Jonathan Bernstein: This is Jonathan Bernstein conducting an oral history interview with Mr. Steve Harding. We are in the Holiday Inn in Lubbock, Texas at the Texas Association of Museums Meeting. It is about 3:30 on April 11, 2002. Mr. Harding can you start off I guess with a brief biographical sketch of yourself growing up leading to you decision to enter the military?

Steve Harding: My father is a career military man. He was a colonel in the Army. My sisters and I grew up all over the world and all over the states. I guess my formative years were in Arizona. I grew up In Sierra Vista, Arizona, when Ft. Huachuca was very young. In fact, we lived in what was called Colonel’s Row. These old former cavalry billets. We listened to retreat every evening and reveille every morning on the parade filed. It was an old cavalry fort. Went to high school at a quasi-military school in Massachusetts, Taber Academy. Graduated from there, my parents at that time when I graduated had been living in Kentucky. Went off to college in Utah. Went to Brigham Young University. I’m not a Mormon. It was at the suggestion of an influential great aunt that I went there. It probably wasn’t the best thing for me to do. I didn’t really fit in. So, I was faced with the draft. Since my father was a career Army guy, I elected to join the Marine Corps, which I guess is a little bit revolutionary spirit to do something other than your daddy. Hindsight I probably would have joined the Air Force. I would have much preferred to wipe wings than do what I ended up doing. Nonetheless, joined
the Marine Corps, went to Paris Island, South Carolina for boot. Then went to Camp Lejune for infantry training. Then on to special MOS school at San Diego for communications school, radiotelegraph school. Trained there for however many weeks that was. I don’t recall right now. Some period of time, six months or something like that. Then at that time you’re given the option to fill out where do you want to go? Do you want to go to Asia? Do you want to go to the United States? Do you want to go to Europe? Asia was my last choice, but at that time Asia was Uncles Sam’s first choice. So pretty much everybody from radio school possessed orders to go to Vietnam. We went off; it was a rotation war, where you fly on an airplane full of people who are not of your unit. You don’t have any idea what you’re unit is really. Although once I arrived in Vietnam, I guess prior I was given my orders to Anglico, which is a very specialized Marine unit. It’s an air naval, gunfire liaison company. Our role was to support usually foreign troops. Not U.S. Marines or U.S. troops. Sometimes we could be attached to Army. But our role was to bring America’s military might bear on an enemy in support of a foreign force. As a Marine a team of two, two U.S. Marines would be attached to a combat group of varying sizes. Anything from a company down to a reconnaissance platoon. Our role was all helicopter support and that would be medevacs and resupply and gun ships. Anything that would typically be HSD. All fixed wing and rotary wing air support. That could be spooky or it could be an arch light or it could be anything or just fixed wing air support. Naval guns if we were within the area. If we were within range of naval guns, it could be rocket ship, it could be anything form the New Jersey to just a rocket ship off the coast, a destroyer and some five inch. I guess that’s kind of the medevac of course. Got attached once I got to Vietnam I went solo to my unit. I was flown into Da Nang because I was a Marine and then informed after sleeping several nights on the floor in Da Nang’s airport that I had to go to Saigon because my unit had it’s headquarters and our colonel was in Saigon. Our air officer was in Saigon. So, I flew to Saigon. Indeed our air officer was there, was outfitted with all the various things you need. Get a weapon, get all the stuff that you need. Then told to go back to Da Nang because I was being attached to the Chien Young, the Blue Dragon reinforced brigade of Korean Marines who were on the Batangan peninsula south of Chu Lai or just a little north of Chu Lai, I can’t remember north or south of Chu Lai. Back on a plane, back to
Da Nang. Get to Da Nang waited around again another couple days until finally I could
find a flight to Chu Lai. Went down to Chu Lai, by then I had hooked up with another
Anglico guy who was also going to the same unit. We arrived at Chu Lai and were
hanging around outside, waiting around this kind of desolate airport not having any clue
where we were going. This guy suddenly comes out of the west in a jeep going about a
million miles an hour. It was some sergeant with a red handlebar moustache and he’s in
camouflaged utilities, but not he kind of camouflaged utilities you see today. They were
the old kind. Like jungle on the outside and brown on the inside, the old Marine ones. It
