

Oral History Report

Keeling/Hibbs Interview
Tape 1 Side 1

Transcribed by:
Christine Scott

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Main Topics Covered

Joseph Keeling and Ronald Hibbs discuss many of their experiences while in Vietnam. One of the main topics covered was why they enlisted in the Kentucky National Guard. Keeling also discusses his brother's tour in Korea that was simultaneous to his tour in Vietnam. Keeling and Hibbs discuss their trip to Vietnam and how they felt during their plane ride. Keeling discusses what it was like for new guys to arrive in Vietnam and how he felt sorry for them. Keeling also tells of his experience when his plane was landing in Vietnam. He compares Vietnam to some of the worst places he had ever seen. They both tell about their jobs while in Vietnam. They were both in an artillery unit. They both talk about the guns, howitzers, and ammo carriers they had to maintain. Keeling describes where their base was and how beautiful the country was. Hibbs explains that he had no contact with the Vietnamese people. Yet, Keeling tells about the Vietnamese children in Phu Bai. He tells about how the children would sell soldiers marijuana and Coca-Cola. Keeling and Hibbs also tell about the night their fire base, Tomahawk, got hit. They both tell how they felt when they woke up and realized they were being attacked. They discuss how some of their men got burned. Keeling talks about how he has learned a lot about the war just by listening to some of his friends tell their stories.

Interviewer: Oral history interview with Joseph Keeling and Ronald Hibbs in Elizabethtown, KY, February 7, 1998.

Keeling: Joseph E. Keeling, Jr.

Hibbs: Ronny Hibbs.

Interviewer: O.K, I'm going to ask you a few questions that I drew up the other day off your questionnaire. If there's anything you don't want to answer, then just tell me. If you want me to shut off the machine at any time, I'll do it. And, if there's something you want to talk about that I didn't ask you about, please just kick in. And, if I'm really doing this right, I'm not going to say much. So, I really want just your all's thoughts and memories, O.K? Did both of you enlist in the Kentucky National Guard and if you did, why did you do it? Just tell me a little bit about it.

Keeling: Yes, I did. And, primarily because, well, there were two reasons. One reason was my mother worked with the Better Commander in Bardstown and he asked her if I would like to join the guard unit. I was getting about the age that I had to do something. And, so I thought about it. And then a friend of mine, a neighbor boy, he had joined and he kept aggravating me every time he'd see me at church, he'd say, "Hey, come on up, you know, and join the guard, you know, we're having fun, we're not doing anything." But anyway, that was primarily the reason, not particularly to dodge anything, but you had to do something toward service time. So, and that way I could stay there at home and work on the farm and everything. And, still fulfill the obligation.

Hibbs: I guess, I think I still, I had a pretty good job I believe at that time. And, seemed like everybody I run around with was going to the Guards, so I figured I might as well go with them. And, that's basically, I guess, how I ended up in the Guard.

Interviewer: Sounds like it was a brotherhood, social type of a...

Keeling: We, basically, somebody or almost everybody knew somebody else in there that wasn't, you know, it was a lot of good friends, and a lot of friends we made after we got in. Cause, some of us lived on one side of the county, some on the other, went to different schools. So, we really didn't personally know each other. But then, we got to know each other through the Guard.

Interviewer: Now, you had a brother that was in Korea at this time?

Keeling: Uh-huh, I had a younger brother, who after I was gone, he was drafted, and then, he wind up serving in Korea because I was in Vietnam. They couldn't send him, cause he was, was it Leather Bravo his infantry? And so he wind up serving his overseas tour in Korea. Simultaneous to my time I was in Vietnam.

Interviewer: Did you have any relatives in the...

Hibbs: No, I didn't have anybody in the family that I know of that was in there. Just some people that I went to school with. And, some that I ran around with. Well, several that I run around with had joined up. That's basically how I got involved in it, I reckon.

Interviewer: Can you all tell me what your arrival was like in Vietnam? What was your first impression? Did you go as a big unit, was it a military transport, or did you come in on commercial flights? Some of the...

Keeling: It was both ways if I remember right.

Hibbs: Yeah.

Keeling: Our, our group, went over on a commercial flight. And, it's now a out of business airline called Brannick International. We flew, I don't know, it seemed like there was three planes left that one day, but I don't know how many of 'em were even commercial. I vaguely remember, we were late leaving, oh, what was it, Austin, Texas. We were late leaving Austin, Texas, so we had to fly straight from Austin all the way to Clark Airforce base in the Philippines before we landed. We was supposed to have landed in Travis, in California and that was, you know, and that was kind of, you know, we'll be able to see California. And the next thing we saw the airport in the Philippines.

Hibbs: But, we stopped in Hawaii, didn't we?

Keeling: Well, you all probably did. You see, different flights, you know, they did different things. I don't know, some of these guys talk about flying on the C141s, but the only thing, we had kind of different experiences. We just shared them later. You know, how much different they were. We had regular stewardesses.

Interviewer: Was that strange? I mean, I've always found that to be strange to hear veterans talk about, I mean, going into a situation where you have regular stewardesses.

Hibbs: They kept getting uglier the further we got.

Keeling: You know, It's really odd, I mean, it's difficult to say how you really felt cause there wasn't anything to base it on. There was no way to say, well I felt this way as far as

I'm saying. Other guys, I'm sure had different feelings. But, you had nothing to base it on. You know, you hear of this place, but up until that point the closest thing we had seen to Vietnam was that movie. What was John Wayne's movie we saw just a few days before we left? Oh shoot, anyway.

Interviewer: *Green Berets?*

Keeling: Yeah, the *Green Berets*. And, that was the closest thing we had come to it at that point. And so, we played a lot of rummy.

Hibbs: **Still**, ye was on there with a lot of people that you knew and you could talk about stuff that you'd done, you know, before, it wasn't like being with a bunch of strangers. You know, just sitting there waiting. I mean, we just kept on making a joke out of a lot of stuff I reckon, you might say. It wasn't like being by yourself.

Interviewer: I suspect that really helped a lot.

Hibbs: Oh, it did.

Keeling: Oh, it was, I mean, I can't, I can't, I can't even imagine what it would have been like I'd been on there with some guys I barely knew or maybe even some people I didn't even know. I mean, you know, cause a lot of those guys came over for replacements and I guess they came over-they just threw a bunch of 'em together, brought 'em over. They landed at Long Binh or Cam Ranh Bay, or where ever it was. Then, they went into a company that said well, you got an MOS we need, and way you go up who knows where? We had some of those guys come in, you know, in there, and I never forget one kid, I felt sorry for the kid, he was a young guy. He came in the night after we got hit. Or, he came in that day and we got hit that night. And he said, "Does that happen very often?" (He laughs) And, I felt sorry for him. No, this is the first time it's happened. I can imagine, your first day in country, and you know, all you see is, you know, numerous fireworks and lots of noises and so I couldn't imagine what he was going through cause we had already been there for a good while.

Interviewer: How old were you guys when you went over there?

Keeling: You know, it's odd, my mom asked me yesterday, or the day before yesterday. My son's birthday, and he's twenty-six, and I was twenty-six when we were in Vietnam.

Hibbs: I was born in '43. What ever I'd been in '68. I'd been twenty-four, wouldn't I?

Keeling: You'd been twenty-five.

Hibbs: Twenty-five?

Keeling: I turned twenty-six while we was over there. I think. I believe it was.

Interviewer: So, you've arrived there, what's it like when you "**unintelligible**"?

Hibbs: Really, you didn't know, you just there, I guess, just waiting for something to happen. (Laughs)

Interviewer: Was it hot? Was, I mean, what time of the year did you arrive?

Keeling: We got there in October and we had come from Texas, so being hot, it made no real impression on us. But I do remember when the plane was banking around, making approach to land down, right on top of Danang, and we were flying actually on top of the downtown part. This was out in a low area because there's a lot of, they weren't lakes, they looked like over-sized water puddles. And we looked down, and all there were just little old huts and I thought to myself my goodness I hope this place begins to look better than this, cause it didn't look too good then. I mean, it looked like some of the worst things I'd ever seen. Some of the film, you know, the news film you see out of places in Africa, you know, that's the closest place I'd ever seen and compare to it. Then, we flew over a little bit of the city and saw some regular buildings and it looked a little different. Then, we landed, and it was kind of vague after that exactly. We was there in a great big airport, airplanes all around us, a lot of noise, concrete and blacktop. "**Unintelligible.**"

Interviewer: What were your all's duties like? What did you...can you give me a typical day once you got situated? What it entailed?

Hibbs: Well, mine was driving a gun, but you done that about once a week just to run it down the road and charge the batteries up, other than that, you had to help, you know, stack the ammo or load the rounds or just working around there, you know, on your bunkers and everything. I don't even, you'd spend two or three weeks and you wouldn't go on a spot probably or however far it was from the gun to the mess hall there, that'd just about be the extent of it. Maybe, two or three hundred feet. You know, you'd spend two or three weeks or a month in an area like that and just content. You know, what you do everyday and I think I was on a night shift, but I can't ever remember sleeping in the day, so I don't know if I slept (laughs) unless I slept at night when I was supposed to be

awake! But, I know we would have to get up and fire some rounds and sometime during the night, what one or two o'clock, something like that?

Keeling: They had different times.

Hibbs: They just had different times. But, it was hot when you'd wake up, it'd probably be 90 degrees a lot of the time. I mean, of a morning, you know, I don't know what time we went to bed cause I really can't member sleeping that much. But, I know I did. But, it seemed like I was up every day and it seemed like I was up every night. But, it was just kind of a routine deal. Everybody had some kind of job to do, but once you got your bunkers and everything set up, all that slowed down. I guess, really, you could work on them.

Keeling: Everyday though if you'd...

Hibbs: And we probably would if we'd got hit a lot. I'm sure we'd a been stacking sandbags to the moon.

Interviewer: You all were in an artillery unit, right?

Keeling and Hibbs: Right.

Keeling: We had, one five five self propelled howitzers. Probably one of the finest piece of equipment the Army ever had. I mean they were, almost fool proof to operate 'em and we had next to no trouble with 'em. Just, the only trouble we had, was put a few starters on 'em, but that was a major job when you put a starter on one of those things. But, I was a mechanic. Primarily was supposed to take the "**unintelligable**" of the howitzer, which is the inside part, the part that actually rotated, and some of the firing mechanism. But, we usually wound up working on a little bit of all of it. And on the ammo carriers, the things that looked like APCs with canvas tops on 'em that we hauled ammo in. And, we just kind of just stayed busy, the second major fire base we were on, we built a big, a big tent and worked on 'em inside this tent. And, we thought we were really getting up town.

Interviewer: Where were you located mostly at? Where's the fire base?

Keeling: We were just north of Danang, actually, we were north of what is known as a **High Van Pass**, which is a mountain range, the pass comes through that mountain. Up out of Danang, I don't know how many, what twenty miles or so probably?

Hibbs: Gee, I don't remember.

Keeling: Twenty, twenty-five miles. Maybe better cause we went back a second time. But, we were, actually it was stated while we were there, this is unusual, it was kind of a, almost like a border. We were told, we were there in '69, that the only **noble** person that had ever visited Vietnam, or visited any troops in Vietnam, and come north of the **High Van Pass** was Billy Graham. They said none of the rest of 'em ever ventured north of the **High Van Pass**. Which, I don't have any "unintelligible" from the DMZ, we weren't really what you call close, there were I think there two more provinces between us and the DMZ. I do remember that, just before we left, that we were either at the edge of the Quang Tri Province, or in it, I'm not sure exactly where the boundaries were. But, we were right on the coast. That was the amazing part, we were on the coast looking out over, if it was on a map, our first fire base, where we call it Hill 88, was at almost like the juncture of the South China Sea and the Gulf of Tonkin. On the map, they just don't have dividing lines, but you have the South China Sea and then the Gulf of Tonkin. Then, we were right, a little peninsula stuck out just a few miles beyond just out into the ocean. You could locate it on the map. You just have to have a map of the country itself.

Interviewer: Was it a pretty country?

Keeling: Oh, it was beautiful.

Interviewer: Yeah, I've heard numerous times that it is beautiful green...

Keeling: It's hard to describe. That is one of the bad part about our- some of the guys took film, but they were primarily black and white, which, I don't suppose they even had color, except for the news cameras. It was just, you just couldn't, you can't describe it, because of the colors, you know, the color combination.

Interviewer: Did you have much interaction with the South Vietnamese people? Do you have any impressions of 'em?

Hibbs: That time we didn't. I mean, we got to know a lot more of 'em the second trip we took back over there. But really, we, I wasn't around them that much. I mean, our fire base was mostly just our people and that's just who stayed there. You know, a lot of 'em had 'em come in and clean up and do laundry and stuff like that. But, I don't know, we didn't have, did we have any at all come up on the hill, maybe one?

Keeling: No, not on 88.

Hibbs: I can't remember any being up there.

Keeling: Now, they did when we got back to Phu Bai. They did then, but we didn't, except seeing them on the roads, that was it. I think some of the guys, there's a little old bridge between us and Phu Bai, and some of the guys would stop there if they went into town, you know, ever so often, they go in for maybe whatever reason, and I think they'd stop there and just kind of, you know, shoot the breeze with 'em. I guess some of the people there knew enough English that they could carry on a conversation. Which, that was the major problem. Now, the kids knew some English slang words, some of 'em weren't real good, but anyway, they knew enough English that they could actually, you know, they could, if they were selling Cokes, they knew what to call Cokes. And, if they were selling marijuana, they could get your attention. But, that's, other than that, the older ones wouldn't, I don't guess, would even talk. I don't know, like I said, we never tried, so they just didn't make any effort at all. But, basically we saw 'em along side of the road.

Hibbs: **"Unintelligible"**

Keeling: Yeah, the little boy.

Hibbs: He was just a kid. I mean, we got to know him pretty well.

Keeling: We had an old, what they call an Army mule. It was a platform truck, I think what they call it. Somehow or other, a Marine unit in Phu Bai had one and they had an extra one, and they were getting ready to have an inspection and they were short a typewriter. And, our medic, who stayed in Phu Bai quite a bit, he knew where they could find a typewriter, so he traded the typewriter for the mule and they wouldn't let him keep the mule there because it wasn't part of their government issue. So, they loaded up and brought it out the hill. And so Coffee kind of, I think, one of the boys in the maintenance section, **Joe Hall**, he more or less, kind of told him to take care of it, kind of keep an eye on it. So, we used it to a little bit, it wasn't of a great deal of use to us. The 101st used it quite a bit. They'd come up and borrow it and they'd take it down and put it on the railroad tracks and the tires would ride right on the rails, the narrow gauged railroad, and they would ride up and down the railroad track with it on the little old patrols. So, they finally messed the motor up a couple times in it. And, one day we were coming down the road and looked out in the rice paddy and there's this big object laying out there and we stopped and kind of checked it over and it was a big generator. And the mule had a two

cylinder engine on it, a two cylinder continental, and here this big generator had a four cylinder on it. So, we wrestled that thing out of the rice paddy, dumped in the back of that truck, and took it up top of that hill and put the big engine on that mule. And then, it was, fact is, I may even have a picture of that thing, I hope I do. It began to look pretty good time it got painted up and worked on a little bit and it run better than the normal mule. So, they would take it down to this sandy area below our fire base, and it was all white sand, just looked like a beach, only if it had a been now, they have built in the meantime a resort out off of the edge of our fire base out next to the ocean. And, we'd take it down there and it was real flat and smooth, and the kids that lived around there, they'd come over and **Joe Boy** would take 'em for a ride on it. And they'd be so many of 'em on there, that they would be some on one side and then reached across and some on the other side holding them on. I mean, I don't know how many kids they got on that thing. And, they'd ride up and down the sand there, you know, the kids, it just thrilled them something fierce to ride on that thing. And, one of the kids, was there were two of 'em; I don't remember the other boy's name, But this one's name was **Wa** and I found out now that his name was **Doi Quong**, was his Vietnamese name. I don't know how they get the name **Wa** out of that, but they did. Anyway, so, that's how we, you know, we went back to the fire base and this boy still lived there. There were a few more houses there that when we were there and there was electrical substation there, too. But other than that, it changed very little. Very little.

Interviewer: I want to get to that later if we can. I'm really, that's a neat perspective. I don't know how to ask it; I assume you guys, I know your unit was at fire base Tomahawk that got hit. If you want to talk about that or not I'd like to....

Keeling: He knows more about it than I do.

Hibbs: What do you mean? Where was you at?

Keeling: He wind up in Japan, over, so he can tell you a little better perspective than I can.

Hibbs: I, all I know was, it was a rainy night wasn't it?

Keeling: It really rained hard while we were having a movie. Yeah.

Hibbs: And I don't know, what time was it? About one or something?

Keeling: It was at somewheres, one, two, somewheres like that.

Hibbs: But, of course I was on night shift still and see I was in the gun, I reckon, me and, oh, I think it was four of us in the gun. And, we heard some shootin' or some incomin', or we thought it was incomin', of course, that's the first thing, if you didn't know what to shoot at, they give you some places where it was likely to be. I don't know how they figured it out, a cross road, just something to shoot at if anything ever started happening. Then, we got a round or two off at those each gun had a different place that it was supposed to shoot. But what it was, was they were all inside the perimeter, here we were, we were shooting out, I don't know, two or three miles, four miles, or whatever. And they was all, they was on top of the gun and everything, and of course, we didn't even know it. But, they had already snuck in, and I guess, got pretty well in place where they wanted to be. Maybe not quite all the way, that's cause David kind of caught 'em off guard, didn't he?

Keeling: That's what they said, yeah.

Hibbs: But they were pretty well set up, I reckon, to pull the attack off, but after we got, I think we fired two rounds, everywhere you look, stuff was blowing up, on fire. And Jerry James, another boy that was in there with me, he lives in Bardstown, too, said, "We're gonna have to get out of here." And, I was the first, I was by the door there and he kinda give me a shove and when I jumped out, I guess they were standing there beside the gun or somethin' cause one of 'em threw a **satchel chart**, I reckon what it was, wasn't it?

Keeling: Probably was.

Hibbs: Underneath of me and it and I can remember turning two flips in the air, and I hit the ground and I was still running the same way I started. I never did even miss a step I don't guess. I was still headed for the bunker. But I can remember turning those two flips just as plain as day. And then he came out behind me, but while we were coming out, they fired one of those RPGs through the gun, and of course we had all that powder stacked up in there already out of the canisters, just in the bags. And, they ignited that stuff and when they did, and the last two guys come out of there, it burnt them something fierce. That stuff goes off, I guess probably as bad as gasoline, doesn't it?

Keeling: Oh, it's hotter than gasoline.

Hibbs: So anyway, we all got in the bunker there, it was right below the gun there, and of course, they had already threw something in 'er and blew the inside out. But, Bobby

Stump, he was my sergeant, he still lives up the road from me just a little ways, handed me my rifle, I didn't have it with me in the gun. So anyway, he pitched it to me, or pitched me somebody's rifle, and then we kinda got situated and started trying to guard, you know, the doors and the one big window we had in front. Of course those two guys that got burnt real bad, they were just laying there in the floor just kinda moaning and carrying on cause they were, you know, wasn't really much we could do at that time. And then after, I don't know, probably fifteen or twenty minutes, how long for those planes started droppin' those flares?

Keeling: It had to be a while, but I don't know, I have no way of measuring time. It's like...

Hibbs: It seemed like forever.

Keeling: Nobody's got a watch. Who knows what time it is. Who knows how long it's been. All I know is when, when will daylight get here?

Hibbs: Yeah. Anyway, once they started droppin' flares, they **had pulled a tact off on us** and then went on the next fire base over...

Keeling: Yeah, next two.

Hibbs: They were suppose to kind of support each other, somethin' happen one, and they hit 'em all three and nobody could do nothin' for anybody. So, once that plane started circling, he would drop a flare and would keep things lit up and then you could start seein' who was who, cause you know, you couldn't tell if he was the Vietnamese or Viet Cong or who. He, you know, right next to each other might as well say. But, **"unintelligible"** of course this went on till about almost daylight, but main part of the tact, I don't know was over probably what thirty minutes or an hour, somethin' like that?

Keeling: I'd say thirty minutes probably about the end of it.

Hibbs: But, there was one of 'em; it was right outside our window behind the rock, a great big rock, and of course, you couldn't shoot him, but he was, we couldn't see him, but we knew he was there. And finally one of the guys that was in our **"unintelligible"** finally kept throwing hand grenades up in the air, till one of 'em hit in there and got him. But he, evidently, they were on our gun, up on the front of it and off to the side of it, I guess, when it all started, cause our gun was kind of one that was up the hill the farthest. We were actually on a bad place to start with cause we were kinda at the base of a hill

and you know, you really can't do much when you're down at the bottom of a hill like that when they'd come in on top of ya. But, it, I guess everybody kinda has a tale of what went on that night. But, that's what I can remember the most is doing those two flips in the air. Thinking I was dead, you know, when I hit the ground. I was still headed the same way and I never slowed down I don't reckon. I'm glad I wasn't turned the other way, I guess I'd run over two, three of 'em. (Laughs)

Interviewer: Do you all ever get together and talk about that, does everybody have different stories, I guess?

Hibbs: Oh, yeah.

