YOUNGSTOWN STATE UNIVERSITY

ORAL HISTORY PROGRAM

Vietnam Veteran Project

Military Experience in Vietnam

O. H. 23

STEVE CRITTENDEN

Interviewed

by

Jeff Collier

on

June 11,1975

STEVE CRITTENDEN

Vietnam veteran Steve S. Crittenden was born in Long Beach, California on April 3, 1948, the son of James and Mildred Crittenden. He graduated in 1956 from Baldwin Park High School in Baldwin Park, California and joined the United States Navy in 1956.

Mr. Crittenden has been in the service for twenty years and fourteen of them have been spent at sea duty on submarines. He was in Vietnam from a year and a half. During the first year, he flew helicopter missions, where he was attached to the recon unit of the fifth marine division. The last six months were a short tour, where he was on submarine duty and went to x-ray school. After Vietnam, he spent about six years in submarine service, stationed in Groton, Connecticut. Prior to his retirement in 1976, he was stationed at the United States Naval Reserve Center in Youngstown, Ohio, where he was a Medical Department representative.

During his years in the service, Mr. Crittenden has been the recipient of several awards including a Presidential unit citation, Vietnam ribbon, and five good conduct citations. He now lives in Alhambra, California with his wife of twenty years, Patricia, and their children Barbara, Laurie, Stephen, and Kathleen.

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INTERVIEWEE: STEVE CRITTENDEN

INTERVIEWER: Jeff Collier

SUBJECT: Military Experience in Vietnam

DATE: June 11, 1975

JC: I'm Jeff Collier. Today I'm speaking with Steve Crittenden for the Youngstown State University Oral History Project on Vietnam. We are at 315 East LaClede Avenue, the United States Naval Reserve Center here in Youngstown, Ohio. It is June 11, 1975 at 3:20 p.m.

JC: Steve, could you please give me a little information about yourself on what you are doing presently, where you went to high school, your marital status, and a little bit about your family?

SC: Well, at present, I'm working here as a Medical Department representative, which entails processing all the medical records of the station keepers. There are eleven of us here, I believe, that are regular navy men and there are about three or four hundred reserves maintaining medical records. They also handle all the naval military dependents in the area and assist with processing naval military insurance claims.

Prior to coming here, I was in the submarine service. I was stationed in Groton, Connecticut, a submarine base. I was there for six or seven years just after I went to Vietnam.

JC: In what year did you graduate from high school?

SC: I graduated from Baldwin Park High School in Baldwin Park, California, in 1956. I am married and have four children ranging in ages from four to seventeen. I have three daughters and one son. The two girls are

very high honor students at Canfield High School. My son is in Canfield Elementary School and the youngest child doesn't go to school. My wife, Pat, is a housewife. She took night courses in keypunch operating at Canfield Vocational School. She'll be working at that when she gets back to California.

JC: You're presently in the process of moving back to California?

SC: Yes, we're in the process of moving right now. In fact, my wife and the children arrived in California earlier this week. I'll be leaving on July 1 to go back to the submarines in San Diego. I retire next year.

JC: How long have you been in the service?

SC: I've had nineteen years and one month of continuous duty. During fourteen of those years I have been on sea duty aboard submarines. I had been in and out of Vietnam for a year and a half. For one year I flew helicopter missions there. The last six months was just a short tour. I was sent back to go to x-ray school and to submarine duty.

JC: What did you do when you were in Vietnam that you could reiterate on?

SC: Well, the first time I was over there, I was attached to the fifth marine division to the recon unit. We had about one corpsman for every fifty to sixty marines. The military was short of corpsmen at that time. In fact, they were drafting a lot of people into the hospital corps. Corpsmen and radiomen were big targets for the enemy. It was said, when I was over there, that if you did not have the corpsmen and the radio-men, you had a complete little squadron.

There was even word out, at one time, that there was a price on our heads. The squadron was a big target if the enemy could see the corpsmen or the antennae of the radio. Needless to say, we never wore a red cross when we went on patrol, if we did the enemy would know who we were. We always gave ourselves nicknames because many of the Charlie [the Viet Cong] could yell "Doc" or "Corpsmen" and a lot of guys would stick their heads up or make a run for that area and would be killed or wounded.

