

YOUNGSTOWN STATE UNIVERSITY
ORAL HISTORY PROGRAM

Vietnam Veterans

,

Personal Experience

O.H. 1031

ROBERT A. HARLAN

Interviewed

by

Dale J. Voitus

on

November 4, 1982

YOUNGSTOWN STATE UNIVERSITY
ORAL HISTORY PROGRAM

Vietnam Veterans

INTERVIEWEE: Robert A. Harlan
INTERVIEWER: Dale J. Voitus
SUBJECT: tour of duty, views on Vietnam
DATE: November 4, 1982

V: This is an interview with Major Robert A. Harlan for the Youngstown State University Oral History Program by Dale J. Voitus at Park House on the campus of Youngstown State University on November 4, 1982 at 1:55 p.m.

Okay sir, tell me a little bit about your background and you family, if you would?

H: I was born on February 20, 1944 in Columbus, Ohio. I was raised and went through all my schooling there through high school. Family, I had three sisters. We are a fairly tight knit family, I think. We did a lot of things together. [I have a] fairly religious background. My family did a lot of things together. As far as schooling, I went to public schools. They were city schools as opposed to a suburb type relationship. I graduated from high school in 1962. From there, I went on to a small, church-related school; Central Methodist College in Fayette, Missouri. During college, my father passed away. He died of cancer during my freshman year in college. The one thing I guess that's been good, at least of my family background, is that we have all continued to stay very close.

We continue to have family reunions each year, not only of our immediate family, but of all my father's brothers and sisters. We get together every August. So, I think we have a basically very, tight family type of relationship. Now we're pretty well spread out across the country. My sister lives in North Carolina, one in Ohio and one in Nevada, but we still maintain pretty close contact with each other. Currently, I am married and have three children, two girls and a boy. I met my wife after I came into the service. I met her and married her after I had been through Vietnam.

V: Did you play any athletics while you were in high school or college?

H: I originally intended to be a doctor. I majored in biology with a minor in chemistry, pre-med type program. Upon graduation from college, I applied for medical school and was not accepted. I tended to have too good of a time, I guess, as I went through college and did not hit the books as hard as I really should have. So, when I graduated I was not accepted. Then I went and taught school for a year. I was a general science teacher there for one year. I enjoyed working with the kids, but I didn't really like the school board or some of the things they required. I guess one of the primary reasons I taught was to coach football there. I enjoyed that. That was one of my primary reasons why I was hired, was to coach football. After that year, I did not renew my teaching contract to sign up for another year. That was the height of the Vietnam period; and soon after, I didn't sign the contract. I received my draft notice.

V: What were the circumstances or the factors that motivated you to become an officer in the United States Army?

H: Once I received my notice to report for my physical and got my draft notice and having been a college graduate, I just considered the various options of coming into the military. At the time, I think I preferred to come in as an officer. I guess one of the reasons was the money was a little bit better, from what I understood. My father had not been in the military. He had been in the Navy in World War II, but he was a pilot instructor and not as a formalized position. I guess I just thought it was a better way of life. I would have enjoyed being a leader rather than just a regular infantry.

Once I received my draft notice I went down and talked to Army recruiters to see what they could do for me. They talked to me about the OCS (Officer Candidate School) option. At that time I opted to go that route. I came in the military and went through basic training at AIT (Advanced Infantry Training). Entered AIT at Fort Dicks: New Jersey.

Upon completion of that I went to Fort Benning, Georgia, I went through infantry officer candidate school. My original assignment, when I was going to come out of OCS and be assigned to the 3rd Infantry Regiment, "The Old Guard," Washington, D.C. I had a couple good friends in my platoon that had prior service in military intelligence. Because I finished third in my OCS class, the top three candidates got their choice of branch when they were commissioned. A couple of them started working on me and said that I was crazy if I stayed in the infantry. I also talked to my tactical officer and he sort of agreed to the same thing. If I had a chance to get out, I should pick a different branch. Based on my recommendations and a good friend that I had at that time, who was in what was known as the Army Securities, I opted to go about a week before we graduated--to military intelligence rather than remain in the infantry.

V: Now we've got you through and you're an officer. When and how and why were you sent to Vietnam? When I say, "When," give us the time period.

H: I graduated from OCS in January of 1970. From Fort Benning I went up to, at that time, the basic officer course for Army security agency. It was a signal's intelligence, electronic warfare, graphic school at Fort Devons, Massachusetts, I went there, reported there in February 1970 and the course lasted until May. After completing the course I was PCS [Permanent Change of Station] at Fort Devons. My first assignment there was headquarters commandant of the ASA [Army Security Agency] School. I held that position until October of 1970 at which time I came down on orders to go to Vietnam. I guess it was just a normal rotation at that time, just common practice, after about six or seven months after commissioning, most officers ended up getting assigned to serve. Coming out of OCS, I had a two year obligation. Usually common practice at that time was six or eight months after commissioning you go to some kind of basic assignment. You came down and got orders for Vietnam.

