

YOUNGSTOWN STATE UNIVERSITY

ORAL HISTORY PROGRAM

Vietnam War Experiences

Personal Experience

O H 1263

THOMAS CONONICO

Interviewed

by

Douglas Senseman

on

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- S This is an interview with Thomas Cononico, for the Youngstown State University Oral History Program, on the Vietnam War Experiences, by Doug Senseman, at Forsythe Avenue, Girard, Ohio, on March 11, 1987
Tom, could you tell me what you were doing prior to the war in Vietnam?
- C I was in high school
- S What had you heard about the war when you were in high school?
- C It was not really a publicized war. Every day you would hear about little incidents and what not. That was the talk at the time, kids going to Vietnam, a lot of them instead of college went to the service.
- S Had you been able to form any opinions about the war just from what you had heard?
- C At that young age, not really.
- S When did you enter the service?
- C It was August 7, 1967.
- S How old were you?
- C I was seventeen.
- S What branch of the service did you enter?
- C I was in the Army.
- S How did you happen to come and join the Army, or were you drafted?
- C. No, I joined. I wanted to go into the service. My brother was in the service and I had come from a patriotic family. It was in 1937 when my father went in and stayed in for nineteen and a half years.
- S So the feelings of your family and friends when you went in were supportive?
- C. Very supportive. Fight for the flag.
- S Before going to Vietnam, do you think you could have found it on the map? Did you know anything about it?
- C. I knew nothing of it other than it was over in Southeast Asia, somewhere was a country I

had never heard of or seen on a map for that matter

S When you signed up for the Army, did you sign up for a particular type of training?

C Heavy and light equipment operator By joining a service, they gave you a station where you would like to go overseas I picked Europe, which they fulfilled I got to go to Europe, but the company I was with, the 101st and 124th Trans, were destined for Vietnam the whole time I had no knowledge of it Our whole unit shipped back from Europe straight to Vietnam

S How long were you in Europe?

C Fourteen and a half months

S Did you receive any advanced training before you went to Vietnam?

C Just in my heavy and light equipment operating Jump school, and just your basic training in the service

S Right before you went to Vietnam, what had you heard about it at that point?

C While I was in the service, you keep hearing of the different units, pick five, six to ten guys, and they were destined for Vietnam The other ones were shipped to Europe, Hawaii, or stayed here in the States When I was over in Germany, which was when our company orders came down, "This unit will reforge back to the United States for advanced jungle warfare training to be shipped to Vietnam, to replace a unit in Vietnam."

S Where in the United States did you receive the training?

C That was in Fort Campbell, and Fort Polk, Louisiana, and Fort Demenz, Massachusetts

S Did anything stand out in particular about the training you had?

C It was like the John Wayne show, "Green Beret" that they had out and that was in the year 1968, right around that era it came out While in Europe it was on a cassern, a Germany Army cassern, we saw "Green Beret" and that was with the booby traps and all of that It kind of made you think about the training that you had, which was basically the same thing, simulated villages and what not You were trained to go in, surround, and capture a village. It was different At that age, you really did not know what you were doing Confused

S How did you feel when you first found out you were going to Vietnam?