Keeling: Somewheres along the line we did. I don't know where's one of the reunions, but I think some of the guys kinda, you know, "**unintelligible**". And it's, it's really, if you could get everybody together and let everybody, you know, one guy tell his part, and the guy who was next to him, he'll situate us like we were on that hill that night. Some guys won't talk about it, some won't even, I mean, they won't even mention it. But, if you could, this thing might be really amazing what you could learn. Because I learned an enormous amount of information that I thought I knew, but didn't. When Mr. Wilson wrote his book, he, we were up Ronny's house and he would take little interviews and he would, after he typed it all up, he gave it to us and we read it over. Well, I read what he, and until that point, I don't know had we ever really talked about it. But then, another person had, you know, this particular thing happened, and it was amazing what was read and some of the people, you know, it brought back, kinda jogs your memory a bit. You know, a little piece was missin' somewheres and you realize what it was. But, it was more or less like Ronny said. We were maintenance, so we just primarily worked during the day and our bunker was about as far from their gun as you could get. Like you said, they were up on a hill out next to the concertina wire and the guns were laid kinda, they call 'em a lazy W pattern, or something. Anyway, they came back down the hill, and some of 'em were, right, the last, the number six gun, was right outside our bunker door. It just is, the fact is, you could throw a rock over and hit it. And I woke up there was this great big noise and I woke up and I couldn't figure out what in the world was going on. And, you know, I kinda looked around and everybody, nobody was saying anything because everybody had been asleep. Didn't know what the noise was cause we got, we

had kinda adjusted, more than kinda adjusted, to the guns firing at night, so the guns firing at night didn't wake us up. When we first got in country, before we were sent out to the fire base they, our rear area was right next to an eight-inch self propelled unit. Well, the first night we were in country, they turned and fired right over top our hootches. I mean, right over top of 'em. They weren't near the 165 from where we were. So, when they fired, it literally, I mean, I literally went up in the air and came back down and landed in the middle of the floor. I mean, just like I was laying on a bed. And, you know, we didn't know if it was like somebody said about incomin' or what, I mean, you have no idea what's going on. We thought maybe it was incomin'. But, we didn't hear anybody hollerin' and didn't see any flashes or anything. So, after while, we realized what it was. Well it, the next night, they didn't bother us hardly at... But then, as time goes along, you just kindly get used to all these extra noises. So when you wake up, when something wakes you up and it's a noise and it kinda, you have to figure this thing out. You know, what was this? And, it turned out to be, it was one of the NVA sappers was right outside our door and he was at the edge of our maintenance tent. And from where he was, he was up against the bank, he could throw things from where, his vanish point, which was, probably wasn't as far from here to that little purple car. And he could heave those little satchel charges, and would, they would bounce through our door. Well, the bottom of our bunker was one-inch boards made from ammo palates. And so it, you'd just hear it, you know, thump, thump, thump, thump right across. Well, the first went off, it went off right inside the door and there was a boy named Gonzales from Texas, and it went off right underneath his cot. It really mangled his leg. And, he was in shock, I don't guess he probably even knew he was hurt; just knew something was wrong. I don't know if it blew him out in the floor, cause it was dark, you gotta almost play it by ear. If you hear, you're in good shape. I remember somebody sayin', you know, somebody's hurt. And about this time, that's when I heard that little noise, the little, thump, thump, thump, thump, thump. Well, what was that noise? About that time the satchel charge went off underneath my cot; I just had got out of it and was standing up and the first thing you do, you know, you put your clothes on. You don't care what's going on around you, you put your clothes on. Then I grabbed my flak jacket, and just as I grabbed it, it went off. And I had my back to my cot, so it blew the boy that was above

me, Jack Lewis, we had, our bunkers were small, so we had double decked our bunk, our, our cots. So, he just took his cot apart and used what they call engineer stakes and ran through the cot and propped it up where he wouldn't have any hangin' down, all we had was a mosquito net. Well, it went off and it blew that engineer stake somewheres, we never did find it, which is just like a metal steel, you know, a metal post. And, it was gone, we never did find it. Had no idea where that thing went. But then, I couldn't hear, I mean, the only thing I could hear was somebody holler real loud. I could barely make out what they were saying all I hear was a ringin'. And so about that time, the boy that had been in the cot, he got out to the front door, and saw where the sapper was standin'. Well, he eliminated him, so that took care of the problem. And I remember turning and looking, cause I kept hearing this other noise, even though I was basically deaf, I kept hearing noises and I turned and looked in, there was a gun section's bunker was almost, was immediately behind there, and was almost attached to one corner. Ours faced kinda to the right and if you stand outside, there's faced almost straight ahead. And, I kept lookin' and these things kept flying up in the air and kept flying. What in the world is that? And, you'd hear this loud noise and there'd be a flash and things would fly up in the air. And so that was my cousin was in that bunker, so I didn't know if he's on a gun, in the bunker, or what it was. And, we didn't know what was going on over there cause we didn't see a soul. And so, during this time, they, we, looked out the bunker and there were, saw one sapper coming up, oh, just over the edge of the bank, the concertina. Then, that's as far as he got. Then, there's another one came up behind him, kind of beside him, and that's as far as he got. Well then, they broke off there, and they drug those off because they were poppin' flares as they were leavin'. Then, the worst part about the rest of that, the next mornin' after daylight, then they moved us up to, moved me up to the top of the hill, so I never get to see anything, or I don't remember seeing anything from our bunker out, so I don't know what was there. They blew up the guard bunker, the guard bunker was just outside our door, it was off to the left, you went out the door and the guard bunker was off to the left just a little ways. And the blew it up the first thing and they told us never sit in a guard bunker. Well, they should have told us too, never sit on top of 'em, because if you're sitting on top, then you're silhouetted against the sky. Well, the boy was there, I think he was sittin' on top of it, then whatever

it was went off inside, because they know that all your, your, claymore mine control wires, **the caps and the claymore mines**, they all come up to the corner of the bunker, that's just normal Army policy. So, if you throw something in there, if nothin' else, you're gonna cause such a disarray, that you'll never be able to find 'em to blow 'em. So, there's not much use to havin' a bunker, really. So, it blew him off and he took off up the hill cause he couldn't tell anything else was going on. He didn't know anybody else was around, what was going on, or nothin'. And, as he went up the hill, he was behind two other guys and when they got to his bunker, he turned, and they turned around and they were sappers. He had followed 'em up the hill; he thought they were GIs, but they weren't. And so, there were other stories of one boy that was this gun section that was directly in front of our maintenance tent. He was layin' in the front seat of a mess truck, taking a little nap between fire missions. Well, they threw a, either threw a **sapper** charge or hit the mess truck with a RPG, one or two. Anyway, it blew him out of the ground, so, first thing he did was take off runnin' for his gun section. Well, as he was runnin' for his gun section, the section chief saw him comin' and assumed he was the enemy. Then, he started shooting at him, and so the story goes, he emptied the magazine at him and never hit him a time. And the guy was right smack, almost, you know, right just, out end of the gun barrel when he finally got through. Never hit him, but anyway, I mean, there's the, Ronny said their gun got hit with an RPG. Some of the guns, they had issued us a chain link fence and they put it primarily toward the perimeter and they set it up and they, they thought it would work. I don't know if they ever tried, or how they came to this conclusion. But the RPG would hit 'em and would detonate and the shake charge itself would kinda be lost through the main part of the propulsion. And they weren't, I don't know if there's because, in their case, I think that the sappers were on top of the hill as he said, we were, this was a multi-terraced hill. You had to come up the hill and there was a terrace, and you come up the hill and there was another terrace, and then you got to where we were, where the main part of the firing battery was, was a big flat area. And, we went back over and we thought it was huge when we were over there before. And we went back, and I find it hard to believe, looking at that little piece of territory, that you've got a whole firing battery on that little, one little area. So, then the hill continued up, took another step, now they were up on a other one, just, kind of a

general rise above it and the FDC's APC was parked in a hole, they dug out a hole and they just backed it in this hole. And I don't guess they ever saw it because the hole was just about as high as that APC and as far I know, they never bothered it because they didn't really see it. But, they were up above it, our latrine was part way up this hill, it was up above us, and then one of the guys, one of the regular Army people that was with us got caught in there. And, during all the excitement, and he was laying on the floor, sitting, looking out the door, watching what was going on. It was another story **"unintelligible"**. But, they were up high and they were shooting down on top of us and that's what really, that's what did the major part of the damage. Because, they had such a good field of view. And so, the next morning there was lots of trash laying around.

Interviewer: Let me flip this over real quick.

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Vietnam/Oral History
Keeling/Hibbs
Tape 1, Side 2
Vanessa Lynn Grizzle
Y. Baldwin

Interviewer: Did you ever find out how they got in so close to you?

Keeling: They, undoubtedly they came in different areas. Some of them came in on top the hill. I wound up in a hospital in Chu Lai with on of the guys that was, let's kinda back up just a second. The 101st supplied us when we first got there on 88. They supplied us with a type of security, I guess you'd call it. They would have a good number of their people on the hill, more or less, almost on R & R. That's where they would come out. Some of these guys had already been in the **unintelligible** by that time and came back. And they were, and they would kind of regroup and they were a good size group. We went to Tomahawk, they only gave us, or the best of my recollection, I won't say this is a fact cause the best that I can remember, they had one guard bunker and it was on the highest part of the hill that had a **unintelligible** wire around it. Now it wasn't a high part of the hill, that was only another kind of a level place. The hill continued up for a long way. And when they came in, they came in by that guard bunker because that was, you know, they wanted that high ground. And they, I think they threw hand grenades in. And, I'm not sure, I don't remember, I know two of those guys got hurt. One of them wasn't serious, the other one was. And it was really ironic at the hospital, the one that was really hurt had his intestines hanging out in a plastic bag, wanted to go look for his buddy, he had to go check on him. So he asked his nurse, he said, "Nurse can," I'll never forget, he was hurtin so bad he couldn't talk, he said, "Can I get up and go look for my buddy?" And she said, "If you can get out of that bed you can go anywheres you want to." This kid

turned, slid out of bed, said, "Grab my IV pole." And he took off, doubled over, took off out of that hospital, down that aisle, out the door and finally found his buddy. His buddy was on guard detail. He had gotten, he got a cut on the back of his neck. And they had him out there policing up the yard there at the little unintelligible hut was all they were. And he found him, he said, "I'm glad you're alright," he said, "I think I'm feelin bad." So we marched him back in and that nurse said, "I knew you'd be back." And so he got back in the bed. But that was really, I mean that was really ironic. But I don't how, I don't know if any those guys got killed or not cause these are only two guys I even saw. And I wouldn't have known that one except he asked me something and he was right across the aisle from and I said yeah. He asked me, yeah, I think that's what it was, he asked me when I came in and I said yesterday. He said, "I did too, did you come from up North?" That's when we got talkin, that's when we found out we were on the same fire base.

Interviewer: What did your group look like? I know you all are from Bardstown, the same area, but the other people you served with, I mean, Gonzales, I assume was Hispanic.

Keeling: Yeah.

Interviewer: I mean did, were there Native Americans, Blacks, Asian Americans, I mean.

Keeling: Oh yeah, we had, we didn't have any Asian Americans, but there were some, that one guy must've been a Creole, or he was from Louisiana. His name was **Bethaia**, he got killed. He was, of, some African ancestry, you know, somewheres. We had one guy in our section that got hurt, he was a mess truck driver. No, a maintenance truck driver. Cause, but anyway, he got hurt, he didn't, well I won't get into that. And so, let's see, there were several Hispanics. There was a sergeant

Diaz, Gonzales, Sanchez, Gonzales was from Houston. Sanchez, I'm not sure where he was from. Then, oh gosh, there were several. But see, these guys were, they began to infuse us, what they call, they would take, bring regular Army guys in and replace our people and send them to regular units. Because, two reasons, we were going to eventually leave as a unit, so you couldn't, everybody leave at one time. And two, if bad things happen then it would be a, just a little hedge against, against the matter.

Interviewer: Did you all get along? I mean were there any....

Keeling: Oh yeah, we, our unit, as far as I know. We had, we had one guy in our unit, when we first got over there, he was assigned to it. I don't know where he came from. And we had a little difficulty with him. He didn't like to, he liked to keep his mind all fogged up. And he never, I don't know if he was ever normal. So they finally assigned him to another unit. They were havin a little difficulty with him. He was supposed to have been on the gun section. And he'd be sleepin and they'd go get him up, and maybe he'd want to go out and maybe he didn't want to go out. So, so they sent him to another unit. And we heard later that they assigned him as a driver for a , a 175, I believe. They ran over a 250 pound bomb one day. They found the section chief. That's the only one they found out of the whole unit, the whole section. And, you know, we hated to hear that. But, I mean, I don't even remember now how we found out about that. But anyway, no, we had, we had the regular Army guys that were with us. Were great guys. They were primarily artillery. You know, artillery guys and, you know, we had no problem. The only problem we did have was, we hadn't been out, hadn't been on 88 to awful long and we had a little, we had a little row after a USO show. And if you don't know what a USO show is, anyway...

Interviewer: Do you want to talk about it a little bit?

Keeling: These uh, they'd bring singing groups. They had one group that came from Hong Kong. They had the group came from Australia. And I'm not sure, there were groups came. But I do remember the one, the group from Hong Kong cause they were so skinny. Poor little kids, you know, they looked like they were malnourished. But the group form Australia was just the opposite, they were quite healthy. They weren't fat they just were healthy. But anyway, after one of the USO shows one day, we had a little difficulty and it took the rest of the afternoon to get it kind of settled down. Cause of one person. And so their 101st battalion commander sent a helicopter out and they loaded him on a helicopter and took him out. And they were getting, I ran into a guy later that I knew with the 101st. And I asked what ever happened with this guy. And he said, you know said, said they brought him back to Camp Eagle and held him there for a little while. And he just, he just wouldn't settle down. And so they said well, you know, take him to, I think it was Cam Rahn Bay and process him out. They took him to Cam Rahn Bay and they, said they processed him out. He was delevated to come home the next morning. They had already discharged him from the Army. You know, well the discharge, I guess would have got in the U.S. They already told him they were going to discharge him. The next, the day before he left, he headed E6. So they transferred him to LBJ, which is LONG BEN JAIL. That's the last he had heard of him since.

Interviewer: Was he just causing problems in jail, was he just rushing the stay?

Keeling: He, no he, it was after the show was over. And we won't get into the details on it.

Interviewer: Okay.

Keeling: It's a, no decent way to describe it. But anyway, he just, I guess had never ran into a situation he couldn't buffalo his way through. We heard later, and one of the guys told us later, that their battery commander sent a guy down and told em , said if this guy hurts anybody, drop him. I mean he just went, he just went nuts. He kept gettin, he just kept gettin worse, more agitated, more agitated. They told him you got to get him off this firebase before the nights over. We can't, said no way. So they sent a helicopter out and loaded him up.

Interviewer: Why did they call it Tomahawk? Is there any particular reason?

Keeling: We don't know. They, they, the Army gave names to places for who knows what reasons.

Interviewer: I didn't know if there was a particular one.

Keeling: No, you know, that was, you had, I mean if we had a copy of the Stars and Stripes right now, it would be something to read. Because you had places, if it was a fire, they called them firebases, if they had either a permanent or semi-permanent support unit there. But if it wasn't, and if it was only temporary, then they called them LZ's. That was for landing zones. And they had one, I'll never forget, one LZ named Nancy. And you know, but they, who knows how many different. they had a firebase, one of our other battery zone was called Bastone. And, which was a, you know, throw back from World War Two. And then they had another firebase, was on, another battery zone, firebase Exeo.

Interviewer: I was just curious.

Keeling: I, I mean I can't, I can't give you a reason to

that, it's military, it's military.

Interviewer: Did you all have any interaction with the South Koreans, and if you did, what were they like?

Keeling: We did, but it was an unusual situation. As a firebase, no. Because we never saw, we never saw a South Korean in our sector. But we would go to Danang and they had what they called retrograde yards, which was actually junk yards. I mean you go down and then there was equipment parked around. And if you needed parts off of it, boy you, what they call cannibalize it. You take it, you sign the paperwork, you know, and you take it. And what they did, after so much of it was gone, and then they would take and load this stuff on ships and haul it back for scrap. Some of it was, was, was obsolete equipment. They had, they had a gun you call the 108. Which was a 105 tube in the same **halicer** configuration. I mean the same gun configuration as our 155's. So we learned after a couple of trips down there that you just take a requisition order, you sign it, you go down there, you hand it to em at the gate. You go in, you make sure you're pulling a trailer with, you know, behind a jeep, and a tarp over it. You go in there, and anything you think you could need, take off, throw in the jeep, and you know, you go out. Sign your little name, and away you went. And so the Koreans had no support units. I think the Marines supported them to a certain extent. And the Marines, you know their support units were stretched pretty thin sometimes. So these guys would park on a road outside this yard. And when we came down the road, they'd stop you. And they'd ask you, and they said, well, we need, you know, certain parts. Primarily for the trucks. Said can you get em for us. If it was reasonable, we'd try to get em a part or something. One time they wanted, they wanted a 50 caliber or something. Said no, were not, you know, we can't. That's armament. We can't, we don't have any access to any of that. But it was, I mean those guys, they

tell us stories about they'd send word around before the ROCS made their patrols in certain areas. They'd send the word out and the Vietnamese would go. They'd go take a vacation till the ROCS were gone. Then they'd go back to work. They didn't want anything to do with them cause they were, they'd say they wouldn't leave them intact. They'd either cut off a finger, or cut off a ear, or mutilate them in some way. And they wasn't, that wasn't good karma for them.

Interviewer: How do you mean the Vietnamese? The Vietcong?

Person: The VC, the VC, the VC would literally, like I said, they would take, they would take a break, a long break, until they were gone. They didn't want anything to do with them. I mean these guys, they didn't take any prisoners. They didn't, they was no such thing as takin a prisoner.

Interviewer: That's what I've always heard, that they were really, very, very tough.

Keeling: They were tough. I mean after seein these guys, I don't know how, I don't see what they needed us in Korea for. I mean, you know. Boy, I mean you know, they even looked the part. They just had that mean look, you know. But I don't know how many of them were over there. That's the only time we, I ever ran into em, was down there.

Interviewer: A couple of years ago I was in Montana, in a big think tank about Asian wars. I met a ROC. It was the first time I had been exposed to any. A very nice guy. He's written a number of books. But it was fascination. I just didn't know that much about them and now I'm really interested in them.

Keeling: They were different folks, they, I never saw one of them dirty. I mean they were just as, their uniform looked like it was starched. And, which over there was, you know,

nobody. Why, you see four old grunts running down the road, you couldn't tell what color they were, let alone what their uniforms were. I mean dirty, have, you know, where they been out there sloshin around through the rice paddies. Mud all over them and everything. But not those guys. You'd think they were executives or something the way they dressed. They took care of the clothes. I guess they took care of everything they had, otherwise they wouldn't have it.

Interviewer: Were either of you all married at the time, and if you were, did you write home? Did you have girlfriends, families, wives?

Hibbs: Biggest part of em was married probably. See I had a daughter then, she was about, she was born in '67. So I guess she was really less than a year old when we got called up.

Keeling: Yeah, we'd write home two or three times a week. I would probably....

Hibbs: As many times as you could.

Keeling: Yeah, that's about all you looked forward to, is a letter. Yeah that was the time of the day that everybody was awake, mail call. I mean if a guy wasn't there for mail call, there was somebody that grabbed that letter and took off and just found him in a hurry. You know, to make sure he got it. It was....

Hibbs: Lot of us would read each others mail. Cause we would know almost as much what they had in their letter, or what they was talkin about, as we did our own. You know, knowin the people back home that was doin the writtin and....

Keeling: Yeah, they'd pass em around. If somebody got a letter, somebody would pass it around.

Hibbs: You'd read it. You'd know who it was and everything about it. All that kinda stuff just made it a lot better, a lot easier.

Keeling: Yeah, we, I had a set of twins that were born in '66. And when I left....

Interviewer: It must have been tough. I'm a new father and I miss mine this weekend.

Keeling: Well, you know, I guess in a sense you'd say it is, but it's one of those situations. See we tried, I guess you could call it tried. We, there was a question raised about the legality of calling up the National Guard without a declared, in an undeclared war. And so, I don't remember, we went to a meeting down in Louisville. And some guys were talkin and so we, they took up donations to kinda see how this thing went. And it came back later, I can't remember when it was or anything. I think that one of the, on Supreme Court Justices ruled that it was legal. It could, they could do it. And to the best of my knowledge, I never heard the word mentioned ever again. And it was as if that's the end of that. It was like it was a closed book. I never heard a soul ever mention it again. I guess most of the guys never even knew it took place. I wouldn't have known it except I lived close to Louisville. And I ran into a , I ran into somebody down there. And they were telling me about the meeting they were having. So I went down to the meeting to see what was going on. But, as far as being, you know, you know it's something you're gonna do, go gotta. I mean it's not, you been trainin, for us, we had basically been trainin for five years for this, for this thing. We had already been through what they call SRF. We had already been trained ride control. We were one of the units picked to do all that. And we found out later that if you could do a good enough job, they'll pick you for all the jobs. So, and that's what we were told,

if you was good enough, they'll pick you to do em all.

Interviewer: What was your trip home like, and once you go home, did you notice a change in anything?

Hibbs: No, not really.

Keeling: He came home first, so....

Hibbs: I was in Japan for a couple of months, I think it was, cause I got burnt that night. And we came home a little bit earlier, but not a whole lot. That's like he was talkin about the good job. There was, I think, three of us from Bardstown that was over there. And we got to, after we got to doin pretty good, well they had us helpin out in the offices there, doin different things. Or we could've probably go home earlier than that. But we half way done our job right. And they didn't tell us we could go home. They was hangin on to us and we didn't know it. But that's just like he said, I guess the average person that come through there just didn't give a crap about anything. And the sooner they go out, probably the happier it make the people. But I don't know, it would tickle you to death to get out of that place and to get back home. No, I didn't see much change. And everything just kinda fell back into place pretty quick really. I mean you just went back to your old jobs or whatever you was doin. People treated us just normal. I mean, you hear a lot of that stuff about this and that, but it was just pretty much normal.

Keeling: That was basically true, once it was over it was kinda like, you know, once it got started, it was started. And once it was over, it was over. I mean, like we came home as a unit once it had, did come on over. And I remember we had a bumpy ride. We really got a lot of air turbulence just before we got into Kentucky, come out of Indiana. Then there

was, aw, there were just a whole mess of people waitin for us when we got off the airplane. And then it was, you know, it was the next day. It was like, almost like we'd never left. You know, it's hard to describe, you know, how fast that things could change from, you know, from one day to the next. Just how much difference, I did, I did, I made a point of watching the news, as much as I could, to see what was going on. And I was watching the news and basically on up to the time it fell.

Interviewer: How did you all feel about the anti-war movement?

Keeling: I don't know, I mean I don't know about Smiley but I, you know, I remember a name. And I won't mention her name. But anyway, I thought that, I thought that you know, she was, at her job, she did a pretty good job. But then, then after the situation, as the situation turned out, I haven't had a lot of use for her since. But that's the only, and I remember one time on, watchin the news, and there was, I think it was at Berkeley, there was, you know, a bunch of kids were hollerin, makin a lot, you know that was the only bad thing, they was makin so much noise you couldn't understand what they were saying. So you know, that didn't really, you know and that was, that was it. I, you know, I saw a little bit on the news and knew what some people did. I knew that some people had voiced their opinion. Which was their right. But anyway, that was the extent of it really. Either didn't focus on it or deliberately stayed away from it. One of the two, I didn't, I didn't dwell on it. Might have been different to Smiley he....

Hibbs: Not really, we just went cause we had to go. And I'm sure not very many people would've went if they didn't have to go. But you know, that part didn't bother us, what they were doin. I mean, they told us we was gonna have to go so we

just had to go, that was about it.

Interviewer: How did Bardstown respond, because I mean I know you lost a number of friends, that must've been tough on the town.

Keeling: Well, you know there's, since we'd been back I'd read some of the news articles. But since we were there and the news was slow in getting back to us. It wasn't, you know, it wasn't like being, I mean I don't know what it would've been like living here. I mean I have no idea what it would've been like. Because we were so far removed from it after this. You know, after this thing happened, we kept with the guy, we tried to keep up with the guys who left the unit. We knew who went back with, we knew who accompanied certain people back. That kind of thing. When they got back, then we did get a little bit of information of what things were like while they were home. But you know, it's just, plus too, it was just, I was in a hospital and Smiley was gone too. So we weren't actually with the unit. So they had a memorial service in Tomahawk for guys in the unit. And except for the pictures, you know, that's the only thing that I can relate to. Cause I wasn't there. And I came back, joined back up with them after they were back in **Phu Bai**. So there's a big, kind of like a blank, because I didn't get any mail at **Chu Lai**. They held the mail cause they didn't who, really know where to send it to. I guess they weren't even sure I was coming back. I mean I wasn't sure. I didn't know what was going on, you just, someone points and says get on an airplane. And you know, that's the way it goes. You don't ask a lot of questions. So we flew back and forth for a , for, that was, that in itself was an experience. The flyin back and forth to the hospital. You had to go back, oh I forget how often it was, had to go back down and well, I guess for a couple of check-ups. So you, you, you know you just go in and say, you know where you goin. You know, **Chu Lai** going back to **Phu Bai**. Okay, sit over

there, we'll holler at you in a minute. There's the airplane, go out there and get on the airplane and take off. I mean, you know, I guess people could've flown all over the country and nobody would've never asked any question. They never asked you any questions about what you was doin. But anyway..

Interviewer: What was it like having a book done about you guys? The experience in general. Were you surprised about it, not everybody has a book done about them.

Hibbs: Not really, well I know I just didn't pay a whole lot of attention to it. I just figured people would ask me some questions and I would answer them.

Keeling: Well see, that's the way it kinda started out. That's kinda, like you said, Mr. Wilson, he said he wanted to ask some questions. Well, we just, no problem. I just thought it was gonna be, you know, he was just gonna, you know, just put them in his book. I didn't realize till later exactly what the book was gonna be like. So it wasn't a, it was a surprise in a sense. But because what we learned out of it more than anything else.

Hibbs: It really wasn't no big deal. To me it wasn't. Just, you know, read the book, got one of em. I read it one time. I reckon it's layin right there on the table at the house now. She keeps it out and open there. Different ones look at it when they come in or somethin.

Interviewer: Are you happy with it, I mean are you happy with what you said and how you handled it?

Keeling: I think he did a good job because, because of what I learnt from it. More than, you know, actually what he did. It's a, he had written another book. Wasn't it about Korea?

Hibbs: I think so.

Keeling: I think so, I think he had written one about Korea. so he had kind of an understanding. I don't think he was ever in the military himself, but he understood, you know, a little bit of the military aspects. And he covered families and what have you. And it was...

