

VIETNAM

Interview with Charles Stallard

INTERVIEWER: The following is an oral history interview with Charles Stallard on June 20, 1997, in Louisville, Kentucky.

CHARLES: Charles Stallard, an interview with a Morehead University professor about my experiences while I was in Vietnam.

INTERVIEWER: My first question is just why you enlisted in the Marine Corps in 1965, because that wasn't a popular time to go in?

CHARLES: My enlistment in the Marine Corps began in 1965 because the army was going to draft me and most of the people were going to Vietnam at that time, and myself, I wanted the best training that I could get before I went to Vietnam, so I enlisted in the Marine Corps and which I had two brothers in the army, and they picked at me and said that I couldn't make the Marine Corps so it was one of my objectives to make it in the Marine Corps.

INTERVIEWER: I had a guy say the exact same thing last month thought he'd get better training.

CHARLES: Well, that's the way I felt and that was my beginning in the Marine Corps.

INTERVIEWER: Did your brothers serve in Vietnam?

CHARLES: I had one brother that did serve. He served two terms in the army. Plus he was in Saigon, so he really didn't get to the really bad part like I did.

INTERVIEWER: Did you all ever get a chance to see each other?

CHARLES: Well, we saw each other in Thailand. We had R & R in Thailand and he was stationed there in Thailand and we had another friend that's from Frankfort that was stationed in Thailand too and so I got to see both of them there while I was there which was really, really great.

INTERVIEWER: I'd like to come back to that later on. What were your first impressions of Vietnam?

CHARLES: My first impression of Vietnam was "what am I doing here?" You know it was just, I was more or less not expecting what I ran into. Landed in Danang. I got off the plane it was like a hundred and something degree temperature there. People's just milling around. More or less trying to figure out what they were going to do, where they were going. They staged me up in a barracks like, for about a couple of hours trying to get my orders straight. After that they had my orders to go to the northern part of South Vietnam, which at that time I didn't know it

was called Dong Ha, which was just a few miles from the DMZ. Upon getting my orders they put me on C-130 and flew me up to Dong Ha, and as the plane was approaching Dong Ha the pilot told the ones that were on the plane that he had very little time on the air strip because the air strip at the time was taking incoming rounds. You can imagine you know, fresh from the States, didn't know what incoming rounds were. I knew what they were but just never anticipated it, so the plane descended and landed, they told us to jump off, get off the plane just as quick as we can and get into our trench or foxhole and just wait it out till after the incoming rounds were through. Not knowing where to go or what to do, you know, you just get off the plane and just stand there and there's, you get off, and just like say the temperature's about 120, 130. The first sight I saw was dead people. Dead soldiers, marines lined up along the air strip. They had nothing covering them up or anything, they was laying there waiting to be shipped back to Danang to be taken care of to be shipped back to the States. Incoming rounds were coming in. People were running, screaming, hollering, jumping in holes and things. We didn't know, I didn't know what, who was the enemy and who wasn't. It was just very confusing and scary. Not having a weapon or anything, not knowing who I was, what I was doing or anything. I finally did get into a foxhole and the rounds kept coming like they was coming for just hours on end. At the time, I don't know what the time was, seemed like they stopped and then all I heard was, "Is anybody there, out there for the Third Marine Division?" I jumped up, "Yeah, that's me, I'm with the Third Marine Division." "Come on, get on this truck," so that made me feel a lot better. Made me feel more relaxed. A lot better, but still I'm just uneasy about everything. So on the way back to the little compound, there was more incoming rounds so we had to stop on the side of the road, get into the trench, or whatever we could get under or into. Finally we made it back to the little compound. I checked in, got all my weapons, my flight jacket, helmet, and rounds of ammunition. I felt much better that I had something but I didn't know what I was going to do with it when I got it. It was just one of those things. All that night incoming rounds just kept coming in and that was just the way the North Vietnamese did. They just shelled the outposts not really aiming at anything, just shooting the rounds.

INTERVIEWER: Did you come in a commercial plane? A lot of soldiers came in that way.

CHARLES: We flew over on a commercial airline.

INTERVIEWER: That had to be strange coming in on a commercial airline with flight attendants and all of a sudden you're dropped in.

CHARLES: It was, it was a traumatic shock. I mean, of course, Danang was very Calm, and it was. People were there and soldiers and marines they were there and some of them didn't have any weapons. It was just more like kind of laid back like. Air strip where you see the B-52's taking off from the air strip going on bombing raids and things like that just constantly going, just a noisy, busy place. Then I leave from that to really into the combat situation where I didn't know where I was or what – I just didn't know anything – I just got off the plane and that was it. I was introduced to Vietnam that way.

INTERVIEWER: How old were you at the time?

CHARLES: I was 21.

INTERVIEWER: 21. Had you come over from working a job? Were you in college?