A few of the guys that had been over there for quite a while came to the conclusion that it would be a good idea to start giving ourselves nicknames. So we did. We just picked any old nickname such as Abe, Joe, or Lou for that patrol which could last from a few days to two weeks.

The first time I was there we went on search and destroy type missions mostly. Then I met up with an old friend of mine who went to FMF school with me, and he talked me into going on helicopter duty.

JC: What is FMF?

SC: That is Fleet Marine Force, a group of navy corpsmen assigned to the Marines. The Marines, as you know, have no medical personnel. We went through an eight-week training course with the Marines, right at Camp Pendleton. It's a regular infiltrating type school that teaches you field medicine, and how to crawl under enemy fire. You go right through training with Marines. Then you're attached to a squadron or a division and you're sent out wherever you are needed. Some of the fortunate guys, got to stay at Camp Pendleton and never even went overseas. Some went to Hawaii and stayed with those units. A few of us went right over to Vietnam.

It seems to me that they were taking the more senior men and sending them over. This is good because the senior men tended to be a little more cautious than some of the younger fellows. Well, we even had a few men who were not very old. I remember old Digby O'Dell. He wore a forty-five caliber and he thought he was John Wayne. He was really gung ho but he came back home and got out of the navy.

JC: Did you carry a gun when you were over there?

SC: I had to carry a gun because I was an E-5. At the time I was over there, if you weren't an E-5, you didn't carry a weapon. A few corpsmen did. We'd tell even the junior guys, "Pick up a gun and stick it in your belt, only for self-defense." You weren't really supposed to carry a gun. That's just like the Geneva convention card that they gave us with a red cross on it. It was supposed to help us, but it certainly didn't.

JC: I've heard stories about when they'd go in, for instance, in the hueys to pick up a group of fighting men, and the corpsmen were amongst them. They would always tell them

"Drop your guns before you get into the helicopters." When you got back to base the helicopters would take off and there would be a half a dozen forty-fives or M16s or Russian weapons laying there.

SC: This is true. There would be a lot of sergeants or corporals with two or three guns when they got back. Once I got attached to the choppers, of course, I had to carry a forty-five all the time. We only had a crew of five men. We had a communicator, the pilot, the co-pilot, a machine gunner, and the corpsman. We had to carry guns because we were constantly, under fire when we set down in the fields. We never knew when we were going to be invaded so we were allowed to carry weapons.

JC: What was the most hazardous job for you, being in the helicopters or being out in the bush?

SC: I think being in the helicopters was more dangerous because most of the helicopters except the lead-plated ones were very easily shot down. In fact, on one of my tours, I can't remember the year, but a helicopter was actually shot down by a bow and arrow. A sniper in a tree was trying to hit the machine gunner in a hovering helicopter. He shot and missed the machine gunner but he got the arrow hung up in the props. Down it went. Well, the whole crew was killed because of that bow and arrow. It is tragic, but it was a fantastic shot, I guess. It was really something.

The Squadron chief over there that was in charge, was named Walt Gelein. You may have read about him in the paper. He was the brother of Tab Hunter. We were sitting in Da Nang one night at a little air base, a chopper base. They had told us, "Don't ever sleep in your choppers" because, at that time, guerillas would come in at night and just make a run through the base and destroy the choppers. We were told to stay away from the choppers. Well, Walt Gelein crawled up into the chopper one night because it was miserably hot. We didn't know he was in there. Well, the guerillas threw a grenade into the helicopter and up it went. He was killed. He had six children and he was almost ready to come home.

I found, when I was over there, that every time somebody was getting ready to come home, they'd get very, very overzealous. They weren't cautious enough. They would think "I can't be hit. I can't be gunned. I'm too close to going home." They'd get very, very careless. I lost several good friends that way.

I lost a few friends after they had left Nam. Sometimes a plane crashed and didn't quite make it to Clark Air Force Base. I lost a few buddies in napalming raids in which the napalm would come into our planes and hit our own men. This was quite common knowledge really. If you have ever been over there and seen the country you would know that it's beautiful. I thought it was absolutely beautiful. But to us it was treacherous for ground fighting because we're not the best ground fighters, or jungle fighters, in the world. It was all jungle and brush.

