Steve Maxner: This is Steve Maxner conducting an interview with Mr. Anthony Goodrich on the 11th of April 2002 at approximately 11:10 AM. We are in the Vietnam Archives Special Collections Library interview room. This interview is part of the Vietnam Archive oral history project. Sir, why don’t we go ahead and begin with a discussion of your early life, and if you would just tell me when and where you were born and where you grew up.

Anthony Goodrich: Okay, I was born December 8, 1949 in Ogden, Utah. My father was a career Air Force enlisted man, NCO; he was stationed in Hiller Air Force base in Ogden in 1945. Traveled around the world when I was growing up, I guess I was in Ogden for about six months, the Korean War happened and I guess it started in the summer of ’50. My father got sent to Japan, we followed him, Musawa, Japan, Musawa Air Force base. He was a 1st Sergeant of an air rescue squadron, after the war came back to Clovis, New Mexico where my younger brother Kevin was born, that was 1954. We went to Clovis, we went to Greenville, South Carolina, Donaldson Air Force base, and that’s where I went to, let’s see, I must have started school there. That would be 1955. I think I was in Kindergarten and 1st grade. I went through one year of Catholic school, then, did not do well with the nuns. My father, he had to come and get me quite often there because I was just not very, I don’t know, the nuns and I just didn’t get a long well. 1956, my father got stationed in France, a place called Chatteru, he was the 1st Sergeant
of, and I think a maintenance squadron there. We followed him over about six months after he got there, in 1956. We stayed there until ’59, came back to Biloxi, Mississippi, Keesler Air Force base. My dad was the 1st Sergeant of a training squadron there. I was going to school of course, all this time. In Mississippi, that's where I started, I guess, my last two years of grade school, and first year of junior high which would be the seventh grade. 1962, went back to Europe, back to France, Roan Air Force base, my dad was the 1st Sergeant of an air police squadron. Roan was an F-101; I think they were F-101 reconnaissance aircraft. That was in the, let’s see, 1962, Cuban Missile Crisis happened that year, for that, I remember my dad coming home with a helmet on and a 45 and said, we might be going to war, and we didn’t go to school for several days, and I thought that was exciting. I don’t think I was ever afraid, so that was pretty fun. Then in ’63 JFK was assassinated and it’s one of those days in your life, where I remember exactly where I was at; I was getting ready to go see a movie, it was, I guess, I don’t know how much what the time difference was between Dallas and there, whenever that happening, it was just a real horrible thing I thought. I was in seventh grade, no, it must have been eighth grade. 1965, when I was a junior in high school we came to Albuquerque, my dad was assigned to one of the squadrons at Kirtland Air Force base. I graduated from high school in 1967, Iden high school. We lived in base housing when I was growing up. I had a great childhood, got to travel, got to learn how to speak lang –I could speak French and Japanese, and all kinds of, I just had a great time growing up. I got to see other cultures, I think that really helped me before I went to Vietnam, also helped me go to Vietnamese language school too, but that’ll be later. Graduated from high school in ’67, my dad was, I guess you probably should know, my dad’s pretty strict, pretty disciplinarian. There was, I had an older brother and a younger brother, so there were three boys and I was in the middle, and my dad and I are always kind of pounding heads, you know, as I was growing up. I went to University of New Mexico, ’67-68, probably had the lowest grade point average there, or at least tied for it. 1968, right after LBJ announced he wasn’t going to run again, I guess it was in the end of March, I was 18, and I ran into a friend of mine, very strange, a fried of mine I knew in Europe and I haven’t seen him in five years. I found out his father had been shot down, he was an MIA, I don’t’ know if they recovered him. He was an Air Force pilot and in May of ’68 we had
both flunked out of UN basically, so we went down to the recruiter to see, we were going
to talk to all the recruiters, the Air Force, the Navy, and the Marines. We get down to the
recruiting office, and the Marines were the only ones that didn’t have anybody sitting in
their waiting room. True story, so we went in there to talk to this Staff Sergeant
Valentine, we walked out of there with three year enlistments, and he was a great guy,
probably the nicest staff that you ever knew. He told us, you guys have a year of college,
we’ll send you to a good school. So, of course, I’m going, yes. I guess I joined the
Marines, that was probably the main reason we went down there, there was nobody there.
I think I joined the Marines too, because I always wanted to show my dad up, show him I
was a man and I didn’t want to go into the Air Force, I wasn’t going to go into the same
service that he was in. I just didn’t see that as being a way for me to show him that I
could be as tough as he was. I liked the uniforms and I watched all the John Wayne
movies and I always that was kind of, you know, they were tough, they were good, so
there were several reasons I guess, why I went in, 120 day delay plan. Joined in May,
went to boot camp in September of ’68, September 3, 1968, San Diego, Marine Corps
recruit depot.