I was not overly upset about it. I enjoyed my job. I had a couple of other good friends that were going over at the same time. I guess I felt that it was the thing to do, to go also. I sort of felt like it was an obligation. You feel bad when other people go and you are just sitting there. Plus, there was also that fear factor in there, a chance of going into a war-type situation. I knew by my MOS (Military Occupational Skill) and my training in military intelligence I would not be in a combat situation. It was not the type of job that infantry handles. I would not be up on the front lines in combat or anything like that.

I kind of looked forward to it. I think there was something that always sat on my mind and that was a question; the challenge to know yourself how you would react in a combat situation when somebody fired at you. That was probably the one thing that I missed about not going in as an infantryman. It was sort of a subconscious thing within yourself to know how you would react in that type of situation. I guess subconsciously I sort of wanted to go, to see myself, how I would react and how I would handle the situation. I would be sort of a challenge. I didn't approach it as being fearful of going. In a lot of ways I was looking forward to it. It was challenging, and a unique type of opportunity to have. At times I guess I am not an introverted...type of personality. I considered this a chance to sort of prove to myself that I could handle the situation or something like that.

V: Earlier you mentioned the initials PCS. Explain that for us.

H: PCS is permanent change of station. You were being assigned from one base to another base or location.

V: Where did you go when you were sent to Vietnam?

H: As far as an MOS, at that time it was called 9600 which was the signal for intelligence. I was an electronic warfare officer. In Vietnam we had a situation, where by the nature of our work...Signals intelligence is basically listening to the radio transmissions of the other side and doing an analysis. By the nature of the work and type of things that were going on, it was not an official government policy at that time that we had military trained intelligence officers in Vietnam.

When I went to Vietnam I was assigned to what was called the 509th ASA group, or radio research group. Rather than using the term "Army Security Agency" or "ASA" it was a cover name "radio research." We went over, under the guise of being signal corps officers or signal corps brass, our insignia on our uniforms.

When I was assigned I originally came into Ton Son Nhut Air Base. This was October 1970. It was just outside of Saigon. For the first week or so you report in and go into the group headquarters 509 base. Headquarters was in Saigon. Primarily they spend a week with you processing and getting your records squared away. It was somewhat of an indoctrination to coming into the country, what is going on and some intelligence briefings to update the situations.

After a week in Saigon, determination was made on where to assign me to subordinate units underneath the 509th. The decision was made that I was going to be assigned to 303rd Radio Research Battalion. It was headquarters in Long Binh which was about 30 miles outside of Saigon. From there I went up to battalion headquarters. I spent about a week there in processing and doing various types of tasks, getting prepared. The determination was then to assign me down to the 409th Radio Research Detachment which was in support of the 11th Army Cavalry Regiment. It was located about 15 miles from Long Binh south in a place called Zian Yan, Vietnam. That was where the headquarters of the 11th ACR was. We were an ASA detachment that provided signals intelligence support for the 11th ACR. I spent from October of 1970 to March of 1971 there.

At that time in the 1970 to 1971 time frame, the war was starting to wind down at least in the "three corps areas" where the Saigon area was. So there was not much of a combat war going on in that area. It was primarily maintaining the bases that were there. It was not fighting some of the infiltrates and so forth like that. It was not any major unit actions in our area that we were responsible for. It was mostly mopping up actions and trying to maintain security in that area. Up in the northern portion of Vietnam, there was still quite a bit of fighting going on.

In the 1970 to 1971 time frame, there were a lot of units standing down. The 11th ACR stood down in March of 1971. At that time, I was reassigned from Zian Yan over to Bien Hoa. It was ten or fifteen miles father west of where Zian Yan was. We were in support of the 1st Cavalry Division doing the same type of work. It was an ASA detachment in support to one of the brigades in the first Cav Division. The 1st Cav Division already stood down and there was only one brigade left. I was there from March of 1971 to October 1971. Then I returned back to the States.

- V: You said you spent a week learning what it was like to be "in country." What kind of things did they tell you about and what were you exposed to at that time period for that week?
- H: It was just like in processing like you do in most new posts when you come in. You have a lot of personnel records, finance records. You probably spend a day like that. You also spend a lot of time laying

around your bunk waiting to get the word of what unit you were assigned to.

By being in intelligence, we had a couple of intelligence briefings over at the war room, just on the current status of military action within Vietnam. We also received some instruction in some of the techniques to use to manage our signal intelligence assets. There was not too much of tactical exploitation or a technical exploitation type thing on what we were supposed to do. I guess there was some climate change and getting used to the climate change. Coming from Massachusetts where it was already starting to get cool, going to Vietnam was a subtropical climate. I guess there was some acclimation to the weather change, time change, and everything else by flying over there. I am sure that answers the question.

V: Did you get any instruction on the language or money exchange or what the people were like or what to expect or anything like that ?

H: None. I had no language training per se; you pick up a couple little phrase words, slang word type thing that you have to use.