JC: What was it like when you went out on a mission when you were stationed with the marines in the bush?

SC: Normally we pulled three missions a month. We supposedly went out on a search and destroy mission for about a three-day run. Our job was to set up a perimeter around the little villages or the huts and then radio out for troops if there was definitely any activity in there. We'd radio out for them to come in with napalm or little bombs. Then we'd search and destroy anything or take prisoners if we were able to.

My capacity was strictly that of corpsman, to take care of the wounded and the sick. We went to a lot of the little communities and villages to hold sick call on the citizens. We weren't pressured into this; we weren't even asked to do it. Sometimes a good medical officer was willing to go into the field with us on occasion which they usually didn't want to do. They didn't like to turn the medical officers loose because they were badly needed by the men.

If we could get a doctor to go with us, we used to go into certain villages and hold sick call on the local populace. We would take care of little scratches, wounds and burns. We ran across many diseases that of course, we were very unfamiliar with, so the doctors would have to read up on them. Actually, certain doctors came out and held sick call, once we determined that there were no Viet Cong around.

JC: Was most of the fighting that you were involved with against the Viet Cong or the North Vietnamese Army?

SC: Most of my fighting was with the Viet Cong. This was when I was with the ground troops. When I was flying, we only took casualties out.

I wasn't involved in fighting with any particular group. We went wherever we were needed. We used to pick up men from the ocean, and out of the jungles. We tried to

fly mostly at dusk, because we were harder to be seen. We'd come out before dark and round up both North Vietnamese and Viet Cong or our own people, whoever was wounded, and we would take them to the nearest medical facility.

JC: Was there any preference? Would you try to take our Americans first?

SC: Definitely we would try to get Americans first. In fact, we could carry eleven bodies or eleven remains on my chopper. The first thing we were taught was to pull out the worst ones first. There were many times that I treated critically injured men right there and sent them right back out. Some had minor flesh wounds such as a bullet wound or a clean wound all the way through. Some had minor shrapnel wounds or minor burns. We'd treat those cases and send them right back in the field, while our litter bearers were loading the more seriously injured on the plane or the chopper.

If I didn't have room, even if there were badly injured Viet Cong or North Vietnamese, I always took our men first. You'd really be surprised at the number of men who refused to get on a chopper. They'd look at a Viet Cong or a North Vietnamese and say, "Take him and get him out of here. I'm okay, I won't get on that chopper." They said, "I'll catch the next plane," or "We'll be back off patrol in a few days."

JC: What would you do when you picked up the men? Would you usually go in groups of choppers?

SC: Yes, always, we went in groups. One helicopter would go in and one or two would hover. The biggest group I ever went in with, was in groups of three helicopters. Depending on the amount of casualties one or two would hover. If they were taking on six or eight casualties in one chopper, two choppers would go in, and one would hover, in the event that one of the choppers would get shot down.

The underbrush was so thick that the hovering helicopters kept a watch on the others even at dusk. Normally we would fly in groups of three helicopters. One or two would set down, and in some instances, when we had the personnel to take three in, one helicopter would take the very seriously ill right back to Da Nang. Some of the helicopters went right out to carriers that were setting off the coast. The men who were not so badly wounded, but couldn't return, would go ahead on the other chopper to the nearest Battalion Aid Station, BAS.

They'd be right back out within a few minutes. When we weren't flying we were waiting to be called up.

We did a lot of surgery and assisted the doctors with surgery. I brought back many slides of actual operations. I left them with the Museum in Groton, Connecticut. We had a camera pool and everyone had his cameras with his name on it. We had film that would take thirty or forty pictures at a time, and whoever wasn't busy would grab all the cameras and take two or three pictures of everything. We had actual pictures of some amputations, abdominal injuries, evisceration and abdomens where all the intestines actually protrude. We also had pictures of a lot of people who had been hit by the bouncing betties, or land mines.