SM: Before we talk about boot camp, let me go ahead and ask a few more
clarifying questions about your earlier experiences. You mentioned going to that
Catholic school, I was wondering, were you raised Catholic?

AG: Yes.

SM: How much did that have, as far as an influence on you, concerning war at
all, if at all?

AG: I don’t think there was any influence there at all. I mean, I did the whole, I
did my first communion and I did confirmation and I was an altar boy for a while, I don’t
think that had any influence on my outlook on war. I always thought war was kind of
neat, I mean, my dad used to tell me war stories about World War II, he fought in the
Pacific, with the Army Air Corps. He was one of the first units to go in 1942, I think
January ’42 was when they got on ships to go to Australia, and he told me some great
stories. I thought they were funny, I thought it was just a, it would be a fun thing to do,
and of course, the movies that I saw growing up, the war movies were very, they glorified
it very much. They looked like the way you become a man, the way that you become a
real American was you go to war. I think that influenced me, my dad's stories and I think
seeing movies I think influenced me, but I'm not sure that my faith did.

SM: Well, did you have other relatives that served in World War II as well?
AG: Yes, actually. My dad was an only child so on my mom’s side of the
family, she had five sisters and all of their husbands, all of my uncles served in World
War II, all of them, and if I remember right they all served in the Pacific, either in the
Navy of the Air Force, I don’t think anybody was in the Marines, or the Air Corps I guess
it was called, so there were five uncles in my family that served in World War II.

SM: Would they talk much about their experiences?
AG: Not too much. I really didn’t see them much when I was growing up
because we moved around so much, but when I did see them, no, they never talked about
it.

SM: You mentioned that you lived in base housing, did you also go to military
base schools, or did you go to the?
AG: Yes, went to the base schools. When I lived in Europe we went to a, I think
both times, we went to half a day of U.S. dependent school, we had French kids go to
school with us, and then in the afternoon we’d go to the French schools and the American
kids would go to half a day in French school, out of the economy they called it, and that’s
where I learned how to speak French.

SM: You said you also learned some Japanese, was that from your earlier
experience there?
AG: Yes, well actually I was very young in Japan and I remember, to this day I
can sing, I can sing, what do you call them, where you’re a kid and your mom is singing
to you in the crib, I can still remember those songs. It’s very strange, I mean my mom
and I start singing Mushi, Mushi, Wo Da Ne, and this kind of thing, I go, “God how can I
remember that mom?” She goes, “Well I used to sing that to you when you were in the
crib.” It’s very, it’s weird, weird, weird, because I was only, I don’t know, a year to three
years, one your to four years old, and I still remember some of the Japanese. I remember
how they answered the phone. We had a Japanese, like a nanny that came in and took
care of us, and she used to talk to us also.
SM: Now, moving around so much, did that strengthen your relationship with your brothers?

AG: I think so, yes, I think I did. I always looked forward to moving. I knew we were going to move every three years. I thought it was exciting, we got to, second time we went to Europe we got to go on the S.S. United States, a steamship, it was great. I got to make new friends everywhere I went to and just new experiences, new schools. I think that my school experiences in the military, dependent schools were excellent. We had great teachers. I feel very lucky to have; I mean they were very good. I learned how to read and write at a pretty young age, and I just was, I think my education was enhanced because of their skills and their abilities to teach well.

SM: You mentioned the Cuban Missile Crisis, and obviously that had an impact on you, and your memory, what do you remember about what was actually happening? Do you remember much at all, as far as the specifics of?

