

YOUNGSTOWN STATE UNIVERSITY

ORAL HISTORY PROGRAM

Vietnam Veterans Project

Military and Personal Experiences

O. H. 473

CHARLES L. ORR

Interviewed

by

Michael Lowry

on

January 21, 1983

YOUNGSTOWN STATE UNIVERSITY

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INTERVIEWEE: CHARLES ORR

INTERVIEWER: Michael Lowry

SUBJECT: POW's, Drugs--Marijuana, Hearing Loss, Short-timers Syndrome, Anti-war Movement

DATE: January 21, 1983

L: This is an interview with Charles L. Orr for the Youngstown State Oral History Program by Michael Lowry on January 21, 1983.

What branch of the service were you in and what unit?

O: I served in the United States Army with the 8th and 4th artillery on the DMZ, Vietnam.

L: And when were you there?

O: April of 1969 until May of 1970.

L: Were you drafted or did you just voluntarily go into the service.

O: I volunteered for the draft.

L: Would you say that you felt a need for the U.S. involvement in Vietnam?

O: I felt it was my patriotic duty. That's what I felt. With my age at the time and my knowledge of world problems and so forth like that, I didn't have any idea what I was getting into.

L: How old were you?

O: I was eighteen when I entered the service and I spent my whole nineteenth year in Vietnam.

L: Did you graduate before you went in?

O: No, I quit, but I did take my GED when I was in Vietnam. I got my GED in the service.

L: When did you get out of the service?

O: May of 1970. I extended over there for 47 days. When you come back to the United States, if you have less than 150 days in the Army you get an early out, so I took the early out.

L: Had your feelings changed about American involvement?

O: No, not right away. I, more or less, had a feeling I was . . . when you are in Vietnam everybody talks about the war. It was just good to be back. I didn't give it a whole lot of thought; I just sat around, had a few beers, and got some sleep.

L: What one thing sticks out in your mind, positive or negative, about your experiences in Vietnam?

O: I would have to say the country's attitude towards me.

L: How do you view the American attitude toward the war?

O: Well, the same thing. Like I said, when I went in the soldiers were proud to wear the uniforms. People were proud of the servicemen. It seemed like the best thing to do. Do you know what I am saying? When I got over to Vietnam, after going through my training, my basic military training and my advanced individual training, there is no doubt about it, it was one of the finest experiences in my life. I was in the best shape mentally. They drill you mentally. They say that they are going to change your attitude, your spirit. I was 100% soldier. When I got to Vietnam, although I didn't bring it up to a point at the time, the leadership wasn't there. When you got to Vietnam, you leaders didn't give a shit. Bad leadership.

L: What kind of effect has this had on your life?

O: I basically fell into the attitude that I felt was being . . . I can't say pushed on my, but the attitude that I felt, that people didn't really give a shit. I-don't-give-a-shit attitude. Do you know what I mean? All my jobs that I have had since 1970 . . . I paid \$300 in income tax. I don't believe in supporting the cause. It's a real negative attitude, believe me.

L: What about a lack of a cooling off period from the time you left? A lot of guys tell me that in 24 to 36 hours you're

back in the United States after you leave Vietnam. How much effect did that have on your adjustment?

- O: At the time I didn't even take it into mind, you know. Over the years I have thought about it and I have had a chance to do some reading on it, and talk with different people on it and so forth. I was rushed right through. I had a hard time when I came out of Vietnam; I arrived at Fort Lewis, Washington. The first thing they said was, "Get a haircut." Now I am going to be out of the military six hours and they are telling me to get a haircut. I just came out of the Army and I just did my shit and then they want me to get a haircut. The same old Army bullshit. I'm running off of the question; I forgot the question. I don't want to run away from it.
- L: The cooling off time. You can run off a little bit, you know.
- O: I have to say, honestly, that at that time I didn't feel, like I said, I was back in the war. Do you know what I mean? Today I look at it as another test for them. The government, when I say them. They're going to use this psychological end of the deal for training purposes for future soldiers; I guess that is their right, but yet they are going for younger soldiers. Do you know what I am saying?
- L: Yes.
- O: It pisses me off. I think they ought to go from seventeen to twenty-seven then. A man is still a man at twenty-seven and he has got a little bit of life in him yet too, you know. He has seen some of the world anyhow. Today I see that they are going straight to the high schools. Recruiting more from the high schools, to the homes--sitting in the kitchens. I think they are ripping again. Just like the draft, I think they are ripping again. Cooling off? I'm not cooled off yet.
- L: You are still . . .
- O: Paranoid? I still flash. No, I don't want to get into flashbacks yet. I still feel it. I still feel my alertness, my awareness, my survival for life. It was put in there.
- L: They put it there?
- O: They put it in there through training and then . . .
- L: They didn't want to help you readjust?
- O: No, no way. No way did they want to . . .

L: In a matter of six hours when you landed, you went from serviceman to civilian?

O: Right. I am not sure if I spent a night, I think I spent a night there. I didn't sleep for three days; I was wired up about coming home. The whole time that I was in Fort Lewis I was in euphoria, like I was high. I don't remember too much about the out-processing or anything of the day. I was tired; I was back in the world. The only thing I remember was that I went to get a plane from Fort Lewis to Chicago and all the flights were booked. I took a standby to Portland and got liquored up in a bar in Portland and I woke up in Chicago. I wasn't old enough to drink. I had ten months to go before I was old enough to drink.

L: Do you think they should have done something? Some guys say, "Well, I came back and walked from the Army to a civilian, and they never tried to help me readjust; they never took away the training." You know, that is basically what you were trained for in the Army. There is one job you are trained for, and that is how to fight a war. You are not trained how to do a job in real life.

O: No, where was I ever going to get a job at humping bombs.

If I would like to see anything done I would say, "Okay, they gave us a choice of a year or service over there . . ." It is really hard to put into perspective, Mike, because if I say, "Okay, take them out of Vietnam after a year; take them to Okinawa or Japan and cool them down," or something like that, the guys are ready to go home; they want to go home. That three weeks in Japan or Okinawa or three months or something like that, is hard. It is really hard to put a perspective on that.

Another thing I would like to bring up, I was young, and in the military, prostitution is cool. That is the only way you are going to get a piece of ass. They actually put it right in front of you. If you smoke a joint, you are doing something on your own; you are harming yourself. You buy a piece of ass you are harming yourself, but they put it there in front of you.

L: They wanted to . . .

O: For carnal reasons, whatever they say, yes. I felt that was wrong also.

L: Do you think they did that to release a tension?

O: No, because I was in Vietnam for a year before I went on R&R. They asked me to go one time; they gave me a choice. When I was in the rear, I hauled ammo for seven months. I

drove an ammo truck loaded with powder, loaded with bombs. You had to get up every morning, shine your boots, get into formation, go down and pick up the bombs and go out on the roads. The roads were mined. You can't really say sniper fire because I was moving; I wasn't allowed to stop my truck. There was a big party in the rear. Do you know what I am talking about? People relaxing, a lot of drugs, a lot of beer, no liquor. The peons aren't allowed to have liquor. It was a real lax situation. I wasn't trained to go fight a war, to haul bombs and then go out on the roads to get killed and then shine my boots and get liquored up at night and smoke dope. They knew we were smoking it.

One day a kid--I was sitting on top of my truck. I was letting my shotgun drive--rolled a grenade out under my truck. He was a little kid. The first thing I thought was, "I'm dead." Then as we were passing by him, I grabbed my weapon and laid the sights on him and I didn't cut him loose. The grenade didn't go off. It might have been a rock, but it was a grenade to me. After that Mike, I lost it. I really started wondering. You know what I mean? My mind just took off man. That's when the war was turning around, things were going crazy. The first sergeant pulled me into his hooch--I got into a fight with a guy. He asked me, "Would you like a cigarette, Charlie? Orr?" He called me Orr. I said, "No, I don't want a cigarette." He said, "Well, have a seat." I said, "I don't want a seat." He said, "What's bothering you?" Now, Mike, I am trained as a soldier. I don't know how to tell this guy I am scared that I am going to die. I tell him nothing is wrong with me. This is my conclusion today about what happened at that time. He asked me if I was having girlfriend problems at home, and I wasn't. Family problems, I wasn't. He said, "Well, what is wrong?" I said, "Nothing." He said, "Well if you don't straighten up, I am going to send you out on the guns. You don't want that do you?" Now today I feel he saw the tension. My ultimatum was to straighten up or he was sending me out to the guns. He asked me, "Do you want it?" I had been volunteering to go, and they wouldn't send me. I told him, "No." Don't you know where I was at the next week?

