

YOUNGSTOWN STATE UNIVERSITY

ORAL HISTORY PROGRAM

Vietnam Veterans Project

Vietnam Experience

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JOHN HAMETT

Interviewed

by

Thomas Kirker

on

November 21, 1983

YOUNGSTOWN STATE UNIVERSITY

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INTERVIEWEE: JOHN HAMETT

INTERVIEWER: Thomas Kirker

SUBJECT: Vietnam Experience, Role of medic, Saigon, People of Vietnam

DATE: November 21, 1983

K: This is an interview with John Hamett for the Vietnam Veterans Project for the Youngstown State University Oral History Program. He is being interviewed by Tom Kirker. We are at Mr. Hamett's house on Arlington Avenue, New Castle, Pennsylvania. The time is 1:14 p.m. on November 21, 1983.

John, how did you get into the service?

H: We had not pushed up my draft. A friend and I, Reggie D'Ambrosi, discussed that we were going to go into the service and do what we had to do and get out. I ended up going and he didn't. He chickened out. I went ahead with it.

K: What year was that?

H: 1964.

K: How long were you in?

H: Two years and nine days.

K: Where did you do your basic training?

H: Fort Jackson, South Carolina.

K: What was your main specialty or MOS (Military Occupational Specialty)?

H: In the service?

K: Yes.

- H: I was a combat medic. It would be 91-BP, 91 bravo paratrooper qualified.
- K: Did you do the jumps at Fort Bragg and all that?
- H: Yes. I was the last class at Fort Bragg.
- K: When did you first go over to Vietnam?
- H: I left the end of March, 1965.
- K: When you went over what unit were you with?
- H: We were a unit by ourselves. It was the 6th Battalion, 27th Artillery. We went over on the Gordon, a troop carrier. We had the Americal, the first part of Americal, parts of the First Division--Big Red One--and a third field evacuation hospital. When we went to Vietnam, we joined up with the First Division. We were the main support for the First Division and we were adopted by the First Division.
- K: What grade were you when you went over to Vietnam?
- H: I went from Pfc. (Private first class) to sergeant, and right back down to Pfc. That was on the way over.
- K: What incident made you lose a grade?
- H: We stopped at Okinawa. We spent twenty-five days on water. They would give us a break by ship, by getting off. We had to pay \$2 to get on and \$1 to get off, which paid for the beers and shows and stuff like that. During that time, I had pulled guard duty and a few guys got in a fight and were put in the brig. They were drunk and they were smoking and they died there of smoke inhalation. The officer had the key and made himself scarce, for what reason I don't know. The guys died and we took it hard! When we saw the officer we told him about it and how we felt. I was very disrespectful towards him. That's what they got me for, abusive language to an officer.
- K: Did it ever come out, what happened?
- H: I just got Article 14. It cost me \$18.75. It cost me, supposedly, fourteen days duty, but when I got to Okinawa, after all this incident, I flew into Vietnam with advanced pardoning. I don't know who the officer was, but I got busted from corporal down to Pfc.
- K: Do things like that happen a lot, people dying in our own prisons and things like that?

H: I'd rather not comment on that.

K: Okay. Where did you first go in Vietnam?

H: My first stop was at Ton Son Hut Air Base, then to Bien Hoa, and then from Bien Hoa we flew into Phuoc Vinh, Vietnam.

K: A couple of those were special forces camps?

H: No, Phuoc Vinh was the end of the Ho Chi Minh trail. The end of the trail was right there in our backyard. We had special forces camps probably five miles away out in little, remote areas.

K: When you got there, did you realize what Vietnam was? When you were home, did you visualize what was going on?

H: What you read and what you see about other countries is one thing, and when you get there and see it first-hand, that's another. I never could believe that people could be denied things the way they have, lived the way they have, eat what they eat, work how they work. It made me a man and it made me a human being. It made me really feel what life was really about when I landed there.

K: You were a medic, and someone remarked that pay officers, medics, and postmen were the three most respected men in Vietnam. Do you think that is true?

H: Officers you say?

K: No. Pay masters, postmen, and medics, that the guys looked forward to seeing those three people.

H: I don't know. A medic, the guys loved the medics. You loved your partner too, and you respected your partner more than you respected anybody else because this man was going to save your life. A lot of the guys have been out in the jungle for 30, 60, or 90 days. God, they would respect the ice cream man! Many times after something like this, they would appreciate ice cream, and appreciate mail. A medic, you're always there. I imagine you would say yes, they do respect you. As a mailman I don't know, either you get it or you don't get it. You have to respect your own karma, your fellow man beside you.

