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William H. Shephard Interview

William H. Shephard

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Yes.

interview date: 7/26/83

O.K. William H. Shepard. Jackson, Ky.

How old are you, Bill?

49.

O.K.. When you entered the service were you drafted or did you enlist?

I joined.

How old were you when you joined?

19.

What was the last grade of school you completed before entering the service?

High School.

How large of a family do you come from?

10 in the family.

Do you belong to a church?

Yes.

Which one is it?

Baptist.

What was your father's occupation?

Electrician.

What kind of education did he have?

Ah, about seventh or eighth grade. He was self educated. He, ah, went on to learn a trade and and, ah, electrical became good to him so he, in fact he worked in the coal mines as an electrician.

Do you have any idea what kind of income he had?

Middle class. He electricianed in mines and he made good money.

Ah, were you a student when you entered the service?

Well, I had graduated from high school.

You just had graduated.

Well, I graduated in June and entered in September.

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O.K. Did you continue your education after your discharge?

No.

Were you employed at the time you entered the service?

Yes, I was a ~~seaman~~ ^{Life Guard} ~~at~~ ^{at} the Mountain Lake

How much were you being paid for that?

\$30 dollars a week. This was in 1953.

What was your occupation or MOS in service?

Infantry. All ~~Bravo~~ ^{Bravo}.

When were you in Vietnam?

1970-1971.

What unit were you assigned to?

Mc V. ~~1st~~.

Did you have any particular area you were in or did you move around quite a bit?

South of ~~Da Nang~~ ^{Da Nang}.

And how long were you in Vietnam?

1 year.

Have you ever used the G.I. bill?

I am using it right now.

O.K. you are going to Morehead right now?

Yes.

You haven't graduated yet?

No, I will graduate next year.

And what's your major?

It's going to be university studies.

I ain't going to give you no long drawn out answer. No. O.K.

O.K. did you see any combat while you were there?

By all means. Got the purple heart, couple ~~Foreign~~ ^{brass} stars, cross gallantry from Vietnamese. Not saying I deserve them, but that I got them.

Did you understand then why the U.S. was fighting in Vietnam?

Well, I had followed Vietnam and this was 1970 and I followed while ~~I~~^I was a Drill Sergeant and I had seen it on television and the purpose that they kept saying was we was going over to help defend South Vietnam and that the South Vietnamese need help. So under those circumstances we wanted to go.

O.K. now do you think, still think the same thing now is, is that the reason you went? Has your attitude changed?

No, no change in attitude.

O.K. while you were there did you form any opinions about the Vietnamese themselves?

Well, the people themselves, now I lived with the Vietnamese, and ah, most of them was very poor, farmers, they didn't make that much, ah, money per year, and ah, I sympathized with the average Vietnamese.

What about the Arvins?

The Arvin I worked with a couple times, ah, some of the Arvins now they were good soldiers, but some of the Arvins had bad reputations. Like I ah, heard incidents and I was advisor to the Vietnamese where the Arvins would actually rob the Vietnamese themselves. And ah, some of the Vietnamese were scared of the Arvins. And the Arvin was there to protect them.

What about, ah, any opinions on the Viet ~~Viet~~^{Cong}, what kind of adversary they were?

The Viet ~~Viet~~^{Cong} that I ran into were, fought at nighttime. And the Viet ~~Viet~~^{Cong} did a lot of assassination and in fact they district where I At the time, the Viet ~~Viet~~^{Cong}, ah, they would come at nighttime, and they would take somebody out of the village, ah, go knocking on the door and the man answer the door and they would take him out by the well and shoot him. Ah, the wife and the kids would run and ah, they were, they were guilty of this.

What about the NVA, did you ever come in contact with the North Vietnamese Army?

No, they were rumored to be in the area, but actually we never did get into it with them.

And were you aware that the sentiment back home was changing toward the war, you know the people were...

I was aware of this when I went to Vietnam.

It had changed before you left really, hadn't it.

Yes, before I went over there.

You went over in '70, so that would have been during the Nixon years, did you form any opinions about Nixon, how we handled the war?

Well, I think Nixon, I still believe Nixon was a good President and I have always like Nixon and I always will.

O.K. What about President Johnson?

I liked President Johnson also. Now, following President Johnson, I understand, ah, that my viewpoint only, that he wanted to concentrate on the poverty and ah, he had a good program here for the state but he also had Vietnam on his hands. And one was creating a conflict for the other. So I think that he, he was in a predicament that they was a no win situation for him.

You don't think there was any way that he could have kept from sending reinforcements?

Well, the public was turned against him, he had money he wanted to spend for the poor people here, and Vietnam was draining him, and ah, he like I said, he was in a no win situation.

O.K. What do you think we lost up in Vietnam? If you think we did lose?

Well, If you didn't win it, you lost it.