L: On the guns?

O: On the guns. A release of tension? It wasn't a release of tension, I'll tell you that right now.

L: We'll get into this a little bit later on. What about the anti-war movement? What did that do you you when you got back home?

O: Well, I had a Stars and Stripes magazine here; I had saved it. Up at the therapist's office, we are now using them for rap sessions. May 9, 1970, I was sitting in Vietnam;

I had eleven days to go before I came home. This was, I guess, right after Kent State; I am not sure.

L: Yes.

O: The niggers didn't like that whites. Puerto Ricans didn't like the niggers or the whites. The whites didn't like the Puerto Ricans or the niggers. The gooks don't want you. You don't know which gook is who. You don't know what is going on over there. You don't know what is happening in the war. Back home there were sixty-thousand people marching in Washington. I was an eight-inch artillery, and man, I'll tell you what, I wanted to turn my gun on Washington.

L: Against the protestors?

O: Against the protestors, yes. Then after I came home, I grew my hair; I grew my beard. I went for their cause, because that was what was here. It wasn't the war you know. Man, I fought it. I fought it for years. I believed in peace. I wanted peace too, because that's . . . I was here in this movement. Today, I lost my pride over there. I didn't lose my pride, I covered it up.

L: Do you think maybe you got into the anti-war movement by the way of mainstreaming back into the American society?

O: Right, yes. All right, I didn't get into the movement; I didn't carry any signs; I didn't do any bullshit. All I did was grow my hair and got into drugs. That was the movement. I would also like to make this point, that when I left the United States I had never seen a joint. I did some when I was in Vietnam. When I came home, where wasn't it?

They said I sent it back. I never sent any home, man. I never sent a seed home. I wish to hell I had some seeds now. You know, I walk in a bar and everybody is passing joints. They are not exactly doing it in a bar but come on, "Let's go outside." Man, I've seen the times though where they were actually sitting in the bar and smoking the shit. Do you know what I mean? I never saw that before I went over there.

L: You think they kind of equated the increased drug use in the United States with the Vietnam veterans? The Vietnam veterans were the ones bringing the drug back.

O: Right, right. Sure, some of the guys were sending it home. This is number one; this is the best stuff in the world.

I didn't smoke a joint for ten months, eleven months after

I came back. I had no reason to send it home. When I used it over there, I don't know why I used it. It relaxed me; it made me more conscious of what I was doing. I felt, in the rear areas . . . the party thing. When I went out there to the field, I was out there I think about five and a half months, maybe longer. I don't think I got high three times. It wasn't a thing that you did in the field, you know. It was a rear type thing.

I would also like to make this point: That I got a chance to travel in Vietnam too. I went to Da Nang to pick up supplies. In Da Nang there was more EM clubs, more whiskey, more opium, more whorehouses, more everything, more black market, more American soldiers. Out on the field we were short of men. We were working eighteen hours on, six off. Two guys had to get up and fire, had to pull KP every four days. I didn't see any reason for it. I lost my faith in a lot of stuff.

L: Because of the way they treated the front line soldier?

O: Front line soldier, that's right. It was all these guys in the rear that wanted to fight a war. Why didn't they fight it? Why didn't they, huh? I was trained.

L: To fight a war?

O: To fight a war. When I got there I was not allowed to fight it.

L: Did you see it as playing games?

O: Not right off the start, because I would say I was hyper when I went in. Like the first night there, they hit the airport. The first night there were rockets coming in. After awhile, you get used to it. You know, when you see guys, infantry guys, they would come into my fire base and sit down and we would talk to them and stuff like that. You don't talk to many of them. Grunts didn't talk to . . . I forget what the hell they called me. We didn't communicate a whole lot. I made it a point to try and communicate with people. I still do it today. I love to communicate with people. You hear stories about, "Well hey, they told us not to go up in that valley; they told us not to go. Ambush, ambush, right." It made sense. Do you know what I mean? You would hear this from these guys man, see it! They were trained to be soldiers, to obey orders. Yes, playing games, a set-up maybe. I feel it today.

L: That they didn't care about the man in the field?

O: No, they took my fire base. They built it from scratch, right



out of the mud, twenty-three layers high, sandbags, every two layers PSP, steel. The sandbags were dressed right dress. Powder bunkers and bomb bunkers the same way. Congressmen or congresswomen would come in. They put a fifty caliber machine gun on top of a powder bunker. My sergeant told me that I was going to feed that machine gun. I told him he was fucking nuts. They take out grenades, put them in ammo cans, take them in their bunker. We didn't have bunkers. They had bunkers. They took our grenades and put them in their bunkers. If we would get hit, we would have to wait for these guys. We had to find them to find my shit. That is the way a soldier is. I have to hunt for my ammunition; I have to hunt to survive, when it is coming down on me.

They brought new boots in, Mike, from California. I say California, because California is ten years ahead of the times. I never saw any heroin the whole time I was there. Brought nine guys in, nine new boots. Just right before I left the field, they all had tracks. They put them on guard; they didn't put them on the guns, they put them on guard.

- L: They were supposed to watch . . .
- O: New boots, strung out man. They were banging up coming over, do you know what I am saying? From the States they were banging up before they left. You know this is just hearsay talk. I can't say I have seen every one of those tracks. Different guys would come in and out and talk and stuff. How do you sleep with that?
- L: You can't trust the guy who is on guard duty.
- O: You can't trust the guy who is on guard. It is not his fault. The man that is training him, it's the man who is disciplining him. It is the military in itself, isn't it? The military messed up.
- L: They are not going to make their own discipline then; there is no discipline at all.
- O: They were making the bucks, I believe.
- L: Do you feel you have been treated fairly by the government and then by the American people?
- O: By the government, I've used my GI bill extensively, vocational rehabilitation, a couple of different schools I've tried and started. I finished this last one. It was a three-year course. I would say as far as my GI bills, yes. It wasn't there when I first came home. I wanted to go to school. I think it was \$260 a month that would pay my tuition and books.

I felt that when I came home I would be able to go to school. I had a couple of bucks in my pocket. You know what I mean, help with the rent or something. No, I would've had to go out and work, and maybe it was a misunderstanding on my part. I thought, you know, if I put my life on the line for my country, this is one of the reasons I did it, to get an education. I got paid for it. It wasn't there. There wasn't enough there to do it.

You know, after the years, after I got my disability established, which they knocked me off, they cut me off; I had to fight for it again. They just cut me again; I have to fight for it again. I used my GI bill, but as far as VA medical care, no. They are paying doctors \$40,000; they are paying nurses; they are paying a bunch of roosters who walk around with bags and pick up nothing that's on the floor. They stand there drinking coffee, you know in the hospital, a bunch of . . . you know what I am saying? It's a good thing for the government; it's a good money thing. Oh yes, there is no doubt about that. The medical care, no. I would have to say that it's geared for the World War II veterans. That cat's sitting there laying in bed. He's laying up in bed collecting his dollars. He's retired. He's got his money made up. They don't want me in there; they threw me out because last time I went in, Mike, twenty-two days, they threw me out. I found out that if I would have stayed one more day, they would have had to pay me 100% for three months. They discharged me so they didn't have to pay me. I got to fight it. I have to work to support my family; I got to fight for something I fought for over there.

- L: Did you get your hearing loss because of being on artillery?
- O: Yes. We were firing one night--it's not a long story--and the oldest guy, if he wants to go up on the guns, he can be the gunner--the number two man. The gunner sets the sights, lays the gun, shows where it shoots. Number two man loads the powder, primers it, and fires the weapon. You got two men humping bombs and one man on powder. The older man gets his choice, seniority. The two guys on the gun are older than me; they are up on the gun. It's an easier job. I never took powder. The bombs were always the heaviest job, the hardest job. I stuck with it. I never went up on the gun. I stuck with the bombs. We had a new guy on powder season and it was raining. They kept hollering for me, and I went in and I would show them where the different lots of primers were, change the lot, take it back out, and the gun didn't fire. When I say the gun doesn't fire they holler, "Standby," when they go to fire. On "Standby" you cover your ears. They were firing directly between us. The gun was from here to my garage, it can't be sixty feet. Here's the powder bunker and here's the Joe bunker; I was in here. Low quadrant, eight inch artillery, the biggest gun they got. Low quadrant means

that they are firing low. I thought they were hollering for me when they hollered "Standby." I ran out the door. I felt my head splitting, I'm not shitting you. It almost knocked me out. My ears have been ringing since December 26, 1969. It was my Christmas present.