K: Do you think that the medics were trained well enough for their duty in Vietnam?

H: The best trained medic I believe this country will ever produce was the Special Force Medics. I believe that anybody that goes through medical training should go through Special Forces Medical Training. They get the training as a doctor

- would and when they get done they would be able to, if you're in a remote area where you can't get out for three or four days, care for you, and if your leg needs amputated or you needed sewn up, they will do this. They will save your life by amputating your leg, by stitching the right way. They can do anything, just about anywhere. The training we had--you got ten weeks medical training and three weeks combat training--was combat medical training.
- K: When you were there, was your role strictly helping combat troops or did you help the civilians?
- H: I helped our combat troops in twelve major operations, and we had one operation within the village. A lot of my time, I would say like fifty to seventy-five percent, I was going into remote villages, not really camps, taking care of women and children and men, giving shots, giving the American dream of candy and chocolate, and giving them clothing. Our company would give a lot of clothing to the people. We would spend a lot of money that way on stuff like that.
- K: You mentioned the Montagnard, did you work with them a lot, help them out?
- H: I was on two operations within the Montagnard homeland, their camp, that's about it. That's the only time I worked with them, twice.
- K: What were a few of the U.S. military operations that you went on?
- H: I was on operation Champ, operation Silver City. I was on operation Coco Beach.
- K: As a medic, what was your role with the unit you were attached with?
- H: Again, I went over with the 27th Artillery. There were thirteen of us medics. We were taken out of medical training or graduated from medical training and put into this artillery until that was airborne in Vietnam. Our job was to, I would say, support other units. When there were operations going on we would go out with these units. Is that what you're looking for?
- K: On an average day, if you were on a patrol, what would you do?

H: Hope ~~that~~ I wouldn't get my ass shot off. There's no average day. You go out, if somebody gets hit, you take care of them. I don't know what you're looking for.

K: Did you have a hard time getting adjusted to people getting shot and things like that?

H: American troops, yes, I really did. I still, today, can't figure it out. They died; you're there one second and bang, you're gone. I was immune to blood and the intestines and all that stuff like that because I worked for a funeral home before I went over. It's not like seeing your own people. You never knew that a bullet could do so much damage and you could get dropped right there. It's something.

K: Did you think that we needed more medics?

H: No. We had a sufficient number of medics on operations. I think you needed more understanding of the enemy, knowing where he was at, what he was doing at all times, being able to get at him before he gets at you. Granted, we are the best American soldiers in the world, but I'll tell you what, they have to be right on top of us because those people were dug in and you would walk over them and wouldn't know it. You have to give these people credit. Shame on our country for letting us lose so many lives like we did. It's something you can't stop.

K: Did you have a hard time getting supplies or did you pretty much have medicines and morphine and all that?

H: Yes. I didn't spend a lot of time, like I said, your ninety-day shots. We were always supplied; food, lots of food, a lot of medical supplies, a lot of ammunition, a lot of back up, a lot of strength, a lot of power. I never had any problems.

K: Did you think the war was going to end up the way it did when you were in there in 1965?

H: No. I expected six months to a year we would have been out of there. I remember what John Kennedy said, "It should take no longer than six months to a year."

K: When you went over there, did you have an idea of what you were trying to do there?

H: I didn't even know what Vietnam was, I really didn't. I got in medical training like I said. Before, I said that I went straight to this one unit, well I didn't; I went to Fort Hood, Texas, to the first of the Sixth Artillery. It was a tank outfit. There was nobody there. I went through

noncommission officer school; I don't know what they call it, it's just a big name and all they did was train you on weapons. Anyway, I kept on taking people back and forth to the Air Force base. I would transport clothes, duffle bags, people, everything. One time, I came back and asked my CO, "What the hell is going on? Where is everybody going?" He said, "Vietnam." I said, "What's Vietnam?" He said, "It's a country out by China." I said, "What's going on?" He said, "There's a war." I said, "You have to be joking. I didn't know the United States was in a war." He said, "They were just declared to go into war." I said, "Okay, I would like to volunteer. I want to go over." He said, "You haven't gone through enough training." I said, "I just got out of medical training. I want to go over as a medic." The next day, I went up to the Air Force base again and I came back and my bags were packed, my uniform was out, my pink pay sheet was out, and they had a jeep waiting for me. I went home for five days and then I went to Fort Bliss. That's how I knew Vietnam. My dad and my uncle fought with Patton and they went over. I owed it to my country to go. I owed it to those people to go.