CHARLES: Well, I was in high school and I wasn't doing so good, and that's when the army was going to draft me and I said, no, it's not what I want to do. So I went in the Marine Corps. For about six months we never slept with our shoes off or nothing. We slept in a rack, on a cot with our rifles right beside of us and the tents were made where they had sand bags all around the tent about waist high and the bunker was right at the end of the tent. Whenever we got incoming rounds, it was the thing we was trained for, after we got there, to crawl out to the bunker, never stand up and walk out to the bunker because of the shrapnel, when it hits it goes up and out, and if you're standing up, chances of getting a piece of shrapnel was almost one hundred percent sure. So if you crawled out, the sandbags would protect you as you crawled out. So there was a lot of things we had to learn just quickly. It wasn't time to think about it, it was just quickly, quickly learned by watching the other guys. The marines that were there, you learned real quick. I was in motor transport so they got me in and issued me my truck and so forth and I guess the next morning we was on convoys running ammunition up to the furthest outpost that we had. That was the beginning of just everyday things in Vietnam.

INTERVIEWER: Where in Vietnam are we talking about?

CHARLES: We're talking about right on the DMZ. The north, I would say the northeast part of Vietnam, which wasn't too far from the ocean if you went east of where we were. Like I say, we would go up to this one outpost and you could look over in North Vietnam and you could see with binoculars, you could see the North Vietnamese over there building up their supplies and just walking around over there just like nothing. Of course, a lot of them were underground and you could see them for a while and all of a sudden they'd disappear and you'd wonder where they went. They'd be underground. So, it was just a constant thing of going up there. They were shooting their guns with the mortar, I mean, artillery at us and they just liked playing tic-tac-toe. Cause we could not cross the DMZ, the demilitarized zone, we could not cross it. We could shoot over there but we could not invade over there on foot. That was really annoying to me and to the other marines and army, and all the personnel up there. It was just annoying cause we felt that if we crossed it, we could have won the war. But not being able to go across. what we was doing was just playing, they would come and hit us and we'd hit them and push them back and they would, just like a tug of war.

INTERVIEWER: What was a normal day like to you, if there was such a thing?

CHARLES: A normal day was like, well its not a normal day, but a lot of times you'd wake up with incoming rounds coming in. I mean, they knew, their thing was to try to hit a place where there's the most people hanging around. They knew that breakfast time, at noon time and evening time, that people at the mess hall or someplace like that, trying to get something to eat and that's where they would shoot – not knowing where the location was exactly, but they would shoot in that direction. A lot of mornings that's the first thing we would hear was artillery coming in. Coming in, just be erratic at times during the day time, you had no idea, you had no warning. You could hear when the guns would shoot from North Vietnam, you could just hear a "poof" and a few seconds later you could hear a projectile going over, over our heads or

somewhere in the vicinity. One guy told me, said one thing to remember, when you hear the “poof” and you don’t hear the round, then it’s coming directly at you. We experienced that. We experienced that and we had just got into the bunker just in time cause it hit right outside the bunker where we were standing. If we had been still out there I might not be here and the rest of us might not, cause there was shrapnel all up on top of the bunker. I just didn’t realize that when something’s coming at you, at that speed and at that height, you cannot hear it. You cannot hear it.

INTERVIEWER: How long did it take you to pick up that kind of knowledge?

CHARLES: It didn’t take long. I’m telling you, you had to learn quick or you wouldn’t make it. You had to learn quick. Just by observing the other marines that were with us. Their reactions, what they did and – you just had to learn quick. If you was a slow thinker or slow reactor, I mean, your life would end quickly. You just had to be on your toes all the time. The guys, they really wanted you to live, they really wanted to show you, teach you what they had learned. That’s were we were. When the fresh marines would come over, we would teach them the same way we were taught, by the ones that were there before we got there. So it was just an ongoing thing of learning and teaching. Not only did I drive the truck, we had to go out on patrols. We’d go out on patrols, we might stay out two or three days, a week, just on patrol, just going out, just on patrol. Then we were back at the compound we would have guard duty around the perimeter maybe two on a bunker and we sat up all night long listening and just waiting for them to come or just anything could be expected. Then we had one patrol which I never did like, and I don’t think anybody ever liked it. It was called a listening patrol. You would go out maybe a mile or two from the perimeter and lay out in the bush all night long. Just lay there, and you were a listening post. If anything is moving in your direction, you would just lay there – you couldn’t smoke, you couldn’t cough, you just couldn’t do anything but just lay there. I think that was the most scary moments of Vietnam that a lot of people really thought about, just laying out there, cause bugs would crawl over you, there was all kinds of snakes and things there that were deadly poison and you just had to lay there, cause if you made any noise you never knew where the Vietcong were or the North Vietnamese – you didn’t know where they were. So when they say that night listening patrol, everybody would just flinch, cause we did not like it. It was just not. Then we would be out there when it rained real hard sometimes we’d lose radio contact and we’d have to come back in. We’d been shot at by our own people coming back in off of those patrols because they didn’t, it wasn’t really publicized that there was a patrol out. Even though some people knew that we were out, they didn’t check around with all the commanders of the duty that night to see if they had patrol out and a lot of times we go out in the afternoon and it might be nice but by the time it got night, it could be pouring down rain, and here we are, punching through the bush trying to get back in. It was a very scary time, a very scary time. Perimeter duty wasn’t any better either. It was just a time when you’re out there in the pitch dark and trying to see something in pitch dark, it strains your eyes, it just wears you down. If we thought something was out there, we had flares we could shoot up to see, to illuminate the sky and stuff like that. Then some nights we’d get into a firefight where we just laid down rounds, ammunition, and artillery and just whatever we had out there. A lot of times it wouldn’t be nothing out there, maybe a water buffalo might have tripped a flare or got entangled into the cantina wire or something like that. Just a lot of things, you know.

