once in awhile. The biggest hassle was mines and rockets.
- K: Did you ever have to go and disarm mines and that?

J: No, you more or less stuck with your ammo. One of the coordinates would take care of mines in the same company but under a different MOS.

K: When you were there, were you rotated in by yourself or did you go in with other guys?

J: By yourself. As your orders came in, they would ship you out.

K: Do you think that made it harder?

J: Yes. When you are shipped around by yourself, it is just the way you feel about yourself. You may be some place for two or three months or two or three days and may get shipped out again. It is kind of a lonely feeling like you against the war.

K: How long were you there?

J: I was there for eleven months the first time and eleven months.

K: You went in for two different times?

J: Yes, I went back.

K: What rank were you the first time?

J: When I left, I was an E5 Specialist.

K: What about the second time?

J: I just stayed a specialist.

K: What made you go back the second time?

J: I joined the Army to learn a trade. I learned it pretty well. There were a lot of things about Vietnam that I didn't like. Nobody likes to be shot at or take a chance on getting killed or hurt for life. The work that I was doing, I enjoyed doing it. Without bragging, I was a good dozer operator. I was a good equipment operator. Vietnam was the only place that was working as far as equipment. When I left Vietnam, they sent me to Germany. I spent three months in Germany trying to get back to Vietnam. In Germany, all we did was paint equipment. We didn't operate it. You would paint it, sand it, and repaint it. It just seemed like my training was going to waste. I tried to extend when I was in Vietnam to stay there. I waited too long and my

paper work got hung up, so when I got to Germany, I got a 1049 back. When I did get back, I got stuck in a postal unit. In 1972, they were sending everybody home.

K: Had the atmosphere changed from the first time you were there to the second time?

J: Yes. I was stuck in a postal unit which was made up of just about every MOS, except postal. I was in 50th APU in Nha Trang. At that time, we were probably one of two major post offices in the full country of South Vietnam. We handled a whole lot of mail for not knowing what we were doing. It was made up of almost every MOS going. The guys at the post office were there for the same reason that I was there. They were trained to do a job and that job was in Vietnam and all of the second tour guys wanted to go back to their original units which had gone home.

K: Was it pretty hectic by then? Did everyone know that we were pulling out?

J: Yes. Even the South Vietnamese. It was a lot of hassle. You would get mail and the units would be gone. We were pulling out. Trying to convert the South Vietnamese Army to take over with the American and Korean troops hadn't been doing. . . They just clearly couldn't do it. Those people never had anything in their life. They really didn't have much to defend. Life meant a lot to them. It does to everybody. The basic western philosophy wouldn't stand up for a typical Vietnamese.

K: Do you think that was a hard problem for you to realize or to understand when you first went there?

J: Yes, it was. We ran into a lot of trouble with it because. . . My first tour there I was stuck in a no fire zone. I couldn't understand what I was doing in a country supposedly defending it and endangering my life when I couldn't shoot back. It was almost the end of my first tour when I realized the reason for the no fire sign. It was for protection for South Vietnamese and Korean troops. The Koreans would go out on patrols at will without letting the allies, meaning the South Vietnamese and United States know where they were at. I guess from what I have been told that there have been mishaps where a lot of Korean troops had been killed and injured by mistake. They were in the wrong place at the wrong time. That is why they put up no firing signs.

K: Where was this at again? Camp Swampy?

J: Yes, it was Camp Swampy and Phen Thiet at Whiskey Run. We had a lot of South Korean troops. They were good fighters.

K: Did you train any of these people to work the heavy equipment and stuff like that?

J: The South Vietnamese had all brand new equipment. MACVE was Military Advisory Command Vietnam would train. It was their job to train and advise.

K: Did you have pretty up to date equipment yourself?

