Ron Frankum: This is Ron Frankum of the Vietnam Archive. I am speaking to Dewitt Roberts in New Orleans, Louisiana at the combat tracker reunion. The day is June the 17th, year 2000. Why don't we begin talking a little bit about your background, before you entered the military service.

Dewitt Roberts: I was born in Tupelo, Mississippi. My dad was a farmer, small time farmer. He died at age 32 of a heart attack. I was 8 years old. My mother moved to the Midwest, Kansas City, with her family to be near her family. She had 4 sons and 2 daughters that she had to raise. She remarried and my sister married a doctor and moved to California for his practice and he convinced us to move to California so my entire family moved to Barstow, California in the desert about 120 miles north of Los Angeles. I lived there until I finished high school. When I finished high school I went to work for the federal government working at a Marine Corps repair center for military vehicles which was in Guillermo, California just outside Barstow. This site was chosen due to the lack of humidity and the vehicles were dry in that area and they didn’t have to put them in buildings in order to protect them from the weather and I worked for 6 months as a welder repairing these military vehicles. I was exposed to Marines working alongside me, most of which were returning from Vietnam and I knew for a fact I didn’t want to be a Marine because I didn’t like what I heard and I had no one in my family to talk to me about the military. I’d never had a family member that was in the military and it was
strictly cold turkey for me. I joined the Army infantry because I wanted to be a part of it because I felt it was my obligation and I was qualified as much as any other young man and I was restless and I wanted to see the world and I knew I wasn’t going to see it the way I was going and I felt like that I was not doing my part and I kind of admired the Marines that were coming back that had been there. I joined the Army. I figured this was the next best thing from achieving the same experience the Marines did without being a Marine. So, I joined the Army and while in the Army in basic and AIT in Fort Ord, California I was approached by an airborne sergeant and I talked to him a little bit about airborne so I joined the airborne and took the test; passed it. Then I was approached by Special Forces. I took the written test, scored high enough to go to their school. They put me on the list and once I finished my airborne training I had to retest for special forces. They took us to Fort Bragg. The ones that graduated were on the list and I went through phase 1 of special forces. During this time I encountered a problem with another soldier that was coming from California and never been in the south. I was from the south and I had some sentiment feelings I guess for the people of the south and their culture and the kid I was with made some remarks about grits in front of some old southern people and I ask him to stop and I was too young to stop the personality conflict from coming out so I got in an argument with him and this argument continued to Fort Bragg when we were in special forces and in order to complete phase 1 of special forces; special forces consists of phase 1 where you go through all the physical training, a lot of the navigation, compass reading, overnight bivouacs tactical ranger type training and stuff like that. I went through that and one of the most important things about being a green beret was to be able to give a class and you have to speak in front of a class military style because they’re advisors and they’re there to advise and train. I got before the class to give my 30 minute period of instruction for a grade and the kid that I had a conflict with insulted me in front of the crowd and I didn’t know how to handle it. I didn't give my speech; I sat down. I flunked it. I was recycled through phase 1 again. It was humiliating. I went through it again because that’s when the movie was out or the song The Green Beret by Sgt. Barry Saddler who was our hero and 100 will test today but only 3 wins the green beret and it was an insult to be recycled. I almost got kicked out. I was recycled the second time. I was determined I was going to pass. I went through the
entire course, [?] instruction, everything about the written test. I stayed up 2 days
studying for the test and I was going to sleep the last day and I was approached by a
sergeant who was a CQ for another company. By mistake he was not assigned the CQ
runner. He walked in, ordered me to be CQ runner for headquarters company and he
wouldn’t accept my explanation that I hadn't slept for 2 days and the next morning I was
going to be taking my test for graduation. I fell asleep in my written test and I failed
again. This was double humiliation. They would have recycled me the third time but a
lot of 173rd airborne soldiers were killed in Vietnam so they were accepting requests for
Vietnam to replace those soldiers. I had to report to a colonel who wanted to recycle me
the third time. I refused, and I had to answer him with a military type answer when he
asked me, “Why don’t you want to be cycled the third time?” and I had to say, “Sir,
apparently I’m not special forces material.” Because that was the military answer,
accepting responsibility without trying to pass it on to somebody else or some
unexcuseful reason. He looked at me; he was an old German man, and he was one of the
first green berets in Germany and he said, “Young man, do you know you could die?”
and I said, “Yes sir.” He said, “What should we do about this?” and I said, “I request to
go to Vietnam with the 173rd airborne.” He said, “Then it’s done.” I got my orders for
Vietnam. I went to Vietnam. I landed in Bien Hoa Air Base and while going through
processing for replacement in 173rd airborne a formation was called. All soldiers with
11B MOSs, infantry, was to step forward and the rest of the formation stayed in place.
At this time the rest of the formation was dismissed. We were now a smaller group and
we were talked to by a sergeant that stated, “We were asking for volunteers for an
organization. This organization is a classified organization and we can’t tell you what it
is due to the fact that you’re going to be trained in another country by another country
that is neutral in this war. For that reason, we’re not able to tell you where you’re going
or what you're going to be doing. What we can tell you is it will be classified training.
You will have to pass a security clearance. You must have 20/20 vision, and you will be
fairly safe for the next 2 months. But, at that point you will return to Vietnam and your
life won’t be worth a plug nickel because the job that you're’ going to be doing is going
to be probably one of the most dangerous jobs in Vietnam. So, if you have any problems
with this, you’re dismissed. If you want to enlist in this organization, we’ll be able to tell
you what you’re going to be doing and where you’re going once we get on the plane.
You will be given pay for TDY, being out of country. You will be given money to buy
civilian clothes. You won’t be allowed to wear your patches in the country you’re going
to indicating which Army you belong to or who you are, but you will be wearing your
jungle fatigues while in the jungle without markers. So if you’re interested in this
organization and you have no problem with the danger, and you have 20/20 vision, we
will accept your volunteering.” Alongside me were two green berets that also dropped
out for similar reasons. They both volunteered also. We were in training together at Fort
Bragg. We were sent to USARV dog training detachment, special troops.

RF: USARV?
DR: USARV.
RF: What’s the full name?
DR: USARV. We were housed there until we were cleared to go out of country
and the paperwork was being put together. During this time we slept in the tent. We
didn’t have room. There was quite a few characters that came out of this group which in
itself was unique. We went to Vietnam. We were told on the plane where we were going
once we got on the plane. We were told which country we were going to and which
country was going to be training us. We landed, came through kind of a back door type
entry in Singapore with a female major and a little desk set someplace out on the airstrip
and at this time we were cleared by her. We were put on British Bedford cattle trucks,
troop transport trucks, and we were told we were going to a British jungle warfare school
called BJWS which stood for British Jungle Warfare School for short. It was near a little
town in Malaysia just north of Jahorbaru between two small towns, [?] and [?] which I’d
never heard of. At the time, I didn’t even know which country I was in. We arrived in the
jungle warfare school and just prior to that arrival we were told, “There’s certain things
you don’t do here, three things in particular. You don’t play The Battle of New Orleans,
you don’t turn your water glass upside down on the table, and you don’t talk about the
Queen.” As we entered the gates of BJWS, one American soldier stood up and yelled
obscenities at the Queen and I knew we were in for a problem. We were told there were
other things we didn’t do, too, such as destroy rubber trees because we would be charged
severely for damage of the trees or anything to do with the barracks. We learned about
the British Army, how they operated. We became friends with some of the British who
was there, also, for special training. At the same school we had dog handler training, we
had visual tracker training, which I was a part of. We tracked the enemy Indian style just
like the old southwest; foot prints, marks, old vegetation, broken vegetation, things of this
nature, scuff marks. We were able to determine from the training that we received in
Malaysia from visual tracking things such as the morale of the people we were following,
the size of the units we were following, and in many cases the sex because of the
footprint size, the speed that they were traveling, if they were a strike outfit, sloppy outfit,
based upon their signs that they left along the trail. For example, if they were running
their heels would dig in more and if they were a woman their feet were smaller, scuff
marks left on trees from weapons being laid against the trees, butt marks at the bottom of
the trees, trash left by the enemy while they were eating or smoking, and if they were
disciplined enough to pick up after themselves and not leave signs and how many we
were following based upon how many footprints. We completed our course in Malaysia.
We were sent back to Vietnam but this course had supervisors from various countries. I
observed 3 green berets; a staff sergeant, a 1st lieutenant, and a captain in the green
berets. I observed British soldiers, the British captain that ran the school, several New
Zealand SAS instructors, ranging anywhere from the sergeant up. I was quite fascinated
and impressed with the New Zealanders especially and their method that they trained.
We were training in Vietnam before we went to Malaysia and we were told that what we
were doing were kiwi type training. We didn’t know what a kiwi was at the time.
RF: Let’s talk a little bit about this, the training school. First, what was the time
frame for your enlistment into the Army and what year did you go over to Vietnam and
what month did you head over to the training school itself?
DR: I went in the Army in November of ’66. I did 4 months in Fort Gordon,
excuse me, Fort Ord, California; 2 months in basic training, 2 months in advanced
infantry. I did I believe it was 3 weeks of training in airborne. Then I did two 2 month
phase 1 training in Fort Bragg for special forces. I was pretty well trained at this time in
the infantry portion and I pretty well knew the way the Army operated and their units,
various units because of all this training that I had. I was pretty well, I won’t use the
word brainwashed because I was able to make my own decisions and I still could
rationalize but we were pretty well orientated on a way of thinking and we had pretty well psyched ourselves into the fact that we would probably see combat and how we knew we were going to react when he did come down and the amount of training that I had at that point, even going in, I knew that I would have reacted as I was trained rather than out of my natural instincts and I would not lose my ability to think and rationalize and know what my goal was.

RF: When did you arrive in Vietnam?
DR: I arrived in Vietnam, I believe it was around June or July of ’67.
RF: You were in country just for a little while before you…
DR: Just for a little while, probably 2 weeks at the most during paperwork. I went to Malaysia and while in Malaysia I spent about 2 months in training and then went back to Vietnam and then went straight to my unit after my short stay in Long Binh.

RF: You were a visual tracker?
DR: I was a visual tracker.
RF: And the training, I believe, was it 9 weeks of training?
DR: Approximately, yes.
RF: Describe a little bit about your expectations or how you felt as you went into the BJWS.

DR: When I went into BJWS I knew absolutely nothing about countries in that region. I was not a fantastic student. I was an average student in school. I wasn’t that orientated on the rest of the world’s geography. But, when I went into the school I knew that this was…there was something here. I knew there was something special here and after seeing some of the instructors and learning a little bit about their background, I could only compare them with our green berets and the instructors, the things that I’d heard about our whole Army. I was very impressed with these people and the way they handled the jungle. They placed high expectations on us like complete noise discipline while in the jungle and I realized that I had to get as much out of this course as I could because I wanted to survive. I’d never been the type of person that accepted leadership roles. I wasn’t ever the center of attraction in my circles of friendship and civilian life. I wanted to absorb as much of this as possible because I believed in the information that I was going to obtain going through this course and my own discipline of my own self was
going to make a big difference in whether or not I returned from Vietnam. I knew that
these people that were training us were very straight, serious commandos.
RF: It was a very intense training?
DR: It was very intense. First thing Monday morning we would fall out for
physical training. I forget exactly the time but it was way before daylight and I
remember the British, or excuse me, the New Zealand SAS Lieutenant Oakley Brown, a
very strike individual, physically in very good shape, heavy accent. As we fell out for
our PT that morning he told us all to stand up straight. We looked at each other with a,
“What kind of a command is that? It must mean attention.” So we all came to attention.
He told us, “By your right face.” We turned to the right. We knew that was a right face.
He said, “Forward march,” and he started us, “Hut ho, hut ho,” which was kind of
comical to us at the time because we’d never heard it. Then it was double march which is
usually double time for us and right wheel turns and all this stuff. But he led us over the
hills and through the valleys of the black top roads in Malaysia which divided the jungle,
the heavy triple canopy jungle in Malaysia. We ran through the cameo fields,
plantations, the rubber fields, and the tapioca field and this vegetation was new to us. I’d
never seen it. I didn’t know what a tapioca plant was, or a cameo plant, but we ran over
the hills, through the valleys. We were told that sometimes elephants were on the road so
if you see them, go around them. But, we would run until someone would drop out and if
that person dropped out and were on their knees we would turn and we would circle that
person and run in circles around that person until that person got up and joined the
formation and ran with us again and we didn’t stop until we got back to JWS. I forget
how many miles, but it was a lot of miles I remember we were running. We would finish
our run and immediately, before we had a chance to catch our breath, we would pick up
telephone poles. Then we would run to a place called kiwi outhouse hill which was on
the far side of the jungle warfare school and we would set the log down and we would
look up a real steep grassy hill with a real steep angle and we would immediately get in
line and have to run up the hill, circle the outhouse which the New Zealanders had
apparently used in the past for their barracks area, and then we’d run back down the steep
hill, and we did have people that sustained injuries to their back from running up and
down this hill because at one point we were carrying our friends on our back up the hill,
switching over at the outhouse, and running with the other person carrying the other
person down the hill on their back. I know there was at least one injury to the back. The
training was hard, and we all endured it. I was in the largest class that went through the
school with 50 people, 50 trainees. It was the largest class out of the 14. The British had
agreed to put 14 classes through the school and after the 14 classes they would send a
representative to the United States and assist us in setting up our own school and at this
time our trainees would have had a chance to finish the course in Malaysia, go back to
Vietnam, do a tour of extra combat, then rotate back to the United States. At this point
we would set up the school as instructors and start training our own visual trackers. I was
with the 5th class, the largest class. We graduated, went back to Vietnam. I completed
my course, but at the end of my course since we had the largest class, a lot of people were
rotating back to the United States on the same date after their tour in Vietnam. The
department of the Army was supposed to have flagged all the students that had gone
through Malaysia and we had what we called 11F MOSs. 11 stood for infantry, the F
stood for intelligence. I was a 40. A 40 stood for sergeant, E5, and there was a D at the
end which stood for dog training. So even though I wasn’t a dog trainer or dog handler, I
was a visual tracker and a team commander, and as a team commander I was over the
whole team but I still had the D which indicated that I was with a dog unit. So, 11F 40D
was my MOS. After the last class had graduated through Malaysia BJWS, they changed
the MOS back to 11B which is infantry and they got away from the intelligence part, for
what reasons I don’t know, perhaps it was to keep the classification of the MOS classified
due to the fact that we were being trained by the British indirectly through the New
Zealanders in a school that was made up of some of the strikest units, strike units, in the
world. We had Australian rangers at the school, we had New Zealand SAS, we had
Gurkhaus, a very strike jungle warfare combat type soldiers that were trained in guerilla
warfare that were known all over the world as being right there with the best, if not the
best. The Gurkhas are from a country that’s pretty close to red China and India and I was
told if we were to let it be known that we were being trained by the British, and the
British being neutral in the war, red China was back in north Vietnam and red China
would probably go over and squash their country for being a part of the opposition. So
therefore, for the safety of the [?] and their country, the British did not want it to be
known and perhaps this was part of the reason for their classification as well as the fact that General Westmoreland was trying to create some type of a pilot program for a commando unit which we were apart of and which I understand the basics of a commando unit has to do with tracking and always has, and the commandos has been the most effective in the jungle warfare type fighting throughout Asia and the jungle, and this is something that Westmoreland, I understand was testing, it was at the United States Army with anticipation of where this thing might go.

RF: Going back to your PT training, you did that for…through the entire training process. When did they start to train you as a visual tracker and how did they determine who would be a visual tracker?

