

## Interview with Grant Furnas

Furnas: The platoon moving up to reinforces was commanded by 2nd Lieutenant Joe Hooper. Hooper had been a staff sergeant in the 68 battle jet offensive in a way. He just about single handedly was the guy who the Citadel in a way was held for about 25 days by the vietcong and the North Vietnamese. Then Sergeant Hooper hold had just about single handedly been responsible for retaking the Citadel from the North Vietnamese. And I read his citation for what he did and he unbelievably killed 21 enemy soldiers in the process of doing this and some were high ranked North Vietnamese officers in this command post. He would start out with an American weapon and eventually ran out of Ammo and jammed and every soul, everyone of these North Vietnamese he killed what ever their weapon was he would grab it and use that until that wouldn't work. He was wounded four or five times that day. But anyway he was awarded the Congressional Medal of honor, was decorated by Nixon at the White House and Hooper commanded the platoon that moved up to the reinforces and he was a different breed he was a career soldier and he was a ....Maybe I shouldn't say this with this interview but I, and maybe it wouldn't bother Hooper, If I, I don't even know where he is now, if he's even still alive. But I would say that Lieutenant Hooper was a guy who was well suited for combat. And I don't know what else he could do in life But he was the kind of guy that America needs in a situation. He was kind of a John Wayne and a Sergeant York all rolled into one, you know. But anyway he moved up to reinforces and we got out of there. That night, the previous night I'd gone to bed thinking that I was in a campground, a national park when I went to bed that night we had to get out of the area so quick we'd even have to leave our rough sacks there and just take nothing but our grenades, our weapons and ammo and that night it had started raining at around nine or so and I was laying there and it was cold and I was soaking wet and it was dark. And right next to me wrapped up in one poncho was that dead North Vietnamese soldier literally laying right next to me. On the other side of me was the dead South Vietnamese sergeant and there were several other dead that we'd taken out of there with us. In fact, I'm thinking we might have even left a few of the dead in the site. Maybe we did, maybe we didn't. We got them the next morning.

Ernst: How many was left? How many individuals?

Furnas: Well of the seventeen, I think there were three killed. Uh, twelve wounded and myself and the Vietnamese Lieutenant were not wounded. All of the Americans wounded, no Americans dead all the Americans killed in the contact or I mean wounded in the contact were minor wounds. All of their wounds, except one, did not require evacuation. The guy who did get evacuated to the states and we never saw him again. It was not a serious wound, as the matter of the fact as he was taken out of there on a medivac helicopter he was laughing and flashing us the V sign and he knew the war was over for him. And he was headed to Hawaii. And it would be a wound he would recover from literally in a couple of months with no permanent injuries. But as I lay there that night and my pillow was a rock. I said the most heart felt prayer I've ever said in my life. And I realize I was just right in the middle of something real nasty and the next morning the group of us moved after we medivaced the dead and had gotten

the wounded out of there, some of the wounded we had gotten out the night before. But the next morning we went to the contact site then we moved about 100 meters beyond that and we found out what we had stumbled onto it was a major weigh station, it had a hospital, a jungle hospital complex equipped with Russian and polish surgical equipment and instruments. It had a cemetery. It had a mess hall; I mean it was a major weigh station. Really I think what had happened the night before that unit that was hitting us and keeping us at bay was doing that so they could clear out of the weigh station and get out of there. Which they did and they left nobody behind. But as we were moving, we were searching it. We spent the morning searching it and walking through it and all that I was with this Lieutenant Hooper and his radio operator walking on one trail in this big complex and all of the sudden Hooper said, "Freeze!" I looked down and he had stepped over because he was kind of tall. And he had told me later he kind of had the habit of high stepping in an area like that. He had stepped over a booby trap right in the trail of tripwire. I looked over in this scrub brush and there was this 60 mm mortar round that was wired to that. And how Hooper didn't trip it I don't know. But he looked back at me and said go ahead and disarm it. Well in the states you're trained to blow them in place and I said, "Well don't you think we ought to blow them in place?" "Doubt we'd have time, go ahead and disarm it." I said, " Well lets blow it in place because disarming was dangerous." I mean because sometimes they would reverse the firing mechanism so the disarming process would detonate it. And so I said, "let's blow it in place." Don't have time. And so he turned around and started disarming the thing while myself and the radio operator stood there watching him. We couldn't believe our eyes that he was doing it. We didn't want to take off running. we would have looked like a couple of old women, so we had to stand there with in three feet while this idiot disarmed this booby trap. And he disarmed it and nothing happened. The radio operator within a few days after that his time was up in the field. He got a job with the rear area as the manager of the rear area officer NCO club. And the neat thing about that was anytime I was in the rear area for the next several months until that guy went back to the states I never had to pay for a beer or a soft drink or a hamburger or anything. Because when I would go in there, I would sit down at the bar and who ever was in there this guy would want to tell the story about the time this other idiot had about gotten us killed disarming the booby trap. But that was the first contact with enemy and a real eye opener.

Ernst: You can continue if there is anything you want to say.

Furnas: How much longer?

Ernst: As long as you want. I still have a number of questions to ask you. It is up to you; you got the time.

Furnas: There was an experience that happened over there that I might mention and I think it's; to me it was very interesting. And it brought some closure to me. A month or two after that. And I can't remember the time. And it's not so important. But one morning myself and a group of about six guys we were on a mission and we had started the mission in the middle

of the night moving along an old French road. The mission was to go along this old French road deep into the mountains to an old french resort and reckon what it was being used for; it was being used by the enemy. And then there was this big steel suspension bridge over this gorge and we were going to cross back over the bridge below the bridge. You know because it was one easy access into the district we were working in and we started the mission off very gung-ho, nice, neat commando mission. A lot of fun. And we moved all night long sat up around four in the morning and we were going to sleep for a few hours then move out. But when we got up around six or seven to move out we had lost our ambition. We said lets just stay here for a few hours and drink coffee. Some of them wanted to sleep some more. I was writing a letter to my wife or fiance and at about 7:30 there was a loud explosion we were in the jungle out from the road and on the road there was a large explosion. We had put what was called a mechanical ambush out there and GI's would take claymore mines and wire them with trip wires and batteries. And set up something so when the wire was tripped it would close the circuit and blow the directional mine. We had one of those set up out there. And when it blew we were deep in the mountains but still wood cutters would sometimes be up in there but of course my first reaction was that it was a group of wood cutters. Three of us started running through the jungle which was maybe 25 meters or so but when we got to this clearing we started talking fire and it was a patrol of NVA soldiers about as many as us. One of them was mortally wounded and died, but he was still returning fire. The others were able to get out of there. We captured this guy he died about 20 minutes after contact, but he had a rucksack and we started going through his papers. And the first thing the guy had a big thick plastic pouch with poems and letters and a diary that he had been keeping. And that was kind of fascinating. And our Kit Carson scout was interpreting this stuff and some of these were love letters from his girlfriend in Hai Phong and the scout. And here's this guy who just died, legs blown off, shot in the chest several times and he was a guy in his mid 20's maybe. And you felt sorry for him. I mean I did, I never could see I mean he is a guy just like me that was just wound up in his situation. And I felt sorry for him but this Kit Carson scout thought it was comical and he started reading these poems and the love letters from his girlfriend in Hai Phong. He was translating as best he could; it was something like you are my butterfly and you have flown away, you must fly back to me and all that. And laughing right there on the spot this poor guy dead and that was kind of sad to me. But the guy had a map in his pouch. And it was an American Military Map. And it was of this area we were in, And he had a bunch of red dots plotted on that map. And we sent that stuff back to battalion headquarters and they immediately started sending units of our battalion out to these red dots. They sent one platoon and it was commanded by Lieutenant Jim Saxon from Gwenburg, Maryland. And Lieutenant Saxon was a young guy, married and I think he had a young child in the states. I had gone to OCS with him, All-American boy, I think he had been a small college quarter back. But just a neat guy and we were just good friends. he had took his unit out to one of these red dots. We went out to one of these red dots and it turned out to be that they were Vietcong locations. And this guy that we killed was a NVA soldier but his group was coming into this area. We found out later that they were to make contact with these Vietcong units and