For a while the Viet Cong worked psychologically on our men. The scout, or the pointer, very seldom ever really got shot in the units I was with. He would go on through the bush and trip a wire, or line, which would in turn lob all kinds of grenades, bouncing betties, pungy sticks or poisonous snakes right into his unit, which was perhaps fifty yards behind him. Psychologically he would feel that it was his fault that these men were all wounded and mutilated. Then he was completely out of the program, too. The Viet Cong were famous for doing this.

When the Viet Cong first started using the Pungy sticks, we didn't have those boots that we have now. There were many, many amputations because of these pungy sticks. They actually put dried human feces on these thick bamboo pungy sticks and if they stuck someone infection would set in and there was nothing to do but to amputate.

JC: Was that a pretty effective tool or deterrent?

SC: The pungy sticks were very effective. They were more effective than land mines, because we could pick up most of the land mines with detectors. Most of the pointers, got to the point where they could see the land mines and the recon men were after them, too. Land mines weren't as effective as pungy sticks and snipers because the bush was so thick.

At times forty or fifty men sat there for eight hours because one sniper was holding us back and we couldn't move. You didn't want to move because you didn't know where the sniper was but he was hitting all around you. Pretty soon one of our sharpshooters or marksmen would get him. It would take hours, though, especially in the evening because he'd start sniping at dark and

continue into the dark. We'd be afraid to move because he knew where we were, but we were just guessing his location. I remember sitting there for up to eight hours trying to get one sniper, which isn't too effective.

JC: You've mentioned something that I hadn't heard of before and that is the use of poisonous snakes as weapons.

SC: I heard of this because corpsmen were always called into these little caves in which many men were bit. On some news programs, they show men going into the caves with flame throwers and flushing these people out. Before we used the flame throwers to burn the inside of the cave, the men stayed outside of the cave entrance and put all kinds of bullets and shells into it. Then one or two Marines would go in and there would be no shooting, but the men never came out.

There's a little snake, whose average size is about six to eight inches long and it is very, very deadly. I don't know the name of it, other than it's a deadly viper. The Viet Cong took these snakes, I think, and tied them by the tails to the top of the cave so that they would actually feel like a cobweb. Very few Marines lived that were bitten by them. They thought they were just cobwebs and pushed them aside. These things would start biting them, and the men would be dead before they hit the ground.

JC: They were probably in shock, too, besides being bitten.

SC: They're a very deadly snake. After we lost enough men in those caves, we began using flame throwers before we went in. The flame throwers would kill anything inside. That's when we finally started getting ahead. This was in 1960 or 1961.

The reports about using flame throwers were sent around to different units. We didn't get a newspaper. We had the Stars and Stripes, but we sent out reports just by word of mouth. We didn't have plans for the day or anything.

I'm very, very upset about Vietnam because it seems like such a waste. We left millions of dollars worth of equipment and stuff over there.

JC: There was a great amount of equipment left behind when the North Vietnamese came down and took over Vietnam. Vietnam is the country that has received more aid than anybody and they also captured the weapons and things which were worth billions of dollars. That's unbelievable.

SC: We just walked away from a lot of this equipment.

JC: Why didn't they destroy it?

SC: I really don't know. I haven't been over there since 1966. Perhaps they just wanted to get out of Vietnam in a hurry. It seems illogical to me to just walk away from this good operating equipment. They always told us when we were flying that if we ever went down in a helicopter at sea, to get out the radio and communication gear. Of course, we had flotation gear but they told us not to leave anything in the helicopter. This was early in the 1960's.

I was so upset about this these last few months. I am still very, very bitter about this. Of course, when you lose a lot of friends over there, and you see so many people wounded and mutilated you feel it's just a waste, one big waste.

JC: What was the major difference in your tours of action? You were over there in 1961 and then you returned in 1965.

SC: Yes, I was there in 1965 and 1966.

JC: Four years elapsed since your first tour and of course, there was a great influx of American manpower, and weaponry. What was the biggest change that you noticed when you went back to Vietnam in 1965 and 1966?

SC: The first time I was there, I was with the ground troops. The second time I was flying so I did notice a difference there. I also noticed that there wasn't as much mean fighting or ferocious jungle-type fighting.