was just kind of exotic. He pulls up to us he says, “You guys Anglico?” Said “Yes,
sergeant” “Got a gun?” “Yeah.” “Got bullets”? “Yeah, lock and load hop in”. I said
oh, man here we go. Anyway we rode out; it was a pretty good ride to where the Korean
Marines were. We unloaded and oh gosh, within two weeks I was on my first operation.
Our operations there we had mountains. We had three mountains that we controlled.
Pretty much the VC controlled everything else it was a free fire. We had Hill 101 and
Monkey Mountain and I can’t remember what the other mountain was right now. But
basically these were like a firebase and then we would go on patrol from there. We went
on our first operation it was a big, big sweep. We swept around; it was my first
experience getting shot at. The old timer, this guy let me carry the radio all the time. We
were supposed to switch back and forth, but me being the new guy didn’t realize that. So
I got to carry the radio all the time until my back gave out. He finally agreed to carry it.
Our role was as I said mostly as a forward air controller. When we get contacted, go to
point of contact. Figure out what we needed. The Koreans were kind enough to give us
body guards, at least two guys, two rifle men that stayed with us to make sure that we
didn’t get popped because we represent all lot to them. So we’d run our air strikes and do
whatever we had to do. Medevac their guys, get in resupply and after about 20 or 30
days in the field, you come back to your firebase and start all over again. Then we didn’t
know it was Big Tet, but just before Big Tet our unit was on the move. We were going to
be moving to Hoi An, which is in the rocket belt south of Da Nang. We had a battalion
sized; well actually the whole brigade was moving. Our whole brigade moved north to
Hoi An. Our whole battalion at the same time. We had our three companies from our
battalion starting in Hoi An and then going out old French Route One to some old French
forts that were located along that old route and set up a series of firebases along there. That was our TOR for the balance of the time I was in country. We had some pretty good shoot ‘em ups from time to time. Conflicts with our enemies. I got hit in March and medevaced, which was the end Tet was kind of winding down. Really Hoi An was overrun during that time. We came into just devastation. We had no fixed base, so we were kind of on the move. We’re a unit in transition and so was the enemy. But we do have a fixed base to come to. We were really kind of on the run all the time. When Hoi An was gone it was overrun we had to go in take back Hoi An and then move out to these other firebases. It was a very chaotic time. Finally got medevaced to Cam Rahn Bay of all places, very far south. That was a good experience to get out of the storm for a while and get fixed up, get some beers and get back. Then within another few months of that time I think I got a little bit of early cut and came back to he States. I guess all in all, probably the best thing about being an Anglico Marine and not being attached to the U.S. Marines was being attached to the Koreans they were great folks. But no one knew who we were. We wore a different uniform. We could be anything we wanted to be. I had pockets full of different Korean insignia and I just put them on indiscriminately. So if I wanted to be a lieutenant, I’d put it on. I’m a lance corporal, but I was a lieutenant for a day. Most U.S. Marines didn’t know what that rank was, but U.S. officers would. They’d pop salutes at me (laughs). We’d have a lot of fun being able to be whatever we wanted to be, which is an Army slogan I know. But we’d get to be whatever we wanted to be because no one knew who we were. We were also exempt from the two-beer rule, which the Marines had in I Corps, again because nobody knew who we were. So, we could go to the Korean club and have a few. We could go to the Marine club and have a few. We could go to the officers club and have a few. We could go wherever we wanted. Which we didn’t have at our base, but when we were in Da Nang we could go to these places. Our bases were very Spartan to say the least. We’d get rocketed from time to time out at our little firebases. My call sign by the way was Ham Salad, which I thought was a great call sign. I was Ham Salad 1-4 Charlie. Our little bases got probed severely from time to time. I wasn’t there when it got overrun, but it did get overrun. Not obliterated, but overrun meaning the enemy had penetrated the wire and penetrated the wire of the other side. We got gassed, we were constantly under pressure. We had
five helicopters down in a company-sized position. It was pretty serious. The pilots were
calling our unit little Khe Sanh. They did not want to fly into that place. It was just too
much stuff all 360 degrees. Anyway that’s the story.