set about and disrupt the district and province elections coming up in a month or so. But started going to these dots. The one we went to and that thick jungle terrain and it's hard to understand how this could happen but the six of us literally had been moving for three days through this mountain valley along a stream bed a good bit of that way. And there was a rock maybe the size of this room and one other in the middle of this stream. And when we rounded this rock; we were literally standing in the middle of a camp of about 35 of these guys. And they were washing clothes, cooking meals, cleaning their weapons; some of them were laying in hammocks. And we literally walked into them and they looked at us dumbfounded. We looked at them dumbfounded and then all hell broke loose. But any way, Lieutenant Saxon took his unit to a concentration of these red dots and when his platoon got in the vicinity of their red dot, Lieutenant Saxon was shot right in the forehead. And killed instantly. and I knew what had happened. Later, some of his men told me what he had done. How he had tried to maneuver a unit, you know. he was very aggressive; a real good soldier. Fearless, you know and he wanted to do a good job and all that. He was shot and killed almost instantly when this contact was indicated. And for years and years I would often think about him. And I felt, I knew a lot of things about his death that probably not many people knew. And what had happened and all that. And you know I'm sure the army sent his parents a very general letter. He died in the line of duty. you can be proud of him. He served his country well. But my wife a couple of years ago took a group of eighth graders to Washington D.C. and they visited the Vietnam Memorial while they were there. And she came back and you can take a piece of paper and lay it on that thing and take graphite and etch it. And she came back and she handed me Jim Saxon's name. And I said you know I've often wondered sometimes if I should contact his family but I would have no idea of how to do it. And you know some years back I tried to get some of my old records and there had been a big fire at St. Louis complex in the late 70's and it had destroyed a lot of records and you had difficulties finding out things like that. And she said, "well I know where he was from" and I said well it was somewhere in Maryland, somewhere, Rhode Island I think. She said, "No, Glenburg, Maryland." I said, "well how'd you know that." She said, "well their home towns are listed in this book." And so I thought about it or a couple of days and I went to my office and started making phone calls to Saxons in the Glenburg area. And I would call and you know "I don't know any Jim Saxon." And all of the sudden I called this one girl a young married lady and she said. "you know my husband had an uncle who was killed in Vietnam and I think it was uncle Jim." And I said, "well, that was probably the one." So she gave me Jim's uncle's her husband's great uncle, she gave me his number. And I called him. And i said you know I got some information , that maybe the family would want to know. He said, "Why are you calling after all these years?" I said, "well you know my after was killed in a car wreck a few years ago and the one the I wanted to talk with the paramedics at the scene, what were his last words, things like that. And I said, "you know I know some things about the mission. I know some things that went on at the time. I know some things Jim did. I know why he was doing that. I know what was going on." And he said you know his dad had been in the commando's in W.W.II and he would have an interest in that but I don't know if I should tell this

or bring all this up. And I said you will have to make the decision. He said well there was some talk he was killed by his own men. I said "No!" I talked with some of the guys who were right there on the scene. They loved the guy. I said he was shot in the forehead with an AK-47. He said, "well that explains something." When he came back to their town, they sent him to the family funeral home. And I was chosen to identify the body. I went to the funeral home. And the reason we wanted to be sure of the identification at the time when they were sending boys back they were sending boys to the wrong families. he said, "we wanted to be sure he was the right one." So I went there and he was in fiberglass type coffin. And he said he was in his dress blues and he looked perfect. And I asked our undertaker where was he hit. And he said let me show you, he rubbed his forehead and rubbed away some makeup. he said what your telling me confirms what the mortician showed me. I said well that's what happened. And I said so if you want to talk to his dad and call me I can tell him in some detail about all aspects of that. I think that guy made a bad decision. Apparently he never talked to Jim's dad because I never got a call. And I think he made a bad decision because he even told me that Jim's dad traveled to Mississippi to talk to the company commander to try to find out some details and I think he would like to know what I knew. He told me at the time though that his mother elderly in her 70's was dying of cancer and he didn't feel the family could handle it and also there was a granddaughter getting married. He just didn't want to.

Ernst: I think most people like your saying want closure. I think maybe that would have gave him some peace.

Furnas: I think it would have. I think the details of that mission in aspect would have. I think sometimes about making another effort but I don't know. I doubt that I will.

Ernst: Have you been to the wall yourself?

Furnas: No!

Ernst: Do you have any desire?

Furnas: Well a little bit. I did go about ten or twelve years ago to a traveling exhibit of the wall and it was a miniature.

Ernst: It is coming to Louisville again.

Furnas: Oh is it? And that was pretty moving really. It is moving to go and find the names of the guys you served with. And it's really interesting, it's moving.

Ernst: Yeah, I've been twice now.

Furnas: It is very moving.

Ernst: You talk about the South Vietnamese the ARVN. It sounds like the people you worked with was pretty good because quite often you know I've been given a pretty negative appraisal I guess.

Furnas: The ones we worked with were crack, the first ARVN division were real strong. We worked with the reconnaissance guys in that. They were fearless, topnotch and we worked with other units that were forward, very successful units. I remember one time I was in a briefing and the Allied Western Advisor to that particular ARVN battalion was an Australian soldier, Australian Captain. But I remember this was when I left the field and was an intelligence officer my last couple of months there and spent a lot of time with our colonel and traveled around. He and I were sitting in a briefing and the guy that was giving the briefing was a young ARVN major who had been trained in the United States. And he had taken his small unit deep in the jungle had infiltrated in the middle of the night had gotten into an NVA encampment with high ranking North Vietnamese and had captured the group of high ranking North Vietnamese officers. And this was really a neat story and this guy was a highly motivated and dedicated, sharp Vietnamese soldier. But the ones we worked with were strong but now a lot of times you had different types of military units over there for example you had the regional popular forces. They called them rough Pups. They were village militia. They could be 13, 14 years old and they were goofy kids a lot of times. And some of them were in the militia by day and by night they attended meetings with the local Vietcong.

Ernst: Did you have any contact with the South Koreans, the rocks?

Furnas: The only contact with the rocks. There was a rock stationed in our rear area. And one time me and a couple guys stopped in at a barber shop and I walked by a group of them. and literally it scared me to be around them. I had heard stories about them and I think the rocks in the Korean Army in Vietnam were probably their best soldiers. And they were a mean war like people. And to be around them even made me nervous. The way they looked at you. They looked, they struck me as being real tough, real good soldiers.

Ernst: I heard that, did you all hear stories about brutalities and atrocities?

Furnas: Well you hear that stuff I'll tell you about brutality and atrocities. I put them in the same category as exploding babies. Anytime when your doing this project and you set and talk with a guy. And he talks to you about 7 or 8 yr. old kid who goes up to a group of GI's and them exploding because he has been implanted with a booby trap or something. I would end that interview real quick and move in. Maybe you've heard some of that but it is a bunch of nonsense.