As I said earlier, men would get very, very careless when they were getting ready to go back home. When I went back in 1965, men weren't that careless. They were very cautious right up to the end. When the officers told us to fly they'd say, "Now if there's any chance of this or that, don't do it." Before that, they'd say "To hell with the chances. I'm telling you to do it." This is the way it was. During my first tour we'd come into a village and they'd say, "Take that village. Don't worry about the cost "

During the second time I went over they'd say "Go in and take what prisoners you can and be careful." It was quite a change. I don't know if some of this came about because of fragging. I don't know if the order came from Washington, saying, "Take it easy on the guys." There was a definite difference. There was a slowdown and we were more cautious.

JC: Could you explain what fragging is?

SC: Well, fragging usually happens to officers but it could happen to anyone. If a group of men don't care for a superior or for another man they can actually frag him or maim him. They don't try to actually kill him but they just want to maim him. They may take a fragmentation grenade, and lob it near an officer. There are different types of grenades. For fragging they usually use the explosive, concussion type of fragmentation grenade. This is how we got the name "fragging." Someone would lob a fragmentation grenade near the officer, normally after dark and it would be just enough to really tear him up good. The officer could almost always tell, if it was going to happen. I talked to a few that were fragged and there were quite a few. They had felt that it might happen and they said, "I may have been too rough on the men." Several of them were written off as being wounded in action when they were, in fact, fragged but it was never proven. They felt they were fragged.

JC: Was this common in 1961 also?

SC: No, it wasn't as common in 1961. In 1961 the general attitude was, "Let's get in there, let's do it, and get it over with and get out of here."

JC: Where were you stationed at in 1961?

SC: I was in Dac Tho and Bien Hoa and Chu Lai. We skipped around a little bit.

JC: Where were you in 1965 and 1966?

SC: I was in and out of Da Nang and Saigon because we had Battalion Aid Stations and hospitals there. Other than the jungle those were about the only places we could set down a chopper. In 1965 and 1966, we were more set up whereas in 1961, we had to set up perimeters and actual areas to do this. The SeaBees and the Marines leveled little villages to nothing to make a heliport right in the middle of the jungles. This was nice.

There were a few times that we would have a lot of firing around the perimeter. You'd never know who to trust. You may have heard of this story or another one like it. This was in 1962, just before I left, Vietnam. I was there from 1961 to 1962 the first time.

We were sitting right in the airport at the airstrip, and a lady came walking out of the bush with a baby in her hands. This was when people weren't cautious. One Marine was going to shoot her because again at the time, the VC were strapping bombs and grenades on children. Well, the chaplain came out and told him not to shoot. We weren't going to kill her or anything, but just fire and stop her from coming into the camp. The chaplain went out and he got blown up.

JC: He got killed? What happened?

SC: He went out there and she handed the child to him and blew him up. We were all standing back. When the chaplain went out there, I turned around to go back in because I thought, "He knows what he is doing," but he was blown up. He and the child died and the lady was very seriously wounded. I treated her but she died later. We got her to a doctor to look at her but she couldn't make it.

JC: Why would the doctors even treat her? Why wouldn't they just let her die?

SC: I don't know if it's a matter of conscience or what. I treated everybody. It made no difference to me, who they were. They told me before I went over there, "Do what you can to save them, even if you save a prisoner." This is what they taught me at the medical school at Fleet Marine Force.

I've seen other corpsmen who just let prisoners die. I've seen a few doctors not work as hard as they could to save a prisoner. Right here in Youngstown, I help out a lot of people that I don't have to help. I've always been that way, I think. If somebody can use it, I help them. You know, someday they may thank me for it.

JC: It was left up to the individual then? There was no order saying that you had to help them? You did whatever you felt like doing.

SC: That's right. We had to take care of Americans, though. We couldn't be sure of the Viet Cong. This young lady that came out from the jungle might have had a gun on her. We never knew. We just treated whoever was wounded or sick. We used to go right into the villages and treat the people.

There was quite a write-up in 1965 or 1966, about a black corpsman named "Foxtrot Doc." His real name was Joe Lucier. He went through X-Ray school with me and

he was one of the corpsmen that went out and made house calls in the villages. There was quite a write-up on him, but there were many more. A lot of us used to do that; we enjoyed it. We'd actually get our minds off the war. It was like making house calls.

