

Oral Interviews with Vietnam Veterans Fred and Steve Helena and Roger Redoing. by
Debbie Perry and Delores Roe

Reaction Paper: Oral Histories of Roger Roeding, Fred and Steve Hellman

by Delores A. Roe

The interview between the three veterans and Dr. Baldwin gave the reader a unique opportunity to understand the Vietnam experience through the words of these eye witnesses. These men were friends prior to the tours of active duty and have remained close through the years since their return home to civilian life. Their attitudes about life in general were positive and they revealed the great effort they had made to make the war experience a positive force in their lives. Although the three men express the horrors of the war experience they balance it out with the great support and love they have found amongst their family and friends in the last thirty years.

The three veterans all seemed to desire to diminish the significance of the war upon their individual lives and to force the time spent there to a back burner that has little effect upon their current status. However, it is obvious after listening to them that the trauma must have been very acute at the time it was first experienced because it is still so alive in their minds and remembered in such vivid detail. Their desire to diminish the time spent in Vietnam seems to be an attempt to distance themselves from the "discontenters and nut cases," that use the war as an excuse for being unable to function. As they stated, it is the medias portrayal of the Vietnam vet as a drug addicts and drifters and the habitual use of the vocal minority group of discontenters that has made the honorable veteran feel the need to distance themselves from the war.

They offered a new perspective of the war. Men were not over there doing drugs and killing time, but doing a hard job and one that turned out to be a thankless one. No victory and no fanfare for these veterans. Their overall opinion of why the U.S. did not win the war is standard for the veteran of the Vietnam War. The government did not do its job. It cared only about treaties and corporate contracts.

These three men renew a persons hope in mankinds ability to bounce back after adversity. Each still loves America, their family and looks to the future with anticipation. Although the long effects of the trauma of the war are still obvious in their recollections, they have used it to make their lives better and to help those around them. They seem to be happy to have a chance to share the truth about the war and see the need to let the younger people know the truth in order to avoid another war such as that one.

Dear Dr. Baldwin,

Debbie Perry is my partner. This will complete
our joint assignment. I did not want to let her down.

The Paper was uplifting & very positive.
I enjoyed it

D. Roe

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SIDE I

#1 : “ It was the eleventh month or close to the twelfth month, and the Marines spent thirteen months over there, and I was due to come back in about thirty days so I knew the ship was going to take about 24 days and you had to be out of the country for exactly thirteen months. So the ship, I didn't nominate myself, I was just told that I was going to go on the ship and go back. So I said , Okay I'll go back.” And the ship took 25 days just going across the ocean. I was great , very peaceful. We saw movies. Read lots books, we knew we were heading home. And we knew we were not going to be shot at. We did run into a couple of storms, but that wasn't anything. I even got them in my movies, I had my movie camera with me. I got it on Video also, of the ship going through Coronado Bay. I will say that when the ship was pulling up, there was a band playing Welcome Home. And I remember some guy must of had some wealthy parents because he had rented a speed boat and had it trailing,” Welcome Home Sergeant...”, whatever. And I just wanted to get on land and when I finally got off the ship I was remained of the POW's kissing the land because I was just so happy to be on the land.”

Interviewer: “At some point in your tour did you realize that you were going to make it or did you not think about it until you were on that ship?”

#1: No not until I got on the ship. It could happen in an instant. No matter where you were, Danang or where ever the area was, it wasn't safe. WE did spend two weeks in Subic Bay, it was fantastic, it was great.

#2 : You did?

#1 : Yeah, two weeks in Subic Bay..

#2 : You said I was there?

#1 : Yeah weren't you there?

#2 : No... I was supposed to go there but that was when they, heh heh..

#1 : Our ships had to be with the battalion landing team and our ships had to be repaired or something.

#2 : We were enroute to go to the Philippines or Bancok or something like that. And uh, thats when that casson , the hail 80- 1861 started and they flew us , thats when that situation started and we had to detour. We were going to go down there for a couple of weeks or something for some nice R&R, but that was when the North Vietnamese started to push more and more and more units were being hit and it got to the point were we needed more men and so they started calling us and that was 1967 because it was a continuous operation just flying in one operation after another. Just like Steve said about worrying about getting hit. You either had the booby-trap or the sniper or some kid throwing a hand grenade at you, thats three things right there. Then you got the accidental rounds dropped from midair by our own people. Then theres the guys ,heh heh, well we never had it in ours where your own men are trying to kill you. I mean that never happened, our men were, we knew that black or white or what ever race or religion, we were all....you really got close, for us the bonding was really very close because we knew

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that this guy might be the one saving your life but then of course the actual contact with the enemy.. yeah..