Ernst: I've not heard that yet. I know you asked me earlier if I had been with anyone who was fairly explicit. The first interview I did was with a Lieutenant Colonel at the time, retired a General his name was Tom Witch and he was there in 66. He is really down to earth. He came

up in the ranks. And he was an excellent interview. He is now 70 years old and very prestigious.

Furnas: To come up through the ranks and become a general officer that is very unusual. There were some of them and they tend to be very good soldiers.

Ernst: Did you have a fairly racially mixed platoon or wee relations fairly good or bad.

Furnas: We were mixed. There were maybe 20 to 25 % of that infantry. In my platoon it was about 25%. And the guys I served with in the Reconnaissance platoon, there was one from East St. Louis and couple of guys from other places. We related well with those guys. I can remember one time we spent three days in a typhoon. I spent three days with no food, plenty of water and it was kind of chilly. To keep warm you would use each others body heat. And for those three days I was with these two black guys. I was raised in a segregated environment in Kansas. My mother was a big a racist as anybody. My father wasn't. I was half and half. But I can remember that those three days I couldn't have cared if they were yellow or cretin. And I don't think they cared what color I was. But race relation was a problem. My first colonel didn't handle it well. He let the blacks in the battalion form groups. In the rear area their leaders would whip men into a fury. But the second battalion leader was top notch. Everyone wanted to help him. I heard he became a three star general. When he took over he said regardless of color everyone is a soldier and their will be no groups. After that it almost seemed like race relations got better in the battalion. I don't think there were race problems in the combat units if there were they were in the rear area. In combat units you looked out for each other.

Ernst: That is pretty much what I had heard.

Furnas: I was saddened by the thought that some of the black guys will go home to less opportunity.

Ernst: How pervasive was the drug problem at that time?

Furnas: Extremely, not so much in a volunteer unit like I was in but I'll tell you when I was in the rear area out along the wire of the compound I would see it all hours of the day. Young Vietnamese kids out there doing transactions. I had not been part of the drug culture. But one time about twelve years ago in an office a guy comes in with cocaine and says you've got to try this. I did it that one time and I told a friend I couldn't see what all the excitement was about but he said if you had done it two or three times you would know. Some GI's told him they were selling drugs like heroin. heroin in the states was Chevrolet quality but Heroin over in Vietnam was Rolls Royce quality. There was very extensive drug problem but mainly in the rear. I spent time with line platoons.

Ernst: Were they very different from the reckon people.

Furnas: Oh, very different. unmotivated lack of discipline. Some were worthless. I had an E-5 sergeant in this platoon. He was a massive guy. His way of getting things done was by threatening the soldiers. Then we had a career E-7, sergeant First class and he had threatened him. I was so mad I just cussed him. But when I left, the guy that took over was a west point Lieutenant and the E-5 sergeant had threatened him. He was arrested and put up for court marshal. I got a call on the radio and was asked about the Sergeant and I did keep a log. I said he never gave me no problem. I was asked to testify at the court marshal and I was compelled to do so. I went to the court marshal and I testified and he just glared at me. I was then asked to escort him to Phubot. we're in this jeep and he rode in the back.

Ernst: Did you get married during this period?

Furnas: I got married when I got back.

Ernst: Did you write a lot of letters home?

Furnas: Yeah, a lot of letters home, pre-posted.

Ernst: What did you miss most about home?

Furnas: When I was over there. Dry bed indoor plumbing, toilets, and running water. I guess that's missed most except for my fiancé and McDonalds. I think just the comforts. Because I can remember the recurring thought I had while I was over there was if I get back to the states nothing will ever again seem like a big problem as long as I've got a dry bed, a hot meal, and indoor plumbing. I'll be content. And of course that's not true. There's always something that you worry about.

Ernst: How often did you write home?

Furnas: Daily I would write in a stenographer's book. I carried a stenographer book. Now sometimes I would go for several days without writing in it. Once every couple of weeks when I resupply helicopter came out I would take all that out, number the pages, put it in an envelope and address it. No postage, you just write free in the upper right hand corner. GI's got that privilege. And then mailed it off. It would be a real thick letter in a number 6 envelope or a number 10 envelope.

Ernst: What kind of stuff did you write about?

Furnas: I wrote about what we were going to do when I got back and we got married. How wonderful life.....house with white picket fence. Two and a half kids and a dog. Then I would write about my experiences omitting the combat, omitting that part of it. But I would write just about what was going on. I think sometimes I would write letters and see how flowery I could make the letters I would even imply some things to impress her that I was in the middle of something great but not go into detail.



Ernst: Any other comments about the country?

Furnas: I'll tell you about one other incident. I think it is significant for my experience over there. You hear a lot of people and what they thought about the South Vietnamese people and how they interacted with them and all that. One morning once again one of those mechanicals went off. And we were deep in the jungle in an area where there were only supposed to be enemy soldiers. When we got out 25 meters or so from our position in the trail where the thing had gone off; laying there were two young kids, one of them about 13 and the other about 8. We knew the boys they were from the village where we worked outside in the area we worked. I knew the boys especially the 8 year old. We called him Leroy. I knew his mother and some of the villagers. And he was laying there and he had both legs blown off at the knee. And when you lifted his knees up they were just dangling by threads of skin. And he had seen a resupply helicopter the evening before and they knew we were out there. They knew we were at the tail end of two or three week end mission and they wanted to get out there and spend the last half a day with us. Get left over C-rations things like that. The 13 year old was killed, died on the operating table that afternoon. Leroy, his legs were gone, I mean I cut off what was left of them and I don't know why I done it, they just seemed like a mess. We shot him with morphine, the medic was working on the 13 year old. He threw me a buck knife, he said go ahead and cut them off. I think we did it because there was nothing left they were a total mess. And I think we did it just so they would quit dangling. And we medivaced him out of there and there was not concealor. I mean the clouds hanging, we were in the hills. The medivacs flew the contours of the hills and that was very dangerous. Got them out of there. And a couple hours later a group of villagers, took them several hours to get from the village to where we were. They came out there his mother, the village chief and some other men, couple women, they were rice farmers and they had machetes and shys. And I walked up to them and I was absolutely devastated I mean I was in shock. I walked up to them and the men were mad and a private standing next to me said be careful Lieutenant and raised his rifle. I literally didn't care what they did, I was in a state of shock. And I walked up and the mother looked over when he raised his rifle and she then realized that he thought they were about to attack me. She couldn't speak English, She said no, no, no. And she walked up and threw her arms around me and just cried for 15 minutes. And then she looked at me and said in a very broken English, something like, Leroy legs fine. I said yeah and she just cried and cried. And then they left. but I've thought about that many times and the idea that they are different than us the emotions or that they is just not right. They were not different than us. And I saw him a month later. He was sent to a hospital in Danang, ran by American quakers. I went to see him. I remember the American quaker doctor was a pacifist. And he gave me holy hell for being out there and having these mechanicals set up but bare in mind that mechanical had saved us when that one group had come up on top of us. It was a common thing for them to use these mechanicals. I was still very upset over this. I talked to Leroy for about 15 minutes and I had to leave, but as I was walking out a nun came up to me. And she said Lieutenant that is the first time he has smiled in the month he

has been here. it took him a seacoil watch that was from the platoon, some gift and all. That quaker doctor often I've thought he just didn't understand.

Ernst: I need to put in another tape if that is okay?

Grant Furnas is a Vietnam veteran. He was drafted in March of 1969. At that time he was 22 years old. Before he was drafted he spent three years at the University of Kansas. Grant admitted that he had low grades about a C- student. He then decided to take time away from school, so he's working as a payroll clerk at Boeing Aircraft Corporation.