K: Now that it's all over, would you go back?

H: Yes. I really would. Nobody understands. First of all, you have to understand life; you have to understand freedom; you have to understand honor, independence, humanity; you have to understand that. We talk about death. Our country knows not of death. They know nothing, to where you see millions of people being massacred, women and children being massacred by the communists. As long as our people are in this country free, they don't care what the hell goes on in other countries. You have to understand. A friend of mine, Tom, this is what he goes by . . . I can't pronounce his Vietnamese name. He was Secretary of Labor in Vietnam. He said, "You know, John, your people in this country have too much freedom. You take away that freedom and they would be in the same category as us." He's right. If the people would just sit down and remember the old ways, the way our parents taught us to love the home, to cherish, to give, to help, maybe they would understand it. Seventy-five percent of us Vietnam veterans do; we are down in Washington, D.C. If the President of the United States said that they have ten thousand planes right now to take our troops over to Vietnam to finish what we started, to free the country, to free them, to let them have the ways of the American way, you would have seventy-five percent of the Vietnam veterans ready to go right then and there. You would have them. They're ready to go. They don't want to go to any other war. They want to go to Vietnam. This is a love for the country that they fought for.

K: What were the people of Vietnam like?

H: In 1965 and 1966 they were great. At later dates, I don't know. I've heard wild stories that I can't believe. In the village that I was in, Phouc Vinh, you used to go down there and they would make you dinners and suppers and make sure you were eating. They took care of you like they were your own family. You would go through some of the villages and you would see a little kid that would maybe recognize you from sometime before. Maybe he understands the Americans but the families are afraid to say something. The kid will put his fingers in his ear. When we're going down along the highway and he's putting his fingers in his ear, if you have a green horn, you have some dead people, but if you have somebody that knows the people, understands them, and they see this kid doing this, they know that there are mines up ahead. You might go through a village where the Viet Cong came through and knowing that's our main route, you will get a kid to put his hand up in a big "O" over his head and it means explosion. You know they're waiting for a big explosion. You can tell right there that people liked you. They used to come . . . At 7:00 at night the gates are closed, you're not allowed up near the gates. Usually, you crack anybody that goes up by the gate. They'll come up and give you information that the Viet Cong is coming through the village and you sit back and you wait for them. When they come in, you hit them. They were good.

K: Was it hard to imagine the Viet Cong, hard to imagine guerrilla fighters?

H: The Viet Cong weren't fighters. They were hit-and-runners. They hit and they ran. When they ran out of ammunition, they would run. If you overpowered them, they ran. The NVA [North Vietnamese Army], they were fighters. They would stay there until the last dying man. They threw a rock if they could. Whatever they had to throw at you, they would do it. You always knew who you fought.

K: Did you ever meet the NVA on occasion?

H: Yes, a couple of times. They were shrewd. They set you up. They might set you up in a V, a C, but whatever way they set you up, they were going to get you from all ends. Usually the point man, they'll let go. They will let the point man and the first two men go and wait until the rest of the platoon gets through and then they hit you. Radio man, there's no way in hell I want to be a radio man. A radio man or an officer, those are the first two to go. They were shrewd. The NVA were very good fighters.

K: Was there a lot of NVA activity?



H: Yes. In our area during that time, they were talking 200,000 or 300,000 Viet Cong and NVA. That's a hell of a lot for the Third Corps, a lot.

K: What do you remember most about that?

H: That they were shrewd. They had no feelings. They didn't care. They would shoot the women and children. They take the father and the son and shoot the little kid.

K: You mentioned women and children being shot, do you think that the Americans did that?

H: No. When you see women and children shot, the Americans, when you get hit, damn, you're not going to know who in the hell hit you and you're not going to give a damn who's in the way, you're going to hit them. If the women and children are in the way, they're not the women and children of the south, like the good people. They come with the NVA. The families always follow the enemy. They're not close by, they're maybe a half of a mile, a mile away. That's why you find very few casualties of NVA or VC, because they will be there to get them. You find trails of blood and all of a sudden the trails of blood would disappear. They used the women and children to work, to build bridges, to build highways while all the men go out and fight. They follow the men and if any of the women or children got killed, it's their fault that they got killed and not the American's fault. There is no way the Americans should be blamed for that.

K: In the early days were there a lot of drugs and drinking?