J: No, we had Korean junk. We had junk from Korea and the Vietnamese had all brand new and up to date. We gave them all the good stuff and they turned around and blew it all up. It used to really make us mad. We could get our parts and some of our supplies. They would give us a lot of work to do with little equipment. All you could do was the best you could do with all that you had. Regardless of the controversy surrounding Vietnam or what anyone else can say about it, I kind of feel for what you never did. I did what I was trained to do and I didn't have to kill and I didn't get killed. I came out of it without a scratch. With what is going on right now, I don't think that I could deal with it. I would be totally. . . I am a little annoyed right now. When I got out I got rid of everything, my uniform. It was bad enough walking down the street with short hair. People look at you like you were crazed. They would say you were a crazed killer, you are a dope addict. You couldn't get a job sometimes because you were a Veteran. It seemed like Uncle Sam put me in a spot and the people just pulled a plus out from under us.

K: Has it changed much today?

J: Yes. People are coming around. I think a lot of the attitude was the people were against the war. They got a little bit over zealous in there in their hatred for the American involvement. I think maybe they carried it over to the GI's themselves. Intentionally or unintentionally, it happened. Now with El Salvador and what is going on in the Middle East the people are what you call a second coming of patriotism. As far as I am concerned, it is too late. These things that are going on right now with Lebanon and El Salvador with the exception of Grenada. . . I think Grenada is good. They

gave those guys a mission and a go ahead. It was a military operation handled by the military. They kept the politicians out of it and they kept it. There was no public opinion of it at the time it was going on because there was no public awareness of it. Therefore, the guys went in and performed their mission successfully with a minimum loss of life and equipment. They performed their mission well. By the time the press did get a hold of it, the only way they could view it was in a positive sense. Whereas with Vietnam it drug on for so long that the people got tired of hearing about it.

K: When you were in Vietnam, did you realize what was going on back home and that people were against the war?

J: One of the things that made me the maddest was going without milk because of a long shoreman's strike. Supposedly you are fighting a war so that the jerks back home would have the right to strike and stuff. Where is what seems like a whole country condemning you for being someplace to do their dirty work for them. It is like these people wanted all of the rights, but they didn't want to pay the price and they want to take it out on the guys who do the job. It seemed like you got shafted everytime you turned around and somebody was sticking it to you. If it wasn't the Army, it was the American people. If it wasn't the American people, it was the press. Everybody had their own opinion about what was going on. The guys in Vietnam. . . I mean their was strife and camaraderie but yet there was camaraderie. When things got hectic, it didn't matter whether. . .There wasn't the racism because the soldiers knew that they needed one another. Black, Chicano, Welsh or Irish, it didn't matter. Everybody pulled together when they had to pull together and they got through whatever it was they got through. Whatever they had to do, they did it. Then they started hating each other's guts again for being whatever they were or weren't.

Basically, I don't feel bad about Vietnam, because I was lucky. I was extreemly lucky. I went over and did the job that I was trained for the first turn. I did a job that I wasn't trained for the second time. I didn't do a bad job over there. I didn't get hurt. I didn't like the situations that I was in sometimes. It was almost like the blind leading the blind. I can't understand how these guys stuck in these Veterans Hospitals and stuff to deal with it. It was almost like nobody cared

and now they care. Why they care is because of a memorial put up in Washington, D.C. It takes an act of Congress. This Sergeant Benitiz fights for thirteen years to get a medal that he so well deserved. He can't get it because he was in Cambodia. It is a national shame. It really is. For as much press coverage, I could probably give it to the media and could plan out right now what color underwear Ronald Reagan is wearing as president. I could probably do that and it would be an accurate account. For the government of the United States and the military and the government as a whole to denounce a man's actions because he was in an area where he wasn't supposed to be, but which the media knew we were in Cambodia. It is a national shame in my opinion. That shouldn't be. Myself, I don't feel as though if I have to write to the government, the Army, to put me where I was at and told me to do what I did, if I have to write to them and buy my medals and ribbons, I don't want them. They don't mean nothing. The Congressional Medal of Honor and a quarter will get me a cup of coffee. I can get a cup of coffee with \$.25, so what do I need the medal for. Each and every individual who went over there knows what he did and why he did it. You can be proud of what you did, or ashamed of what you did, but you can't change it. All you can do is live with it.