Grant Furnas seems to me to be a very compassionate person. For example when he tried to locate Jim Saxon's family to give them some details about his death. Hoping to give them closure.

Grant said he never got into the drug scene in Vietnam but he did admit to using cocaine several years after he came home. He said he really didn't notice a bad drug problem in the front lines but he said it was extremely bad in the rear.

The few things he missed the most from back home except for his fiancé was a dry bed, indoor plumbing, toilets, and running water. He said as long as he had these comforts when he got back home nothing will ever seem like a big problem.

He said he has never seen the Vietnam Memorial but he had seen the traveling Vietnam Memorial. He said it was very moving. He said it would be very moving and interesting to look up the names of the guys he served with.

When Grant came back home he got married. He lives a good life. And he had come to terms with his Vietnam experience and gave himself some closure.

I recently got to hear an interview done with a Vietnam Veteran named Grant Furnas. He seems to me to be a really remarkable person. He had no problem answering any questions, no matter what it was that he was asked. When he told a story he put emotion and excitement into each one. He was honest about many of the problems in the army during the war. And he did not mind discussing his personal life. He seemed to be a very likeable person.

Grant Furnas was drafted in March of 69. He was 22 years old at the time he was drafted. Before he was drafted he had spent three years at the University of Kansas. He said he had low grades. He was a C- student. He then took some time away from school and worked as a payroll clerk at Boeing Aircraft.

After he was drafted he went to Infantry Basic training. He then spent six months at Fort Benning, Georgia for OCS school. For ten years he was a TAC officer NCO, OCS for Fort Benning. The last three months of his training he was in the Republic of Panama for jungle training school for OCS officers. He was a commissioned 2nd lieutenant. He felt he was well prepared for Vietnam due to all his training.

I think that it is good that he felt well prepared. He showed he had confidence. At least he had done a variety of different things before he was drafted like school and work. There are some who never got to do both. To me it sounds like he did have plenty of training to prepare him.

Grant said when he arrived to Vietnam it was very hot and humid. When he got there he saw total poverty. He knew the country was geared up for war because anyone under 50 years of age was in uniform. They were either village militia or a regular soldier. Along the roads were many villages and fire stations. Everything was like a compound with wire surrounding it. I bet Grant was shocked when he seen the poverty and the villages, because he sounds like he came from a reasonably good home. He was probably was not used to the heat and humidity. If I had saw all that poverty for the first time I would have been very shocked and somewhat depressed because even during the war and after it will be over there will still be poverty.

By 1971, Grant spent a week at Phubot, which was a camp for a couple of Brigades if the 101st airborne. He said the only thing he did there was get up in the mornings with four or five other lieutenants and go listen to a briefing of the rear area officer about what had happened the day before out in the fields. At that time we were losing about one hundred fifty one soldiers a week.

Grant was given the chance to lead a reconnaissance platoon. A reconnaissance platoon answered only to the battalion commander. The battalion gave Grant the mission. Grant briefed him after each mission. He got his soldiers from the general infantry pool of trainees. Reconnaissance platoons were well motivated and good soldiers.

He must have been a good soldier for the colonel to offer him a chance to lead his own reconnaissance platoon. I think his training is what gave him the confidence to lead the platoon on their missions. When he was at Phubot at least he got to make some more friends that he may need to depend on in the future. But one hundred fifty one soldiers lost a week is still a very large casualty rate.

Grant said his biggest fear during battle was to be overran and captured by the enemy. Grant said that he would shoot himself first before he would be captured. He said the reason was all the horror stories that many had heard. For example, being captured and living in POW camp for many years or the one's about soldiers being tortured beyond imagination before being killed.

I feel the same as he does. I would not have wanted to be captured by the enemy because I had heard the same type of stories. I know it is a sin to kill yourself but isn't murder a sin also?

I'll just be honest it would be hell deciding between being captured or being dead.

So far Grant has discussed about how he got into the Army and some of the things he did there but when he discussed his own mortality his voice appeared to be shaky. Your own mortality is the biggest issue to a soldier in Vietnam. A soldier will do whatever he has to do to survive and stay in one piece. Being captured by the enemy is one of the worst fears of anyone in war. That was one side of Grant that I was surprised to see.

Grant explained a story about how he almost lost his life.

He and his platoon along with another platoon were walking through an abandoned Vietcong compound. Grant, Hooper and the radio operator were walking on a graveled walk and stepped over a trip wire that went to a sixty meter motor fire. Hooper looked at Grant and told him to disarm it. But Grant said that they were taught to set them off because that was safer than disarming it. Well Hooper got upset and started disarming it while Grant and the radio operator were in the line of fire. They both thought Hooper was crazy.

I agree with them Hooper was crazy disarming that automatic gun with his friends in the line of fire. That would have scared me to death. Grant said that in infantry school they were taught to set the bomb off rather than disarm it. I think some soldiers get gung-ho and don't really think about situations clearly and sometimes not only put themselves in danger but also a fellow soldier.

When I heard Grant Furnas talking about how he tried to contact Jim Saxon's parents or family, I thought that was very touching. It takes more than just time to try and find someone's family and give them details on that person's death. He was trying to give them some closure. I think it takes a very caring and companionate person of life to do that.

It must have been hard on him to have a fiancé waiting for him back home in the states. He said he wrote in a journal like everyday but mailed the collections every two weeks or so. He said that he never wrote about anything about combat but instead he wrote about what they were going to do once he got back and they got married.

I think one of the reason's he never wrote about combat was that he didn't want to worry his family and fiancé. Another reason I think he didn't write about combat was that he would always have it in his mind why should he write it down just to remind himself of the fear and pain.

There was a combat group of South Koreans in Vietnam. They were called the Rocks. Furnas said they struck him as being real tough, a real good combat soldier. He said the way they looked at you made him real nervous and scared him to be around them. He said they were a mean war-like people. In my opinion if the Rocks made our soldiers nervous, imagine how they made the enemy feel.

Grant Furnas stated that he came from a segregated environment. He said his mother was a big racist and his father wasn't, so he thought he was half and half. He said his platoon was about 25% black. He was trapped in a fox hole due to a typhoon for three days with three other black men. Furnas admitted he didn't care what color or race he was because they needed to use each other's body heat. To him race relations was more of a problem in the rear than in the front lines.

To me it seems like there wouldn't be any racial problem's because they were all Americans in a foreign country. They should have depended on each other to stand strong against the enemy and not pick little fights between each other because that would make them very vulnerable to the enemy.

The one part in the interview with Grant that really shocked me was when he talked

about drugs. Grant said the drug problem in Vietnam was worse in the rear more than the front-lines. Heroin in Vietnam was rated rolls royce quality compared to the United State Chevrolet quality. The price of heroin in Vietnam was five dollars. And the same amount of Heroin in the United States could be bought for sixty dollars. Grant said he was never in the drug scene during Vietnam but once several years after he came back home he tried cocaine. To him it felt like he drank about fifteen cups of coffee. He couldn't see what all the excitement was about but his friends said you wouldn't until you tried it three or four times then your hooked.

Many people said the GI's took drugs to get their mind off of what was going on but that was just an excuse. The soldiers carried morphine on them to be used for pain but morphine is very addictive. Drugs were dirt cheap in Vietnam. From what it sounds like to me there were no regulations on any drug related incidents in Vietnam. The drug addiction was probably one of the worst things a veteran brought back to the States with them.