Interviewer : Race was that something that any of you experienced any difficulty with ?

#1 : I had one, I had some black men in my platoon, I had a black sergeant and it was my second month there , maybe my third and we went out on patrol, and I took my turn on radio watch at night, and every hour two people would be on and I remember it was my turn and this guy did not wake me up it was this black fellow. He was a good man but what I found out later on and it really upset me, that he was that he was smoking marijuana or pot on our patrol when we were way out. And I asked for him to be transferred because it endangered our whole patrol. He didn't like that, he wanted to stay with our outfit. And I thought , as I was transferring him, I had a round in my 45, because I was going to shoot him, because I expected him to shoot me , I expected him to shoot me. He was really mad. But that was the only problem I ever had. Now I did have on problem back in camp Lagune, the guy accused me of discrimination. Now I had given him pro-com marks, I'd given them very high, so he had nothing really to go on. I just didn't let him do something , I forgot what it was so he said , " well that's discrimination." and he went to the captain and put charges against me. But they said look you gave him almost a perfect pro-com marks, and so you can't complain.

#2 : So why complain?

#1 : And that promoted him to, so it was just this one instance.

#2 : You have good and bad in all. I mean there were some white guys that weren't such good guys. Well you know what, you don't realize, I shouldn't say you don't realize, but that is one of the good things about going into the military, about going in and meeting all groups of people and then going to another country, that's totally a good experience. You really look at life differently. That's why I really encourage people to get out of their little old towns and little groups and see what the rest of the world is like. Because the world isn't like what you think it is here. A lot of people think this is what its really like but it isn't. It could be bad or worse or better. Anyway , in the military you get a lot of these people that are , what would you call them, not uneducated, not under-privileged, but..

their backgrounds were very limited and um...I could just, in my groups I already had a lot of that, I felt like i was the most educated one out there, with only one year of college.

#1 : Generally the people out in the field were by far the least educated. When if you could type you stayed back, if you were good in math you stayed back to help the sergeant. And they wound up being a lot of minorities, a greater amount of them were out in the field. If you think of running a war, and if there were a million soldiers in Vietnam, I have no idea how many were over there, do you?

Interviewer : There were a little over 2 million served in the war.

#1 : How many at any one time? Lets just say if there were a million people , soldiers in Vietnam, I doubt if there were more then 300,000 doing what we were doing at any one time. doing the fighting. The rest were over there supporting the ones doing the fighting. Now if you take the least educated 300,000, and thats who you were with and if you were a forward observer actually you were designated to some artillery battery that you had

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never seen. You didn't even know where they were, you never saw them and you had one other artillery guy with you and he was your radio-telephone operator well it was absolutely common knowledge that if you screwed up your battery they sent you out with DFO, so that the guys I got, he was consistently not up to standards. You brought him up upto standards pretty quick or got rid of him sent him back. The people out in the fields were the less fortunate. They were the ones doing the fighting. I'll agree with Roger. I was very fortunate and I guess I thank God or what ever, that I was able to pick my own men. I went for the most educated and I would interview them and ask them if they wanted to do this. I had some bad ones. If not, I'd keep them one week and send them back. I had one guy that got up in the middle of a patrol and, well I still do this today, I sleep with one hand behind my back, I don't like to have any body behind me, I still sleep like that today. and this guy just got up and started sleepwalking. And this one guy, just kind of went crazy, couldn't even reason with him, I don't know what it was. He was just too young, he tried but he just couldn't make it, he just wouldn't make it. I taught everyone how to use a radio and how to read the map. Any one of us could of gone down and I needed someone that could take it. And I was fortunate to have good men, I was lucky.

Interviewer : When you came back all of you have indicated that you were really happy to be home, was there never any thoughts of staying in the army, was that never an option after you experience in Vietnam?

#1 : I re-upped for 6 months, because I wanted to go back and get a masters degree so I re-upped for 6 months because I wanted to coordinate going back to school, I had 6 months to kill and I wasn't going to get a job. So I just re-upped for 6 months, but I didn't go back to Vietnam I just made going back to school an easier transition. See, their experience coming back was totally different from mine. I walked out of the field one day and I came back to Ton su nu . They flew me by helicopter to the base in Ton So Nu and by the next morning I was in San Francisco I wasn't there a half hour and I was on a plane to Chicago. My parents had a call right away from Chicago and said I'll be home in an hour and a half. When I left where I was it was 110 degrees and when I got off the airplane, it most of been a 40 hour waver, it was 30 below zero. And it was a real shock.

Interviewer : What's that like coming immediately out of a war zone when you don't have any, you had several weeks on a ship. You were wounded so you had a little bit of a delay, what's it like to be suddenly in an entirely different environment?

