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Interviewer: M. Downs
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Q. What is your date of birth?

A. 7/6/47

Q. Where were you born?

A. Jackson, KY

Q. How large a family do you come from?

A. Three children.

Q. What was your father's occupation?

A. He was a minister and a coal miner.

Q. Are you married?

A. Yes.

Q. Do you have any children?

A. Yes, two girls.

Q. Where are you employed?

A. Breathitt County Board of Education.

Q. Did you go to school in Jackson?

A. Partially, I went my junior year at Breathitt County, but the rest of my education was at Oakdale, a private school about six miles from Jackson.

Q. That's where you graduated?

A. Yes, I graduated in 1965.

Q. 1965 is when the American build-up in Vietnam began. When you were in high school, did you have any knowledge at all about Vietnam?

A. Well, yes, it started to come over the news quite a bit. I was aware that if you went into the service there was a good chance you might end up there.

Q. What did you do after high school?

A. I went to Pontiac, Michigan and was hired by General Motors. I worked there from August 1965 to August 1966 when I got drafted.

Q. Do you think it was fair?

A. I think the draft was fair, but I was against the amnesty program.

Q. What about around here, did you see any politics in the draft?

A. I've always felt that around here the National Guard unit selected people who had a little prestige or money and kept them from the draft. I don't have any proof, but I just have the feeling it runs like that in this area.

Q. You went in the army in 1966, were you at Ft. Knox?

A. Yes, I had basic and AIT at Ft. Knox. There was a unit formed there, 7th Squadron, 17th Air Crew, we trained for approximately 10 months before we went to Vietnam. That was the purpose of it, we knew we were going to Vietnam.

Q. What was your M.O.S.?

A. 11D40, armored intelligence specialist. More or less a scout.

- Q. You were trained as a unit and sent to Vietnam as a unit. That's contrary to the way most people went over, sent over and put in as replacements.
- A. This unit had one ground unit, D troop, and the rest were air cav, gun ships and that type thing. Our mission was to make contact, then they would pull us out and bring the infantry in.
- Q. You knew when you were taking this special training that you were going to Vietnam, did it make it better knowing ahead of time or would you rather have not known?
- A. I don't think it made any difference. I feel like you might be a little bit better prepared over a period of time. They ran us through the mill pretty good at Ft. Knox.
- Q. You went over in 1967?
- A. We went by ship in October 1967. It took about 17 days.
- Q. Where did you come in-country?
- A. Quinbon.
- Q. When you first got off the boat did you have any particular feelings?
- A. I don't know, just scared I guess. Have you heard of Hanoi Hannah? She had a radio show and we picked it up about a day before we landed and she more or less welcomed us to Vietnam. She knew we were coming.
- Q. About what was the age of your group?
- A. I was 19, which was about average. The mass of the troops were really young.
- Q. When you got to Vietnam, did the army give you any kind of indoctrination or training? Any information about the country?
- A. I don't remember the length of it, but we did get some training, at least a couple of days. Trying to give us a general idea of the country, which we had done at Ft. Knox also.
- Q. Did they tell you why Americans were involved in Vietnam?
- A. I don't recall.
- Q. Do you have any thoughts yourself?
- A. The Fourth Infantry brought us in to Pleiku which was our base camp. I remember writing home almost immediately and telling about the poverty I had seen coming in by convoy. I told mom that these people need help of some kind. I'm not sure that this was it. I wasn't anti anything, but I could see that these people were really poverty stricken. I grew up in poverty, but it was nothing like that.
- Q. What unit were you in?
- A. 7th Squadron, 17th Air Cav.
- Q. What type operations did you go on?
- A. A lot of days we would only be on stand-by. The gun ships would go out early and cover an area and if they made no contact and didn't see any need to bring us in we might sit there for 10 hours and they would airlift us back to base camp. A lot of days were spent like that. On the other hand we might be called in to trampel the bushes. We might not find anything or we might make contact. If it wasn't too sizable a force we would carry on through, but if it was they would airlift us out and bring the infantry in.