K: What do you remember about Vietnam the most?

J: What do you mean? As the worst time?

K: Well, that. Some of the guys said the children and the people just seemed not to care, the South Vietnamese, at times.

J: They didn't care. I can remember in 1972 when I was with 50th APU when Hue was bombed. I can remember standing in the street, and as far as I could see the streets of Nha Trang were packed with the citizens of Hues. Men, women and children were on mopeds with everything they owned on their backs. If you could picture a small moped, just imagine three kids, a man, a wife, their pots and pans and maybe a goat on a moped heading south. Times that by 7,000 a day. Everybody was coming south. As the Vietnamese were moving south, they were leaving brand new artillery. They could have turned the attack. They could have saved Hue with the equipment that had if they would have used it.

K: How far south of Hue were you?



J: I really don't know. I would have to look on a map. Nha Trang is very far south and Hue is up toward the DMZ. The last three months of my second tour, I was flying mail to outlying areas. About every two or three days there would be a MACVE advisor headed for Hue. They would take those guys up there and they would have to dig themselves in deep, really deep in calling U.S. airstrikes on everything that was left behind, brand new 105s that hadn't been fired, jeeps, tanks, personnel carriers. It just doesn't seem right.

K: When you showed up with the mail at another camp, were they always glad to see it?

J: There was a mail cart for each unit. It was the only one that would come. At Ban Me Thout you had a permanent runway. Phan Thiet's runway was PSP or Perforated Street Plate on sand. It was a quick job. Quang Duc was a permanent runway. It was designed as a helicopter pad. Air America pilots used to get \$100 for landing there and \$100 for taking off from there because it was so short. It was only about 300 yards long. The Army and Air Force pilots were stuck with it. It was like landing on a postage stamp. For the most part, the other runways were jiffy quick just PSP. You would have one two guys authorized to come down to the post office to take the mail clerk test to show that they could handle the mail, security, and what not. They would meet you and sign the necessary papers to get the mail. Post office people were treated very well. I would say about number three as compared to the medics and maybe the finance office. People liked to hear from home even the bad things.

K: The first time that you were in, what would a day at camp be like?

J: A day at camp for me. . . When I got there, we were authorized two dozers. One of them was in the third shop getting the transmission fixed. They already had two dozer operators which would alternate. They would send one out one day or for a week and he would come back. When he would come back, the next one would go the next time. In between times we would help the mechanics or whatever they needed you to do for a day to more or less get your eight hours in. We had a permanent shower set up. We had outhouses that were wood flaps with screen. There was a door in the back where you slide about a quarter of a fifty-five gallon drum where you dropped your load or whatever. Everyday

somebody had to take that out and pour diesel kerosene over it and burn it for sanitary reasons. You could end up doing that, or helping in the mess hall, checking your perimeter for bad wire and claymore mines and making sure that they were turned around right. Just about anything that they could come up with you did. You might ride shotgun in vehicles. It was regulation at that time. You had an operator and a shotgun rider. You can't drive and shoot unless you have too. When you have to, you can do anything. They kept you busy.

K: Were you exposed to many of the guys that were fighting and things like that the infantry men?

J: Not really. Most of the guys who would go out in the field had a certain amount of time that they had to spend, or would have to go out on a mission and when they came back they would get a couple of days of off time to rest up. They would generally head for Cam Rahn Bay, Nha Trang, or Dong Bitin. For short periods, just like out place Camp Swampy, we had a little one of the hooches after the 864th moved out and converted it into our own little private Camp Swampy Club. The guys, if they were out on the road, QL14 closed at 6:00 in the evening for safety reasons, if they were caught between Nha Trong and Ban Me Thout, they would spend the night at Camp Swampy. As a dozer operator with the 19th, I spend a lot of time clearing runways, and clearing brush around the runways, helicopter pads, did some work for America, knocking down brush. I got stranded there. I was supposed to be there for three days and I ended up spending three weeks there. That was another thing. They would send you out and you never really knew where you were going. Like I said, you were supposed to have a shotgun rider with you. However, you never would have a shotgun rider. They sent you out to a Vietnamese Village to clear. About the only other English speaking person around would be an interpreter with broken English or a MACVE advisor would come by and check up on you. They did a lot of that. They would take you out for a two day job and you would be out for three weeks.