AG: Well, I remember my dad came home, we were, the only media was radio, Armed Forces radio, didn’t have any TV, and remember, we listed to the President talk about they had photos of missile sites in Cuba, and he gave them so much time to get out of there, we read, I remember the blockade, they put a blockade on, and I remember we were, my mom was scared to death, my dad was his usual stoic self and we got to stay out of school for a couple of weeks, I mean, that was fine with me. But I remember listening to the radio quite often to see what was going on, and since we were in Europe, they thought that we would be, my dad was saying, well we might be the first ones to have to go to war, because the Russian might come across the German border, or, I remember my dad telling us that we had to be prepared for, and I don’t know how much I listened to him, except I do remember him telling us we need to be prepared if something happens, for us to. I’m not even sure, I think there were places we could go on the base where they had shelters or something like that, because we used to have nuclear drills, you know, the duck and cover, and then a couple of times they took us to these places on the base that had food and water stored. We did that a couple of times; I always thought that was fun.

SM: Where in Europe were you again?
AG: In France, twice in France, a place called Chatteru in the middle of France, and then a place called Rouen, which is up north, about seventy miles north of Paris.

SM: Any other memories of drills, you mentioned duck and cover drills, I guess, evacuation drills to shelters, anything else?

AG: I guess, I’m a history major; I’ve got a history major too. I liked living in Europe and studying World War I, because we went to Verdun, we went to, we got to go the battle sites. We went to Normandy to see where the Americans came on shore on June 6, ’44, and I think that’s probably where I started. I love history, and being there to where you could actually go to these places, and Europe’s very old, we used to go to Paris and go to Versailles and I think that was, I really enjoyed that part of school because of the field trips we used to take in Europe, up to Belgium, we went to Germany. We did lots of field trips, you know three and four day field trips around northern part of France and southern Belgium, stuff, I just had a great, that’s probably why I became a history major, and I like to read history, so I thought that was exciting and I thought that was fun.

SM: And these were school field trips, took you around?

AG: Yes, school field trips, sure.

SM: Wow. How about family outings?

AG: Once a year we traveled. We went to Spain one year, we went to Italy one year, Germany a couple of times. I had an aunt that was a colonel in the Air Force and she was stationed in Europe the same time we were in Germany, we visited her a couple of times. I was in the Boy Scouts, we used to camp everywhere in Europe. In fact I think I remember we went to Belgium once and I got to meet the ambassador to Belgium, I think it was, I want to say, John Eisenhower was the ambassador I think, then. It was just, I loved Europe, I’d like to go back. I haven’t been back since ’65 when we came back to the States; I’d like to go back. I’d like to take my wife there and see those places where I used to live and maybe try to find some of my old friends.

SM: Did you have, were you able to establish any long-term relationships with people, and did you ever encounter eventually the same families or same kids?

AG: Actually, no but I do remember names of some of my French friends that lived in Lyon, that lived in, actually around the Lyon area in Renus, but I really haven’t
stayed in contact with them, no. But I have stayed in contact with some of my junior high
and high school friends from there.

SM: From Europe?

AG: Yes, from Europe. In fact, just recently they’ve started a website and I’ve
run into people I haven’t seen since ’65. We’re emailing each other now, so that’s kind of
neat.

SM: How were you received in Europe, was it always?

AG: I thought, from what I remember we were received very well. I mean it was,
I don’t know as a kid I guess I never, I never, I hung out with other kids and it didn't
really matter what culture or what country you were from. For the most part, I think we
were received pretty well in France, although my mom says some of the French did not
like us there. That’s what she’s told me, but she probably saw things I didn’t see. For the
most part, especially us children were accepted as just kids.

SM: Did you play many sports in school?

AG: Yes, I played baseball. I love baseball. I was too small to play; well
actually we didn’t have any sports over there like football, played soccer and baseball,
were the two things that I played.

SM: And you mentioned already that some of the motivating factors as to why
you went into the Marine Corps. Did you have any interest at all, especially since you
were volunteering and took a three-year enlistment, did you have any interest in the G. I.
Bill that you might be able to use it?