INTERVIEWER: Was there any particular one event that you remember more than any other? And there may not be, we always ask.

CHARLES: I know there's one event on night duty that was really just almost terrifying. The Vietnamese, North Vietnamese, they didn't have any planes or anything. What they had were sam missiles. They were uncontrollable missiles – we classify them as uncontrollable weapons because they would just go anywhere. They had no control over them, where our artillery, like the seven inch gun, eight inch gun, they could almost put it on your head if they had coordinates, they could almost put it on your head, but the sam missiles wouldn't. But one night we was on the bunker and when it's coming at you, you can hear it, and it's screaming worse than a woman screaming, terrified woman. I mean, it's horrifying to hear it when it's close to you. I told this other marine, we've got to get in the bunker, cause it's coming straight at us. He was slow in acting and I got into the bunker and it hit, and he was, I don't know what happened, he was just lucky not to have been killed. Just things like that. That was the closest I've come as far as an artillery round hitting close to me – that was the closest I've come. We had one outpost, too, that was surrounded by water. You sat out there – there'd be two of you sitting on this little island like and most times you learned that when there's something moving in the grass and bushes the frogs and things will stop chirping, stop doing what they're doing, it gets perfectly quiet. I mean, the hair on your back just raises up, you lock and load, and you get your hand grenades out, you set there and you listen, you're just ready for it, and you set back to back. You know, back up against each other, and wait, and all of a sudden when the bull frogs get to chirping again you kind of relax. It goes on all night long like that.

INTERVIEWER: That's got to wear you down.

CHARLES: Oh, it does, it tires you out. And next morning you're so happy to see that sun come up. Then you go and get in your truck and drive all day. It's just things like that, it was just constantly go. Truck driving was very tricky too. We had several guys got hit by land mines. Run over the land mines where they put them out on the side of the road there. It was just, it was just very very . . . You had to be very careful.

INTERVIEWER: Was there anything you could do to take precautions against that?

CHARLES: Well, you'd try not to get as close to the edge of the road, but sometimes you couldn't help it when you meet another truck coming on the other side, you had to get over. I know several times I had been so close to other trucks that we'd clip mirrors passing each other. But they might sweep the road this morning, in the morning, by noon time there could be land mines – they could be that quick. They could put a land mine out just that quick. Then you don't know who is putting them out because everybody looks alike. Everybody is dressed alike. The only distinction was, the North Vietnamese, they had uniforms. The Vietcong, or sympathizers of the Vietcong, they were dressed in black pajamas, so you didn't know, could be a child, woman, older person. I think that was some of the worst parts about it. You didn't know who it was that was your enemy. They would say they was sympathizers for the South Vietnamese. Then some of the South Vietnamese would say no, he was a sympathizer for the Vietcong. You'd go arrest them and take them in. They'd get interrogated and they find out it's not true or that it was, they would be given over to the RV's, which were the South Vietnamese

police, or to the South Vietnamese Army, that's what we call them, RV's. Then they would disburse them the way they felt like they needed to be disbursed with. A lot of them were executed right there, some of them were executed right there on the spot. Without even a trial or anything – they was executed.

INTERVIEWER: I was curious, this is one of my questions, how were relations with the Vietnamese people cause I noticed from one your photographs that one of your buddies, he said, “so and so's girl” or something like that.

CHARLES: Right. Well. Well, we had some that were on the little compound. They would, some of them would wash clothes and things like that. The Colonel that was in charge of the company, he had one to come in and clean his quarters and stuff like that. Some of them were checked out by the South Vietnamese Army and they would come in and they would do the laundry or whatever. We really didn't have that many on our compound, it was just a very few that they could get on the compound. Then going out into Dong Ha they treated us real well. They treated us real well. They were real friendly, they was glad to see us there and we had a good relationship with them. Every now and then something would happen in Dong Ha, some marine or soldier would go in there and not come back out. Be killed in there or be taken off some place, or something like that. Those were the ones who thought they were as big and bad as anybody else and would go into a village like that, and we'd never see them again. Or if we did see them, they'd be dead or something like that. Mutilated – things like that. But you never went by yourself. You always had a bunch of people if you went into Dong Ha which was just a little side of the road place. They had the little huts and things like that and wood-bamboo houses, huts and things like that. It wasn't really a town, but it could have been, and it probably was at one time, that's before the French got in there and fought. You could see the thing; you could see in some of the pictures some of the bunkers that they had and stuff like that. A lot of them just lived in little lean-tos, especially in the little villages and things, we'd go through and they'd be so glad to see us cause they really wanted to war to end too. But it's a fascinating thing that I saw that they were not afraid of bullets, artillery. They would take precautions, most times you would think people would run and just like we would, we'd go and get in the bunker, but they had been used to that kind of life ever since they were born, and they were not afraid, and it always puzzled me why we'd be in a fire fight out in the rice paddy fields and they'd be out there still harvesting their rice and stuff, just like another day. Artillery rounds blasting around, they just be out there. I guess it's what you're used to growing up with that you don't pay any attention to it. It always fascinated me how they could just go along with their daily lives and not be running and hiding or something like that. They just be out there just working right on. Bullets would be flying and artillery and things be going and they would just be going right on.