I spent three weeks soaked to the bone. They sent me out on a gun truck. The guy was going to marry a Vietnamese girl and he had to go to Siagon to do it. He went to Saigon. It was just a logical thing. Jones can take care of Jones. We had a duece and a half with a .50 caliber machine gun and an M-60 caliber machine gun on it. There was a bridge washed out about half way between Nha Trang and where we were at. We had to lead

up the bridge parts and taken them down there. We got through Ban Me Thout pass and the bridge washed out behind us. As we got a little bit farther on, there was one washed out in front of us. We had to build a bridge to cross. We had to tear that sucker back down and go on deliver it, and then we had to wait for somebody to bring a bridge. It was a bad typhoon. We stayed wet for three weeks. We were wet and stranded. We lost three quarter tons with the driver and the shotgun rider in it. It washed off of the road and the kid couldn't swing. He drowned. The shotgun tried to help him and he drowned. The only way we could more or less make it was one guy got out and walked while another guy drove. If he went under then you just didn't go any further.

K: What year was this? 1971?

J: Yes. This was 1971.

K: How many guys went on this?

J: I couldn't even tell you now. Like I said, you spend a lot of time trying to forget. It wasn't a popular subject. People don't like to hear about it. It is more a matter of as long as it is happening to the next door neighbor it is all right. There could have been about fifteen vehicles. There was about fifteen vehicles. There was a jeep in the front with like an officer or a sergeant designated as convoy commander. You had ten tons that would be bridge parts. The jeep would have two. Ten ton would have two. There were three on the gun truck, myself and two gunners. I think there was a mail truck, which could be a 3/4 ton or whatever was available.

A lot of times in order to get enough vehicles. . . They had a set amount of vehicles that were supposed to be set up for convoys and more or less for fire power. If there wasn't enough vehicles in one compound, they would call two or three around the area and they would send two or three different mail trucks. It was just what they could spare for the day and still get the job done. It was one of those types of deals.

K: When you left in 1972, how far south had the North Vietnamese come?

J: They were still fighting over at Hue when I got out of there. I got out of there a month early. There was a rift. They thought of troops coming home, they were

rifting right and left as far as dropping a guy with a year left in the service. If he wanted out, fine. They let him go. They started in 1971 to disprogram. If you were stuck in you rank for a period of time with no progression then they would rift you against your will. If a guy was happy, say an E6 for instance, that was maybe as good as an E6 maybe he was a little afraid of an E7 or higher whatever the reason. If he was stuck in that rank for X amount of years, they would can him. A lot of those guys weren't happy with that, sitting two years in the service or whatever and being let go.

K: Did you think that the war was going to end up the way it did?

J: I tell you what, I got out in 1972. Do you remember how they used to buy those P.O.W. bracelets?

K: Yes.

J: My wife, she was my girlfriend at the time, we would sit and I had been out of the service for four or five months, and when they showed those guys getting off of it, I cried like a baby. There are those poor guys that were deprived of all their civil rights to do a job. They gave up everything. For the most part, a soldier is so much worse off than a guy in jail in this country. People don't understand. I woke up at nights with rats looking me in the eye. I have had it nice being an engineer. I wasn't out in snakes, tarantulas. This was at Camp Swampy. Could you imagine being out in the swamps at night was like. To put up with all of that bullshit to do a job, and to turn around and walk away from it, not finished, I just saw that as the start of the downfall of the country as far as the military doing their job. Not too long after that, Saigon fell, Cambodia, Afghanistan. What is going to be next? I firmly believe that if we would have let the military do what the military was trained to do the way the military knows best to do, and kept the politicians out of them, Vietnam would have been successful. I firmly believe that a lot that is going on today would have stopped right there. Just on a personal basis, when you pick on somebody and they knock you down and they get you good and hard, you think a whole lot more the next time you are going to tangle with them. Basically, Afghanistan Chief means is supplying the mortars let alone the troops.

