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Interviewer: M. Downs
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354

- Q. What is your date of birth?
A. October 28, 1950.
- Q. Where were you born?
A. Lexington, KY
- Q. How large a family do you come from?
A. I have one sister.
- Q. What was your father's occupation?
A. He was assistant director of Forestry at Houston, KY.
- Q. Are you married?
A. Yes
- Q. Do you have any children?
A. One child
- Q. Where are you employed?
A. Breathitt County Board of Education, as a teacher.
- Q. Did you grow up in Breathitt County?
A. My family moved here from Lexington in 1955 and I've been here since.
- Q. What year did you graduate?
A. I graduated from Breathitt County High School in 1968.
- Q. Were you aware of the Vietnam War at the time of your graduation?
A. Yes I was, very aware of it. I was getting ready to come of age. All through high school you dreaded to come of age because you knew that was there.
- Q. Was there quite a bit of talk about it in school?
A. Not a whole lot. It was there but nobody talked about it. It was constantly on the news.
- Q. What did you do after your graduation?
A. I went to Castleton farm in Lexington and worked as a horseman up until Jan. 20, 1969. First I went to Swift Meatpacking Plant. My uncle worked there and I got a job there right after high school and then I went to Castleton.
- Q. Were you drafted in January 1969?
A. I was drafted in November and they were going to take me in February so I went ahead and volunteered for the draft in the Marine Corp.
- Q. Why did you go ahead and volunteer?
A. I knew there wasn't any way to get out of it. I had already been to the induction center for my physical. I had a history in my family on my mother's side, a lot of them had been in the marines.

- Q. Do you think the draft was fair?
 A. No, it wasn't. They weren't taking everybody. Some of them would get on the milk truck. Of course Breathitt County has a history of putting out their share for the army but I had some friends who got out of the draft one way or the other they were sick or weren't sick and still got out of it. Of course it wasn't as bad as a lot of people said but there were some guys who should have gone and didn't, some who were a lot healthier than I was.
- Q. Do you resent the fact that some didn't go?
 A. No, I did what my country ask of me. I kind of resent that some people with money didn't want to do for their country.
- Q. Where did you take your training?
 A. San Diego, California. Boot camp was 13 weeks then I had 2 weeks PIT at Camp Pendleton. Then I got a 30 day leave and went back to a staging battalion. I got orders for Westpac right out of boot camp. That's where a little more politics got involved. It wasn't as bad in the Marines as it was the army. If you were a marine you figured sooner or later you would get WESTPAC orders. We had 60 men in our platoon and about 55 got orders for WESTPAC. Some of them were going to Quantico, Virginia for OTS and a couple of them got in the band. I even tried to get in the band.
- Q. You found out fairly early then that you would be going to Vietnam?
 A. Well, it never really dawned on me. But after a couple of weeks, I found out what I would be doing. At the time that's what they were training the Marines for. You knew you were going to Vietnam. But you didn't know what you were getting into, whether you were going to be a ground pounder or in maintenance or aviation.
- Q. What was your m.o.s.?
 A. My m.o.s. was 5500, that was motor vehicles. It could be a mechanic or truck driver or whatever. Basically in the marines they train you to be a grunt.
- Q. When did you go to Vietnam?
 A. I think it was July 13, 1969. I came back in August 1970.
- Q. Where did you come in country?
 A. I landed at Danany. The processing center for the Marines was there. We first went to Okinawa. I stayed there for 7 days. That's where you found out what your m.o.s. really was. If you were a grunt you got sent on an LSD on down the coast. If you had a critical m.o.s. they would fly you in.
- Q. Did you go over as part of a unit?
 A. No. We were sent over as replacements.
- Q. That's been one of the criticisms, you weren't part of a unit and there wasn't that closeness like during World War II.
 A. There were 3 of us who had been together in the same platoon. One was from Lexington and another was from Texas. One of them didn't make it back.