The currency was different of course. It was illegal to have green currency or greenbacks. They used what was called MPC. I am not sure what it stands for, Military...something...Currency. It was like funny money or Monopoly money. They used that instead of having greenbacks. Greenbacks could have a higher value on the black market, so it was illegal to have greenbacks. You converted your money from greenbacks into the funny money, and that is what you used. I had some instruction on the conversion or the regulations as far as being able to trade MPC for Vietnamese currency and the illegal aspects of that.

I don't remember getting any instruction on the customs or what the Vietnamese people would be like or how to treat them or things like that. There may have been something like that or some type of indoctrination course, but I really don't think there was that I can remember. There might have been. Most of it was just picked up from people that you talked to and stuff like that and how that was.

When you were in Saigon, you were permitted outside of the base. Most places you were restricted to the bases. You weren't allowed to travel or anything on your own per se. The housing area when we were in Saigon was separated from our group headquarters so you traveled back and forth. You could travel by what they called...it's like a Rik-Shaw type of thing, motorcycles that had seats on the front. You could travel back

and forth by them. You could use a taxi. Most of the time we traveled by jeep, or a government vehicle. It was possible to move, at one point in Saigon through the city. There was also a couple of POQ's (Permanent Officer's Quarters) in Saigon that was mostly where officers stayed. If you were a permanent part in Saigon, you traveled. They were also separated in various parts of Saigon. You traveled where they had clubs and so forth and where you were going to meet. You could travel through the...town, city of Saigon some.

I think during the 1970's time frame, reception period, when I was there, we probably still had some reservations of it still being a war zone although it was not like you were being fired on or something like that.

V: We talked about what our government did to acquaint you to what it would be like. Did you meet civilians periodically or were you exposed to them? How do you think they felt towards you presence there or the United States' presence there?

H: The only civilians, or the Vietnamese, that I got to know or really met besides seeing them on the street were the Vietnamese that were local national hire or whatever you would call them, they worked inside of the compound that we were assigned to. Most of them were called hoochmates. They would come in, do laundry, shine shoes, and clean up the area, or something like that. Those were the only Vietnamese that I really knew during my time there. There was only half of a dozen or so that spoke English that you were able to converse with. Again, most of them were uneducated, at least the ones that I knew. They had been working around the American camps for so long that they picked up English enough that they could speak and get by on it. You could talk to them about simple things. The people that I knew, the Vietnamese, were uneducated and were farmers. I am not sure what they had been before, farmers or growing up in a rural area they were attached to a camp and following the GI's around. That was a good place to earn money. They earned a heck of a lot more money than they could somewhere else. There were a number of young ladies that earned additional money for other types of activities that were there. Mostly, they were uneducated.

V: Not room for much philosophical discussion?

H: No. The people that I knew, I don't think there was a feeling of distrust. You trusted them, at least the ones that we had. They were in your quarters. When you went to work in the morning, they would come in and pick up your uniforms and do the laundry, shine your shoes, clean

up the area. They would be brought in during the morning and checked in through the MP's. They would be checked in during the morning and checked out at night or late in the afternoon. They were pretty well controlled. Usually you got the same ones everyday. You got to know who they were and something like that.

The ones that I knew I could talk to I think were by the nature of the way they were working. They were pro-Americans. There had been security checks already done on them prior to coming into camp. By working with us most of the time, the same ones, I think they were fairly pro-American. I guess as far as their education level and so forth like that, they, like you said, you couldn't talk much philosophy. I really don't think they had, the ones that I knew, much of a feeling of being able to discuss and say, "What is democracy as opposed to a dictatorship or Marxism, communism, or socialist state. At times they didn't have any concept of anything like that.

I felt that most of them were, in a way, glad to have the Americans there because they protected them from that type of life. Most of them were fairly young. I would guess they were probably in their twenties and thirties. They had been exposed to fighting their entire lives either with the French being there or fighting against the Vietnamese. Since we had come in, they had liked sort of to the Americans to protect them, and what they had. They were probably more fearful of the Vietcong than they were of what the Americans might do to them. I think they thought that we were the lesser of the two evils or something like that. The ones that I knew were, again, uneducated so they really had no concept of what a government was. They knew there was a president there who was in charge of them and ran the country. I do not think it really meant anything to them. As long as they were able to have their little patch of ground to raise the rice and be happy, they would be satisfied. To understand the government structure, I really do not think they had much comprehension, or really cared, as long as they were able to live in peace, raise their crops, and take care of their family, and stuff like that. They were happy. It wouldn't have made any difference with the government they had or the North Vietnamese in control, whoever, just as long as they had their personal safety. I really don't think they had much of an understanding of government processes back then.

One time when they had the elections there, they had a term that was called "white mice." It was a policeman. They were called white mice because they wore white shirts. When the election came, most of these people could not read or write. The people were basically herded off and forced to go and vote. They vote for whoever they were told to vote for.