K: Would you go back to Vietnam?

J: I will say no but. . . Yes, I would. I would have to. Seeing all of these people leaving and stuff, I knew Vietnamese people. I worked with some Vietnamese that were there. . . All they wanted out of life was life itself, and a few of the fringe benefits like a little bit of happiness. All of the Vietnamese weren't thieves or corrupt. It was just like any country in the world. There were a hell of a lot of good Vietnamese. They had their share of bad Vietnamese. It still hurts me to think that those people that I left behind as friends are going through what they are going through right now. It hurts me. I have a four year old daughter. If something like that. . . If we can't stop something like what went on in Vietnam and Cambodia, can we be sure that we could stop something like that from happening like that in this country? That is something to think about. It's one thing to say that you're patriotic. . . The flag is a symbol of freedom and stuff. Basically, I don't feel that anybody goes and fights and dies for his country. I just don't feel that they do. I think that the things that make soldiers and sailors do what they do is the people that they know and what you know.

K: What year bulldozer is this?

J: What year?

K: 1950's or something?

J: I don't even know. It wasn't that old. It couldn't have been older than twelve years. The DX after twelve years in the service. Everything that we had was. . .

Here is George, our company mascot. Here you go, a guy adjusted the clutch in the ten ton.

K: Thanks.

J: I had pictures of montanards working in the fields. We were stripping for limestone and this Vietnamese came up to me. I was eating a Reese's Peanut Butter Cup. I had my back turned. This other dozer operator was sitting across from me and he is holding his sides and cracking up. What the hell is the matter with him? He must be going nuts on me. Here comes this trunk over my shoulder. This kid was riding an elephant and I never even heard him coming. This Vietnamese kid is doing this. The elephant snuck up on me. That trunk came

over me and I gave him the peanut butter cup. I had about ten shots of that. I had some shots of the compound. Somebody got into my photo album. I had it put away. There was nothing in there. There were no gory details or anything. It was just private. I had some pictures from home in there. Somebody hit me in the wrong way. Some unauthorized person was in my house which would have been fine if they would have kept their mouth shut. They started making jokes about stuff and I got pissed off and threw the whole work away. That would have been a big collection.

Our bunkers was just pushed up dirt over railroad ties. Anything that was in under it was still under it. Basically, what they call them are living-fighting bunkers. It was like a two-man hooch with an Army cot in it with ammo boxes for shells. There was firing port at both front and rear. That was at Camp Swampy. Then Phan Thiet we had cement slabs with slanted sliding and spring pulls your permanent type billettts and hooches were the same. Phan Rang was the Air Force base that we knew. That might have been downtown New Castle for all you know. Those boys did it right. They built a PX. The PX comes first then the living quarters and a mess hall. That is the Air Force and then you got the runway and work out your missions from there.

K: How big was Camp Swampy?

J: It was about 250 yards or 300 yards across. You could damn near throw a rock across it. It might have been 400 yards on the outside.

K: Was it just for engineers and heavy equipment?

J: Yes, we had two companies there. There was Charlie Company of the 19th engineers and the Bravo Company of 864th Engineers. Bravo Company 864 moved down to Phan Thiet. Shortly after they moved, the 19th Engineers broke up and deactivated. That is where I got sent to the 864th. They were construction and we were combat.

K: Did you have to do your own guard duty and things like that?

J: Yes. Guard duty was a pain in the buns. Somebody was always trying to sneak up on you to see if you were awake. You would get up and work all day and it was like two on and four off. Generally you would guard either a bunker or a tower twice a night. It generally

ranged on the size of the company and your duty roster and stuff how many times through the week you would have it. It was definately a pain. You would stay up two hours at night straining your eyes against. . . Our perimeter at Camp Swampy was lit, but we had a path about seventy-five yards that were cleared of just dirt. It was probably about 100 yards of high grass and then there was woods. For two hours and you would sit there and strain your eyes trying to stay awake and looking around. Up against the four of sleep, it is like a drop in the bucket. That four hours of sleep, it is like a drop in the bucket. That four hours just won't handle that too. It is a stressful situation. With any movement that you would see, you would have to call the sergeant or the guard. The sergeant or the guard would have to call the officer of the day. It could be just about anything like a rabbit, dog, Vietcong. You couldn't tell. Those little suckers were slick.