JB: Let’s step back a second I guess. Well first of all what year did you graduate
from high school?

SH: ’65.

JB: Going into boot camp first of all did you have any expectation of what was
your first impression?

SM: First impression was “Oh shit. Why am I here?” These guys get on this bus
and they’re really mean and what have you. I had a brother in law actually who was in
the Marines and he was at Paris Island. I mean that’s neither here nor there. But I don’t
know. Maybe I thought I could always escape and go find Tom.

JB: Had you talked to him before going in?

SH: Yes, I talked to him but he wasn’t a mentor or anything. I made a decision
and I just went and did it and surprised my dad with it. He said he was ok with it. He
didn’t care (laughs). “Ok, go.” So really it was just kind of a shock of being in this
environment. But I’d been around the military and I knew what the environment was. I
knew what discipline was. I wasn’t totally surprised.

JB: Were you instructors at basic Vietnam vets?

SH: They were, two out of three were. Sergeant Olteiser and Sergeant Prater I
think were both vets. There was one other one I can’t remember his name.

JB: A lot of invocation of this is what you’re going to have to know in order to
survive?

SH: Well that was the whole boot camp experience was “you’re going to get
killed maggot.” Ok, things were very rudimentary because this was ’66. We didn’t know
a lot that we know now. The Marines had been in country since ’66. So we just had
barely gotten there and these guys were just back. They just were developing these
training programs for trying to find booby traps and thing.

JB: Was there any booby traps or counter insurgency instruction during boot
camp?
SH: Yes, littler bits booby trap instruction. Didn’t help, we still lost most of our
guys to booby traps. Well they were Koreans but still most guys were booby traps and
snipers.

JB: I guess moving on to NIT and advanced training and then your technical
training.

SH: Camp Pendleton. I always felt that was pretty rudimentary. That was really
ok go shoot the bazooka. Shot it once you missed, you’re done. Ok, now what? If I had
really had to go out in the field and use any of that training I would have been lost. I
would have really been lost.

JB: They were still using bazookas in ’66?

SH: No, that’s what you trained on. You didn’t have any laws. They were
probably too expensive to really use in training so we used the bazooka and M-14.
Carried the M-14 in Vietnam. The Koreans had M-16s. We had M-14s. We got them
about half way through, but I carried an M-14.

JB: What did you think of it?

SH: I thought it was a great weapon. It was terrific. I used to have competitions
with the Koreans. We used to try to shoot down trees. I said, “I can knock that tree
down with six rounds”. The Korean would say, “Oh, no, no I do it with four”. So we
tried (laughs). We’d take a little tree and shoot it with six rounds and see of you can
knock it over (laughs).

JB: Moving on to your specialized training. Was that specifically training for
Naval gunfire support?

SH: No, that was radiotelegraph. All the gun fire and FO stuff was on job. If
you had gone into Anglico and trained in Hawaii, which was home base for Anglico
you’d have gone through all that and you’d have been a trained Marine when you came
out. But this was another time and another place. It was kind of like you’re going to
third Marines, you’re going to first Marines, you’re going to third Marines, you’re going
to Anglico. You’re going to third Marines. “Ok, what’s that”? You end up doing it. As
it turned out I much prefer it. I’m glad I went there (laughs).