Yeah.

So, we didn't win.

So, we must have lost.

And we must have lost it. And I think there was too much meddling and ah, by the higher people.

Politicians.

Yes, They should have left it alone, ah, stayed out of it, let the generals handle it, let the militarymen take it, and go in and ah, see what they could do. Like when the ah, body count came out, and ah, like we killed so many of the enemy pretty soon that body count go unrealistic. And I know that was completely wrong.

Yeah, those figures never were too reliable were they?

No.

O.K. When you came home did you need any medical treatment?

I was medivaced. I hit ah, land mine before I had maybe two weeks left to do and I got wounded and the wound wasn't really all that bad, but it was my right arm and today I got full use of my right arm mostly, but ah, because my tour was over with they went ahead and parked me on back to the states.

Did you spend much time in the hospital?

I was operated on in Vietnam, then I was operated on in Japan, and they finished up in the states, and given 30 days, ah, leave to go home and take it easy.

O.K. How did others treat you when you got home, you know you see a lot of stories about people back home when they call you veterans a bunch of killers and things like that, did you encounter anything like that?

No. I'm from Virginia and ah, the people, ah, it's a little mountain town called Norton, and ah, my wife lived in a little town called Pound, and the people are more patriotic than in the big cities. And they was no such thing as a big celebration or nothing like that. Ah, I wasn't given a pat on the back neither was I throwed off ..

Yeah, that's the same. I started to ask you, ah, you know a lot of people said they didn't get a parade or anything like that. Did you really want one?

No. No parade.

What about, were you dissillusioned, did you think you'd been, the government had told you one thing and then sent you over there and you found out that it was all different?

Well, with living with the Vietnamese I got a different picture than the average American. Ah, when I was over there I could see that somebody was trying to free them and they were going to be freed one way or another or they were going to be killed and ah, they were depending on a large degree on the Americans for their economy and I could see where we were helping them out.

What about, what's your views today on Communism? Do you think we are losing the battle on Communism, is there some other way we can go about it other than sending troops or something like that?

Well, on Communism, there, I believe they're out to take over the world, they're dedicated, they're hardworking, they're going to try to accomplish their mission, and I think the United States is not using all of their facilities, like, ah, it's my opinion that they come up and they say they want to buy, ah, so many millions and billions of bushels of wheat and we turn around sell it to them. I think we ought to use some of this food as a weapon to them now you keep pushing this into other countries and we will take away your food and won't sell you no food and we won't help you this way or that way and I think we should concentrate more on this area too.

What about the draft, do you think there should be a draft today?

By all means, there should be a draft. The draft represents a portion of the population and right now the United States Army does not represent the portion of our citizens. And ah, have absolutely nothing against them just like ah, they said too many blacks were being killed in

Vietnam and it was a valid statement and ah, particular young man that no education and they put him in infantry, and the infantry comes up with a high percentage of blacks, they go into combat, they get killed. And I, I just say that the draft would represent our nation in one proportion.

What about your opinion of the voluntary army, do you think it's very efficient or combat ready?

Maybe the airborne units, maybe the 82nd hundred and first, but I wouldn't, I wouldn't depend too much on some of them other units. Just like when we went for into the Vietnam the very first, they said the American troops were ready, they went into Vietnam and they had a high percentage of casualties. They were not ready.

What about, do you think the Americans are as patriotic today as they were in the past?

Well, I, I think the Americans, Yes, they are, but you have to explain to them and you have to have a reason and believe in you. And this is why I think the next war, Vietnam is going to have a reflection on it. And what we have done in Vietnam and what we are doing today is going to reflect on maybe the next war we have.

The people today they want to know more about what's going on?

Yes, that's true.

What about the economy? Do you think it's going, it's in very good shape now or?

It's bouncin' back, bouncin' back.

And what about the future of the country?

Our country?

Yes.

I believe we are going to be here for a long time and ah, we got good people, and ah, I don't believe there's a country in the world that can whip us. If we lose the next war it will be our own fault. The enemy won't whip us. We will whip our own self.

What about the El Salvador today and Reagan's policy down there, do you agree with the way he's doing it, do you think it may lead to another Vietnam?

Well, I don't know I read in the paper the other day, that the average man does, the average citizen does not understand the, what is happening in central America. And I hate to say it, I am in that category too.

And ah, I know he's is trying to increase the number of advisors, they're having a manuever down there and he's trying to show a little bit of force and show of strength and I hope he's right.

Well, you know, in other words, you'll stand behind him until someone proves him wrong. Right.

I'll stand behind him.

What about, ah, do you belong to any veteran's organizations?

No, the reason the town we live in there are no veterans' organizations and ah, ah, between teaching school and ah, driving a school bus and church work I don't have that much time really.

O.K. Have you ever taken part in any kind of protest of any kind?

Definitely not.