K: Did they ever attack your camp or anything?

K: No, not at Camp Swampy. On the perimeter and in barbed wire you would have claymore mines about fifty yards or so. Every night we would have to go out and turn them around. If we would have gotten hit and we have detonated our claymore mines, we would have blown every one of our tires down. It is spooky. We wanted to booby trap them the way you pull a pin on a hand grenade. Claymore mines have legs. You set the mine on top of the hand grenade so it hold the pin. When they lift the claymore to turn it around, boom, surprise. They wouldn't even let us do that. They said, "What if it is some kid? What if it is a Vietnamese kid?" Well, it runs through my mind that if it is a Vietnamese kid playing with these claymore mines to the point I need it and detonate it and end up killing myself, the kid had got to go first. He is not playing with a full deck.

K: They said that a lot. They are baby killers and things like that. Do you think it holds true?

J: Yes, definately. All you have to do is look at Reader's Digest a couple of months back on the way the Russians are going into Afghanistan. The Russians, the KGB, are the ones supplying the North Vietnamese. They are going to do whatever they feel necessary. Their mentality is that they are there to win at all costs; preferably, our costs are the South Vietnamese. What is a baby or two among the way. It isn't their kid. They can go home. One of the things that disturbs me the most is the

American people who weren't in Vietnam for the most part didn't understand that we had Chinese troops as an enemy and the North Vietnamese troops as an enemy. We had Vietcong, the terrorists. You had Vietcong sympathizers. When you drive through a village, it seems all normal on the outside. Here are all of these people who are supposedly trying to help when the Vietcong sympathizers, they are radicals that agree with the Vietcong and those are the guys that are trying to kill you, these people help the Vietcong regardless if it is for your life or for the sympathy to the cause. They know that the area is booby trapped or they know that there are Vietcong in their village. They are aiding the enemy. As Americans, we have to be concerned about civilian casualties, hurting old men and women and young children, and civilians. Those people are playing by entirely different rules. They will use a civilian populous for a firing base knowing that you won't fire back upon them. If you get hit to the point where you are going into an area and you can't retreat. What are you going to do? You can't go forward or you can't go backward and you want to live. By God I will tell what. It is too bad. You had to stop and think that the other side would do something like that without even batting an eye. A village of 5000 they don't care. Age means nothing. Sex means nothing. The only goal that they have is to rule the world. If we don't wash up and change our strategy and our way of thinking, by God, they are going to do it. Nice guys don't win. Until people realize war ain't a game. A lot of people will say that Vietnam wasn't a war because it wasn't declared. Korea wasn't a war because it wasn't declared.

When your son comes home in a box, the bullets can't read. Those bullets can't read. Those bullets don't care. They just keep eating off legs. The thing of it is, the guy is just as dead if you just want to call it war games or some paperwork to call it a war. People lose their lives and that is a war to me.

K: I don't have any more formal questions. Is there anything else you would like to add? Are there any stories or anything?

J: Basically, one of the things that upsets me is people ask you questions. They find out that you were there or whatever. One point that I would like to see cleared up about Vietnam is there are or there were no front lines. There was more fighting in some areas than in others. There was fighting all over. There were zappers,



Vietcong sympathizers with satchel charges. It was almost like a briefcase with four or five sticks of dynamite in it. Those people really didn't care. They would throw them into a hospital. The Red Cross didn't have a defense. They shot at Red Cross helicopters.

The point that I would like cleared up is the Veterans, the people who were there, the infantry against the Marines, the Marines against the sailors, in one sense it is healthy pride and in another sense it is kind of degrading to the cause because the guy that works in the flying unit when the building blows up and he dies, he is just as dead. He got into the MOS because he got tested and that was a field that which he was proficient. He is just as important as the guy out there in the bushes killing people because that was his job. Everybody did their job to the best that they could. They all deserve equal credit.