#1 : To be able to take a shower and to sleep in a bed. That's all I could think of , taking a shower...I mean it was just, sheets, we never had anything like that. You appreciated the tiniest little convenience, I mean it was just unbelievable to remember how you were living and then you were home for thirty days. And then it was a cultural shock. Then going back to UK, and having had these experiences for three years, and having to go to class with these college kids .It was really different.

Interviewer : What was that experience like? To be a veteran, were there any encounters, many of the young folk had become disenchanted with the war. Did you have any problems with that?

#1 : No, uh

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#2 : Baby Killers...

#1 : Yeah, stuff like that. I didn't do that, I tried to tell them, I tried to do the right thing. I thought that they were so... they were so uneducated about the situation, the circumstances, I thought, you know, you'll grow up. You'll learn, you have no idea what your talking about but you'll learn. Just stay away from me. I wasn't agitated, I wasn't aggravated...but to me they were just a bunch of college kids that didn't have any more sense. They didn't have anything else to do but to jump on some band wagon.

#2 : Thats the nice thing about what your doing, which is this...educating or making other people know, there is always two sides, you can't criticize until you have been through it. I mean thats why I really encourage my kids and other kids to go to see other places, see what its like. I always tell my kids, " you don't know how lucky we 've got it.." I guess I am fortunate in a way that I saw it face to face. I mean there are a lot of Vietnams in the world, over in Bosnia, South America, Africa, all these countries. What they are doing to one group of people with the other group of people, with the children and with the women. And the men, how they cut them up, in this day and age, I suppose its always going to be going on, you have to face reality. And thats the whole great thing about what your doing. Uh, I was just... this is just one little facet in our life, and there are going to be more of these things. Hopefully the people that are running our country, well, the people that are running it now and hopefully the people that will be running it will have this and will know the other side of the story and will know what it could be like. Clinton, something I have never liked ever since he ran for office ...Clinton being a protester and going to Russia, I felt sorry for the military when he became our president. I have never met anyone who has been in the military that has any respect for him.

#2 : I have no respect for him.

#1 : Because the people that have been in the war, they don't want to go back, they know the horror of war and the terrible... you don't want to go. A person that has never been I don't know how they can make that judgment.

#2 : See they really can't make a judgment. Hey, there's always going to be a Saddam Husein in the world. Thats what gets me about their people, that really think he is doing the right thing, they just don't know any better. If you have always lived in one tiny little area for generation after generation, then you just can't see the big picture. They think thats the way the whole world is. Thats the way itis with a lot of these countries. Thank God that, well I don't want to go patting my own self on my back but... definantly the Second World War Veterans and the Korean War veterans and the WWI veterans, if all of us had said, "we're not going ." These crack pots that are running this country and around the world, um.. somebodies got to say, "enough is enough." Especially when you see them taking over country by country.

Interviewer : All of you have kind of indicated a criticism of the political system, as we have been going through this and Roger you particularly mentioned that you believed that the war could have been won, had it been run differently...

#1 : No doubt about it.

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Interviewer : How would you, from your perspective in the field, what were the problems, what were the short comings?"

#1 When I was there, we were losing, you get the Stars and Stripes every week, and the and the first thing you do every week is see how many people died and you read the names. To see if you knew any of them, just something you did. Every week when you are in the army,...KIA, MIA, they listed everybody. I remember seeing one guy I went to OCS training with and he died some how. We had the weapons to stop those people from coming down from the north, bombs or nuclear weapons, we could of stopped them with very little effort and we wouldn't do it . There were two countries , one on each side, Cambodia and Laos that we wouldn't go into, they had a whole staging area.

#2: Supply routes...

#1 My God in heaven, Vietnam was surrounded by enemy territory and we wouldn't go into it , and it was all political. Its bull crap. You think of the Second World War, would we have won if we had not have gone into another country if that was where they were staging from? Switzerland was the only country that nobody bothered to go into and actually the Nazis went there in fact. I,m not angry at the political process, I am angry at the way they ran the war. For insatance, it was all self serving. They ran the war according to the opinion polls. My God you know, were over there fighting according to these polls. The American people want us to stop bombing? We had better not bomb...come on, what ae yoou going to do. So we wound up losing the war. I don't mind being part of a losing team except for the 50,000 people that had to die, thats absurd. Those people didn't have to die like that. In the incremental ways they did it. I mean they built it up, and it was actually built up according to what they thought they could get away with, Can we send more troops in without getting anyone aggravated? Okay lets send some more in. If we're in this war, we ought to go in to win it. The Gulf War was a perfect example. They didn't worry if smart bombs were going to upset anyone. They used them and they won the damn war and came home. If you ever saw a B-52 strike, you would know we could have won the war.