They really didn't have any concept of who they were voting for. I think that is the way most of the election took place at least for the people that I knew.

V: How did you and your fellow officers that you were with feel about them, the Vietnamese, in the sense that your presence there was helping them or by our continued presence that they would get that understanding eventually? How do you feel on those lines? Did you think they could eventually comprehend what a democracy was or was it something that it would just take so long that it would be worthless?

H: I think as individuals if they were educated they could. The problem there is I don't think they were ever educated. It was not that they weren't smart or couldn't comprehend because some of them were very, very intelligent. They had never been trained in it. By the American presence there, I wouldn't think those particular people that I knew--the farmers, lower class, peasants-- I don't think they would ever have a complete understanding of the government just because they weren't educated. I am not really sure how the education system worked. Maybe in a city environment where they had better schools or that type of situation, there may be more of a recognition factor that we were doing something there to protect them. I know the people that we had in the hoochmate type thing appreciated us being in there taking care of them. I think they felt that we were protecting them. They were glad to have us there. I think, even though I was not directly involved and didn't know much about it, the stories I heard were like the atrocities the North Vietnamese and the Vietcong had performed. I think they looked upon us as protectors. I think also somewhat of a protector possibly even some from the Vietnamese government itself. They had some problems there, too. Again, the type of people that I knew I think they appreciated us. I know they appreciated the monetary gains that they could make as compared to what the other people around them. They earned money. The Americans paid quite high compared to what they could make working as a farmer or something like that. I think the monetary gain was a lot better for them.

I think they had a sense that we were protecting them, some of them. Whether or not they were better off, I don't really know. I said I think they had grown up constantly in the fighting. The fighting had been going on for 30, 40, or 50 years between the French and the Vietcong. Now they had us in there. I think they hadn't known much of peace at all at any time. I think they probably looked at it that we were

providing some protection. I think they would be glad to see the fighting ending and let everybody go back to normal. I think that we had a purpose at that time.

V: How did you feel or the people around you feel about what was going on at home around the same time? You were there in 1970. That was during the period of the Kent State incident. How did you feel about the protest to the war that was happening at home?

H: I think Kent State happened before I left. I think it was in May of 1970. Again, in 1968 when they had the presidential riot in Chicago at the presidential convention, you saw all of the riots. I guess with my family background, I was not too much of a riot-goer. I went to a fairly conservative school. My general background is of a fairly conservative nature. Those things never really appealed to me, so it turned me off a little bit by the long-haired hippies and all that kind of stuff in a generalization.

Even before I came into the service, those actions sort of revolted me. I was opposed to them. I could not understand why they would do it that way. Even though I had not gone out and joined the service, I doubt if I would have enlisted on my own. I was not really in favor of that. Once I got into the military, I guess it affected me a little bit more that they were knocking for something. I felt they was knocking the military, which I was a part of, and knocking the country which was contrary to my beliefs.

I guess I was sort of an anti-demonstration. It sort of turned me off. I had a hard time understanding what there rationale was or how they would think. Again, I guess my background was an influence contrary to my beliefs.

While I was in Vietnam, I did not see much. We had some news coming. Occasionally we watched television. You could see student riots back in the states. I guess it sort of made you mad. You thought that you were over there not really defending the country, by holding a duty or something like that. A lot of the students back home were rioting against the war. It made you tend to think, "You ought to draft those guys instead." I guess it was just the idea that you didn't know the person on the other end. Nobody liked being there. It was an obligation to serve your country. There were other people objected to it also. I guess it just sort of turned you off a little bit.

V: Getting in to what you were talking about before, how did you feel about what the United States was doing there? Did you feel they were trying to accomplish something? What were the political motives that you thought the country was involved in? Can you give that serious consideration? Did you feel that you were there to do a job and win the war or were you just there maybe not so much to win, but to hold out? Did you give that much thought?

H: Probably not. Once you get into the situation, it is sort of like a survival type thing. You do not stop to think of why you are doing it as much as you want to survive if you stop and think about it. You do not stop to think about why I am doing this or doing that.

In the three corps area where I was, the war was especially low there. There was not the daily fighting. There might have been an occasional ambush or some infiltrates that were caught. It was not the daily activity of actual fire fights going on. We occasionally had rocket attacks at night at some of the bases which were near by. Personally, there was only two times in our unit that we actually had a rocket attack at base and that was at Bien Hoa. When I was at Bien Hoa, there was also an Army base and an Air Force base. Both times, the enemy was going for the air base. There were never any direct hits coming in our area. You did have this sense of feeling, of being in a combat type situation, a physical nature type thing.

I guess you stop to think of why you are going over there prior to going over and maybe after you get back. While you are over there, I think you are placed in a situation where you have a job to do, so you basically go out and perform the job you were trained to do. I do not think I sat around a whole lot trying to decide on whether or not the war was right or wrong, or why I was there. I was already there. There was a job to be done. You went out and tried to do the best you could. I do not remember there being a lot of discussion of the other officers in my unit when they sat around trying to evaluate whether or not it was good or bad that we were here. I think within my unit and the people that I knew it was unspoken, or thought of in the mind more. I really do not remember sitting around trying to evaluate the rights and wrongs and why we were there. I think once you got into that situation, everyone just tried to do the best job that they could.