INTERVIEWER: Did you have any interaction with the South Koreans that were over there? Did you meet any?

CHARLES: No, I didn't meet any. I know there was some and of course, you hear a lot of tales too so I don't know, but I never saw any. They said there was some Russians over there too. It was happened in North Vietnam. But I never saw any. About the only foreign people that I saw

were some French reporters. They were over there. Other than that it was just GI's and marines and that was it; and the South Vietnamese Army. That's what we saw.

INTERVIEWER: What did you think of the South Vietnamese army?

CHARLES: Very weak. Very weak. There was some companies that they had were pretty good, but just in general, all over, what I could see, where we were, they were very weak. Really there wasn't that many up at Dong Ha they were down at another place, about, I don't know how many miles it was down at a place called Quang Tri. That's where usually they were but there was very few up at Dong Ha where we were. Very few up there. So really we didn't come in contact with that many unless we went down to Quang Tri. That's the only time we'd come in contact with a lot of South Vietnamese Army. But as far as patrolling and running convoys, anything like that, they weren't up there. It was just marines and army up there.

INTERVIEWER: Do you feel like the training you got in the marines was adequate?

CHARLES: Oh yes. I feel like it was more than adequate. It was what I needed. When you go to Parris Island, no matter how macho you think you are, or how super you think you are, they tear you down and build you back up. And it starts with your mind. They play with your mind then they build the physical part of your body. But the mind is the thing. The training is just harsh training. When I got to Parris Island I was ready to come home to be truthful with you. I was ready to come home, but I got to thinking about my brothers and everybody else saying that you can't make it, but I dug in there and I looked at other guys that were there and I said if they can do it, I can do it. So that began my initial training. I really do, I know some people might dispute the training but I feel like that it was very positive, very instrumental, because we had all facets of training. When I left Camp LeJeune I went to Camp Pendleton, California. We had desert training. We were in a concentration camp. We had to fend for ourselves in a concentration camp. That's the first time I'd ate rattlesnake. We had that, and we had a pot and we had rice and we had carrots and stuff like that. We had the rattlesnake in the pot.

INTERVIEWER: How was the rattlesnake?

CHARLES: The rattlesnake was good.

INTERVIEWER: Was it good?

CHARLES: It was really good. Really tasty. Really was. At first I looked at it, it was chopped up, I said, oh, I don't know. We stayed in the concentration camp from sunup till the next morning. We was in there almost, we was about forty eight hours, we were in this basin. They'd holler at us, they'd yell at us, they'd make us get up, make us stand at attention. Just all kinds of things, like if you were in a concentration camp. You just felt like that you were just all alone, just like these people. They don't care about us, they just care about themselves. I think that's the way that a lot of captains really felt. They did feel that way. But you had to overcome that. The buddy system, and your friends, you had to, but they didn't put us in any solitary confinement, nothing like that, we just all together but we were all treated just like we were prisoners of war.

INTERVIEWER: How were your friendships?

CHARLES: I had some real good friends. Some real good friends, and over there, you had to be a friend. There was no place for animosity or anything and the ones who did, I'm afraid to say, some of them didn't come back. Because of the attitude and way that they were, and it was just a way of war, way of people of surviving. If you can't trust me, and I can't trust you, what good are we together. We have to trust one another, we have to be a friend. You had to be a follower and a leader. Without that nobody would survive.

INTERVIEWER: I asked a guy last night, he was in the front line unit much like yourself and I said, did you all have any racial problems? He said, no. He said you depended on each other.

CHARLES: That's it. I mean, you know, and the ones who did have that, just to be the truth about it, you get in a firefight, you just don't know. You don't know how those bullets are flying. Some people just didn't make it. I wouldn't say that it was done on purpose, but no one is to know what happened. But I know we had some very negative people over there. Some of them were, but they're the ones that didn't wise up and didn't realize, and a lot of them were officers.

INTERVIEWER: Really?

CHARLES: Yeah! A lot of officers, fresh over there out of OCS, or whatever, they just went by the book. You could not go by the book. You had to go by your instinct and what the conditions were at that time. All the book stuff needed to be thrown out. It was no time for that. But they, a lot of them tried to instrument the book. You can't do it. You couldn't do it. I mean, it would get you killed. It would get you killed. The purpose of being there was to stay alive, not for something like that. But I don't know of anybody particularly that was, but I just know that I've seen people around and I didn't see them after we'd go out and have a **scrimmage** with North Vietnam or the Vietcong. They just didn't come back. Another important, interesting thing too, we, every now and then we had to go out to the sand dunes to fill sand bags. The first time I went out, even the second time I went, we get sniped at. And some of the other older marines said, he's not hitting nothing so we'd leave him alone. But if we kill him, they might put somebody up there that can shoot. Which was right, I mean, he would not even get close to us but he'd just be shooting, just trying to see what he could hit. They would not do nothing. They would not do nothing, so they left him alone, I left him alone too.

INTERVIEWER: Makes good sense.

CHARLES: And we'd go on and fill our sand bags and go on and nobody would get a scratch or nothing. But he'd be up there just shooting away sometimes. If you looked through binoculars, you could see him.

INTERVIEWER: He's just a bad shot.