H: No, none. Drinking? A lot of drinking. You looked forward, after ten days out in the bush, to coming back to a good Budweiser. I drank a lot of Budweiser. I used to drink Tiger Beer, this big pitcher of Tiger. It was potent stuff. I used to drink 33 beer every once in a while. I don't drink now, but every once in a while when I go down to Washington I'll go to a Vietnamese restaurant down there and I'll tell them to bring some double or three over and they'll bring it. Drugs, no. There was grass there, that's about it.

K: When you were out in the jungle or in the bush, what was it like, how could you ever explain to someone what it was like?

H: You go out in the middle of one of our forests where there is a lot of green, there is no sound other than animal sound, there are no highways where you can hear the road roars, and

just sit there with nobody and look around. That's what some of the jungle looked like. Some of it, it can be 120 degrees out and you would be in the thick of this and it would be like 70 or 75 degrees under there. You couldn't even see. It was very hard to see it was so thick. The jungle was beautiful, very, very beautiful country.

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

H: I despise Christmas; I hate Christmas. The only reason we celebrate around my house is because of my kids. I wouldn't give a damn about Christmas; I lost a very good friend Christmas day.

K: When you came back from Vietnam was there a lot of prejudice?

H: Yes. I couldn't believe it. Here you are, America's greatest fighting soldier, fighting for peace for your country on behalf of another and you come back and you're nothing. The protesters got more respect than the American soldiers did.

K: Was it tough to find a job too?

H: No. I never had any trouble finding a job. I probably had six jobs in six months. I was good and happy.

K: How did you adapt to change?

H: I went to California. I went to where the surf was, freedom. I went out there and a psychiatrist helped me to regain my respect.

K: Today, how do you see the world of the Vietnam veteran change? Do you think that they're becoming more aware of who they are?

H: Yes, but the wrong way. The Vietnam veteran, a lot of them, don't give a damn anymore. I can't blame them; I can't. When they came home, you had your VFW's (Veterans of Foreign Wars), your American Legions, none of them wanted them. Their own mothers and fathers didn't want them. They wouldn't sit down and talk to them. Your priests would maybe say, "Well, it was wrong to do this and wrong to do that; let me bless you." They went to veteran's organizations and they got turned down, things like that. They went to maybe a couple Vietnam veteran's organizations and things didn't work out. You have things that were supposedly set up to help a Vietnam veteran and they were denied it.

They got the denial so many times, they decided, I'm backing off for the rest of my life, I'm going to go into hiding. I don't need this garbage. It has taken me three years, excuse me, it's not myself, it has taken three of us really, three years to get fifteen people together. As the days are progressing, people call me up for help and I see it's starting to come out, but they're waiting until it's too late, until they harm somebody, harm themselves, or end up in jail, or in a psychiatric ward up here in St. Francis. You can't do that; you have to come out now, right now. If you don't, it shows that you don't want help. But when the time comes that you're in trouble is usually when the Vietnam veteran gets help. They're afraid that they're not going to get the help, and I'll tell you what, still today they're not going to get that much help. Our government won't help them. Our VA (Veterans' Organizations) won't help them. Our own damn people won't help them.

- K: When you were in Vietnam did you think it would be like this when you got out?
- H: The only thing I thought about when I was in Vietnam was coming home, going home to see my family and my girlfriends and my friends. That's the only thing I thought about. Most of the time I was thinking about saving my hind end.
- K: What one thing do you remember most about Vietnam?
- H: Really, the people. The people not having what we have, sleeping in mud huts on the floor, the kids not having clothes, the pity, the agony, their fight for freedom and humanity. That's the way I left Vietnam, something that I thought they would be helped with and they were denied.
- K: If there is one thing that you would like to add that we haven't covered, what would it be, is there anything you want to say?
- H: Yes. We have to help them. We definitely have to help those people. Not only those people, anybody that needs help you have to help them, especially that country because we have 2,400 still there, the study of agent orange, the help for a country that wants us again, the security of a country, mainly the security of a country. You don't know how fast peace would come about all over the world if we, as Americans, would fully back the country over there again, saying we're going to go in and we're going to do the job and we're going to secure that country. When you do that, let me tell you, Russia is going to back off. You have to think of humanity. Humanity and independence, those are the two main things you have to think of because that covers it

all. That's not only for this country, that's for any country, Lebanon.

God bless Reagan for Grenada. I went down to volunteer and they said, "No," because I was too old. You have to have peace. You're going to die, but you have to have peace.

K: Before we wrap it up, do you have any pictures or anything we could take a look at?

H: Here's that operation, Silver City. That's me right there.