DR: At the point when we first entered the school we were told that the British were running a larger class of trackers than we were going to be running. For example, the teams were going to be larger, but we’re going to be smaller than the British had utilized. The British units were, I believe, somewhere around 10 people if I recall correctly with everyone on a team being trained as a visual tracker with exception of the dog handler and any person in that team could be brought forward and put on point to visually track and he should have been trained as visual tracker. The rest of the trainees or the rest of the trackers were all visual tracker trained, but they performed duties within the team such as a cover man which rode shotgun for either the tracker on point or the dog handler, whichever was on point. We alternated dogs and visual trackers on the trail depending upon the terrain. The terrain, if it was open for example, a dog would sometimes work faster than your support. The British used the larger tracker teams that could keep up with the dog but we knew that we had the United States Army platoons, companies, or even squads behind us. They were humping a lot of ammunition and a lot of equipment and they could not keep up as fast as a tracker team. Out team was gong to be altered to a smaller team, so we more or less used the visual tracker if we wanted to track slowly. If we were in an open area where everybody could keep up, then we could use the dog. But, we used 10 man tracker teams in training, for training purposes. We were each brought forth and put on point to test our abilities to track. Those that could track best were utilized more than some and the reason for this was I guess they had anticipated only the best visual trackers would probably be used once we returned to
Vietnam for visual trackers and the ones that were not able to track as well or seemed to pick it up as easily as the others would be used more or less as cover men that could be used in more or less emergencies in order to get the best effect out of the team and the better trackers were put more to the test and they were given more of an opportunity to track than the less, the ones with the lesser abilities.

RF: While you were at the school, who did you track?

DR: While I was at the school, we had American soldiers that was sent to Vietnam for nothing but track lavers, to be a track laver. But, they worked for the dog department. They laid track for the dogs. The Gurkhas worked as track layers for the official trackers. The Gurkhas worked in small units and we would be taken out sometimes several miles out into the jungle to landmarks along the roadside which would be a cement marker that would have a 50 or something on it which would mean you’re 50 miles from the beginning of that road and we would get off our British Bedford transport trucks and we would be told that in this area between here and maybe a block to the north on the west side of the road, the enemy has entered the jungle and we are to ascertain at what point they entered the jungle, follow the enemy, and determine any information that you could about this enemy patrol and try to avoid making contact at any cost. Our objective was to find the enemy before we make contact and we were to use the skills that we were taught there in order to do that. If we were to make contact, we had a certain method that we were supposed to retreat which was for the purpose of actual combat we would actually be retreat because we did not have the fire power in order to encounter the enemy and stay in contact with that enemy until one was neutralized. We had to travel fast. We didn’t carry much ammunition, and we only had enough ammunition to allow us to get out of the situation and let the regular infantry force coming up from behind step in and take over and that was our purpose and if possible, try to locate them before we made that contact in order to save our lives and back up and tell the infantry what the situation was and a lot of them to use their military tactics in order to neutralize the enemy. The Gurkhas, occasionally, we would walk up on The Gurkhas, we wouldn’t see them, and many times we were not allowed to carry flag ammunition in training but through the excitement and anticipation of an ambush, due to human nature, sometimes we would react so fast that we would not consider the fact that we could hurt
these [?] by shooting them in the face with a blank and out of natural response if we saw
one set near the trail, he would usually be turning his head and putting his hand over his
face because he knew that we would shoot him in the face because we had done it before
and they were a little irritated because…but in turn, the Gurkhas used a lot of explosives
in order to simulate mines or booby traps and we were to detect this as well. Over a
period of time we were able to establish a little pattern of the Gurkhas behavior as well
which we probably did; they didn’t anticipate us doing, but we were able to figure out
that usually when they hit us it was usually near…there was an obstacle and an obstacle
we referred to as being in a place where we were very vulnerable to the enemy attack
such as in a clearing. We were vulnerable to the enemy. He could be waiting for us on
the other side of the clearing. In a river, if we went down to the river to get water during
break we always got the water at a bend in the river and the reason we got it at a bend in
the river was because we could see either direction of the river when we were down there
to see if there was anybody there and if we was to just walk out on the river we could be
hit if the river was straight. The Gurkhas could usually find a log going across the stream
and allow us to get on the log, maybe even 2 or 3 people, and they would throw TNT
blocks in the water and blow up the fish at the same time they were springing an ambush
on us and after we went through the types of withdrawals that we did when we
encountered an ambush, the Gurkhas would go out into the water and pick up the fish and
that would be their dinner. So, we became very leery of water holes and we would go
through villages. We would be ambushed in villages where real natives of the jungle
lived. We came up on people that were so shy of civilization that they lived in grass huts
back in the Malaysian jungle and you would be on their house before you knew it. At
one point, due to my being an American and ignorant of a lot of facts of other places, I
walked upon while tracking with the rest of the patrol behind me, I walked up on a grass
hut. We were looking for water, a place where we could get water for the platoon or the
squad or team and there and there was a cistern which is just a hole in the ground with
grass growing out of it with water standing. A lot of people get their water out of those in
the jungle and I did not want to take the water without asking and it had just turned dark
and it was almost too dark to even find the water and I walked up to the grass door and I
knocked on the door with my hand and nobody answered and me and one other…a
soldier walked inside the house and a native with his wife and his little boy was in a one
room grass hut. He was on one end, she was on the other end bearing food and I said,
“Excuse me, could I fill up my canteens in my cistern?” The woman ignored me and I
had to get her attention. They did not know how to act. The man continued to play with
his little boy on the floor and I finally got her attention and she called her husband and he
finally raised his head, got eye contact with me, and made some sounds that I didn’t
know and I said, “I want to get some of your water, thank you very much,” and we went
outside and we got water and its…they probably wondered what these people were,
where they came from, and how did they find us, but we encountered so many things in
the jungle that we were not accustomed to such as flying foxes, a fruit bat that we’d never
seen before in the United States, I encountered Spanish moss hanging from the trees
which I thought was unique only to New Orleans and areas of the south. Our first day in
the jungle I observed a fruit bat flying through the jungle. We were told that due to the
fact that we were in a triple canopy jungle and if you wanted to see in the jungle your
best bet would be to crouch down just a little bit lower than eye level and you could see
for a greater distance. You could not see because of ground vegetation of approximately
knee high and then about shoulder height up it was also dense so that you couldn’t see
and if you crouched down you would be able to see better. So, we spent a lot of our time
in kind of a crouched down position with our knees slightly bent and this fruit bat was
flying kind of in a circle around us and we all saw it and we were watching it. We were
told, “Keep your right hand along…both hands on the weapon at all times. Never take it
off.” Your right finger is to remain alongside the trigger guard with your weapon on
automatic if you're in front, and if you're in rear it should be on safety. That way you
would not shoot anybody in front of you if you tripped or accidentally touched the
trigger. But, the person in front gets his weapon on automatic but his tracker and his
cover man. I had my hand on both ends of the weapon; my right finger alongside the
trigger, my weapon on automatic and the fruit bat flew around us and it landed on my
chest. I turned loose of my weapon with my right hand, took it off the weapon, I grabbed
the fruit bat which I would have never have done under any other circumstances and I
threw it against the ground. The bat flew away and I turned to the rest of the patrol and I
was very excited. I yelled, “Did you see that?” approximately 3 times. The rest of the
patrol’s mouths were hanging open, surprised at what they saw. I turned around only to see my instructor, known as Sgt. Brown - a very strong featured New Zealander appearing to be maybe a Hawaiianer, someone from Hawaii, Polynesian, high cheek bones, very strong facial features – watching me. I didn’t know he was watching me until I heard a noise, a voice come out of the jungle, “Roberts!” I turned and he said, “You don’t take your hand off your weapon and you don’t talk! We have noise discipline! You’re to remain quiet at all times! You don’t talk on the trail and you don't take your hand off the weapon. Keep tracking.” I thought I got caught, I was in trouble, but when he said, “Keep tracking,” I thought, “Well, I got out of that one. He understood I did it for a reason.” I didn’t know that at the time he was just thinking of what he was going to do about it. Approximately 10 minutes later we came to a clearing where there was a hill and I found out he was looking for a hill. He made me get…he told me, “I want you to take your weapon, put it on top of your hands, put your head down hill in the prone position, your feet uphill, and give me 20 pushups. You never take your hand off the weapon. You never talk while on the trail. The life of your team depends on it, for any reason.” I tried to explain; there was no excuse. I gave him 20 pushups with my feet uphill which is very hard. This is known I guess as the way the Kiwis did it. The Kiwi had their own special pushup which I was glad he didn’t have me to do that one whereas your partner would hold your feet while you stood on your hands and the Kiwi pushup would be where you to down with your hands with your whole body straight above you, touch your nose to the ground, and push your entire body in a vertical position and someone balanced you with your ankles and they were not to help you by pulling or pushing. So, I only had to do it in a downhill position rather than the Kiwi because these guys trained hard and these were the type of pushups they did and I knew we could never be expected to do that because we weren’t physically capable, period; at least I knew I wasn’t and several of my friends tried it and we weren’t able to do it. But, I learned from that that you do not take your finger off the trigger in the jungle and they meant business when they said, “Don’t take your hand off in the jungle,” excuse me, “Your hand off your trigger or your weapon, and you keep your finger alongside that trigger.” It was certain to those, and we knew what they were, and we constantly called on them; the hand on the trigger…the finger on the trigger, the hands on the weapon. The visual tracker walking
point was to assume that the enemy was out there at all times and you were the first
person in line and you were never to drop your head to look at a track. You were to look
straight ahead, drop your eyes, do your tracking with your eyes and not your face because
if the enemy saw you drop your face he would know you were more vulnerable at that
point, therefore the flash from your face in the jungle would give him the indication that
the flash isn't there anymore and he would take the opportunity when you weren't
watching in order to take the first shot. The tracker was not expected to be totally
responsible for spotting ambushes or the enemy. That was the job of his cover man who
normally walked as close to him as possible off to his side, either the left or the right of
the trail in order to keep a good view of the trail in a possible ambush. He was the eyes
and the ears of the tracker while the tracker actually put the track together and did the
tracking. The cover man was never to try to do the tracking for the tracker. He was to
protect him. He was his eyes and ears. Our training usually started on Monday morning
after we’d finished our physical fitness runs and running with the logs and climbing that
Kiwi outhouse field and then we were put onto Bedford trucks, taken out to the jungle,
put on the trail, and we tracked all day once we found a trail and when nightfall would
come the New Zealand instructors were usually close by, real close. All instructors had
weapons because the jungle had wild animals and the jungle was a place where you
needed a weapon in case of emergency. The instructors carried the live weapons and
they were usually close enough by in case something did happen they could come to our
rescue and when nightfall would come, just before dark, they would come to us in the
jungle and they would lead us to a place usually along the ridge of a mountain and they
would tell us, “This is the ridge of a mountain; there’s animals in the mountains.
Animals run the ridge of these mountains, little animals, because animals are like people;
they don’t like walking on the side of a mountain. You will notice there are trails usually
right along the ridge where these little animals run, and where you find little animals you
will find larger animals which are predators and the best place for these larger animals to
find food is along the ridge of the mountain where there’s small animals.” So what I’m
trying to tell you is you don’t sleep along the ridge of a mountain. We have learned this
from experience. They would take their machete and they would cut a piece of bark out
of a tree right on the ridge along the trail and this would be like a flash, something that
would easily get a tracker's attention that this was an unnatural thing in the jungle; its white and it's an axe mark or a chop. The instructor would send us, the first person in line, 50 meters either to the right or the left of the trail and they would tell us to go 50 meters down the hill, by yourself, find yourself 2 trees that you could hang your parachute silk hammock on, and you're not to do it if you run across an animal trail. You're to go further down the mountain. If you run across a logging trail where logs have been taken out of the jungle, elephants and other animals have walked these logging trails because its easy walking and they're just like us; they will take the easiest route. Go further down the mountain. If you come upon a trail, walk 50 more meters. Don't hang your hammock in a swamp area because there's wild boars, all kinds of animals in the swamps. Try to find an area that is usually pretty dense and there's a lot of concealment. When you to this area, find you two trees within a concealed area with other vegetation so you can hide in there. Don’t break any vegetation. Don’t leave any signs that you were there. If you have to bring string with you, tie the vegetation off to the side and when you leave in the mornings, take the string with you. If you eat peanut butter in your rations or jam that’s in your rations, when you finish, take the little cans and bury them deep. Don’t leave them laying on top. We have bears in this jungle; bears love honey and jam. They can smell it. They smell the natural smell of the jungle. If you have peanut butter, don’t leave it. Elephants love peanuts. We have lots of elephants here and people get killed by elephants. If for some reason while you're out here alone in your patrol, tracking, you come across any of these wild animals, this is the way you are to evade them; if its an elephant, you never run in a straight line. An elephant can run fast. Run downhill and zig zag because an elephant’s front legs are shorter than the back and their head is heavy and if you run downhill the elephant cannot control his balance while running downhill and an elephant cannot zig zag running down hill as easy as he could if you ran straight. So this is the way you are to evade an elephant. If you see a tiger, don’t make any noise, don’t try to scare it away because the tiger will attack you. Don’t shoot blank ammunition whatever you do because we had one soldier that claimed that he saw a tiger and he shot a bunch of blank rounds off in one of the previous classes, I was in class 5, one of the previous 4 classes. This soldier shot some blank rounds. The instructor came upon him to find out what was going on and said, “Why are you
shooting?” he said, “I saw a tiger a little ways further down the hill,” from his location, “that had two babies.” And he said, “I was lying to you. There are no tigers in this jungle. I was just trying to scare you to make you watch out for these things,” but the following morning that soldier convinced his team commander before they went upon the trail to go down by the river and look for tracks because he was sure that he saw a tiger and there was a mother tiger and baby tiger tracks and he knew that I was lying then, but I was trying to do it because he thought he was lying. When I found out he was telling the truth I told him, “You’re lucky to be alive, shooting those blanks, that she didn’t turn and attack you.” So there are tigers in this jungle, don’t fire your rounds. Stay 50 meters apart. Whatever you do, don’t get any closer because we want you to hear the natural sounds of the jungle and that is the purpose of why we are sending you 50 meters down the trail. The next person in line will walk the trail 50 more meters forward. There will be another mark on the tree and that person will be sent 50 meters down the opposite side of the mountain where they are to what the British call, “Bash up” for the night. Therefore, they would go 50 more meters and send another person 50 meters down the hill to the left and when they finish with the patrol the patrol would be along the side of the mountains, 50 meters inside of the trail, and 100 feet apart, 100 meters, which would mean like 100 meters apart on each side of the mountain and 100 meters apart alongside of the mountain and that way we were split apart far enough that the natural sounds of the jungle would be observed by each of us without hearing another soldier possibly making noise that would effect his observation. Very few people can sleep every night from dusk to dawn that many hours without being awake part time, even if you are as tired as we were for all the physical stuff that we encountered and we spent a lot of time at night during that period of time listening to the sounds of the jungle and we were told, and we observed, that something would make a move in the jungle at night, animals would stop moving, the crickets would stop, and we would be able to smell that something was there, something large; something that scared these little critters and we would hear this when animals would walk. As soon as dark would hit you would hear rustling in the leaves and you would suddenly become aware of the fact that you’re no longer in Los Angeles or in some big city in the United States where you had all the protection. You were in the jungle, you were vulnerable, you didn’t have live ammunition, you were out there with a
weapon with only blanks, and you knew that there were a lot of predatory animals and
you learned to listen to what was around you and the purpose of this was so that if you
were a guerilla fighter and you were in an unfriendly area and you were asleep at night or
laying, listening, you would be able to hear if the enemy was to come upon you because
the small critters around you would warn you of that and this was just another thing that
we learned in the jungle. My first night in the jungle I was taught a very good lesson. I
took my jungle boots off and I laid them on the forest floor next to me. The next morning
when I got up…during that night, something touched me beneath my hammock which
was made of parachute silk. The hammocks were parachute silk with a little sheet sewed
along one side of the parachute that you could throw over you to help keep the
mosquitoes off and you hung between two trees and we weren’t supposed to use
spreaders even though we did. We knew we were in training and we took our British
SLR rifles and used them as spreaders to hold our hammock part at our shoulders so we
could sleep better so we were told not to use our weapons at all for that because we might
need that weapon in a realistic situation. But, we somewhat modified it for our comfort
and I left my shoes on the ground and the next morning I only found one boot and I
panicked for a minute because I knew I was approximately 50 miles out in the jungle.
From the road, I was about a day inland and there was a lot of things on that forest floor
that I did not want to come into contact with; leeches were so bad that it sounded like
water soaking into the ground, and thousands of leeches in swampy areas could be
observed crawling like maggots on the forest floor. They would crawl along the seams of
your boots trying to get to your foot between the threads of your shoes, your boots. My
boot, I found my boot approximately 25 yards from my hammock the next morning and it
had a hole ate in it at the ankle where I assume it was a wild boar had picked up my boot
and tasted it and didn’t like it so he left it, and I would have been in trouble if I had not
found my boot, so I learned a very important lesson. I brought it up once I got back on
the trail and the instructor told me, “You always tie your boots up into the tree by the
laces, and you always check them in the morning to make sure there’s no scorpions inside
those boots because there’s poisonous scorpions in the jungle and snakes. Don’t ever
leave your hammock once you get into it because snakes have been known to come out of
the trees and actually kill British soldiers. When they get in their hammock they would
be in the hammock.” We were to take the vegetation and make sure it looked like it had not been touched the following morning because an enemy soldier trained the same way that we were as a guerilla fighter would be able to assess an area where the enemy had bashed out and determine the same thing that we were trying to determine about them; how many there were, how well disciplined they were, if they left their peanut butter cans laying on top of the ground or if they buried them and their jelly, their shoestrings, if they left any strings behind where they tied the vegetation or if they broke the limbs in order to keep it from touching their face during the night while they were sleeping. All this could be determined and we would be able to read those signs ourselves. So, if we could read them, they could too. We learned very...we learned a lot of things about the jungle and we were very well trained. Compare this to special forces; it’s a different type of training than I got when I was in special forces, and I can make the comparison not to discredit special forces because I have a lot of respect for our people too, but for that type of training, I found these people to be much more advanced. But, they were advanced in a way that they were orientated to fight in smaller numbers and assess the sustaining unit without the support. So once we got back to Vietnam we had to work in a modified state and we knew that, they knew that, and we went through several little transitions of modified programs in order to try to come up with the most effective way that we could be utilized in our Army with the type of support that we had or the type of terrain and the way we expected it to be used.