CHARLES: He's just a bad shot.

INTERVIEWER: That's good. It makes good common sense. Were you there at TET?

CHARLES: Yes, I was.

INTERVIEWER: Cause I thought you were right on the year there. I wasn't sure.

CHARLES: Yeah, I was right there at TET and it was, it was a time that you just couldn't believe, that something like that was, the build up, of TET was humongous. I mean, the way it was broadcast and told to us that it was going to be the hell of all hells, right there. When it came, it came, and it was, it was just hard to describe. Cause it just happened at just a time that, you just built up for it, but yet you wasn't expecting it to happen. And the North Vietnamese and the Vietcong, they came at us with everything they could possibly have. In fact, they even got inside of our compound and I don't know if you've seen a fifty caliber machine gun projectile, I got one laying over there I'm going to show you. We were shooting them with a fifty caliber machine gun and that's the anti-aircraft weapon. But, it was just a time you just didn't expect it.

INTERVIEWER: Did it go on for days or was it?

CHARLES: Well, no, it was just only one certain night, they had projected that one certain night that it came on, after that it was over. It was over. It wasn't like just an ongoing thing. They had built up for that one particular time they come through. And that's when Khe Sanh and Rock Pile and Campcurl, that's when they just got bombarded up there too. So all the front lines got hit really heavy. We took heavy casualties and they did too. So it was a time, and they were not wrong saying that it was going to be something that we'd never forget. They were not wrong.

INTERVIEWER: Where were you at in your service at that time? Were you close to coming home, or not?

CHARLES: Yeah! I was pretty close to coming home. Pretty close to coming home at that time. In fact, two days before I was to come home I was on a convoy and they had to send a chopper in to bring me out back to the compound so I could fly back to Danang, and that's how bad things were, and I told the C.O., I said I got two days, three days left here. I can't keep going on the convoy. That was it, you know. You didn't argue, you got in the truck and you went on the convoy. I was up there, I stayed overnight up there and they flew me back the next morning. On a huey chopper.

INTERVIEWER: Was it more tense towards the end?

CHARLES: Oh yes. It was very tense cause at that time a lot of people – getting there is tense, leaving is very tense. Cause I know a lot of marines were killed a day or two before they left. A lot of them. In fact, we had a lieutenant he was supposed to be shipped back to Danang for duty. He wanted to go up to the furthest outpost that we had to take some pictures before he went back to Danang. So help me, this wrecker was going up to get this truck that was up there. When

you go up to this furthest outpost you had this long ridge that you ran across and then down into where the bunkers and things were. And I don't know, you probably don't know what a recoilless rifle is. A recoilless rifle is just like an instant shot, it just, I mean, you can aim it and it just goes boom, straight to the target. The Vietnamese, the North Vietnamese over there they shot one right at the wrecker and he was sitting on the back of the wrecker and we couldn't find pieces of him. It just...He just...

INTERVIEWER: Cause he wanted to take photographs?

CHARLES: He just wanted to go up and take photographs, and even before that, I'd seen other people who would, they just did a lot of perimeter duty and they wanted to get out and do a little bit more. I stayed away from people who volunteered because three-fourths of them would not come back. They would volunteer. I never volunteered but when I was told to do something I did it. But as far as saying I want to go. No, I never did and I saw too many of them do that and never come back. And when they would go on a convoy I would ask, I said, anybody on my truck who's volunteering to go, cause it was just a bad thing. Lots of other guys that were driving, they would feel the same way. They would feel the same way. They didn't want the volunteers on their trucks. Because we just felt like they was a bad omen. A lot of times it was.

INTERVIEWER: Curious, what did you miss most about home?

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Interview with Charles Stallard

INTERVIEWER: Curious, what did you miss most about home?

Charles: Getting landed in Louisville it was like 3 or 4 o'clock in the morning, and a call came to my aunty's house, which lives in the West end of Louisville. They knew that I was coming home, but they didn't know when, and I had no way of letting them know exactly when, and I didn't want nobody at the airport just sitting there waiting on me. So I took the airplane. The embrace and just sitting up the rest of the night just talking, just seemed strange, seemed like I was out of place. Then trying to go to sleep the first day or first night at home, back here, it was just that any little thing I heard, noise or anything I was wide awake. It felt really uncomfortable, really at ease and it took me quite some time to get kind of adjusted to being back here, seeing the cars, and the things, and people just the way they was acting. Then you would hear on the T.V. about them demonstrating at different places about Vietnam, and it just made me bitter, because I lost some friends over there, and ended up on the Vietnam wall in D.C.. Every time I go, I go to the wall and their names are still there, and I lost some good friends over there, and for the people to have demonstrated back at that time, they did not know what they was demonstrating for. I know one day I was thinking, I said, you know if we would have had a war here in the States, like we had over in Vietnam, I would say that half the people here would kill themselves, because running, and just terrifying, because we are so crowded, we are so congested, and it is best to fight over there where there's some open ground, open space, then it is to be over here. That is what I thought we was fighting for, was to keep the war out of the states. Then to come back here and see the demonstrations, and all this stuff was just bad, it was bad. My feelings were hurt and I just didn't adapt to it very easily, but then getting back to the Lord and going to church and things like that, I realized that there's nothing I could do about it. It was these peoples problems, and I had to get on with myself, and try to get something out of this whole thing, but I wasn't through with the service, I had to go back to a Camp LeJeune, and that's where I got discharged. It was just a thing, you look around and see people, and over there in Vietnam you pretty much detained awhile who your enemy was, but over here you didn't know who was going to lash out at you as being a murderer, or something like that, you just didn't know. People would look at you, you in uniform, and they didn't respect your uniform. They knew that if you had been in any time at all that you had been to Vietnam, whether some people who didn't go, but still were labeled as being in Vietnam, whether they didn't go or not, because they were in uniform. People just thought that anybody in uniform went to Vietnam, and a lot of people didn't go, but yet they were harassed, and put in that contence of being in Vietnam. A lot of people hadn't step foot out of the States, but they were classified. That kind of thing to, and just a whole lot of things just bittered me, and the politicians, I felt like they let us down to.