Hibbs: Just different people, I mean like me, I read the book. Why I could care less really what he put in it. You know, it don't bother me but some of the others might read it and there might be something in there that just really tick them off. You know, one little ol statement or somethin that didn't amount to crap. But yet, it would. I mean you hear every now and then a comment, you know, somebody would say, well this is not right, or somethin like that. You know, but I just, I never did take it that serious. I mean it was just a book. And I don't pay any attention to the little stuff like a lot of people does. It just don't bother me.

Interviewer: Well, I was just curious. You all have gotten a lot of attention, what did you say about CNN?

Keeling: Yeah, they had a, what was it, four of ya, five of ya?

Hibbs: Four or five of us.

Keeling: They had a CNN interview. But I don't know if they ever aired it. Did they?

Hibbs: I don't even know.

Keeling: See, that was, this was, we're talkin about, not a long time ago but I barely knew what CNN was. And until the ordeal with the pilot in Somalia, and ever since then I've

had a bad taste in my mouth, but anyway, but they interviewed us. But they interviewed, I think, four or five of them together. And they asked me some questions. And I'm sure what I told em wasn't, wasn't gonna make, I knew it wasn't gonna make their news for sure.

Interviewer: Why were they interviewing you? Did they ever tell you or they just...

Hibbs: Shoot, I don't even know why. They just called us one night and wanted to know...

Keeling: See, we get together once a week, about six or seven of us, over there. We do that year round. And a bunch of us got old cars. We put on car shows all the time up there. And anyways, we's at the Sonic, that little ol 50's and 60's burger place up there, and they called us and wanted to know it they could be up there. We told em one Wednesday night, we're there Wednesday night. And I don't even know what they done it for, to tell you the truth. And, like him, what little I said didn't amount to nothin. But I never did hear anything more about it. They's the one that said they just wanted to do it. Of course, like I say, we didn't care.

Interviewer: Was this before or after the book came out?

Keeling: Aw, it was before the book, fact is it must've been four to five years.

Hibbs: It's got to been since '92, because it was at the Sonic. See, that was built in '92. It's got to be since then.

Keeling: Wasn't it the 25 year, something to do, wasn't it the anniversary, it wasn't the fall.

Hibbs: I don't know.

Keeling: Or was it the fall of Vietnam? The anniversary of the fall, 20 years.

Hibbs: Shoot, I don't remember.

Keeling: Maybe it was '95, maybe...

Hibbs: But it wasn't really any big deal, it just...

Keeling: No, it wasn't, no, it was long over a few years ago.

Hibbs: Just asked a few questions.

Keeling: Anyway, like I said, I don't really remember. We was up there and we got kinda chilly. We were, we were over dressed. One little girl did, did I say a little girl, from over here at **Ratcliff**, she interviewed us. And I thought she did a real good job, Cindy Eagles. And I noticed, boy I, once you meet a person you kinda, she was a reporter for the Courier-Journal. Now she is, I see articles in there by her, in the paper, almost everyday.

Hibbs: When she do that?

Keeling: Oh, that was about the same time. See, there were three of them. Seem like me it was, she did that one, CNN, and somebody else.

Hibbs: I remember Cindy Eagles, that name, but I forgot about that.

Keeling: Yeah, but the, back to the book. The fellow that wrote that book, Mr. Wilson, He died in, was it over three years ago?

Hibbs: We tried to find him.

Keeling: He died the year before we left to go back in '95. That's right. And he died, it's kinda unusual. He was in a clinic, he had a heart, some kind of heart trouble. And when he got sick he was in a clinic for some reason. And the best we could understand, he never, they never did get a hold of his family. So they didn't know what was wrong. They didn't know whether he had a history of, of some kind of a heart problem or something. And he wound up dying in the....

Hibbs: It was a while before anybody claimed him too.

Keeling: Yeah, seemed like to me it was something unusual about it. Then his daughter wrote a letter. Don Parrish is kinda like the CEO, more or less, of the group. He's a, he wrote a letter looking for him, to tell him we were going back on the second trip, in case that he wanted to accompany. Because he would be able to see exactly what he wrote about. Or not exactly, but he'd be able to see a portion of what he wrote about. And his daughter wrote a letter and said that he had, he had died. We were really surprised, really surprised.

Interviewer: Why did you guys go back and what was the experience like going back?

Keeling: Well, it was WHS, I guess is the, they, I don't know if, if Rachel or who it was, I guess maybe Rachel. If, I just, this is kinda off the top of my head, if I'm wrong I'm sure Rachel will find out about it. She'll, she'll correct me. Her dad was over there.

Interviewer: Now, who's Rachel?

Keeling: Rachel Platt, she works, she's one of the news folks for WHS television.

Interviewer: I'm a little **unintelligible**, I don't know her.

Keeling: Are you? Oh, okay. And so, some how or other she got a hold of Don and ask him if they would be interested in going, you know, if anybody would be interested in going back in a trip over there. And they would do a special on it. He said well, he'll check around, thought there would be. So there was a little, I guess a little time lapse there. And then I guess he got a hold of him and said, you know, it's, this thing'll, is gonna go.

Hibbs: Not much notice. They gived us two weeks notice.

Keeling: Yeah, then all of a sudden, yeah, then they were ready to go, more or less.

Hibbs: Had to make up your mind.

Keeling: Yeah, had to make up your mind in two weeks. So we just, for me it was just, it was, anytime before that or anytime after that, I wouldn't have been able to go. But it just, it was just one of those, it worked for that time and that time only. So he and I both, or one or two of the groups went back. It was, it was some trip.

Interviewer: You gotta get more specific than that for me.

Keeling: It was, it was long.

Hibbs: You could talk for a week, about, you know, I mean we didn't know nothin evidently the first time we was over there. I didn't. The second time, it was, it was probably the most exciting trip I've ever been on in my life. As far as go to another country and see how people live. It's actually, they always say you can't go back, but I tell you what, when we went back over there it was just like goin back in time, to 1968. Almost, other than the war, everything else was, the trucks, the people, everything was just like we left it over

there. They was still using the same things that was wore out when we was over there, 25 years before. We didn't know how it was runnin, and they were still usin it. But it was just like goin back in time. But, I don't know, the people, I didn't, we didn't pay a lot of attention to them. A lot of people, when we left, you know, about half of them over here still thinks the war's goin on. There are a lot of people you talk to, you know, that's just the average country people, they don't understand. You know, when they found out we's goin back, they thought aw, you all will be killed, and everything else, you know. Which we didn't give that part much thought. I don't reckon. But once you get over there and get with the people, I don't know, they seemed like they've treated, they treated us alright. We didn't have any problem at all out of them. I don't guess. Did we?

Keeling: No.

Hibbs: Other than customs, we had a little hassle gettin through customs.

Interviewer: What happened in customs?

Hibbs: Well, they couldn't read my writin, and I couldn't read it either. That was the worst part.

Keeling: We'd just got off the plane. We'd have flown, now this is, this is hard to, we flew from Amsterdam to Singapore, with a dog leg around Iraq, that was included in our trip. Thirteen hours, we got to Singapore. We had manage to at least stand up and walk around a little while in Singapore. Then we flew from Singapore to, to Saigon and went right in to customs. And here we were, still in a mist of jet lag, and so they said fill out these forms. Well, you know, what did, what was it you had was worth so much you wrote down there. I didn't have anything. So Smiley wrote two or

three things down there. Well he couldn't, this customs inspector, which he was a military person, what he was, he couldn't read English. I mean real simple. And so rather than to say he couldn't read it, he got mad cause he wrote it in there. And oh, you talk about , he was a jabberin and a hollerin, and goin on. And I said, oh no, here we are, just got in country and we're on our way to prison, right now. I know it. And it was, aw it was, after it was over with it was alright. But at that time, it wasn't alright.

Hibbs: He was kinda ticked off.

Keeling: Aw, he was.

Hibbs: you just supposed to put down what you got when you go in country. Course, we had like Beenie Weenies, and all that junk we took. And our clothes, you know, and I just wrote it on there. But I wrote it fast and he wanted me to read it and I couldn't even read my own writin. I guess he thought I was makin fun of him or somethin, I don't know.

Keeling: Anyway, he was upset.

Hibbs: Rachel, she got a kick out of that.

Keeling: The girl with us, now if it hadn't been for the girl that was with us, now the trip wouldn't have been anything like it was. The girl that was, that headed the trip as the tour guide, more or less you would call her, she was native Vietnamese. She was Vietnamese-American. She lives in Los Angeles. She is one liberated woman, to say the least. And she is not, I don't guess she's afraid of anything.

Hibbs: She's afraid of heights.

Keeling: Yeah, well okay, she is afraid of heights. She got

right up there and she was talkin right with them. And he finally, just, this guy wasn't used to a woman comin up and almost standing toe to toe to him. And it took him back too. That upset him too.

Hibbs: Another thing, those blank tapes that WHS had for their cameras, that was the only thing they didn't want to let through customs. They had to check that stuff to make sure there wasn't pornography on it for they let it in the country.

Keeling: Literally had to view it.

Hibbs: And it took all night, I guess somebody done it. And anyway, she picked it up the next morning before we could start our, our trip. But that was the only problem we had, gettin through customs, actually was that. The people, I don't know, I tell you what, we went in towns. And we went, I don't guess it was, it might have been the good part of town. But I, it was nothin, it was the slums here. I mean you're talkin slums. And we'd just wade right through the people. And we didn't pay a bit more attention to them than nothin. Well, I guess if anybody have wanted to done somethin, well, they could have done it. And we wouldn't, we would have just evaporated. Nobody would have known where we went. But the people, you could be ridin down the road, and if you wanted to stop and go into somebody's house and take a camera and film it, we pretty much just done that. Well, you can't do that around here. And stop and go into people's houses and do what we done.

Keeling: We stayed at, after we flew from, well we flew from Saigon to Hanoi and this was part of the scheme of things. To make the trip, you had to go to Hanoi. And which was, they were hopin that you'd drop a few dollars along the way. And they were, and I'm here to tell, see we flew to Saigon, not

having seen anything cept what we went through in customs.
Wait a minute.

Hibbs: Yeah, we flew to Hanoi.

Keeling: Did we fly from Singapore straight through to Hanoi?
How did we do that?

Hibbs: No, we went to.....

TAPE ENDS

INTERVIEW WITH JOSEPH KEELING AND RONALD HIBBS

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INTERVIEW- TAPE 2 / SIDE 1
JOSEPH KEELING AND RONALD HIBBS

Dr. Ernst's interview with Joseph Keeling and Ronald Hibbs

Keeling:

As I was saying They were probably three of the , they had to be three of the best people at WHS, WHS had.

Ernst:

Did her dad go?

Keeling:

No, No he didn't go and I don't know , like she explained all this , this to us about her dad and you know my mind will only take so much information. It's a hit and miss job you know it hits a little and misses a lot. But during the trip it poured down the rain, in fact it even got we even lost some money because we couldn't make a flight out earlier and come back to Saigon one day earlier, because it rained so much. But anyway she never complained, she was I mean as tough as any of us. I mean just she amazed me.

Ernst:

Was she just curious about the Vietnam War because of her dad or I mean...

Keeling:

Like I said she told us, you know she gave us kind of a run down of why she was, what the real interest was besides being her dad, but she knew it was an opportunity to travel. She had a young baby when she left him that really

Hibbs:

Yeah, it wasn't about two or three months old

Keeling:

It wasn't very old at all. And her husbands Gary Folk is that his name?

Hibbs:

Yeah, Gary Fogle. (Both talking at same time--Can't understand him) (I BELIEVE HE SAID) "You have him confused with another station". Sports.

Keeling:

He is at WEE.

Ernst:

I know those names.

Keeling:

He's from, he's from Bardstown. So anyway he took, he did the baby-sitting job for the (illness part..)??

Hibbs:

Well, WHAS, they had a part I mean in all of this too didn't they it was..

Keeling:

Yeah, they paid for the transportation over there you know while we were in country.

Hibbs:

I mean she just, she done a special for WHS too. I know she said, she got some kind of a something out of it. I forget what.

Keeling:

She got an award didn't she?

Hibbs:

Some kind of a, yeah, she got some kind of an award. It was something promoting WHAS. It was just one of those things they picked to do.

Ernst:

Sure.

Hibbs:

Because, I think they blew more money than they were supposed to on that trip too didn't they.?

Keeling:

I think that it costs them a little more than they intended.

Hibbs:

Yeah.

Keeling:

Because they had to pay for the... Now that was one of the.. What was it a day for the camera, just having the camera over there \$300 a day, just for having the camera over there?

Hibbs:

I don't know but the (Both are talking at same time --Cant' understand him)... Where they had that one girl that was with them.

Keeling:

Yeah, she had to be there everywhere the camera went, she had to be there .

Hibbs:

What they charged \$300 a day for her or something?

Keeling:

Maybe that's what it was.

Hibbs:

I think it was \$300 a day the communists or whatever it was charged for having her with us, and she probably got a dollar or two of that is what she actually got.

Keeling:

A dollar a day. She got a dollar a day. So they made \$299 every day that the camera was there. Because she was a government...

Hibbs:

Something. If we wanted to stop on this hill here, she had to say it was all right that we go on there and we went anywhere we wanted to go. She didn't say nothing about any of it I don't reckon, because we just wanted to go back where we had been, you know, the night we was (hit)? and all that..

Ernst:

This was a tour guide that was (there once and was living in Los Angeles now)?

Hibbs:

Right, no she was a Vietnamese. She works for the government

Keeling:

She works for the Government in Vietnam. She had something to do with you know they were afraid that somebody was going to do something you know that they don't know about.

Ernst:

Sure.

Keeling:

And this was the part that's really, I mean this is the amazing part, we were at the Hanoi, so we hadn't seen, you know, we hadn't seen the south.. Actually. So we go to Hanoi, we got off and it was night and they took us down into Hanoi...

Hibbs:

Cause see we got to Saigon during the day remember it was daylight, so we had to fly on up to Hanoi from Saigon.

Keeling:

And so we got, we were riding up through town in dark, you know you didn't know what was going on in dark, so you just turn down this street and here's this hotel. Real nice hotel, you know, no complaints about the hotel, but woke up the next morning and looked out over top, you know standing up there looking out over top of the city and it just you know it was kind of ... disappointing I guess is one way to say it. You know here you kind of expected to see something, but not you know, not exactly like this. And the people, the was it premier, was that what they called it, Iranian premier, it wasn't premier. (Name-- Sounds like Rocks and Johnny!) .. He was in the same hotel we were in Hanoi, the same time we were so we saw these big Arabs, not Arabs

Hibbs:

Irans

Keeling:

Or Iranians or something-- My mistake. All over the place. I mean you know they were all over that hotel.

Ernst:

It 'd be their version of the secret service

Keeling:

Yeah, I wouldn't ... They were, that was close enough for me. We saw him, yeah we did see him riding through Hanoi, you know in the back of a Mercedes. When he went down the street, we heard the sirens, and know that their sirens are unusual, so we immediately looked toward the street. Well, we were going down the street and looked out and here's this police escort came through and then setting in the back seat, there he was. Big as, Big as life. But Hanoi kind of smelled bad, and like I said it was our first experience with Vietnam after all of these years. So we were, you know people were I guess friendly to a certain extent, especially the younger people. You know the younger people were...

Hibbs:

They'd flock all over you.

Keeling:

Yeah. Yeah. And we rode in the ugh what do they call them? Peddalbuggies?

Hibbs:

(Ricochets?).

Keeling:

Yeah, but they had some name for them. There was some..

Ernst

Paddiecabs?

Keeling:

Yeah, Paddiecabs. That's more, that's more or less what they were. They had a -- they got in a fight, somebody paid his cabby a little more than another one and the rest of them found out about it, and you talk about raisin cain. That was worse than a bunch of chickens running around there squawking and carrying on. But it was, ugh, it was different. And after we left there, we went back down south. We flew back into the main.

Hibbs:

Where was it in Hanoi, what was they doing to the street there?

Keeling:

Oh!

Hibbs:

That was in Hanoi, yeah.

Keeling:

Yeah, Just over from the hotel. We went through it in the dark, and nobody saw anything. We came back the next day, they were taking us on a ride, what did they take us to a museum or something ?

Hibbs:

I don't remember.

Keeling:

Anyway, took us to something, we were riding down the street, there was all these houses and somebody said "Did somebody bomb this place or something?" Or hadn't fixed it up since the war or some comment like that. Here was the front of all of these houses-- was gone! The fronts completely gone up three or four stories.

Hibbs:

On both sides of the street.

Keeling:

And he said no. What happened, some Vietnamese official sold, sold part of the state right away for these folks to build on, well they found out about it after who knows how many years. I mean these houses have been there for years. Well they finally found out about it or discovered it somehow or other. And so they, they cut off the part of the houses on the state right away.

Hibbs:

It was like they took a big chainsaw.

Keeling:

Yeah, a chainsaw!

Hibbs:

Went down the front of the houses and all the furniture and everything was still in the road. They didn't have no fronts on them! You was just looking in their houses.

Keeling:

It was! It was like something they had built and you know just forgot to put a wall up.

Here it was...

Hibbs:

Just knocked it down. Old concrete was all shattered and rebar was sticking out of it.

Just like you took a chainsaw and went right down through the middle of the houses and

took that much of it down. But that was one of the things that was you know kind of

weird in Hanoi. It wasn't the farthest out, or the further south, or the further north you

went toward Saigon or which ever way it is, the better things seemed like they got.

Hanoi was really a run down part. I mean I don't guess they got much money to do

anything with as far as keeping stuff up. But, that was one of the things we noticed up

there, and I don't know. We went to a prison there too.

Keeling:

Oh Yeah.

Hibbs:

Hanoi. Hanoi Hilton.

Keeling:

Hanoi Hilton. And we actually... And they were , they remodeled it gonna turn it into a..

Hibbs:

They were tearing it down and gonna build a,

Keeling:

Build something

Hibbs:

Gonna build a hotel there

Keeling:

Maybe it was a hotel.

Hibbs:

A Hilton hotel I think is what it was.

Keeling:

I believe it was, that's what they said. Big sign out there. When they were in there working they said the old, .. we would have been able to toured inside except they were working inside and they wouldn't let us.

Hibbs:

No, they wouldn't let us.

Keeling:

But, the walls. I don't know what were they twelve fourteen feet tall next to the street? And on top of the wall they had, they had, poured cement, and while the cement was wet, they had put broken glass in it just, just continuous broken glass all the way around the thing. (Both talking at same time???) And then above it, they had electrical wires so far above it, all the way around this place.

Hibbs:

But this main entrance was still standing I reckon where they, where they went into it you know. But it actually took up about a whole block.

Keeling:

Yeah, just about a block..

Hibbs:

And you really couldn't , you could just see through some of the places where they had it all cleared out inside pretty much and was starting, starting to build. But you know it was kind of weird standing in that thing about all them prisoners and things that went through there and like we said they had all of that stuff to keep you from getting out. But what would you do if you got out of that thing, you'd be right in the middle of nowhere. I don't know where you'd go to. I mean, you're right in the middle of communists people. I don't know how you'd, what you'd do.

Keeling:

You wouldn't know where to go. I mean there was no place to go I mean.

Hibbs:

No place.

Keeling:

There was just solid wall to wall people. What did they call that big lake that the hotel was on?

Hibbs:

Oh shoot!

Keeling:

It was a reservoir, but they called it a lake. And I can't remember the name of it, I've heard it before. They had water systems. They had a big old lake there and we drove

through it had a water system. The water pipe came out of this lake. I don't know what they pumped it to, but I hope it was cattle or something,, but it was a rough looking. You know the water was just you know. Everything was..

Hibbs:

The place smelled like sewage is what it smelled like.

Keeling:

Yeah.

Hibbs:

You wake up in the morning and that's just the smell.

Keeling:

Rotten vegetation

Hibbs:

That's just the way it smells. And we, we was just lucky that we took beanie weenies and crackers and all that stuff for the first three days. We didn't eat over there. I mean we just couldn't eat that food they had. Especially after that smell and everything you know the only thing... we had bottled water, we took that but, we lived off of what we took in our, and we didn't take near enough I don't reckon. Cause we'd eat more if we had it but, more than what we eat ugh...

Keeling:

They, they did have fruits

Hibbs:

Yeah we'd eat their fruit as long as it wasn't unpeeled or anything like that, we'd eat that. But it was what the third or fourth day before we could find a place where they could scramble us some eggs.

Keeling:

Yeah they ugh (Tweety?) This was the lady's name that was the tour guide. Tweety Pran. And she taught these ladies how to scramble eggs. They had never... They had no idea what a scrambled egg was.

Hibbs:

This was the international hotel to wasn't it?

Keeling:

Well, no that was the (Hoi Inn?) where she taught them that. No when you got back to that hotel man let me tell you, now you talk about eating, there was one thing about it. There was a hotel I can't remember the name of that place in (Quay?) Right on the river bank. We ate in there and you could have been anywhere in the world. You could have been in London, New York, ugh just anywhere. That place was fantastic. I mean they had food that you couldn't... what really amazed us. I mean we had been in Hanoi that was, that was. If we had come through the south. See if we'd gone through the south and we'd kind of adjusted to this thing, it wouldn't have been quite so bad, but you know they dropped you in Hanoi and so you've got to do this culture change you know just instantaneous.

Ernst:

Right.

Keeling:

You have to adjust the food. They told us going in that the food was you know they told us what not to eat. You didn't touch anything raw. You didn't even touch it. The water, stay completely away from it. And it did take...

Hibbs:

We had to take those malaria pills and shots and things before we went back for the second time. We had to just like we was going into the army you might as well say. We took all that.

Keeling:

Yeah. There was that ugh. But they tried to (can't understand what they are saying)

What do they call it?

Hibbs:

They tried to I mean they would really put on us a deal trying to fix you a meal you know that. I guess to them that was really out of this world. Of course they don't have paper plates or anything like that everything your eating off of is..

Keeling:

Somebody else ate off of it.

Hibbs:

Well is dishes and is china and stuff.

Keeling:

You know it would be good china.

Hibbs:

Yeah, it'd be worth a fortune over here. I mean that's all we had to eat off of cause they don't have paper plates and things like that.

Keeling:

We had one little episode that it was probably the highlight. We ate at this ugh...

Hibbs:

Kingfish?

Keeling:

Yeah, ugh basically. It was an outdoor restaurant. I was a nice little place. It was just right on this lake. And you know we didn't know what to expect so they said they was going to take us down there and feed us. So we went down there and

Hibbs:

My birthday.

Keeling:

Yeah. It was Smiley's birthday. And we didn't...I don't even know if he knew what we were going to eat or not, but anyway they brought this fish out. It was cooked complete. One big fish totally intact. They brought it out and brought something else. And I can't eat fish. I mean I just...it just does me a number real fast.

Hibbs:

It was real yucky looking.

Keeling:

Yeah. And so anyway, it just so happened that while we were waiting to eat, one of the guys had gone around to find a comfort station. And he came back around and he said "You know where they're washing those plates at?" And we said "Where?" And he said "In that lake". So you know, you don't have to say much more about what the meals are like. But anyway this kind of took a turn for the worst. So anyway everybody was looking at that fish and even the guys who liked fish I'm not real sure were inclined toward eating it. And nobody, nobody offered to eat it. And I wasn't going to.

Hibbs:

It hurt their feelings I reckon.

Keeling:

I know it did. I had to of cause this here was a bunch of , a bunch of rich Americans over there making fun of their food is basically what they felt like and I can understand that.

Hibbs:

I only thing we had was we drank a coke, remember?

Keeling:

I think remember they fixed that rice.

Hibbs:

Was that what it was?

Keeling:

Yeah. They, they had cokes and then Tweety immediately came to the rescue and you know she started this at the other end. So they brought us a bunch of fried rice. And we learned right quick that you can eat fried rice. And that was good. It was a little bit odd

tasting. And you didn't, you didn't hold it in front of your nose too long, but you could, you could eat it. And there wasn't anything wrong with it.