K: Out in the jungle.

H: We didn't get hit once there on operation Silver City. I didn't come in contact with the enemy. That was the only operation that I was on that I didn't get shot at. These are the eight inch guns; this is me here and I'll show you this guy.

K: Is this on an operation?

H: Yes, operation Silver City. You see what I mean by how thick the jungle is.

K: Pretty dense.

H: Those are the guys from the 25th Infantry. Here's rice and cooking oil that we found.

K: How did you destroy it?

H: We didn't. We would take it back and give it to the people. This is a tank driver. Here's one operation we were on, operation Little Big One.

K: At Phouc Vinh?

H: Yes. They didn't make it out as it should have been. It wasn't small, there was a two hour fire fight; we hammered them. I'm going to write a letter and I'm going to send a copy of this to the President. I feel that the commanding officer, the doctor, and the pilot took their own life in their hands and they delivered a boy. This kid here, we came off an operation one day and he got hit by a helicopter. That was something. This was up in Phouc Vinh.

K: Was that an operation up there?

H: Yes.

K: Did you take that picture?

H: No, a couple of guys did. This was when we first went in on advance party. I'll show you some pictures in the back. This is our old swimming hole. We got water and stuff out there. We would take jeeps down and wash them there. We would take a bath in there and still use that water to drink out of. That was the only water you had. Here's the 10th ARVN troops. They got a VC one day when one of the buildings burned down and they opened him up from his rib cage all the way down to his groin. People talked after that and that's how we found a lot of the enemy. People were scared. You can't blame them.

K: What about the R.O.K. [Republic of Korea], did you ever meet any of those?

H: Korean R.O.K., no. I didn't meet them, but we were in the area where they were and we were told if we saw them to get down and stay down until they passed because they would mow anything down. They're hard-nosed fighters. I would never want to go to war against those guys. They were great!

I can't remember all the villages. It took me time to remember half of the stuff I go through now. This is Tudo Street and Tudo Bar. There's a mother and her two daughters. I walked out of there and went down around a building, around the Ambassador--I think it was the Ambassador--and they threw a grenade in there and blew the place out. I got out of there just in time.

K: What city is that in?

H: Saigon. They were gorgeous girls. This is at Am Loc and this is in Saigon. This is the Royal Australian troops that dropped in one time.

K: How many medics were there?

H: Thirteen medics. They had two medics and a doctor at our base camp and the rest of us.

K: How big was your base camp?

H: Small. With service headquarters, A and B battery, we had a total of 145 men; that was it, just in the immediate area.

K: Did you ever get attacked?

H: Yes, at 4:00, 11:00, 5:00, and 11:00.

K: Like clockwork.

H: Charlie knew. At lunch time, depends. This is on the Saigon River here. I was going in for R&R [Rest and Relaxation] and they had to call in artillery in there. They saw Charlie or an NVA coming out of that path. I don't know where they were going, but they were calling fire power. Here are the big guns there that our battery set up. Here's a recognizance officer. Those would be the province chiefs houses. They were coming in under fire and we were getting hit.

K: Where's this?

H: Phouc Vinh, the air strip.

K: Is that why the red smoke?

H: Yes, under fire.

The day I left Vietnam I was pulled right out of an operation. He brought me back in a helicopter as nine days overdue coming home. Pan Am Airlines, I got on it and this officer came on and he said, "The last guy that got on is going to have to leave because we're on rank pervals." At this time it did. That plane got five feet off of the runway and either a mortar or a rocket hit it. I took a Continental Airline out, a Golden Eagle.

K: Did it shake you up pretty much when you saw that plane get hit?

H: Yes, it did. When I got back to Camp Alfa I stayed all that day, and the next morning I went out and I got on a Continental and I left to go home. A kid that was there said he saw me and we started to talk. He has a hat place now, they make hats and T-shirts down here on Long Avenue. He said he saw the plane get hit and he thought I was a goner. He turned around and was coming down the next morning and he said he saw me again and he said, "It's a good thing you left because Camp Alfa got hit that day." I guess they got hit pretty bad.

I never knew we had radar in Vietnam. We had it at our base camp; I don't know what the hell we had it for either, we never had any enemy planes up in that area.

Here's something to read. Is that a joke? Go ahead and read that.

K: It says, "I deeply regret that this unfortunate incident occurred; if you desire I will assist you to the hospital or your home. The agencies that will investigate this incident are the U. S. Military Police, the U. S. Foreign Claims Commission, Office of the Staff Judge Advocate, a U. S. Military Assistance Command of Vietnam located at room B-A 72, second floor, 135 Wind Way Boulevard, Saigon, Legal Officer Headquarters Fort Activity, Saigon, located at . . ."