- C The feeling was good, because at the time, I thought I was doing something for this country I thought I was needed
- S When you were finally on your way to Vietnam, what was the trip over like?
- C The closer it seemed we got, the worse the butterflies got I was scared It was the fear of the unknown You did not know exactly what you were going to be facing other than what you heard from guys that were on their way back that you would meet
- S: What would the guys tell you?
- C That it was really bad over there That there was more killing going on than what was publicized in the media, than what was let out to the United States, and that you really had to keep your ass down, so to speak It was like the tropical type of heat They would say you would bake from the inside out, more or less It was different jungle type
- S How exactly were you transported to Vietnam?
- C By air. I flew out to California. I was sent from there I spent an extra week there A lot of the guys were taking off and going to Canada That was in the year 1969 for fear they did not want to go to Vietnam
- S You are not saying guys from your outfit, you are saying what?
- C Guys that were in California that were going to be shipped over with me on our departure dates They extended their dates themselves and they decided, "Well, I am not even going to go," and they would take off and go to Canada
- S: Had you talked to any of those people?
- C A couple of guys. "We do not have to go over there, come on, let us go You can always come back and see your family " It was either give them a year of Vietnam or spend three years in Leavenworth
- S How did you feel when president Carter gave amnesty to the people that did go to Canada?
- C At first, when I took a rest and relaxation, it did not seem right that these guys from Australia that had orders down here, went AWOL, they just split, desertion Under those circumstances, if they were caught, they would be shot, because I even thought about splitting there I was in-country nine months when I took a rest and relaxation It kind of hurt Here I was and I did my tour and these guys get away with everything My attitude was that I felt they should get something, even if it was a slap on the hand, a dishonorable

discharge, something The majority of them came back They gave them general discharges under honorable circumstance where they were entitled to some benefits and stuff

S Were you optimistic or pessimistic when you were on your way to Vietnam?

C I would say optimistic

S About survival?

C About survival, yes.

S Do you remember when you first saw Vietnam?

C Yes We were landing in Long Bin and when we were coming down, you could see explosions happening on this PCP type runway The compound itself was getting hit with RPG rounds As we were landing, my first thoughts were, "Is this what it is going to be about? I am not even going to last one day here the way it is coming down" Then this gunny had come running in, a sergeant and said, "You keep your heads down, we are under attack, fall out" Once they opened the doors of this air conditioned plane, the heat was intense and the stench of the place was really unbelievable It was the type of thing where you have to be there to experience it It was a scared type of feeling, the butterflies, the shakes

S What would have been the exact date that you arrived? Do you remember?

C It was either June 8, or June 9, 1969

S What was your first day like?

C That was it We got hit and formed into these underground bunkers that were built It calmed down in about an hour and a half, maybe two hours We had landed in the afternoon It was like 2 00 p m their time The majority of the first day was getting more jungle fatigues, more ammo, constantly getting more shots, and learning about your pill to take every day for malaria It was just a more advanced type of training for being shipped into your permanent unit for the year

S We have heard that the new arrivals were sometimes treated differently and thought upon differently How were you treated as a new arrival to Vietnam?

C Green, and a lot of the guys that were over there that had a few months over, they looked at you like you were just coming into the service, a green boy, a boot You were scared, so they tried to make you even more scared More or less they tried to help you prepare

for what was ahead to try and make your tour in Vietnam as comfortable as possible. Everybody would tell you different ways of survival over there, but a lot of it you learn on your own. They would say, "You are a rope a day."

S: Were you doing the job in Vietnam that you had been trained for in the states?

C: No, they were asking for volunteers for door gunners on choppers, stuff like that. If there were no hands to go up, they would put you where you were needed. Replacements were needed mostly throughout Vietnam. I went over there as a heavy/light equipment operator which would have been an engineer outfit, but instead I was a grunt. They turned me into a grunt.

S: A grunt means what?

C: That you are a ground pounder, a ground soldier so to speak. Like a pawn, infantry, which is basically that, is your first MOS when you go into the service. In this day and age, is your first MOS, 64b20, which is infantry.

S: A typical day in Vietnam. I just wanted to go over some of the main parts of a typical day, for example, food. What was your food like?

C: A lot of lurps, a lot of c-rations. Lurps were dehydrated in the bag, where you add hot water and let it soak for a few minutes. You did not drink the water. You had your purifier tablets. You could not really handle it. I was getting Kool-Aid in the mail. I received maybe four letters the whole time I was over there because the mail was always screwed up coming from the States. Packages you would get, but you would not get them for a month later and half the stuff was spoiled anyway. I went over from Germany there. I weighed 192 pounds and when I left Vietnam I weighed 123 pounds. So the food and that was all dehydrated types of food, or it was canned back in 1942.

S: How about sleep in Vietnam. Did you get enough sleep?