Interviewer: You mentioned earlier about having to get permission to fire. Was the Beauracracy of the war machine that combersome?

#2 : When I first got there, it was. Then after awhile I got the feel of it. So I learned to get around it. Hey you need it , you'll get it. And I was protecting my men and the other people around me, sit didn't bother me any more. But uh, and the truce bothered me, one was Xmas, one was New Years. Two different times we saw them out there and we couldn't do anything about . There's an attorney here in Morehead, he was Westmoreland's advisor. I remember because I put in air-conditioners and heaters for him. And he said," I advised Westmoreland about those movements and he said it wasn't good information. " Maybe his hands were tied, he couldn't bomb or could't do something.

Interviewer: All of you during the course of the conversation have told of your experiences and how they effected you. In the long run, what did Vietnam do to you as an individual and perhaps to your life?

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#2 : Oh well, I used to have this saying, Never Give Up or one day at a time. To me you will never find me unhappy. Because everyday since I made it back ... I could of been killed over there 6or7 times. So God has been good to me and spared me this life and I am happy. No matter if my wife yells at me or ..

#1: Bad golf shot... heh,heh...I agree, I am healthy, I will always be a happy person.

#2: Yeah, Its the little things in life that matter. I don't need money, I don't need a million Its just my health and my family. The three kids that I have will hopefully never experience that. Its faith, you can't help but to believe in God. Was it fate? was it luck? I made it out so did God have a hand in it or was it just fate ?

#1 : you get an appreciation for sacrifices that most people would never understand. The only comment that I would have would be that its a shame that you have to go through with that to have those values ingrained into you. I have 20 yr. old son at UK and if I could give him some of those values in him but I can't. He will never understand some of that. All our kids are gonna be the same. They will never have a learning experience to be able to appreciate the values that we got out of that .

#2 ; Like sometimes even if you are not in a war, unfortunately it takes a dramatic disaster to make you really wake up. Like if you loose your wife or your father, by a sudden cause to make you wake up and realize that those things happen. You see it on the highway, you see unfortunately you see people get shot by someone else. Young people committing suicide. They give up their life so quickly. You'd think somewhere along the line someone didn't see this and explain to them that there is more to life then this little like ... lets say right here in Morehead and some people say, "I wonder if there are really tall buildings."But anyway its just the environment that they have been brought up in. We as older folks need to encourage them to get out and do it. I can't stand when someone gets upset about the little things. I mean do you know how lucky you are? Forget it and drive on.

#1 : Reminds me of my kids, they think when they get their license they automatically get a car. I wanted to mention also, you writing this book, you have a tool there to educate people. I don't know how you will do it. Pictures and words, I guess through oral presentation like you said. It will teach these people that they can learn at least by reading. It hurts to get shot, and I will admit that I have not been shot but at least take it for granted that it hurts. Maybe you can teach these kids through your book and they will learn something..

#2 : I know if I had to go back to Vietnam, today lets say it was 31 years, lets say I went back right now, knowing what I know today after 31 yrs of experience past that how would I handle that, or if I was the head of a government, how would I handle it differently. , boy I would sure do it differently. Thats why the military people the people in our government, they 've got to listen to us. I can't believe they will not listen to us, I can not believe people don't weigh peoples personal experiences alot. I mean if you just get one person's opinion maybe not but if you get hundreds and thousands of peoples experiences saying the same thing... I'm going to be contradictory here. When you see one person being a patriot for his country and then there was those protesters, you have to give them credit for expressing their opinion but I said "hey this is the patriotic thing to

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do.' But the thing of it is when it gets right down to war, maybe I was brainwashed, but when there is a war you sign up and you go over and if you die you die, but as we keep going through these wars, That why I was so interested in the Desert Storm situation, how were they going to handle that situation. Brother they were right on, it was so perfect. There was no American loss of life, but there is a big but there. In Desert Storm they knew the aggressor, Saddam he went into Kuwait by force, it was a huge army. In Vietnam there was no huge army that took over South Vietnam. It was the little VC, communist infiltrators that did it. It was just like over here when we had Russian Spies when they were trying to get info from us or trying to get labor unions to create unrest..

#1: Maybe the head of the military has learned from the experience. General Shwartzkoph was in my and Colin Powell was over there when I was. Maybe they have learned...

#2 : Maybe there was too much of a stretch between WWII and Vietnam, Korea was in there and it was a bad war but that was what it took, the power of education and understanding other people. I really respect the oriental people their family values. How they respect the head of the family. In our country I feel like I don't have the respect I deserve from my own family. In Vietnam it wasn't just the mind of one people, there was a lot of different things. The village cheif? Is he going to side with us or is he going to risk his son being killed?