JB: Sounds fun, a unique experience. What was the radio training like? I mean
what kind of equipment were you using? Prick 25s?
SH: Yes, prick 52s. Well first it was radiotelegraph. You had to learn Morse, which you never used, but it was interesting to know. You had to train, learn Morse. Then you went through the usual with prick 25s and what were those bands? TSE15s, I guess. TSE15 bands. Then there were step downs to jeep-mounted radios too, but I don’t remember their numbers. The only thing I ever used was a prick 25. All of our communication with aircraft was all fox mics. We didn’t use any UHF. When were working with fixed wing we were phantoms and stuff, they’d all be fox mics so we didn’t have to have ago between for them. But we did for arch light or anything that was really serious. There would be a blackbird that would not mean anything. But a spotter plane that we would talk to that we would talk between. Naval guns talked right to the maybe it was a spotter, I can’t remember. I thought we talked right to the ship. I can’t remember. Somebody would come up on the radio and say, “Ham Salad this is whatever their call sign” and you knew to expect that was your ship and your ship had arrived.

JB: Did you ever work with the U.S.S. Boston?

SH: Not that I know of.

JB: Had a friend that was a Naval gunfire support stationed on the Boston.

SH: I don’t know. If she was off the Batangan maybe.

JB: I think she may have been. I’ll have to check. Getting in country, first impression?

SH: Chaos. The smoke it was Asia, it was a new place. It was new smells. It was a lot of little motorcycley things that gave a lot of exhaust. I remember the exhaust smell and the heat just hit me first. You know it was kind of exotic little put-puts going around. Of course you’re looking around wondering who’s going to shoot your first. Then the parade by, I saw it in a movie once. You know the old guy’s leaving, the new guy’s coming. Well, that was a reality. You did pass the old guys going back. You know flipping the bird and telling you, you’re going to get killed and shit. Oh, man thanks for the welcome (laughs). You know you’re in your really green utilities and looking very pale and what have you. Of course I came over with all Army. Mostly Army. No, I came over with all Marines that’s right. But none of them were Anglico. Of course then I had to go back to Saigon, which not back to Saigon, to go to Saigon,
which as actually a pretty good experience. I sort of kind of got into that and then I had
to go back north.

JB: How long were you down there?

SH: Just a couple of days, but it was long enough. To realize these guys had it
good. They were going out to dinners and these hotels. It was great. They had a great
life. They really had a great life. They were the rear echelon guys. They didn’t have to
go out in the field or anything. Just sit back there and welcome us, give us our uniforms
and stuff. Then we’d go off to do their bidding.

JB: Were you given any briefings or anything? What to expect getting in
country?

SH: I suppose. I don’t remember any of it. It’s like any kid getting a briefing.

“Huh”? What did he say? “I was in the back.”

JB: So you’ve gotten in country. Told you you’re going to Anglico. Did you
have any idea what it was?

SH: No clue. What Anglico was?

JB: Yes.

SH: No clue.

JB: Then of course being attached to a foreign unit.

SH: Again no clue. Then arriving and going alright (laughs). It’s interesting
because the Koreans were great guys. We had some wonderful experiences. Lost a lot of
them though. I mean a lot of these guys went back in body bags. Most Americans don’t
know that we had a lot of Koreans over there. This was a reinforced brigade. The Army
had the Korean Army had a white horse division there. They had a sizeable force there. I
know that your commander what’s his name was saying all of his anecdotal stories about
Koreans, but I didn’t want to hear that. These were my friends, these were my Marines.
I don’t care. I don’t give a shit about Auckland, New Zealand or Australia or these other
guys. Or them having to arrest some Korean officer because he was drunk. That doesn’t
matter to me. Oh, by the way it wasn’t the Korean people who forgot the Korean War, it
was the American people. The Koreans remembered and that’s why those guys were
there. You know they were getting their little roses for war. They didn’t have a clue, not
that we did, but they had even less clue why their boys were dieing there. I forgot the
question.

JB: Basically just impression on being attached to a Korean unit.