INTERVIEWER: I was going to ask you what your opinion of Lyndon Johnson and Robert Macnamera was.

CHARLES: I thought they was pitiful, they way they acted, they way they let the whole thing go on. Just like I was telling you, when I was up on the DMZ you could see the North Vietnamese over there stock piling this stuff, you could see them. Now why couldn't we have just went on over there and done what we was suppose to have done. The Marines before I went over there was saying the same thing, they said that the war could have been over a long time ago. Let us march on up to Hanoi, and take care of Hanoi, there was more than one that wanted to do that, but we couldn't do anything, we couldn't do it, we had to sit there, could not go across the 30th parallel, could not go across. At that time in War, they had learned through WWI, WWII the same thing, they could not cross that body of land, and here we were at another conflict, another war and we could not cross that piece of land. Our jets and things could fly over and they could bomb, but we could not go over there on foot. We had reckoned and went over there to scout and see what was going on, but as far as troops going over, we could not go over there in any kind of a combat readiness, we couldn't go, they wouldn't let us. I think in war time you need to throw those cards out, especially when someone else is using them and your not using them. Just like with Dessert Storm, they through out all the things in Desert Storm, they just went in there, and marched right on through there like nothing was going to stop them, and that's what they did. In war time I guess you learn from one war to the next war, but for the three wars there were WWII, and the Korean War they never learned that, they never learned that. That body, that DMZ we never learned to cross it, and I think that if we had learned to cross it, a lot of wars would not have been as long as there were, but we couldn't do that.

INTERVIEWER: When you got back to the United States, did you get a job immediately?

CHARLES: Well I just pittled around. When I was in Camp LeJeune, to get out of some, what I thought, petty duty in Vietnam, walking around motor pool compounds, I went took a test for the post office. I had no intentions of going into the post office. I really had no intentions of doing anything. I did not know what I wanted to do, I just took that to get out of guard duty, and things like that. When you took the test and if you past it, they tell you to put down three places you would like to work. So I put down Frankfort, which is my home town, I put down Lexington, and Louisville. My dad, he did a little farming in Frankfort, on the side of Frankfort there, so I went back and I was helping some more guys do some farming, and I was just pitteling around with it. Then Frankfort sent me a letter to come in and be interviewed by the post office. I said, I'm not going to no post office, I don't know what I want to do. I just threw the letter in the trash can, and went on doing that. I think I went up to Randy Macnally's, in Versailles and worked up there for a couple of weeks, or so, I didn't like that. Come back and put an application in over at the ammuniton plant, over in Charleston, Indiana. Went over there and worked over there for a couple of weeks. Went back home to Frankfort, and I got a letter from Lexington to come and be interviewed for the post office. I just threw that in the garbage. Then one day I got to plowing, and went home for lunch, and I had a letter from Louisville to come down to the post office. I did not go back to the fields. I got in the car and came right back down to Louisville, and I think in the next day or two they called me to come to work. I have been here 29 years, been at the poet office 29

years. That's the only jobs I have ever had, was Randy Macnally's in Versailles, and the ammunition plant over in Charleston, Indiana, and I have been at the post office ever since then.

INTERVIEWER: Going back to the wall. How was it when you first went? Did you go when they first unveiled it, and to the ceremony?

CHARLES: I didn't go when... It was several years after, after they had revealed it, but I was going...really I was going with a church group. Going up there with a church group for the homeless, and the wife said, "Are you going up there to see if your name is on that wall?". She just misconstrued that thinking that the people that had come back names was on that wall, but I said, "No" I said, "No, if I was going to see my name on the wall I wouldn't be here. She said, "Oh"... She apologized, she said, "I didn't, I didn't mean that." But when I first got to that wall it was...it was really devastating to see all those names on that wall. I just broke down, I just... Then you wonder, how you find people that you really want to see. Then they instruct you to go over there to this, they had this big table that had this glass top on top, then they had big booklets in there, and they was alphabetized the names and the year that they were, they were killed, and you have to look at the year that they were killed, and so you look at that. You have to kinda look at the year and then they advertise the name and you go down and that's where you find it. Then on the wall, the wall is set up in sectors, in year sectors I think it was, and you had to go for that particular year, that particular period of time and find that name. If you looked at it you could find the name. Just seeing those peoples names, and then thinking back how much fun we had over there before they were killed, and it was just really something to see all those names on that wall. It was just, it was just unbelievable, really unbelievable. I just didn't think. I knew there were a lot of people killed in Vietnam, but I didn't know that many was.