#1 : He's probably going to try to do both..

#2 : He'll do both, and for examples. If someone was to put a gun to your husbands head, and tell you to go get some documents, what would you do? You'd try to be on their side. In the beginning there was a lot of effort to try to convince them that the American way is the better way. But your dealing with centuries of the oriental upbringing and ideologies of how to run their country and their life, I mean those people... that was one of the biggest things. It wasn't a black and white situation. We were in that mix of that gray , Thats where all the guys were that died from a sniper round or stepping on a booby trap or their gut being blown up by the kid dropping a hand grenade on him.

#1 : I think the enemy did a very good job. I think...

#2 : Really I respect them. At first I thought it was going to be easy, these little guys, we'll go in and kill all of them, and after a while,

#1 : You can't find them...

#2 : They were smart, really smart. When I was on that last operation, When I was flying in there, I thought this is it, I'm not going to trust anyone or anybody. If I don't get any sleep, too bad, I'm not going to close my eyes. I just... well I got scared being in there. Its funny like I told you. I can't tell you how much more I fear it now more then I did then. I got to the point that I was becoming a kind of a "gung-ho", and I was becoming an animal, I didn't worry about killing anyone. But when you saw dead children and women you had second thoughts, but then when you thought about what they did, their mother told them to go out and drop that hand grenade just because she had a gun to her head by a VC. So you can't blame them.

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Interviewer : Roger, you mentioned awhile ago when you gave me that paper about veterans. Have either of you been involved in any veteran organizations since the war? Vietnam Veteran Org.?

#2 : I just joined one last year, we had our 20th reunion from our second batalion, 3rd marines, down in Charlotte, N.C. through the power of the internet, I found some friends and they said, " Fred we've been trying to track you down for 30 years, and I said, " well, here I am." So we met down there. I joined them, in fact one of the articles where they were really trying to help other veterans. I think the three of us handles the war and we didn't let it get to us emotionally. I mean it got to remembering, but some of these guys just keepriving the war and they won't...you know , just forget about it and drive past. I mean I saw some vietnamese people in my store the other day , the young people, and everytime I see an oriental I kind of have a mixed emotion but I am open-minded enough to know that when I asked them , ' How old are you?" She said 29 yrs old. Hell she wasn't even born yet, she doesn't know anything about the war. Thats what gets me about some of the older vets, they Keep reliving and they have that hatred, I think they ought to just let it go, its a shame that it happened but they keep reliving...

#1 : I was approached by an outfit about 10 years ago, and I went to a meeting but I was disappointed. But the two vets that I saw were long-haired and ragged.I don't want to belong to an outfit like this, I thought they would be neat and squared away..

#2 : I wouldn't join one.

#1 : I'd say the same thing. My opinion is that the veteran org. are a bunch of malcontents and they want to blame all their problems on the war. They are still wearing their boots and their camouflaged stuff, and I think get a life, join the volunteer fire dept...

#2 : But with Bill and Roger and some other people we have our own informal group. We don't talk about it all that much but when we do we respect each others opinion because each of us were there.

#1 : We never talk about

#2 : and I wouldn't...

#1 : I remember on our last golf trip, Steinman, he was trained to be a gunner buthe never got to go, he stayed in Germany. He asks us all about it, I don't mind talking to him.He talked to you to, remember him the big fellow?

#2 : yeah, thats why I wanted to get on this thing because some people they want to know, because you and I could sit here and talk for a week or a month and still not tell you everything.I wanted to get it all documented, all the letters and things , not to relive it but as a sort of reference point..

Interviewer : There's been a always a sense for the soldiers that served in Vietnam were sort of blamed for the fact that we didn't win that war..

#2 : heh,heh, you should read my paper...

Interviewer : What is your reaction to that, have you ever had people say that to you? Be critical of you?

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#1 : I've had more people say, "Thank you for serving or welcome home," but I've never had anybody jump me for it. Of course they were probably afraid I'd jump all over them. But really they respected us, because we were doing a very, very dirty, difficult job, and as the old saying goes, "It's a dirty job and someone's got to do it." You can't do it with words it takes people. I always felt like I was part of the dispensable mass, of the human mass, I was a part of the young men that the govt. felt were not really an asset to them, hey they're not getting an education and all we need is someone we can teach to pull a trigger and some men... the more I think about it, the stupidity of war and how there should never be war. It makes me think of Desert Storm and the smart way of doing it. But I'm afraid something is going to build up in S. America or over in Africa, you never know. ...