We were in a lot of different situations than the combat arms people who were out walking through the boonies every day facing the dangers of combat. We were pretty much in a rear area. we were in a support type situation. We had a lot of different perspectives of it.

V: I am going to ask you what a typical day was like. Maybe you can relate that when we get to that question. How did you feel that your time spent there related to helping you? Do you think it helped you to be a better officer? Was it necessary to go through something like that to see if you could handle that type of a challenge? Do you feel it made you a better officer, or a better person? How do you think it benefited you in any way?

H: For myself, being in a situation, I was never in a combat type situation, so I think that the experiences a combat officer would have an infantry, or armor or something like that would changed his prospective on how to perform and fight.

My role as a combat support type organization, we were in the rear. We did plan our support operations when we sent out our linguistic analysts with our 11th ACR troops in the various fir support bases. We planned that type of operation. That would be unique in that type of data that we collected and the analysis that would be performed. However, by signals intelligence, you do not have to be right next to the guy to do it. We performed basically the same type of intercept operations today that we did in Vietnam in various locations around the world. On operational type perspectives, I do not think it was necessary that I would have had to have been in that type of situation to improve my self operation.

I think as far as the biggest benefit, the type of situation would be working with people. Being in a detachment, there were about 90 personnel detachments in Zian Yan and Bien Hoa. I think the interrelationships with the people would be difficult to have the same type of relationship, say being stationed in the states and have a similar type of operation. Even though you did not have the type of camaraderie or pulling together like an infantry squadron, just by being placed in that type of situation, you are forced to live together in a small compound, and the same type of atmosphere. Because there is a war going on, you pull together. That would be difficult to duplicate being in a troop situation, say, having a company at Fort Hood, Texas. You are forced to live together, and there are no great extra-curricular activities to pull the unit together. You tend to have a different relationship between the officers and enlisted personnel. You have a lot closer knit and less formalized rank structure in a situation like that than

you would find in a state unit being in a small company side or a smaller detachment. There was not the degree of rank consciousness. I think maybe you tended to become especially closer with the officers and the NCO's.

In our unit, there were only three officers. I think there were two lieutenants and a captain. We worked together and socialized. I think we spent more time together with the NCO's playing cards, drinking, telling war stories, or just talking about things. I think you had a closer relationship in that way than you would in a state side unit.

There are people who will come in and talk about things totally off the wall just to have someone to talk to. When I came back into the United States, I did not want to have a sense of being in a company size unit, state-side. I cannot really make a true comparison. That is just my feeling. I think that is a type of experience that I would have not gotten being in a state side unit.

Operationally, technical knowledge, I do not think it provided anything unique that I could not have picked up in a state-side unit as far as explaining the operations. There might have been a couple of unique situations as far as finding logistics or things like that, that would be unique to Vietnam, as opposed to being state-side or in Germany. I do not think there is that great of a difference; I think if I would have been in an infantry company, it would have made quite a difference.

Most of our operations were done the same way in peace time Germany as they were in Vietnam as far as the deployment strategy and analytic techniques.

V: Did you feel like you still knew what was going on back home? Did they keep you up? Did you know who won football games? How good was your communication as to what was going on at home?

H: It was pretty good. Unlike what it might have been like in an infantry unit, being based in Zian Yan and Bien Hoa, which were major. Zian Yan was not big; it was pretty small. The post at Long Binh, only fifteen miles away, had the largest troop concentration in Vietnam. At Bien Hoa, we were right next to an Air Force base that had a large Army compound too. A lot of people think that you were really isolated way out there. When we were in Third Corps we had a forces network radio 24 hours a day. You continually were updated on what was going on in the news. I do not remember if we had a newspaper that came out every day. A ward T.V. was available, only I didn't have one personally. If

you went to a lot of you bases, you could watch television. The reception would go in Saigon. You still got most of the programs that were taped. It might be a couple weeks or a month old. You still had that contact. There were a number of sporting events that were telecast live. The time zones were different. If you wanted to listen to a game, it did not come on until two or three o'clock in the morning, but you could still listen to it live if you wanted to stay up.

You really did not lose contact with what was going on back in the United States, commonly referred to as what was going on "back in the world." You really were not isolated like in World War II when you could have been gone for months or weeks at a time without really knowing what was going on back in the States. We had daily newscasts when we could listen to the radio. It never really felt like you lost touch from the world.

Being in that particular area of Vietnam was probably a lot different than being in First Corps where the units would go out and be on patrols for two and three weeks at a time. That would be a situation that they would be out of contact. In III Corp area, we did not have that type of a situation. We never really felt that we lost touch with it.