Q. Did you see very much combat?

A. I'm sure I didn't see as much as a lot of the infantry units. As far as having someone in my gunsights, I couldn't swear to that. But they have been so close, 30 to 40 feet, that you could smell them. The jungle was just so thick that you couldn't see them.

Q. When you made contact with them, was it for a short period of time, hit and run?

A. A lot of times there would be a small force of them and when we moved in they had already gone on. And sometimes they would be in bunkers or dug in the ground. It was different situations. Some times we would have Montagnards interpreters with us and if the VC were dug in we would use these interpreters to try and talk them out. If we couldn't talk them out, we would grenade them.

Q. Did you say your base camp was at Pleiku?

A. Yes.

Q. Is that the II Corp?

A. Pleiku is considered the central highlands.

Q. So you operated in a mountainous area?

A. It varied. Sometimes we would go as far as 100 miles in a day. There was no certain area. We got close to the DMZ a couple of times.

Q. When you choppered out in the morning, how long did you usually stay in the field?

A. The vast majority of the time they would fly us back in at night. I would say in the 10 months I was there I spent maybe 25-30 nights out in the field. The longest time was during Tet. We were close to Kontum. We were in a Special Forces base camp for 7 nights. That was the longest period in the field.

Q. Was that when Kontum was under seige?

A. Yes, we were in a very small base camp. They actually piled them up with dozers up there.

Q. Was that the closest call you ever had?

A. We had pretty good security, we dug trenches and bunkers. We had a few people wounded when a mortar round would actually land in the trenches. I don't think we ever had a man killed. We stayed in the bunker for the most part. If I had to say, that was probably the closest call. Except maybe for the times you knew they were close but couldn't see them. We would go in sometimes to look for the crew of a downed chopper and you knew they were really close.

Q. What kind of a weapon did you carry?

A. When I first went over I had a 45 and a M-79 grenade launcher and I felt like I might as well have a big stick. And I let them know that.

Q. You didn't care for the M-79?

A. It wasn't long before I got an M-16.

Q. What did you think of the M-16?

A. I loved it. It was a sweet little weapon.

Q. We are really getting different opinions about the M-16, some really liked it and others complained about it jamming?

A. Of course when you're in the field, you have to clean the weapon, especially when your life is at stake. What I liked about it was that it was so light.

- Q. Do you think it was a great disadvantage in not knowing the country very well?
- A. Well, no. I know the Vietnamese knew it better than we ever would, but I felt that after you were there a few days you got orientated to it pretty well.
- Q. Do you spend your entire time going on these airlifts?
- A. We did have some jeeps and 2½ ton trucks. About six weeks before I came home we convoyed over to the Bammetuot area, 100 miles south. Did work from a convoy type thing. We had quite a bit of contact getting down there. It was the rainy season. By the time we got out base camp set up it was a pretty messy situation to work from. Regardless of what we were doing we always had these other troops with gun ships. We always had support except occasionally we went on five man patrols for two days. But you still had your radio and you could call in the gunships.
- Q. Did you think you were accomplishing anything? There was a lot of criticism of the "search and destroy" strategy. It seemed so useless to clean an area out and then go off and leave it. Did you have that feeling?
- A. Well, yes. After all's said and done. . . I said earlier that those people needed help, but I don't think they got it. The Communists took it over so I know they didn't. We just got fifty thousand men killed.
- Q. What do you think we could have done differently?
- A. The only thing I can see that we could have done different militarily is to come down harder and completely wiped out the north. Of course we may have risked trouble with the Russians and Chinese.
- Q. Some people have said that we should have concentrated more on the north instead of continuing with these search and destroy missions.
- A. So what if you killed a handful of men, the rest of them were raring to go the next day.
- Q. Did you ever know who the enemy really was?
- A. A lot of times, no. These people in the towns who were friendly to you during the day and they would be trying to get you at night. That was a common feeling.
- Q. Did you have much contact with the Vietnamese people?
- A. Actually the Montagnards, the village type.
- Q. What were they like, primitive?
- A. Yeah, everything bamboo. They didn't have the features of the Vietnamese. More like a dark-skinned American or Indian. There was a lot of them in our area.
- Q. What about the ARVN's?
- A. We worked with them on a few occasions. As a matter of fact we were crossing a field on day and they were dug in and started shooting at us, they didn't know who we were. Fortunately they didn't hit anybody. They weren't trained to the extent they should have been. I don't know who's fault that was.
- Q. Do you think the people over there really cared one way or another?
- A. What little contact I had with them it seems that the money they could get out of us was more important to them than the war. Of course I wasn't able to communicate with them so I really couldn't say what the mass of the people thought.
- A. Of course when your 11: anything or we might make carry on through, but if entry in.