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Side 2 : Roger Roeding and Steve and Fred Hellman.

Debbie Perry

#1= Roger

#2= Fred

#2 : ...in the Marine Corps. and he spent four years in Paris Island and then advanced training at Okinawa but the only good type he had was at 29 Palms, out in the Desert where they went through actual training like it was an actual war. He really learned something then. Otherwise it was just routine stuff. Also what bothered him, and I hope it doesn't get you mad but the amount of women in his forces that he had to be in charge of in his squadron, and they were good looking women but they would whine, "do I have to do these push-ups corporal Hellman?" and then he had a woman for a sergeant that bothered him at times. This sounds really awful to say but I almost wish he had gone to some kind of war and experienced something. He was in for the full 4 years but he really didn't experience what the three of us experienced. A lot of his friends ask me about what I experienced and they want to join. They say, "I want to be a part of that corps. You guys talk about it and I want to serve my country." I'm finding more of that with my sons friends. I have another son that is 19 and he is even possibly talking about the military. I told him to go in as an officer, get your education first. Its a lot better picture if you can. Because I know my son had it hard and I know you had it hard and my brother Dennis had it hard.

#2 : I'm trying to think where Dennis went..

#1 : He went to Hawaii...

#2 ; He had it hard? and he went to Hawaii ? ha, ha...

#1 : How long was he in? Three years wasn't it?

Interviewer : Do you'all ever watch Vietnam movies? And if so are they anything like your experience?

#1 : I watch quite a few of them. As a matter of fact, I probably have them all and I watch them 4,5,& 6 times. There are a few parts in each one that I can show my son and say to him, " This is pretty real." And I say, "I don't know how this outfit was but with mine we were constantly moving so that we were never involved with the drugs and stuff. I was.. the movie, *Apocalypse Now*, was pretty much like what I was involved with. We even dealt with the mountain roads , we never went up into any of the rivers and we never had to kill any of our own men but...Platoon was very good, Purple Heart was pretty good. I think that when they say it was " pretty good" it means it had quite a few parts that were realistic. But the overall nature of the movie was such that everybody is on drugs and you've got Americans shooting Americans. That whole concept is so far from reality that it made the Vietnam veteran so stereotypically a nut case, in fact the whole media has made the Vietnam Veteran a nut case . When.. if you look at Time Magazine, any article on a

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V. Veteran is always about some screwed up nut case. At home if they interview 5 veterans, they are always some long haired goofballs, and the media seems to be fixiated on this one type of individual. They never come to Steve or Fred and ask him how they are doing... Its always someone that says how terrible it was and how it ruined their life and now they're an alcoholic and there is not one Vietnam movie that is realistic. If they would just make one that shows what these 18 year old heroes did and had to sacrifice , but they'll never do that. These things are so far out.

#2 : My ultimate goal is ...I would love to produce one... to tell a real true story. Not one blown up. It maybe boring but it would be real. For the people that want to know what it was really like. To tell my own true feelings. The title would be, " True Feelings." And by the way, about the drugs, while I was there, the eleven and a half months , I never once came in contact with anything. We had beer, when we got back from these operations, that was our only in...that and the mail call. Beer is not going to hurt you. Thats why Roger is right. I don't blame the movie industry. They're big goal is to make money. The only one I really like was "Forrest Gump," that scene where he carries his wounded buddy out, that is so much like how it was. I remember the day I got wounded what it was really like, if I could get it set up with all the camaras and everything, that would be what it would be like, pretty close...

#1 : If you can imagine someone out in the field for about a week trying to stay alive and then coming back and sitting around trying to play Russian Roulette, let me tell you, it doesn't happen. And ...some of the most heroic people I have seen were the medics.

#2 : Ah, man, yeah..

#1 : They would crawl 100 yards, risking their life, to grab a guy and drag him back. Or you'd see a medivac helicopter come in, right in the middle of a fire fight, they'd do anything to get that guy out of there. Then you've got these damn movies showing Americans killing each other.

#2 : Again, you'd really like to know, where's the truth? Thats what your trying to do. None of this is...

#1 : Instead of a 1000 heroes, they've created 1000 nut cases! heh,heh.

#2 : I am really curious and I don't know if your going to tell me of not. You said you've talked to 300 people so far. I'd like to hear their opinions but Jesus trying to listen to all of it and I know you don't have time to tell me..

#1 : You'll have to read the book or do you want to listen to the tapes?

#2 : Is it like us, I mean?

Interviewer : Some of what you say is very similar to what other Vietnam veterans have told us. But we have also interviewed some that it was the worst thing in their life and they have never ..

#1 : recovered..?