Grant said he remembered being wrapped up in his poncho with a dead enemy to one side of him and on the other side was a dead ally. I don't see how he could handle that. That would have drove me crazy not only lying next to a dead body but also a dead enemy body. Just the thought of a cold, stiff, bloody body lying next to me would give me the creeps. But I guess the soldiers had to so they could to survive.

The last story Grant Furnas mentioned almost brought me to tears. It was about an eight year old boy named Leroy. Leroy's legs got blew up by a mechanical. The reason Leroy and the other boy was up there was to spend the rest of the day the GI's. The soldiers loved Leroy. Grant said after Leroy was hurt by the mechanical his legs around the knee held by a thread of skin, he was the one who cut Leroy's legs off. Grant was the one who told Leroy's mom about the accident and she just cried while hugging him. Grant insists that the Vietnamese, when it comes to emotions are not different than us. He went and saw Leroy in the hospital a month later. He could stay no longer than fifteen minutes with Leroy because his emotions got to him. Grant said he was still very upset over this. As Grant was leaving a nun came up to him and said that was the first time she had seen Leroy smile.

This story was very touching to me because Grant was the one who had to put his emotions aside to help the two boys, one of which he knew very well, who had been blown up by a mechanical. Then he told the mother and that took some courage considering how angry the other villagers were. But luckily thanks to Grant and his fellow soldiers one of the boys lived. That boy was Leroy.

This interview was very interesting and educational. A many variety of things had happened to Grant in Vietnam and with this interview I got to learn how he felt when he went through the ordeal. From what I heard Grant Furnas say he seems to me to be a very good and down to earth person. I would think before he could have done this interview he must have found some type of closure to his experiences in Vietnam.

**Oral History Interview With Grant Furnas on  
June 21, 1997 in Louisville, Kentucky**

Interviewer: What were you doing and how old were you when you were drafted?  
Answer my first question.

Grant: I was drafted in March of 1969. I was 22 years old and at the time I had spent three years at the University of Kansas and majored in partying and in the course of that my grades, I hadn't really flunked out but I was a C- student. I had after three years I decided oh I guess to lay out a year or two and maybe go back to school. I knew that the draft was out there and it was before the draft lottery so I knew that I was prone to getting drafted. The idea kind of intrigued me. At the time though, I wasn't adverse to the idea of getting drafted and going in. It just, it seemed like adventurous and exciting for a 22 year old guy, so I was working in Seattle, Washington for a **Boeing** aircraft company as a payroll clerk at the time I was drafted and I was inducted in Seattle, Washington.

Interviewer: I'm curious, do you think your college experience gave you a different perspective and maturity which allowed you to handle Vietnam better than let's say an eighteen year old coming out?

Grant: Well, I don't know if it did or not but I know that in my platoon of draftees, out of about 35 or so soldiers, I had 3 years of college, another guy had 2 years, 2 guys- one guy had just graduated with a degree in business. All the rest had not yet graduated from high school, so I don't know statistically if that platoon was representative of who was being drafted at the time but I got a gut feel it was. So I was 2 or 3 years older than the average inductee and I think that because of that and maybe because I had a little more education I tended, you know, step back and look at things and think about a little bit more. About what was going on but as far as helping me handle it I don't know if it did or not. I think that people who were you know fairly stable one way or another tended to handle it better than those who weren't and maybe age was..

Interviewer: I heard that perspective so many times. Now my partner whose husband served says the same thing. He says that if you're fairly grounded going over it made a difference and usually the people who had problems later would've had problems anyway in life.

Grant: That's my feeling. I've always felt that and this post-traumatic stress syndrome I wonder about that too you know. I wonder if there wouldn't been something else in their lives had it not been that.

Interviewer: When you tell me about your training, you were in a number of schools and I guess for lack of better phrasing you had a number of certifications.

Grant: Well, not really. I was in infantry basic training for eight weeks and then infantry advanced training and from there I went to Fort **Benning**, Georgia for 6 months OCS

program. You know in World War II you always hear the expressing 90 day wonder well I guess we were 180 day wonders because it was a 6 month program and after that I spent 10 years at Fort **Benning** as a **tact** officer in that NCO/OCS school. Then after that right before I went over seas I spent 3 months in Republic of Panama in a jungle training school for officers and from there went over, but really no certifications. I mean just- I had commission second lieutenant and I was infantry MOS.

Interviewer: Can you tell me if you thought the training was good? Did you feel prepared? Or can you go...

Grant: I thought that the training was excellent and it was very efficient training and it covered a little bit of everything. I think that I was well prepared, well prepared for you know what I encountered over there.

Interviewer: Yeah, cause sometimes you'll hear especially from people who don't know they'll say that OCS was not very good and like you used that phrase 90 day wonder and sometimes they get a bad wrap.

Grant: Oh no! Well you mean from people who didn't go through it.

Interviewer: Yeah, just people don't know or ....

Grant: Well, I think that young officers who were commissioned by and large were able to get the job done and what they did in OCS there was a lot of stress and it was a very stressful situation for about 5 months. Then in the last month you became a senior candidate and you were basically almost an officer at that point. You were being treated like an officer by anybody who was below that level or below the senior candidate level and you were treated like an officer to a certain extent by younger enlisted men but up until that time it was a very, very rigorous , stressful training. What they did, it was good training and it was very quick intense leadership course because you know you had at the time we seemed old to each other but I mean we were 20 and 21 years old. Once again I would say that the average out of, in my platoon we started with 33 and I would guess that maybe a third of them had college degrees and the other two-thirds had some college at the time. My story was probably very common, you know majored in fraternity and a lot of partying and fairly sharp guys, you know, above average intelligence and guys who could've made the grade. I would guess that a good many of them have since gone back to school and gotten their degrees. I know I have and I'm sure a lot of them have but they came out of there. We started with 33. We finished with 11 in our platoon. Once again that attrition wasn't uncommon and what they did, they tried to simulate the stress of combat and they did that with very, very long hours and just cramming a lot of material into short, you know 12 hours of material in 10 hour days or really 16 hours of material into 12 hour days. We got started at five in the morning and really didn't quit until 9 or 10 at night. I guess that's even more than 12 hours. For 5 months very, very intense, very stressful and 20, 21 year olds, 22 year old guys who came out of that program were pretty much ready to lead a group of 18 or 19 year olds and do a credible job. The lieutenants, people can say what they want, but the second lieutenants and the

first lieutenants at the platoon level generally were very, very good and got the job done and were well trained for it.

Interviewer: Can you tell me what you're, well how about this- What were your first impressions of Vietnam and how did you come in? Did you come in on commercial flight?

Grant: We came in on an airline and in looking back on it I didn't pay a lot of attention to it at the time, but I suspect that it was a for profit company under contract with the government. It was a large DC-10 I think, very large airliner. It had a crew of older stewards and stewardesses and international, you know, Germans and Dutch and different types of people and some Americans. There were stewards and these were guys who seemed to be in their mid-thirties, fortyish. There were stewardesses who also were 30 or 35 years old. In talking with one of them at the time, she said, "You know if you have seniority with the airline you can get the overseas assignments." I said, "Is it America to Saigon all the time?" She said, Oh no, we fly all over the orient and everywhere." They were under contract I think with the government. It was a charter flight on a commercial aircraft with a civilian crew, but it was all GI's from an airbase in California to **Ben Hanoi** there in Vietnam> Was that your question?

Interviewer: Yeah.

Grant: How did that come over?

Interviewer: I always found it intriguing that quite a few took a commercial flight and all of a sudden you're in Vietnam. That kind of shift.