SH: At first it was kind of scary it was kind of weird because you’re there with
your American. You bond immediately with the Americans because everything out there
is yet another somebody else. You didn’t know who they were and the food was foreign.
Pretty soon they kind of take you under their wing. Somebody takes you under their
wing. You’re a young guy and stuff. I remember it was a Sergeant Lee who took me
under his wing. He kind of escorted me through everything and made sure my
bodyguards were with me. Then the captain would take you under his wing because we
were very important remember to them. So we would get to go and have drinks in the
captain’s bunker and out in the field we’d sometimes have dinner with the captain’s guys.
Of course everything was done in the field. Our food was all communal. So, we’d give
them some C’s, some different C’s and add their K’s to it and some kimchi and whatever
we found that day. We’d have guys who’d find stuff. Like find a chicken, the chicken
would go in. Whatever pig, vegetables and stuff that all goes in the soup. The machine
gun guys would do the rice and then we’d all just eat together. We’d always have good
food. I mean spicy, spicy food, but I liked it. Kimchi’s good stuff.

JB: Kimchi’s good stuff.

SH: It was the underlying flavor. That and Dien Jahn Paste was the underlying
flavor of everything we ate.

JB: Excellent. So when exactly did you arrive in country?

SH: Oh, God the day? I have don’t remember.

JB: Don’t need the day. Just a year, month.

SH: It was ’67. Probably like in August maybe. September of ’67.

JB: First engagement.

SH: First engagement coming up the hill.

JB: First impressions, what was it like getting shot at?

SH: Well, I didn’t know I was the only one who was standing up. I was the only
one who was standing up and my partner says, “You might want to get down. You know
that popping noise? That’s incoming.” Oh, ok so I got down. But all the Koreans were
already down. If it was VC well this was later of course you learned these rules. Probably two weeks later because you learned them very quickly. If it was VC you knew you could stand up a little bit. If the second volley you go down on one knee. Third volley they might be getting a little closer, you might have to go down a little bit further. If it was NVA first volley and then you better be flat. They were better shots.

JB: Were a lot of your engagements against NVA or VC?

SH: Yes. We had some engagements that were defiantly NVA and some that were defiantly VC. We had pockets. On the Batangan we had a huge body of enemy that we caught them one night. In fact we were occupying some hills, some sand dunes and we’d been on this operation forever, just forever. We had these sand hills that we were occupying. I had some tanks, not tanks tractors. Some Marine trackers, LVTs. The ones with the bladder underneath I can’t remember what they called them. Anyway they were very lightly armored. They had a bladder of gasoline underneath and they had a .30 machine gun on top with sand bags around it. We had this group of marine trackers who were trying to reach us. I don’t recall why. I guess they were supposed to link up with us or something. Anyway they got caught in the middle of this rice field way down. We could see the engagement. I remember calling a strike. I had gun ships up that night. They popped a couple flares but I was doing this from the edge of a sand dune, almost doing it in my mind like a video game with my radio. Bring them in as this lieutenant is telling me how far in I ought to come and the I bring it in another 10, bring it in another 10, bring in another 10. They did not get wiped out. They got pretty well shot up, but they did not get wiped out. The next morning we linked up with them. From that same position about a couple weeks later we had a moon come out where we could see what seemed to be a very long line of movement. So, I called and got a spooky up. We dropped a couple flares and sure enough we had a trail of people coming out. Spooky pretty much obliterated that entire grid. We went the next day to check it and there were very, very few bodies. There were body parts but there were very, very few bodies. So obviously they’d been able to cart things around. We don’t really know what our damage was for that. But golly it just had to be devastating when you find hands and things. They obviously cleaned up in the middle of the night. We didn’t go to the next morning.
Took us a while to get there. We didn’t get there until noon so they had plenty of time to clean up.

JB: Were these NVA?