K: How did they test you?

J: You went through a battery of tests, mathematical, mechanical, psychological, science. They have got a standard battery of tests that they give. When you enlist and your test scores are in a reasonable range of what you want, then you can enlist for a specific MOS. Supposedly you get a guarantee that you will get this school.

I would go back, but I would not want to be like it was. I just feel as though America and the American fighting man has disappeared. Our drive is as good or better than any in the world. It has been proven again and again. If you set a goal and turn the military that is a military objective and turn the military loose on it, they will do it. You can't have the politicians back in this country pulling the strings. Politicians have the politics. The military has to do their job. The civilian populous has to do its part. It is on country irregardless of how you feel, whether you are pro or con for Vietnam. A lot of people seem to forget that this is one of the few places in the world that you can say that or do that without too much consequence. That is what it is all about. Those guys over there are giving up everything so that you can open your mouth when you say it back here. It means a lot. We never know how many rights you have until you loose them. It is the simple things like a peanut butter and jelly sandwich and being able to go to the corner store anytime that you want to buy a pack of cigarettes. We would get

sun-dried packs of cigaretts, paper, shoe laces, shaving stuff. Sometimes you would break a cigarette out of the pack and light it and it would be gone. It would be like lighting a fuse. There would be nothing to it.

K: We are coming up on the holidays right now. When you were in Vietnam, did you do anything special for Thanksgiving or Christmas?

J: In 1970 for the Fourth of July I just get a little nervous. I was supposed to clear an area for a village. The Vietnamese were going to relocate this village. They didn't want them to . . . I got stuck clearing that. It was on the Fourth of July. It was elephant grass. Elephant grass is tough. Even with a bulldozer it is hard to cut. As I was cutting it, I hit an ammo camp for .50 caliber. I got down and looked at it. As I was getting down off the dozer I saw a little bone hanging out of this cannon. I just totally smashed it. There were all kind of Vietnamese people starting to gather around, not military, just the civilians of that village started to gather around. I couldn't understand Vietnamese, but I knew that they were upset. They were very upset. I couldn't understand a lot. I looked at the can again and saw a little skull. It was of a premature baby. In about fifteen minutes, a Macvee later came out. As it turned out, I was plowing up an unmarked cemetery. It was ancient and still in. . . Those people were very displeased with me. With no doubt in my mind, they probably would have killed me, I made a mistake. I remember that on the Fourth of July.

I remember at Christmas all of the guys that got killed on Christmas and the accidents. I remember rolling over jeeps and getting drunk. We had people getting drunk and drowning in their own vomit. We lost more guys. . . It is hard to believe that Christmas like 1971. I think if you go down to the records for the 864th Engineers, I am pretty sure for all of Vietnam if you look at it, we killed more of our own soldiers than we lost in action. There was horse play. Guys would get drunk and try a quick draw. Guys would goof around. The 864th confiscated it. Only officers could carry .45s because so many guys were shot with them. It wasn't very long after that, only a matter of two or three months, that officers couldn't even carry a .45. It was a very dangerous weapon. It has seven safeties on it. That is what makes it so dangerous. It makes you a little tense. You try not to think about it. I forgot a lot. It takes me time. You try to. This past Veterans Day

was probably one of the worst weekends that I have spent in a hell of a long time. I got out of Vietnam and I threw everything away.

My brother who was in the Navy at roughly the same time. I came home on leave after my first tour. They had a party at the V.F.W. My dad was retired and he was probably 67 years old. He was a veteran of World War I. He asked my brother and me to wear our Class A's to the legion. We did. We walked in there in the pride that that man had. He had two sons in the service at the same time. I just got funny about that. Dad was one of the reasons that I did go back. I turned around and let public opinion and anti-war iduce me to throw away everything that meant so much to him. He is gone now and so is my brother. I just realized that this weekend with all of this memorial services and it kind of hurts. It hurts a lot. It doesn't matter whether I am proud of what I did or ashamed. It was a big part of his life. He had two sons in the service. It meant a lot to him.