- Q. But you think a lot of them saw the opportunity to make a dollar?
- A. They would sell us Cokes for fifty cents, and at that time that was a pretty good price.
- Q. You hear a lot about drug abuse, was that a problem?
- A. Yes, it was in our outfit. I must have been real ignorant in high school, because I never heard of marijuana until I got over there. I didn't even know such a thing existed, I really didn't. But I could find it out real quick over there. They would sell marijuana cheaper than Cokes. We had five or six guys who got caught smoking it in the bunker one night and they all got sent to the brig for six months.
- Q. Was that back in base camp?
- A. Yes, it was in base camp.
- Q. What about out in the field?
- A. Not a lot. I never participated myself. Of course they could have been in little groups, but I didn't notice. I think it was mostly in base camp.
- Q. Did you have many blacks in your group?
- A. We had several. I don't know what the ratio was, probably a fourth or fifth.
- Q. Did you have any trouble with them?
- A. We did have a couple of skirmishes on base camp. One of the black guys we had was from Dayton, Ohio. Around base camp he was what I would consider a poor soldier. He was very much pro-marijuana. But in the field you couldn't ask for a better machine gunner.
- Q. How would you evaluate the officers? How old were they?
- A. The major who trained with us at Ft. Knox was 38. But he left us shortly after we got to Vietnam. That put our training officer in charge, who I had driven for at Ft. Knox. That put me in a different situation, because all I had done at Ft. Knox was drive him around. He was very educated.
- Q. A lot of people have said our officers weren't trained well enough for the situation they were put in.
- A. I don't believe he had been there before. But he had had such tremendous training and was a college graduate. I think he was about 28. On the other hand as you go on down the line, your 2nd Lts., we had a couple of them come in and I didn't feel safe with them.
- Q. Did you correspond much with the people back here?
- A. I didn't read many papers. I wrote my family, but not as much as they thought I should. My wife, or the woman who became my wife 10 days after I got home, I wrote her quite a bit.
- Q. Were you aware that people back home were turning against the war?
- A. I was to a certain extent. We had a radio station that we could listen to. We heard some of the news. People thought we were spending too much money and losing too many lives for what we were getting out of it.
- Q. When you came back to the states, when was that?
- A. I just had 10 months left when I went over there, so I came back in August, 1968, and I got out.

Q. Did you have any trouble readjusting?

A. Not really. Like I said I got married 10 days after I got back. General Motors was like a lot of corporations, they let your seniority go on while you were in the service. In October we went back to Michigan and I went back to the same job I had. We stayed there until May, 1970, and then came back here. I got a late start but I went to college and got my teaching degree.

Q. You went to Morehead.

A. Yes.

Q. What was your major?

A. I majored in history and minored in geography.

Q. You graduated in 1974?

A. Yes.

Q. Did you stay at Morehead?

A. Well, there was a teachers aid program that formed in this county. There were three counties in the state that had it. It was called COP, Career Opportunities Program. They preferred veterans. It was set up to work as an aid in the school and go to college at night and in the summer. We went on campus in the summer and we had to commute some nights and some nights they would come here. I guess it took me 4 years and one summer. We did stay there for one semester on campus other than the summer.