- Q. When you first set foot over there, were there any particular thoughts that went through your mind?
- A. I didn't think too much about it until we flew between those 2 mountains and saw the villages. I thought then that I was in another world. That didn't really get me so bad there but then they sent me, they couldn't find my unit. They sent me to Quang Tri. When I got on that C-130 with no windows, I said I'm definitely in another world. You didn't have no field gear, you didn't even have a damn weapon. We landed on that LZ and it was tore all to pieces and we didn't even have a weapon. All I had was my travel clothes. They made a mistake. They were supposed to send me to Chu Lai and they sent me to Quang Tri. That was a division mistake, they didn't even know where the unit was.
- Q. What was the age of most of the guys you were with?
- A. About 18 or 19. That was replacements. Once you got to your unit most of the E-5's were in their thirties. The officers were young.
- Q. Here you are 18 or 19, 12,000 miles from home, you don't know anybody. It was kind of bewildering, wasn't it?
- A. Well, like you say, you only knew 2 or 3 guys. They sent us to the 9th Engineer Battalion, and then the 3 of us got separated.
- Q. What unit did you finally end up in?
- A. Charlie company, 9th Engineer Battalion. That was something different in the Marine Corp., they had never had any engineers until the Vietnam War.
- Q. When you first got there, did you get any kind of indoctrination program?
- A. No, when we to battalion headquarters they just sent us on to where we were going to.
- Q. Had they given you any before that?
- A. At the staging battalion, jungle warfare training.
- Q. Did they give you any history of the involvement there?
- A. That was done in one week at the staging battalion, at Camp Pendleton, Calif.
- Q. Did you have any idea why American Marines were in Vietnam?
- A. No, we just followed orders.
- Q. Did you see any combat?
- A. A little bit, quite a bit. We were engineers, our main function was to build QL1, Highway One, which was nothing but rice paddies at that time. We also pulled long range LRAP runs, where we were a reactionary runs. I was on the reactionary force. They may pull you out and send you to Quang Tri for 2 weeks.
- Q. You didn't have a set routine did you?
- A. No, our main job was to build Highway One. All the truck drivers would haul dirt from Chu Lai to Highway One, it was eighty some miles we were responsible for. The engineer platoon would build the bridges and guard them but you might get pulled out for a reactionary force to Khe Sank, Plecku. When the 26th Engineers got overrun at Khe Sank we had to go up there.

- Q. You got stuck with anything that needed done.
- A. Anything, all the dirty work.
- Q. How long were you in the field at any one period?
- A. No longer than 2 weeks. The companies would trade us around. Charlie company got stuck out for a month one time but I wasn't with them that time. That's when all those reactionary teams came across from Laos, NVA. The NVA usually didn't get that far south. We went to Phu Bai and stayed three weeks building an L2.
- Q. Do you remember any close calls?
- A. Yeah, our biggest dread was mines. I was making supply runs one time in a 10-ton tractor and hit an anti-tank mine. I spent 7 days in the hospital. I never did worry much on patrols. I carried an M-79 and I could take care of myself out there.
- Q. I was going to ask you what types of weapons you carried.
- A. I had an M-16 but when I went on patrol I made sure I got the M-79. You could fire it at point blank range.
- Q. A lot of people didn't like the M-79 because of the weight.
- A. You carried a lot of weight but you had a lot of fire power.
- Q. What's your opinion of the M-16?
- A. The thing I didn't like was that we were trained on the M-14 and then when we got over there they handed us an M-16. I never did get that thing zeroed in while I was there. Now that I'm in the Guard, I think its one of the finest weapons. One of the problems is that we were lax with our equipment, it was muddy and nasty. It was a hard job to keep it clean and we were worried about other things.
- Q. When you made contact with the enemy was it a short fire fight?
- A. Yes, the NVA hardly made it down that far and the VC would just hit and they would be gone. But when the NVA did hit us it would be a little longer.
- Q. Do you think it was a big disadvantage in not knowing the area very well?
- A. My problem was that I didn't know how to read a map and you go out in a rice paddy and they all look alike. Of course we knew that one trail around our camp but papa son had holes dug all over the place.
- Q. Did you have any restrictions?
- A. When we were on patrol we could fire at the NVA any time we found them, but we couldn't shoot at the VC unless we were fired upon. Once they fired we could let them have it. We had Tam Key, a small village, 20 miles from Chu Lai. I think when I was there they blew the bridge up about ten times.
- Q. Would you keep building it back?
- A. We'd build it back and they would blow it up again in about a month. One month they blew it up 3 times. We put in a float bridge, a baby bridge and finally a timber tressel bridge and they blew all of them up. It was a river about like the Kentucky and they could float stuff down and blow it up.