Hibbs:

That fish's head just flopped around for awhile.

Keeling:

Yeah, somebody...

Hibbs:

I was the one that stuck my fork in it or something. I didn't know how you were supposed to eat the darn thing I mean it was just all laid out there on a big platter looking right at you. I took my fork in the head and when I did he just flopped off, he was just laying there looking. I said I'm stuffed. And I was starved. And everybody else said "Yeah me too". We never touched none of it. But there's one thing to that he's talking about them washing the dishes in the lake, there was also a woman holding a little kid peeing in the lake at the same time. That's the one thing that really turned everybody off when they talked about the dishes being washed.

Keeling:

They had a lady, and old lady who was coming up undoubtedly, she was I'm assuming that she was either begging, or, she never said anything, but she was either looking for handouts or she was looking for food that was being... They hustled her off in a hurry. I mean they didn't take but... as soon as she... what she did, she came on the shoulder of the lake and the shoulder was just a few feet lower than the tourist area that we were sitting on. And so she came along there and she just eased up over the kind of like a

bank and then there she was right there where we were. And as soon as they saw her then they..

Hibbs:

They wouldn't let her in there.

(Both talking at the same time--can't understand them)

Keeling:

Somebody was going to give her something. I don't remember who it was. And all boy they started jabbering right quick, and boy they grabbed her and hustled her out of there just you know real fast. So ugh, we stopped at a, it was a was that a, an old Catholic church that we stopped in ?

Hibbs:

Yeah, that one...

Keeling:

No this...the one in Hanoi. And there were two, a little kid and an old guy out there begging out in the front. And they tell you, you know you never give a beggar anything. But that's easier said than done but... So you know we...

Hibbs:

Is that where they was playing up on top of the church when we got there? Or was that..

Keeling:

It might have been. This was almost dark when we got there. I believe because, they said you know not to give them anything and we gave them a few dollars and told them Di Di which was you know, which I never had no idea what it means in Vietnamese, but they whenever you'd (throw it ???) kids would leave in a hurry so I'm assuming that

means go away. So he said something, nodded his head a couple of times then shoop!

He was gone like a bullet.

Ernst:

Did you all go back to Firebase Tomahawk in spite of it?

Keeling:

Yes. Yeah we went back to... we went back to it.

Hibbs:

Hill 88 and Tomahawk both.

Keeling:

Hill 88 and the Tomahawk. They changed lots. They were covered with pine trees.

Don't ask me where they got the pines, but they, they covered in pine trees. There were pine trees all over the place. And I had no idea that they would even grow over there.

Hibbs:

You couldn't hardly even recognize it.

Keeling:

You knew what it was because there was this big hump in the ground all by itself, you know that's got to be it. But ugh...

Hibbs:

He found a guy, the little boy that used to ride with him. We found him.

Ernst:

What was that like?

Hibbs:

Well he is, what is he 37 now?

Keeling:

Something like that. He was...

Hibbs:

Got seven kids.

Keeling:

Yeah, he's got about seven kids. He writes. He...I got a letter from him and got a picture from him. And he wasn't a bit ashamed to ask for money right off the bat.

Hibbs:

It didn't take ten or fifteen minutes to find him when we got there. First person we asked, or she asked was his brother wasn't it?

Keeling:

Yeah, it was his brother and that was, he showed us you know the .. we asked where the firebase was. You know where's the GIs you know used to be. And he more or less you know made noise you know being there you know like the guns made. So it's pouring down rain and we followed him on up the hill there and he showed us where it was and I said something to one of the girls about ugh, one of the kid's names when we were there was named...one of them's name was Ho. Now I never did understand what the deal was because Tweety said that, that I said one of them's name was Ho and one of them's name was (sounds like Wa?) And she said Wa?? that's the name. I said well the name was Ho and she said Wa?? is the proper name. So there were two kids and I don't know what

the other ones name was. It wasn't Ho. So this one boy said ("the head waiter"??) So some kid, they sent some kid looking for him real fast. And they'd had a school there. And they turned.. we just...we eliminated school when we showed up. All the kids come rolling out down the, down the...

Hibbs:

Just mobbed you!

Keeling:

Just I don't know how many kids there were. And here they come piling out just a jabbering and a carrying on. You know never seen I guess an American before.

Hibbs:

They just want to touch you and...

Keeling:

Yeah. Just jabbering and smiling and carrying on. Just you know ...laugh. Those kids. I don't know where they learned to laugh but that's what they do for a pastime is laugh.

But it was.. it was some..

Hibbs:

But just the way they...the way they can do stuff with nothing over there is just what's amazing. Every time you turned the corner you'd see them. At one place they was making mufflers I think for motorcycles. Well... They had an old electric welder there that must have been I don't know how old it was. Anyway they had one dude with the welder and he didn't have him a pair of sunglasses on welding, electric welding. Over

here you don't even think about doing something like that. They just... And they was making it with stuff that you would use back in the horse and buggy days is what they was making this with. And when they'd get done it was a nice looking, I mean it looked good. It was polished out. It just looked good and they done it all with nothing.

Keeling:

They'd use a scratch stainless. And when they got through that muffler, I mean it had, they had the inside put in it, they made, every guy had a certain job that he did. There was three of them I think. Three or four of them. One guy was making the little racks that go on the motorcycle. The little bitty short racks that go on the back. He was making those. And these other two or three guys were making mufflers. One of them made, he made the inside. Another one made the big part that would go on the end. The other one was making the shell. Then the other was welding them all together. And when they got through they would hand it to a guy who was inside there and he had a (buffing bill??) And he would buff. And when he got through and laid that thing down, you could not tell it wasn't made in some big factory some where.

Hibbs:

Big factory. And they was, all of them working in a room that wasn't much bigger than the bathroom.

Keeling:

The bathroom. Yeah.

Hibbs:

And all the electrical wires in the city like on poles, they'd be hanging on fence posts, they'd be run down the top of a fence. You could reach up and touch them. All this

power and electricity and everything, I mean what kept them from getting shocked or killed you know. We'd just walk along and look. I mean just anywhere you could hang wires is where they'd be hanging. It didn't make no difference. Didn't make a bit of difference. If they was on a pole or if they was on a fence. Just as long as they'd get them off the sidewalk.

Ernst:

Wow.

Keeling:

But. But the trip to Tomahawk was you know they was a little different. They was, I guess they was in a sense it was good to a point in my mind. I don't know about the other guys. But in my mind, I remember what it used to look like. The last time I saw it, the last time I saw it was one more, the 19th of June in 69. So, we went back, they had taken a dozer and had cut. They had put a power line in. I don't know whether the source was. I assuming it was probably some big dam way up in the northern part of Vietnam, up in, up in the mountains somewhere. But this power line came right through beside the firebase. Well they had built the road right through the side of the firebase, because it was on this ridge, and they built the road out. And that's what they used to put up this power line. I mean we're talking about the steel towers and everything. I mean just like you'd see here. And so they cut out part of the firebase and the fact is they went right through where our bunker was. So, you know that part was destroyed. You couldn't tell what had been there. Besides that was, it was heavily eroded. And this, one fellow said that they'd had a fire go through there four years before. And I couldn't imagine you know it burning that country. And they burnt, who knows how many thousands and

thousands of acres. They burnt probably a stretch, probably ten or twelve miles long. And just burned it, and the only thing that had come back was little old scrub stuff that was maybe a foot tall. That's the only thing that grew back from all that vegetation that had been there before. I don't know how long it would take to burn it. Because you know they had, there was huge trees and everything in front of those mountains. It burnt all the way, it started, we could see the top of those mountains, which we're talking about they're low mountains they're not real tall mountains, right off the edge of the ocean. And it burnt that whole area through there. They didn't say why, but I'm assuming that they must have had a terrible drouth. I would have never suspected that it would have burnt, we couldn't burn it. And we threw everything in the world we could at it and it wouldn't burn so...

Ernst:

How long were you all over there? The second time. How long was your visit?

Keeling:

Twelve days all together but, it took fourteen days to get over there and to get back I think. It was a..

Ernst::

Yeah. A long flight.

Keeling:

Yeah, that one was thirteen hours. But I don't....

Hibbs:

Takes about what twenty-three or it takes about twenty-three hours of actual in the air time to get there. Cause we went, we went from Louisville to where New York? From

New York to New York to Amsterdam. Amsterdam, what was it we noticed in Amsterdam? Is that where they had the guards that was...?

Keeling:

Yeah. We got off the airplane and we, we didn't know what, we thought that they were ready for a military take over. They were armed with automatic weapons, hand grenades, ugh...

Hibbs:

This was the airport.

Keeling:

This was the airport.

Hibbs:

But that airport was a big airport, but there is nothing for sale in it. It 's just, all you do is switch planes in there. You don't buy no snacks, you don't buy no shirts, you don't buy nothing. And they got big signs hanging up "Smoking \$1000 fine".

Ernst:

Whooo!

Hibbs:

In the airport. I mean that's, I mean big signs. And with all them guys standing around with them rifles and things hanging on them, you just ain't going to mess up in that place too much.

Keeling:

I mean hey, they look like commandos. We never did understand why.

Hibbs:

No.

Keeling:

When we came back the next time, they weren't there. Weren't even around so we didn't know why, I mean they were just there was a half a dozen of them. One of them was a woman. She was dressed just like the guys were. I mean with the combat boots and the black, the black uniform. They had flak jackets. I mean it was, they looked like a SWAT team is what they looked like.

Hibbs:

This is what seven hours from New York to Amsterdam? And it was thirteen hours from Amsterdam to Singapore. When you get to Singapore, you're twelve hours difference in the time. And then you've got to fly back. Let's see now we got to Vietnam. We had a Vietnamese, Vietnam airlines is what picked us up in Singapore.

Keeling:

Yeah in Singapore.

Hibbs:

No other airlines I don't guess is allowed in Vietnam. But I have to give them credit. They did have some nice airplanes. And that was one thing we was wondering about when we went over there. What kind of airplanes was we going to be getting on. I was really thinking about that. Cause I'm scared to death of flying anyway. And I'll have to give them credit though they had some, they had nice airplanes. Real nice.

Keeling:

Nothing else.

Hibbs:

Yeah, nothing else. They had nice airplanes.

Ernst:

Did you all meet any former NVA soldiers or did you have any kind of connection you made like that, while you were over there?

Keeling:

No. We... If we had to do it over. If I had, believe maybe if we had to do it over we may have tried to of approached the (???) something just a little bit. We didn't. Cause we weren't really sure.

Ernst:

Sure.

Keeling:

You know. For instance. We were flying back and we didn't know what these people thought about us. After we were there and what somebody said was the absolute truth. They, I forget who it was, they had already said it. One of the, one of the Vietnam Vets that had been there a couple or three years before. And he made the statement, he said, "these people would surrender today if the U.S. would come back." And that's absolutely true. I mean they didn't know, the north never realized how good the south had it. While the U.S. was there. And the south, they'd welcome the U.S. back with open arms.

Ernst:

Were there big differences between Saigon and Hanoi when you all were there.

Keeling:

Oh yes. Yeah. Hanoi just looked like it was at a stand still I mean it just looked like it was frozen in time. Saigon was just, it was bustling. I mean, if it, it was this is one thing that history doesn't ... If we aren't careful history is going to portray our so called loss, which wasn't that much, wasn't a loss as some people look at it. Because if we hadn't, if the south Vietnamese hadn't seen the western civilization, they would look just like the north. And that would be, that would be horrendous. They, they were just like Smiley said. It was just like we had left the day before and went back and while we were gone, they pulled all of the military people out. The rest of it was exactly the same. Dress. They, basic dressed still the same. They have a lot of the western dress now. They have a lot of t-shirts...

Hibbs:

What was that show that they was watching was Charlie's Angels.

Keeling:

Yeah.

Hibbs:

That's two years ago now, and they was just, they was just starting to watch that show Charlie's Angels.

Keeling:

Yeah, Charlie's Angels. They had I guess somebody had released you know some of these films and they could you know made them to where they could afford to show them.

Hibbs:

Little House on the Prairie. That was another one that was getting ready to But you know like I say look how far behind they, they are on that.

Keeling:

They had Karaoke bars. Just drive down the road and stop and... You had a bus driver that was probably the best bus driver in Vietnam. I mean the kid was good. It's the only thing you can say about him. And we stopped one time they, they wanted to go down to a rice paddy and film. So we just pulled off the side of the road and stopped. And he stopped. He knew where he was stopping. He stopped right across the road from a karaoke bar. So he went in there and put his money in and set there and he had the microphone and everything and had a video and I didn't know it till then, but they had the words on the video. He was singing right along with them. We were sitting in the bus just about as far as from here across to the courtyard right there just sitting there watching. You could actually even hear the music. We were so close to it. But those people, I mean it was two different , it's still two different worlds. It was two different worlds then... And it's still two different worlds now. There's nothing that the communist government will ever be able to do to unite the two different countries. Because the north, they just haven't had that exposure. I mean if they transferred them. Split half of them out of the north and sent them down to the south, and take half of the south up to the north, then you'd get some interaction. But as it is now, they expect to be that way till who knows when. They are doing some building. I did see a paper that they

are building a another school close to (sounds like Way?) But the building has really getting slow started.

Ernst:

Sure.

Keeling:

Right now they have tourism. That's it. That's the only thing they have that's , that's really putting any money in their pockets. But ...

Ernst:

So in Saigon could you get American style foods?

Keeling:

Yeah. I think somewhere they even had us hamburgers.

Hibbs:

We didn't get to... We didn't stay in Saigon but two hours when we come back on a count of we couldn't get out of the airport where we left from in what Danang?

Keeling:

Yeah.

Hibbs:

They don't have radar and the only way that you can land those big planes is they have got to see the runway from the sky, that when it's raining like that they can't find it.

Ernst:

Sure.

Hibbs:

When you got ready to leave, they had to send somebody down on the runway to run the water buffalos off the runway so the airplane could get to it. I don't know how them motorcylces...

Ernst:

Was this down in Danang?

Keeling:

No it was in (sounds like way) Yeah. If anybody traveled up there you know if they were around Camp Eagle or (sounds like Thu bai or Ja lai) they saw the airport. And it's still the same airport.

Hibbs:

It's a big old airport. But it's .. I mean there it is right out there in the middle of, nothing around it except the tower that's it. That's the only thing there, and the parking lot.

Keeling:

And where...Saigon or where did we go into the one where we was just standing there looking and we was only one or two planes...

Keeling:

That was Danang.

Hibbs:

Yeah Danang.

Keeling:

Only plane in Danang. Landed, we landed in Danang where planes all over the place coming and going. Jet marine fighters were just you know taking off and landing just one after the other. And there we was, we was, we landed (both talking) We were the only plane. And we were the only people there. There was nobody else there on that runway except us.

Hibbs:

It was just us. You know it was kind of a weird feeling just to think the way it was with all the traffic in the world was going on and now there was just nothing. It was just us sitting there and we just got off the plane and just... If you look up in those hills you can still picture the shooting and everything going on almost you know. But, I don't know. It's just something to be able to go through the country and... Bicycles that's all people use, bicycles and motorcycles. Cause what is it they say the tax is on a car over there was? Like 200 percent?

Keeling:

I don't know.

Hibbs:

Some kind of a deal like that, if you have a .. Nobody hardly has a car. And you just, when you drive everybody just stays on the horn you know. The , the people on the bicycles are thick. I mean you might have drove from here to that building over there and you'll pass or meet twenty-five or fifty of them. I mean and that's out in the country. But, they just, ugh, never look. When you come up behind them, they'll be in the road and you'll just beep that horn, and nobody ever looks. From the bicycles they just, they

just move over and if there is too much traffic on one side of the road the guy in the bus he'll just get on and drive on the other side of the road and going up them mountains. He'd pass them, he'd be on the wrong side in them trailers that you couldn't see twenty-five foot around. And if you met somebody, everybody would just spread out some how or other. I don't know how they done it the roads wasn't that wide. They would just spread out. But they could carry more on a bicycle than what... I tell you what they can get as much on a bicycle as you could get in that Jeep right there. As far as, as what they, hogs... they had them tied on the back. Ducks, they'd have ducks hanging all over it somehow. They'd have like a 4 x 8 or 4x 10 sheet of metal somehow or other they'd have it on there. It would be sticking out that high off of the ground at the front. (Settling ??) tanks, I , you just couldn't believe how much they could put on a bicycle and then still ride it. It's just unbelievable.

Ernst:

Have either of you ever been to the ~~w~~all in Washington?

Keeling:

Yeah. They've , now they've went up to the wall. I've seen them. The moving wall twice.

Hibbs:

WHS took us up. What just a few weeks before we went over there didn't they?

Keeling:

No, it was after we came back wasn't it? No. Okay it was.

Hibbs:

It was. That's right. Two or three weeks. They'd sent four of us. They'd take four of us up and pay for the thing if we wanted to go. So we went up and it was a one day trip.

Ernst:

Sure.

Hibbs:

But they'd pay for it, and we got, you know went to see the wall and that was pretty, pretty neat. And there was, you wouldn't believe the people that went through there that day we was there. I don't even remember what day it was one day during the week. But, you would have a hard time getting up next to the wall to find the names cause there was so many people that were streaming through that thing. And most of them were foreigners.

Ernst:

(Can't understand ???) I been twice. It's now the most attended monument that we've got in America.

Hibbs:

Well it was...I had no idea there was that many people that would... I mean that might just been one particular day or something, but it was sure crowded that day I know that. It was really crowded.

Keeling:

We had the opportunity... What was it five or six of us? To closing, when they closed the (???) wall, the last time we was in Louisville?

Hibbs:

Oh yeah. That was last year, the closing ceremony. Yeah, last summer down at Memorial Gardens on Bardstown Road there.

Keeling:

I forget what the name of that is there on Bardstown Road.

Hibbs:

I think between (???)

Keeling:

We had, had a bunch of guys there. A bunch of vets.

Ernst:

Have I missed anything? Is there anything you all want to mention or talk about that we haven't ..

Keeling:

I... let's see I like, I say we still several of us gets together every Wednesday night. You know that's kind of neat. All of us being over there together and ...

Ernst:

Sure.

Keeling:

We still, we laugh and cut up about it all the time and this and that. Who done this and who done that.

Hibbs:

But it was a real interesting trip to go back. I, if it wasn't for the flight over I'd like to go back again. But I'm scared to death of airplanes and it don't get no better. Every time I ride one it gets worse.

Ernst:

Have you all seen the WHS show they did?

Keeling:

Oh yeah. They sent us tapes of it.

Ernst:

Were you pleased with it?

Keeling:

Yeah, as far as I know they was about as good of a job as anyone could have done it.

Hibbs:

That was, we thought that was going to be like a little thirty minute video was what they were putting together was my understanding. And heck that thing went on for a week or two didn't it?

Keeling:

Yeah. It went on I think it was ten days wasn't it? Something like that.

Hibbs:

I don't remember what it was now but it was on every night.

Keeling:

People would come up to me and tell me you know they saw it and one boy that I hadn't seen, in fact he graduated high school with Smiley. And I had not seen him since... since he graduated from high school. He came up to me one day and said "You know I watched that" and I kept thinking I said "I know this guy". What's his name? And he finally told me his name and I said well yeah. But there, it stirred up an interest that I had, you know I had no idea that, that it was you know that kind of interest in it.

Hibbs:

(Something about a lot of people???)

Keeling:

Yeah but, you know the part about the history of the thing, I know lots of people that have different views. Fact is there is some that were about a marine that this past week in the paper who was wounded and he came home and he began a protest against the war after he got home. But, and I, in my opinion would have been maybe even close to that, maybe. I never was to opinion was a waste to start with. But after going back for the second time you know. If we hadn't been there and those people hadn't been free those, that number of years from what, from the time when we first got involved in it in 62' until you know the mid 70's they were those years that those people lived in a, in a certain you know relative freedom. But now you know it wasn't, maybe it wasn't total and they were, there always were those possibilities that you know things happening to them. But if we hadn't been there, our influence on that part of the world would never have been. I mean you are talking about third world country. It's hard to believe that they are even, the north and the south are even part of the same country. Because the

DMZ for all intense purposes are still there. I mean they're still there. And I don't believe the north will ever see the prosperity of the south. Because of their mindset. Because they haven't seen anything, that would I don't believe that would really prompt them. You know their idea of freedom is different than ours too. That was part of the other reason that we didn't fair so well. Because they had little to lose. And some of them didn't see that it what little bit they had to lose was really worth all the, all the big hoop la. We did learn on the second trip that they at one time, they taxed the people of Vietnam. and all they did was taxed them into poverty. They still didn't get anything out of them cause they didn't have anything. You know, taxing somebody who has nothing is, is not a winning proposition. so they finally had to quit. They finally just quit taxing them and let the people go, you know go on their own and just do whatever they could do to survive. And they're back to the same...

Hibbs:

You know, nobody has nothing really.

Keeling:

They had little.

Hibbs:

But it seems like they are so happy.

Keeling:

Yeah, but they're, you know that's

Hibbs:

They're all happy.

Keeling:

Smiley made a good, he made a good observation. He said "I wonder if these people ever heard of a law suit over here?" He said "I seriously doubt it. I doubt seriously if these people know what that means." Because like he said they had little. What little they had, you know I don't think they are beyond sharing with somebody else.

Hibbs:

Everytime you stop on the side of the road, there would be kids run out of every house almost with little old trays on them with stuff to try to sell you. If you buy, you may buy from this one over here, if you don't have change, she'd run over to that ones house and get the change and come back and give it to you. And they are all trying to sell you something, but you never hear no squalls out of them or nothing. Or if it was, we couldn't understand them. But nobody got nothing and everybody seems happy.

We probably messed it up I guess. Yeah, if we'd took over there we'd probably messed them up. But anyway it was. you know....

Keeling:

It's hard to put into words.

Hibbs:

Yeah, you have to go see it.

Keeling:

You really have to. You can see it, but when you begin to verbalize it it's, it's somewhat a different project.

Hibbs:

Just seeing, just seeing the way it is... Like I say, they'll chase you for a mile to get a dollar off of you, and over here a dollar is just nothing here. It's what I'm telling you know it's just, it's just totally different. They'll just try and try and try

Dr. Ernst's interview with Joseph Keeling and Ronald Hibbs

Keeling:

As I was saying They were probably three of the , they had to be three of the best people at WHS, WHS had.

Ernst:

Did her dad go?

Keeling:

No, No he didn't go and I don't know , like she explained all this , this to us about her dad and you know my mind will only take so much information. It's a hit and miss job you know it hits a little and misses a lot. But during the trip it poured down the rain, in fact it even got we even lost some money because we couldn't make a flight out earlier and come back to Saigon one day earlier, because it rained so much. But anyway she never complained, she was I mean as tough as any of us. I mean just she amazed me.

Ernst:

Was she just curious about the Vietnam War because of her dad or I mean...

Keeling:

Like I said she told us, you know she gave us kind of a run down of why she was, what the real interest was besides being her dad, but she knew it was an opportunity to travel. She had a young baby when she left him that really

Hibbs:

Yeah, it wasn't about two or three months old

Keeling:

It wasn't very old at all. And her husbands Gary Folk is that his name?

Hibbs:

Yeah, Gary Foggle. (Both talking at same time--Can't understand him) I BELIEVE HE SAID "You have him confused with another station". Sports.

Keeling:

He is at WEE.

Ernst:

I know those names.

Keeling:

He's from, he's from Bardstown. So anyway he took, he did the baby-sitting job for the illness part...

Hibbs:

Well, WHAS, they had a part I mean in all of this too didn't they it was..

Keeling:

Yeah, they paid for the transportation over there you know while we were in country.

Hibbs:

I mean she just, she done a special for WHS too. I know she said, she got some kind of a something out of it. I forget what.

Keeling:

She got an award didn't she?

Hibbs:

Some kind of a, yeah, she got some kind of an award. It was something promoting WHAS. It was just one of those things they picked to do.

Ernst:

Sure.

Hibbs:

Because, I think they blew more money than they were supposed to on that trip too didn't they.?