V: What was a typical day like for you? What did you do? How many hours did you spend awake? What was it like on a daily grind as it was?

H: My primary jobs when I was there--when I came in I started out as an assistant operations officer when I was at Zian. I was also set in with two lieutenants. There was one captain. The captain was the commander. The first lieutenant was the operations officer. I was the operations officer. I also had a number of additional duties, a type of thing that you always have. I handled the supply and maintenance and motor pool. Most of my duties were oriented that way as opposed to learning the operations. The war was starting to wind down by that time. We started getting GI inspections, and CMMI's. There were a lot of records that had to be kept. They had not been done for the last three or four years because of the combat situations. I spent the majority of my time doing a lot of paper work and getting caught up, proper accountability, functions, and things of this nature. I did preventative maintenance on electronic equipment which we had a lot of. We were trying to get caught up in that way. We were supposed to handle things like maintenance and repair.

A typical day in Zian would be getting up around six in the morning. We had a mess hall that was run by the Military Police on base. They

ran the mess hall and would provide one or two cooks. It was like a consolidated mess hall for the entire Zian compound. We usually went to chow which was not all that bad. We would go in about 6:30 or so. We would read the traffic intelligence messages or reports that would come in overnight to try to stay up on what was ongoing there. Around 7:00 or 7:30 there was always a morning intelligence briefing that was given to the commander and staff of the 11th ACR.

Depending on who was there, the intelligence officer usually gave the briefing along with a couple of out analysts. If for some reason he was not available to give the report, I would give the briefing to the commander. It was basically a recap of what we had collected from signals intelligence, what we collected ourselves, and what was reported from other signal intelligence units on the current situations in the area of responsibility of the 11th ACR. We would provide him with a morning update of what happened the night before and what we thought was going to happen the remainder of the day. It also gave him a schedule of what signal intelligence units that we had out with his units. Also, there were aerial platforms that collected signal intelligence. They were not under our command, but we would tell them what the flights were going to be and what type of activity he could expect to have during the day with that coverage. If at that time he had any special requirements that he or his staff had, they would pass those along to us so that we could pass them along to our higher headquarters for incorporation to the daily intelligence schedule.

As far as our operations, we ran in three manual Morse intercept positions out of Zian. We had a quon-set hut built there that was a semi-fixed facility. We had three main Morse positions in the hut. Most of our tasking came from the field station that we worked for. It was located in Bien Hoa. We were in direct support of the 11th ACR. Most of our tasking came down from the field stations. We responded to those tasks and anything special that the 11th ACR wanted to do.

We also had low level Morse teams that actually went out with the squadrons out to the various fir support bases. Their functions were basically to intercept different types of communications that might get at short range by manual Morse which were at high frequencies. You could had a longer range in intercepting.

After briefing, we would return. My day was mostly, at that time, going over paper work and insuring that supply requisitions were taken care of, maintenance was being performed, looking out after the motor pool, making sure inspections were being done, and vehicles are taken care of.

It was just routine, day to day types of things to keep the motor pool and the supply and maintenance area operating. There was a lot of paper work that still had to go on even though it was a combat type situation. Most of my job was related to overseeing those actions.

You had a number of other personnel actions: people coming into the unit and people leaving. Most of the day was spent on paper work. Occasionally the operations officer, or the other first lieutenant handled most of the operations, as far as doing intelligence analysis of maintaining current statuses of the units and so forth.

A couple of times, later on, during the last part of the tour at Zian when the 11th ACR stood down, our unit stood down also. I spent about the last month between February and March of 1971 just getting equipment ready to turn in. It was a major task trying to clear a property of everything. Just trying to come up with the equipment and accounting for all of it, making sure that all the pieces were there with the various parts, and preparing to turn it in to our support activity. The last month was spent doing this.

Getting back to the normal day, most days were spent with a lot of people working. You tended to go to the operations area just to see what was going on throughout the day. You had a lot of message traffic to go through day after day. You probably ended up writing a couple messages a day mostly related to supply functions and personnel. The day seemed to go by somewhat quickly because there was always something to do all of the time.

Usually we went to evening chow between 5:00 and 5:30. We came back and prepared for the evening briefing. It usually went on until 7:00. We would go over the material and provide, again, an intelligence update to the commander of the 11th ACR and his staff. That would usually last thirty to forty minutes. We had our section and would brief the current intelligence, and the staff would sit around and plan the next day's operations. Based on what their input was and what was going to be done, usually afterwards we sat in on the intelligence briefing for discussion. We would then come back to our unit. Anything special like intelligence collection objections that we wanted to put in, we would write them up, turn them over to our people, and transmit them to other units. It was around 10:00 when this task was completed.

That was the daily routine. It was like this seven days out of the week. There was a lot of other activity. It was not always like that. The evening briefing would be called off because the commander was not

going to be there. Occasionally we called off. Usually around 10:00 we would wander over to the officer's club and have a couple of beers of something like that. We would stay there until 11:00 or 11:30 and then come back and hit the sack. We would get up at 6:00 the next morning.