L: They won't let you have your disability?

O: They gave me a ten percent, and after five years, sent me a letter and said, "You are no longer getting ten percent," which was 25 bucks at the time. I appealed it; I sent a letter for an appeal and I got a twenty percent rating, without going through the review board or anything. Over the course of the years, I went and saw specialists, and my hearing was getting worse. They wanted to treat it with medication. I don't want to get into the drugs that I got into after I got back. I don't like a whole bunch of them.

I feel that it happened from the concussion from the artillery piece. Pills are for a disease. This happened; this was a physical thing. I don't feel, in my mind . . . the doctor is getting money from the VA, give him pills, bring him back, give him pills, bring him back. Hey, job security, right? Money in the bank. That's Monte Carlo and the rest of them. I just got another letter from them, they cut me down again. I filed for an increase. My hearing got worse so I filed for an increase and they cut me. Their letter states that they cut me from twenty to ten and ten to zero. I'm still getting ten. I've filed about four other claims now. For agent orange, I have a back problem that had been chronic for about ten years. They denied that. I have to prove it, you know what I'm saying, Mike. I guess it's understandable, but for so many years I just felt . . . when I get my honorable discharge, and I look at it, and I get my army accommodation medals, and it says, 'For Honest in Esteem,' and I get my good conduct medal and I look at them . . . now why am I a liar?

L: You do all right then and . . .

O: I did all right. I served proud. I got honorable . . . one hundred percent man. I thought I was one hundred and fifty percent if you want to know the truth. Now I am a liar, because I want money; that's what they say. I would rather have the treatment for it. I'll tell you what, I would give them sixty-eight bucks a month if I would hear, if I didn't have to listen to this ringing. You know it's not ringing now because of this refrigerator running and we are talking. I go lay in bed at night, wake up in the morning, listen to the first thing that is in your head.

L: It's the ringing.

- O: At times I think people can hear it. I wake up with my back twisted and I can't get out of bed and I have to think about . . . I lost six months of work this year because of my back, six months. They want proof it happened in Vietnam. I sent for my records, look what I get.
- L: What about the movies they have now?
- O: I only saw one, The Deerhunter. I can't relate to that a whole lot because I wasn't a grunt; I wasn't out in the fields, you know. I'm sure they are probably based on true things that happened. I really don't even like to talk about that because I know there are a lot of guys who saw shit like that and they hear me saying shit like that, it's grounds to kill another man, you know what I'm saying? I don't believe it happened. No, I believe it happened. I could not relate to it; I could relate to the meaning behind that story; there was a good meaning behind it, I believe. Then again, they are portraying every Vietnam veteran as . . .
- L: Nuts. One of the biggest problems we had in this country was right after My Lai. The publicity surrounding it. How much do you think that affected the American view on the vets?
- O: In Vietnamese terms, he got a number ten, that's the worst there is. Do they know? The American public doesn't know how many of those guys saw their friends blown away by a child, stabbed by a woman, booby trapped by all of them. They were covering their ass, that's all. They were making sure that when they went through there, they weren't losing any more men. They were right, they were right.
- L: Do you think that came from higher up? A lot of people say Calley was a scapegoat.
- O: Yes, I believe it. I believe it.
- L: They are covering the ass of the captain and up, right?
- O: And up, right. They are covering the ass of the government. They are passing the buck, the scapegoat. They are putting it down on one lieutenant and his men. He was the leader, so they got to grab one leader. They can't just say you know, there was a Spec 4 of a PFC. There had to be one guy who was taking charge there, so they had to hit him. That's the military way, chain of command. He had to give the orders. He didn't get any orders.
- L: Somebody else gave the orders and he followed them?
- O: Somebody else gave the orders and he was doing his job. How many times did these guys sit back in the Pentagon, push buttons and send orders over there? I believe it happened.

L: That's how we got involved in the first place.

O: Yes.

L: Somebody in the Pentagon said, "Yes, maybe we should go over there."

O: Maybe that guy in the Pentagon, I'm not saying that he was over there in World War II, I don't give a shit. If we are American and we are American fighting men, we fight together, we die together. Not just, "You tell me. You tell me." Hey, let's go. The greatest man is the one who does it, not the one who sits back and says, "Hey, I did it." What? With somebody else's sweat? That's not the way I was brought up to believe as a man, no. That's not the way.

L: The media coverage, how do you view that in relation to the Vietnam veteran?

O: I have heard bad points and good points on it. I would say it's a right. Freedom of press, it's a right. I can't see anything wrong with it. Maybe it helped to end that war. It's a good thing that war ended, but it should have been won. It never started out to be won, which we didn't know at the time. I think they played a part in ending it and God bless them.

L: You don't think that they gave a distorted perception of the soldier?

O: I didn't watch a lot of it on the news, okay. When I would come home and I would see it on the news, if I watched it, I'll tell you the truth Mike, I don't think I paid attention to it. Same thing over there. There were a lot of things that I was there and saw, and to this day, I've got to search for them. I put a block up. I know I was there, but I tried to laugh things off, I guess. It's not a funny matter, but it was just good therapy for awhile.

L: Westmoreland, they are pushing for the war, and got the radical left-wing pushing against the war. Do you feel caught in the middle?

O: Today?

L: Then.

O: Then, yes, I was dead in the middle. I kept a low profile, let's put it that way. I didn't scream out at the government and I didn't run around hollering that I was a Vietnam veteran either. I sort of just went with the flow. I wasn't in a position to take up my fight. I wasn't in a position. I was talking up a fight, a fight for my life, a fight for my sanity, I guess, or whatever it is. No, I couldn't. I

don't think I put myself in that perspective. I don't think I put myself in that position. I was more or less trying to just get by, and you know there were two super powers going at it. A struggle, I guess I just didn't want any part of it because they didn't want any part of me.

- L: You felt if you got in the middle of it you would get ripped to pieces. You couldn't join either side or . . .
- O: I couldn't join either side, no. If I joined the government I was wrong. If I joined the radicals, I was wrong again because that wasn't my belief when I went over. Not to join either one, I would have got . . .
- L: There was such a lack of commitment in this country toward the war, did that bother you at the time? The American people saying, "Well, we don't want this war anymore."
- O: Yes. There are a lot of kids that come up through school, as I did, believing in patriotic values, believing in fighting for your country. Towards the end of that war a lot of them knew that they weren't there for that reason. They were drafted, it was either jail or Vietnam. This system, that they throw you in jail and you get punked on this here and that there. You hear about what goes on in jail and the guys that couldn't handle jail, they are scared of jail. I think a lot of them felt that they would rather face Vietnam than they would face jail. I ran off the question again, Mike; I ran right off.
- L: The commitment of the people. You know in World War II you got . . .
- O: They backed out, Mike. They backed out. I wrote something downstairs. I want to read it to you. It's about the commitment. When this is all over, I'll read it to you and you can have it on tape. It has my view on the American commitment. It really does.
- L: Did you see a lack of justification for the war?
- O: As the years went by, yes.
- L: But at the time you didn't?
- O: No, I had to. I think that's what hurt the most Mike. All the feelings that I had in myself when I went over there were instilled in me from childhood, from TV, from school, "God Bless America," "The Star Spangled Banner," "When Johnny Comes Marching Home Again, Hoorah! Hoorah!" "I wish I was in Dixie." You know what I mean?
- L: Yes.