Keeling:

I think that it costs them a little more than they intended.

Hibbs:

Yeah.

Keeling:

Because they had to pay for the... Now that was one of the.. What was it a day for the camera, just having the camera over there \$300 a day, just for having the camera over there?

Hibbs:

I don't know but the (Both are talking at same time --Cant' understand him)... Where they had that one girl that was with them.

Keeling:

Yeah, she had to be there everywhere the camera went, she had to be there .

Hibbs:

What they charged \$300 a day for her or something?

Keeling:

Maybe that's what it was.

Hibbs:

I think it was \$300 a day the communists or whatever it was charged for having her with us, and she probably got a dollar or two of that is what she actually got.

Keeling:

A dollar a day. She got a dollar a day. So they made \$299 every day that the camera was there. Because she was a government...

Hibbs:

Something. If we wanted to stop on this hill here, she had to say it was all right that we go on there and we went anywhere we wanted to go. She didn't say nothing about any of it I don't reckon, because we just wanted to go back where we had been, you know, the night we was (hit)? and all that..

Ernst:

This was a tour guide that was (there once and was living in Los Angeles now)?

Hibbs:

Right, no she was a Vietnamese. She works for the government

Keeling:

She works for the Government in Vietnam. She had something to do with you know they were afraid that somebody was going to do something you know that they don't know about.

Ernst:

Sure.

Keeling:

And this was the part that's really, I mean this is the amazing part, we were at the Hanoi, so we hadn't seen, you know, we hadn't seen the south.. Actually. So we go to Hanoi, we got off and it was night and they took us down into Hanoi...

Hibbs:

Cause see we got to Saigon during the day remember it was daylight, so we had to fly on up to Hanoi from Saigon.

Keeling:

And so we got, we were riding up through town in dark, you know you didn't know what was going on in dark, so you just turn down this street and here's this hotel. Real nice hotel, you know, no complaints about the hotel, but woke up the next morning and looked out over top, you know standing up there looking out over top of the city and it just you know it was kind of ... disappointing I guess is one way to say it. You know here you kind of expected to see something, but not you know, not exactly like this. And the people, the was it premier, was that what they called it, Iranian premier, it wasn't premier. (Name-- Sounds like Rocks and Johnny!) .. He was in the same hotel we were. in Hanoi, the same time we were so we saw these big Arabs, not Arabs

Hibbs:

Irans

Keeling:

Or Iranians or something-- My mistake. All over the place. I mean you know they were all over that hotel.

Ernst:

It 'd be their version of the secret service

Keeling:

Yeah, I wouldn't ... They were, that was close enough for me. We saw him, yeah we did see him riding through Hanoi, you know in the back of a Mercedes. When he went down the street, we heard the sirens, and know that their sirens are unusual, so we immediately looked toward the street. Well, we were going down the street and looked out and here's this police escort came through and then setting in the back seat, there he was. Big as, Big as life. But Hanoi kind of smelled bad, and like I said it was our first experience with Vietnam after all of these years. So we were, you know people were I guess friendly to a certain extent, especially the younger people. You know the younger people were...

Hibbs:

They'd flock all over you.

Keeling:

Yeah. Yeah. And we rode in the ugh what do they call them? Peddalbuggies?

Hibbs:

(Ricochets?).

Keeling:

Yeah, but they had some name for them. There was some..

Ernst

Paddiecabs?

Keeling:

Yeah, Paddiecabs. That's more, that's more or less what they were. They had a -- they got in a fight, somebody paid his cabby a little more than another one and the rest of them

found out about it, and you talk about raising Cain. That was worse than a bunch of chickens running around there squawking and carrying on. But it was, ugh, it was different. And after we left there, we went back down south. We flew back into the main.

Hibbs:

Where was it in Hanoi, what was they doing to the street there?

Keeling:

Oh!

Hibbs:

That was in Hanoi, yeah.

Keeling:

Yeah, just over from the hotel. We went through it in the dark, and nobody saw anything. We came back the next day, they were taking us on a ride, what did they take us to a museum or something?

Hibbs:

I don't remember.

Keeling:

Anyway, took us to something, we were riding down the street, there was all these houses and somebody said "Did somebody bomb this place or something?" Or hadn't fixed it up since the war or some comment like that. Here was the front of all of these houses-- was gone! The fronts completely gone up three or four stories.

Hibbs:

On both sides of the street.

Keeling:

And he said no. What happened, some Vietnamese official sold, sold part of the state right away for these folks to build on, well they found out about it after who knows how many years. I mean these houses have been there for years. Well they finally found out about it or discovered it somehow or other. And so they, they cut off the part of the houses on the state right away.

Hibbs:

It was like they took a big chainsaw.

Keeling:

Yeah, a chainsaw!

Hibbs:

Went down the front of the houses and all the furniture and everything was still in the road. They didn't have no fronts on them! You was just looking in their houses.

Keeling:

It was! It was like something they had built and you know just forgot to put a wall up. Here it was...

Hibbs:

Just knocked it down. Old concrete was all shattered and rebar was sticking out of it. Just like you took a chainsaw and went right down through the middle of the houses and took that much of it down. But that was one of the things that was you know kind of weird in Hanoi. It wasn't the farthest out, or the further south, or the further north you went toward Saigon or which ever way it is, the better things seemed like they got. Hanoi was really a run down part. I mean I don't guess they got much money to do

anything with as far as keeping stuff up. But, that was one of the things we noticed up there, and I don't know. We went to a prison there too.

Keeling:

Oh Yeah.

Hibbs:

Hanoi. Hanoi Hilton.

Keeling:

Hanoi Hilton. And we actually... And they were , they remodeled it gonna turn it into a..

Hibbs:

They were tearing it down and gonna build a,

Keeling:

Build something

Hibbs:

Gonna build a hotel there

Keeling:

Maybe it was a hotel.

Hibbs:

A Hilton hotel I think is what it was.

Keeling:

I believe it was, that's what they said. Big sign out there. When they were in there working they said the old, .. we would have been able to toured inside except they were working inside and they wouldn't let us.

Hibbs:

No, they wouldn't let us.

Keeling:

But, the walls. I don't know what were they twelve fourteen feet tall next to the street? And on top of the wall they had, they had, poured cement, and while the cement was wet, they had put broken glass in it just, just continuous broken glass all the way around the thing. (Both talking at same time???) And then above it, they had electrical wires so far above it, all the way around this place.

Hibbs:

But this main entrance was still standing I reckon where they, where they went into it you know. But it actually took up about a whole block.

Keeling:

Yeah, just about a block..

Hibbs:

And you really couldn't , you could just see through some of the places where they had it all cleared out inside pretty much and was starting, starting to build. But you know it was kind of weird standing in that thing about all them prisoners and things that went through there and like we said they had all of that stuff to keep you from getting out. But what would you do if you got out of that thing, you'd be right in the middle of nowhere. I don't know where you'd go to. I mean, you're right in the middle of communists people. I don't know how you'd, what you'd do.

Keeling:

You wouldn't know where to go. I mean there was no place to go I mean.

Hibbs:

No place.

Keeling:

There was just solid wall to wall people. What did they call that big lake that the hotel was on?

Hibbs:

Oh shoot!

Keeling:

It was a reservoir, but they called it a lake. And I can't remember the name of it, I've heard it before. They had water systems. They had a big old lake there and we drove through it had a water system. The water pipe came out of this lake. I don't know what they pumped it to, but I hope it was cattle or something,, but it was a rough looking. You know the water was just you know. Everything was..

Hibbs:

The place smelled like sewage is what it smelled like.

Keeling:

Yeah.

Hibbs:

You wake up in the morning and that's just the smell.

Keeling:

Rotten vegetation

Hibbs:

That's just the way it smells. And we, we was just lucky that we took beanie weenies and crackers and all that stuff for the first three days. We didn't eat over there. I mean we just couldn't eat that food they had. Especially after that smell and everything you know the only thing... we had bottled water, we took that but, we lived off of what we took in our, and we didn't take near enough I don't reckon. Cause we'd eat more if we had it but, more than what we eat ugh...

Keeling:

They, they did have fruits

Hibbs:

Yeah we'd eat their fruit as long as it wasn't unpeeled or anything like that, we'd eat that. But it was what the third or fourth day before we could find a place where they could scramble us some eggs.

Keeling:

Yeah they ugh (Tweety?) This was the lady's name that was the tour guide. Tweety Pran. And she taught these ladies how to scramble eggs. They had never... They had no idea what a scrambled egg was.

Hibbs:

This was the international hotel to wasn't it?

Keeling:

Well, no that was the (Hoi Inn?) where she taught them that. No when you got back to that hotel man let me tell you, now you talk about eating, there was one thing about it. There was a hotel I can't remember the name of that place in (Quay?) Right on the river bank. We ate in there and you could have been anywhere in the world. You could have been in London, New York, ugh just anywhere. That place was fantastic. I mean they had food that you couldn't... what really amazed us. I mean we had been in Hanoi that

was, that was. If we had come through the south. See if we'd gone through the south and we'd kind of adjusted to this thing, it wouldn't have been quite so bad, but you know they dropped you in Hanoi and so you've got to do this culture change you know just instantaneous.

Ernst:

Right.

Keeling:

You have to adjust the food. They told us going in that the food was you know they told us what not to eat. You didn't touch anything raw. You didn't even touch it. The water, stay completely away from it. And it did take...

Hibbs:

We had to take those malaria pills and shots and things before we went back for the second time. We had to just like we was going into the army you might as well say. We took all that.

Keeling:

Yeah. There was that ugh. But they tried to (can't understand what they are saying) What do they call it?

Hibbs:

They tried to I mean they would really put on us a deal trying to fix you a meal you know that. I guess to them that was really out of this world. Of course they don't have paper plates or anything like that everything your eating off of is..

Keeling:

Somebody else ate off of it.

Hibbs:

Well is dishes and is china and stuff.

Keeling:

You know it would be good china.

Hibbs:

Yeah, it'd be worth a fortune over here. I mean that's all we had to eat off of cause they don't have paper plates and things like that.

Keeling:

We had one little episode that it was probably the highlight. We ate at this ugh...

Hibbs:

Kingfish?

Keeling:

Yeah, ugh basically. It was an outdoor restaurant. I was a nice little place. It was just right on this lake. And you know we didn't know what to expect so they said they was going to take us down there and feed us. So we went down there and

Hibbs:

My birthday.

Keeling:

Yeah. It was Smiley's birthday. And we didn't...I don't even know if he knew what we were going to eat or not, but anyway they brought this fish out. It was cooked complete. One big fish totally intact. They brought it out and brought something else. And I can't eat fish. I mean I just.. ..it just does me a number real fast.

Hibbs:

It was real yucky looking.

Keeling:

Yeah. And so anyway, it just so happened that while we were waiting to eat, one of the guys had gone around to find a comfort station. And he came back around and he said "You know where they're washing those plates at?" And we said "Where?" And he said "In that lake". So you know, you don't have to say much more about what the meals are like. But anyway this kind of took a turn for the worst. So anyway everybody was looking at that fish and even the guys who liked fish I'm not real sure were inclined toward eating it. And nobody, nobody offered to eat it. And I wasn't going to.

Hibbs:

It hurt their feelings I reckon.

Keeling:

I know it did. I had to of cause this here was a bunch of , a bunch of rich Americans over there making fun of their food is basically what they felt like and I can understand that.

Hibbs:

I only thing we had was we drank a coke, remember?

Keeling:

I think remember they fixed that rice.

Hibbs:

Was that what it was?

Keeling:

Yeah. They, they had cokes and then Tweety immediately came to the rescue and you know she started this at the other end. So they brought us a bunch of fried rice. And we learned right quick that you can eat fried rice. And that was good. It was a little bit odd tasting. And you didn't, you didn't hold it in front of your nose too long, but you could, you could eat it. And there wasn't anything wrong with it.

Hibbs:

That fish's head just flopped around for awhile.

Keeling:

Yeah, somebody...

Hibbs:

I was the one that stuck my fork in it or something. I didn't know how you were supposed to eat the darn thing I mean it was just all laid out there on a big platter looking right at you. I took my fork in the head and when I did he just flopped off, he was just laying there looking. I said I'm stuffed. And I was starved. And everybody else said "Yeah me too". We never touched none of it. But there's one thing to that he's talking about them washing the dishes in the lake, there was also a woman holding a little kid peeing in the lake at the same time. That's the one thing that really turned everybody off when they talked about the dishes being washed.

Keeling:

They had a lady, and old lady who was coming up undoubtedly, she was I'm assuming that she was either begging, or, she never said anything, but she was either looking for handouts or she was looking for food that was being... They hustled her off in a hurry. I mean they didn't take but... as soon as she... what she did, she came on the shoulder of the lake and the shoulder was just a few feet lower than the tourist area that we were sitting on. And so she came along there and she just eased up over the kind of like a bank

and then there she was right there where we were. And as soon as they saw her then they..

Hibbs:

They wouldn't let her in there.

(Both talking at the same time--can't understand them)

Keeling:

Somebody was going to give her something. I don't remember who it was. And all boy they started jabbering right quick, and boy they grabbed her and hustled her out of there just you know real fast. So ugh, we stopped at a, it was a was that a, an old Catholic church that we stopped in ?

Hibbs:

Yeah, that one...

Keeling:

No this...the one in Hanoi. And there were two, a little kid and an old guy out there begging out in the front. And they tell you, you know you never give a beggar anything. But that's easier said than done but... So you know we...

Hibbs:

Is that where they was playing up on top of the church when we got there? Or was that..

Keeling:

It might have been. This was almost dark when we got there. I believe because, they said you know not to give them anything and we gave them a few dollars and told them Di Di which was you know, which I never had no idea what it means in Vietnamese, but they whenever you'd (throw it ???) kids would leave in a hurry so I'm assuming that means go away. So he said something, nodded his head a couple of times then shoop! He was gone like a bullet.

Ernst:

Did you all go back to Firebase Tomahawk in spite of it?

Keeling:

Yes. Yeah we went back to... we went back to it.

Hibbs:

Hill 88 and Tomahawk both.

Keeling:

Hill 88 and the Tomahawk. They changed lots. They were covered with pine trees. Don't ask me where they got the pines, but they, they covered in pine trees. There were pine trees all over the place. And I had no idea that they would even grow over there.

Hibbs:

You couldn't hardly even recognize it.

Keeling:

You knew what it was because there was this big hump in the ground all by itself, you know that's got to be it. But ugh...

Hibbs:

He found a guy, the little boy that used to ride with him. We found him.

Ernst:

What was that liket?

Hibbs:

Well he is, what is he 37 now?

Keeling:

Something like that. He was...

Hibbs:

Got seven kids.

Keeling:

Yeah, he's got about seven kids. He writes. He...I got a letter from him and got a picture from him. And he wasn't a bit ashamed to ask for money right off the bat.

Hibbs:

It didn't take ten or fifteen minutes to find him when we got there. First person we asked, or she asked was his brother wasn't it?

Keeling:

Yeah, it was his brother and that was, he showed us you know the .. we asked where the firebase was. You know where's the GIs you know used to be. And he more or less you know made noise you know being there you know like the guns made. So it's pouring down rain and we followed him on up the hill there and he showed us where it was and I said something to one of the girls about ugh, one of the kid's names when we were there was named...one of them's name was Ho. Now I never did understand what the deal was because Tweety said that, that I said one of them's name was Ho and one of them's name was (sounds like Wa?) And she said Wa?? that's the name. I said well the name was Ho and she said Wa?? is the proper name. So there were two kids and I don't know what the other ones name was. It wasn't Ho. So this one boy said ("the head waiter"??) So some kid, they sent some kid looking for him real fast. And they'd had a school there. And they turned.. we just...we eliminated school when we showed up. All the kids come rolling out down the, down the...

Hibbs:

Just mobbed you!

Keeling:

Just I don't know how many kids there were. And here they come piling out just a jabbering and a carrying on. You know never seen I guess an American before.

Hibbs:

They just want to touch you and...

Keeling:

Yeah. Just jabbering and smiling and carrying on. Just you know ...laugh. Those kids. I don't know where they learned to laugh but that's what they do for a pastime is laugh. But it was.. it was some..

Hibbs:

But just the way they...the way they can do stuff with nothing over there is just what's amazing. Every time you turned the corner you'd see them. At one place they was making mufflers I think for motorcycles. Well... They had an old electric welder there that must have been I don't know how old it was. Anyway they had one dude with the welder and he didn't have him a pair of sunglasses on welding, electric welding. Over here you don't even think about doing something like that. They just... And they was making it with stuff that you would use back in the horse and buggy days is what they was making this with. And when they'd get done it was a nice looking, I mean it looked good. It was polished out. It just looked good and they done it all with nothing.

Keeling:

They'd use a scratch stainless. And when they got through that muffler, I mean it had, they had the inside put in it, they made, every guy had a certain job that he did. There was three of them I think. Three or four of them. One guy was making the little racks that go on the motorcycle. The little bitty short racks that go on the back. He was making those. And these other two or three guys were making mufflers. One of them made, he made the inside. Another one made the big part that would go on the end. The other one was making the shell. Then the other was welding them all together. And when they got through they would hand it to a guy who was inside there and he had a (buffing bill??) And he would buff. And when he got through and laid that thing down, you could not tell it wasn't made in some big factory some where.

Hibbs:

Big factory. And they was, all of them working in a room that wasn't much bigger than the bathroom.

Keeling:

The bathroom. Yeah.

Hibbs:

And all the electrical wires in the city like on poles, they'd be hanging on fence posts, they'd be run down the top of a fence. You could reach up and touch them. All this power and electricity and everything, I mean what kept them from getting shocked or killed you know. We'd just walk along and look. I mean just anywhere you could hang wires is where they'd be hanging. It didn't make no difference. Didn't make a bit of difference. If they was on a pole or if they was on a fence. Just as long as they'd get them off the sidewalk.

Ernst:

Wow.

Keeling:

But. But the trip to Tomahawk was you know they was a little different. They was, I guess they was in a sense it was good to a point in my mind. I don't know about the other guys. But in my mind, I remember what it used to look like. The last time I saw it, the last time I saw it was one more, the 19th of June in 69. So, we went back, they had taken a dozer and had cut. They had put a power line in. I don't know whether the source was. I assuming it was probably some big dam way up in the northern part of Vietnam, up in, up in the mountains somewhere. But this power line came right through beside the firebase. Well they had built the road right through the side of the firebase, because it was on this ridge, and they built the road out. And that's what they used to put up this power line. I mean we're talking about the steel towers and everything. I mean just like you'd see here. And so they cut out part of the firebase and the fact is they went right through where our bunker was. So, you know that part was destroyed. You couldn't tell what had been there. Besides that was, it was heavily eroded. And this, one fellow said that they'd had a fire go through there four years before. And I couldn't imagine you know it burning that country. And they burnt, who knows how many thousands and thousands of acres. They burnt probably a stretch, probably ten or twelve miles long. And just burned it, and the only thing that had come back was little old scrub stuff that was maybe a foot tall. That's the only thing that grewed back from all that vegetation that had been there before. I don't know how long it would take to burn it. Because you know they had, there was huge trees and everything in front of those mountains. It burnt

all the way, it started, we could see the top of those mountains, which we're talking about they're low mountains they're not real tall mountains, right off the edge of the ocean. And it burnt that whole area through there. They didn't say why, but I'm assuming that they must have had a terrible drou. I would have never suspected that it would have burnt, we couldn't burn it. And we threw everything in the world we could at it and it wouldn't burn so...

Ernst:

How long were you all over there? The second time. How long was your visit?

Keeling:

Twelve days all together but, it took fourteen days to get over there and to get back I think. It was a..

Ernst::

Yeah. A long flight.

Keeling:

Yeah, that one was thirteen hours. But I don't....

Hibbs:

Takes about what twenty-three or it takes about twenty-three hours of actual in the air time to get there. Cause we went, we went from Louisville to where New York? From New York to New York to Amsterdam. Amsterdam, what was it we noticed in Amsterdam? Is that where they had the guards that was...?

Keeling:

Yeah. We got off the airplane and we, we didn't know what, we thought that they were ready for a military take over. They were armed with automatic weapons, hand grenades, ugh...

Hibbs:

This was the airport.

Keeling:

This was the airport.

Hibbs:

But that airport was a big airport, but there is nothing for sale in it. It 's just, all you do is switch planes in there. You don't buy no snacks, you don't buy no shirts, you don't buy nothing. And they got big signs hanging up "Smoking \$1000 fine".

Ernst:

Whooo!

Hibbs:

In the airport. I mean that's, I mean big signs. And with all them guys standing around with them rifles and things hanging on them, you just ain't going to mess up in that place too much.

Keeling:

I mean hey, they look like commandos. We never did understand why.

Hibbs:

No.

Keeling:

When we came back the next time, they weren't there. Weren't even around so we didn't know why, I mean they were just there was a half a dozen of them. One of them was a woman. She was dressed just like the guys were. I mean with the combat boots and the

black, the black uniform. They had flak jackets. I mean it was, they looked like a SWAT team is what they looked like.

Hibbs:

This is what seven hours from New York to Amsterdam? And it was thirteen hours from Amsterdam to Singapore. When you get to Singapore, you're twelve hours difference in the time. And then you've got to fly back. Let's see now we got to Vietnam. We had a Vietnamese, Vietnam airlines is what picked us up in Singapore.

Keeling:

Yeah in Singapore.

Hibbs:

No other airlines I don't guess is allowed in Vietnam. But I have to give them credit. They did have some nice airplanes. And that was one thing we was wondering about when we went over there. What kind of airplanes was we going to be getting on. I was really thinking about that. Cause I'm scared to death of flying anyway. And I'll have to give them credit though they had some, they had nice airplanes. Real nice.

Keeling:

Nothing else.

Hibbs:

Yeah, nothing else. They had nice airplanes.

Ernst:

Did you all meet any former NVA soldiers or did you have any kind of connection you made like that, while you were over there?

Keeling:

No. We... If we had to do it over. If I had, believe maybe if we had to do it over we may have tried to of approached the (???) something just a little bit. We didn't. Cause we weren't really sure.

Ernst:

Sure.

Keeling:

You know. For instance. We were flying back and we didn't know what these people thought about us. After we were there and what somebody said was the absolute truth. They, I forget who it was, they had already said it. One of the, one of the Vietnam Vets that had been there a couple or three years before. And he made the statement, he said, "these people would surrender today if the U.S. would come back." And that's absolutely true. I mean they didn't know, the north never realized how good the south had it. While the U.S. was there. And the south, they'd welcome the U.S. back with open arms.

Ernst:

Were there big differences between Saigon and Hanoi when you all were there.

Keeling:

Oh yes. Yeah. Hanoi just looked like it was at a stand still I mean it just looked like it was frozen in time. Saigon was just, it was bustling. I mean, if it, it was this is one thing that history doesn't ... If we aren't careful history is going to portray our so called loss, which wasn't that much, wasn't a loss as some people look at it. Because if we hadn't, if the south Vietnamese hadn't seen the western civilization, they would look just like the north. And that would be, that would be horrendous. They, they were just like Smiley

said. It was just like we had left the day before and went back and while we were gone, they pulled all of the military people out. The rest of it was exactly the same. Dress. They, basic dressed still the same. They have a lot of the western dress now. They have a lot of t-shirts...

Hibbs:

What was that show that they was watching was Charlie's Angels.

Keeling:

Yeah.

Hibbs:

That's two years ago now, and they was just, they was just starting to watch that show Charlie's Angels.

Keeling:

Yeah, Charlie's Angels. They had I guess somebody had released you know some of these films and they could you know made them to where they could afford to show them.

Hibbs:

Little House on the Prairie. That was another one that was getting ready to But you know like I say look how far behind they, they are on that.