If you did not end up going to the bars at night, a lot of time sat around and played cards with the NCO's or whoever wanted to join in. We spent quite a few hours playing pinochle. We also had our own club for the detachment. You would go in and have a beer or drink some sodas.

Basically that was it for the seven day week. Sundays were usually lighter days. We usually slacked off as far as the paper work goes. In my opinion, the good part about it was you were busy doing something all of the time, therefore the time seemed to go by a lot faster. When we first got there we thought 365 days of this is a long time. Now that I look back on it the time really did go by rather quickly.

When that unit stood down, I went to Bien Hoa. I was the executive officer of the detachment. I still ran most of the supply and motor pool actions. We had additional maintenance headaches and three helicopters assigned which flew one of our intelligence missions of the CAV. There were a lot of headaches keeping up with the maintenance of the helicopters. There seemed to always be something wrong with the. By being an organic collection asset that we had in that unit, the CG was always looking at that a lot closer. Keeping those aircraft flying were a major headache.

The basic day was pretty much the same as before. Again, Sunday was the light day. At Bien Hoa, we had an Air Force base next to the Army base. The Air Force had a beautiful club. It was like going to any club, and officer's club, that you could find in the United States. We used to go over there a lot, often every night. That would sort of break up the day.

You still had basically the same thing. You had morning briefing given to the commanding general. Then you had a lot of paper work, and miscellaneous activities to do during the day. Afterwards we would sit around with the people in our detachments, or go to the club.

We had our own movie theater, and movie projector. They had movies that rotated among the units. Usually around 7:00 when the briefing was over, they showed movies to the troops that were not on duty. A lot of the support troops were working though.

We were kind of separated because of the type of work that we did in comparison to the other units. We had a lot of things that were unique to us. We tended to stick together a lot more. We were also a lot closer to some units than others. In the evening prior to dinner, or sometimes afterwards, we would have volleyball games. There were activities like this that kept the unit together. It was not a solid eighteen hours a day work type situation. There were laxes in the schedule so that you could sit around and shoot the bull when you got a chance. It was not a connate eighteen hour duty day at work unless you were in the operations area or something like that. Those people were constantly working

V: You talked about your unit. You would probably know more about just you unit. You heard so much about how prevalent drugs were in the military over in Vietnam. Were there and circumstances or do you feel there was any problem with you unit?

H: Being in military intelligence, we had a unique situation there. Anyone who was caught with drugs automatically had their clearance taken away or their access. They were shipped out of the unit. because of that fact they would lose their MOS and were sent out to be infantry types or put in the infantry. I think our run-ins with drugs was a lot less. I know there were quite a few people using marijuana, or maybe some other type of drugs. I can only remember one or two people that got caught in our unit. I do not think the use was as heavy as it might have been in some of the other units like in an engineering unit or at a maintenance unit that was in a base compound.

Basically, by being in military intelligence, we had a higher level of education. It was much more difficult to get into the unit and be able to get the clearance to get in. I do not think we really had the problem that some of the other units had. The only personal experience that I had with a person who was actually caught using drugs was one or two people that were not caught by us. They were caught by other people. They lost their clearance and were shipped to other units. One night there was a staff duty officer, which was rotating with all of the other officers that were on the compound in Zian. This basically entailed being up all night. At the start of the night, he periodically went out and checked the perimeter bunkers to make sure that the troops were awake and performing their duties. The one night we had one of the troops over-dose. I do not know if they found out for sure what he OD'd on, but he ended up dying. They found him and called me in there to investigate and to call the paramedics. That was the only personal incident that I had with the contact of drugs.

I know there were a lot of people that were using them. From what I understand it was quite easy to obtain these drugs. By the type of unit we had, we did not have much use for drugs. I should say, I don't know if we had much use, but we did not have open use of the drugs that I knew of. Maybe we had smarter guys in our units.

We did not go out, physically, every night to check all of the enlisted quarters trying to catch people. Periodically, we had inspections to check for drugs and things of this nature. It was not in our daily routine. In my opinion, by the caliber of troops that we had, it was not as prevalent as it might have been in other divisions.

V: You said you were there for a year. What were the circumstances of and you feelings coming home?

H: Well, everyone was happy to get out. It was kind of a unique type of war, I guess, or conflict, whatever you want to call it. I cannot imagine what it was like to be in World War II when you did not know when you were coming home. By the situation in Vietnam, you knew you had a one year tour of duty. I guess there was always something to look forward to. I did not start my short time calendar until the last couple of months. A lot of people started them the day they got there. You would start out with 365 days and work down until one, coloring in each day.

When you left, it was the reverse process of when you came in. You went to Saigon for the last couple of days to out process. You got your records squared away with finance and personnel. You spent two or three days in Saigon prior to getting on a plane to go home.