INTERVIEWER: I don't know of anybody that has been that has not broke down or hasn't really experienced that.

CHARLES: I know I've been several times. I took my sons last year. I had a meeting. I belong to a veterans group, and we had a meeting there in D.C., and in fact my oldest drove up with me, and my youngest one, he flew into Baltimore and then we went to the wall, to the wall and to all the Korean Memorials there, and the women's memorial. All that you know we toured, all that and they were very exited about seeing it. They've seen it, but being with me, and me explaining things to them. I guess it made it impact a little bit more than to be with someone that you don't know, or some guide just telling you what's going on, that it doesn't, you know, has no impact, that much. I then bought a few souvenirs. They was wondering, what did I buy, why did I buy that, you know, and things like that. It was really good. I really liked it. They was old enough to know what was going on, eighteen and twenty two at the time, and they really realized what was really going on.

INTERVIEWER: I was going to ask you if they ever ask you about Vietnam.

CHARLES: They do, and you know, I got so I don't mind talking about it , because it's something that happened years ago, and I seen some various sights that no human should ever see hardly, you know. I done some things that nobody should ever do again, but that's something that's past us, it's gone, and like I say I've been away, and I've been here doing this mail for the past twenty nine years, it's, it's just gone.

INTERVIEWER: Would you have been willing to talk about it, lets say ten, fifteen years ago? Would you have sat down and talked to me?

CHARLES: No! No! I wouldn't have. No In fact I don't even look at the movies, the Vietnam movies that they portray. I don't even look at them, cause I mean kind of peep at them, but to sit down and just look at them I've never down that. But it's just not real, it's not real to me, and it's not real to the way I saw Vietnam the way I was there. You can have your super heroes. You can have your one on one man teams, or nothing like that. You worked together, you did things together. Some of them say some of them came close, but really truth, I never sat down and watched the whole movie about Vietnam, any of them. You know? "Rambo" and all of them, I've never done that. I just don't fell that it's portraying them, cause you can't portray a movie as being the real thing unless your just actually there.

INTERVIEWER: That's the reason we wanted to do the project, is cause so many of the high school kids coming into college, all they know about Vietnam is Hollywood's version.

CHARLES: It's not kids fault, it's nothing like that. They said that, "Walking Dead" is... I haven't seen the "Walking Dead". I don't know. I heard people talk about all of them are pretty good. Even some of the Vietnam vets said that some of them are pretty good, but the ones I've seen, or the ones I've just looked at, they're not. They don't even come close. The choppers, the planes, the jungle, the...all that kind of stuff is just not there. I don't really believe they can make a movie that would really be real. It would be just too hard on people to make a movie like that.

INTERVIEWER: Do you stay in touch with any of your friends, those acquaintances you were in the war with?

CHARLES: Not really. No. When we flew back to the States, it seemed like we was just going to different parts, and after a while shuffling around a little bit, you lose addresses. You lose names, but I don't forget the names. I know the names, but addresses, things like that you forget those after while, but I'll never forget the names. They're right there, and I could tell you just about everybody that was in the motor transport division. Just about everybody who was a was a commanding officer at the time, and those people, they, they will never leave me. As far as seeing, or a reunion, or anything like that. I've never seen, or never been contacted by anybody to have one. I've never contacted anybody, to try to get together or something like that. I guess when we left, we just left and that was it. I don't even know where they reported for duty station after they got back. They might have told me sometime on the way back, but I

don't remember. I just knew that I was to Camp LeJeune, and in a month or two I was going to be discharged, and that's the way it was. They tried to get me to ship over, but I know if I did, they was going to send me right back to Vietnam. Cause that's what they were doing to the people who would stay in, cause they wanted experienced Marines to train other Marines, after they got there, or even before they got there. But officially I would have went back. I'm pretty sure of that eventually. Even though if I could have been a D.I., or something like that, a drill instructor, or something like that, to train these people that, that eventually I would have went back over there. I got out in '69, and they didn't bring all the troops home until '72. The chances are I would have spent another tour of duty over there.

INTERVIEWER: I interviewed a Louisville police officer, I guess it's been a month ago, who was a Vietnam vet. He had an interesting comment about the Gulf War. He said, "You all had made your homecoming possible, that they Americans would never treat the veterans that way again."