SH: We don’t know. That was not NVA. Probably mostly civilians actually if you really want to know. It was probably VC and civilians. NVA when we moved up to Hoi An that is where we had more contact with NVA. In fact we were about less that a couple miles from My Lai when it happened. We saw the smoke from My Lai. Americal Division. Anyway it was in roughly that same area. We’d been in a kind of running gun battle for a couple days. It was kind of that Tet period of time. We walked into this little village like area and kind of put our gear down and spread out. Everybody was kind of sitting around. All of a sudden NVA regulars are popping out of holes around us. We kind of set down in the middle of a whole bunch of bad guys (laughs). They were just kind of coming up. We were just sitting down and it was pretty wild for a few minutes until they decided to stay down and they got out. Then we regrouped and we got out and we left immediately as well. Obliterated that grid square with whatever I could find. But you couldn’t find much during Tet. It was not a good time.

JB: Were you aware of what was going on across the country during Tet?

SH: We were sure of what was going on around us. But yes we were just because pilots would tell us. They’d be coming back from something and he’d say, “We’re in deep shit and I need something.” I said, “Well, I’ve got to divert for you.” So, you’d get some Air Force divert. The guy come in and he’s got 20 rounds of mic I’ll give you that. Done Bye. Of course the Air Force would never drop below 10,000 feet anyway. They did not understand close air support. There’s only one service that did and that was Marine pilot.


SH: Hard luck division.

JB: Marine phantom pilots come in below the treetops.

SH: Well, at anyway for sure. Americal they were a funny group. We had a little stand off with the Americal one day. Like I said our positions were very small, company positions. We were surrounded by bad guys. In fact we had them digging
trenches into our positions. They were out to get us (laughs). We were sitting there one
day and all of a sudden these Indians pop up on the ridge out there and a tank come
pulling up. Obviously we certainly hoped it wasn’t the NVA, but we’re pretty convinced
it wasn’t. So my partner and I said ok, listen we’ll go out. We took our bodyguards and I
think maybe another squad of fire team or something came with us. We walked out to
see where these guys were. There was this very nervous American captain out there
looking down at our Americal Army guy looking down at our position. We’re good guys
and we’re peaceful. We’re peaceful. We told him who we were and everything. You
know he looks at us very skeptical. I took off my helmet, I’ve got blonde hair. We’re ok.
Not anymore, but I did. We were ok. Then they decided they were going to settle in and
make their camp. They make their camp. My partner and I were standing. We hadn’t
been back to our rear position in God knows how long. Our boots were falling off.
There were big holes in the side of our boots, we smelled bad. We hadn’t had bastes or
anything. These guys were flying in ice cream and do you think they offered us any?
No. Those pricks. God, I hope they all got wiped out. But they were funny. They
would advance. The next day they moved on they were doing something. They weren’t
RTOR but they were doing something I’m not quite sure. But they would call in artillery
on a tree line, obliterate the tree line. Then they’d move to that tree line. Then they’d
call in artillery on the next tree line. Then they’d move to the next tree line. They’d call
in artillery on the next tree line. Then they’d move to that tree line. Oh, shit by the time
you get there there’s nobody there. They’re all gone, they’d scared them away. We
could have told them some tree lines to go to though. Boy, I’ll tell you we had one that
we could never penetrate. It was on the other side of our position from where those
Americal guys were. We had gone in there many, many times and come back with many,
many casualties. We’d never been able to get into that tree line. It was just so loaded
with bad guys. We took heavy machine gun fire. We’d take rocket fire. We’d take all
kind of shit out of the tree line. We’d run air strikes, we’d run artillery in there. I was
close enough to U.S. Marine eight inch and U.S. Marine tanks we could fire U.S. Marine
guns in there. Which I could do a lot more accurately that same of the Korean FOs.
Anyway we’d made many attempts, these were the guys that were digging the trenches
into us, but we could never get to them. We’d done everything we could. We’d fire all
the time. We even had two tanks, U.S tanks that had come to rescue us. One of them
was blown up because it hit a mine on the way. Then we had to have a tank retriever
come get that. Then they were all stuck there because we couldn’t get out. We had to
find helicopters in the zone. This was that one. It was really a crazy place. They were
digging trenches and we’re trying to get into their tree line and couldn’t. Finally arch
light city. That finally made it a little more penetratable. We still never really penetrated
the tree line because it was still infested. We hope with that effort.