JC: Do you think the people were appreciative?

SC I think, as a rule, they were appreciative. Even the Viet Cong prisoners would be so grateful that we worked on their wounds. You could hear them at night calling, "Doc, Doc." This was after they were prisoners. We'd go over to them, but, of course, we couldn't understand them. They'd mumble and mumble and they'd smile if they could, and then they would go to sleep. But you knew that they appreciated it.

There were a few prisoners that would refuse treatment. There were a few that you had to hold down to treat. They were scared. We were limited because we didn't know what allergies they had. We treated the men equally as much as we could after we treated our own guys. We took care of our own men first. Also, it depended on what supplies we had. I have to say that the whole time I was over there, I was well supplied. We always had medical supplies.

JC: What difference was there in the drug situation in 1961 and 1966 in Vietnam?

SC: In 1961, I really can't say that I knew of hardly anyone that used drugs. There was a very, very minimal amount of people who used drugs, as far as I knew.

JC: Now when you say drugs do you also include marijuana?

SC: Yes. Marijuana, opium, and morphine were used later because a lot of the medics and corpsmen, would get killed and some men would take them out of the dead man's pack. Many medics carried morphine. Alcohol was more of a problem than drugs, as far as I was concerned. We were allotted two cans of beer per day or something near that when we came back off patrol. We used to get guys that would actually fill their water canteens with beer. There's no place for a guy like that out on patrol. I would say that alcohol was a bigger problem, at least in 1961, than drugs.

JC: What was the drug problem like in 1966?

SC: When I went back in 1966, I did notice an increase in drug users, but most of them just smoked marijuana,

and as far as I was concerned, I would never report a marijuana user. It was like a tranquilizer, a very mild tranquilizer. I never saw anyone get high using it I never used it myself. I never saw a man that was going out on patrol get as high smoking marijuana as on drinking six to eight cans of beer and being hung-over and not worth beans. I saw more marijuana in use in 1965 and 1966 than I did in 1961, but it never really bothered me very much.

JC: Was the My Lai incident a common occurrence? What is your feeling about My Lai?

SC: The My Lai type of incident wasn't very prevalent, that I know of. My own opinion is that is was not a prevalent occurrence. We did go out on search and destroy missions. As I said, in 1961, if we knew there were VC in the villages we were told to go in and take the village at any cost. In 1965 and 1966, they said, "Be cautious, be careful. Take prisoners if you can." It was quite a difference, so I would sav that it was not a very common occurrence. I wouldn't think so.

My own opinion is that Lieutenant Calley was the scapegoat. I think that this incident had happened before and he was the scapegoat. I don't think, though, that it was a very common type of occurrence.

JC: I think that most people would concur with your opinion that he was, in fact, a scapegoat.

SC: I think he was. I won't say that I saw officers or enlisted men do that, but I did see a lot of people killed that could have been taken prisoner. They weren't massacred, but would get shot trying to escape. Naturally, if a Vietnamese man is running and an American yells at him, the Vietnamese man wouldn't understand.

I've seen people get shot. I saw one lady get shot one time as we were setting down a chopper. We were in a rice paddy and I was loading on all the dead and wounded. All of a sudden, out of no where, came what sounded like a Browning Automatic Rifle. My machine gunner opened up, really at nothing but the bushes moving. This lady jumped up and it was her he was shooting at.

Our Marines were out there and there were Vietnamese interpreters out there too. They could have stopped her, I'm sure, but they just shot her. I'm sure that somehow or other they could have just wounded her and then gone over to check her.

JC: Of course, she could have had some explosives strapped to her. You never know from a distance.

SC: This is very true, but upon wounding her, if she had had explosives on, she would have detonated them. Wounded Vietnamese usually went ahead and detonated any bombs that they had on them, believe it or not. I did see this happen several times. We'd wound someone that might have been mined if we took them prisoner and rather than be taken prisoner, they'd go ahead and blow themselves up. She didn't. She wasn't mined.