RF: So you graduated from the school and you went back to Vietnam?

DR: Approximately 2 people that I know of did not graduate and that was more or less due to their character rather than their capabilities of training. We got back to Vietnam and the 2 people that did not graduate was returned to Vietnam and they replaced the tracker teams also as far as I know. I know of one in particular because it was a very costly training for United States. I understand that a green dog cost approximately 8,000 dollars to the United States Army, a green Labrador, and then we trained that dog with one soldier who worked 6 months in Malaysia.

RF: To train the dog?

DR: Just to train the dog, and with the visual tracker it was very extensive, too, so they utilized these trackers which is, I guess, a good thing, because of a character flaw,
not a flaw in their abilities to track, and when I returned to Vietnam I was assigned to the
25th division. I was told that the 25th division was the first division that had a tracker
team assigned to it. Only one tracker had been killed at that point and he was killed in
the 25th division and I was to go to the 25th division along with a lieutenant that had been
an instructor in Malaysia and each of the people could pick their own people that they
wanted to go to their team and I was one of the people. We rotated with about 5 of my
class of 50 going to the 25th division. At the time I arrived, the 25th division had more
people than it had had in the past at any one time. It was still going through the struggle
of what to do, how to be used, and how to deal with a lot of problems that they were
encountering while trying to go through this period of transition.

RF: This is the summer of 1967?

DR: Summer of 1967, or August. It was around September I believe it was that I
returned. I was a visual tracker. One of our visual trackers that came back was converted
to an OJT dog handler because that particular unit did not have enough dog handlers and
we were well orientated of how a dog should be working in a trail alongside trackers and
he was easily converted to a dog handler. We knew most of the basics and we had to
modify each team to use it as effectively as we could to get the most out of it and we had
an excess of dogs at the time and a shortage of handlers. Our tracker became a dog
handler and he remained a dog handler for the duration. I was a visual tracker and I…I
became a visual tracker on the team. I was not placed as a cover man, and I suspected
this because certain people were used more than others in training on the track and
toward the end of the training I was being used pretty regular, switching off with maybe 1
or 2 other guys out of the whole team mostly during most of the period and I knew they
were intensifying our skills and abilities more than the others because they knew more or
less what we were going to be doing once we got back to Vietnam. I was made a visual
tracker on one team, one of my friends that was a student was made a tracker on another
team and we were utilized as visual trackers until I became the team commander which
was approximately 3 months after arriving in Vietnam out of training. I was made a team
commander and I had my own team from that point. I ran several successful missions
during that tour in Vietnam from ‘67-'68. During this period I found we were very
serious in our missions. There was very little opportunity to be changing into clothes and
hit clubs at night like most soldiers do when they’re in a division base camp. We were more or less confined to our platoon area in case we were called out even though it was night. We were occasionally allowed to go places and eat after certain hours because we could not track at night and if we were called on a mission it would probably be for the first thing the following morning and we were allowed to go to the PX and things like this while we were on call. The next team up was always on call and had to stay at all times in the company area until they went on a mission, and at that time that team would be allowed to go places while the other team waited on call. When I got to the 25th division I observed Mark Howard, a former student at JWS, that I’d bought a mosquito net from that was rotating back to Vietnam and I bought his mosquito net in Malaysia before he left. I encountered him in the 25th division and got to know him pretty well for a short period. He was a folk singer out of St. Louis and he told me he had a 6 month old son. Mark Howard was killed a few days later alongside Coon, Bob Brady, and one of our best tracker dogs, Bodie. Sgt. Adams was the team commander for this team and we had a Lieutenant, I can’t think of his name, this always gets me, he’s paraplegic now, Lieutenant…it’s important to get his name.

RF: Let’s go on. We can get back to it.

DR: The lieutenant was an instructor and he rotated back to the school with me. It was his turn to rotate back to Vietnam to pull active duty himself, and he picked his students that he wanted to come with him and he knew that we didn’t have any combat experience and the remainder of the guys in the 25th division, when we arrived, were ready to rotate back to the United States and this just so happens this was the guys with the most experience in actual combat and the lieutenant did not want his teams to go out without someone that had combat experience. That would be like throwing away almost a whole year of people that had experience that was not able to pass it on to the new comers and it would be like starting over again. So, he did something that he didn’t want to do and that was to take at least one of the veteran combat seasoned soldiers that was already removed from the field and had 20 days before he was going home. Bob Brady was told that he was to go back out into the field and help this lieutenant on one mission to obtain some training in actual combat so he could pass it on to the newcomers. It was a good idea. It was for our benefit, for our safety. It was something that should have

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happened, but the lieutenant had no way of knowing that it was going to be a disaster.

So, the lieutenant’s first mission he took these seasoned veterans out with him and Bob Brady, the dog handler, died along with Coon Howard and the lieutenant was shot in the shoulder and it came out his belly from what I understand and I talked to him the following day in the hospital and he was cut from the bottom to the top, searched the path of the bullet, and he told me to take care of myself because nobody was going to do it for me and I consider that the most fatherly advice I could have ever received from anybody and I respect him for that over the years because he knew he was going home and he wanted me to look out for myself because he wasn’t going to be able to do what he wanted to do to teach us before we got into the field. It was cold turkey for us because he had almost died. Pop Adams, the team commander, took the team out, and was the only person to make it out without being wounded or killed. His helmet was shot off his head. The bullet did a complete circle around the circumference of his helmet and left a ring around the inside of his helmet and came out the same bullet hole it went in. I saw this and observed it for myself. I knew at this time that though I’d never been a person that took charge of a situation or became the leader of anything I had to trust my own judgement and I immediately started thinking serious about this and I became a team commander and I talked to my friends and I told them, “I know we’ve been used improperly in the past.” We knew how we were supposed to be used, and sometimes this might require me to maybe stand up to a colonel or a high-ranking officer and argue my point as the reason these people were killed; they were not being used as trackers. They were on point looking for the enemy because the infantry did not know how to utilize it and the infantry would take any opportunity to gain bodies in order to fill positions necessary in order for them to be more effective for their unit. So, they utilized any support that they could possibly get and if you were not a strong enough individual as a team commander to realize what was a true track and what was not a true track and [?] condition that would require you to do a job the way you were trained, then you were not a very effective team commander, then you had to have the ability to stand up to that, that officer or whatever, and argue your point and sometimes that meant the possibility of being disciplined by an officer that was hard core and didn’t want to hear an EM or an NCO saying, “I don’t want to go out on this mission because we don’t walk point just to
be walking point,” and you have to explain how you are to be utilized and sometimes
they did not want to hear that because they had their needs and they were a general or a
colonel and they wanted it done, now, and you were there. So, we had a lot of problems
with people that did not have the ability to do that and I was put to the test in terms of I
was going to be able to do this and I did at one point. I remember the first time I did it, I
was very uneasy because it was like you don’t say, “I don't want to go out,” because you
would be a coward. So I tried to utilize my teams the best that I could. I tried to use the
advice of my team because their lives were on the line same as mine with the idea and we
ran into conflicts over this that I was the one that made the final decision and sometimes I
don’t have the time to explain to you guys that this is not Jahorbaru, Malaysia; this is
Vietnam. These are Americans that we’re going to track that we don’t know…we were
never taught to do and we know that there’s contact already made. We know that there’s
enemy in the area, and we’re to track these guys that may be dead out there and we’ve
got to go find them. Sure, there’s contact already made in the area. Sometimes I had to
argue with my own guys because their lives were on the line, too, and we would have
screaming matches, “I am not going to feed you to the lions. I would not ask you to do
anything I wouldn’t do myself. I find this to be a situation that’s unique and fits my idea
of the criteria of a track. Even though it doesn't fit yours, I think it is necessary due to the
situation and I will not feed you to the lions. I will not ask you to do something I
wouldn’t do myself. If you don't want to track, I will not hold it against you. You can go
back and wait at the rear and be humiliated, but you make that judgement.” But we ran
across situations like this and I tried to…we had a close pact, my team and I tried to, I
tried. We had a close pact, my team and I, and we had discussed this when we had
another team commander, and due to our relying on each other for our own safety, we
had made pacts, “I will not leave you. You don't leave me, and I won’t leave you. If you
do leave me, you leave me knowing that it is a situation that not that you say, ‘I don’t
think I can make it, get him out,’ but a situation where, ‘I know 100% that he’s not going
to make it and it would be suicide to take him back,’ and I wouldn’t expect you to do
that, but you better make sure we both have the same assessment in this.” Yes? I find in
my own mind that it was good we established a comradery knowing that the people we
were with were trustworthy, they were true friends, and we tried to team up within our
own teams of people that we knew that we could trust and we developed this type of trust in each other that remained throughout the whole...our whole tours. For my team, it worked. Call it luck, call it fate, or call it skill which I would not say. I would not say skill. The skill part of it was only a factor; luck played a large part and I would not be so vain to say that I am so good that I would get us out. But, I can say that I believe it played a great part because not only my judgement but the judgement of the rest of the team which I took in consideration but I let it be known that I made the final decision and you did not confront me as a team commander in front of superiors in the field which downplays my authority which also downplays their trust in me as a unit supervisor. It has been done. I called my friends on it in front of the supervisors in order for me to reestablish that authority. I have gone off on my friends for confronting me in front of high ranking people that looked at my arm and looked at their arm to determine who is the supervisor here. I had to reestablish that. Later on I apologized for confronting them in front of the superiors, but also advised them of the reason I did it and don’t ever do it again because this is a part of it.

RF: That comes from the different training that the British gave you as more of a peer or a team concept as opposed to the United States Army which was very rank oriented so that you had to balance one for the other?

DR: Right, and we worked. Team commanders were an officer’s slot for all I heard. We did not have enough officers to fulfill the team commander positions, so NCOs, low ranking NCOs, buck sergeants were often used or staff sergeants as team commanders and I think it put a lot of responsibility on a kid that came straight out of the States and grew up with the concept of Christianity; Thou shalt not kill, Thou shalt not steal, now its okay and you're making decisions right now as a kid even though you only had a year of training. I had more than most because I was special forces, I was airborne, I had more exposure to the brainwashing tactics that goes along with a person off the streets that they have to have in order to go up against this, but even though I had been trained more than most…I don’t know if [?].

RF: Let’s talk about what they appropriate missions were for the combat tracker team. Also mention, if you will, how a team was organized and which team you were assigned to when you were with the 25th infantry.
DR: I was assigned to a Sgt. Woodbury’s team. He was the team commander, a
staff sergeant. He was on his second tour in Vietnam, but from what I understand his
first tour was more of an administrative and he took another tour and my first team
commander was Sgt. Pop Adams, the same team commander that was in charge of the
Howard, Coon, Brady, Johnson team that was wiped out.

RF: This was team number 12?

DR: This was team number 12, right, but actually I was with the 5th class that
graduated from Malaysia. I was with the first team that was assigned to Vietnam which
was the 25th division.

RF: Right.

DR: The first active team, but I was team number 12 which was kind of
confusing. I wasn’t in the 12th team in any way.

RF: Right, that was just your designate.

DR: That was the designated number of team number 12 which later became 66th
IBCT, 66th infantry platoon combat trackers which was designated that way because the
school had switched from the 11 classes that graduated in Malaysia now over to the
American school that we were getting ready to start up.

RF: Is that Fort Gordon?

DR: At Fort Gordon. We were converted over with the idea that we were going
to start turning out classes immediately. It didn’t turn out that way because we didn’t
have the instructors in Georgia. The administration was there. We were lost off by the
department of the Army who should have flagged our 11F 40D MOSs and said, “Hey,
this is a unique, rare, MOS,” but we became part of the large US Army system that was
just a small part of it and like a lot of the other things it got a little off bases and we
wound up going to drill sergeant positions all over the United States. When I came home
on my first tour - to get off the subject for a second to explain this – I had my orders
changed in Oakland as soon as I arrived back in the United States. I stayed 2 hours on
my own time when I was very anxious to get home to talk to reassignment. They had to
call the department of Army in Washington, D.C. and ask permission to reassign me and
then the major and staff sergeant that handled it for me told me, “This is a very rare thing
to happen because everybody wants to be reassigned,” and the staff sergeant told me,
“This…I’ve never seen it happen so you must have a rare MOS. What is it all about?”