- Q. That's about like the search and destroy, you would clean out an area and then go off and leave it. Did it do any good?
- A. No, I'll tell you what, there was a lot of innocent people killed doing those things. We didn't know what we was doing. Jungle warfare. Our military forces are not qualified right now to fight any country.
- Q. You think we did a lot of destroying that we didn't have to do?
- A. We didn't need to do it.
- Q. What do you think caused it, frustration?
- A. Frustration. We didn't do as much as those cav units. The Americal Division had their headquarters there at Chu Lai and they would do a lot of destroying with those helicopters. Might have created us more problems than we had to begin with. It turned people against you.
- Q. They came to dislike us as much as the French?
- A. Yes. Of course I didn't know at the time. I was there to do a mission, stay alive and follow orders and do what I was supposed to do.
- Q. When you were sent over you knew when you were coming back.
- A. You just wanted to strive for that date, you started about the week after you got there. You were going to get out of there one way or another. We had a lot of mental problems, too. Racial problems in the units.
- Q. Did you have a lot of blacks?
- A. The Marine Corp at that time was about 40% black. Probably 60% or 70% now. We had one major problem. The blacks and whites were constantly heckling each other. All the time I was there. I always tried to get along with everybody, I was raised as an old country boy. We had some pretty good black boys. We had some souther boys in our unit, Mississippi, Alabama, and the blacks were from the North, Chicago. That was a mess up in processing. I think that should have been handled in military intelligence. They may have learned from that.
- Q. Did the trouble carry over into the field?
- A. No that was mostly in base camp. The main problem we had was that there was about 10-15 black guys in the PX causing problems. Somebody dropped a satchel charge in the PX with everybody in it. They brought in MI people, military intelligence, and they interrogated a lot of people. I had a month left and I was glad to get.
- Q. That was at Chu Lai?
- A. Yes. the marines had a policy that after 10 months they would let you go back to base camp.
- Q. Did you see much drug abuse?
- A. I saw a lot of pot but I didn't see any hard drugs. It was a problem. They stayed back in base camp, too. When you went in the field you wanted a pretty straight guy, you didn't want anybody messed up.

- Q. Do you think idleness caused it?
- A. No, I think it was pressure. When a guy got back he just wanted to get things off his mind. It was either drugs or alcohol.
- Q. Do you think some of these people were doing this type of thing before they came over?
- A. Probably so. In high school I don't ever remember seeing a marijuana cigarette. I never saw one until I got to Vietnam.
- Q. What about your immediate officers?
- A. Most of them were 18 or 19 like myself. They didn't know their job. I think that goes back to World War II, you took whole units and the officers were well trained and knew their men. The older lts were pretty good, they tried to take care of their men. We had one from Lexington, a platoon sergeant.
- Q. Did you correspond much with your family or get any hometown papers?
- A. My mother.
- Q. I was wondering if you were aware that people at home were turning against the war?
- A. No, I wasn't.
- Q. As you look back now, did we have any business over there? Were we in a no-win situation?
- A. I think we lost a lot of respect as a country by being there. We probably had business there but we should have done the job while we were there. And we shouldn't have taken 10 years to do it. That's why we lost a lot of respect. You've got the same situation in Beirut right now. I think if we're going to be there they ought to do the job they're sent there to do instead of just being sitting ducks.
- Q. Do you think we're getting in the same situation in Lebanon that we were in Vietnam?
- A. It's not as big an area but it's basically the same situation. I think we're going to have to prove something to the world that we're not going to stand for that. And too, you can't go into a place like Beirut and change things overnight. They have been fighting there since the Bible was written. We probably don't have any business there. I'm not saying whether we do or don't, but it looks like if we're going to do something, we'd do it.
- Q. If you were to name one reason why we lost in Vietnam, would you blame it on bad strategy?
- A. I would have to blame it on Congress. I think Congress didn't give us the support and turn us loose. They didn't even know why we were there. I think we should have been pulled out a long time before we did. If a country asks for help, like Grenada, let's go do it, let's don't piddle around, let's go in there and clean it out. But you have to have a total commitment from the factions there, you can't get one militant group asking for help. I think that's what happened in Vietnam, the staff Vietnamese wasn't a stable government. I think Johnson got involved with the wrong group, a militant group.