Q. You've had about 15 years to think about it, do you think our involvement in Vietnam was a mistake?

A. As far as I know, there's not a democratic type of government there now. Apparently that's what they said we were there for. If it hasn't happened, then we didn't accomplish anything.

Q. Why did we fail?

A. It has to go back further than the troops or soldiers. To the people who make decisions, congress or whatever.

Q. You mentioned earlier that we should have been in the north fighting, do you think our strategy was wrong?

A. I guess that would be summarization. There should have been a different strategy if we really meant business.

Q. Do you see a parallel between Vietnam and our situation in El Salvador and Lebanon?

A. I guess maybe we have more in the future that we need. Lebanon is the center of oil country where in Vietnam it was just the idea of democracy versus communism, which is still in Lebanon too but there is some other things involved.

Q. Do you think 2 thousand marines can really make a difference?

A. When there is a civil war in a country, like there was here from 1861-1865, what can another country do about it. It has to start with a few individuals, a few great leaders, which those people apparently don't have, and the people can start following them and then possibly another country can come to their aid. I think there is possibly more derogatory feeling by the people toward us than anything else.

- Q. Do you agree with Reagan's strategy of placing more emphasis on nuclear weapons than conventional forces?
- A. Probably not. If we go to a world war there's been enough inventions that each side can take care of itself. There's no doubt that we've got enough in reserve that each side could leave no living soul on the earth. Why pursue that type of thing any more.
- Q. What about the security of the nation? Do you think the volunteer army is sufficient or do we need a draft?
- A. I think every person, every male, when they reach a certain age should have to go for at least basic training, if not AIT training. Anywhere from 2 to 4 months. And then, the ones that wanted to stay could, and the others could go home. But if they were needed in 2 or 3 years, at least they would have a head start.
- Q. Do you think the army was a positive influence on you?
- A. The two years, I was in all I looked forward to was the day I would get out. As I look back now, I don't know if I wouldn't have been just as well off if I had made it a career. I think it is an excellent opportunity for a lot of young people today. Of course some people think they may lose their life and that automatically turns them away from it, regardless of the pluses.
- Q. Do you think the army better prepared you for life?
- A. I don't think the army hurt me in any way that I can think of. There were more pluses than minuses.
- Q. You got your degree in 1974, what happened then?
- A. I had worked as an aid for 5 years and I had gotten my fill of classrooms, what with all my classes at Morehead. I decided I didn't want to be a school teacher. I got a job with a coal company. It was a small company and they got wiped out. I bought a truck and hauled coal for a while. That fell through. By having a degree I got a job with community services administering federal programs, teaching high school drop-outs. I worked at Lees College for a year on a federal program. They finally gave out and I was almost out of a job. I worked at a meat cutting job and I liked that about as well as anything I ever did. Finally, you know how politics is in Breathitt County, you have to know somebody before you can even get in the system. I finally got hired-in-1980. At the end of that year they had to cut back 15 teachers, so for a couple of years I substituted a little and drew unemployment. This past year I got hired again and hopefully they won't have any more cutbacks and I'll get to stay with it.
- Q. Do you feel you got a decent education at Morehead?
- A. Yes, for what I came for. I feel you learn more by being in the classroom than you do in college. There's classes that help you, no doubt about that, but I feel there should be more emphasis on classroom situations, for teachers especially early in college before you complete 4 years to see if this person can be a teacher. That way a person won't go through 4 years of college and then find out they are not suited to teach. I was an aid to a girl who had just got out of college and the only reason the principle had me in there was to keep the kids from throwing her out the window. She had no form of discipline whatever. All I did was keep order.
- Q. Would you be in favor of a Vietnam Veterans memorial at MSU?
- A. It wouldn't affect me one way or another.
- Q. Have you joined any veteran organizations?
- A. No.