H: I came home with this; I came home with the standing orders of Rogers Rangers and my military code of conduct. I always carried these three orders. Rogers Rule order, do not forget, have your musket clean as a whistle.

K: Did anyone ever use the card?

H: I don't know, I really don't. I never did because they had so much stuff that they gave you that you were supposed to carry around. But what this is is if you were to go towards a village and you got hit and maybe these people were in the line of fire and they didn't understand your American language, you had it in American and you had it in Vietnamese. You would show it to them. You put your name and your unit up there. This way they knew if they came with us we weren't going to hurt them.

You very seldom, at least I haven't, saw a lot of abuse by American soldiers towards the people. Sometimes you have to get a little rough with them. A suspected Viet Cong, you might have to get a little rough with them.

You know my Mexican friend, every time he had to go someplace it was "non comprende" so I caught him on the toilet. That shows you what kind of toilet we have. We slept in tents. We were always ready to move. I saw base camp twice, that's all. The rest of these pictures are not too good. There's a C-123 transport. I always took a picture every time we went somewhere, before, during, and after. I always carried a camera with me. Here's my first Playboy, the first Playboy I ever had. This guy got it.

K: Who was he?

H: I don't remember his name. He got it down in the village. What they used to do at the time was grind up glass and put it in the beer and pop. One day we went down and didn't realize it and when we came back we had an orientation on drinking in there and how to take the beer and look through it and see if there were any shiny particles and stuff. Here, they did it down in that village.

K: That's what happened to him?

H: Yes. I have more pictures. It took me eighteen years to get these developed. I just didn't want to develop them until I found somebody that I could talk to and they could understand what I was saying and I could understand what they were saying. This is when I brought them out.

K: Did you have a unit mascot?

H: I was only in base camp twice. I don't know.

This is a very good friend of mine here. He took a bullet for me; he popped out of the helicopter before I did and took a bullet. That's why I said I despise Christmas, because of him. I'll probably go up and see his family again one time, but it's too hard.

K: Was it around Christmas?

H: Christmas Day, 6:30 in the morning. I had to put a KIA [Killed in Action] tag on him. Twenty-nine days and he went home. I have more pictures. It's going to take time to develop them. It costs you 55¢ to develop these things.

I would do it again, not only Vietnam. I'm 38 years old; if my country calls on me I'll go again. That's respect. You have to remember one thing John Kennedy said, "Do not ask what your country can do for you, ask what you can do for your country." You have to respect this man; he was the most liked President of all times.

K: How do you tell your kids about the Vietnam War?

H: I don't.

K: Do they ask?

H: Sometimes. I tell them more about the respect and honor these people have, their culture. My wife, the same way if she asks. I feel uncomfortable telling you this because you don't understand. I don't care how much you read, you still don't understand. When we say that we would fight for those people again, a lot of people think we're nuts. "Didn't you go through enough?" They still don't understand. That's like here in America, if we lose it, we'll be back to fight for it because of the love we have for our country. We had a love for their country. My daughter asks me what the people were like, I tell her. A lot of kids, or her friends, the first thing they ask is if you killed anybody. I just shrug my shoulders and I walk away. If this is what the kids want to hear, I don't want to tell them. If they want to hear about the culture and the beauty and the people



itself, I'll tell them. It's hard, it's really hard to tell somebody what Vietnam was really like; they don't understand.

K: Do you think that's one of the problems that has hurt the Vietnam veterans, that they haven't been able to explain it to everyone?

H: What hurt the Vietnam veteran is the media. They killed the Vietnam veteran and are doing it now. I feel everyone that wrote gory, untrue stories about the Vietnam veteran should be put up for murder charges. The people in our country won't believe what we say as Vietnam veterans because they don't believe that we can tell the truth. They'll believe a damn television studio or a paper, but they don't understand. These guys may have been with us one or two days, but they weren't with us the whole year or two or three years. This is what our organization is about, to come to the people. If they want us to go all the way around the world to tell the people what Vietnam was really about, we'll be more than happy to go all the way around the world. We want to tell the truth; we want them to understand what we went through and not what the media put us out to be, and went through. They have to understand freedom, like I said, honor, culture, what our involvement was really about in Vietnam. I'm willing to bet right now that you don't even know that Vietnam was declared a land war.

K: What do you mean?