- O: It was put there. It was taken away. That's in this little thing I wrote down there, too. It was a different song. They were playing a different song there, different people hearing different music.
- L: The thing is, the President said it was right, so you felt it was right.
- O: At the time I had no commitments towards the President. I had a commitment towards my beliefs; my brother was over there, my neighbor was over there, the cat on the next block was over there. There wasn't a lot of resistance and so forth at the time. My commitment was right; at that time my commitment was right. That's what I believe in. I still believe in it now.
- L: There was a problem of knowing who the hell the enemy was. Did that lead to any kind of guilt after you came back, not knowing who you were really fighting?
- O: Yes. I pulled guard one night. I was at the rock pile up by Khe Sanh. When I say Khe Sanh, I was never there, but it's something that the American people, when you say it it rings a bell, whether they know it or not. Rock pile doesn't, but I was there. About two o'clock in the morning, they were planting mines in the road; there was a road going through the middle of our fire base, and a Marine called up and told the lieutenant he saw three movements, thirty meters out, was it okay to shoot? The lieutenant said, "No." It's two o'clock in the morning, who is the enemy? Called him up again, Mike, he said, "They are twenty meters out sir, I can distinctively see three forms, human life." Whatever, I don't know his exact words. He said, "Don't shoot." He called him a third time, "They are ten meters out." That's thirty feet if my metric is right. I don't understand metric. "Should I shoot?" He shot one off. That Marine died, got him right between the eyes. Who was the enemy? Was it the guy in the bunker or was it the Vietnamese like you wanted to save here. You know what I'm saying? You are stuck in the middle.
- L: It even went further than just not knowing if every Vietnamese you saw . . . it could even be your own people.
- O: Sure. That is third world countries. It's illiteracy and everything else. Right?
- L: Underdevelopment.
- O: It's underdevelopment, communism force, huh? If communists came in and took your father, who is an old man, took your daughter, and they tell you that you have to send your child, your other child, out there with a booby trap to save these

lives here, it doesn't leave you much choice. That's who the enemy was. I wasn't ready for that guerrilla warfare.

L: And that's the problem?

O: That's the problem. Psychologically, we weren't. Today, with a bunch of us back here, I think we're ready. We need more Calleys. I'm not saying that I believe in killing, but I believe in 2500 men who are sitting over there.

L: Go back and get them?

O: Yes. Why, again I say, why should I go back? Okay, I'll go back, but every son of a bitch here has to go too. I mean, we float California, man. We make this world take a fast spin. When everybody hits that Pacific shoreline this world takes off fast. There are so many people there. Send them a letter and say, "Hey man, we are the greatest country in the world. You are holding my prisoners and if you don't give them back to me, I'll take every damn thing you have and kill everybody too." They would do it to me. They would do it to me in a minute. They did it to their own, you don't think they would do it to me?

L: What about the frustration of . . . you're not fighting a conventional war, you say your fighting guerrilla warfare. You do in, you take a piece of ground and the next day you move back.

O: That's what I say. That firebase that I moved into, it was a U.S. fire base. I can't tell you, I could say three months, I could say six months, somebody told me at the time, okay? Military moved out. I'm not saying that they fought for that hill . . . I imagine they did fight for that hill. They bombed it. Our own bombers bombed this fire base. We had to go back in and build it up from scratch. When it was a base . . . just money. People were making money. I was firing forty, fifty, sixty thousand dollars at one gook running around the jungle with a flag, a North Vietnamese flag. Somebody is making money.

L: That is what you see the war as, a money-making project?

O: That's right. I think it was money-making, yes. A lot of, you know, the black market. Compared to the black market dollars and compared to the dollars that U.S. Steel, Republic Steel, Dow Chemical, yes, it was a money-maker. Six million a day, they said. That is what they said. We can go for more than that, I'll bet you. I'll bet you on that--eight times that.



- L: Even Robert McNamara said, "We are not making any more money. Let's get out."
- O: Still, I live in America. I love it. I'm not kidding you Mike, I love it. That is why I am sitting here talking to you, because the foundation of this country is the strongest that there is. It's the best there is. Democracy, federalism and communism, there's a ring to it. I'm not saying to take arms up against it to try and tear it down, no. It has got to be done by people like me and you. The future, if the future can hold on long enough for us to get up there and say, "Hey, we have a voice in this country and I have to come out with my voice and speak it." That's what changes it. I didn't realize it at the time because I was a soldier. I thought it had to be done by killing people. It is a good country; it just needs a few things, a few more good points added to it. It needs more patriotism, it needs . . . hey, if more have to die Mike, if we have to go back and take those guys and we have to lose a hundred thousand to bring one back, the patriotism that is there, for what America stands for, is there. That's what men die for. That's what I want to die for.
- L: Is that still frustrating you? I mean, you say we should go back no matter what it takes and get the men left over there back. Do you think that is going to stay a sore spot until they do something about it?/
- O: Yes, I do. There is no doubt in my mind.
- L: You think they are just diddly-shitting around?
- O: They say it is over money. Five and a half billion or something like that that Nixon promised them and never gave it to them.
- L: They are keeping 2400 men?
- O: Two thousand four hundred men. If they kept one, what about their families? What about their children? What about their children's children? I don't know how these people can take it. I have a hard time telling my children, "Believe in America," when America doesn't believe in their own men.
- L: They were willing to go get the hostages out.
- O: Out of Iran, yes. That was a false . . . I can't say a false thing. It was a move by Jimmy Carter to create some patriotism. I don't understand these views toward POW's. I mean, I get guilty because I don't write letters to Hanoi; I don't write letters to my congressmen. I guess I have to start doing that. Writing letters, to me Mike, is just like

that Marine calling on the phone.

L: It doesn't do any good.

O: They say it does. It has already been eighteen years for some of them. Each day that goes by, freedom loses another day. That is what we stand for, freedom.

L: You said you weren't a grunt, but did you still have enemy attacks?

O: The Lord was with me. I wasn't there three times that they got hit. Other times they hit the guys below the hill. They would come up. Today that, I have to say, as a soldier, I felt it was there every moment.

L: It's just the unpredictability of it?

O: Right, right.

L: They kept you waiting.

O: Yes, you know, they would come up and say, "Hey, we got an intelligence report, we are going to get hit tonight." They kept us on our toes, yes. I kept myself on my toes.

L: One veteran told me that they lull you into a state of apathy. They wait, and they wait, and they wait, and they don't attack. It may be a month and it may be two months. Then finally they hit you with all they got.

O: They hit us every twelve days.

L: Every twelve days?

O: You could mark it on your calendar. Every twelfth day. You know, like you said, they would throw some in between once in a while. They would make it every twelfth day and they might only send in two volumes, maybe four rounds. They might do that for . . . I was only out there for five and a half months. I saw a lot of incoming in the rear too, but that's a different story. It's a bigger base. I was in a fire base about the size of a football field. They hit pretty good. Every so often, they would all come in. What I am saying is, they would walk them over us. Then just to tease you . . . they would walk them over you, put them on, just outside of you, make you run, make you go. Then maybe the third time after that . . .

L: All hell would break loose.

O: Right on, man. Blow the guns up, blow everything up.

- L: Did this give you a survivor mentality, that all you could do was to keep your ass alive?
- O: That was instilled in me. That comes from fear. It's like if you smoke a joint you get high; if you drink enough beer you get high. You get scared enough, it's put there. I don't know if you want to call it psychosis or whatever it is, but that's instilled; that's part of fear.
- L: That comes with the terrain.
- O: Yes.
- L: Was there a lot of tension between your officers and enlisted men?
- O: They stayed the hell away. In the rear there was. In the rear, a lot of tension. In the field, they stayed the hell away. They stayed in the bunkers. Very seldom . . . they would have to come out and give orders and walk around and so forth. When I got my chance to tell them how I felt, I told them how I felt. I never thought about killing any one of them. No, not because of their lack of leadership, hell, we were in the same boat.
- L: Yes.
- O: That man might happen to hit on me. I don't study him, I study myself. He might save my life someday. I might need an extra gun.
- L: Yes, he dies just like you do.
- O: Yes. I never thought of killing one of my own men.
- L: Was the tension because of things like you were talking about, the Marine who got killed because they wouldn't give the order to fire?
- O: It was the same tension when I was on guard in the rear. If you saw something you had to call in. I had seen this in the rear. The rear is a different story. You still have to pull guard; it's a pretty secure area. That fear is there and, hey, when I pulled guard, I was up all night. I didn't pull guard for no two and a half hours of my shift. Bullshit, I'm staying up all night. Then like I said, when I got out to the field and I saw that happening . . . but the night I saw that happen, heard it happen, my truck had broke down and I had to spend, I don't know how many days out there. I had to pull guard. Then I went back to the rear for maybe three months; then I was sent out to the field. When I was out on the field on the artillery

pieces, I never pulled guard. I humped bombs.