So at this time I began to realize that we were a unique organization so they reassigned me to Georgia and also, to back step a little bit, as I was leaving Vietnam going through orientation there was about 200 guys coming home in this large seated area. The person handling the orientation for us and our paperwork for coming back State side said,

“Gentlemen, we have a person here that belongs to a very unique and strike organization. This person is a combat tracker.” When I heard this, I knew I was a combat tracker and it embarrassed me because I was afraid he was talking about me in front of all these people and he went on to talk about the combat trackers and how this is a very unique organization that was trained in jungle warfare and it was the most hazardous job in Vietnam and that we were trained in all type of jungle warfare and special training and he said, “Would you stand up?” and I stood up and my face was beet red and he asked me to tell them, tell everybody where I was from and I told them the 25th division and he said, “I talked to a few more trackers that came through, also,” and I remember being kind of confused because I wasn’t aware that we were as highly rated as this guy had paraded me in our organization and it really embarrassed me but it caused me to start thinking, “Are we? What did we do? We tracked and we did our job. We did the best we could. We did what we were trained.” But, we had lots of friends. We had a lot of way to go and a lot of pull where we went. We talked to the brass a lot because we were critiqued in the command bunker of any unit we went to as to what our job was to be, if it was to be running operations out of a forward location or another base camp. We would go in and be critiqued as the team commander with the high ranking of the officers. At that point then we would go back and tell our people, our team, what we were going to be doing and the objective and we were going to be going out with Charlie company tomorrow and they’re going to go out here and there’s a mine laying team. The type of jobs we did – this gets into something else – the type of jobs we were to do, the function that we were to pull, for example, we ran artillery from base camps. We had to take artillery rounds and ammunition and stuff, heavy cargo, had to be transported by road. We used helicopters to bring in food and perishables and things like this, Chinook double prop choppers with nets hanging from the bottom with all these boxes and stuff in it and the reason they carried it in all those boxes and nets is so they could hover above them and
drop it and take off without being shot out of the sky because it takes the helicopter time
to take off, to land, and if the mortar attack came and the Viet Cong was watching the
shot of mortar when the guy lands, its going to take him a while to get off and they could
lob a few rounds in first, but the chopper could drop that cargo and leave. But, heavy
stuff had to be brought in by 2 and \( \frac{1}{2} \) ton trucks, deuce and a halves, and they ran those
roads on convoys and the Viet Cong knew, they had their ways of doing things, that they
would come out during the rain and they would dig a hole in the road, put a mine in that
road, and cover it over and the rain would cover all tracks of them being there and if
you’re running this road and you see something in the road where there’s been digging
you would stop and check it out. But with the rain, it would conceal it and they would
run over it the next morning so you learned to watch out for mines on these roads the
following morning after rain and a lot of times we were called out after the rains to track
the Viet Cong that put the mine on the road that blew up the truck and they knew, in the
beginning they didn’t, but after we were in operation for a while and we were able to
orientate the infantry, don’t mess up our tracks, try not to walk around over them too
much irregardless of the reason you’re calling us out because we want to be able to read
that track and try to ascertain as much information as possible so we can put this in our
after action reports to be turned over to intelligence so the general can go up there to this
board with his cellophane overlay map and mark certain things on that map that will feed
into the overall picture to create a picture of what is going on, which way the Viet Cong
are moving, the one that laid the mine in the road was tracked in this direction for maybe
300 yards and the tracker was pulled off, became very disgusted that he was pulled off
the trail, didn’t get a chance to find the enemy. He didn’t know that the infantry captain
that was in charge of that platoon was told we suspect a Viet Cong stronghold to be in
this one area. We know that this is the way the tracks are leading, so anything that
happens such as a mine land team on the road, we want you to track them but don’t go
beyond certain points. We want to know direction of travel. We’re still establishing the
overall picture. We didn’t necessarily receive the total picture information. We became
frustrated sometimes because you didn’t get a chance to finish the tracking and thought
that we didn’t do our job, but it was only later, after I’d been there long enough to realize
what was going on, that I realized what we were doing, and the reason we had to be
intelligence MOS was because we were field intelligence. We were providing
information to headquarters intelligence to help them make a decision on where the
weapons were being stashed, where the ammunition was being stashed, and this was
determined on if the person came from this area and laid the mine, went back to the same
area; that was a good indication that was an underground weapons or explosives or a
stronghold for their materials and this would be considered for maybe an attack by our
jets to come in and drop napalm, white phosphorous, or whatever depending on what they
knew was in that area.

RF: So one of the main missions, then, was tracking the enemy to gather
intelligence?

DR: To gather intelligence, not necessarily just to make contact, and we were
kind of confused coming out of the school thinking that we were doing what the New
Zealanders were trained to do; to find the enemy only, pull back, and let the infantry hit
them. We were told all of the stuff about the ammunition which was a very important
part of the Vietnam war was destroying their explosives or to try to find out where their
resupply of troops were coming in. That was another one we established especially
during Tet. We knew the Viet Cong would come down the Ho Chi Minh trail which was
of various places of entry into Vietnam where they thought they could achieve their goal
of reaching from point A to point B with less opposition. So one of the main areas of the
25th division that we encountered was a place called the parrot’s beak which was a tit like
area that stuck in out of Cambodia into Vietnam, south Vietnam. The Viet Cong would
come through the parrot’s beak, come as close to Saigon as they could, coming into this
protrusion of Cambodia and at nightfall, they would make a bee line trying to get to
Saigon into the Cho Lon which is the Chinese section of Saigon so they could mingle and
become one of them, of the citizens, long enough to participate in whatever offensive the
Viet Cong wanted pulled upon the United States so they would have this huge force
walking around like civilians ready to react as soon as Tet hit which was the time that
their morale was the highest and they felt more invulnerable and their comradery was the
greatest, and at this point we were used as a blockade. The trackers not necessarily but
the infantry of each unit would set up blocks and as they would head for Saigon they
would hit these ambush patrols laid out across the rice paddies during the night when
they were traveling with a concealment of darkness. They would call the trackers out the
following morning or ask us to be out there with them at night which was one of those
borderline things of what we should do. We were out there part of it now. We’re not
looking for a track, we’re looking for a track that will probably be established this night;
almost positively will be, and we were to follow them the next morning. We know where
they’re going, we know what their mission is, and why are we there? Because during the
night we follow the ones that got away and the infantry would follow us and we would be
going towards Saigon from the parrot’s beak on the trail of the ones’ that got away. We
would locate grave sites where the dead were drug off. The infantry would dig them up,
count the bodies for military purposes. We would search villages. We were on their tail
because we knew they had to sleep during the day and get as much rest as they could
during the day and that was to our advantage. We would hit them if we could find them.
The following night we would be picked up by helicopter, lifted over the top of the…and
set down at a point we would figure would be just beyond their abilities to travel the
previous day and we would set up another blockade and we would hit them again, and
again, and again, and they probably thought they were hitting large forces but they were
hitting the same unit. We would be there and we would have followed them. We were
still establishing the Ho Chi Minh trail, the replacement units from north Vietnam to
south Vietnam, but this is another function that we pulled in the 25th division. We
worked with special forces. The 25th division, to my knowledge, is the only unit that
worked with special forces, A-Teams, and this was only in the early part of the 25th
division existence of the 66th IBCT or the tracker team number 12. My team commander
became friends with a green beret lieutenant that was an A-Team member. We had not
established in Vietnam exactly what our potential and our purpose was and which way
we could used most efficiently and each of these team leaders, lieutenants, that was
assigned with the platoon to these various divisions would use his own discretion as to
how he thought we should be used because it was not clear to him as well as anyone else
and we became involved in special forces. We landed at a base camp A-Team called
Treku. The person calling in the chopper that I came in on was my stick leader in special
forces when I was a trainee and my squad leader. We ran missions with special forces.
Every member of that special forces team died before leaving Vietnam and this probably
could tell you the kind of action we received while we were with them and many of the
team members on my team experienced this during the early periods and we became
involved with certain aspects that was not experienced by any other military force in
Vietnam, probably any other tracker team in Vietnam. We experienced ritualistic
cannibalism by the CIDG forces which are volunteers in the green beret A teams. The A
team members, the green berets, performed the duty of advisors. They appointed
lieutenants for company commanders. They appointed platoon sergeants and they hired
the regular soldiers. To my understanding, they were paid 6 dollars a month per soldier,
6 dollars per automatic weapon that they captured, and so much per kill. They wore tiger
fatigues and they were organized in the south. They were made up of all types of outlaws
that were given immunity for prosecution for their volunteered as CIDG force which
stood to my understanding was Civilian Indigenous Defense Group forces, but local, and
it was to their advantage to capture as many weapons and kill as many Viet Cong as
possible. Many of these people were double agents. They were known to be double
agents by the green berets. They were on whichever side was winning and they would
switch sides depending on who was winning.

RF: In the tracker teams, you worked with the CIDGs?

DR: We worked with the CIDGs and the green berets. To my understanding my
team was the only team that did this. I experienced, while out with the green berets, the
CIDGs would take their kills and I’d seen this many times, I have photographs which I
will show you in a couple of minutes, whereas the CIDGs would take the north
Vietnamese kills, stab them in the stomach, rip them to the side, on the right side below
the rib cage. They would pull out their livers and their hearts and they would take their
machetes and they would cut the top of heads off and take the brains along with the livers
and the hearts. They would take parachute silk that they could obtain from [?] that was
kicked out of choppers during the night, we call them aerial flares which had a large
parachute attached to it, and it was like a can of white phosphorous gas, like a gallon can,
that was ignited and kicked out of a chopper and it would light the sky up like daylight
and these buckets would fly over your head at night during battles and the Vietnamese
CIDGs would run out of their fox holes and trenches and retrieve these parachutes. I’d
seen the CIDGs run for the parachutes. Other CIDGs would point a carbine rifle at him
and shoot over his head, yelling to him in Vietnamese, “Leave it alone! The lieutenant
wants it!” and make him retrieve the parachute, bring it back, and give it to the lieutenant
which was the company commander. The green berets were only advisors. They could
not order these people to do anything; they could only advise them that the team
commander was given the ultimate authority of taking his advice or refusing it, and it was
usually his platoon support, radio operator or somebody close to him that enforced when
he said, “I want that parachute,” and if the guy didn’t bring it back he would have shot
him. The parachute was cut into little squares and used for various things but one
purpose they used it for they would cut it in squares approximately a foot and a half
square and they would take these brains and livers and hearts and lay them in it like a
handkerchief and tie them into a pouch and they would tie it on their side. They would
also use them for carrying ammunition, the little pouches, and once they returned back to
the base camp, the A team, they would take rice wine which looked like vodka, it was
clear in appearance, and they would dice the liver into little pieces and put it in the wine
to pickle it and they would lie in hammocks and drink it. I have observed them with the
hearts and the livers sticking on a sharp stick by their hooch being dried. I asked the
green beret, “What is happening here?” He told me that this is a ritualistic way they have
of obtaining control over their kill, the adversary; you eat his brain, you gain his
conscious in the afterlife because the Vietnamese have various religions that is somewhat
intact with Christianity, Buddhism, and their relatives. They believe they worship their
relatives, their ancestors, and this is all tied together. I’ve observed in different ways in
the past in my future experiences in Vietnam other things that fit into this type of
ritualistic beliefs which I’ll explain later, but this eating the liver would give a person
courage, stamina. The heart would give a [?] would perform a similar function as the
heart and the liver and the brain and the person that had the brain would become the slave
of this person in the afterlife. I observed outside each village, Vietnamese village, there
will be a pagoda which is similar to an old fashioned bath tub sticking out of the ground
with the round end pointed up with a picture of Mother Mary or a statue, only theirs it
was a little box sitting on legs resembling some type of Buddhist temple with a Buddha
sitting inside a little building maybe 3 or 4 feet square with Buddha in an open end in the
front. In the back it closed, and a place to burn incense. This little pagoda would be on
the outskirts of a village outside a cemetery. Almost every village had a cemetery on the
outskirts of the pagoda and the Vietnamese worshiped their ancestors and while tracking
the Vietnamese, be it Vietnamese or NVA…Viet Cong or NVA, the distinction that the
Vietnamese, Viet Cong if they were sympathizers of the north, and in the beginning of
the war they had the function of destroying the communication transportation supply
lines of the enemy. As the pressure was put on them they still performed these functions,
but they started leaning more towards a guide for the NVAs that came in through the Ho
Chi Minh trail to the south bringing rockets, mortar tubes, mortars, all types of
explosives. In order to utilize their other arsenal as much as possible, the Vietnamese
would tell them, the south Vietnamese Viet Cong would say, “Here’s a military
installation, here’s a military installation, and they’ve got dogs here or whatever, the dogs
are playing a big part. You might want to knock them out.” Or an NVA commander
would say, “I’m here, I’m supposed to do this, this, this, and this on my way down. Now
I understand you have some dogs in this area or whatever that we consider high priority.
Do you have the coordinates?” I have observed in our own base camp, the 25th division,
division size, Vietnamese women working, filling sandbags, walking foot in front of foot
facing walking straight to the dog kennels. We caught her. We have been hit several
times within our little area almost precision. I myself received a rocket attack and almost
was hit by a rocket. I was blown through the air. I didn’t know I was injured; I knew I
was injured but I didn't know how bad. The rocket from one of these attacks which I
assume came from one of these NVA teams that came from the north that brought a
rocket with him and the Viet Cong told them where we were at based upon the woman
pacing. I’ve had rockets to walk down the road walking straight toward the dog kennels,
or mortars. A rocket came in. It tore my intestines out. I thought I had appendicitis.
The doctor misdiagnosed me for 2 years until I did another tour in Vietnam, went home,
and I was home 17 days. I went through major surgery. My intestines were all in the
wrong place from this explosion. It busted my appendix. It messed my kidney up, and I
had some major problems. But I went to go through major surgery to correct this, but it
was because of one of these rockets that came in which I’m assuming that came from the
north which the Viet Cong told the crew that was coming through, a replacement crew,
that everyone was to bring something and on your way through you hit this point, this
point, this point, and this point which we consider priorities according to our intelligence
from the Viet Cong side or north Vietnamese side. But, we were used. We were used
against these guys and we were trying to establish these things and we would, during
’68…was it 6 or 7 Tet? A good example of the most perfect mission that we could
perform, I’ll explain it to you, the best one that I’ve seen with the description, by
definition, of how we should be deployed and information we should obtain. I was called
out by a battalion and the battalion had about 4 companies. We had a major who was the
battalion leader. He wasn’t quite totally aware of our function. I sat down on the
outskirts of a village where an ambush had taken place the night before. A lieutenant told
me that the colonel wanted to talk to me on the radio, the team commander, so I talked to
the colonel. The colonel said, “We want…how many dog teams do you have?” I said, “I
have one tracker team, actually 2 dogs.” I kind of confused him. “I have a scout dog and
a tracker dog.” He said, “I want you to bring one of your teams over here where we
ambushed these Viet Cong the night before to sniff out the Viet Cong in the village, and I
want you to take the other team, go with that lieutenant who has the grid coordinates or
an azimuth reading on a rocket that left the rice paddies last night and went into Cho
Lon,” and that lieutenant shoved that compass reading and, “I want you to walk that
compass line and determine where that rocket went and possibly where it came from.”
So I said, “Sir, my dogs don’t know the difference between a Vietnamese and a Viet
Cong and my dogs don’t sniff out Viet Cong, they follow footprints or foot tracks and
one dog is a scout dog and one is a tracker and we don’t split the team up. Its one team, 2
dogs and we use the scout dog as an extra protection. We walk off side when we’re using
the visual tracker so he can alert to any enemy that is about to give us any additional
protection we can possibly get.” It was hard to use a scout dog for a tracker dog because
they might interfere with each other’s job due to the fact that they were dogs and by
working them close together it would probably hurt our situation more than help it, but
we were able to use them when we used the tracker on point off to the side, possibly a
little bit to our front. That causes the dog to alert. So, the scout dogs played a very
important part of a tracker team because they usually accompanied us on any mission we
went on if there was available of the teams in Vietnam. Later, understand the trackers
were assigned a tracker dog to work with them full time. But, in the beginning, it was
just an occasional. These teams coming in from North Vietnam, the NVAs, would hit
those areas and the colonel became very irritated with me and he told me, “I know your
so-and-so dogs don’t know the difference between the Viet Cong and the Vietnamese. I
was just using that as a such-and-such expression, sergeant!” The lieutenant grabbed the
phone out of my hand and said, “You’re being disrespectful to a colonel,” and this is part
of the misunderstanding that we all encountered with these dogs trying to get these
people to understand the way we work. “He wants you to take the whole team, check out
the rocket blast if you can find it. Then, he’s going to wait and he wants you to come
back and check out the dead that they killed that night and follow the ones that got
away.” So, I took the azimuth reading on the compass and I followed it and I found a
rocket back blast area where it had burned the top off of the rice in the rice field. Around
this rocket site was several pieces of bamboo sticks sticking out of the ground in different
locations. Each piece of bamboo had a small candle, colored candles, homemade, but
they appeared to be little kids birthday candles but they were homemade. They were
melted onto little limbs on the bamboo and they were stuck in the rice paddy. The
lieutenant proceeded to pull them off and throw them on the ground. I told the lieutenant,
“Don’t do that!” He said, “They’re aiming sticks for the rockets and they’ve got them set
up and they’re going to have to re-set them up because I’m not leaving them,” and I said,
“Supposing you were Viet Cong and brought a rocket all the way from Hanoi on your
back and you came up here to set that rocket up to shoot it and they’ve got the aiming
stakes and they’re going to use it again, and they come back out and they set that rocket
up and they reorientate and reestablish their coordinates and they set it up and they hit
their target, but if you move that aiming stake over just a little bit, maybe a foot…” this is
what I was told by a soldier that had been there 3 years and he wasn’t a tracker, he was an
infantryman. Don’t ever tear down aiming stakes; move them just a little bit and that
rocket will take the wrong move and hit outside the base camp off their objective and
we’ve accomplished our mission. We’ve put one Viet Cong out of commission and one
rocket that came all the way down bringing the rocket. So, good idea, he reestablished
the sticks. I found an ox cart trail leading from the rocket site in the opposite direction of
the patrol. I advised the colonel that it probably went around and circled the village and
came in on a different road and it was probably still in the village at the time. “Do you
want me to follow the tracks?” and he said, “No, I want you to come over here and find
the ones that are wounded.” What had happened, they had shot the rocket and they were
running across the rice paddies around the side of the village, outside the village, getting
ready to go back in the village and the road and they were laughing, talking probably
about what they had done, and they ran into our ambush patrol, about battalion size, and
several of them got killed. The rest ran into the village. The tracks lead around the
village in the opposite direction of the ox cart. I tracked…I asked him, “Have you had
anybody walking over in the body areas or looking for the ones that got away?” He said,
“No.” So, I tracked the ones that ran into the village. I tracked them into the village and
up to the front of the house and there was a road ditch in front of the house with water in
it. There was an ox cart sitting right in front of the villa…the house on the road. I
walked around the ox cart. I found the same sandal tracks, Ho Chi Minh sandals, which
are made of old car tires. One person in an NVA patrol, a north Vietnamese regular
patrol, carried a template and they would take old car tires and take the tubes from that
tire and use them as the straps and cut this foot sized piece of tire and they would use
them and they called them Ho Chi Minh sandals and they had different treads and you
could decide who you were following, if it was the same person, because of the different
treads on the car and we became familiar with that and marks left by gauges in the tracks
in these Ho Chi Minh sandals. The same guy that I was tracking at the rocket site that
was hooking up a number of the ox was around the ox cart and unhooked the ox there
that left the cart there the night before and this was during the rainy season. The road
ditch along side the cart was full of water. The Viet Cong, the NVA, had stepped on the
side of the road ditch and slid into the water. When he slid into the water I looked in the
water and there was a round bundle of candle laying in the water, all different colors like
birthday candles but homemade. They had a piece of newspaper; they didn’t have Scotch
tape like we have. They took a piece of newspaper approximately an inch, inch and a
half wide, folded it 2 or 3 times, wet it, and wrapped it around the candle to hold it in
place. I pulled them out of the water. I followed the tracks and I observed the house next
to me had several people standing out front watching and I tracked inside a little bridge
that went over the road ditch into the driveway or the yard of this hooch. An old lady
came out of the house with a homemade weed broom sweeping the tracks away walking
toward me. As I walked toward her, she walked toward me and she met me in the center of the yard sweeping tracks and walked straight up to me. I looked at her with a battalion behind me and said, “Do you think I’m stupid?” jokingly for my friends, just said, “Do you think I’m stupid? I mean, you must think I’m pretty stupid to not know what you’re doing? You know what I just did? You’re busted!” Two beautiful, young Vietnamese women, approximately 20 years old, standing on the porch with approximately 15 to 20 little kids approximately 3 to 4 years old standing on the porch. Both women reached down and picked up kids and was holding them in their arms. I knew they were trying to disguise. I walked over to the first one and I took her by the hair of the head with my hand and I said to my friend, “Take her.” She ran. She threw the kid down and ran. My friend chased her through 2 or 3 houses, caught her, brought her back by the hair. I turned her over to the battalion. I said, “She’s a Viet Cong. The same ox cart that brought the rocket out is right here in front of this house, the tracks are coming in from a different side just like I told you probably, candles on the aiming stakes of the bamboo were in the field. Here’s a bundle of candles that came from the same batch that was on the ground underwater next to the ox cart that he dropped when he slid and fell into the water. The tracks went into this door. The woman met me half way sweeping the tracks away. These two women are Viet Congs. They picked up kids as soon as they saw me headed that way and tried to disguise their purpose as being a nursery workers.” He turned them over to a Kit Carson scout which is a Viet Cong usually that turned to south Vietnamese…