C: You were either on one shift or the other, the day shift or the midnight shift, and it was twelve on and twelve off. That is how it worked. My whole tour was consistent of nights. I really did not even want to sleep the majority of the time. I could not sleep. I would sleep during the day. I took mostly the night guard duties. We would go on sweeps, so you got what sleep you could.

S: You mentioned the weather was very hot. What else about the weather?

C: We had about a two or three month period of monsoon season. It was just raining and raining continuously. You would get little breaks in between these quick little rain storms and it would be blistering hot. The heat was a tropical type heat. It was a dry

heat, nothing like you would have around here in the four seasons.

S Now being out in the field, you must have had to put up with a lot of insects and things like that

C Yes The insects and that were a lot bigger than what you are used to back here A small mosquito over there we would call a dive-bomber They were so big It was just unbelievable Leaches, as you would go through rice paddies, if they would get to you, you would have to burn them off with your cigarettes That was just different When we would try to sleep, these huge bugs, almost like a waterbug, would be everywhere Snakes, they had the two stepper or the three stepper coral snakes They had viper snakes You always had to check your boots, check your gear, and where you were going to sit, squat, what not So you were constantly looking at the environment It was all together different

S Do you remember your first encounter with the enemy?

C That would have been my first day when we landed in Long Bin when we were getting hit and that It was just like a small, maybe squad of V C (Vietcong) that were at the ends of the runway and were trying to penetrate the perimeter and what not The guys with the experience had been stationed there and took care of the matter

S Now when they talk about the V.C. and the North Vietnamese what would be the difference between them?

C The V C were the ones that did not want us there They were the ones that wanted their communism The North Vietnamese were trained by previous military personnel to fight for their rights and independence or whatever they were trying to get, a democracy type of government They were supposed to be on our side Arvins was what we tagged them as.

S I have heard a lot about the booby traps and you had mentioned it before, hearing about it Did you have a lot of encounters with booby traps and mines?

C Once we started doing our search and destroy missions and our sweeps and what not, that is when I really started seeing them They would use all various types where they would use planks just to slow us up We would then get over to the field radio that V C was in the vicinity and they would fly us out We would drop down ropes and then pursue them on a search and then destroy the type of mission It would be close, too Our firebase was LZ Betty, which was a type of perimeter that the engineers had landed and plowed up onto It was on their grave yard that is was what we called a fire base, a place to fall back to regroup, rest, and relax a couple of days.

I saw all the different kinds of booby traps Using our discarded shells, they

would take a piece of bamboo, put a nail up through it, and then put a shell down in it. The pressure of your foot would blow your foot off, a casualty. They would try to cause any type of casualty to slow us up so we would have to call a medi-vac to get them out. They also used punge sticks and frag grenades. They would take cans and fill them up with nails and explosives and stuff and when you would trip it all just to slow us down.

S: So they would almost rather mame you than kill you?

C: When we were going, they were moving right ahead of us. The majority of the time we were pursuing them, so they would set up these little goodies for us, like little obstacles for us get through to slow us up. They were meant to kill us, but a lot of the times, they made amputees out of a lot of the service guys in my company.

S: So what were your impressions of the V C as an enemy?

C: I did not even trust the Arvins that were supposed to be working with us because I have never seen such a bunch of chicken shits. By day they seemed to be working for us. By night they were V C. You just would not know who to trust right down to the ten year old boy.

S: One thing you hear a lot about is Americans being killed by friendly fire. Did you know of any?

C: We were told quite a few times that we would call in for an air strike, the 155's would blow off. Then off in the Black China Sea there, we had a destroyer, the LZ Betty. We got overrun three times when I was over there. We had to fall down into these LTS's and then come back up and recapture our own little firebase. Some of the rounds would fall real short until they got the coordinates for where they wanted these rounds dropped. I had never seen any of the free fire killing. I am sure it went on quite a bit.

S: What was your rank at this time?

C: I was an E-4, a specialist.