JB: How did those events unfold? Working with losing five helicopters and a
tank and everything there?

SH: Just day-to-day. There were so many bad guys 360 that you’d need to
medevac some guys and you’d bring in your medevac helicopter. You’d be sitting on the
ground. Those turbines they can’t take too much. The CH-34s were bullet proof. I mean
those things could fly through anything. They weren’t very fast, they were very slow.
They were vulnerable but in a different way. The pilots were so slow and it was all
bubbled in the front. The 46s you hit them in the right spot and there were a lot of right
spots, they’d go down. That’s what we were using mostly was 46s for resupply. The
guns would just zip around and nobody was shooting at them. They knew what they were
shooting at. We just had bird after bird. You’d take them out and you try to go low level
down the river, you take some and you’d need to come back to someplace. Thos was the
only place he could come back to or he’d be sitting on the ground. He’d take it and have
to just shut down. We’d just move him off to the side until we had a parking lot full of
them. This is only a company position (laughs).

JB: Damn, running out of space really quick.

SH: Really, valet (laughs).

JB: When the medevacs were coming in would the gunships come in low to
cover them?

SH: Sure you’d have cover, but if the enemy is not shooting you don’t know
where they are you can’t shot everywhere. They’d just be kind of covering, but you don’t
know where to shoot until somebody pops up and starts to shoot. Then you get a fix on
them and you can give the gunships someplace to shoot at. Keep their heads down.
They’d strafe a tree line or something were you thought they might be. The Korean
captain always wanted me to go out there and he wanted me to run Napalm on all the tree
line around us so we could kind of burn them down. I said I don’t think I can convene
my AO to do that. To burn down your tree lines. Actually we could have done it, but it
just didn’t seem like a wise investment. So, we took the tanks out and we knocked down
some trees and just spread and some diesel over it once they decayed a little bit, we
burned them.

JB: How far was your position from the tree lines, a rough estimate?
SH: Hundred and fifty meters.
JB: That’s really close.
SH: It was pretty close, yes.
JB: I guess what was your favorite form of support to bring in? What was most
effective?
SH: Nape and snake, the ordinates of preference I guess.
JB: Some fast movers.
SH: Big stuff, I mean 500 pounds and stuff like that. It was too much for close
air support. I mean if you had a fixed target you knew it. I mean if you had a house or
something like that yeah, ok. But I mean houses I shouldn’t say this but we used to blow
up houses just for fun because they were there. Not necessarily because we had a target.
JB: Tactically speaking it could be a sniper position.
SH: Sure that’s right. There you go. It could have been snipers.
JB: Some military justification for it.
SH: What types of gunships were we working with?
SH: Hueys mostly.
JB: Hmong hueys.
SH: I don’t recall any Cobras. Maybe about I think the Army had most of those.
I don’t know that Marine Corps had many.
JB: Marines didn’t get them until ’69. Ok, just wondering.
SH: Of course gunships were always a preference too, but I thought you meant
fixed wing. Gunships were always good and spooky was fun. Spooky was always fun
and the pilots were cool. “Hands all this is spooky.” “Hey spooky.” “This is spooky
how do you do”? They we’re very cool on the radio.
JB: I’m trying to think of what else to go on. During Tet a lot of stuff going on also a number of other significant events going on. LBJ’s decision not to run for reelection, any thoughts on that?

SH: Thoughts I didn’t know about it. We didn’t know. The big things that happened to us was RFK getting shot. I think and Martin Luther King and those were big deals. RFK when I was there. Martin Luther King after I got back when I was at Quantico. Those were big deals. RFK was a big deal because the Koreans questioned it. They said, “Why did you kill him?” I said, “I didn’t.” But you had to justify to another. We always had to justify politics to the Koreans, which kept us on our toes I guess because they were coming at it from a totally different point of view.