RF: A Chu Hoi.

DR: …and gave himself up. He was called a Chu Hoi. They were called Kit Carson scouts. They walk point along with the infantry. They stay near the point. If there was, they were assigned usually to any large infantry unit. If Viet Cong was captured or a possible suspect, this Kit Carson scout was told to interrogate them. If you can imagine the dialect of our country if you’re from Boston, if you’re from Alabama, if you’re from New Orleans, or if you’re from various other places in the United States, you can hear a person talk and basically determine what part of the United States that person’s from due to their dialect and their accent. Vietnamese - even though we don’t understand their language - have dialects just like any other people of any other country
and a Kit Carson scout is able to determine that dialect better than we are because he is
local and provided he is able to brief these people, he can be a great asset to us. But, he is
also in a position where he is able to deceive us and if he encounters a Viet Cong and he
still is a Viet Cong double agent working for us and getting paid, working for the north
Vietnamese Army getting paid, and killing anybody that might be an informant or willing
to talk that would give them information regarding north Vietnam/Vietnamese activities.
He could easily kill them without being questioned and pass it off as a person that was
bitter because, “They killed my mother, my father, my sisters, my kids, and my wife and
made me become a Viet Cong and I hate them and I killed them.” Maybe he doesn't do
this to every one but the ones that are necessary and actually the ones that are south
Vietnamese sympathizers are the ones that he’s actually saying is Viet Cong and he’s the
only one to make that determination and usually we would believe him. We were aware
of that. This Kit Carson scout had been suspected of it and he had been known to blow
them away before we could stop him because he had a .45. That’s what we issued
him…they issued him. This particular case they had taken his .45 and given him an M-
16 hoping they could get to him faster with an M-16. I continued to search the village to
help bring out people that were ordered…the village was ordered to fall out into the
center of the village with their ID cards. Every south Vietnamese citizen was ordered to
have an ID card and if they did not have a south Vietnamese ID card, they were
considered a Viet Cong or from the north. There was a lot of counterfeiting went on, a
lot of fake ID cards that were very easy to pick out; I mean, they were crudely made. We
ordered everybody to the streets and we searched the village to make sure that the rest of
the village came out and we made them come out. Helicopters flew over talking to them
in Vietnamese. We got them in the village, in the middle of the village, and another
soldier came up and asked me, “Do you want a souvenir?” I said, “Souvenir?” He said,
“Yeah, do you want the scalp of the nurse you just caught?” I said, “Scalp?” He said,
“Well, we cut her hair off real close and she had a pony tail,” and he handed it to me and
he said, “I had to leave because that scalp was bleeding so bad I couldn’t stand to watch
it.” So I went up to see it myself because I felt bad because I had captured these two Viet
Cong nurses; one that talked and the other one didn’t. The one that wouldn’t talk got
beaten severely. The Kit Carson scout had her off to the side, a little on the side of out
commander, and he was beating her; doing side kicks to the boob, elbows to the boob, knees to the boob, the crotch, her face was swollen and bruised badly, her hair was cut off. She was laying against a hay stack around a telephone pole...not a telephone pole, but a hay pole and she had fallen into this stack so many times she kind of wore out a hole where he had beat her into this hole and she locked eyes with me, contact, like, “Are you happy? You caught me.” But, she wouldn’t take her eyes off of me while he was beating her. She had a large breast and he was hitting her in her boobs and in the face and all that. Then he drug her...I had to leave because I didn’t want to see it and I began to wonder if what I just did was the right thing even though they kill us and they were probably doing it and that’s the reason we caught them. This is not the way I’d intended for it to wind up. I walked away and I had to come back again later and I saw her standing in a little stream that ran through the village, its kind of...reeds growing out of the stream about 3 foot high above the water and he was holding her under the water with both hands between his legs and he’d hold her for a long period and pull her out and push her back down again. I told one of the soldiers, “Why don’t you stop him?” He said, “I don’t get involved.” So, I had to walk away. I stuck the hair in my sock and stuck it in my clothes as we returned to the United States when we came and I kept it for years because I wanted to remember the details of the actual facts and I knew a lot of stuff people wouldn’t believe if you told them, the ritualistic stuff I knew they wouldn’t believe, and outside these villages back to the ritualistic stuff, I would often lose the track for no apparent reason while tracking the enemy that was seen during the night or had pulled something during the night and they would travel when they didn’t want to be seen. They would travel in between the villages on [?]. They were probably following us with a compass at night through the rice paddies and the fields and they would pretty well stay on track unless they were coming near a village and they would sway away from a village to keep from being seen to remove any possibility of the villagers that came through here if they were American sympathizers. So, I would lose a trail and I was told by this same infantry soldier that had been there 3 years that told me about the aiming stakes, “If you ever lose a track, look for the nearest grave yard and you will find that they will do a 90 degree turn and deviate from their objective and walk through that graveyard in order to receive the blessings of their ancestors. Even though the ancestors
are not their ancestors, they are the Vietnamese ancestors and the reason they are here is
to try to reunite Vietnam for the people; that’s their purpose, and for that purpose these
are their ancestors – the ancestors of Vietnamese and they will walk through that
graveyard and take a chance on being exposed to the village and south Vietnamese
sympathizers and possibly even their apprehension by the ability to receive the sanction
of the ancestors,” and I have found a lot of tracks. I have reestablished a lot of lost tracks
by this information about the graveyards and I tried to pass this on to as many of my team
members and the team itself because I thought it was unique. I thought it was something
that has repeated itself, something that they would encounter, something that would
greatly advantage us by familiarizing ourselves with their customs as people. Because
they didn’t speak our language did not mean that they were not intelligent. It did not
mean that they had the same values of life that we had, same religion, and did not place
the same emphasis of importance on the same things that we did. This ritualistic thing
was part of their culture - the eating of the hearts, the livers, the brains, the walking
through the graveyard to receive the blessings of the ancestors - is only the surface of the
differences in their background and ours which established a barrier with us as far as our
understanding the Vietnamese people. We saw it as he’s either a Viet Cong of the north
or he’s a south Vietnamese, and if he comes here from north Vietnam with a uniform on,
then he’s an NVA and we know who he is. But, we didn’t understand, I don’t think, as a
majority, I don’t think we understood that these people had no concept of politics; of a
democrat or republican or what was going on here. They would see us as personalities
and as individuals, of course, and then they saw us as a whole. But if they saw us do
something that was offensive towards them, irregardless of which was they were leaning
for, they could easily become a Viet Cong sympathizer which may mean the difference
between telling you something with the promise of confidence, or not telling you or
telling you the wrong thing and that’s why I did not like seeing GIs do things -
degrading people they were interrogating. If the village that they definitely saw these
people being abused; beaten, hair cut off, and beaten in the boobs, held underwater, and if
they weren’t a Viet Cong sympathizer, they would have been one when it was over and
we didn’t place enough emphasis on that. I’ve seen them kill Viet Cong and ask the
village if there was any more in the village, if there’s any there and they’d say, “No.”
Then they would pull out the bodies and say, “Do you know these people, because they came from your village last night? We killed them here,” knowing that they’re probably the son of some of the villagers that grew up in the village and is known by all of them. “Well, if you don’t know them then you shouldn’t mind,” and they would hang them over the side of the tank with the heads tied to one end and the feet tied to the other, hang it over the side and run through the villages and, “Well, it shouldn’t offend you because these are Viet Cong and we don’t like them, do we? One of those things.” This is an American thing; you don’t hear about this. People don’t talk about it, they try to cover up for it, but this is stuff that was wrong. We did it. It was 3 bodies at a time being drug…hung over the side of the tank. Now I understand animosity for people who had their buddies killed, like some things happened to them and we were told before we went over even in the regular Army, “Don’t get off into cutting X’s on the front of your bullets with a knife, putting an X on it, because if you do that’s called dumb-dumb. When that bullet hits a body it’ll split 4 different directions; it’ll tear them all up. Its like shooting a [?]. If they catch you with dumb-dumb bullets and stuff like that and your body is retrieved by them, they’ll mutilate you. They’ll cut your guts open and sit your head down inside your guts and they’ll leave you for the Americans; that’s one of the things they do. So, don’t get off into that.” Well, we did little things like that. We did little things; every unit did it, but nothing near as bad as special forces, you know. Special forces we condone and we pay their salary; we paid them six dollars a month, we gave them a weapon, we paid them so much for a kill, and they told us, they knew at least half of them were double agents. They were on the side that was winning and we have to consider that under any situation that we encounter by enemy or whatever; you had to be ready. One time in particular I was out as a tracker with [?] or with the special forces; one American [?], two companies, half of the A Team of the CIDGs. I had one Vietnamese soldier reach down and grab me in the crotch as I was walking along the side of their formation. I chambered around, I was young, I didn’t think too much. I just chambered around and I backed off. He stood there and was looking at me and was laughing and he [?] laughing. The green beret was my friend, I’d been with him in training in special forces. He came around the back, “What’s going on?” “Wait, wait, wait, wait! Come here, I want to talk to you!” “Don’t do that, what happened?” I
said, “He grabbed me!” He said, “What are you locking and loading on him for?” I was about to say, “Well, he pissed me off!” He said, “You’ll get us all killed! They’ll kill us. There’s only your team; a 5 man team with a dog, and me. That’s all the Americans out here. They’ll all turn on us and kill us. However, remember his face; remember him well, and first fire fight we get in get in and get behind him and kill him.” I said, “What?” He said, “Shoot him in the back.” He said, “I’m serious.” He said, “While we’re on the subject, I got some more I want you to kill. I want you to kill the commander, that guy right there, I want you to kill that sergeant, the platoon sergeant, and this other one over here, I know he’s Viet Cong, I want you to kill him. Get behind him, don’t let him see you. Get him from the back. Get behind them when you’re shooting so that you can get them in line and shoot them because you don’t want the rest of them to know that you did it because if you do, they’ll kill every one of us.” And I was shocked! I was really shocked about the suggestion to me which would be murder, you know, and it wasn’t defense. Now here we’re going beyond the fight, the battle; killing somebody in combat. You’re talking killing somebody, shooting them in the back, because you know that they’re the enemy during a fire fight. So, remember him so that you can kill him – I was shocked by that and this was outside the tracker thing, but it was something that we encountered while we were looking for our purpose in Vietnam in ways other than what the British had taught us in order to adapt to the betterment of our deployment in Vietnam. We came upon a hooch in a serene setting with a beautiful bog, green grass, and irregular shore line on this bog which was palm trees and a little grass house sitting back in the trees in a free fire zone and we had 2 companies of CIDGs and one green berets with us. A woman came out with 2 children, about a 10 year old little girl. Her face was swollen huge on one side. She had a baby in her arms. We asked her, “What are you doing here? Do you know you could be killed? This is a free fire zone; we could kill you without any questions asked? You’re not supposed to be in a free fire zone.” She said, “My husband…” I said, “What happened to your daughter?” She said, “The Viet Cong came and they beat my daughter, they killed my husband, and we’re here alone.” He said, “Tell her she’s a God-damned liar; her husband is Viet Cong. She’s living out here because she’s Viet Cong and didn’t have time to get away so the husband ran, beat his little girl real bad first to make her keep her mouth shut and let her know that
he’s serious.” The interpreter said, “The commander wants to know what you want to do with them,” and the green beret said, “Shoot them.” I was shocked again. He said, “No prisoners, we don’t take prisoners. Shoot them.” And I thought, “He’s talking about killing 2 little kids.” The commander said, “No taking prisoners.” He said, “I said kill them God-damnit and tell him I said that!” The interpreter tells him, and he said, “No.” So we took them prisoner and we were being followed by the Viet Cong, we knew it. We had CIDGs climbing poles, trees, watching them follow us. We went into a bog. We were going across to an island to spend the night, a little bog across some water. I took the woman, she had little kids and I knew they weren’t going to walk across there, so I took the little girl, the year old, picked her up, and I walked across the bog with her and the woman carried the baby. When I picked up the little girl they looked at me because its something you don’t do and I’m caught between my values and the values of this hard, hard core unit. You don’t do anything for the Viet Cong; they were your mortal enemies. I gave them my poncho liner for the night because it was wet on the bog for the woman and little kids. My buddy, the green beret, he looked at me but he didn’t say nothing. We got a plane, the chopper came in, and we had 16 people on that chopper and they’re not supposed to be able to carry that many. But, they said, “We’ll carry you all; we’re not going back in.” I went in that day, and the next day the woman, the 2 kids, myself, and the other 4 men on my team, the dog, the green beret, 2 door gunners, or the door gunner and the crew chief, the pilot, and the co-pilot all on that UH chopper and we were surprised to get off the ground. But, I was ready to get out of the field on that one. Following the big battle at the green beret team, there was supposed to have been 5,000 hit our base camp during the night while I was on the ambush patrol. We knew they were out there, but we didn’t have any idea there were that many. They hit the base camp during the night, overran the base camp. They had green lamp cord wire, just like we have on our lamps, tied around their body with satchel charges which are the plastic explosives and the idea is once you get inside the base camp you tie yourself together and you kill anything that isn’t tied together; even your own because people are expendable. We entered the base camp after it got hit, the following morning after the attack. We went out to assess the situation, me and the team members, because we had approximately 500 dead from the choppers during the night. They were flying with lights
on the ground and other choppers flying close to the ground around the lights killing the
ones in the light while the other choppers went back to refuel and reload and they would
replace the other ones. They were kicking out flares, luminous flares, with the
parachutes. They were drifting over our heads; we were that close to the battle itself.
They crossed the river during the night on American stamped US Government air mats
that we didn’t even get. So, the Viet Cong and NVA Army had US Government air mats
as flotation devices to move across the river on the side of the A Team which was on the
river and hit the A Team alongside the river during the night and once they were retreated
they floated their wounded and their dead back across the river on United States
Government issued air mats. I found them, they had blood on them, I heard them in the
swamps screaming, crying, lying, dying. They were in bad shape, the ones that got away.
We walked across the field of the dead and I found with mortar rounds, all kinds of
exploded weapons. They were cutting their hearts and their livers and brains out to take
in. I came across a live one. We walked upon him with a Kit Carson scout that was with
the CIDGs. He was a CIDG too but he was one of these scouts that had turned from Viet
Cong. As we approached this Viet Cong laying on the ground, or NVA, he looked at us
and he cowered with his eyes; kind of turned his face to the side to avoid eye contact and
he was laying on one hip, and he had wounds at the lower part of his body. As we
walked up on him he started moving slowly to his right and he reached behind him. He
pulled a beer can out with a handle on it and I have never seen a potato masher. I didn’t
know they existed in the military and Vietnam. I’d seen pictures of them where the
Germans had used potato mashers, but he pulled the beer can out with a handle on it and
he twisted it and I said, “You got a grenade?” We turned and ran, like me and two other
trackers and the CIDG Kit Carson scout. As we ran, the grenade went off. We ran back
up before he could do it again and a little Vietnamese took his carbine, aimed it and said,
“Sorry about that, mother fucker,” and bing – right between the eyes. He dropped it, and
it shocked my conscious. He didn’t have a weapon in his hand, he had thrown a grenade
at us, but this was reality. You see the dead, that’s a reality check, but when you see a
live one and he tries to kill you and here you’re thinking about all this stuff, justification
for a kill, he was pointing a gun at me at the time which was just sufficient, but now he’s
laying there, wounded, no weapon, grenade in arm extended, and next thing shoots him
right between the eyes. Murder is what you think; what distinguished murder? Then,
this kid kind of picks you as one of his confidants as a buddy and on another mission he
walks up to me out in the field with all these CIDGs and says, “Can I see your weapon?”
In broken English, he wants to see my weapon, and I’m thinking, “If I give my weapon to
him, that would be one of 6 Americans that would not have any defense in case they all
decided to wipe us out,” and maybe he thought maybe I was the most qualified out of all
of them and he has already befriended me, and if he came up and got my weapon and
stood there and took my weapon and shot the rest of them, it would be a pretty easy take,
and we were standing at a…we’d just found a location of the enemy who had run from
his position and had been living there in this little dig out alongside a rice paddy dike and
maybe he knows we’re approaching their perimeter and he’s getting ready to kill us. So,
I hesitated and I took his weapon for my own protection. At least I had something, but I
didn’t want to create any problems here, either. So, I gave him my weapon and I looked
at his and he admired my weapon and he gave it back to me. They took a letter out of the
location where this guy had ran from and the interpreter read the letter and I think this is
interesting, its unique; it, not word for word, I don’t remember it, but I remember in
detail, “Son, we’re waiting for you to come home to Hanoi. Your girlfriend has been
loyal to you since you were little kids. She loves you, she wants you to come home. She
wants to live with you for the rest of her life and have a family with you. We love you,
we want you to come home. You have every reason to live. Take care of yourself and
come home.” And he had wrote a letter back, “The Americans are they mortar us and
they artillery us and it doesn’t bother us as much but the war dogs, the planes dropping
the big bombs while we’re in the tunnels and it busts our eardrums and stuff,” and he’s
telling this story because he can’t get away from them because they’re so big. He’s
talking about the B-52s and he’s telling the story, sometimes it’s interesting. We went a
little bit further, not very far, and we got hit, and bullets were cracking there was a hedge,
elephant grass, long trench. We got in the trench and the trench was probably 5 feet
deep. We were using LRRP rations which was like old dry rice that had set in sulphur for
like 2 hours, you mix water with it. I had it in there for 2 hours walking with it on my
side to let it soften up a bit with little pieces of like guppy fish in a little cellophane
wrapper, like a sucker wrapper, for flavor in it in the rice so I put that in and I took an
opportunity while we were down in this to get some nourishment and I started eating my
LRRP rations and over the bank my friends were on the other side and telling me that I
should be on this side of the trench and I said, “If they come over I’m sitting here so I can
see them along here and I can have a chance to shoot them. If they come over and you’re
right on top of me you won’t have the chance.” So the guy came over the hill, over the
bankment, with one of his dead buddies that had been shot right between the eyes and he
had this buddy laying across his shoulder with the guy’s…the bridge of his back was on
the guy’s shoulder. He was flopping upside down, and he brought him over and he threw
him down next to me and my friends kind of…I don't know, I was being [?] with this
dead body laying next to me but this was something that I didn’t consider because I
needed the nourishment and we’d seen so many bodies and I caught a lot of flack from
my friends over this because I was being insensitive by eating next to a dead body, things
like that from a person that had not been hardened; you would have thought about it.
You didn’t’ do it to be funny, you didn't do it to be tough guy, but to a person who hadn't’
seen it and hadn't been exposed to it enough, then it was real vulnerable to have feelings
about it and stuff like that. During periods where we got out own people killed, to most
people that was something that effected us the most. The first dead Viet Cong I’d seen, I
took a stick and I looked through his insides to see what a person looked like. I didn’t do
it to be funny; curiosity, and it was like an animal in there, and I took the stick and I lifted
part of his stomach to see what’s the stomach of a person look like. I got called on by
one of my buddies when my friends got killed; my whole team would be wiped out.
There’s been times when my team commanders, my platoon leaders, higher ranking
NCOs would take a bottle and my friends would be crying and they would be very upset
and the medics would even come down and give them shots to calm the whole platoon
down. This is not something you see in the movies; this is reality, and I’ve been called
out by my supervisors to come up and talk to them and tell me, “You’ve got to do it; I
can’t.” “Well what about your boss? I’m not going to do it. You’re supposed to do that,
and he’s supposed to do it first.” “He’s worse off than I am. I’m asking you to do it.”
So, I’d look around at my friends – I’m not trying to inflate myself in any way, as a
matter of fact it was probably a big disadvantage to me as far as my reentry back into
society as a normal person – I went up and I would handle the bodies of my buddies and
look for the wounds and write a report on what it looked like, what he looked like before, all I knew about him, how he got killed, what I thought killed him, what round, how I thought the bullet went in him. We had to write that out. If the doctor could get a hold of somebody who knew this person he made them fill out this…