JC: What did you think of the Vietnamese people?

SC: Well, the ones that I met, in Saigon, and Da Nang were very, very gentle people. I have to say from a sailor's standpoint, that they have some of the most beautiful women in the world. There were beautiful women, I thought, like the Eurasians, very pretty, and very friendly and willing to help you.

Wherever I've been in twenty years, the corpsmen have always had good communications with the people. I've been all around the world. As a corpsman I've been to Australia, Japan, the Mediterranean and up North, through all the European countries. I always communicated easily with the local people. I always got along fine, maybe it was my attitude. I never had any problems. Whenever we did pull liberty, the people were always willing to assist us with directions and to talk to us.

The people were very friendly in Japan but the Greek men were very, very obnoxious toward Americans and they were very bitter toward Navy men. I don't think that the Vietnamese really expected too much of us. I think that once the Americans got in there and got set up, the Vietnamese military became quite lazy. I found out that when we wanted them to do something or asked some of them to do something, they wouldn't do it. If there was an American around, they wouldn't even load their own weapons. In training they'd shoot them until they were empty, then they'd shout to our lookout and our Marines would go over and reload them for them.

Since we pulled out, they had to learn how to do it themselves. They were just using us. The military was like that but the civilians were different. They welcomed us. We used to go into these villages and the people would offer us food, cattle, and their homes. They were very, very nice, friendly people. Of course, there were a few unfriendly ones, but overall, I'd say that they were very friendly.

JC: Did you expect Vietnam to fall like it did?

SC: No, it caught me by surprise really and made me very bitter. I would have to say that in part, the fall was due to laziness. They had the ammunition, the weapons and the training. We trained the South Vietnamese; we trained them hard. We gave them boats. We took them out on patrol boats and taught them how to use them. We taught them how to use weapons. We left them medical supplies, and hospitals and Battalion Aid Stations.

I could see the fall coming. I knew that it would eventually come but I didn't think it would come this fast. It really surprised me. It caught me off guard. Even my wife could tell that I was very bitter. You would know that it was a waste of time if you would have been there, and lost your friends. It was just a waste of time. I wasted a year and a half and there was also the possibility of getting killed. It seems all to no avail. It seems like a waste.

JC: Do you think we ever had the opportunity to win that war?

SC: My opinion is that we would never have won by fighting on the ground. It's one of the thickest brushes I've ever seen. I think we would have had a better chance in a completely air war. I don't think we would have ever won it on the ground, in the jungles. Those people were really something. You could be standing right there and never see them. At first the Vietnamese didn't believe in taking prisoners. They used to kill anybody that moved, even if you were wounded. We tried to get all of our wounded out or they would kill them. I really don't remember when we started taking prisoners. I think it was in 1960.

Once, on Christmas eve, the Skipper and I had to go out to Lisbon, Ohio and notify Mrs. Haisley that her son was shot down in Vietnam during a flying mission.

JC: Was he a helicopter pilot?

SC: No, he was a jet pilot, and an officer. We also had to tell his wife, who was living in Lisbon too.

JC: Was he killed or missing in action?

SC: He was missing in action then and was just recently declared killed in action. This was two years ago. It was pathetic. The Christmas tree was up and everything

and I assumed he was ready to come home soon from what his wife said. He was flying off a carrier. Washington sent a full Commander and a Captain, in a jet to go out with us and tell her. That was a waste. He was killed for nothing. I don't think we gained anything.

JC: Well, hopefully we learned something.

SC: Yes, we gained a little knowledge.

JC: When fifty-six thousand people die, I guess you should learn something.

SC: I don't think we should have ever gotten in on the ground fighting. Sea and air fighting was sufficient. We've won all our other wars that way. Never have I seen jungles like the Vietnamese jungles. Even the Phillipine jungles are not as bad as those in Vietnam.

JC: A final question: Do you think that South Vietnam fell because the North Vietnamese were so determined? Was that apparent when you were there? Were the Viet Cong or the North Vietnamese Army, so determined to win and so persistent, that they eventually just won it?

SC: It was a mixture of determination on the part of the Viet Cong and a lack of initiative on the part of the South.

END OF INTERVIEW