Keeling:

They had Karaoke bars. Just drive down the road and stop and... You had a bus driver that was probably the best bus driver in Vietnam. I mean the kid was good. It's the only thing you can say about him. And we stopped one time they, they wanted to go down to a rice paddy and film. So we just pulled off the side of the road and stopped. And he stopped. He knew where he was stopping. He stopped right across the road from a karaoke bar. So he went in there and put his money in and set there and he had the microphone and everything and had a video and I didn't know it till then, but they had the words on the video. He was singing right along with them. We were sitting in the bus just about as far as from here across to the courtyard right there just sitting there watching. You could actually even hear the music. We were so close to it. But those people, I mean it was two different, it's still two different worlds. It was two different worlds then... And it's still two different worlds now. There's nothing that the communist government will ever be able to do to unite the two different countries. Because the north, they just haven't had that exposure. I mean if they transferred them. Split half of them out of the north and sent them down to the south, and take half of the south up to the north, then you'd get some interaction. But as it is now, they expect to be that way till who knows when. They are doing some building. I did see a paper that they are building a another school close to (sounds like Way?) But the building has really getting slow started.

Ernst:

Sure.

Keeling:

Right now they have tourism. That's it. That's the only thing they have that's, that's really putting any money in their pockets. But ...

Ernst:

So in Saigon could you get American style foods?

Keeling:

Yeah. I think somewhere they even had us hamburgers.

Hibbs:

We didn't get to... We didn't stay in Saigon but two hours when we come back on a count of we couldn't get out of the airport where we left from in what Danang?

Keeling:

Yeah.

Hibbs:

They don't have radar and the only way that you can land those big planes is they have got to see the runway from the sky, that when it's raining like that they can't find it.

Ernst:

Sure.

Hibbs:

When you got ready to leave, they had to send somebody down on the runway to run. the water buffalos off the runway so the airplane could get to it. I don't know how them motorcylces....

Ernst:

Was this down in Danang?

Keeling:

No it was in (sounds like way) Yeah. If anybody traveled up there you know if they were around Camp Eagle or (sounds like Thu bai or Ja lai) they saw the airport. And it's still the same airport.

Hibbs:

It's a big old airport. But it's .. I mean there it is right out there in the middle of, nothing around it except the tower that's it. That's the only thing there, and the parking lot.

Keeling:

And where...Saigon or where did we go into the one where we was just standing there looking and we was only one or two planes...

Keeling:

That was Danang.

Hibbs:

Yeah Danang.

Keeling:

Only plane in Danang. Landed, we landed in Danang where planes all over the place coming and going. Jet marine fighters were just you know taking off and landing just one after the other. And there we was, we was, we landed (both talking) We were the only plane. And we were the only people there. There was nobody else there on that runway except us.

Hibbs:

It was just us. You know it was kind of a weird feeling just to think the way it was with all the traffic in the world was going on and now there was just nothing. It was just us sitting there and we just got off the plane and just... If you look up in those hills you can still picture the shooting and everything going on almost you know. But, I don't know. It's just something to be able to go through the country and... Bicycles that's all people

use, bicycles and motorcycles. Cause what is it they say the tax is on a car over there was? Like 200 percent?

Keeling:

I don't know.

Hibbs:

Some kind of a deal like that, if you have a .. Nobody hardly has a car. And you just, when you drive everybody just stays on the horn you know. The , the people on the bicycles are thick. I mean you might have drove from here to that building over there and you'll pass or meet twenty-five or fifty of them. I mean and that's out in the country. But, they just, ugh, never look. When you come up behind them, they'll be in the road and you'll just beep that horn, and nobody ever looks. From the bicycles they just, they just move over and if there is too much traffic on one side of the road the guy in the bus he'll just get on and drive on the other side of the road and going up them mountains. He'd pass them, he'd be on the wrong side in them trailers that you couldn't see twenty-five foot around. And if you met somebody, everybody would just spread out some how or other. I don't know how they done it the roads wasn't that wide. They would just spread out. But they could carry more on a bicycle than what... I tell you what they can get as much on a bicycle as you could get in that Jeep right there. As far as, as what they, hogs... they had them tied on the back. Ducks, they'd have ducks hanging all over it somehow. They'd have like a 4 x 8 or 4x 10 sheet of metal somehow or other they'd have it on there. It would be sticking out that high off of the ground at the front. (Settling ??) tanks, I , you just couldn't believe how much they could put on a bicycle and then still ride it. It's just unbelievable.

Ernst:

Have either of you ever been to the wall in Washington?

Keeling:

Yeah. They've , now they've went up to the wall. I've seen them. The moving wall twice.

Hibbs:

WHS took us up. What just a few weeks before we went over there didn't they?

Keeling:

No, it was after we came back wasn't it? No. Okay it was.

Hibbs:

It was. That's right. Two or three weeks. They'd sent four of us. They'd take four of us up and pay for the thing if we wanted to go. So we went up and it was a one day trip.

Ernst:

Sure.

Hibbs:

But they'd pay for it, and we got, you know went to see the wall and that was pretty, pretty neat. And there was, you wouldn't believe the people that went through there that day we was there. I don't even remember what day it was one day during the week. But, you would have a hard time getting up next to the wall to find the names cause there was so many people that were streaming through that thing. And most of them were foreigners.

Ernst:

(Can't understand ???) I been twice. It's now the most attended monument that we've got in America.

Hibbs:

Well it was...I had no idea there was that many people that would... I mean that might just been one particular day or something, but it was sure crowded that day I know that. It was really crowded.

Keeling:

We had the opportunity... What was it five or six of us? To closing, when they closed the (???) wall, the last time we was in Louisville?

Hibbs:

Oh yeah. That was last year, the closing ceremony. Yeah, last summer down at Memorial Gardens on Bardstown Road there.

Keeling:

I forget what the name of that is there on Bardstown Road.

Hibbs:

I think between (????)

Keeling:

We had, had a bunch of guys there. A bunch of vets.

Ernst:

Have I missed anything? Is there anything you all want to mention or talk about that we haven't ..

Keeling:

I... let's see I like I say we still several of us gets together every Wednesday night. You know that's kind of neat. All of us being over there together and ...

Ernst:

Sure.

Keeling:

We still. we laugh and cut up about it all the time and this and that. Who done this and who done that.

Hibbs:

But it was a real interesting trip to go back. I, if it wasn't for the flight over I'd like to go back again. But I'm scared to death of airplanes and it don't get no better. Every time I ride one it gets worse.

Ernst:

Have you all seen the WHS show they did?

Keeling:

Oh yeah. They sent us tapes of it.

Ernst:

Were you pleased with it?

Keeling:

Yeah, as far as I know they was about as good of a job as anyone could have done it.

Hibbs:

That was, we thought that was going to be like a little thirty minute video was what they were putting together was my understanding. And heck that thing went on for a week or two didn't it?

Keeling:

Yeah. It went on I think it was ten days wasn't it? Something like that.

Hibbs:

I don't remember what it was now but it was on every night.

Keeling:

People would come up to me and tell me you know they saw it and one boy that I hadn't seen, in fact he graduated high school with Smiley. And I had not seen him since... since he graduated from high school. He came up to me one day and said "You know I watched that" and I kept thinking I said "I know this guy". What's his name? And he finally told me his name and I said well yeah. But there, it stirred up an interest that I had, you know I had no idea that, that it was you know that kind of interest in it.

Hibbs:

(Something about a lot of people???)

Keeling:

Yeah but, you know the part about the history of the thing, I know lots of people that have different views. Fact is there is some that were about a marine that this past week in the paper who was wounded and he came home and he began a protest against the war after he got home. But, and I, in my opinion would have been maybe even close to that, maybe. I never was to opinion was a waste to start with. But after going back for the second time you know. If we hadn't been there and those people hadn't been free those, that number of years from what, from the time when we first got involved in it in 62' until you know the mid 70's they were those years that those people lived in a, in a certain you know relative freedom. But now you know it wasn't, maybe it wasn't total and they were, there always were those possibilities that you know things happening to them. But if we hadn't been there, our influence on that part of the world would never have been. I mean you are talking about third world country. It's hard to believe that they are even, the north and the south are even part of the same country. Because the DMZ for all intense purposes are still there. I mean they're still there. And I don't believe the north will ever see the prosperity of the south. Because of their mindset. Because they haven't seen anything, that would I don't believe that would really prompt them. You know their idea of freedom is different than ours too. That was part of the other reason that we didn't fair so well. Because they had little to lose. And some of them didn't see that it what little bit they had to lose was really worth all the, all the big hoop la. We did learn on the second trip that they at one time, they taxed the people of Vietnam. and all they did was taxed them into poverty. They still didn't get anything out of them cause they didn't have anything. You know, taxing somebody who has nothing is, is not a winning proposition. so they finally had to quit. They finally just quit taxing them and let the people go, you know go on their own and just do whatever they could do to survive. And they're back to the same...

Hibbs:

You know, nobody has nothing really.

Keeling:

They had little.

Hibbs:

But it seems like they are so happy.

Keeling:

Yeah, but they're, you know that's

Hibbs:

They're all happy.

Keeling:

Smiley made a good, he made a good observation. He said "I wonder if these people ever heard of a law suit over here?" He said "I seriously doubt it. I doubt seriously if these people know what that means." Because like he said they had little. What little they had, you know I don't think they are beyond sharing with somebody else.

Hibbs:

Everytime you stop on the side of the road, there would be kids run out of every house almost with little old trays on them with stuff to try to sell you. If you buy, you may buy from this one over here, if you don't have change, she'd run over to that ones house and get the change and come back and give it to you. And they are all trying to sell you something, but you never hear no squalls out of them or nothing. Or if it was, we couldn't understand them. But nobody got nothing and everybody seems happy.

We probably messed it up I guess. Yeah, if we'd took over there we'd probably messed them up. But anyway it was. you know....

Keeling:

It's hard to put into words.

Hibbs:

Yeah, you have to go see it.

Keeling:

You really have to. You can see it, but when you begin to verbalize it it's, it's somewhat a different project.

Hibbs:

Just seeing, just seeing the way it is... . Like I say, they'll chase you for a mile to get a dollar off of you, and over here a dollar is just nothing here. It's what I'm telling you know it's just, it's just totally different. They'll just try and try and try

Vietnam/Oral History

Keeling/Hibbs

Tape 1, Side 2

Vanessa Lynn

Grizzle Baldwin

Interviewer: Did you ever find out how they got in so close to you?

Keeling: They, undoubtedly they came in different areas. Some of them came in on top the hill. I wound up in a hospital in Chu Lei with one of the guys that was, let's kinda back up just a second. The 101st supplied us when we first got there on 88. They supplied us with a type of security, I guess you'd call it. They would have a good number of their people on the hill, more or less, almost on R & R. That's where they would come out. Some of these guys had already been in the unintelligible by that time and came back. And they were, and they would kind of regroup and they were a good size group. We went to Tomahawk, they only gave us, or the best of my recollection, I won't say this is a fact cause the best that I can remember, they had one guard bunker and it was on the highest part of the hill that had a unintelligible wire around it. Now it wasn't a high part of the hill, that was only another kind of a level place. The hill continued up for long way. And when they came in, they came in by that guard bunker because that was, you know, they wanted that high ground. And they, I think they threw hand grenades in. And, I'm not sure, I don't remember, I know two of those guys got hurt. One of them wasn't serious, the other one was. And it was really ironic at the hospital, the one that was really hurt had his intestines hanging out in a plastic bag, wanted to go look for his buddy, he had to go check on him. So he asked his nurse, he said, "Nurse can, I'll never forget, he was hurtin so bad he couldn't talk, he said, "Can I get up and go look for my buddy?" And she said, "If you can get out of that bed you can go anywhere you want to." This kid turned, slid out of bed, said, "Grab my IV pole." And he took off, doubled over, took off out of that hospital, down that aisle, out the door and finally found his buddy. His buddy was on guard detail. He had gotten, he got a cut on the back of his neck. And they had him out there policing up the yard there at the little unintelligible hut was all they were. And he found him, he said, "I'm glad you're alright," he said, "I think I'm feelin bad." So we marched him back in and that nurse said, "I knew you'd be back." And so he got back in the bed. But that was really, I mean that was really ironic. But I don't know, I don't know if any those guys got killed or not cause these are only two guys I even saw. And I wouldn't have known that one except he asked me something and he was right across the aisle from and I said yeah. He asked me, yeah, I think that's what it was, he asked me when I came in and I said yesterday. He said, "I did too, did you come from up North?" That's when we got talkin, that's when we found out we were on the same fire base. Interviewer: What did your group look like? I know you all are from Bardstown, the same area, but the other people you served with, I mean, Gonzales, I assume was Hispanic.

Keeling: Yeah.

Interviewer: I mean did, were there Native Americans, Blacks, Asian Americans, I mean.

Keeling: Oh yeah, we had, we didn't have any Asian Americans, but there were some, that one guy must've been a Creole, or he was from Louisiana. His name was Bethaia, he got killed. He was, of, some African ancestry, you know, somewheres. We had one guy in our section that got hurt, he was a mess truck driver. No, a maintenance truck driver. Cause, but anyway, he got hurt, he didn't, well I won't get into that. And so, let's see, there were several Hispanics. There was a sergeant Diaz, Gonzales, Sanchez, Gonzales was from Houston. Sanchez, I'm not sure where he was from. Then, oh gosh, there were several. But see, these guys were, they began to infuse us, what they call, they would take, bring regular Army guys in and replace our people and send them to regular units. Because, two reasons, we were going to eventually leave as a unit, so you couldn't, everybody leave at one time. And two, if bad things happen then it would be a, just a little hedge against, against the matter.

Interviewer: Did you all get along? I mean were there any....

Keeling: Oh yeah, we, our unit, as far as I know. We had, we had one guy in our unit, when we first got over there, he was assigned to it. I don't know where he came from. And we had a little difficulty with him. He didn't like to, he liked to keep his mind all fogged up. And he never, I don't know if he was ever normal. So they finally assigned him to another unit. They were havin a little difficulty with him. He was supposed to have been on the gun section. And he'd be sleepin and they'd go get him up, and maybe he'd want to go out and maybe he didn't want to go out. So, so they sent him to another unit. And we heard later that they assigned him as a driver for a, a 175, I believe. They ran over a 250 pound bomb one day. They found the section chief. That's the only one they found out of the whole unit, the whole section. And, you know, we hated to hear that. But, I mean, I don't even remember now how we found out about that. But anyway, no, we had, we had the regular Army guys that were with us. Were great guys. They were primarily artillery. You know, artillery guys and, you know, we had no problem. The only problem we did have was, we hadn't been out, hadn't been on 88 to awful long and we had a little, we had a little row after a USO show. And if you don't know what a USO show is, anyway...

Interviewer: Do you want to talk about it a little bit?

Keeling: These uh, they'd bring singing groups. They had one group that came from Hong Kong. They had the group came from Australia. And I'm not sure, there were groups came. But I do remember the one, the group from Hong Kong cause they were so skinny. Poor little kids, you know, they looked like they were malnourished. But the group form Australia was just the opposite, they were quite healthy. They weren't fat they just were healthy. But anyway, after one of the USO shows one day, we had a little difficulty and it took the rest of the afternoon to get it kind of settled down. Cause of one person. And so their 101st battalion commander sent a helicopter out and they loaded him on a helicopter and took him out. And they were getting, I ran into a guy later that I knew with the 101st. And I asked what ever happened with this guy. And he said, you know said, said they brought him back to Camp Eagle and held him there for a little while. And he just, he just wouldn't settle down. And so they said well, you know, take him to, I think it was Cam Rahn Bay and process him out. They took him to Cam Rahn Bay and they, said they processed him out. He was releaved to come home the next morning. They had already discharged him from the Army. You know, well the discharge, I guess would have got in the U.S. They

already told him they were going to discharge him. The next, the day before he left, he headed E6. So they LBJ, which is LONG BEN JAIL. That's the last he had heard of him since.

Interviewer: Was he just causing problems in jail, was he just rushing the stay?

Keeling: He, no he, it was after the show was over. And we won't get into the details on it.

Interviewer: Okay.

Keeling: It's a, no decent way to describe it. But anyway, he just, I guess had never ran into a situation he couldn't buffalo his way through. We heard later, and one of the guys told us later, that their battery commander sent a guy down and told em , said if this guy hurts anybody, drop him. I mean he just went, he just went nuts. He kept gettin, he gettin worse, more agitated, more agitated. They told him you got to get him off this firebase before the nights over. We can't, said no way. So they sent a helicopter out and loaded him up. Interviewer: Why did they call it Tomahawk? Is there any particular reason? Keeling: We don't know. They, they, the Army gave names to places for who knows what reasons.

Interviewer: I didn't know if there was a particular one.

Keeling: No, you know, that was, you had, I mean if we had a copy of the Stars and Stripes right now, it would be something to read. Because you had places, if it was a fire, they called them firebases, if they had either a permanent or semi-permanent support unit there. But if it wasn't, and if it was only temporary, then they called them for landing zones. And they had one, I'll never forget, one named Nancy. And you know, but they, who knows how many different. they had a firebase, one of our other battery zone was called Bastone. And, which was a, you know, throw back from World War Two. And then they had another firebase, was on, another battery zone, firebase

Interviewer: I was just curious.

Keeling: I, I mean I can't, I can't give you a reason to that, it's military, it's military.

Interviewer: Did you all have any interaction with the South Koreans, and if you did, what were they like?

Keeling: We did, but it was and unusual situation. As a firebase, no. Because we never saw, we never saw a South Korean in our sector. But we would go to Danang and they had what they called retrograde yards, which was actually junk yards. I mean you go down and then there was equipment parked around. And if you needed parts off of it, boy you, what the cannibalize it. You take it, you sign the paperwork, you know, and you take it. And what they did, after so much of it was gone, and then they would take and load this stuff on ships and haul it back for scrap. Some of it was, was, was obsolete equipment. They had, they had a gun you call the 108. Which was a 105 tube in the same halicer configuration. I mean the same gun configuration as our 155's. So we learned after a couple of trips down there that you just take a requisition order, you sign it, you go down there, you hand it to em at the gate. You go in, you make sure you're pulling trailer with, you know, behind a jeep, and a tarp over it. You go in there, and anything you think you could need, take off, throw in the jeep, and you know,

you go out. Sign your little name, and away you went. And so the Koreans had no support units. I think the Marines supported them to certain extent. And the Marines, you know their support units were stretched pretty thin sometimes. So these guys would park on a road outside this yard. And when we came down the road, they'd stop you. And they'd ask you, and they said, well, we need, you know, certain parts. Primarily for the trucks. Said can you get em for us. If it was reasonable, we'd try to get em a part or something. One time they wanted, they wanted a 50 caliber or something. Said no, were not, you know, we can't. That's armament. We can't, we don't have any access to any of that. But it was, I mean those guys, they tell us stories about they'd send word around before the made their patrols in certain areas. They'd send the word out and the Vietnamese would go. They'd go take a vacation till the ROCS were gone. Then they'd go back to work. They didn't want anything to do with them cause they were, they'd say they wouldn't leave them intact. They'd either cut off a finger, or cut off an ear, or mutilate them in some way. And they wasn't, that wasn't good karma for them.

Interviewer: How do you mean the Vietnamese? The Vietcong?

Person: The VC, the VC, the VC would literally, like I said, they would take, they would take a break, a long break, until they were gone. They didn't want anything to do with them. I mean these guys, they didn't take any prisoners. They didn't, they was no such thing as takin a prisoner.

Keeling: They were tough. I mean after see in these guys, I don't know how, I don't see what they needed us in Korea for. I mean, you know. Boy, I mean you know, they even looked the part. They just had that mean look, you know. But know how many of them were over there. That's the only time we, I ever ran into em, was down there.

Interviewer: A couple of years ago I was in Montana, in a big think tank about Asian wars. I met a ROC. It was the first time I had been exposed to any. A very nice guy. He's written a number of books. But it was fascination. I just didn't know that much about them and now I'm really interested in them.

Keeling: They were different folks, they, I never saw one of them dirty. I mean they were just as, their uniform looked like it was starched. And, which over there was, you know, nobody. Why, you see four old grunts running down the road, you couldn't tell what color they were, let alone what their uniforms were. I mean dirty, have, you know, where they been out there sloshing around through the rice paddies. Mud all over them and everything. But not those guys. You'd think they were executives or something the way they dressed. They took care of the clothes. I guess they took care of everything they had, otherwise they wouldn't have it.

Interviewer: Were either of you all married at the time, and if you were, did you write home? Did you have girlfriends, families, wives?

Hibbs: Biggest part of em was married probably. See I had a daughter then, she was about, she was born in '67. So I guess she was really less than a year old when we got called up.

Keeling: Yeah, we'd write home two or three times a week. I would probably....

Hibbs: As many times as you could.

Keeling: Yeah, that's about all you looked forward to, is a letter. Yeah that was the time of the day that everybody was awake, mail call. I mean if a guy wasn't there for mail call, there was somebody that grabbed that letter and took off and just found him in a hurry. You know, to make sure he got it. It was....

Hibbs: Lot of us would read each others mail. Cause we would know almost as much what they had in their letter, or what they was talkin about, as we did our own. You know, knowin the people back home that was doin the writtin and....

Keeling: Yeah, they'd pass em around. If somebody got a letter, somebody would pass it around.

Hibbs: You'd read it. You'd know who it was and everything about it. All that kinda stuff just made it a lot better, a lot easier.

Keeling: Yeah, we, I had a set of twins that were born in '66. And when I left....

Interviewer: It must have been tough. I'm a new father and I miss mine this weekend.

Keeling: Well, you know, I guess in a sense you'd say it is, but it's one of those situations. See we tried, I guess you could call it tried. We, there was a question raised about the legality of calling up the National Guard without a declared, in an undeclared war. And so, I don't remember, we went to a meeting down in Louisville. And some guys were talkin and so we, they took up donations to kinda see how this thing went. And it came back later, I can't remember when it was or anything. I think that one of the, on Supreme Court Justices ruled that it was legal. It could, they could do it. And to the best of my knowledge, I never heard the word mentioned ever again. And it was as if that's the end of that. It was like it was a closed book. I never heard a soul ever mention it again. I guess most of the guys never even knew it took place. I wouldn't have known it except I lived close to Louisville. And I ran into a, I ran into somebody down there. And they were telling me about the meeting they were having. So I went down to the meeting to see what was going on. But, as far as being, you know, you know it's something you're gonna do, go gotta. I mean it's not, you been trainin, for us, we had basically been trainin for five years for this, for this thing. We had already been through what they call SRF. We had already been trained ride control. We were one of the units picked to do all that. And we found out later that if you could do a good enough job, they'll pick you for all the jobs. So, and that's what we were told, if you was good enough, they'll pick you to do em all.

Interviewer: What was your trip home like, and once you go home, did you notice a change in anything?

Hibbs: No, not really.

Keeling: He came home first, so....

Hibbs: I was in Japan for a couple of months, I think it was, cause I got burnt that night. And we came home a little bit earlier, but not a whole lot. That's like he was talkin about the good job. There was, I think, three of us from Bardstown that was over there. And we got to, after we got to doin pretty good, well they had helpin out in the offices û    there, û  doin different things. Or we could've

probably go home earlier than that. But we half way done our job right. And they didn't tell us we could go home. They was hangin on to 7

^ Q

us and we didn't know it. But that's just like he said, I guess the average person that come through there just didn't give a crap about anything. And the sooner they go out, probably the happier it make the people. But I don't know, it would tickle you to death to get out of that place and to get back home. No, I didn't see much change. And everything just kinda fell back into place pretty quick really. I mean you just went back to your old jobs or whatever you was doin. People treated us just normal. I mean, you hear a lot of that stuff about this and that, but it was just pretty much normal.

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Q Keeling: That was basically true, once it was over it was kinda like, you know, once it got started, it was started. And once it was over, it was over. I mean, like we came home as a unit once it had, did come on over. And I remember we had a bumpy ride. We really got a lot of air turbulence just

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before we got into Kentucky, come out of Indiana. Then there

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h was, aw, there were just a whole mess of people waitin for us when we got off the airplane. And then it was, you know, it was the next day. It was like, almost like we'd never left. You know, it's hard to describe, you know, how fast that things could change from, you know, from one day to the next. Just how much difference, I did, I did, I made a point of watching the news, as much as I could, to see what was going on. And I was watching the news and basically on up to the time it fell.