S: How would you rate the relations between the officers and the enlisted men?

C: At first it was, "Do not salute this lieutenant. Do not salute this captain." Rank meant nothing. It was, "You are here. I am here. We will try to make it back home together." You knew who your superiors were, and who your noncommissioned officers were. Between them and the lieutenants, you knew the difference, but it was still on the basis of, "We are here together. Let us try to go home together."

- S So that would mean you had basically good relations, then?
- C Some good, some bad I mean, when I was there, the Black Power was going on The whites would stay by themselves, and the blacks would commune by themselves and look after each other, the color type thing
- S Was it ever common for men to disobey orders of officers?
- C. A direct order, you could hash it out with them and what not, but you never actually refused a direct order from a superior officer or your platoon sergeant and that You look to them for your everyday learning and that rope a day of survival They were in-country Some of them were going on their second tours and what not You kind of paid attention to their instructions There were two times where someone would come out of O C S and they did not know anything You had more time in-country to say, "Go over that ridge and survey it Come back and tell me what you see " You would say, "Well, you would not order me to do something that I would not do myself So why don't you come along with me " That type of attitude That kind of went over good They would stop and say, "Well, maybe you are right If you want to go together, let us do it together "
- S What about the term fragging? What does it mean, or have you ever heard of it?
- C I saw it in a movie now that they have out called Platoon As far as an actual fragging, I have an experience of what I would have called fragging if I did not leave the country. That was the C O We had a new C O I had something like 45 days left and he was trying to bust me down He told me that I was not going back to the world because we were into doing a lot of drugs and things at that point
 As my mate in 1970, he knew I was one of them that had got some from every village we had gone through I would get a lot of marijuana and stuff and stick it in my pack and bring it back to the other guys This guy was really out for mass About four baseball frags had turned up missing and I had told him, "If I do not leave this country, you are going home in a bag yourself " It was a threat type situation I had buried them under the shitters and a couple under his hooch and that They were dug up before I left I think that is what they considered fragging
 Say you were out and you had sniper fire in the evenings, it was not only that you had to watch the front enemy, but I became your enemy, too You did not only have to watch your front, but you had to watch your back now because there were killings going on like that. I know a person who had gone over a couple captains and I saw a lieutenant get it It was not a V C that shot
- S You had mentioned the relations between blacks and whites, and the black power movement which was gaining momentum at the time How were relations between black and whites at the time?

- C It depended on whether it was split into two or three groups at that time. You were either straight, which you did nothing. You drank your coffee and your soda pop, or you were an alcoholic. You were more or less a drug addict. You had the alcoholics, but even they would fight and get on each other and that. It was still a racial thing. The whites and the blacks would look after their own kind.
- S Did you find that the black or Hispanics were more against the war than the whites?
- C Actually, I think we were all against the war, because you did not know what you were even doing there at the time I was there. It was more or less who could overpower whose platoon. Who had the most blacks and whites and it was that type of situation.
- S You mentioned now knowing exactly why you were there. Had the government really told you why you were there?
- C We were there so that communists would not overtake this country, plus the resources. They said we were in there to gain what resources we could, try to help them organize their government and what not. The French were there first from what I understand and fed them all their supplies, their medical supplies, their weapons, their ammunition, and what not. It was a game control, who was going to win, a democracy or the communism or what type of government they wanted. We were there on a peace mission as it started.
- S They told you this when you were in the United States?
- C This is what we went over with, this type of thought. But once we got there, you could actually see that those people did not want us there.
- S You mentioned the availability of drugs in Vietnam and of course, that is one thing a lot of people hear about. How rampant was drug use in Vietnam?
- C It was an everyday thing. Like I said, you were either an alcoholic, or you did drugs or you did nothing whatsoever. When we would go out on our missions and that, we did very little drugs and whatnot. It was when you came back into your firebases and that, and you had one or two days to regroup, get your gear back in order, and be ready to go back out again. That was like a party time. It was also a time to mourn over the comrades that got killed and try to block everything out of your mind, more or less what was going on.
- S Did you form friendships in Vietnam?
- C I do not know if I would call them friendships because you did not know if this guy was going to make it or if you were going to make it. It was very brief. It was, "Where are you from back in the world? What is your name? You got a family? You got a

girlfriend? You married?”, this type of thing. Then you really did not have tight, close, friendly relationships.