L: There is something that they call the Short-timers Syndrome. The idea that you are there for one year and you know that all you have to do is survive 365 days and you get to go home.

O: Yes.

L: Did you get into that, the Short-timers Syndrome?

O: I wrote a poem on the plane on my way over, to my girl at the time; she is my wife now. On top of that poem I put the number thirteen. I believe the day I got there, I extended my 47 days to get out of the Army. Not that I hated the Army, it was just that I wanted to do my time, and I knew that when I got out of there . . . I figured I had better extend now because if I got too damn scared I wasn't going to do it. Maybe I didn't figure that okay? Let's not say that. I'm just . . .

L: Hypothetical.

O: Hypothetical, all right. I'm trying to pick up my vocabulary in these later years of my life. Get off that street jive a little bit. But, no, I had nine days left. I got a profile for my ears and got sent back to the rear area to change tires. I wasn't allowed to be around any loud noises and so forth, so they say. I had a medic friend of mine, from Struthers, about seven to nine miles from there. He came up and asked me one day--because he had to go up to the village, inside the DMZ; it was out of South Vietnam--to pull guard for him, because I had nine days left. I told him, "Mickey, you're crazy. You actually want me to go, when I'll be sitting home in nine days?" He said, "All I want is for you to do it for me." I went and I bought him a popsicle while we were there and he lost it. He thought it was poison. Oh, what the hell, you know what I mean? I guess I took a peek at the village. I saw the most beautiful woman-- I can't say that because of my wife. Yes, I saw a lot of beautiful women there. She was an angel. I remember that ninth day, you know what I am saying? Very . . . yes, it was Short-timers Syndrome man, but I still . . .

L: You just wanted to get out.

O: I went out and did it, yes. He asked me! I couldn't turn him down. If he felt secure, then I guess my insecurity doesn't count. Now, that's your brother; that's a soldier. He asked me. I said, "Hey, he asked me to do something and I just felt that I should do it, that's all." I had it, it was there. That's a good sign, flies in the winter.

L: Early spring.

O: You know that when you say Short-timers Syndrome, I'm not sure exactly what you are talking about.

L: The way they explain it is: You have your 365 day-tour. Now, like you said, you extended it, so that makes it like 412 days. What it consists of is when you get there, you know you have . . . in World War II you didn't know. You were there . . .

O: Yes, I felt that. Yes, I felt that going over. All I had to do is get by a year. Yes, I felt that, sure.

L: And that's what you geared yourself to?

O: That's what I geared myself . . .

L: Getting out of there when your time was up.

O: Right, there you go. Yes, you are putting yourself . . . you are psyching yourself up right there that you only got a year. That's the syndrome, right?

L: Yes, that is it. Everything else is geared to survive that year.

O: Yes. I also got that from my brother, because he had served a year before me. Do you know what I mean? He had told me, "Hey, you're going, you do your year and you're done." It was put in my head even before I joined the military; it was in my head. It's like getting it over with.

L: There was the idea that you go alone and you come home alone. How much did that hurt? You don't have any cohesiveness. I mean you don't go with the same unit. Some guys are rotating out, and you get there and five months later the guys that you work with now rotate out and some new guys come in your unit.

O: Yes.

L: Does that bother the combat soldiers?

O: I think it keeps soldiers from getting close right from the start. Number one is, I met my replacement--not the one who replaced me, but the one I replaced. I got a chance to be known that I am his replacement; I'm his boot. You know, we drank a few beers and we bullshitted. I guess it felt good to see him happy he was going home. You know, hey, I was going to do my year, that's the incentive. I was going to do my year, do my time on top

- of his. I think it was going to break down a communication between the men. That's why I tried to talk to everybody I could. I tried to bullshit with people. A lot of guys didn't.
- L: Do you lose a lack of trust because you don't know who the hell the next guy is that is coming in? I mean, you build up this relationship over such an extended period of time where you are facing this life and death situation every day; you build up a closeness, and then all of a sudden it is a new guy.
- O: The trust is gone. That is an aspect that I never really touched on. Maybe that is where . . . when I walk in and I see people and I tell them right off the bat, "Hey, I don't trust you." Maybe I didn't have . . . you know I was looking for that trust. I'm glad you brought that up. That's a good thing. I guess the sense that I was losing it was at a different angle. I couldn't figure it out; I couldn't figure out why I didn't trust people, you know what I mean? Maybe that's the reason why. Thank you.
- L: Okay, you got this quick rotation time that we talked about before. You are not allowed any decompression. Guys in World War II . . . my father was in Okinawa, and before they sent him home, he spent another two months there before they finally sent him home. It gave him time to cool his jets a little bit.
- O: Yes, go down and drink some beer.
- L: Yes.
- O: Walk around . . .
- L: Bullshit . . .
- O: Have a good time.
- L: Get laid, whatever.
- O: Yes.
- L: In Vietnam, you are home in 36 hours. Then you don't have any time at all.
- O: You are right back in the world man. It is not the same world you left.
- L: Did it scare the hell out of you?
- O: Maybe not at the time, because I was just so damned happy to be here. The fear might have been there. I think it

took a year and a half to two years to have that dwell, you know, to come onto me strong. I was just glad to be home. I was just glad to be alive. But that changed.

L: The longer you were here, the more you . . .

O: Oh yes. The longer I was here the more it changed.

L: One guy told me that he thought that maybe they should have had some kind of program, where you sit down and you talk about it. You get out some of your frustrations, some of your . . .

O: Well, they have some; they have them now, and I'm going to them.

L: Don't you think it would have been better then, though? You would think that they would have realized . . . Let's face it, you saw people die; you saw your friends die.

O: Do I think that it could have worked better then?

L: Would it have helped the adjustment? What I am trying to say is that people are taken away from you so quickly in Vietnam. Some of the guys I talked to, who were front-line troops, combat troops, combat infantry, say that one minute the guy is standing next to you talking to you, and the next minute he is in two hundred little pieces all over the place.

O: Okay, what you have to put in that aspect then is that I was in artillery. I tried to make friendships, and I told you that a lot of people didn't try. I saw people sit on the hill for ten months and never go to the rear, and never have a lot to say to anybody. It wasn't there, maybe it wasn't being offered.

L: What I'm diggin for though is the guys that you worked with directly, you would have to have some kind of camaraderie you know, comradeship. You would have to get close to them in some kind of way because you work as a unit. You function as a machine.

O: Yes, artillery, number one gun.

L: The relationships you get there and then all of a sudden, you know, you talk about the quick rotation time, some guys are going out . . .

O: It's a void then, you know what I'm saying? The void is there. He was here, today somebody else is in his place.

L: Can you relate this to interpersonal relationships with

people today? Like you are afraid that void . . . they are going to suck you right up into that void again.

O: Yes, right.

L: You are going to be left with nothing.

O: Be left with nothing again. Yes, yes. I can't handle it.

L: Does that lead to a lack of trust in people?

O: It must, because I don't trust. I don't trust my wife; I don't trust my children. No, I don't. I don't want to be lied to. I am really filled with a lot of mistrust.

L: This is all generated from what happened?

O: I would say it is. It had to be. I didn't have that before I got over there. I was not like this before I went over there.

L: Are you suffering nightmares and flash . . . you know how you said you had flashbacks--just laying in bed at night and having . . .

O: I wake up in cold sweats. You know, I can put that in the same sense. As I said, there are things that happened there when I was there that I didn't see. I don't recall my dreams. I know I don't sleep for shit unless I get good and liquored up. When I wake up the next morning I have a double-bubble on top, you know what I am saying? What didn't go through my mind or I didn't catch, I got twice as hard a hangover if you want to call it that. I don't wake up screaming and hollering. I just don't sleep. Like I said, I was in artillery; I slept under a gun that was right over my head.

L: You slept through that but you can't sleep through this?

O: I can't sleep through this; I can't sleep through the quiet.

L: Do you go out of your way, one guy told me that he . . .

O: I want to add one thing to that Mike, for ten years I never heard a car pull in the driveway; I have that dog out there. One time, about three months ago, I did hear a car pull in the driveway. It felt good. I used to be a light sleeper before I went over. I felt good when I woke up because my mind was actually on. I was ecstatic when I heard his car pull in the driveway. That was just a feeling.