Interviewer : Yes. I think that you'all, the fact that you have a life and the war did not stunt your growth is more typical . We have also selected inadvertently a selected audience. The

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article about our work appeared in the Courier-Journal and the Lexington-Herald, and there is a certain type of person that will read the newspaper and contact us. When we began, we agreed that we would not request an interview we would only use volunteers. Just the fact that they would volunteer tells a lot about their type of experience.

#1 : Does that indicate that it was a positive experience?

Interviewer : In a way yes. Or if it was a negative experience, it has become a positive force in their life now.

#1 : I'll be honest with you, people that I would encounter that would want to talk about it are the discontents. I'm surprised that you do not have 1000's of unhappy veterans that want to talk about it. Those that want to blame all the bad in their life on Vietnam.

Interviewer : We have a few. My partners take on that is that in all the publicity, it mentions that I am an army wife. I do not know if that has had an impact on it or not, he feels that it has. And the fact that he is young and I am a woman. All this has had an impact on the kind of people that have responded.

#1 : Is it we are the vast silent majority and the discontents are the really small vocal minority?

#2 : Yeah...

#1 : I think also the people that I know came from strong families and did things together and were raised to respect and were able to handle many things. Some of the men that I knew came from broken homes and boy it is a difference.

#2 : You hit the nail on the head there . It is the environment that a person is brought up in , they don't know any better. This is the way it is.

#1 : But it wouldn't take Vietnam it would be any thing else that could set that guy off. If they got into a series of jobs where they got fired they'd say the same thing. " I'm getting screwed, this is not fair, ...", but I look at the discontented Vietnam Vet as one that went in as a discontent in the first place.

Interviewer : I've asked some specific questions and have given you all the opportunity to give a particular story that you would want to be in a study like this. Is there anything that either one of you would like to relate?

#2 : I got... it would take a while.. I'll just have to let you read what I have..

#1 : he's right, it'll take a while. If he starts to relate, I'll have to circulate.

#2 : ha, ha. He's right. It will take a while. I have the letters I wrote home. The first three months or so, I wrote too graphically, every little detail. Then I realized I shouldn't because it might worry them. I guess I'm glad I said it and got it off mine so that they knew exactly what was up...

Interviewer : How did your parents react? What kind of letters did they write you?

#2 : My relationship with my family I can't tell you how close I got to everyone in my family. My Dad, they all started to open up to me. I guess they started to think maybe Fred's not going to make it. I told them things that bothered me. We got close as ever. It

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was the first time any of us were in a spot where death could happen . Some people don't open up until some kind of traumatic disaster and then they say the words " I love you." It shouldn't have to take something like that to say it. So now I say those words all the time.I don't care if it is embarrassing to my son or not. He'll say, " Dad, you don't just come out and say I love you. But I need to say it and I do frequently. Sometimes it takes ...you know when you come close to a death and you almost know its over with, and thats ... we all need that but it was a rude awakening to me. Sometimes God does something to wake a person up and if it takes a death or something like that to do it, so be it. Thats why sometimes when I go to a funeral, like my brother-in-law, married to my favorite sister, the one I was closest to. And he died of an aneurysm. How old was he , 30 something?

#1 : I think he was more like 40...

#2 : So quick and sudden. And there she was all alone. He left three children. It just as soon could of been me. You know somebody like that. It makes you wake up and not take your loved ones for grante. The same thing you do at a wedding. All the vows and stuff. And you know you look back at it later and you remember that you said those things to your wife in the beginning. So many people get divorced and forget all that. They just give up to easily. I guess they want life easy. Thats why I go through life. There is always going to be a little down slope, but I know I will always swing back up. I've had a few dips in my life. Vietnam and it always goes back to swimming in Nam when I was a looser

#1 : No,No,No,ha ha now you know you were...

#2 : I started off behind, loosing in every race, not only last but several laps behind. But if it wasn't for these two guys. There the two closest friends that I've got, thats why I put these words on my helmet." Never Give Up," thats the same words I had in my swimming. Coming down the last lap and I just felt I had enough energy for one more stroke. And thats the way I've gone through life. The results are worth it in the long run. Vietnam was just a little experience. Well it was a major experience, but other people can have the same experience. If they are brought up in an environment where they have a lot of death and things like that. All they have to do is to get out of there. Thats the main thing..

#1 : I'm going to bring something up. You said to talk about something that we remember about Vietnam. It was my first fire fight that I was in. It was our fire fight. Intelligence said this whole area was enemy, no matter who it was, it was enemy. And I was up in front and I wasn't the first guy I was the second guy. And this woman runs across the rice paddy. She had on these black pajamas. And I just took aim and shot but I didn't try to hit her, because I was told that it was enemy running across but I didn't feel right. It looked like my mother running and it shocked me. So I knew she got away because I just shot behind her. I mean when you first get there and your used to everything being all nice and all like back in the US, you don't know. I mean that person didn't do anything to me, she was just out there picking her rice and we surprised her.