S: Have you kept in touch with anybody you met there?

C: There were two guys. I tried to find one. He lived in Hula Vista, California. One I have seen, his name is Burnside. We called him Side burns. He lives in North Carolina. I talked to him a couple of times.

S: Do you remember what they were paying you for combat pay when you were in Vietnam?

C: I got paid a jump pay, but I never made a jump in Vietnam. Hazardous duty pay, and overseas pay. I think it came out that I was making about \$420.00 a month, something like that.

S: What did you find to be the basic skills of survival when you were in Vietnam?

C: Learn to keep your ass down. Be like a mole when you heard fire or a boom, or any type of distraction other than your normal everyday sounds. I saw a lot of guys who were alcoholics and that, (I also drank, too), could not function under ground fire. They would sneak the fifths in their pack instead of their lurps that they should have been carrying, to take the edge off out in the bush. They would get a little carried away and they were the ones that would be stumbling around trying to find their shit and we would die of sniper fire. I saw a lot of them get hit, more so than someone that was smoking a joint that could function under those circumstances.

S: One person said that when he was in Vietnam, he formed a primitive state of mind. Does that mean anything?

C: I would get out of that primitive state of mind, survival. I am going home, and it got to the point where I am looking after number one first, and it got to that point. Every other day it got shorter, the more uptight, jittery type feeling overcame me where I was willing to kill my own comrade. I was going home. Nothing was going to stop me from getting out of there and coming home alive. It was that type of survival where you were going to kill to come home.

S: You mentioned the term short tier. What exactly does that mean?

C: When you became a short tier, you knew that your tour was supposed to consist of 365 days in-country. At that time, they were not sending over replacements and that and I ended up doing about fourteen months, sixteen days, and some four odd hours in-country over my DP's date, departure time. So as the days clicked off, you kept short-time.

calendars or what not I saw guys who had about a week to get on the “freedom bird”, the plane home, and a sniper got them or they got blown up

S: Why were you there fourteen months instead of twelve?

C: Like I said, we were out on the LZ Betty and we just were not getting replacements They quit sending the replacements out and what not

S: That must have made you very angry

C: Sure it did Every day it was like heart attack time, so the tension was there each day “What the hell am I still doing here? What is the problem?”

S: So for two months, you kept thinking, the next day could be what?

C: “When am I going to get out of here? What is the problem? What is the hold up?”

S: How did you react to the vast change in culture going from the United States to Vietnam?

C: It was like taking a city boy and sticking him out in the jungle down here and telling him, “Here to survive for a year, and you are going to be all right If you make it, you can do anything ” It was like right out of a comic book These people were just so uncivilized

S: For example?

C: They would run out of their hooches, in the villages, they had nothing for their sanitation They would run out into the street and just squat and do their thing and run back in They would not wait for anything They would eat raw fish, monkeys, dogs, water buffalo, and that type of thing Still, they are living in a grass shanty, hooches It was something you would see on T V as a kid, or what you would see in a National Geographic book You would see villages like that People were still living like that We were in the Nineteenth century and these people were still like this It was unbelievable

S: Did you have any relations with the Vietnamese adults? Did you work with any of them?

C: No We had the Arvins that came in from the villages that worked during the day, going around picking up and policing the area They would work in the mess tents and beat the clothes As far as clothes, I had a hooch maid She was a little young girl that would come in and clean our hooch There were two guys to each bunker. She would come in and take care of our area That was the extent of it The Arvins that worked for us were honor scouts, so to speak They really were not because they just could not be trusted To me, that was V C , too.

S A lot of people recall the Vietnamese children Did you have a chance to talk with them?