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W — Interviewer: How did you all feel about the anti-war movement?

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^ ã Keeling: I don't know, I mean I don't know about û Smiley but 7 Ò ^ U Ò I, you know, I remember a name. And I won't mention her name. á U U á But anyway, I thought that, I thought that you know, she was, ð U S ð at her job, she did a pretty good job. But then, then after 7 ÿ S S ÿ the situation, as the situation turned out, I haven't had a 7

S U

lot of use for her since. But that's the only, and I remember U T one time on, watchin the news, and there was, I think it was , T Y , at Berkeley, there was, you know, a bunch of kids were û Í; Y _ ; hollerin, û makin a lot, you know that was the only bad thing, J _ \ J they was û makin so much noise you couldn't understand what s Y \ T Y they were saying. So you know , that didn't really, you know h T U h and that was, that was it. I, you know, I saw a little bit on w U P w the news and knew what some people did. I knew that some '† P S † people had voiced their opinion. Which was their right. But 7 • S U • anyway, that was the extent of it really. Either didn't focus ¼ U U ¼ on it or deliberately stayed away from it. One of the two, I ³ U R ³ didn't, I didn't dwell on it. Might have been different to U Â R # Â Smiley he....

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^ à Hibbs: Not really, we just û went cause we had to go. And I'm 7i ^ S i sure not very many people would've went if they didn't have 7p S] p to go. But you know, that part didn't bother us, what theyû U

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were doin. I mean, they told us we was û gonna have to go so we ` \$

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@ ÿÿ —ÿÿ just had to go, that was about it.

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` - Interviewer: How did û Bardstown respond, because I mean I know - ` T - you lost a number of friends, that must've been tough on the < T < town.

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Q Z Keeling: Well, you know there's, since we'd been back I'd s i Q S i read some of the news articles. But since we were there and 7 x S U x the news was slow in getting back to us. It wasn't, you know, ‡ U R ‡ it wasn't like being, I mean I don't know what it would've U - R U - been like living here. I mean I have no idea what it would've ¥ U U ¥ been like. Because we were so far removed from it after this. ´ U U ´ You know, after this thing happened, we kept with the guy, we Å U U Å tried to keep up with the guys who left the unit. We knew who Ò U T Ò went back with, we knew who accompanied certain people back. á T Q á That kind of thing. When they got back, then we did get a s ð Q U ð little bit of information of what things were like while they ÿ U T ÿ were home. But you know, it's just, plus too, it was just, I

T P

was in a hospital and Smiley was gone too. So we weren't 'P Q actually with the unit. So they had a memorial service in s, Q S , Tomahawk for guys in the unit. And except for the pictures, 7; S U ; you know, that's the only thing that I can relate to. Cause I J U U J wasn't there. And I came back, joined back up with them after Y U f Y they were back in _____

Phu û _____

Bai . So there's a big, kind of like a 7h f e h blank, because I didn't get any mail at _____

Chu û _____

Lai . They held Uw e T w the mail cause they didn't who, really know where to send it † T T † to. I guess they weren't even sure I was coming back. I mean • T Q • I wasn't sure. I didn't know what was going on, you just, sʌ Q Q ʌ someone points and says get on an airplane. And you know, s³ Q T ³ that's the way it goes. You don't ask a lot of questions. So Â T U Â we flew back and forth for a , for, that was, that in itself Ñ U _ Ñ was an experience. The û flyin back and forth to the hospital. à _ S à You had to go back, oh I forget how often it was, had to go 7i S \ i back down and well, I guess for a couple of û check-ups. So sp \ U p you, you, you know you just go in and say, you know where you

U q

goin. You know, _____

Chu Lai going back to _____

Phu û _____

Bai. Okay, sit over q \$

| €:

| €: \$

] ÿÿ ``ÿÿ there, we'll holler at you in a minute. There's the airplane,] R go out there and get on the airplane and take off. I mean, U - R T - you know, I guess people could've flown all over the country - T P - and nobody would've never asked any question. They never ' < P ^ < asked you any questions about what you was û doin. But anyway..

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R Z Interviewer: What was it like having a book done about you U i R ` i guys? The experience in general. Were you û surprised about it, x ` ? x not everybody has a book done about them.

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_ - Hibbs: Not really, well I know I û just didn't pay a whole lot ¥ _ T ¥ of attention to it. I just figured people would ask me some ' T 8 ' questions and I would answer them.

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e Ò Keeling: Well see, that's the way it û kinda started out.û - á e ` á That's û kinda, like you said, Mr. Wilson, he said he wanted to ð ` U ð ask some questions. Well, we just, no problem. I just thought ÿ U _ ÿ it was gonna be, you know, he was just û gonna, you know, just

_ Q

put them in his book. I didn't realize till later exactly sQ Q what the book was gonna be like. So it wasn't a, it was a s, Q] , û surprise in a sense. But because what we learned out of it U;] . ; more than anything else.

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S Y Hibbs: It really wasn't no big deal. To me it wasn't. Just, 7h S U h you know, read the book, got one of em. I read it one time. I w U _ w reckon it's û layin right there on the table at the house now.

†_R † She keeps it out and open there. Different ones look at it U•R ? • when they come in or û somethin.

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U ³ Interviewer: Are you happy with it, I mean are you happy with Â U ; Â what you said and how you handled it?

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U à Keeling: I think he did a good job because, because of what I ï U R ï learnt from it. More than, you know, actually what he did. Up R Q þ It's a, he had written another book. Wasn't it about Korea?

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ÿÿ ÿÿ Hibbs: I think so.

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T - Keeling: I think so, I think he had written one about Korea. - T ` - so he had kind of an understanding. I û don't think he was ever < ` O < in the military himself, but he understood, you know, a ~ K O S K little bit of the military aspects. And he covered families 7 Z S 6 Z and what have you. And it was...

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P x Hibbs: Just different people, I mean like me, I read the ' P Q † book. Why I could care less really what he put in it. You s – Q U – know, it don't bother me but some of the others might read it ¥ U S ¥ and there might be something in there that just really tick 7 ' S _ ' them off. You know, one little ol statement or û somethin that ã _ Q ã didn't amount to crap. But yet, it would. I mean you hear s ò Q S ò every now and then a comment, you know, somebody would say, 7 á S _ á well this is not right, or û somethin like that. You know, but ð _ T ð I just, I never did take it that serious. I mean it was just ÿ T Q ÿ a book. And I don't pay any attention to the little stuff s

Q I

like a lot of people does. It just don't bother me.

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T , Interviewer: Well, I was just curious. You all have gotten a ; T C ; lot of attention, what did you say about CNN?

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☒ Y Keeling: Yeah, they had a, what was it, four of û ya, fiveû û ofû 7h ☒ \$ h û ya?

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0 † Hibbs: Four or five of us.

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S x Keeling: They had a CNN interview. But I don't know if they 7³ S . ³ ever aired it. Did they?

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/ Ñ Hibbs: I don't even know.

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^ ï Keeling: See, that was, this was, we're û talkin about, not a 7p ^ S p long time ago but I barely knew what CNN was. And until the 7

S R

ordeal with the pilot in Somalia, and ever since then I've UR \$ F "" F "" \$
] Uÿÿ %oÿÿ had a bad taste in my mouth, but anyway, but they interviewed] O us. But they interviewed, I think, four or five of them - O U - together. And they asked me some questions. And I'm sure what - U ^ - I told em wasn't, wasn't gonna make, I knew it wasn't û gonna 7 < ^ / < make their news for sure.

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R Z Interviewer: Why were they interviewing you? Did they ever U i R . i tell you or they just...

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T ‡ Hibbs: Shoot, I don't even know why. They just called us one - T 1 - night and wanted to know...

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U ´ Keeling: See, we get together once a week, about six or seven Æ U S Æ of us, over there. We do that year round. And a bunch of us 7 Ò S _ Ò got old cars. We put on car shows all the time up there. And ù á _ [á anyways, we's at the Sonic, that little ù ol 50's and 60's ´ ð [T ð burger place up there, and they called us and wanted to know ÿ T R ÿ it they could be up there. We told em one Wednesday night, U

R T

we're there Wednesday night. And I don't even know what they T O done it for, to tell you the truth. And, like him, what ^ , little I said didn't amount to ù nothin. But I never did hear 7; ^] ; anything more about it. ù They's the one that said they just UJ] M J wanted to do it. Of course, like I say, we didn't care.

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N h Interviewer: Was this before or after the book came out?

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_ † Keeling: ù Aw, it was before the book, fact is it must've been • _) • four to five years.

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P 3 Hibbs: It's got to been since '92, because it was at the 'Â P S Â Sonic. See, that was built in '92. It's got to be since then.

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R à Keeling: Wasn't it the 25 year, something to do, wasn't it Uï R : ï the anniversary, it wasn't the fall.

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Hibbs: I don't know.

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ÿÿ aÿÿ Keeling: Or was it the fall of Vietnam? The anniversary of U Z) the fall, 20 years.

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5 - Hibbs: Shoot, I don't remember.

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9 K Keeling: Maybe it was '95, maybe...

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J i Hibbs: But it wasn't really any big deal, it just...

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S ‡ Keeling: No, it wasn't, no, it was long over a few years ago.

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8 ¥ Hibbs: Just asked a few questions.

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U Ã Keeling: Anyway, like I said, I don't really remember. We was Ò U Z Ò up there and we got û kinda chilly. We were, we were over ¯ á Z S á dressed. One little girl did, did I say a little girl, from 7 ð S c ð over here at û

Ratcliff , she interviewed us. And I thought she ÿ c U ÿ did a real good job, Cindy Eagles. And I noticed, boy I, once

U Z

you meet a person you û kinda, she was a reporter for the ¯ Z T Courier-Journal. Now she is, I see articles in there by her, , T 4 , in the paper, almost everyday.

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. J Hibbs: When she do that?

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] h Keeling: û Oh, that was about the same time. See, there were Uw] R w three of them. Seem like me it was, she did that one, CNN, U† R († and somebody else.

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U ¤ Hibbs: I remember Cindy Eagles, that name, but I forgot about ³ U ³ that.

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Q Ñ Keeling: Yeah, but the, back to the book. The fellow that sà Q R à wrote that book, Mr. Wilson, He died in, was it over three Uï R ï years ago?

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Hibbs: We tried to find him.

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ÿÿ iÿÿ Keeling: He died the year before we left to go back in '95. 7 [] That's right. And he died, it's û kinda unusual. He was in a U -] T - clinic, he had a heart, some kind of heart trouble. And when - T T - he got sick he was in a clinic for some reason. And the best < T S < we could understand, he never, they never did get a hold of 7 K S S K his family. So they didn't know what was wrong. They didn't 7 Z S Q Z know whether he had a history of, of some kind of a heart s i Q L i problem or something. And he wound up dying in the....

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K ‡ Hibbs: It was a while before anybody claimed him too.

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Q Keeling: Yeah, seemed like to me it was something unusual s' Q R ' about it. Then his daughter wrote a letter. Don Parrish is U ã R] ã û kinda like the CEO, more or less, of the group. He's a, he U Ò] Q Ò wrote a letter looking for him, to tell him we were going s á Q U á back on the second trip, in case that he wanted to accompany. ð U T ð Because he would be able to see exactly what he wrote about. ÿ T T ÿ Or not exactly, but he'd be able to see a portion of what he

T U

wrote about. And his daughter wrote a letter and said that he U ^ had, he had died. We were really û surprised, really surprised.

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N ; Interviewer: Why did you guys go back and what was the Í J N 1 J experience like going back?

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` h Keeling: Well, it was û WHS, I guess is the, they, I don't know w ` P w if, if Rachel or who it was, I guess maybe Rachel. If, l '† P _ † just, this is û kinda off the top of my head, if I'm wrong I'm • _ R • sure Rachel will find out about it. She'll, she'll correct Uæ R 2 æ me. Her dad was over there.

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5 Â Interviewer: Now, who's Rachel?

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` à Keeling: Rachel Platt, she works, she's one of the news folksû ï ` 4 ï for û WHS television.

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Interviewer: I'm a little _____
unintelligible , I don't know her.

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ÿÿ @ÿÿ Keeling: Are you? Oh, okay. And so, some how or other she got] P a hold of Don and ask him if they would be interested in ' - P U - going, you know, if anybody would be interested in going back - U S - in a trip over there. And they would do a special on it. He 7 < S Q < said well, he'll check around, thought there would be. So s K Q R K there was a little, I guess a little time lapse there. And U Z R ^ Z then I guess he got a hold of him and said, you know, it's,û 7 i ^ < i this thing'll, is û gonna go.

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X ‡ Hibbs: Not much notice. They û gived us two weeks notice.

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Q ¥ Keeling: Yeah, then all of a sudden, yeah, then they were s´ Q 1 ´ ready to go, more or less.

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6 Ò Hibbs: Had to make up your mind.

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S ð Keeling: Yeah, had to make up your mind in two weeks. So we 7 ÿ S [ÿ just, for me it was just, it was, anytime û before that or ‘

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anytime after that, I wouldn't have been able to go. But it 7S S just, it was just one of those, it worked for that time and 7, S U , that time only. So he and I both, or one or two of the groups ; U : ; went back. It was, it was some trip.

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[Y Interviewer: You û gotta get more specific than that for me.

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3 w Keeling: It was, it was long.

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T • Hibbs: You could talk for a week, about, you know, I mean we ƒ T Z ƒ didn't know û nothin evidently the first time we was over ⁻³ Z U ³ there. I didn't. The second time, it was, it was probably the Â U U Â most exciting trip I've ever been on in my life. As far as go Ñ U R Ñ to another country and see how people live. It's actually, Uà R T à they always say you can't go back, but I tell you what, when ï T ^ ï we went back over there it was just like û goin back in time, 7p ^ U p to 1968. Almost, other than the war, everything else was, the

U T

trucks, the people, everything was just like we left it over T \$ Ö , ~ Ö , ~ \$] ÿÿ <ÿÿ there. They was still using the same things that was wore out] S when we was over there, 25 years before. We didn't know how 7 - S i - it was runnin, and they were still û usin it. But it was justû 7 - i [- like û goin back in time. But, I don't know, the people, I ' < [R < didn't, we didn't pay a lot of attention to them. A lot of U K R T K people, when we left, you know, about half of them over here Z T U Z still thinks the war's goin on. There are a lot of people you i U] i talk to, you

know, that's just the average country people, they don't understand. You know, when they found out we's goin back, they thought aw, you all will be killed, and everything else, you know. Which we didn't give that part much thought. I don't reckon. But once you get over there and get with the people, I don't know, they seemed like they've been treated, they treated us alright. We didn't have any problem at all out of them. I don't guess. Did we?

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" ð Keeling: No.

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Hibbs: Other than customs, we had a little hassle gettin through customs.

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< ; Interviewer: What happened in customs?

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\ Y Hibbs: Well, they couldn't read my writin, and I couldn't sh h read it either. That was the worst part.

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R † Keeling: We'd just got off the plane. We'd have flown, now U• R K • this is, this is hard to, we flew from Amsterdam to 'x K S x Singapore, with a dog leg around Iraq, that was included in 7³ S T ³ our trip. Thirteen hours, we got to Singapore. We had manage Â T N Â to at least stand up and walk around a little while in ÍÑ N V Ñ Singapore. Then we flew from Singapore to, to Saigon and went à V U à right in to customs. And here we were, still in a mist of jet ï U S ï lag, and so they said fill out these forms. Well, you know, 7p S Q p what did, what was it you had was worth so much you wrote s

Q R

down there. I didn't have anything. So Smiley wrote two or UR \$

Y Âx

Y Âx \$

W Uÿÿ %oÿÿ three things down there. Well he couldn't, this customs W R inspector, which he was a military person, what he was, he U - R U - couldn't read English. I mean real simple. And so rather than - U S - to say he couldn't read it, he got mad cause he wrote it in 7 < S O < there. And oh, you talk about , he was a jabberin and a K O ^ K hollerin, and û goin on. And I said, oh no, here we are, just 7 Z ^ S Z got in country and we're on our way to prison, right now. I 7 i S U i know it. And it was, aw it was, after it was over with it was x U N x alright. But at that time, it wasn't û alright.

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A — Hibbs: He was û kinda ticked off.

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5 ´ Keeling: û Aw, he was.

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U Ò Hibbs: you just supposed to put down what you got when you go á U _ á in country. Course, we had like û Beenie Weenies, and all that ð _ T ð junk we took. And our clothes, you know, and I just wrote it ÿ T U ÿ on there. But I wrote it fast and he wanted me to read it and

U T

I couldn't even read my own writin. I guess he thought I was T M makin fun of him or û somethin, I don't know.

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4 ; Keeling: Anyway, he was upset.

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@ Y Hibbs: Rachel, she got a kick out of that.

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U w Keeling: The girl with us, now if it hadn't been for the girl † U R † that was with us, now the trip wouldn't have been anything U • R S • like it was. The girl that was, that headed the trip as the 7x S S x tour guide, more or less you would call her, she was native 7³ S Q ³ Vietnamese. She was Vietnamese-American. She lives in Los sÂ Q R Â Angeles. She is one liberated woman, to say the least. And UÑ R I Ñ she is not, I don't guess she's afraid of anything.

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5 ï Hibbs: She's afraid of heights.

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Keeling: Yeah, well okay, she is afraid of heights. She got 7S \$ | ÌS | ÌS \$
d 7ÿÿ Šÿÿ right up there and she was û talkin right with them. And he s d ^ finally, just, this guy
wasn't used to a woman û comin up and 7 - ^ T - almost standing toe to toe to him. And it took him
back too. - T) - That upset him too.

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[K Hibbs: Another thing, those blank tapes that û WHS had for ' Z [S Z their cameras, that was the
only thing they didn't want to 7 i S Q i let through customs. They had to check that stuff to make s x
Q R x sure there wasn't pornography on it for they let it in the U ‡ R - ‡ country.

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8 ¥ Keeling: Literally had to view it.

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^ Ã Hibbs: And it took û all night, I guess somebody done it. And 7 Ò ^ Q Ò anyway, she picked it up
the next morning before we could s á Q R á start our, our trip. But that was the only problem we had,
U ð R P ð gettin through customs, actually was that. The people, I ' ÿ P U ÿ don't know, I tell you
what, we went in towns. And we went, I

U `

û don't guess it was, it might have been the good part of town. ` R But I, it was nothin, it was the
slums here. I mean you're U, R] , û talkin slums. And we'd just wade right through the people. U;] ^ ;
And we didn't pay a bit more attention to them than û nothin. 7J ^ _ J Well, I guess if anybody have
wanted to done û somethin, well, Y _ T Y they could have done it. And we wouldn't, we would have
just h T R h evaporated. Nobody would have known where we went. But the Uw R ^ w people, you
could be û ridin down the road, and if you wanted 7† ^ R † to stop and go into somebody's house and
take a camera and U • R R • film it, we pretty much just done that. Well, you can't do U ‡ R U ‡ that
around here. And stop and go into people's houses and do ³ U # ³ what we done.

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T Ñ Keeling: We stayed at, after we flew from, well we flew from à T U à Saigon to Hanoi and this was part of the scheme of things. To ï U] ï make the trip, you had to go to Hanoi. And which was, theyû Uþ] ^ þ were û hopin that you'd drop a few dollars along the way. And 7

^ S

they were, and I'm here to tell, see we flew to Saigon, not 7S \$

« Öþ

« Öþ \$

Z 7ÿÿ Šÿÿ having seen anything cept what we went through in customs. U Z \$ Wait a minute.

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4 - Hibbs: Yeah, we flew to Hanoi.

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U K Keeling: Did we fly from Singapore straight through to Hanoi? Z U) Z How did we do that?

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0 x Hibbs: No, we went to.....

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- TAPE ENDSü ü

Vietnam/Oral History

Keeling/Hibbs

Tape 1, Side 2

Vanessa Lynn

Grizzle Baldwin

Interviewer: Did you ever find out how they got in so close to you?

Keeling: They, undoubtedly they came in different areas. Some of them came in on top the hill. I wound up in a hospital in Chu Lei with one of the guys that was, let's kinda back up just a second. The 101st supplied us when we first got there on 88. They supplied us with a type of security, I guess you'd call it. They would have a good number of their people on the hill, more or less, almost on R & R. That's where they would come out. Some of these guys had already been in the unintelligible by that time and came back. And they were, and they would kind of regroup and they were a good size group. We went to Tomahawk, they only gave us, or the best of my recollection, I won't say this is a fact cause the best that I can remember, they had one guard bunker and it was on the highest part of the hill that had a unintelligible wire around it. Now it wasn't a high part of the hill that was only another kind of a level place. The hill continued up for long way. And when they came in, they came in by that guard bunker because that was, you know, they wanted that high ground. And they, I think they threw hand grenades in. And, I'm not sure, I don't remember, I know two of those guys got hurt. One of them wasn't serious, the other one was. And it was really ironic at the hospital, the one that was really hurt had his intestines hanging out in a plastic bag, wanted to go look for his buddy, he had to go check on him. So he asked his nurse, he said, "Nurse can," I'll never forget, he was hurting so bad he couldn't talk, he said, "Can I get up and go look for my buddy?" And she said, "If you can get out of that bed you can go anywheres you want to." This kid turned, slid out of bed, said, "Grab my IV pole." And he took off, doubled over, took off out of that hospital, down that aisle, out the door and finally found his buddy. His buddy was on guard detail. He had gotten, he got a cut on the back of his neck. And they had him out there policing up the yard there at the little unintelligible hut was all they were. And he found him, he said, "I'm glad you're alright," he said, "I think I'm feeling bad." So we marched him back in and that nurse said, "I knew you'd be back." And so he got back in the bed. But that was really, I mean that was really ironic. But I don't how, I don't know if any those guys got killed or not cause these are only two guys I even saw. And I wouldn't have known that one except he asked me something and he was right across the aisle from and I said yeah. He asked me, yeah, I think that's what it was, he asked me when I came in and I said yesterday. He said, "I did too, did you come from up North?" That's when we got talking, that's when we found out we were on the same fire base. Interviewer: What did your group look like? I know you all are from Bardstown, the same area, but the other people you served with, I mean, Gonzales, I assume was Hispanic.

Keeling: Yeah.

Interviewer: I mean did, were there Native Americans, Blacks, Asian Americans, I mean.

Keeling: Oh yeah, we had, we didn't have any Asian Americans, but there were some, that one guy must've been a Creole, or he was from Louisiana. His name was Bethaia, he got killed. He was, of, some African ancestry, you know, somewheres. We had one guy in our section that got hurt, he was a mess truck driver. No, a maintenance truck driver. Cause, but anyway, he got hurt, he didn't, well I won't get into that. And so, let's see, there were several Hispanics. There was a sergeant Diaz, Gonzales, Sanchez, Gonzales was from Houston. Sanchez, I'm not sure where he was from. Then, oh gosh, there were several. But see, these guys were, they began to infuse us, what they call, they would take, bring regular Army guys in and replace our people and send them to regular units. Because, two reasons, we were going to eventually leave as a unit, so you couldn't, everybody leave at one time. And two, if bad things happen then it would be a, just a little hedge against, against the matter.

Interviewer: Did you all get along? I mean were there any....

Keeling: Oh yeah, we, our unit, as far as I know. We had, we had one guy in our unit, when we first got over there, he was assigned to it. I don't know where he came from. And we had a little difficulty with him. He didn't like to, he liked to keep his mind all fogged up. And he never, I don't know if he was ever normal. So they finally assigned him to another unit. They were having a little difficulty with him. He was supposed to have been on the gun section. And he'd be sleeping and they'd go get him up, and maybe he'd want to go out and maybe he didn't want to go out. So, so they sent him to another unit. And we heard later that they assigned him as a driver for a, a 175, I believe. They ran over a 250 pound bomb one day. They found the section chief. That's the only one they found out of the whole unit, the whole section. And, you know, we hated to hear that. But, I mean, I don't even remember now how we found out about that. But anyway, no, we had, we had the regular Army guys that were with us. Were great guys. They were primarily artillery. You know, artillery guys and, you know, we had no problem. The only problem we did have was, we hadn't been out, hadn't been on 88 to awful long and we had a little, we had a little row after a USO show. And if you don't know what a USO show is, anyway...