RF: This is when you were a team leader?

DR: Yeah. So, I would check the body out laying in a metal box, in the dark, with a flashlight, give me the key, a clipboard, and a flashlight. My buddy’s in that box; go in there and take a good look at him, look around a little bit, see if you could find any wounds. First, I want you to tell me what he looked like before, how old he was, where’s his family, where’d he live, everything you know; complexion, nationality, whatever. Then, I’d go in and do this and it was eerie knowing I’d just seen this guy a few hours before and considered him a friend or a good soldier or warrior, then here I am now doing a body search on him to find out the bullet hole that killed him and what I think did it and then I would go back and all my friends are just ripped, messed up in the head over their friends that they trained with in Malaysia. So, it wasn’t’ like a storybook movie that you see with everybody being gung-ho and very manly about the thing and I don’t’ think I was either but because the part that got to me was myself. It kind of scared me like, “What’s wrong with you? There’s got to be something wrong with you. You’ve changed. You’re not the same person that you were before. You were never a leader, you didn’t assume any leadership as a young man growing up. You were one of the guys; you never tried to be a big mouth in front of a crowd, but now all of a sudden you’re doing things that all these other people can’t do. Are you immune from it?” and I went out to be vain enough to say, “Hey, I’m tough,” and simplify it. I just think the fact is that I was fortunate enough to be able to take reality. I grew up on a farm as a kid and I’d seen dead animals and stuff and I knew what life and death was and I had seen that and that’s where I thought about it and I knew once it’s over it was over for an animal and I knew what a corpse, bodies looked like laying there, mammal, and I was able to associate this I think with the enemy. But, the first time they handed me an American when my chopper landed to pick up a body, the chopper pilot says, “I’m picking up a body, grab it,” as they hand it to you. I had a feeling of just chills that ran over my body when they handed me that bag and there was a difference and I think a person over
there…it was hard. A lot of people could not get the grasp of that the way I did and was
able to…even though I knew that I was going to have trouble going back to being the
person I was before and I honestly gave myself a test when they told me, “You’re going
home, you no longer have a team,” on my first tour, I thought, “Do I have a home? Is
there such a thing? I haven’t seen window glasses in a building in a long time. I haven’t
seen paved roads. Riding in this truck is the only thing I’ve ridden in and what would it
take to shock my conscious anymore which would make me an individual and a sensitive
individual which is a great part of my character and my personality and everything else
and I thought, “Well, I know my mother loves me, I know my brothers and sisters love
me, I can rationalize that. But, what would it take for me to show compassion because I
don’t know very much lately. If I found a dead person laying in the road, it could be a
woman with two little girls laying dead next to her, bleeding to death during an accident
in a car, would I…what would be my real feelings at this point?” I really asked myself
that question consciously or subconsciously and my answer was, “That’s too bad,” and
then the reality of that hit me and scared me, it scared me. That would be my response,
my honest response, is, “That’s too bad.” So I knew that I had problems as a result of
this, but these other guys, I don't know if they were just weaker in that area and had a
greater problem than I did coming back to the way they were before because they were
maybe more sensitive than I was and they just broke over it, or if I had just callused
myself and prepared myself better for this and did not know the way to get back to where
they were all the time. So, I think that was part of it because it took me a long time to get
compassion back for other people to be sensitive of their feelings. I had a good memory I
didn’t want to forget. Here a lot of people say, “I have a brother in law that was over
there and he won’t talk about it,” and you hear people say, “Well, the guys that really saw
stuff won’t talk about it,” and you have other people that sits back and says, “Well, I did
this, I did that, and I went in to get my men out and [?] wouldn’t let me,” and they get off
into this bizarre…I run across this and they’ll sit there and they’ll start talking to you and
they’ll start crying, “I tried to get my men out. I was special forces, I was this and that,”
and they use that word special forces so much, so many of them use it, and I don’t’ like
calling people liars because a guy that’s seen action over there has got some credit
coming. He’s not being applauded for it, but he has got some respect coming for not
being doubted for what he saw over through actually one just in the field and the rest of
them were supporting him, but some of the guys has gone overboard and they live it and
they believe it and I made a promise to myself, “I will not distort this. I will not get off
into to these lies and start believing that what happened happened,” and that’s probably
the reason I go into detail and all these guys were telling me, they were telling me, “Talk
to that guy, you’ve got to talk to that journalist, you got to I mean really talk to them
because you used to look at the facts and you remember the details and you’re not lying
because I know what you’re telling me…I forgot it until you were telling me and its
exactly what you say,” and God I’m trying to remember all the details of this. Well, to be
perfectly honest with you, I have a bubble in my brain. Now, you hear about all Vietnam
vets having a brain tumor. I’ve heard that, “Vietnam vets have brain tumors, oh yeah,
he’s a Vietnam vet, he’s got a brain tumor and he’s got PTSD.” Well, I was involved in a
car wreck in 1992 and I was having headaches and I went in for a catscan, no, it wasn’t a
catscan, it was an MRI and they found this…what’s it called, and arachnoid cyst. Its
where the brain lining gets a hole in it and the spinal fluid that surrounds your brain seeps
through the hole except for each one of those 3 linings of your brain. So, I’ve got a
bubble behind my left eye. Its not…some doctors call it a tumor. It’s not a tumor. Its
semi-solid. It has a nucleus, so that’s what causes it to be possibly a tumor or not a tumor
or whatever, but its got a nucleus which is fortunately classified as a tumor isn’t
necessarily a solid, its semi solid, but the treatment for these things, I don’t’ know where
I got it, I assume it was from the car wreck that I had in 1992. I got smacked in the head
pretty much. I forgot where I lived, I forgot my address, I forgot my telephone number, I
forgot all my friends telephone numbers, I would pass my house while driving home, I
would run red lights and stop signs, and I was still just pretty regular. I was forgetting a
lot of things, names and numbers, like now; I cannot tell you the month I came to
Vietnam, the month I got out. I can’t tell you a lot of stuff I would say the other day, I
won’t say day before yesterday. Sometimes I will say that and my wife will say, “That wasn’t’ yesterday, that was 5 days ago,” so I have trouble with those things; I don’t’
know if its because of the cyst, I don’t’ know where I got it, if I did get blown up by a
rocket, if I did get my intestines messed up. I’m not blaming this on Vietnam, but I’ve
always had a real good memory of things of the distant past with exceptional details; my
family’s told me about it, but this thing, I do have this bubble and I don't know if this has
affected this in any way or if it has caused me to remember more of the past, but I have
trouble with instructions; I have trouble with written or verbal instructions. I have a little
trouble with speech if you haven't noticed that as far as organizing stuff and keeping on
track of one subject; I would jump around, but this is a problem I’ve got and I’m having
to deal with it and I get embarrassed sometimes because I do screw up on something like
this and I know people see it and they know something is wrong. But its something I
deal with and its getting better, it’s getting better. The work I do, I deal with numbers a
lot and it helps me. I type a lot on the typewriter. I’m still fluent, but it helps me keep
my senses in tune. As far as my distant memory, it is excellent as far as most stuff goes,
but even myself, I have noticed a tendency with a lot of other vets; they will forget some
things totally, and talking to these guys there’s some things they should remember. I
have a perfect memory of the past, but I can tell you that when the 25th division lost the
biggest team, which you’ve heard a lot about. Mark Howard Jr., have you talked to him?
RF: No, I haven’t.
DR: You probably should talk to Mark Howard Jr. One of the greatest rewards I
have had out of this outfit was I went on Mark Howard Jr.’s dad’s wall on the internet.
You’ve seen those, where you can go to the person’s grave site and leave a message and
the family would come back to you; The friend of a guy that got killed, his name is Mark
Howard. The little story, real quick here, not to get too far off the track but I want to tell
you this one. Mark Howard graduated in class 4 right out of the school in Malaysia. He
came back to Vietnam, I bought his mosquito net, and I met him in Malaysia. I graduated
class 5. I came to the 25th division, he was there already. Mark Howard, Jr. he had a son
that was 6 months old and he said, “I’m a folk singer out of St. Louis. My son’s 6
months old, I never saw him.” I guess he never saw him, that’s what someone was telling
me, but he told me he had a 6 month old son. Mark got killed. He was killed with Coon,
Brady, and…Coon, Brady, Howard, and a guy by the name of Johnson. Johnson I totally
had never remembered him. I was there when that team, platoon, what happened…and I
heard it on the radio. I remember the guys as if it was yesterday. When they mentioned
Johnson I thought, “Johnson? There’s no Johnson there. Why did they say there was a
Johnson?” and I saw it on the website and every where Johnson was there which tells me
I don't [?] but Johnson was killed along with them; he was a team member and he was killed out there with them. I cannot remember what he looked like, I couldn't remember him at all. I had only been there for about a month, but I remembered all the rest and I remembered them well and I talked to Brady before he died. He knew he was dying the next day, swear to God. The guy approached me crying, ripped, standing outside the bar. When my lieutenant wanted to get that experience, he called Brady to go out with him. He had been out of the field, only had 20 days left. Brady was an adopted son of an old couple and an only child and he said, “I’m dying tomorrow, Roberts,” and he was crying outside the bar and he sat down on the bunkers and I said, “No, you’re not dying, man.” I knew in country, I had no experience. I had no way of comforting because I had no experience to base it on. “No, you’re not dying, man.” He said, “I’m dying tomorrow.” He said, “I thought I cheated fate.” He said, “I knew I was dying when I came over,” he said, “But I thought I cheated fate because they took me out of the field.” I looked at our Lieutenant Gibson, there’s the name again, I can’t remember it, a lieutenant, a large guy, was making me go out tomorrow to help teach him. He died all right. He went out the next day and died and I’ve always…this has always made me think about how he really knew; whether he really did or if it was just something that happened. He cried his eyes out and I didn’t tell anybody about it until our last meeting last year, we talked about it. Mark Howard, Jr.’s friend found me on the internet at the wall sight. He contacted me and told me, “You were in a friend of mine’s who was a assigned to one of the other guys in your units, I wonder if you might know him and know how he got killed and get some information from you because his kid doesn't know. He’s 32 years old and been in the Navy 8 years and I’m trying to help him find out about his dad because I was in the Army in Vietnam too and I’m trying to help my Navy friend,” and I said, “I would be glad to, and I have a picture of his dad playing the guitar with another friend of mine if he would like the picture,” and he said, “Yes.” I blew it up, I sent him a copy of it, and we talked on the email. I invited him to come to the reunion last year. The friend that found me as well as Mark Howard, Jr. came to the reunion last year and I got to meet him and it was at St. Louis where he had lived, the kid had lived and been raised. That’s’ where the father was from before he died and we went to his dad’s grave site in St. Louis together, he asked me to go, and about 4 or 5 of us, we went and found the grave site and took
some pictures and told him as much as I knew about his dad and how he died and he
wasn’t very sentimental about it because he never knew his dad, but he came and did a
little talk last year at our reunion and this year he came in last night and he’s a young guy
probably about your height, a little higher, taller maybe, kind of blondish-reddish hair and
he’s in the Navy. You’ll spot him when you see him out there, he’s not as old as the rest
of them, and he’ll be out there when you go so you might want to contact him, if it has
any value to you, and talk to him. That was rewarding to me. I was able to give him a
picture of his dad, I understand he only had 4. I gave it to the other guy and the other
guy…I blew it up, sent it to him. The other guy took it, blew it up again, and put it in a
frame and he keeps it on his wall. Another guy caught me on…wrote me on email, he
had a friend that got killed in Vietnam, some friends on the tracker team, and he don’t
remember their names. Their names, he said, “I don’t know why, I can’t remember any
of their names.” Now this is how certain things will just block out like a circuit breaker
goes off; it just blocks it totally. He didn’t remember, “I knew them well, they were good
friends, we were running for the same tree, and I know the guy ran for the tree and got hit
by a rocket in the back,” and he said, “If I had got to the tree first, it would have been
me,” and he said, “I don’t remember anything about their names,” and he says, “I don’t
know if you remember me or not, I was the scout dog handler,” and I wrote him back and
said, “I remember you. You came in, you brought the body in. You took your shirt off
and laid it on the ground on the sergeant, Sgt. Parish, located the enemy, and wasn’t able
to get back behind the infantry,” pull back like we were trained. Instead he ran for a tree
up front. The infantry laid out their march banner, called in air support, said they’re to
our front, to the north, whatever, chopper flew over, saw the banner, saw movement at
front, the first rocket I guess hit him in the back and blew him in half. “You took off
your shirt and you told me that you folded him in half and you put his head down next to
his feet on your shirt and you took one side and your friend took the other side, the guy
was with you that helped you, and the chopper realized what they’d done, [?] was also
there, he yelled for a medic, raised his arm, and another round hit and shrapnel went
under his arm, went through his heart, and killed him. So, they were both killed by
friendly fire. The chopper then landed and took the body of Sgt. Parish back to the Cu
Chi. You escorted the body and I remember meeting you and you were with a 38 scout
dog,” and he wrote me a letter back, “As I read this letter I sit here crying my eyes out
because only you would know the way I feel, knowing that this could have been me and I
saw him and everything and I had forgotten a lot of the details,” and I wrote [?] a letter
and I said, “This guy really wants to be part of this organization,” and I said, “I welcomed
him to come to the reunion even though he was a scout dog handler, and because he was
part of the trackers; he worked with us so much, and he saw the mutilation of one of our
team members and he assisted in moving the bodies so apparently his circuit breakers, his
own mind has spared him the details and I had helped him relive them which I did not
know that this is the…but I think we should give him a welcome to being part of it.” She
posted my letter along with an invitation, posted it so I could see it like, “What are you
doing here?” but she invited him.