- Q. Do you think that's one of the problems in Lebanon, there's so many factions that you don't know who you're dealing with?
- A. That's right. I think that's what happened to us.
- Q. When did you come back from Vietnam?
- A. August, 1970.
- Q. When you went in the service, how many years did you have to serve?
- A. Two years. That's the reason I volunteered for the draft.
- Q. When you came back to the states, did you have some army time left?
- A. Yes, I stayed until January, 1971.
- Q. Where were you?
- A. Camp LeJune. That was odd because they put me in a job that I wasn't qualified for. I got a 40-day leave and when I reported back they sent me to the MP's and they made me a court observer. They had what they called a kangaroo court in Jackson and I would sit in the jail at night and observe what they were doing to the marines, if they were being treated right. I'm no lawyer. I don't know what their rights are. And I would report to the Provost Marshall the next day if I thought anything was wrong. Then I would go to court and listen to their cases. I thought that's really taking care of the troops. Of course, it was a good job for me. I enjoyed it.
- Q. Did you do that the rest of your time?
- A. Yes, until Jan 15.
- Q. Did you have any trouble readjusting to home life?
- A. Yeah, you had a chip on your shoulder. People didn't care where you had been.
- Q. How did others treat you?
- A. I stayed in Jackson for two weeks and then went back to Castleton farm to work. I wasn't happy there. I worked up till April and I happened to be in Jackson one day and they had a program called COP. I talked with some veterans and I got on the program. It was a challenge to me. It was something I wanted to do out of high school, go to college. It was a challenge so I tackled it. I guess that really helped me adjust. It gave me something to do, it was a challenge to me. Actually I wasn't doing too bad. I was getting veteran's pay and the program was paying me a hundred dollars a month. I thought it was a good program. It was initially created as a teacher's aid for low income people and they worked it around where they got veterans on it. It was a poverty program initially. The chance to get an education. We were a teacher's aid and went to school at night.
- Q. What year did you start on the program?
- A. 1971. I got married on June 4 and I started summer school that summer. It was intersession. I took 10 hours that summer.

- Q. Do you think you would have gone to Morehead if it hadn't been for that program?
- A. Well yes, after I got married I would have eventually went, probably not to Morehead, but to Lees here in the county. It was closer and my wife was working for the soil conservation. I probably would have taken 3 or 4 hours, whatever I could.
- Q. A lot of veterans have said they wouldn't even have attempted to go to college if it hadn't of been for the G.I. bill.
- A. That was the big thing. Actually it was a pretty good thing. I think I started out at \$375 and that was pretty good money then. It went a little farther than a dollar does now. You didn't save anything but you had a little money in your pocket after you paid for your courses.
- Q. What did you major in at Morehead?
- A. Education. I got my BA in 1974 in education and didn't stop until I got my Masters in education. I got my rank I.
- Q. What do you teach?
- A. I teach the 6th grade.
- Q. Obviously your education has been a big help to you.
- A. Yes. I probably would have gone in the coal business if I didn't have it and might have made more money but it's been a help to me. Coal isn't going to be around forever.
- Q. How would you evaluate your education at Morehead?
- A. I like self-evaluation. I think a man will give himself a harder evaluation than anyone else. I'd like to say that I'm one of the best teachers in the county and I was taught to be one through the Morehead program.
- Q. Do you think one of the problems with education is interference?
- A. Yes. There is problems but you're not going to change them overnight. One of the biggest problems is that you've got too many children in one place. Too centralized. When you take children out of the community you take the parents out of the program. It's not as easy to go talk with the teachers as when you had a school in your own community.
- Q. Do you feel we are as secure with the volunteer army as we were with the draft?
- A. No I don't. But people have overlooked the fact that the Guard and Reserves are made up of veterans. People don't realize that maybe we've got a better reserve and guard force than we do a regular army. We're getting some top graduates in the guards. That makes a strong unit when you've got people with experience.
- Q. What about the draft, do you think we need it?
- A. I think we need the draft but it would be pretty hard to get it.