SIDE 2

Transcription of side 2
by Debra Petkus-Perry
May, 1998

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Interviewer: did you ever get to a point that you weren't sure they were innocent? Women, children? You've mentioned a couple of episodes with children, and you have too.

#1: Oh well all the time because sometimes when you were approaching a village you would get fire out of that village and maybe a couple of guys would get hit and you would go into that village and there were women, there children and you didn't know who shot. I mean you didn't go shoot everybody, but you didn't know who did that. And you weren't allowed to, you couldn't call artillery into the village and it would be called quote "a friendly village," except two guys just got shot.

#1: See you did know who. You didn't have no idea. You never caught them em. People whoever it was got away.

There's a lot of publicity now because I guess it's the 30's year anniversary of the Me Lai incident. Was that ever part of anyone's experience at this table, any atrocities against civilians, murder of people.

2: No, but see it came very close. Some incidents same thing in those pictures you'll see that we are going into these villages and some of our men are getting shot and their dead and you call in the artillery to go in there and there is the women and the children. I think, I don't know, the Calley thing

where he killed all those women and children on that one road there, in a way I could almost relate how it could happen, but he, I don't know if he, he had the decis...I mean he, it's difficult because you you you get so mad and angry that you want to kill somebody and somebody your mad at getting killed. That was the one so frustrating thing about that is In the beginning, In the villages you weren't sure who the enemy was. There was times I felt guilty as some of these people that we killed. I mean I did, I wasn't proud of it but someone killed our man that's why it was trying to get on the side of these people first that's why the example of a guy putting a gun to your head, what would you do? you know, that's what was probably happening to them.

#1 I think the Me Lai experience was a one in a million occurrence, I think they should of hung Calley, I think they should of executed him , I think he should be gone, uh he was in command and he let it happen. And if that would of happen in any unit I was associated with they would of shot him.

#2 Yeah, that was horrible. I'm was not proud of that at all.

#1 And I'm sure that has happened in WW2 and every other war but as far as saying was that an occurrence, I can't believe that out of the worst units I ever saw, I just can't believe it. Something snapped there, shooting a kid like that. It's just, just so grotesque. Just think. When he got off and he's selling jewelry I understand, down in Georgia somewhere, he doesn't deserve to live. I don't even know how he got off.

Interviewer: he was pardoned.

#1: That's right, he served for a year or something, oh yeah that's right, I knew he was found guilty and they pardoned him. That's right. That doesn't send a good message.

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3: Uh, I don't know, I can't think of anything right off the top of my head. I wanted to say something before, talked about wanting to stay in the military. I enjoyed it, I enjoyed the military, I enjoyed being an officer in the marine corp. So many privileges, so many good people I met. There's some bad

people but I just avoided the bad .people. When I came back I guess I wanted to keep going, and this thing that came up with Camp LeJune, do you want to volunteer to go to army's ranger crew, which is stupid for a marine to go to cause they are really going to harass you, it was really stupid, so I did it. And it was almost harder than ietnam, it was so deep, so rough. I don't know why I did it, but I had to do something, Vietnam was in the groove and I had to get back out in the field and do the patrolling, and that was some of my outlet. I almost wanted to stay, but I didn't want to go back to Vietnam so I said I better, I asked for an early out, I got out six months earlier than I was supposed to that was allowed. But I enjoyed my military. I think it's a good opportunity for many people, both men and women.

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#2 -Do you have maps on this, on Vietnam? Large maps and all. I'm sure you do, don't you?

Interviewer: We have quite a lot of pictures

#2 - Got any videos? One thing I'll tell you right off the bat is this hill 881 and 861, the layout, the way I understand, through the internet I've been communicating with this um organization that I joined, it's only through the internet and all, and they are going to have a special on NBC supposedly this Friday on 9 o'clock, channel 5 about interviews with guys who were on hill 881 and 861. It's just that I really want to see it but it's on the same time as Kentucky's on. (laughter) So I'm going to have to hit my VCR button.

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Interviewer: yeah

#2 - So I expect you to be...I "m going to come down and check on you in about a year. I'm going to sit on one of your classes, can I sit in your classes?

Interviewer: that would be wonderful, yes.

#2 - Would I have to pay? Would I have to pay or could I just come in as a visitor?

No, you just come.

That'd be kinda.....(end of tape)

Debbie / not a bad
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