L: Because you could hear it.

O: I could hear him coming in. My mind wasn't gone while I was



sleeping. I actually tuned it in to something that was going to happen. It has only happened the one night.

L: What about, as I was saying before, someone told me that he has a dreadful fear of the woods. He can't look at the woods without shuttering. He is afraid of the woods. All he relates the woods to is Vietnam. He has to stay away from them.

O: See this here?

L: Yes.

O: That is the tree line. That's my sights, I was never a grunt. I keep that just above the tree line. Keep that just above. I can't go without a hat.

L: You have got a hat on too?

O: Yes, I have to have a hat on to keep my head on.

L: That helps you?

O: It helps me with what I want to think about. What I am saying is if I am like this here . . . it's a synonym. It's a synonym for the Vietnamese. A 122 is going to get me. While I am sitting here--I don't know if you know this--I look, you know. The slightest movement, I catch it. If I don't catch it . . . a lot of times I don't catch it. I wasn't a grunt so I can't tell you about any tree line or booby traps and stuff like that there. What I'm saying is there are flashes going off in the distance. That's artillery coming in on you.

L: Don't you ever try to get away from that? Things that remind you of the war.

O: Oh yes, I go to Quebec.

L: You go for peace and quiet?

O: There is nothing there. There are no trains, boats, planes.

L: You don't have to hear anything?

O: Don't have to hear anything but the water slapping against the boat and that is it. There is nothing. You don't have to hear anything.

L: Do you feel better there than you do here?

O: Night and day. My brother went one time with me. He served in Vietnam in the sixties, in 1967 or 1968. It

was the only trip up there. He doesn't believe in delayed stress and stuff like that.

L: He adjusted?

O: So he thinks. I'll take my own, you know. We are sleeping in the boat; we both fell asleep. It was May, the end of May. The only boat on the lake, way up in the woods. A woodpecker hit the tree and hewed to get out on the right side of the boat. He went to get out that side, I went to get out of the other side. We both looked at each other like two assholes, but we didn't call each other assholes.

L: Because you knew what it was?

O: Yes. We just went back to sleep.

L: It sounded like a gunshot?

O: It was AK; same thing. If I was in a boat with a friend, I don't think I would have had that same reaction. He was a grunt. I heard the sound, but he made the first move.

L: It hit him quicker than it hit you?

O: Right, right. What I am saying is, I believe, that is fast thinking. Yes, I know he made the first move.

L: But let's say that would have been . . . let's reverse the role.

O: It could have been 122.

L: Let's say it would have been a tree falling and it sounded like . . .

O: Artillery.

L: Artillery going off . . .

O: Like it would have been a 122, I would have heard it coming.

L: You would have been the first one out?

O: Yes, I would have been the first one to move.

I was laying in bed one day, sleeping over there, and the Marines moved out. I stole a bed off of them. We were sleeping in tents and I was the only one who had a bed. I used to take pans of water like this bowl here and dump it over my head and take a shower. I had a pair of clean pants and a pair of rubber boots. I laid them beside my

bed. I got into bed. I had two pillows. I slept on one and I hugged the other one. My section chief was sitting on my foot locker at the end of my bunk. We got incoming. When I went to hit the floor, we bumped. He beat me to the floor. I came down on top of him. When I went to get up, I had my pants on, my boots on, and I was still hugging my pillow.

L: No time to even think about what you were doing?

O: I still had the pillow man. Hard to believe. I almost beat him to the floor. He was reading a newspaper. When I moved, I can thank God for this . . . he can move, like a deer throws his tail up. I was deaf, ringing in my ears, but I could hear them shooting seven or eight miles away.

L: Do you still have that acute sense of awareness?

O: Sure. I bring it upon myself. That's part of survival, like we were talking about earlier. If I am in a bar, or if I am in a place and I see something . . . I can see it before someone else. If I want to get involved in a fight, I am real quick. I haven't lost yet. If I don't want a part of it I get up and get. Sometimes I have been caught. I was too damn drunk to even know the difference. That is when you don't give a shit about anything.

L: Have you lost an interest in life on a whole? Do you think you are just here to survive?

O: I am going to this therapy that I just started, Mike. Yes, I had that, I had that for so long. I don't want it anymore. I really want to try to get something out of this lifestyle. I'm tired of existing, tired of surviving, just getting by on whatever, you know what I'm saying? Like I say, dollarwise, just getting by. But who knows what tomorrow brings? I know what I'm going to wake up like tomorrow morning. I have to fight every time I wake up.

L: It is just a constant struggle?

O: It is right there man. As soon as I get out of bed it is the whole monkey on your back. That is the truth.

L: Do you have survivor's guilt? Like maybe . . .

O: Why didn't I get it? Maybe I would be better off if I got it. Oh yes, yes. That is what leads you to suicide. Maybe I would be better off dead.

L: Have you contemplated that aspect of it?

O: I just went through, just last week. I think it is a point

in life where I try to look at all aspects of life. I try to take it to the hilt, take it for what it is worth. But if you follow that one through . . . How close can you get to tease death?

L: Push it?

O: Push it, yes! Take it to . . .

L: Try to see where you can max out.

O: Yes, shit. Take a motorcycle, walk into an all nigger bar; those guys are passing guns on you and shit. Danger, you look for it. Sometimes you are out there looking for it because you don't want it anymore. You don't want that monkey feeling when you get up in the morning.

L: Do you think you will ever be able to cope with it?

O: Yes. I have to say, "Yes." Do you understand that?

L: Oh yes, I understand that.

O: I have to say, "Yes." I am the only one who is going to do it. No, maybe I am not the only one. There are others who have to dwell on it.

L: You are the only one that can do it for yourself?

O: For myself, yes.

L: Do you find support from other vets? Have they pulled you through it?

O: Well . . .

L: Trying to help you pull you through it?

O: I think that is it. We are building a foundation, and it is on the same foundation that this country was built on. It has got to be a strong one, and I think that it is just coming to the surface now. The foundation is coming up out of the ground. I think with that support, and I hope and pray that I can help in some way, we can add another block to it. Do you know what I mean?

L: I know exactly what you mean. If you had a choice, and you were back again, in 1969, and you knew what you know now, would you have gone through the same thing again? Would you have gone to Vietnam?

O: I can't answer that honestly because I have already gone through it. There is no way that I can say yes or no. I

answered that when I said, "Get those prisoners back." If I had to go, I would go. You know, like I said, the question that you asked me there . . . in fact I cannot be honest with you; I don't believe it can be answered honestly once you have been through it, because you have to say, "No."

L: You know more now . . .

O: I would say yes. Yes, I know more now. What it is Mike, the grounds were there then, the grounds are not there now. God help us, man. People better learn.

L: War is not the answer?

O: War is not the answer.

L: Do you think the veteran is starting to be expected? Do you think people are starting to reevaluate their own misconceptions?

O: Well to answer that honestly, they are not going to accept me unless I accept myself. If I continue dragging myself down and making an asshole out of myself and following false beliefs . . . I am a drug addict, and I'm this and that; I'm that and that. They have no other choice unless I clean my act up, put my shit down, and let somebody hear it. Stand tall and be proud, and don't be scared of them.

L: Don't you think, though, that it is about time the American public faced it's own stupidity in judging somebody where they really knew that facts?

O: That's history man.

L: Don't you think history is finally coming out on the side of the vet? That they were misrepresented?

O: The vet is coming out.

L: And that is the only thing?

O: That is the only way that they can come out is if we come out and put our shit into the books, put our shit into learning, put our shit into understanding. It is not my fault that they didn't want to listen. I can't remember what you tried to say or what you tried to do. It's been ten years. It was just not there. They didn't want to listen. Do they want to listen now? I see a little bit here and there. And at first, I questioned you and you questioned me. That is what it is going to be. It is going to be a question and answer period; it is going to be communication. Communication works good, if both people get their sides in. All right, they say I was wrong, but I

was right. To me our country is suffering. It is time, but my song is not going to change, no. I was right. Sure I was right, because . . .

L: That is the way it was?

O: That is the way it was.

L: Do you think we can reach a happy medium between that? Maybe the people involved in the anti-war movement weren't wrong. But then again, you weren't wrong either, because you were . . .

O: No, maybe I'm on their side. I'd like to be on their side.

L: But they should see your side too.