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

J: No.

K: That is about all I have.

J: Vietnam as I saw it was depressing people. It was your drug addicts and your alcoholics. Not alcoholics, but your drinkers. They really didn't get along very well at all. Those two don't mix.

K: What happened to the monkey know?

J: George died, somebody shot him up with too much heroin. Somebody shot him up with too much heroin. He died. Luckily, we never found out who did it. They would have been in some very serious trouble. That monkey meant a lot to some of the people. He was one of us. That little guy right there was one of us. That is what kept us together. That monkey meant a lot. When a guy would DROS, he would get it in writing from whoever he gave that monkey too, whoever he put in charge of this monkey. He would give it in writing that you would keep George safe. That was a company mascot. Even in 1971 there was a shortage of rabies vaccine. When the word came down from MACVE we were to get rid of all mascots. The whole company, as a whole, refused to harm one hair of George's head.

Sandy is the dog that George is riding on. For a captain who has planned a career in the service to stick up for a monkey, George was some kind of fellow. This little black dog is Sandy. We couldn't do away with her. We had another one. This dog was a mongrel. His name was Junior. Then we had one that was half shepherd that was Crute. They were more than animals. They were family. Crute used to ride on choppers. George would ride on Sandy. Sandy and Crute would get into fights and George would jump on Crute just like we used to do. There was a lot of fighting among yourselves. When you aren't working, you don't have anything else to do. There isn't anything out in the boondocks. If there was, you wouldn't want to. Our pets meant a lot to us. I still say if we would have found out. . . We would get him drunk. He loved bourbon. We would get him some bourbon. You would see him the next morning when he would come out. He would be laying there with his head on his arms. You would say, "Hey George, you made it." He would look at you and his eyes would be all bloodshot and stuff. You felt the same way he did. You knew that he understood. If he was in the motorpool, I used to send him after cigarettes. If I was in the motorpool and I ran out of cigarettes, I would say, "Hey George, go get me a pack of cigarettes." He would go and get in the footlocker if it wasn't locked. He would bring them to you. You would only have about 3/4 of the pack because he would eat the corner off of them. He would be like me, he like the tabacco. He would sit there and check your head for lice. He was a good little boy.

K: Who took care of him most of the time?

J: Everybody. George had more food than anybody. George had more everything than any of us. George always got his. The First Sergeant, Captain, and the Heads that did him in. I think it was an experiment to see how George would act when he was shot up on heroin. The thing is that he only weighed about three pounds. That heroin over there was lethal. A lot of those guys didn't know what they were getting into when they started. Then it was too late. They started shooting up. That is another thing too. I watched guys when I was in the 19th. Everybody said, "Oh, marijuana won't hurt you." We had, I don't know if it was by design of what, but one hooch was where all the dopers went into one barrack. That was the headquarters barracks. I got stuck in there when I first got to the 19th. I told them tok get me the hell out of there. I will swim for the company. I don't take dope and they would never

believe me and then you are stuck with these people smoking. You couldn't see from one side of the room to the other. They had strobe lights going and a stereo. You couldn't hear anything. This was day in and day out. Those people were so defiant that was all that they did. It was easier just to let them have their way. As long as they stayed inside their hooch and they didn't create trouble and just leave them alone until you could discharge them and be done with them.

For awhile that was where they stuck all the new recruits. A lot of guys really got ruined. I know three guys that came in that were mid-west farmers and never knew what marijuana was or had any idea of any drugs. They started off smoking marijuana. They ended up in detox units and Section 8's with dishonorable discharges. I get a little distraught when people say that smoking grass is alright. If you don't do it, then there can't be any urge to further. I see guys from the camp. New guys that came close to losing his finger from shooting up underneath his finger nail. He got a dirty needle and got discharged. He was basically ruined for life. There were a lot of drugs. Everybody that was over there wasn't a drunk or a dooper.

END OF INTERVIEW