C Each village that we went into, they would run up to you wanting cigarettes, candy bars, and stuff like that You have to keep them away from you because they could kill, too They were known to do that V C would go into a village and take nice looking little Vietnamese girls and threaten them by saying, "Give me your life or your whole family " Their honor was to their whole family, mother, father, grandfather, brothers, and sisters If she did not carry these satchel charges in and do something for their cause they would wipe out her whole family, kill them

Other incidents I have seen were out in this rice paddy when they had taken a baby, and broke its arms and legs so it would just scream It could not crawl or anything and they booby trapped it. Being a good Samaritan, All-American kid, the medics would go over and the minute they would flip them over they were just unbelievable They had no value on life what-so-ever, it seemed

S The Vietnamese were real capitalists, were they not, once the Americans got there?

C Yes

S They wanted to sell you?

C They wanted to sell us? They made money off of the United States without a doubt I mean, they ended up with everything It was the tax payers back here that really went in debt Everything was shipped over there and they got everything anyway

S. Could get a cold coke alongside the road, or what?

C I never drank any of their soda pops because it was said that you would have to watch because there would be glass slivers in it Any of the products that were going into the villages, cold soda pops, I never indulged There were guys that had, though They would get sick with the runs

S How would you rate the medical attention given to the G I 's?

C Excellent If it was not for our corpsmen, I will tell you They were medics, but to us they were corpsmen The corpsmen were just superb They did wonders out in the field If a guy was wounded, if it was not for them he would have never made it back They were really excellent and well trained

S Did you have to have any medical attention?

C Myself, I got shrapnel on the back when some rounds fell into our firebase A medical unit was right there, so it was not really out in the bush It was that type of a wound

- S When you were halfway through your tour of duty, what really kept you going?
- C I think my family and friends back home and just the urge to want to get out of there, to survive. What I thought every day was I am going to go home.
- S Although this may sound like a strange question, did you have any good times when you were there? Was there anything that was good about it?
- C There were some fond moments. You had some good moments, I would say. A guy had four months left in country and we were all sitting around in a hooch, joking, listening to "Inagodavidda," by Iron Butterfly. They were songs of that era and guys had sent them to us, in walks of a home body, so to speak. It was my home buddy that I had gone to school with and played basketball with and what not. He was in a different unit. He was in a signal unit that was up on another hill where he had looked me up. He came in the country and that. I kind of took him under my wing, but I could not get rid of him once I was there. My platoon sergeant said, "Who is the guy sleeping in your bunk all night?" We thought it was you not doing your duty. It was a real fond friend that I had gone to school with. Finally my sergeant had to tell him, "Hey, what company are you from. You are not assigned to us." It was that type of thing.
- S I am sure you probably remember exactly when you heard you were getting out.
- C. That was my E.T.S. date. The minute that I hit the States, I was to be discharged. My three year service hitch was up.
- S What about when you were in Vietnam and you found out you were going to leave the country? How exactly did they tell you that?
- C A chopper had come in and my C.O. --this was after our little battle of fragging so to speak--he tried to get me to repeat this guy is threatening you. I played dumb and he said finally, "Cononico, you can go. You leave in the morning." He had told me they learned the day before. "There will be room on this ride for you out of here." I was still scared. I did not want to believe it until I was actually on that bird and coming across the pond. Then I knew I was on my way home. So even in the last few hours in country, I was not excited until I knew I was on that plane and we were in the air, and I was on my way home. That is when it really hit me that I was actually coming home.
- S Had you said some of your goodbyes?
- C Yes. They are very brief. It was a joking type, "We will see you guys later. Have a nice tour. Hold down the fort." That type of thing, it was no great loss. I did not lose anything over there, other than my mind. Part of my mind is still over there. Friendships, a few close guys, but it really was not tight, close friends. A lot of things.

race through your mind when you were coming home. What you had left is just unbelievable.