JB: So, I guess you were coming home I guess August of ’68?

SH: Actually I got a little early cut it might have been June, July.

JB: Actually that’s right you mentioned getting hit. What happened there?

SH: Well, we were out on a little op. We started to take some incoming and the guy we were running over to grab some cover. We had a tank with us. The Korean in front of me stepped on a mine. He took the bulk of it and I took the rest of it. Unfortunately it killed him. We had a little shoot ‘em up for a while. Then had to get started with medevacs. Since we had a tank and we realized we were in the middle of a minefield I had the tank do a neutral steer, clear out the mines and that was our LZ. Then I got my Koreans out that were hit. I stayed with the unit until resupply that night. Then I went out. I probably could have stayed, but a warm bed and a meal was nice. I was hit after all, but it wasn’t life threatening. Cuts along here and a little bit of shrap down my arm.

JB: Did you have any R&R while you were in country?

SH: I did went to Taipei, Taiwan.

JB: How was that?

SH: It was alright.

JB: Refreshing change from being in the jungle. Now the areas you were operating in were they primarily jungle?
SH: No, there was some jungle but we were in rice paddies, savannah. What you call forest I guess more than triple canopy jungle around Da Nang. A lot of fortified gorges and forest, but not triple canopy. We didn’t have that.

JB: You had mentioned wearing different uniforms. What exactly were you wearing?

SH: We wore a Korean camouflage uniform, which was an old Marine uniform which was jungle utilities on one side and desert utilities on the other side. It was just unique in that nobody else wore that. So people wondered who we were. Plus we’d wear different insignia. The Korean insignia is different that U.S. insignia and we’d be traveling with Koreans, which was different. People were always very nice to us when we would go ask for bread form the bakeries they’d give it to us. I guess we looked forlorn or I don’t know.

JB: Did you have any encounters with wildlife of various forms?

SH: I wouldn’t call it wildlife. Bugs, the big centipedes and stuff. There were lots of those, lots of rats. The Koreans used to take the centipedes and put them on leashes and take them around and then the doc would inject them with something and they’d die. Those were the biggest. Water buffalo and pigs and chickens and things weren’t wildlife. I mean we didn’t see many snakes.

JB: Tigers, elephants?

SH: No. Never saw any of that stuff. Centipedes, big centipedes, big bugs especially when you’re digging underground. We lived underground so you get bugs and rats.

JB: Any encounters not mentioned with the NVA? Any tunnel operations?

SH: Did we go into tunnels?

JB: Yes.

SH: Not me, but we had Koran who did that sort of thing. I didn’t have to do that, no way.

JB: That’s sort of a little insane. I guess heading home early, what was the experience like? First of all leaving I’m sure it was quite a relief?

SH: I was glad to leave.

JB: Getting back home impressions, anything that stands out?
SH: Yes, getting back home was the worst. You know you arrive back in country. There’s no parades, there’s nothing. You just rotate back. You just arrive at an airport, somebody gives you an envelope and you’re on your way. So, I decided to go visit my sister. My family in fact was overseas so I went to visit my sister. She at the time was an avid anti-war protestor and just was all over me like cheap suit. I didn’t need that. That was my welcome home was my sister calling me baby killer and stuff. So I spent a very short period of time with her and took off. In fact I checked in my next duty station early because I was just done with it. I didn’t want to deal with the way that my country.

JB: Were you aware of the anti-war sentiment coming home?

SH: We weren’t really aware of it. You hear a little bit about it, read a little bit about it. But it wasn’t something I was; I certainly wasn’t ready for that.

JB: That sounds quite harsh.

SH: I was ready to go to Quantico.

JB: Anything else you’d like to discuss about your time in Vietnam?

SH: No.

JB: Ok. I guess we’ll end this now. This will end the interview with Mr. Steve Harding on April 11th.