Grant: Well, it's interesting that you would say that because when that plane landed , we were at **Ben Hanoi** airbase and somebody told me at the time that it was the busiest airport in the world at the time because of the war effort. I mean everything from little two man helicopters to these big DC-10s and I guess 747s.the interesting thing about it when we got off that plane immediately I mean when we were literally on the concrete a siren went off and all of these guys who were airforce guys who had been in the country for obviously months or whatever, they all started yelling , Get Down! Get Down! It's a rocket attack and I looked up and I saw the stewardesses were just totally bored with the situation and a couple of these guys who were escorting us off this plane, they got down, but I noticed that all of these guys handling baggage and walking around they also just kind of looked and sneered and were kind of bored. I think it was just a hoax that they would do on every flight coming in. Most of us just kind of stood and looked at each other. You know it was obvious, but I was like you it just struck me as odd at the time this in essence a civilian airliner landing Saigon. Once I had been over there a while I learned that in fact that there was a very secure area where that plane landed. I mean more so than or as much as any airport in the United States at the time.

Interviewer: What else can you tell me about those first days? I mean I understand that it's exceedingly hot...



Grant: Very hot and humid about like Louisiana or Georgia in the middle of the summer. It was, some other things that just kind of struck you right away once you drove through the countryside just the total poverty in the country. I mean truly third world nation. Another thing that you notice at the time the country was totally geared up to war and every male under the age of 50 was in a uniform of some sort whether he was village militia or regular soldier or whatever. Everywhere along the roads, villages and little fire bases and everything was like a compound with concertina wire around it. You saw that everywhere. These Vietnamese men everywhere you looked in uniform often times carrying rifles and they would be M1 carbines that I guess they had gotten from us out of World War II stock and Korean War stock. Another thing you noticed right away, you quickly noticed that you don't always have indoor plumbing. I mean immediately you realize you're in a different world. You didn't have indoor plumbing based on where you were. Immediately we found that there were varying degrees of availability of food, when you wanted it and how you wanted it, wasn't a McDonald's or KFC around the corner. You know you quickly noticed. There may be a PX close by there may not be. It might not have been opened. Right away you realize, you don't have the comforts of home and that struck me.

Interviewer: Where were you stationed at?

Grant: I went in country at **Ben Hanoi** airbase in Saigon in the south and I think it was in what they called, well it was the Delta area around Saigon. I stayed there for 3 or 4 days. I went over there with 43 lieutenants from my OCS company in Georgia. We all went over together. When we left the OCS training we were dispatched all over the country to different bases and different assignments, but because of the way the paper work flowed and everything all of sudden when it came time to check in at this California air base and we traveled there from all over the country in every way imaginable. When we all got there low and behold here were all these guys we had gone to OCS with and we were all together, grouped together. We went over together and there in Saigon was the last time that's when we got split up. Five or six of us were assigned to the Northern part of the country to the 101<sup>st</sup> Airborne Division there at Fort Campbell, Kentucky. They were operating out of a large base camp outside of **Huay** and **Huay** was the northern ancient capital of the country. After about 5 days and **Ben Hanoi**, we were flown up there in some kind of transport type airplane. We arrived at the base outside of **Huay**. From there we went by convoy about 30 miles north to a base camp right outside of Quang Tri and that was really about the northern most big city in the country. I think it was within 15 to 20 miles of the DMZ. At Quang Tri, at that base, we had one week of a very intensive in country training program. We trained on some very conventional things like repelling off of walls and out of helicopters. We did some work on rifle ranges and with machine guns and rocket launchers and grenades and things like that. Something fascinating, we had one class where a guy who was a captured Viet Cong gave us a training session on booby traps and how they did it. Then something else that was fascinating, another guy had been a captured **sapper**. A **sapper** was a Viet Cong commando. Their specialty was inching in under barb wire base camps and getting in under the cover of darkness, crawling under this wire that was very difficult to negotiate and avoiding trip flares and

booby traps and everything else. Getting inside of compounds, setting off mines and explosives and things like that right before an assault on the fire base by standup infantry soldiers. We saw a guy, he was a captured Viet Cong, he gave us a demonstration and they had a typical barbed wire situation set up and you can't imagine unless you see it, not only did you have the rolled concertina wire with the little razor blades and things like that on it but you had other barbed wire that looked like somebody's garden or something with a lot of strings attached to poles going every which way only it was barbed wire. I mean literally you couldn't walk through it if you had to. You couldn't step high enough without just getting yourself totally tangled up in this stuff, but we watched this guy go through that and it took him minutes. It was just fascinating the way he did it. Of course, they were about half our size. They were very small people. It was really amazing to watch. Another thing right away you noticed about the in country training, in the states things had been so cautious and so careful. For example, on live fire ranges and with grenades and when you fired the live rounds and things like that. The safety precautions taken were a fraction of what you experienced in the states. You started to realize that you were a lot closer to the real thing there than what you had been in training.

Interviewer: Boy if I can ask it this way, I don't know. What was a typical day like or an atypical day or I mean just duties I guess?

Grant: Once I got to my unit?

Interviewer: Or whatever.

Grant: Well, I was in training for a week and then I shipped out. I'll tell you it was kind of a comical situation. My brother-in-law and I, that's how I met my wife, we went over there. We were roommates in OCS and I met her along the way. In fact, we were engaged when I went over there. He and I, during a break in that week of training, we got in this one briefing. Quanset hut is what it was. I mean it was the size of a house, but we found a map and it was covered up with a confidential leather covering. We got this map out and it was a map of our divisions, area of operations, AO. WE found the unit that had the least concentrations of red around it. We made the assumption that that unit is the unit experiencing the least activity and so when this clerk was processing this group of lieutenants as to where we were going to be sent. We said, "Well we got a preference. We would like to go to the 2<sup>nd</sup> of the 501<sup>st</sup> ." He said, " Well I'm curious why you would have a preference." I think one guy said that his dad had served in that unit or something. I don't know, but anyway, myself, my brother-in-law, and another guy out of a large group of lieutenants getting ready to be sent out to these infantry battalions. They called each of us separately to meet with this major who was interviewing for a position. I walked in and he said, " Have you ever counted money?" I said, "Well I have 3 years at the University of Kansas. I'm going to be an accountant like my father." I didn't know how to answer the guy. I set up systems for internal control and I've done this and I've done that. He says, "Yeah, but have you ever counted money, a lot of money?" I said, "Well, not a lot of money." He said, "OK." Apparently he asked

the next two guy that. One of them was my brother-in-law. He says, "Have you ever counted money?" My brother-in-law says, "Yeah, I was a bank examiner before I was drafted. I would go in the vaults and I would count money." The guy said, "Well, good." He put him in charge of about 25 rear area officer's clubs and that's what he did the year over there. We have a lot of fun to this day when we get together and kid each other about our war experience. I didn't see him after that for about six months, but the next time I saw him he was a big old guy anyway, he had gained about 50 pounds and I'd lost about 30 pounds.

Interviewer: I bet.

Grant: In fact, he took me out. His job at night was to go to as many as these clubs as he could hit and he'd have a couple of these guys who worked with him, a couple of these sergeants and enlisted men. They'd drive around in a jeep in these large rear areas, totally secure. They would visit the officers clubs and the next morning write up a little reports. They'd listen to the Philippine bands from the USO. He would sample the steak and the menu at every club and sample all the boos. He had in his quarters hut, again the size of a small house, he had two refrigerators totally stocked at all times. I spent a night with him, after about six months over there when I got some time off, and I literally got sick. It was the first good food I'd had in six months. I'd been eating C-rations and just got sicker than a dog that night from eating the stuff. He had a pretty good life over there.