Interviewer: Do you want to talk about it a little bit?

Keeling: These uh, they'd bring singing groups. They had one group that came from Hong Kong. They had the group came from Australia. And I'm not sure, there were groups came. But I do remember the one, the group from Hong Kong cause they were so skinny. Poor little kids, you know, they looked like they were malnourished. But the group form Australia was just the opposite, they were quite healthy. They weren't fat they just were healthy. But anyway, after one of the USO shows one day, we had a little difficulty and it took the rest of the afternoon to get it kind of settled down. Cause of one person. And so their 101st battalion commander sent a helicopter out and they loaded him on a helicopter and took him out. And they were getting, I ran

into a guy later that I knew with the 101st. And I asked what ever happened with this guy. And he said, you know said, said they brought him back to Camp Eagle and held him there for a little while. And he just, he just wouldn't settle down. And so they said well, you know, take him to, I think it was Cam Rahn Bay and process him out. They took him to Cam Rahn Bay and they, said they processed him out. He was relieved to come home the next morning. They had already discharged him from the Army. You know, well the discharge, I guess would have got in the U.S. They already told him they were going to discharge him. The next, the day before he left, he headed E6. So they LBJ, which is LONG BEN JAIL. That's the last he had heard of him since.

Interviewer: Was he just causing problems in jail, was he just rushing the stay?

Keeling: He, no he, it was after the show was over. And we won't get into the details on it.

Interviewer: Okay.

Keeling: It's a, no decent way to describe it. But anyway, he just, I guess had never ran into a situation he couldn't buffalo his way through. We heard later, and one of the guys told us later, that their battery commander sent a guy down and told them, said if this guy hurts anybody, drop him. I mean he just went, he just went nuts. He kept getting, he getting worse, more agitated, more agitated. They told him you got to get him off this firebase before the nights over. We can't, said no way. So they sent a helicopter out and loaded him up. Interviewer: Why did they call it Tomahawk? Is there any particular reason? Keeling: We don't know. They, they, the Army gave names to places for who knows what reasons.

Interviewer: I didn't know if there was a particular one.

Keeling: No, you know, that was, you had, I mean if we had a copy of the Stars and Stripes right now, it would be something to read. Because you had places, if it was a fire, they called them firebases, if they had either a permanent or semi-permanent support unit there. But if it wasn't, and if it was only temporary, then they called them for landing zones. And they had one, I'll never forget, one named Nancy. And you know, but they, who knows how many different. they had a firebase, one of our other battery zone was called Bastone. And, which was a, you know, throw back from World War Two. And then they had another firebase, was on, another battery zone, firebase

Interviewer: I was just curious.

Keeling: I, I mean I can't, I can't give you a reason to that, it's military, it's military.

Interviewer: Did you all have any interaction with the South Koreans, and if you did, what were they like?

Keeling: We did, but it was and unusual situation. As a firebase, no. Because we never saw, we never saw a South Korean in our sector. But we would go to Danang and they had what they

called retrograde yards, which was actually junk yards. I mean you go down and then there was equipment parked around. And if you needed parts off of it, boy you, what the cannibalize it. You take it, you sign the paperwork, you know, and you take it. And what they did, after so much of it was gone, and then they would take and load this stuff on ships and haul it back for scrap. Some of it was, was, was obsolete equipment. They had, they had a gun you call the 108. Which was a 105 tube in the same halicer configuration? I mean the same gun configuration as our 155's. So we learned after a couple of trips down there that you just take a requisition order, you sign it, you go down there, you hand it to them at the gate. You go in, you make sure you're pulling trailer with, you know, behind a jeep, and a tarp over it. You go in there, and anything you think you could need, take off, throw in the jeep, and you know, you go out. Sign your little name, and away you went. And so the Koreans had no support units. I think the Marines supported them to certain extent. And the Marines, you know their support units were stretched pretty thin sometimes. So these guys would park on a road outside this yard. And when we came down the road, they'd stop you. And they'd ask you, and they said, well, we need, you know, certain parts. Primarily for the trucks. Said can you get them for us. If it was reasonable, we'd try to get them a part or something. One time they wanted, they wanted a 50 caliber or something. Said no, were not, you know, we can't. That's armament. We can't, we don't have any access to any of that. But it was, I mean those guys, they tell us stories about they'd send word around before the made their patrols in certain areas. They'd send the word out and the Vietnamese would go. They'd go take a vacation till the ROCS were gone. Then they'd go back to work. They didn't want anything to do with them cause they were, they'd say they wouldn't leave them intact. They'd either cut off a finger, or cut off an ear, or mutilate them in some way. And they wasn't, that wasn't good karma for them.

Interviewer: How do you mean the Vietnamese? The Vietcong?

Person: The VC, the VC, the VC would literally, like I said, they would take, they would take a break, a long break, until they were gone. They didn't want anything to do with them. I mean these guys, they didn't take any prisoners. They didn't, they was no such thing as taking a prisoner.

Keeling: They were tough. I mean after see in these guys, I don't know how, I don't see what they needed us in Korea for. I mean, you know. Boy, I mean you know, they even looked the part. They just had that mean look, you know. But know how many of them were over there. That's the only time we, I ever ran into them, was down there.

Interviewer: A couple of years ago I was in Montana, in a big think tank about Asian wars. I met a ROC. It was the first time I had been exposed to any. A very nice guy. He's written a number of books. But it was fascination. I just didn't know that much about them and now I'm really interested in them.

Keeling: They were different folks, they, I never saw one of them dirty. I mean they were just as, their uniform looked like it was starched. And, which over there was, you know, nobody. Why, you see four old grunts running down the road, you couldn't tell what color they were, let alone what their uniforms were. I mean dirty, have, you know, where they been out there sloshing around through the rice paddies. Mud all over them and everything. But not those guys. You'd think they were executives or something the way they dressed. They took care of the clothes. I guess they took care of everything they had, otherwise they wouldn't have it.

Interviewer: Were either of you all married at the time, and if you were, did you write home? Did you have girlfriends, families, wives?

Hibbs: Biggest part of them was married probably. See I had a daughter then, she was about, she was born in '67. So I guess she was really less than a year old when we got called up.

Keeling: Yeah, we'd write home two or three times a week. I would probably....

Hibbs: As many times as you could.

Keeling: Yeah, that's about all you looked forward to, is a letter. Yeah that was the time of the day that everybody was awake, mail call. I mean if a guy wasn't there for mail call, there was somebody that grabbed that letter and took off and just found him in a hurry. You know, to make sure he got it. It was....

Hibbs: Lot of us would read each other's mail. Cause we would know almost as much what they had in their letter, or what they was talking about, as we did our own. You know, knowing the people back home that was doing the writing and....

Keeling: Yeah, they'd pass them around. If somebody got a letter, somebody would pass it around.

Hibbs: You'd read it. You'd know who it was and everything about it. All that kinda stuff just made it a lot better, a lot easier.

Keeling: Yeah, we, I had a set of twins that were born in '66. And when I left....

Interviewer: It must have been tough. I'm a new father and I miss mine this weekend.

Keeling: Well, you know, I guess in a sense you'd say it is, but it's one of those situations. See we tried, I guess you could call it tried. We, there was a question raised about the legality of calling up the National Guard without a declared, in an undeclared war. And so, I don't remember, we went to a meeting down in Louisville. And some guys were talking and so we, they took up donations to kinda see how this thing went. And it came back later, I can't remember when it was or anything. I think that one of the, on Supreme Court Justices ruled that it was legal. It could, they could do it. And to the best of my knowledge, I never heard the word mentioned ever again. And it was as if that's the end of that. It was like it was a closed book. I

never heard a soul ever mention it again. I guess most of the guys never even knew it took place. I wouldn't have known it except I lived close to Louisville. And I ran into a, I ran into somebody down there. And they were telling me about the meeting they were having. So I went down to the meeting to see what was going on. But, as far as being, you know, you know it's something you're gonna do, go gotta. I mean it's not, you been training, for us, we had basically been training for five years for this, for this thing. We had already been through what they call SRF. We had already been trained ride control. We were one of the units picked to do all that. And we found out later that if you could do a good enough job, they'll pick you for all the jobs. So, and that's what we were told, if you was good enough, they'll pick you to do them all.

Interviewer: What was your trip home like, and once you go home, did you notice a change in anything?

Hibbs: No, not really.

Keeling: He came home first, so....

Hibbs: I was in Japan for a couple of months, I think it was, cause I got burnt that night. And we came home a little bit earlier, but not a whole lot. That's like he was talking about the good job. There was, I think, three of us from Bardstown that was over there. And we got to, after we got to doing pretty good, well they had helping out in the offices there, doing different things. Or we could've probably go home earlier than that. But we half way done our job right. And they didn't tell us we could go home. They was hanging on to us and we didn't know it. But that's just like he said, I guess the average person that come through there just didn't give a crap about anything. And the sooner they go out, probably the happier it make the people. But I don't know, it would tickle you to death to get out of that place and to get back home. No, I didn't see much change. And everything just kinda fell back into place pretty quick really. I mean you just went back to your old jobs or whatever you was doing. People treated us just normal. I mean, you hear a lot of that stuff about this and that, but it was just pretty much normal.

Keeling: That was basically true, once it was over it was kinda like, you know, once it got started, it was started. And once it was over, it was over. I mean, like we came home as a unit once it had, did come on over. And I remember we had a bumpy ride. We really got a lot of air turbulence just before we got into Kentucky, come out of Indiana. Then there was, aw, there were just a whole mess of people waiting for us when we got off the airplane. And then it was, you know, it was the next day. It was like, almost like we'd never left. You know, it's hard to describe, you know, how fast that things could change from, you know, from one day to the next. Just how much difference, I did, I did, I made a point of watching the news, as much as I could, to see what was going on. And I was watching the news and basically on up to the time it fell.

Interviewer: How did you all feel about the anti-war movement?

Keeling: I don't know, I mean I don't know about Smiley but I, you know, I remember a name. And I won't mention her name. But anyway, I thought that, I thought that you know, she was, at her job, she did a pretty good job. But then, then after the situation, as the situation turned out, I haven't had a lot of use for her since. But that's the only, and I remember one time on, watching the news, and there was, I think it was at Berkeley, there was, you know, a bunch of kids were hollering, making a lot, you know that was the only bad thing, they was making so much noise you couldn't understand what they were saying. So you know, that didn't really, you know and that was, that was it. I, you know, I saw a little bit on the news and knew what some people did. I knew that some people had voiced their opinion. Which was their right. But anyway, that was the extent of it really. Either didn't focus on it or deliberately stayed away from it. One of the two, I didn't, I didn't dwell on it. Might have been different to Smiley he...

Hibbs: Not really, we just went cause we had to go. And I'm sure not very many people would've went if they didn't have to go. But you know, that part didn't bother us, what they were doing. I mean, they told us we was gonna have to go so we just had to go, that was about it.

Interviewer: How did Bardstown respond, because I mean I know you lost a number of friends that must've been tough on the town.

Keeling: Well, you know there's, since we'd been back I'd read some of the news articles. But since we were there and the news was slow in getting back to us. It wasn't, you know, it wasn't like being, I mean I don't know what it would've been like living here. I mean I have no idea what it would've been like. Because we were so far removed from it after this. You know, after this thing happened, we kept with the guy, we tried to keep up with the guys who left the unit. We knew who went back with, we knew who accompanied certain people back. That kind of thing. When they got back, then we did get a little bit of information of what things were like while they were home. But you know, it's just, plus too, it was just, I was in a hospital and Smiley was gone too. So we weren't actually with the unit. So they had a memorial service in a Tomahawk for guys in the unit. And except for the pictures, you know, that's the only thing that I can relate to. Cause I wasn't there. And I came back, joined back up with them after they were back in Phu Bai. So there's a big, kind of like a blank, because I didn't get any mail at Chu Lai. They held the mail cause they didn't who, really know where to send it to. I guess they weren't even sure I was coming back. I mean I wasn't sure. I didn't know what was going on, you just, someone points and says get on an airplane. And you know, that's the way it goes. You don't ask a lot of questions. So we flew back and forth for a , for, that was, that in itself was an experience. The flying back and forth to the hospital. You had to go back, oh I forget how often it was, had to go back down and well, I guess for a couple of check-ups. So you, you, you know you just go in and say, you know where you going. You know, Chu Lai going back to Phu Bai. Okay, sit over there, we'll holler at you in a minute. There's the airplane, go out there and get on the airplane and take off. I mean, you know, I guess people could've flown all over the country and nobody would've never asked any question. They never asked you any questions about what you was doing. But anyway..

Interviewer: What was it like having a book done about you guys? The experience in general. Were you surprised about it, not everybody has a book done about them.

Hibbs: Not really, well I know I just didn't pay a whole lot of attention to it. I just figured people would ask me some questions and I would answer them.

Keeling: Well see, that's the way it kinda started out. That's kinda, like you said, Mr. Wilson, he said he wanted to ask some questions. Well, we just, no problem. I just thought it was gonna be, you know, he was just gonna, you know, just put them in his book. I didn't realize till later exactly what the book was gonna be like. So it wasn't a, it was a surprise in a sense. But because what we learned out of it more than anything else.

Hibbs: it really wasn't any big deal. To me it wasn't. Just, you know, read the book, got one of em. I read it one time. I reckon it's laying right there on the table at the house now. She keeps it out and open there. Different ones look at it when they come in or something.

Interviewer: Are you happy with it, I mean are you happy with what you said and how you handled it?

Keeling: I think he did a good job because, because of what I learnt from it. More than, you know, actually what he did. It's a, he had written another book. Wasn't it about Korea?

Hibbs: I think so.

Keeling: I think so, I think he had written one about Korea so he had kind of an understanding. I don't think he was ever in the military himself, but he understood, you know, a little bit of the military aspects. And he covered families and what have you. And it was...

Hibbs: Just different people, I mean like me, I read the book. Why I could care less really what he put in it. You know, it don't bother me but some of the others might read it and there might be something in there that just really tick them off. You know, one little ole statement or something that didn't amount to crap. But yet, it would. I mean you hear s every now and then a comment, you know, somebody would say, well this is not right, or something like that. You know, but I just, I never did take it that serious. I mean it was just a book. And I don't pay any attention to the little stuff like a lot of people does. It just don't bother me.

Interviewer: Well, I was just curious. You all have gotten a lot of attention, what did you say about CNN?

Keeling: Yeah, they had a, what was it, four of ya, five of ya?

Hibbs: Four or five of us.

Keeling: They had a CNN interview. But I don't know if they ever aired it. Did they?

Hibbs: I don't even know.

Keeling: See, that was, this was, we're talking about, not a long time ago but I barely knew what CNN was. And until the ordeal with the pilot in Somalia, and ever since then I've had a bad taste in my mouth, but anyway, but they interviewed us. But they interviewed, I think, four or five of them together. And they asked me some questions. And I'm sure what I told them wasn't, wasn't gonna make it, I knew it wasn't gonna make their news for sure.

Interviewer: Why were they interviewing you? Did they ever tell you or they just...

Hibbs: Shoot, I don't even know why. They just called us one night and wanted to know...

Keeling: See, we get together once a week, about six or seven of us, over there. We do that year round. And a bunch of us got old cars. We put on car shows all the time up there. And anyways, we's at the Sonic, that little ole 50's and 60's burger place up there, and they called us and wanted to know if they could be up there. We told them one Wednesday night, we're there Wednesday night. And I don't even know what they done it for, to tell you the truth. And, like him, what little I said didn't amount to nothing. But I never did hear anything more about it. They's the one that said they just wanted to do it. Of course, like I say, we didn't care.

Interviewer: Was this before or after the book came out?

Keeling: Aw, it was before the book, fact is it must've been four to five years.

Hibbs: It's got to be since '92, because it was at the Sonic. See, that was built in '92. It's got to be since then.

Keeling: Wasn't it the 25 year, something to do, wasn't it the anniversary, it wasn't the fall.

Hibbs: I don't know.

Keeling: Or was it the fall of Vietnam? The anniversary of the fall, 20 years.

Hibbs: Shoot, I don't remember.

Keeling: Maybe it was '95, maybe...

Hibbs: But it wasn't really any big deal, it just...

Keeling: No, it wasn't, no, it was long over a few years ago.

Hibbs: Just asked a few questions.

Keeling: Anyway, like I said, I don't really remember. We was up there and we got kinda chilly. We were, we were overdressed. One little girl did, did I say a little girl, from over here at Ratcliff, she interviewed us. And I thought she did a real good job, Cindy Eagles. And I noticed,

boy I, once you meet a person you kinda, she was a reporter for the Courier-Journal. Now she is, I see articles in there by her, in the paper, almost every day.

Hibbs: When she do that?

Keeling: Oh, that was about the same time. See, there were three of them. Seem like me it was, she did that one, CNN, and somebody else.

Hibbs: I remember Cindy Eagles, that name, but I forgot about that.

Keeling: Yeah, but the, back to the book. The fellow that wrote that book, Mr. Wilson, He died in, was it over three years ago?

Hibbs: We tried to find him.

Keeling: He died the year before we left to go back in '95. That's right. And he died, it's kinda unusual. He was in a clinic; he had a heart, some kind of heart trouble. And when he got sick he was in a clinic for some reason. And the best we could understand, he never, they never did get a hold of his family. So they didn't know what was wrong. They didn't know whether he had a history of, of some kind of a heart problem or something. And he wound up dying in the....

Hibbs: It was a while before anybody claimed him too.

Keeling: Yeah, seemed like to me it was something unusual about it. Then his daughter wrote a letter. Don Parrish is kinda like the CEO, more or less, of the group. He's a, he wrote a letter looking for him, to tell him we were going back on the second trip, in case that he wanted to accompany. Because he would be able to see exactly what he wrote about. Or not exactly, but he'd be able to see a portion of what he wrote about. And his daughter wrote a letter and said that he had, he had died. We were really surprised, really surprised.

Interviewer: Why did you guys go back and what was the experience like going back?

Keeling: Well, it was WHS, I guess is the, they, I don't know if, if Rachel or who it was, I guess maybe Rachel. If, I just, this is kinda off the top of my head, if I'm wrong I'm sure Rachel will find out about it. She'll, she'll correct me. Her dad was over there.

Interviewer: Now, who's Rachel?

Keeling: Rachel Platt, she works, she's one of the news folks at WHS television.

Interviewer: I'm a little unintelligible, I don't know her.

Keeling: Are you? Oh, okay. And so, somehow or other she got a hold of Don and ask him if they would be interested in going, you know, if anybody would be interested in going back in a trip over there. And they would do a special on it. He said well, he'll check around, thought there

would be. So there was a little, I guess a little time lapse there. And then I guess he got a hold of him and said, you know, it's, this thing is gonna go.

Hibbs: Not much notice. They gived us two weeks' notice.

Keeling: Yeah, then all of a sudden, yeah, then they were ready to go, more or less.

Keeling: Yeah, had to make up your mind in two weeks. So we just, for me it was just, it was, any time before that or any time after that, I wouldn't have been able to go. But it just, it was just one of those, it worked for that time and that time only. So he and I both, or one or two of the groups went back. It was, it was some trip.

Interviewer: You gotta get more specific than that for me.

Keeling: It was, it was long.

Hibbs: You could talk for a week, about, you know, I mean we didn't know nothing evidently the first time we was over there. I didn't. The second time, it was, it was probably the most exciting trip I've ever been on in my life. As far as go to another country and see how people live. It's actually, they always say you can't go back, but I tell you what, when we went back over there it was just like going back in time, to 1968. Almost, other than the war, everything else was, the trucks, the people, everything was just like we left it over there. They was still using the same things that was wore out when we was over there, 25 years before. We didn't know how it was running, and they were still using it. But it was just like going back in time. But, I don't know, the people, I didn't, we didn't pay a lot of attention to them. A lot of people, when we left, you know, about half of them over here still think the war's going on. There are a lot of people you talk to, you know, that's just the average country people, they don't understand. You know, when they found out we's going back, they thought aw, you all will be killed, and everything else, you know. Which we didn't give that part much thought. I don't reckon. But once you get over there and get with the people, I don't know, they seemed like they've treated, they treated us alright. We didn't have any problem at all out of them. I don't guess. Did we?

Keeling: No.

Hibbs: Other than customs, we had a little hassle getting through customs.

Interviewer: What happened in customs?

Hibbs: Well, they couldn't read my writing, and I couldn't read it either. That was the worst part.

Keeling: We'd just got off the plane. We'd have flown, now this is, this is hard to, we flew from Amsterdam to Singapore, with a dog leg around Iraq that was included in our trip. Thirteen hours, we got to Singapore. We had managed to at least stand up and walk around a little while in Singapore. Then we flew from Singapore to, to Saigon and went right in to customs. And here we were, still in a mist of jet lag, and so they said fill out these forms. Well, you know, what did,

what was it you had was worth so much you wrote down there. I didn't have anything. So Smiley wrote two or three things down there. Well he couldn't, this customs inspector, which he was a military person, what he was, he couldn't read English. I mean real simple. And so rather than to say he couldn't read it, he got mad cause he wrote it in there. And oh, you talk about, he was a jabbering and a hollering, and going on. And I said, oh no, here we are, just got in country and we're on our way to prison, right now. I know it. And it was, aw it was, after it was over with it was alright. But at that time, it wasn't alright.

Hibbs: He was kinda ticked off.

Keeling: Aw, he was.

Hibbs: You just supposed to put down what you got when you go in a country. Course, we had like Beenie Weenies, and all that junk we took. And our clothes, you know, and I just wrote it on there. But I wrote it fast and he wanted me to read it and I couldn't even read my own writing. I guess he thought I was making fun of him or something, I don't know.

Keeling: Anyway, he was upset.

Hibbs: Rachel, she got a kick out of that.

Keeling: The girl with us, now if it hadn't been for the girl that was with us, now the trip wouldn't have been anything like it was. The girl that was, that headed the trip as the tour guide, more or less you would call her, she was native Vietnamese. She was Vietnamese-American. She lives in Los Angeles. She is one liberated woman, to say the least. And she is not, I don't guess she's afraid of anything.

Hibbs: She's afraid of heights.

Keeling: Yeah, well okay, she is afraid of heights. She right up there and she was talking right with them. And he finally, just, this guy wasn't used to a woman coming up and almost standing toe to toe to him. And it took him back too. That upset him too.

Hibbs: Another thing, those blank tapes that WHS had for their cameras that was the only thing they didn't want to let through customs. They had to check that stuff to make sure there wasn't pornography on it before they let it in the country.

Keeling: Literally had to view it.

Hibbs: And it took all night, I guess somebody done it. And anyway, she picked it up the next morning before we could start our trip. But that was the only problem we had, getting through customs, actually was that. The people, I don't know, I tell you what, we went in towns. And we went; I don't guess it was, it might have been the good part of town. But I, it was nothing, it was the slums here. I mean talking slums. And we'd just wade right through the people. And we didn't pay a bit more attention to them than nothing. Well, I guess if anybody have wanted to

done something, well, they could have done it. And we wouldn't, we would have just evaporated. Nobody would have known where we went. But the people, you could be riding down the road, and if you wanted to stop and go into somebody's house and take a camera and film it, we pretty much just done that. Well, you can't do that around here. And stop and go into people's houses and do what we done.

Keeling: We stayed at, after we flew from, well we flew from Saigon to Hanoi and this was part of the scheme of things. To make the trip, you had to go to Hanoi. And which was, they were hoping that you'd drop a few dollars along the way. And they were, and I'm here to tell, see we flew to Saigon, not having seen anything except what we went through in customs. Wait a minute.

Hibbs: Yeah, we flew to Hanoi.

Keeling: Did we fly from Singapore straight through to Hanoi? How did we do that?

Hibbs: No, we went to.....

TAPE ENDS