O: Yes. I don't think that they did, no. You know what I am saying? Because they were into something else. I was into a war; they were into an anti-war. We still have to say that we are the greatest nation of this world. If we want to show love and understanding to the world, we have to do it with ourselves. Do you know what I am saying? Just like your children, if you don't show them love and understanding . . .

L: Your actions speak louder than words.

O: You are the role, we're the role, we are part of this world. If we don't get our shit together . . .

L: We're lost.

O: We're lost.

L: Does that go with the government too? Should they get their act together?

O: It's a government for the people, of the people, and by the people. They are out of the picture. If enough people believe, then the government will be the people.

L: Okay.

O: I wrote this down here:

"If you want to know what Nam was really like, you first must listen to a song. Then you must go and start up your fight. Someone will come to help you along, leave you standing there; you are on your own. To fight their fight and bring you back home. When you come home and start up your fight, no one will come to help you along. Everyone here hears

another song. Now a song is a song to everyone's ears. It all depends on which one you hear. My song remains the same, it will never change. God Bless America, our forefathers came. My fight is right, it can never be wrong. The truth is, I don't hear your song. I'm crazy, that is what you say. But yet you are the one who turned away. To stand up and fight for all people's rights, is it wrong? Is this your song? You question me and I question you. To me our country is suffering because of our fight. The war is not over, we continue to fight. Forget those years, I'm told. Don't dwell on the past. It is my right, look what has been cast. I don't expect you to believe just me. There are others, look around and see. We are the Americans that nobody wanted. What is it to wake up haunted? Not only of the past, also of today. For this is the world in which I returned, that so many died for. Some are still there. I can't help but wonder, does America care? All that it stands for, all that we share."

After you called me, you know, I started thinking about things. I write a lot of shit down and try to put my feelings in the shortest words that I can. I could keep writing because my war will never be over. You know, I find it hard to finish something that I write because I just want to keep going and going and going. I tried to put a reason behind it and . . .

L: Do you think that? It was excellent. You ought to try and get that published.

O: I don't know how to go about it. I was thinking about putting it into the letter to the editor or something like that, but it is kind of long to be, I don't know, you know, putting it in the newspaper or something like that.

L: No it isn't.

O: I was part ashamed man, to stand up and speak. You know what I'm saying. That was put in me, somehow, someplace. I mean I lost my pride, I hid it. I didn't lose it.

L: Suppressed it. Everybody talks about the welcome home that the vet got from World War II and even Korea. They got at least--"How you doing?" What about the lack of welcome home? How much did that hurt you?

O: Well, some of that I said in that verse right there. When I came home, I wanted to surprise my mother. I wanted to surprise everybody that I was home. I called up a friend

of mine and I asked him to pick me up at the airport. I called him from Chicago. His dad drove the car and two of my friends that I went to school with, that never served in the service, they came along. They picked me up at Youngstown Airport. I had to ride nigger. Riding nigger is three in the front, one in the back. I didn't understand it. I still don't to this day.

L: They didn't even give a shit that you were home?

O: No. I thought that maybe one was scared to get in the back seat with me or something, you know what I mean? I was crazy or something.

L: Do you think they had a distorted view of the vet as a crazy maniac?

O: No, I think what it was, was see they were both trying to hit on my babe while I was over there. I have a feeling maybe they might have gotten the word on me, you know what I mean? That is what I felt, you know, after, not right away. I didn't understand what it was at that time.

L: When you came back, did you have a lack of training for civilian jobs? Did you feel that you were ready to come back into the world?

O: I came back. I had about \$1300 in the bank and I wanted to just take it easy, try to get my head together or whatever. My mother came in the room one day, I'd only been home about two months. She had been bugging me ever since I came back to go get a job. I say, you know, make her happy. I went down to the mill, applied for a job. As luck would have it, I started at six o'clock the next morning. I found myself in a steel mill, with the steel blowing up on me. Colors were everywhere, shit flying around. Death was at each turn. I stood it for about three years and that was it. I could not take the mill anymore. I had to get out of there. Since then my feet never been without a . . .

L: Do you think that is because of reactions to combat situations? Do you get jumpy? Do you get . . .

O: Yes, yes.

L: Do you say, "I have to get the hell out of here."

O: Yes, yes. You know I had to get out of that mill and then, you know I still had other jobs that, I look at every job, safetywise first. I mean I really take life for what it is worth. Then there are times when it scares me Mike,



because I am thinking so much about the VA, the government, the world, this and that. I am out on the job and I am walking into things. Do you know what I am saying? Man, I say, "Hey, I got to get off this job." Do you know what I mean?

L: You become preoccupied.

O: I become preoccupied and the job means nothing man. I mean life means more to me than that job. For some reason what is going on in my head, it is not the job. I've walked off, hey, how many of them?

L: Did the constant exposure to life and death situations, has that affected you?

O: One hundred percent.

L: Can you fight now?

O: Shit, that's nothing.

L: You don't want to die?

O: I don't want to die.

L: That affects everything you look at, your outlook on life, your outlook on the job?

O: I try to make myself ready for it. Self, I go into myself. I prepare myself for it. Yes, it affects me, every day, every waking moment, every move that is out of place, you know. I'm not saying that it's twenty-four hours a day. If I see something that doesn't look right or I hear something that doesn't sound right, or you know, I question myself.

L: Are you jumpy? Are you still jumpy? Like you are still in a combat situation?

O: Oh yes. If I go downstairs to take a shower there are a lot of times, well not a lot of times, I'll put it as one instance, I took a shower and I got this feeling like, what if somebody was going to shoot through that window? Anything came through that window, what would my reactoin be? I look and see where the light is at, because if I am going to wash my hair and I get soap in my eyes, I want to know where to hit that light. I'm living in my home in a free country.

L: And you are still stuck.

O: Still stuck. I see flashes, you know these are flashbacks,

yes. I think about, sometimes, maybe, you know, like I was down in Florida, and I had to go down and get that van there. I smoke a joint. I saw some flashes go off in the sky. You know I was ready to hear it. I was ready to see it.

L: Ready artillery and incoming.

O: I was ready, you know, whatever there was to do. It makes no difference to me. It is still reality. It was right there. Now whether, if I would have had that, whether I smoked a doobie? I've had it lots of items when I wasn't high. You know what I am saying? What about in the shower? What about a German police dog walking around out there with nothing around her neck, checking out. Do you know what I am saying?

L: Fear.

O: Fear. She has to know you are coming. I don't have the weapon.

L: A lot of guys tell me that they gave up weapons after they came back. They used to hunt.

O: This is the only weapon I have. I can hit a tomato at about ten paces, twelve paces. I call it a man's heart. I am not perfected at it yet, but that is my means of survival. It can get me out of a situation. A knife in somebody's heart, everybody stops. Not me, I'm on the move.

L: Do you still think you have to survive?

O: I sure do.

L: You can't, I really don't know how to put this, like you can't put the survival you learned there out of your head.

O: That comes with fear Mike. I read something the other day, it said something about fear of life. If you have the fear of life or something, 3/4 of your life is gone. I try and study it for what it is worth. No, survival to me is, I have to be ready if somebody is going to get me. If I'm not ready, I'm dead. Even if nobody is out to get me, I believe I create that situation, because I don't want to be lax. Do you know what I am saying?

L: Yes.

O: If you are lax you are dead. In this world here, this one . . .

- because killing is going on everywhere and there are crazy people. I don't feel I am crazy. I'm surviving.
- L: What about the Army of South Vietnam? Do you have any resentment towards the fact that you did the fighting and they kind of sat back on their haunches and let American GI's die?
- O: Today I look at a lot of different aspects. They were assholes, they were, we can say the same and say that we tried to press an ideology on them. They weren't ready for it. That is all there is to it. They weren't ready for it, no.
- L: They didn't care?
- O: No. It wasn't within their means. It wasn't it, you know what I'm saying. I don't believe it was in their minds. They didn't have the comprehension to do it. No.
- L: They would rather you do it than they did it? They didn't have the patriotism for their country that . . .
- O: No, no, no. I never, I didn't get a chance to work for them that often. When they pulled the third Marines out, the first Marines, I'm not sure which one it was, they put an armored unit in with us. We had to put up wire, inside the wire, to keep them out, from stealing our shit. They shot mortars up that came down on top of us. I saw a couple of them shoot themselves like they were John Wayne or something like that. You know, walk out there and pull them up and shoot them.
- L: You talk about the lack of leadership? Do you think that significantly affected . . .
- O: I'm glad I got a chance to think about that. Uh, leadership. Okay as a soldier you go to fight a battle to win it. If the leaders didn't want to win it then they weren't leaders. That's what I know today; I didn't know that then. If I know it today, I guess by the few things that I read, and saw here and there and so forth, like at Vietnam, they didn't want to go there to win, so why lead?
- L: Settle for mediocrity?
- O: Yes. Who wants to lead to a nothing. A leader, he had more experience than me, more knowledge than me. He's not going to do it. It's not his fault.