CHARLES: Well that's what... I believe that to, but still all the time it was going on, it was very bitter for me. I was very bitter. Another thing that bothers me to, is when people get shot. Like, just like the **Stanley Raveer** shooting...and I don't know if you remember that guy, yeah. When anybody gets shot with a gun or rifle, or anything, it just tares me up, because I know what projectile will do to a person. And you talk about someone getting shot with an A.K.-47, I know what it does to a person. It just tears, I mean it could go in your arm, but it could come out your leg, or any part, you know. It has no...and those kind of...I don't even own a gun now. I don't even want to own a gun, no kind. Somebody said you need something. I don't even want one. I've been making it all these years without one, and I don't even want one. It's just a thing, like I watched the T.V. thing, the news out in California, when the policemen was surrounding, going for bank robbers, and they was dressed in armor. They had all the protection, and all those assault rifles, and the police did not have anything to match...Nothing. They had to go to a gun shop a barrow something. That just terrified me, cause I know what those assault rifles will do. I mean...they, they are for killing...it's a killing machine, that's what it is. I can imagine people getting shot with those. It is just...if people never seen it, and never been up close to something with an arm blown off by just a round. Something like that, or fingers off, or face discarded, or anything like that. It's just a really hard thing knowing that stuff is here, and their using it on civilian people. It reflects back to when I was over there. It does something to me. I wish they would outlaw assault rifles, I wish they would just take them all and trash them. They're no good for nothing, no good for nothing, but the rifle association people, they got their own version. But to me I just ditch all of them. I go to the gun stores, I see the M-16 in there, I know what it do to you. A.K.-47, all those kinds of weapons, they need to be discarded, because they have no benefit unless it's time, that's the only thing they have. What can I do, What can I say. I can't do nothing about it, because it's to over powering. People have them and they want to see them still around. It terrifies me knowing that people have them in their hands, in their cars, and in their trucks, and walking around with them, and libel to just open up anytime.

INTERVIEWER: My brothers a police officer, and I...

CHARLES: Yeah. When they upgrade a police man with a 9 millimeter from the 38, or 45 they haven't done nothing, because the crooks got more fire power than they have. It's time people should wake up and try to get grips on themself. Those things are just killing machines, and that's what they...that's. When the manufactures made them, they made them for military and they made them to kill people, cause I know I had an M-16 in my hand a many of a time. I had to burst off a lot of rounds with people, and I know what it'll do. I really do. It's terrifying after it's over with, after you... Really I can't say that I came point blank knowing that I really killed somebody, but laying down the fire power, that I did. I know I hit something, somebody a lot of the times. But not really come face to face with someone, but I think it simple enough after you see what you've done with the weapon to people, and knowing that if you come face to face with someone and do that to them it's even worse. But I can not honestly say that I have actually killed someone, like one on one, but I can say that I put down enough gun fire to now that I did hit something or somebody. It's just the way it was. We had no hand to hand combat, or nothing like that. We didn't get that close, and they didn't get that close to you. It was just...everything was gun fire, rifle...it was always at a distance. There never was that hand to hand combat like you see in a lot of movies. You didn't get that close to them...didn't want to get that close to them. But I know sometimes there probably were people who did probably get that close to them, people with the hand to hand combat. But I never experienced that. I never experienced that. All of mine were long range, well not long range, but like a hundred yards or something like away from each other, something like that. I was time that was supposed to be the way it was, and I felt privileged that I had a chance to do what I did, and survive and to have some kind of mind about it...and not let it eat at me. I know that some people still can not deal with it, and there's a lot of people, like myself, who has dealt with it and have moved on. It's...it's...it's the make-up of the person.

INTERVIEWER: Do you and any of your brothers ever set down and talk about it?

CHARLES: No. We really don't. We really don't. There's times we might mention something about Vietnam, or might mention about us meeting in Thailand, something like that, but far as us just sitting around and really just talking about it. Because we both were in a whole different setting. Like I say, he was down in Saigon, which was they call it the Miami Beach, that's what they call down in Saigon. Man at Dong Ha it was hell-hole. So we was at two different places, and he experienced two different things cause he was in communication where he didn't see the combat. He didn't see the kind of situation. He was over there a year before I went, but yet, he was stationed in Saigon. So that's basically where he was at. And my other buddy that was in Thailand, I don't think he made it to Vietnam. I think he went to Vietnam he just stayed in Thailand. His tour of duty was in Thailand. If he did he didn't say nothing that weekend that we were there together, that week he didn't say nothing about Vietnam. He asked me some questions about Vietnam, but I didn't even think to ask him if he'd been there or not. We just talked...just had...he'd pop out a few questions, you know, "What is it like?", or things like that, but nothing really could say that he had really been there. But I know my

brother, we was talking before he went, even before I went, we talked about, “You know they can’t send two brothers to a tour of duty”. I said, “Well one in the Army and one in the Marine Corps.”. I said, “How they gonna know if...”. Well I guess they have a way of knowing, but it just so happened worked out that he was leaving when I was going in there. So we didn’t have to experience that, or really test the reason if they knew we were both over there at the same time. Course, I don’t guess it really made a difference, cause I got five more brothers. So if we was the only son, something like that, it would have made a difference back then. But five more brothers to carry on the Stallard name, I don’t think two of us over there at the same time would have really been Earth-shaking to the defense department. I don’t know. It Could have been, or not. I don’t know, but anyway it worked out. He went, and I went.

INTERVIEWER: Do you have anything you want to close with that I’ve not asked you?

CHARLES: Well, I want to close with is just that it was an experience that I hope nobody’s children would have to face. Nobody’s children, or no country should face another war. I know, I look at Iraq and all of those places they would fight. I just wish it would end over there, but it seems like there is no end to that, and there’s, there’s got to be an end to the war, because it is just to devastating. I hope this country, the United States, will never see a war, any kind, here in the United States, because I don’t think the people would survive. I think more people would kill themselves, or kill other people unknowingly, without their control, by the panic and the fear. And I just hope that the military does not shrink down low enough that would allow whatever country could rise up and attack us. But it’s, war is what they say, “War is Hell!” It’s a simple fact. This is it.