Then the fear, scared, just for fear because of what you heard back here in the States and that. We heard one guy had come into Chicago O'Hare Air Base and the got off and me this fiancé, his mother and his father. They were walking through the airport. A woman would walk up to him and say, "Did you just come from Vietnam?" He says, "Yes, I am just now arriving home." She pulled out a .38 and shot him three times and said, "If you made it home, my son did not make it home. You should not have made it home." Different little stories like this were being told and we were scared to come home.

We heard we were labeled as drug addicted baby killers and just wild drug addicts and crazy people all of a sudden. They were bringing us home like this. Coming home, I knew I was going to E.T.S. I did not even wear my uniform home. Actually, once they took my jungle fatigues off and threw a uniform on and said, "You are going to represent the United States right up to the point of actual discharge." I bought civilian clothes and wore them. I was scared.

S Now what was the date that you actually left the country?

C It was June 30, 1970.

S Can you tell me a little about the trip home?

C It was pretty close to about seventeen hours. When I left, it must have been 110 degrees in the shade and it was out of Cam Rahn Bay, Vietnam. We landed in Fort Lewis, Washington. It was a straight flight, not stopping in Hawaii or anywhere and when we landed, it was pouring down rain. It was fifty-some degrees. It was like, "Here is your steak dinner. Now you are going to get your change of fatigues, your mustering out pay, and a pat on the back. Thanks a lot. Here is your plane ticket home." It was that type of thing.

S What was the first thing you did when you got home?

C I did not come straight home. I went to Portland, Oregon, with this friend of mine and he was married. He said, "Well, if you do not want to go straight home, why don't you come on up to the house for a while in Portland, Oregon." He was a friend that I had met as I was processing out for about the last two months I was there. I went and stayed with him for about two weeks and then I finally called my mother and said, "Guess who made it home." I was there maybe seven and a half months and they had notified her that I was missing in action and here we were, out on a mission. It was a hush-hush type mission. It was called a Hamburger Hill Assault that we were on. I had not written, had not received any mail, where the Chaplain actually had to come up to me and said, "When is the last time you wrote home?" I said, "It must have been a month or two months, now."

He said, "I think you ought to drop them a line because we had you down as missing in action." That upset her quite a bit.

S: How would you say the participation in the war changed you and your family?

C: There is definitely a big change, even today. This is seventeen years later. They do not understand that it is hard to make people really understand the traumas, the experiences. You would have to be there, actually be in that situation to really understand. In mind, it changes your whole outlook on life, be it your job, or meeting another person that had not been there. You hear them talking and being patriotic and here this guy who is not patriotic, laughing about the war, "That was a stupid war." You really do not know, because if you look at it and see how many were killed, it hurts. It is a wound that is hard to close.

S: Have you ever had any desire to go back to Vietnam?

C: Would I ever go back if I was asked? I thought about it many times. I think I left something there, like a part of my life. That is a hard question to answer. Would I go back and serve? I do not know.

S: What do you think the main feeling of today's Vietnam Vets are?

C: I feel that we were not really looking for sympathy ticker tape parades. Empathy is what we were looking for. There should have been some kind of recognition for the disabled vets and that. Some of the benefits and that is just being taken away. It seems like every year something else is whacked away from it. Because it was publicized as the most unpopular war era or conflict, like the Korean conflict and that, they were kind of like sweeping it under the rug. I think more recognition is needed for that.

S: If someone was listening to this tape 100 years from now, what would you tell them to remember about the war in Vietnam?

C: That if they are at the age between sixteen and twenty years old, maybe to really sit back and think what reason is it that they are going into this war. In other words, Is it for themselves or is it for this country? What are they going to gain by it? Do not waste so many lives over nothing. That is probably about it.

S: Tom, you have one more thing you want to add. What was that?

C: If they ever have another war and they have prisoners of war and M I A 's, to never forget them because they are the flesh and blood of this country that fought for this country. Never forget them.

S: Well, I want to thank you for doing the interview I appreciate your time

C Thank you

End of Interview