The feeling of relief that it was over was so great. The situation that we were in was not such that I felt that I was in constant fear, or that I was going to be shot at, or we were going to get blown up. It as almost like it was a regular job, except the hours were a lot longer. We got to the point, or at least I did, I was not afraid that I was going to be shot or killed. You sort of lost, after being in Vietnam a month or so, that perception of being in constant danger. We became less cautious.

When we traveled around, we traveled frequently from Zian to Long Binh to the battalion headquarters. We would go occasionally, maybe once a month, to Saigon to group headquarters to provide operational briefings or to provide status requisitions for supplies or maintenance. When we traveled on the roads back and forth we would sometimes feel

uneasy. It was not in the sense of danger like being in the other type of city.

The last month that you are in the country, you begin to be more cautious and a bit more worried. You do not want anything to happen to you after you made it through the whole year. You get a bit more cautious in the activities which you choose to do. You do not want to take the weekly supply run to Saigon. All you want to do is stay on the base where you know you are safe. In the final weeks you have a sense of relief knowing that you are going home.

I remembered when they loaded everyone up on the plane in out processing. I flew out of Ton Son Nut for my return trip home. The main thing they had there was the processing through. They had a lot of dogs to sniff for drugs as you were out processing. By being ASAS, again, we were special. We were taken off to the side so that we did not have to wait in the lines and go through all of the processing that a lot of the people did. We basically slipped through and went to the plane and anxiously awaited our departure.

Everyone sat on the plane looking out of the windows watching everything around them. It was a commercial airline, Pan Am if my memory serves me right. The engines started up and the plane cruised down the runway. As soon as the plane lifted up, everyone got up from their seats cheering and applauding. We were glad to get out.

We flew directly from Saigon into San Francisco. The one thing I remember was in the middle of the night, we must have hit an air pocket on the flight back. It felt like the plane had dropped from the sky. I do not know how far, but it seemed like a couple hundred feet. What flashed through my head was the sense that we made it a year in Vietnam and on the way home the plane crashes!

I do not know if I had the satisfaction of knowing that I did the best I could while I was there. I don't think I really had the feeling that I accomplished a whole lot by being there. You did not have the feeling of what you might have had in World War II, where there was a victory celebration. There was not any celebration from the aspect that you had accomplished something, or there was a goal that was accomplished. You were finished and you were worn. You had a feeling that maybe you survived, but it was different. You can say to yourself, "I went over there with a purpose and I've accomplished it. It is over with."

The main feeling that you had was you were alive. Hopefully you had the feeling that you tried to do your job the best that you could while you were there. I don't think I had the feeling that I had done something really good and was proud of it. That is not what I remember. There was a sense that I had survived it and it was over. Again, that was being in an environment where you weren't in combat.

I am sure that the feeling would have been much greater being in the infantry, or something like that, having to go through a whole year like that. I guess you were just glad to finally be back.

It sounds strange to say, but it was an enjoyable experience. I enjoyed what I did in Vietnam. That was probably the turning point of my decision to stay in the military. As I said, I came in as a draftee that would put my two years in and get out. While I was over there, I enjoyed the job that I did. Based on that, about halfway through the tour, I decided to go indefinitely. That means as an officer you don't have a particular enlistment type time frame. I didn't have a certain time to get out of the service, I just went in based on the fact that I enjoyed the work. I decided to stay in and take an extra assignment. It was an enjoyable move.

V: Do you have any final comments?

H: I think my experience and the idea of what Vietnam was really like was a lot different than what the perception was and what the news people reported back. I guess it was a different type of war than what the people thought of it. It wasn't like a nine to five job or something like that. In the situation we had, there was not the daily threat of danger. I guess it was always there in the back of your mind. We weren't constantly threatened or facing somebody coming up and shooting at us.

W We had a couple of incidents during the year where we had a couple of rocket attacks. They were not directed directly against us, they were against an air base. On occasion we had a satchel charge that would blow up at the MPs or the main gates of the compound. There wasn't anything directly at me.

One day we were driving to Saigon and all of the bridges were guarded by Vietnamese to protect them from being blown up. We were driving across the bridge and I guess one of the vehicles backfired or something. I thought for sure somebody was firing at us. I dropped down in the jeep and my heart stopped beating a couple of times. But there really wasn't a constant fear there. You could say that I had a good time while

I was there. It was an enjoyable world assignment. You felt that you had some job satisfaction, much more so than being stationed in a state-side air base. You were actually doing something that you were trained to do. Hopefully you did it fairly well, and you got some satisfaction out of it. You would see results of it maybe that day or the next. It wasn't like a peace time situation where you involved a lot stat work or training type situations that take a long time to see direct results. You had a job to do and you did it. You could see tangible results coming back immediately.

It was, for me, an enjoyable experience. I like it. It is not that I would want to do it again, but in a type of situation that I worked in, it was a good experience. The funny part of it was that it was enjoyable, that's strange for being in a war type situation.

V: Well, I thank you for your time.

H: You're welcome.

END OF INTERVIEW