Interviewer: Boy, the contrast is unbelievable.

Grant: Yeah, it really was. The contrast was amazing, but my typical day- a week of that first in country training and then I was sent to a battalion. The battalion at the time was at fire base **Basstone** operating out of a town called **Phu Bai**. **Phu Bai** too was a pretty large base camp for a couple of brigades of the 101<sup>st</sup> Airborne Division. I spent one week there and the only thing I did there, there were a group of 4 or 5 of us lieutenants, and every morning around 10 o' clock we would go listen to the briefing of rear area officers on what had happened the day before with our battalion out in the field. It was 1971 by that time and I think our troop strength was down to maybe 300-350,000 and we were still losing maybe as many as 150 men a week maybe. There was a feeling the war was winding down and I was wondering if maybe it was a little bit less intense. For a couple of days the briefings were pretty neutral, not much was happening out in the 400 man battalion out in the jungle and in the area they were working. But on the third day, a unit was hit. A lieutenant lost both his legs and several were killed and I realized then how close I was getting to what was going on and that was a shocker. I spent a week doing that and at that time I was assigned to an infantry platoon. I met my captain and didn't even meet the platoon because before the day was out the reconnaissance platoon leader was relieved of his command for refusing a mission and the colonel called me in and he said, "I want to give you the reconnaissance platoon if you'll take it." The reconnaissance platoon in any battalion was an all volunteer outfit and what was unique about that, the soldiers weren't any different than the guys in the 16 or so regular platoons in the battalion, but the difference in the structure, you might be aware of this,

the infantry platoons, the lieutenant reported to a company commander generally a captain who reported to the battalion commander or colonel. The reconnaissance platoon was directly under the battalion commander, so my immediate superior was the battalion commander, the colonel. He gave me my missions. I briefed him at the end of the missions. When I was on the fire base or in the rear I would spend a lot of time with him, so that was the way it was set up. It was an all volunteer outfit and I got my soldiers from the general of infantry trainees in the battalion, however, they tended to be as a general rule of better discipline, highly motivated, generally good soldiers. In an infantry platoon you had a tremendous problem with drugs. I mean every platoon of 25 or 30 guys had everything from just somewhat unmotivated soldiers, coming out of the sixties young men who'd been in the drug culture and everything else down to just outright sociopaths almost. Guys who now I'm sure have committed crimes, many in prison, having all kinds of problems, but in the reconnaissance platoon, it was an all volunteer outfit, you got the very best and in an infantry platoon if you didn't like a soldier you were stuck with him and you had to work with him. In the reconnaissance platoon, if I didn't like the way a guy parted his hair I could go to the administrative section battalion. I could literally have him removed from the platoon, literally in minutes just by telling them I want him out. It happened one time in the rear and I'm thinking it might have happened out in the field one time. Where I wanted a guy out and I mean literally a helicopter came in and got him the next morning and they got him out of there. So that was the good thing about it, in that unit you didn't have to deal with a lot of what the line infantry lieutenants had to deal with. But my typical day, reconnaissance platoon was about 25 guys typically we would have around 20 healthy and fit to be out in the field. We would split up into 3 teams generally 6 to 7 men. We would have a mission that would typically last around 2 weeks sometimes 3 weeks. The team of 6 or 7 guys would be inserted deep into that mountainous jungle area and it was right where Laos and North Vietnam and South Vietnam came together. An area that was just kind of right in the heart of the Ho Chi Minh Trail Complex, the **Ashau** Valley that immediate area. We would be inserted into an area deep into the mountainous jungle and for 2 to 3 weeks we would move down through the valleys coming down out of the highlands and we would get into, sometimes we would be inserted close enough to where after 2 or 3 weeks we would literally get down into the lowlands and we would then be on the very last day moving along rice paddy dikes and things like that. The battalion would send out either trucks from the fire base or helicopters to pick us up, take us back to the fire base for a few days and then we'd go out on another mission. Typically, I spent my eight months in the field on missions like that. Inserted deep into the jungle we would move then for 2 to 3 weeks back to the lowlands along the way looking for signs of enemy activity. Finding the enemy, determining where they were, how big their unit was, how they were armed, what they were doing and that's what we would do. Gather intelligence for the infantry companies to do battle.

Interviewer: Did you feel fortunate to be in recon? I get the sense because you said you could pick your own men...

Grant: Well, I did. For a lot of reasons I felt fortunate. I felt fortunate because I felt they were better soldiers. I didn't like the idea, it quickly occurred to me that being out in a

jungle environment was not a place for 80 to 100 men moving through the jungle and I mean these guys typically the infantry company soldier have 6 or 8 tins of jiffy pop hanging off his ruck sack. They eat the C-rations. They cooked their meals out in the jungle. They were noisy, somewhat undisciplined, lot of drug problems. The enemy knew they were there a day or two before they found out the enemy was there. On the other hand, traveling with a 6 or 7 man recon team there was a lot of stealth. The enemy often times didn't know you were right on top of him. I felt that it was safer almost. Interestingly enough, and lot of it was luck and chance and some of that I think was because of that small. The fact that we were out there moving quietly and generally not walking into ambushes although we did on occasion. I felt it was safer. The only thing that bothered me about it, I always worried that we would walk into an ambush and with 6 or 7 guys several would be killed instantly. We would immediately be captured and that was something that concerned me whereas with a 70 or 80 man infantry company it wasn't like you were going to be overrun and have 80 prisoners of war after a one hour battle or something because in that area in the jungle in Vietnam in 1971 it was generally you were up against units of 5 and 7, not always, but typically a few soldiers against a few Americans.

Interviewer: Do you mind telling me about the one ambush or not?

Grant: Well, no. It's an interesting thing and this is what a lot of people don't realize about Vietnam. A lot of people would have you believe and they would want to imply that in Vietnam it was like Normandy Beach daily for 10 months or a year. It wasn't that way at all. In reality only about 1 in 10 soldiers, only about 1 in 10, was a guy actually in a combat unit. A tremendous number, 9 out of 10 generally never fired a rifle or were fired at. Of the one in ten in combat units, I would guess that only about 1 in 10 of those were ever in close proximity to a enemy soldier. In the 8 months I was out in field with recon and I spent my last month with an infantry company out in the 7 months with recon and the one month in an infantry company I was only in what you would call contact with the enemy, 6 or 7 times yet that was regarded as a lot. It was a lot. The very first time was on February 28, 1971. I had been there for 28 days, for 28 days, a week or so in training and the rest of the time out in the jungle with my recon team. On this particular mission we had, there were 6 or 7 Americans and we were working with 6 or 7 South Vietnamese counterparts from a recon platoon. It was the ARVN 1<sup>st</sup> division. In fact, the colonel in charge of that battalion was very proud of his position because that had been precedent to his position as a colonel, so he was very proud of that. It was an elite unit. They were called, I think the tiger division. They were a very famous ARVN division, like the 101<sup>st</sup> really a lot of tradition. But we were on a mission with those guys and we'd been out several days moving through the jungle and we found a couple of old places where there had been old bunker complexes and had long since abandoned, by long since, maybe several years. I was starting to get a sense that the war was kind of a little bit over and I was starting to think that maybe I would spend 8 or 10 months in the jungle and never see an enemy soldier, and in fact I went to bed that night thinking that it was a lot like Yosemite National Park or something. We were just camping out that much but this could be kind of enjoyable. This isn't going to be too bad. At about 3 o'clock the next afternoon, we decided to stop a little bit early. There was myself and a