RF: One more question to ask regarding your Vietnam experience and that was
on your return home, you did one tour over in Vietnam and you came back to the States
in…would it have been late ’68?

DR: Right.

RF: Oh, wait…

DR: Early ’68.

RF: Early ’68. Describe your return home and how you were greeted, how you
felt.

DR: I came home; I had visualized in my mind only things that I’d seen on TV of
the homecoming of World War II vets, all of the decorations and all this stuff and
being…but we came back one at a time, depending on the date we went over; we didn’t
have a homecoming like they did when the war was over. We came back one at a time
and that diluted our homecoming celebration because we came home one at a time.

When I came home, also, you know the ’60s movement was going on and the hippies and
all that stuff. When I was standing in line in San Francisco waiting to catch my plane
hop to go home I had been [?] and you had so many mixed feelings of people; some
sympathetic, some critical of the military and what we were doing over there, baby
killers; some of them really treated you great. Two hippies, a guy and a girl, they walked
up and they walked right in front of me on the airline and there was a long line of people;
they just walked up and took cuts right in front of me, they didn’t ask me, and there was
a lot of people behind me. I didn’t’ stop them; I didn’t’ care. I was so glad to be home.

There was times, like when I was over there, I would think during a battle, “If I’m alive
an hour from now, I will consider myself lucky,” and you know what? [?] able to see
daylight in the morning, I will gladly trade this position as far as the danger and fear that
is in me even though I handled it well and I never lost control, I was scared as everybody
else. There was times when I didn’t think I was going to live to see the next morning, but
I would think that I could go to the worst ghetto in the worst alley of the homeless and
prison, anywhere you could put me, and tell me I’m sleeping on the ground tonight and
you’d be willing to hug the guy next to you and say, “You’re American and you’re home
and this is my home,” and you think about these things when you’re up against death and
you come home and you just don’t’ want to hurt anybody or nothing; you’re just glad to
be home, even though I went back. I was hooked on adrenaline and I didn't know it; I
didn’t’ know what it was. We didn’t have PTSD at that time. There was no such word.