H: April 17, 1965, Vietnam was declared a land war. This is what hurt. April 25, 1965 they had the first massive demonstration in Washington, D.C. Now they have this Ten Thousand Day War; it's a book; to me it's garbage. You have some good points in it and then the rest are bad. They have this thing on television now, the "Vietnam Experience", or whatever you want to call it. I watched the first six documents on it and I shut it off; I've never watched it since. It's garbage. It's put out by the French and the British and they hated us while we were in Vietnam. How can you believe what people say? I would say to the people, if they know a Vietnam veteran to go up to them and say, "I am very concerned. I want to know about the Vietnam War. I want to know about the people. I want to know about the soldiers. I want to know what you went through. I want to know how I can help you."

This is what hurts, nobody want to listen to us now. Nobody sat with us and cried with us; nobody sits and hugs us, or kisses us. Nobody even offers to come out and have a beer.

They see a bunch of Vietnam veterans with our hats we wear, they go to one side and we're off to another side. It's just a complete hassle. It will always be a hassle because the country doesn't want to remember the Vietnam. We're here to stay and there isn't a damn person in this country who is ever going to forget Vietnam. We don't want them to go through what we went through. Either they're going to fight and kick ass and get out, or you're going to leave them completely out of it. We're here to defend them; we're here to do anything we can. We'll make the mom be there waiting to shake their hands, hug them, kiss them, whatever it is that will make them happy. We're there to do it for them. I don't know. You can go in for hours of this stuff. I just don't know where it starts or where it ends. I don't know what you're looking for. If you guys over in Youngstown ever want people to speak we'll go over and speak.

K: Okay.

H: We'll bring high-ranking officials from Vietnam. We have guys who are head of the Hoa-Hao buddhist. We have people that were doctors. We have people that were generals, colonels, and majors; we have a lot of them. In fact, there will be one kid who will be here in three weeks. He just escaped from Vietnam. He was put in a concentration camp in 1975 for five years and he was put in a reeducation camp and he escaped. He tried to escape ten times and he finally got out. He'll be here. This kid, he can tell you what Vietnam was about.

K: When you were in Vietnam, what did you think about the events going on back home, about the protests and things like that?

H: I'll tell you what, we never heard that much. I really didn't. I never knew. My mom used to send me the New Castle News. All I used to read out of it were the obituaries, to see if any of our guys were killed, the sports page, and the funnies. That's all I read out of it. I'd get the Stars and Stripes once in a while, and they would have a few things about Jane Fonda and her high-class activities here in this country and abroad. I never paid much attention. I didn't need that aggravation. I had more on my mind to help there than to worry what was going on at home.

K: Kennedy implemented a program to protect the people.

H: We put them in compounds.

K: Yes.

H: It's like what you call base camp. A base camp within a base camp is probably what you're talking about.

K: Okay.

H: The special forces did that a lot. They built camps and brought people in and people helped build it up and people lived within the compound and the special forces were there.

K: Do you think that was a good program?

H: If it's to help somebody, to save them, one of their lives, yes. If it's there to use them as shields, no. I don't believe that we did use them as shields, not during that time. During that time, we were dedicated. We used to take in people in our arms and hug them and kiss them and treat them like human beings.

K: What was Saigon like?

H: Wild! Go to Wall Street and all those wizards inside that building there, let them stand outside about fifty yards, and this is the people. Open the door and let those people come charging at you and visualize these people on little running carts or motorcycles, just running all over the place. This is when I first hit Saigon because we were in a jeep and we went down around the one square, and all I saw was the whole street and it was so damn wide. All these people were coming at me and I looked and I told this driver, "What did we get into?" He said, "We're going the wrong way." I said, "Let's cut off somewhere." What you have in New York now, your vegetables, black markets, they were great for that. You can't blame them though, because the Americans taught them black market. That's the truth. It was a way for them to live, to survive. People here in this country do the same thing. Clothing, I bought a pair of elephant hide shoes for \$15. I bought a camera for \$7.50, a Canon, \$7.50 over there. I flipped; I couldn't believe it. Saigon was pretty, it really was. It was different. We have churches, they have temples. We have fancy eating areas, they have, not in the wall, but small eating areas. Our food is more frozen, and they cook theirs all fresh. You never know who's who. Your head is always turning. Your neck is always sore, checking out to make sure nobody is stabbing you in the back or something. It's a very busy place. There are a lot of high-class people there.

K: That is all the questions I have. Is there anything else?