L: So why should you?

O: I was disciplined as a soldier to follow orders. Military training. Draft register, they had it in the paper. Military maladjustment, misaligned or something like that. We were misled. They misled you, yes. He was right. He didn't have it in this country, he didn't have a ground to stand on.

L: Do you think the use of the high technology that we had in Napalm, the intensive bombing we did, what effect did that have on you? I mean you are killing a great number of people.

O: Did it win the war?

L: No.

O: I used to be riding down the road in an ammo truck, loaded with powder, and they would be pulling air strikes in the valley beside me. I've seen the valleys that they burned up with napalm, the night before; I've seen them dropping napalm. That was not my aspect of the war, because it was such a distance off, okay? Not a long distance. Not a close distance. My job was to get that ammo out to that gun. If I had to sit there and sight-see or think about who was killing who with that, I wasn't doing my job. I was top trouble, top man.

L: So you got detached from it?

O: I had to. I could not; killing is part of a war. I was trained.

L: Would you say you were a trained soldier or would you put it as a trained killer?

O: I was a trained soldier. That is what a soldier does. A mountain climber climbs mountains.

L: A soldier is trained to be a soldier?

O: To be a soldier. And soldiers kill or be killed.

L: Do you have a lack of, when you were there, did you get a lack of interest in humanity? I mean you began, like you didn't care anymore?

O: Yes, I got a letter right here, can I read it for you? I just want to read one part. It's the only letter that I have. This letter was written from Camp JJ Carroll on the DMZ, December 27, 1969, on a Saturday. I don't want to read the whole thing, but this letter, I told my--it was my girl-

friend at the time--wife, it says:

"Honey, if you only knew how many times I actually didn't care about one thing in the war. If you could only understand how this place makes a person. There are so many times that a man gets fed up, and just doesn't care. Honey, I know I asked you to try and understand a lot of things, mostly because I can't really understand them myself."

That is all I want to put on there.

L: And you still can't understand it?

O: Understand what Mike? Life? Reality? Survival? Trying to sort it out, trying to get by? That is part of what happened I guess. I have to say it happened and no, I still don't understand. I'm trying to understand, maybe I understood it in the first place. Maybe I understood it then. How do you . . .

L: Pinpoint that?

O: Yes.

L: Do you suffer any form of depression from all of this?

O: Lots of it. I don't think I have known a day when I haven't been. There are moments, do you know what I mean? I had a good day today. Don't ask me why. I just had a good day, I'd say.

L: Do you get depressed over what happened there or what happened when you got home?

O: It's all rolled into one ball.

L: And you can't separate it?

O: Yes, I have to separate it. What I have to say is today, is today, and try.

L: Try and make it until tomorrow?

O: Try and make it until tomorrow.

L: Do you become numb?

O: Yes. I know that numbness you are talking about. It is

not a numbness in you, it is a numbness in your mind. My ears ring a lot louder when I got . . .

L: Is that because you don't want to . . .

O: I think that if I'm trying to block something out, I am trying to pinpoint and block it. I am trying to do two things at the same time. It is either all negative thoughts or all positive thoughts. It is not . . .

L: One or the other. Everything comes crashing on you at the same time?

O: Yes. What it is, I don't know; it is a force. Go out . . . you know, I felt at times, a magnetic force has a lot to do with this world. One time in my life I felt like, well, everybody's got a magnetic force. Yes, it has a lot to do with the negative and positive feelings in my mind. Yes.

L: Are you angry? Are you angry at the way you have been treated at . . .

O: I'm thoroughly pleased. If I left anger control my life, I'm not controlling it; anger is controlling it. That is what I am trying to learn through therapy, through rapping with people. I learn from myself. No, I guess it can't. No, it is there in every person. It's just I guess by therapy and by rapping to people. They can bring things out and put them in a different light. It is not a different light. You know what I'm saying. It's something I am looking for and it is just a good feeling that somebody can tell you, "Hey, this is how it is and that's what you have been looking for." I found that since I've talked to you and you wanted to do this interview. I found it. Man, I am going to hold onto it. It won't be easy. Life isn't easy. The military isn't easy.

L: Does the anger have to do with the fact that you don't feel accepted, that you feel alienated, alone?

O: Sure. I'm alone. I said it in there, what I wrote there. Nobody wanted me. Nobody wanted to hear what I had to say. Nobody wanted to believe what I believed in. They all believed in it before I left. When I got back here, nobody believed in a thing.

L: Were you the same person when you came back?

O: Yes.

L: They had all changed?

O: They had all changed.

L: Do you have anxiety over your . . .

O: I don't understand anxiety. Do you know what I'm saying? I picked up a dictionary once and tried to look up this stuff. I've got to get a really good one. Can you explain that just a little bit, anxiety?

L: Of all the problems that you have faced since you came back, like the anger, the frustration . . .

O: They all run together.

L: Does that eat at you?

O: Yes. While I am sleeping. It will come to the point where I am walking on the job. I have to get off the job. I have to quit my job. I've got to walk away from my job. I have to, I hate to say I have to, but I don't understand the anxiety. I don't understand why it's there.

L: You have feelings, you just can't, you don't know what is motivating you.

O: Right. The control. It's hard to control when it comes up.

L: What about your relations with your family? Have they suffered?

O: Just as much as I have. They live with me every day. I'm the role model in this house. Yes. They have to, don't they?

L: So when it affects you, it affects everybody?

O: It hurts them. Especially when you know it.

L: And that hurts.

O: And you finally see it. I can change that. I hope it is not too late. You know, too much damage done. I don't believe there is. I have to believe in myself that I can make it better than what it has been, the best.

L: Do you have a hard time, making friends, making close friendships with people?

O: I chase them away.

L: Do you scare people away?

O: Sure. My brothers are scared of me. People at work, my wife is scared of me. My family is scared of me.

L: Why are they afraid of you?

O: Because I want them to be. That is what I feel now. I don't want, maybe the closeness, you know what I am saying, Mike? Nobody ever tried to understand me, so why should I try and understand anybody else? It is a constant fight.

L: This goes even into the idea that you lived with men and you saw people that you knew died, and now you are afraid of the same thing happening all over again. You built up a relationship and then . . .

O: No. When I was in Vietnam, I was fortunate that none of the men that I was with died. That is another feeling that I can't understand why I get the role. You know what I am saying, from a grunt to artillery, you know what I am saying? I feel the same with these guys. I want it to be known. I read books and they dwell on the fact of combat infantry. Okay?

L: Yes.

O: I have these feelings. Why? I don't know. They are the same.

L: You were faced with the something though. I mean you never knew what was going to happen.

O: No, it was the same. The degree of combat has a lot to do with it. I am sure of that.

L: It could be, even you know, close relationships, like friendships, are based on . . .

O: True friendships.

L: Yes, spending time, and then you have these guys rotating out and you get to know them and then all of a sudden they are gone again. You never see them again.

O: Yes, that is true.

L: Would that affect it?

O: Sure it did. Everybody that left that place was going to write back to you. They never wrote back. You can come to this country. They say they are going to look you up; they never look you up.

L: Are you afraid of that, man?

O: I went and saw them. I called them; I contacted them. No, I am not afraid of them.



L: No, I mean are you afraid that this will happen in your . . .

O: I don't know. I truthfully can't say that. Could I put a numbness there, could I put a block there? You know, I am going to have to face it. I know what you are looking for. It might have passed me by in that stage when we go back to . . . It might have passed me by at that age. That's when I basically, maybe, would have got out of it. You know what I am talking about?

L: Yes.

O: Going out of high school and going into maybe a job, or starting a home or something like that.

END OF INTERVIEW