Vietnamese lieutenant was in charge of the overall group. At about 3 o' clock, I say that we hadn't been in contact, another one of my teams had moved into an area and had captured a guy a couple of days before. A young seventeen or eighteen year old North Vietnamese soldier. The guy at the last minute, technically he came over to our side because when they were about ready to be captured sometimes they would start yelling **chu hoi** and that meant I want to come over to your side and they would become what they called a **chu hoi**. Often times they would be turned into what they called Kit Carson scat cats. Every platoon had a Kit Carson scat cat. We had one and he was a former Viet Cong. He would just kind of go with us and he was an interpreter of sorts. Generally they did, they tended to be extremely cautious and careful and they kind of sensed where it was. This kid on the other hand had not been a Viet Cong. He'd been a North Vietnamese regular. In fact, he had been captured in this village by the North Vietnamese. They had taken him and a group of young men from a village right near where we were working there in the south and he told me his story. He was marched north and he was trained in North Vietnam for 4 to 6 months and then marched south along the trail with hundreds and hundreds of other recruits like that. He was regular North Vietnamese soldier and joined a North Vietnamese unit operating in that area, but anyway one of our other teams had captured him a couple of days before and he was with us and he was supposed to be, he was going to take us to a weapons cash or something like that. I don't know really what he was supposed to do but on 3 o' clock on that day on February 28 I was standing there talking with him a Vietnamese, myself, and a Vietnamese seargent and we were all making camp for the night and all of a sudden a round, a rocket hit right next to the three of us. It blew me through the air. It felt like I kind of jumped but when I looked then how far I'd gone, I'd been blown through the air and it was quite a shock and I wouldn't sure what had happened and then all of sudden there was gunfire and just all hell broke loose. We were setting camp, we found out later about 100 meters from a major **barker** complex with a hospital. It was a major weigh station up in that area and the jungle was so thick you could do that very easily. As a matter of fact, you could literally make camp in the middle of one those and not know it, move out the next day, never know you were in the middle of it because there was a lot of tunnel complexes and things like that. There wouldn't a whole lot above ground lot of times, very well concealed, but anyway we found out the next morning that we were setting up camp literally next to a complex of about 500 men, 16 or 17 of us. When they sprung that ambush, I looked over and within about 30 seconds every single guy was either killed or wounded except for myself and the Vietnamese lieutenant. When I looked over at the Vietnamese seargent I'd been talking with and this NVA soldier they were both dead and had literally been blown to pieces and I didn't get a scratch and how I didn't I don't know but you know ordinates, explosives are very funny and very unpredictable and they say they have a killing rate as of 5 meters. It might all go one way and none. You could literally stand right next to it, a rocket going off like that, and not get a scratch and that's what happened to me. For about 4 hours we were in contact and the enemy kept trying to overrun us. I had gone to bed the night before thinking that I might never see an enemy soldier. My biggest fear was being overrun and captured that was my biggest fear. In fact, I had an idea that right before I'd let that happen I'd shoot myself rather than be captured like that because there were horror stories of guys being captured and held for years in the jungle and all that. I didn't want that but when I looked

up after that initial triggering of the ambush. I looked up and there were enemy soldiers running everywhere and they were trying to overrun us. Immediately- another interesting thing about Vietnam, I was a first lieutenant unlike World War II and Korea and places like that you could literally call in the world on your opponent and instantly by way of radio I was in contact with navy gunships off the coast. I was in contact with artillery from our fire base 6 or 8 miles away and they could drop it with pinpoint accuracy based on **red** coordinates and all that. I was in contact with helicopter cobra gunships with F105 fighters and I had all of that at my disposal. We started calling in all of that support on the unit position. Their tactic was to close right on top of you. Closer they could be to you the safer they were and of course they were trying to get right on top of us. Another fear I had in the states in my training was if I ever got in a situation where I had to call in the artillery and the cobra gunships right on top of my position to get the enemy because that was usually last ditch what you did and that day I called in three rocket strikes and cobra gunships right on top of our position. The interesting thing about it, in the states I had always wondered how in the world could I do something like that. Call in a strike right in on top of my position. How could I do something like that but when it's happening and you're being overrun like that and you're trying to get them off of you it's the easiest thing in the world to do. You can't get the cobras to put it down fast enough. There's a little procedure, you had to give your initials, you had to initial each time it came on top of you so they could hang you later on if it didn't work out right or they would know who was responsible or who had taken responsibility for doing it. We were in contact about 5 hours and finally... and we were of course all shot up and in bad shape but they moved another platoon up to reinforce us. It took him about 3 or 4 hours moving through the jungle to get to the point of where we were. Another interesting thing about that, these are the silly things about that war, unlike World War II where you had generals way, way, way in the rear and colonels back behind you. You had a situation there where that contact that day in the 101<sup>st</sup> Airborne Division that became the major, that was the major event that day. At a couple 1000 feet I had our battalion commander or maybe even at a 1000 feet I had the artillery **fort** observer directing artillery fire. At a couple 1000 feet I had our battalion commander, the colonel, in his helicopter and he was directing the artillery and directing me. Above him, I had the brigade commander, full colonel, and then about 30 minutes into the contact at about 5000 feet we had a general, assistant division commander up there and he was directing. The comical thing about it was all of them, they were trying to direct me and the general was trying to direct me and the colonel and then they would have little mini debates and arguments as for who was responsible for talking to the ground. Then the general would back off. I remember one time in the course of all this I heard him on the radio in a very, very complimentary way complimenting the colonel for the way he was moving this other platoon. He had a name for that tactic and were going to have to... I want you to write this up. I want all the battalion commanders to... and this is something we need... big flowery compliment for what he was doing and I was trying to break through on the radio at the time because they were coming back on us and we were trying to get. You couldn't get the radio network cleared up for these guys, these professional soldiers complimenting each other.

Interviewer: Was that frustrating?

Grant: It was very frustrating. Then another thing, we were using these smoke grenades to, you would pop these grenades to identify your location for the gunships up above you. We quickly ran out of smoke grenades about 30 minutes into that thing. They had to drop a couple boxes of smoke grenades. The enemy would back off after about 30 minutes then they would come back an hour later, back off and come back. Of course, we were shot up and waiting for this other platoon to reinforce us. The colonel wanted, he kept wanting me or somebody to take a small patrol out and do some **clover leaves** and see if we could get the enemy to fire, to start coming again. They wanted this contact. I mean that was what they were all about. That's what they were all about. It was like I guess a history professor looks and says where are my students. These guys said where is my war, where is my contact. They were professional soldiers. He kept wanting me to take or somebody to take a patrol out to see if we could stir up the hornet's nest again. Of course I didn't want to do it, I felt it would be suicide. Each time he would tell me to do it I would come back with some reason that I couldn't do that at that time. I had some leeway as a ground commander. There was a frustration in his voice trying to figure out a way to order me to do it without contradicting what the ground commander should know is best on the ground and so what he did he brought out these two boxes of big crates of smoke grenades. He dropped one of them right on top of us. He dropped the other about 300 meters from our position. He came back on the radio and he said you know I accidentally dropped them about 300 meters from your position. Well, we had no choice but to go get it, so I took myself and 2 of these Vietnamese soldiers and we went and got the thing and that was scary to have to do that, but we had to have that stuff. Finally, this other platoon moved up to reinforce us and was commanded by second lieutenant Joe **Hooper**.