H: Did patriotism really die with the Vietnam War? Probably not, patriotism is created. What did happen was the U.S. failed to start the war machine at home. But some will say that would have meant that the folks at home would have

suffered along with the soldiers who were fighting overseas, and that is correct, and that is also one of the reasons why Americans failed to support the American troops fighting in Vietnam. The Vietnam War was never taken seriously by anyone but the veterans and the peace movement.

Thinking back on past wars of the U.S. it is easy to see how the war bond movement took over the advertising of the newspapers and radio, how the scrap metal drives got the populous into the mood to do their part at home at their sunnyville, U.S.A., white-frame home. Then there was rationing and the hardships placed on the citizens. Every time a dollar was spent, gasoline purchased, or bread eaten, there was the thought of bringing the troops home and getting the whole thing over with. If you don't believe it check the Mogue files of the local paper from 1941 to 1946. If the citizens have nothing to lose or gain in a war like Vietnam, then the war will be forgotten, the troops will not be thought of and the whole thing can march on for twenty years. Vietnam is a case in point.

The people at home must lose something if their soldiers are forced to risk the sacrifice of their life and limb and in the case of those MIA and POW's still held by the communist government of Vietnam, their freedom as a human being.

The administration of the White House must be blamed for not recognizing the need to gear up the war machine. Declaring the war a real war would have helped, but in view of the fear of Soviet and Chinese intervention its understandable why it was not a declared war. It was, however, a war with all the capital letters of any war.

The demand by law of public support is not a pretty sight, and it is not something that should be hastily pursued. But the death of Americans abroad is not pretty either. And if there is one lesson that should be learned by American government it is the fact that if war is entered into, it must be a war that involves the people and demands their support, taxes their income, places burdens upon their households, makes each and every family suffer a little across the board, instead of a few families suffering all the hardships, and all the grief and all the pain for the nation. It is no wonder that the Vietnam veteran and his family couldn't get support then as now. No one told the Americans they had to. If the Americans of the 1960's and 1970's had been rationed as to the food, clothing, gasoline, rubber products, and metal products he or she used, then Vietnam

would have been fought to win, or as your own inclination lead you, America would have pulled out of Vietnam without suffering all of the 57,000 deaths and untold casualties of America's longest war.

The institution of the acts of war, whether declared or undeclared, should bring about the action at home that makes it important to the individual citizen of the nation whether the war is to be fought or conceded. Otherwise, you have a runaway government that could fight for periods of up to twenty years without stirring up enough interest to fight the war like it should be fought or pick up and go home. This should be readily accepted by both hawks and doves alike. The hawk will be assured that he will be supported, and the dove can know that no free country has ever fought a war like Vietnam when the people really had something to lose or gain by continuing or ceasing hostilities.

If the American public had been treated in World War II like the American public of the Vietnam War period, then we probably would still be fighting that war or at best making treaties with the lineal descendents of the Third Reich. It is the American public that must ask itself if they enjoyed the open gas pumps, the fresh bread, the new cars, first day of school clothes, and the like during the Vietnam War. I don't know of any that were forced to forego those luxuries except those of us who were in service during and immediately following the Vietnam War. "Never have so few suffered so much for so many," could have been written for the veterans of the 1960's and 1970's in America.

We, the Vietnam veterans, have returned from this battlefield to a nation that was not openly grateful for the sacrifice we had made in the spirits of the American tradition, just like our forefathers of previous wars and with the same spirit and dedication that the patriots have fought to make this country a free nation--with liberty and justice for all.

We did not come home from Vietnam as heroes, but were stigmatized as killers, warmongers and drug addicts. We were not associated as good citizens, but were branded as the ass who went to Vietnam. We appreciated the stone monument that we veterans are erecting in Washington, D.C. in the honor of our brothers who died.

We did not shirk our responsibility to our nation when we placed our lives on the line in your unpopular war. We now ask out to our nation to shirk their responsibility to the living monuments of the Vietnam War. There are many Vietnam veterans suffering from emotional disorders from these unique conditions of coming home. We ask our nation to provide funding for VA centers to be used for sessions

for Vietnam veterans to get in touch with their feelings. We would like treatment centers for those suffering from illnesses of agent orange and other chemicals used in Vietnam.

Please help support the Vietnam veteran to enable them to come out and get help they need to become good, respective citizens once more.

And for you my brothers of the Vietnam War--WELCOME HOME!

CPI John C. Hamett  
Combat Medic  
1st Inf Div. 1965-66  
Phuoc Vinh Vietnam

END OF INTERVIEW