It came later, years later. I stood there in that line and let the hippies take a cut and I
became very aware that the people behind me were upset over it and I looked at them and
they looked at me, “This is disgusting. I wonder how he’s feeling with these people.
They just took cuts in front of him and here he is in uniform, probably coming back from
Vietnam. These sloppy hippies!” and I turned so that I wouldn’t have to face the people
behind me that was giving me these looks. I went home, but I remembered that. They
just boldly took my place; they got in front of me. But, I came home. I found my family
had been [?] head of the household because I assumed that position, the next to the oldest
brother, and I had more or less kept my family in check, my brothers and sisters younger
and they kind of got out of hand and doping and stuff and using drugs and had been
arrested for robbery and all this stuff, my younger brothers. I was kind of confused over
it, and I remember my sister’s kids were babies when I went over and I remember picking
up my sister’s kids, a little boy, and I laid down with him on my chest and I actually went
to sleep with him laying on my chest and I thought…I woke up and 2 or 3 of my family
members standing there watching me and because these are people that I loved and I was
getting feelings back towards love and all that kind of stuff, compassion, whatever. I still
have one form of it anyway from that because I was really attracted to little kids, little
kids. Even in Vietnam the little girl especially I just felt so bad over it, you know? You
get these mixed feelings, here you tend to be their friends and you turn around and kill them. We go on...I’m getting off subject. Going back home, I came home. I wasn’t satisfied with the way my family was acting. I had seen an Indian buddy of mine over there get in a fight with the one that got shot under the arm. He hit Sgt. Parish in the back of the head the night before as he was walking into the room. The other Indian, the one that died, grabbed him, took him outside, and said, “I’m ashamed to be called an Indian the way you’re acting,” and he had been here a long time, the guy had, and the other one was a new guy. The next day both the sergeant that got hit in the head and the Indian that called him outside got killed. The night came. I finally got everybody in bed after I identified the bodies. Everybody had had shots, put them down, I got them to go to bed and turn the lights off, quit reliving it, and I saw the light come on at the Indian’s bed and everybody was laying in bed and I could hear him sniffling in the barracks. He turned his light off and he walked down the barracks and he sat on my bed, leaned up against my mosquito net that covered my bed, he leaned into it and he said, “Roberts, I feel bad,” and I said, “About what you...” he said, “I got into a fight with Sgt. Parish last night and the chief. I hit Sgt. Parish in the back of the head and me and chief got into and didn’t get a chance to say I’m sorry.” I said, “Well, chief, we’re all in a position here where we’ve got to face life and death and we all face it, every one of us, and its taking its toll on us and if you get to the point of where you let it affect you so much that you do something like that to somebody else, you are throwing your burden at them and you’re compounding theirs,” and I said, “I forgive you,” and he said, “You can’t forgive me because Indians feel bad when they do something like this,” and I said, “You don’t’ feel bad if you’re an Indian chief, you feel bad if you’re anybody and you do this and you don’t get a chance to clear it,” and I said, “But you know, you’ve got to get on with your life. We’ve got a war to fight here,” and I said, “You’re not going to just forget it and go on, but don’t...let it be a lesson not to lean on other people because they’re hurt just as bad as you are and they have the same feelings that you got,” and I said, “But if Sgt. Parish or chief were either one here right now, I have no doubt that they would forgive you for what you did,” and I said, “So I have taken responsibility for forgiving you for them.” I said, “I forgive you for what they did,” and he said, “You can’t do that,” and I said, “I did, I just did, and that’s why I’m taking responsibility for it. I forgive you for
them. Just remember it in the future, don’t do it again. You’re hurting the person next to
you.” I said, “Don’t worry about it, put it behind you. Its over, its over, you're forgiven.”
He was sitting there crying and I heard the whole barracks just about and the sniffing
really began, you know, but they were all laying there, and the things that they were
thinking, in their conscious. In their conscious they were really reliving this thing and
sorting out what had just taken place and the fact that they had lost a buddy and odds
were very great that the next one could be you because we were small in number and my
team made it through without any scratches on their body. Nobody got injured, nobody
ever got killed. There was…we were out on many, many, many successful missions. I
do not attribute that to my being the greatest person in the world, either. I'm not saying
that I was lucky. I would like to think that part of it was my training that I received at
BJWS because I did it the best I could with the modified version and it was during the era
that I was there that the 25th division came into focus with the way that we were really
going to be active. It wasn’t for the fact that we were in an area; we were in a very
active area. We were very active units. We went out constantly. It wasn’t’ because we
were in the worst area of Vietnam necessarily or that we were the poorest trained,
sloppiest troops out there and didn’t get killed, either, even though we had the greatest
number of casualties over there in our unit. Our unit was the worst because of we had
more action, maybe I can’t say it was contributed to either one of those things totally. It
was a combination of things. But, I like to think that it was partially not only me but the
way we thought and each time we would go out we weren’t beyond…we were so macho
that we would not say, “Hey, look, I’m the team commander, and we’re going out there.
This is a very special mission. I want you all to be aware of what we’re getting ready to
do is very, very dangerous. They made contact yesterday they went out there with a
patrol, they made contact with an ambush patrol last night out there, and they went and
made contact this morning. Now, they want us to go out there and establish a track; we
can’t deny it because there’s tracks out there from the enemy to hit them and they want us
to go track them before they head further. We know we’re going to hit them, too, its just
a matter of where, if they’re there, and they only went out like 50 yards at the most of any
of the 3 patrols. So, within the next hour you’re going to possibly be facing being blown
to bits and I want you to think about it right now before we hit that trail because I want
you to think of me as having my legs blown off, my arms, or my head blown off; I want you to see it and I want you to visualize it so that when it happens, if it happens, and the same thing with you if you have it happen. I can promise you I will not leave you if there’s any way possible that I can keep from leaving you without committing suicide,” I said, “But I will not commit suicide for you and you better not for me. If you do, if you leave me and don’t try to save me, I’m going to come looking for you and you being in the Army ain’t going to stop me, so as friends, I want you to all make that pact with each other and visualize the very worst and don’t’ you panic when you see it. Visualize it now and how you’re going to deal with it before you get there. I will go over this before we hit it, before we hit it. Don’t’ try to stop them from seeing things that would possibly effect them if they were out there [?] don’t’ go out there and don’t’ do that, don’t’ do that, because its still there. They just blew up a bunch of Americans and body parts laying everywhere, they need somebody to go and pick up the pieces and pile them up, you don't need that; don’t’ do that.” We had an objective and I didn’t’ want them to be distorted by that. We had line guys out here that had very little training and they would do it, okay? I didn’t want my team…I didn’t want them to be effected by stuff like that. I came home, so [?]. I came home. I would go to my friends and say, “Let’s go do something about it!” “Oh man, I think I’ll stay home and watch television,” and I would get mad, “Why? What the hell are you doing staying home? Let’s go someplace. Are you stupid? Come on, let’s go! Do something!” and I didn’t realize I was hooked on adrenaline. I needed that suspense, I needed that action. I tried to join the LAPD, scored a 95, but because when I came home I had ulcer craters that had healed and I admitted it on the disclosure, they refused to hire me because they said I was a potential stress case and I would not be effective because of high stress and I would probably wind up having to retire from the state or from the LAPD so I didn’t get hired. I worked for the State of California prison system as a guard at the time. I was making good money and we were full time peace officers and I worked on that position. The first day on the job – now this is after I got out which is actually 2 years after my first tour – I went straight from the Vietnam murder or slaughter position into a prison where a man was killed during my orientation probably 200 feet from me. He was stabbed to death by 2 other Mexicans and I had to go out and drive stakes in the ground where the blood went, and a captain that came in
from the police department to investigate it said, “Give these rookies some rags and let
them wipe up the blood; they need the experience,” and I remember the animosity that I
had toward that captain, looking at him thinking, “I’ve seen more blood shed, I’ve seen
more violence than you will ever see in your entire life. You’re a slob. You’re a
disgrace, and you’re a very offensive…” and I remember thinking about how I resented
this guy for making that remark. I tried to go to college; my concentration was bad. I
took police science because I wanted action. I sat in the classroom. I was very critical of
the cops and their war stories of how, “I busted down a door and put my knees in a
bitches belly when she was sitting in a bathtub fixing…” and all that stuff, you know,
“And I caught her trying to flush and I stuck her head in it,” and I’m sitting there
thinking, “Yeah, if I got up front of this coon, M-16, and tore up that blackboard for you,
you would have…or an M-60, you’d probably run and stick your head under a doggoned
[?] someplace, you know?” I remember being very critical like that thinking of these
guys. I sat in the back and I watched and I’m getting critical of even the cops, they
became disrespectful of the cops and the whole purpose that I wanted to be a cop was to
be a cop and I’m hearing this stuff so I had some mixed feelings on it. I got shot on
Christmas Eve of 1969, the first year, out of ‘Nam, by a dope dealer on the streets just
because I gave him a ride and he lost his dope and so many people using it those days I
was hitting the bars and he thought I stole his dope and he shot me. He was trying to
shoot me in the heart. I took my right elbow and blocked it, and it caught me in the right
either. Then the police force wanted to know what happened and I told them he thought
I ripped him off for his dope so then they asked me what I did it for and started accusing
me of ripping him off for his dope so I became very angry towards dope dealers, very
angry towards the…I was going to kill the guy that shot me. I really thought about it and
justified that he was a worse enemy to me that any Viet Cong could have ever been and
that I would be justified in killing him. That was before I started working at the prison
system. Then I ran across the same man in prison while sitting on the gun tower and
thinking about what would happen if I shot him. I didn’t; I had the man transferred to
another outfit. I found out he shot another guy the day after he shot me for no apparent
reason and every time he would come to the prison in the next 15 years I’d send him to
San Quentin. I would be contacted; I had a flag on him and they would send him off to
another prison. But, the 5 months of the crossover from there in ‘Nam and the prison
system, being in several riots, seen several murders, mainly by the Mexican mafia. I
went through this for 15 years and it got to the point where I began to have trouble
sleeping. I had to. I’ve been married 3 times. My first marriage I was so gung-ho on
getting an education with my GI bill. I didn’t want to get a family but I wound up having
one anyway and getting married, but I warned my wife that I was going to get an
education. I went to school, got 3 years of college. I had to drop out a lot of times and I
lost a lot of credits because of it because of my shift changes at the prison system. I
burned my GI bill up after 3 years of college because I would switch shifts so many
times. My marriage, I became very, very controlling. Here I was a person that went to
Vietnam, an average Joe, was not a leader. I assumed a leader position in Vietnam and
was made one. I was responsible for people’s lives. I made decisions that cost them their
lives. I made decisions that saved lives, I know that, and as a result of it I’ve kind of
sorted out to this and I’ve had guilt feelings over this, but logic tells me that it wasn’t my
fault. I…this adrenaline problem didn’t go away. I had a lot of anxiety. I tried to
control my family and my wife with arguing with me over any subject. I would turn very
angry, “Don’t argue with me!” It was like, “I am the final decision; don’t’ you even
argue with me,” and this all came behind my association with my team members and
seeing that Indian argue, that fight with the other one and he died the next day before he
had a chance to say, “I’m sorry,” and here you’re arguing with me over petty stuff that
shouldn’t even be considered as an argument and you want to argue over anything?
Things that maybe sounded important to her…but to me it wasn’t’ even a matter to be
considered and for the fact that they wanted to argue I became very, very, very hostile;
right in the face, “Don’t you argue with me!” you know. It was like I am the authority.
Now, I’m not that way now. I’m not that way now. I was that way for years. I went
through 2 divorces. I had 2 kids with each divorce. Child support went along with it,
high child support, more stress. I became angry towards the department of corrections
because of my…I would stand up for things that I believed in and tell supervisors,
“You’re wrong. You’re not being fair.” Fairness became such an obsession for me. I
thought I had it coming with fairness and I thought I had fairness coming and everything
had to be based on merits and fairness but working for law enforcement everything is not
based on fairness, its based on the law and rules by laws that the organization worked for. I tried to insist on it. I'd push you to the point and I'd tell them the way I felt about them and then their abilities as supervisors, “You’re not a supervisor,” or “You’re not a leader, you’re a supervisor.” I’ve seen more of it…I’ve seen better leaders, a lot better leaders, than you are because a leader is fair, a supervisor isn't and you're a supervisor and I know what it takes to be a leader. I don’t respect you as a person or a man, I don’t respect you as a supervisor, and now I’ll never promote so now you know the way I feel about you. I respected you before; I don’t now,” and these people promoted the high ranking people all the way. I became a counselor, I’ve acted as a counselor for years, but they wouldn’t promote me into leadership positions. I would see somebody railroading a convict, create a disturbance with him, making him become hostile and then they would write him up and I would walk in behind him and say, “If you write him up, I’m going to testify against it because he provoked it.” and the supervisor would look at me, “You’re not trustworthy. You won’t stand behind a person. You’re not trustworthy,” and that came into conflict with, “Should I be this way? You’re in law enforcement, you’re supposed to stand behind a uniform, badge, but you’re standing behind a convict and what does this do to the convict? It’s not right. You’ve got administration, you’ve got expectations, and you got your own values and they’re all coming into conflict.” I had a little heart problem. I retired; stress, heart related because [?] the heart [?] peace officer for the State of California, any heart problems assumed to be work related so they had to give you a choice of a waver or retiring. Now the heart, [?] has to be a reason for the heart so we have to put down stress on every case of the heart because of the stress and tension of a stressful job. I don't want stress. I tried to stay away from this. I did not want that label, stress. It doesn’t give an explanation what the stress was about, it just says, “Stress,” and I did not want that, but I retired from the state and I’d already accepted retirement and here I was signing the papers. I became angry over that. I couldn’t use my GI bill anymore because I was law enforcement and now I’ve got a stress related retirement but they retired me with half my pay for the rest of my life and my family’s insurance, medical and dental, and I went out and became a contractor in the state of Michigan. I left California and moved where my wife lives presently and I didn’t want to get married again. I went 12 years without getting married; we lived together for 12 years and now
we’ve been together for about 18 years and our kids are grown up. I paid high child
support on both kids, a lot of problems with custody, visitation problems all the way
through. I was spending 1,000 dollars a month for 2 kids at one point. The more money
you make, the more they would get and everything seemed to just pile up and get worse
and worse. Even though when I first came home from ‘Nam the first time I had 45 days
leave and the first time it started effecting me of the adrenaline shock, I was home 15
days, couldn’t take it anymore, and checked into Fort Gordon, Georgia because I had 45
days vacation and I couldn’t handle it. I had to get on to something else and hope that
something there was more exciting. I stayed there 9 months and I wasn’t able to handle
it. I had such a bad case of adrenaline addiction I had to go back to ‘Nam. I went back to
‘Nam. I was miserable all the time I was back in Georgia. I put the first school through,
I went back to ‘Nam, and I was okay for my second tour. I got out, I faced the same
thing again and I’ve been living with it every since and it got to the point of where I
finally couldn’t sleep at night; I was up all hours of the night, I couldn’t sleep. I would
sit down and write myself letters while my family was sleeping. My wife would get up
and say, “What are you doing? How long have you been up?” “All night sitting in here.”
I don’t’ know my heart’s thumping real hard. I wake up with my heartbeat having
combat dreams mixed with the prisoners, mixed, and people being killed, people being
thrown over the tier, people in the jungle and their prisoners are killing the Viet Cong but
they were bleeding together and I finally, after years and years, I refused to be put on any
medication. Anybody who had problems with PTSD when it started coming out, it was
disgraceful. I knocked it. I criticized crybabies that ran around here, “I got this, I’ve got
that.” I didn’t know I had it myself. I didn’t know I had it myself. I didn’t know what it
was. Finally I realized that I had it and after working all those years with the Department
of Corrections in a peace officer position you didn’t want to admit it or face it. I admit I
was miserable and it just effected my life a lot. I can’t deal with…I’m not as flexible as I
should have been. I’ve learned to deal with other people. I’m not quite as rigid about,
“Don’t argue with me!” I have taken a stern role with my kids. I have a good
relationship with 1 of my 4 kids and I’m getting another one, one of my other ones, we’re
getting a good relationship; 3 daughters and a son. One of my sons and one of my
daughters, we don’t’ talk. My daughter and my other son, we talk occasionally. I guess
he felt he was being raised in my shadow, joined the Army while he was a senior getting ready to graduate, and the Gulf War was going on. He joined the Army to go to the Gulf War, went to the Gulf War, was in on the invasion, drove a fuel truck, was there for a heartbeat, came home, and had a problem. I recognized it. He wouldn’t talk, he would sit and watch people in the crowd at the family reunion. The family would say, “What’s wrong with him? He’s not acting right.” I tried to talk to him about it and he came off on me, accused me of putting my war better than his or something. I was trying to explain to him, “I don’t’ want any kind of association with this and I’m not trying to…what’s mine is yours and yours is better than mine,” and people have always said that the Gulf War was nothing and he had heard it so many times from other people and he tried to say this was the same thing and I tried to tell him, “I’m trying to help you because I know the way you’re acting and I’ve been there myself and I denied that I had it. I was in denial and you need to get back to reality as soon as possible,” and he said, “Yeah, you haven’t seen what I’ve seen.” I said, “Oh, I’ve seen what you’ve seen and I’ve seen it for a lot longer than you have and it effected me a lot longer, probably, than it will you,” and it got to the point where he was up in my face and started on me as a father and I think it resulted as a result of me being associated with this war so much and it was such a big part of my life that everything that I did was associated with it; the leadership or expectations of my son, because he was a man and someday he may have to be in the same position I was in. I did not want him to be one to sit back and have somebody tell him what to do. I did not want to accept that because I saw so many bad decisions. I assumed the leadership position and I wanted him to be able to be able to function as I did if it ever happened and I expected more out of boys than I did girls. I married my third wife, a woman with two kids, two boys, and I’m so disgusted with her the way they were raised, the way they acted while they were being raised. The way they acted when they were big caused their lack of manhood for not [?] and being straightforward and little things I considered cowardly. I placed so many expectations on them, not working, being lazy, and coming straightforward at them over this but you look back and over the whole picture I have to say this has destroyed my family life. I don’t’ think I…on paper it looks good. Expectations, you know; everybody had these expectations, you know. But, they’re looking at this guy here that says, “Hey, you got to do something with your life. You
haven’t done nothing in the last 6 months. Now, you’re not going to live at my house and
you’re not going to not work, draw unemployment, and screw around with your buddies
eyery night. Times have changed, I know that, and I will let you live here as long as you
 want to in my house as long as you are going forward in life, but I will not let you use my
house as a crutch for your laziness,” and this is the way I approach him, “And as long as
you’re working and you’re doing something that will help you and…I mean, I don’t
mean go out here and wait tables. If you’re doing something educational that will work
toward your future and work, it has to include both; not just working out here waiting
tables in an area where its all tourists. You’re never getting anywhere like that. You’re
going to have to go to school or you’re going to have to take some kind of training.
You’re going to have to do something,” and I boot him out of my house and they never
want to talk to me anymore. Neither one of my stepsons ever wants to talk to me and my
wife, I justified to her what’s going on. We can’t tolerate it. So, my 2 stepsons I have no
relations with at all. I let them come home and they would steal from me and even try to
steal jobs when I was a contractor and give them to his friends and go out and help their
friends do it, and I felt this was very rude, very unethical, and especially for your family,
to do something like that for your family, and I justified it to my wife that I won’t tolerate
it but it punishes her too. They won’t contact her. So, this has affected my wife. I feel
sorry for her over it. I’ve got a son that has nothing to do with that and he and I have
very little contact because all he wants to do is borrow money. He don’t want any help
but…he wants people to help them but he wants to be able to do it himself. He don’t
want you to know where the money went that he wants to borrow from you. If he wants
to borrow it, it’s none of your business and he never pays you back and he only calls you
when he wants more. These are things that I can’t stand. He’ll come up and hug me and
try to sugar coat me, “You’re trying to pull the wool over my eyes. If you’re going to
hug me, mean it. Get your hands off me.” I tell my wife to, “Get your hands off me. I
know what your game is. You’re getting ready to pull some shit and I know if you love
me, you’ll come up and tell me you love me and mean it. Don’t come up and put your
arm around me every time you’re getting ready to try to pull some shit on me,” and [?] by
pushing him back and it just causes the anger or should I go ahead and let him continue to
pull this and let nature take its course? Maybe that’s the wrong approach. Maybe I think
it has a lot to do with this and being all tied into my heart or approached to expectations
of a young man that may wind up getting caught in the same thing I got caught in and his
life may depend on his ability to deal with it and [?].

RF: Going back to the trackers themselves, is there anything that you would want
to add to kind of put this into…

DR: Perspective?

RF: Closing things, yeah, I mean, if you can put it into perspective.

DR: I believe that being a tracker was very good for me. I wouldn’t have wanted
it any other way. I believe that what we did, we should feel more gratification than we do
as individuals for what we did because all of us weren’t aware of what we were actually
accomplishing. We knew we were trackers and we knew the concept of the tracking, but
we did not know what went on with that information and therefore we didn’t’ give
ourselves credit for it, and I think they all should know that these times they were being
pulled off missions right in the middle of a track and disgust, discouraged, and times that
they thought that they were just blowing a track, it wasn’t’ that. It was done for a reason
and the unit we were following had made the decision to pull off. It wasn’t’ cowards.
They were told at a certain point. So, we accomplished a lot that we weren’t aware of
that we accomplished. That’s one thing at the end of the war in the overall picture.

There was flaws in the people just like there was any other outfit, big mistakes made; that
was due to personal people. That wasn’t’ due to the program itself. I think that it was
good that we were able to come in on nights that we wouldn’t have been able to do if we
would have been working in an infantry or something. I think its good that what has
come out of this now, everybody’s getting together, at least the ones that have got
together, they do feel a comradery. They do feel a sense of belonging and even my wife
that found this website with this information on it feels like she has given me something -
and she has – that nobody else could have given me. She located this website, she found
my friends, she talked while I was working away the winter on an island, Mackinan
Island, Michigan, working on the Grand Hotel, long hours living on the island, she was at
home clicking on the website and found this letter where this website existed and she
made contact. I have found my friends out here. I have talked to them about things,
Mark Howard, Jr. for instance has been able to find us. He knows what happened to his
dad now. The guy that called me and wanted to know Billy Joe Parish’s name and
Rodney [?] name and he became involved in this and he opened his own website for
people in his unit now and I think that was gratifying. Johnson’s brother’s wife emailed
me. I have dealt with her and told her what took place to the best of my knowledge and
she has decided not to pass it on to her husband because he has a hard time with his
brother’s death and even though he is a professor in a college he has had a problem with
it and she has decided not to pass the information on. She found it very depressing. Now
everybody has been able to take this information. Billy Joe Parish’s wife was on her
deathbed and she may still be. Billy Joe Parish’s nephew contacted me and wanted to
know what took place with Billy Joe so he could tell his aunt who was dying. His aunt
came back to him and told him this is the third story she has heard and was not even near
what she was told about what happened out there. The story was totally different, but she
got the final story on what took place. We’ve taken different walks of life. Various
trackers are not coming forth for various reasons. One lost his hand in a machine
accident since he got out and he has problems with that. His wife is overweight, he’s
overweight, he’s bald headed; all these reasons for not coming to the deal. Another one
hit the lottery in the state he lives in. He had 3 sons and put them through college. He
lost 2 of his kids during the last year and rented a hotel room but never made it. Others,
their wives were gung-ho on the deal. I’ll tell my husband when he gets home. We’re
interested, we will be there. No, we’re not coming, and for various reasons. Each person
has their own reason. Maybe, “I don’t’ want them to see me like this. I want to be
remembered the way I was. I don't want this clouding up my memory. I’m going to put
it behind me. I don’t’ even want to think about it anymore.” I talk about it because I
wanted everybody to know the truth of what really took place; anywhere from the
cannibalism, for ritualistic reasons or whatever, these people aren’t all Christians that are
coming over here. They’re people that have lived a different life than we are. They have
different expectations out of life and they’re coming to our country and we’re going to
have to accept that but don’t just believe that they’re just poor individuals that never had
a chance because when I was in the prison one of my prisoners was a Viet Cong, boasted
of it. He got on the plane with us. He got on the plane with us because he had some
gold, and I know the story; if they brought gold back with him, then they were able to get
on the plane. They’d send them in Fort Knox and give them little red wagons to haul their little gold around in and they could turn it in once a week for cash and they pulled their own guard duty in their own bed areas and a friend of mine drove the armored car back and forth to Fort Knox every week and if they brought gold, then they were able to get out. They were just a bunch of people looking for better opportunity and life that came over here and it doesn’t mean that everyone that came was the person that most citizens out there think they were and they didn’t get here for the reason that they were on our side and helping us or working in the embassy or something like this which we were all told. The fact is they’re here and we’re going to have to live with it.

RF: Well is there anything else you would like to add?

DR: No.

RF: Well why don’t we conclude it there? This will be the end of the oral history with Dewitt Roberts. I thank you.

DR: You’re welcome.