AG: Yes, actually I did have an interest in doing that, because I knew when my
dad was paying for my school, I flunked out I knew I had to find another way, another
source of income. So yes that was definitely there, that was definitely, the G.I. bill looked
like it would be a good way for me to serve the country and then get out and be able to go
back to school, and I guess I had a sense of duty too. I don’t know if I mentioned that. I
knew I was going to go into the military as I was growing up, I just knew it was a matter
of time. It was just something that was there, I never questioned it. Both my brothers
went into the military. My older brother Sam was a pilot in the Navy, and my younger
brother Kevin was an F-4 mechanic and they went in after I came back from Vietnam. It
was just something we knew was going to happen and it was a way for me, my dad was
always talking about we need to give back to the country, and it was just that honor and

duty ethic that my father had. It was just part of the family, part of growing up.

SM: Did you have much contact with your grandparents?

AG: No, neither set of my grandparents were alive, they all died before I was

born.

SM: When you were in high school, and just before you graduated, the two years

basically before you graduated, the Vietnam War was under way. Did it ever become a

subject matter for school, for classroom, was it ever discussed much?

AG: Never.

SM: How about in your home, as far as your father talking about the war, and

what the United States was trying to accomplish?

AG: The only thing I remember my dad saying he thought that the President was

doing the right thing. My dad was a big stickler on keeping a strong defense, and he was

a big stickler on thinking that the Communist were a threat that the government told him

it was. I had no, I watched TV, I could turn it off, it was one of those, I had no feelings

one-way or the other about it.

SM: When you got to college, University of New Mexico, what was it like there,

what was the atmosphere like there, especially regarding the war?

AG: Well, starting I guess in ’67, there was some protest on campus, I remember

that against the war. I remember there was some, I don’t even remember. I remember I

was, I guess I was for or on the side of the war, I’m not exactly sure how to put it, but I

started to become aware of my feelings about why are these guys against the country. I

guess I believed that they were wrong to protest the war, they were wrong to think that

this is something that wasn’t, that we should be into, the draft card burning started then, I

just didn't understand that, but I think that’s mostly, I was pretty naïve about things I

think then, but naïve in the respect that I just didn’t understand why they were doing this.

And my opinion said that these people aren’t being the loyal Americans that they ought

to be or something. But I think that was just all my youthful, my youth coming through or

something, didn’t quite understand things yet.

SM: When you left UNM in ‘68

AG: ‘68, right.
SM: So, you were still there when Tet occurred, Tet of ’68 occurred, what kind of effect did that have on the atmosphere on campus if any that you remember?

AG: Well, I remember my dad saying that, I think my dad started getting disillusioned after Tet. Well, I remember my dad saying years later saying, you know after Westmoreland got on TV and said, the light's at the end of tunnel, my dad said, “I remember when he got up there and said, ‘we can win this war in six months we have them right where we want them,’ and then all of a sudden Tet happened.” It was a big huge surprise, and my dad said, what is the government lying to, my dad’s saying this stuff, I was just amazed that he became very, I think that's where his disenchantment started, that he didn’t think that we were being told the truth and that right there amazed me. My dad never ever questioned anything the government did. You know that was the same year that LBJ resigned, Martine Luther King was killed that April, Bobby Kennedy was killed in June and my mom thought the country was falling apart, maybe it did that year or something. But Tet, I remember watching Tet, too and seeing the Embassy in Saigon on TV being attacked and I didn’t really know what was going on. I knew there was a real war going on there, but I guess it wasn’t till then that I saw scenes of what was really going on there. I joined, I guess in the first week of May is when we went down to join up. I’m sure that was in the back of my mind. I can’t really say that it was, I’m sure it was there, but the thing that hit me is my dad started turning and I think that he started really questioning things.

SM: When did he retire?


SM: Okay, so he was active the whole war basically . . .

AG: Never went to Vietnam, well he had orders to go, but I was already there so they didn’t send him.

SM: Oh, I guess they wouldn’t send necessarily a father.

AG: Unless he signed, I think you could sign waivers, but they wouldn’t send him because I was already in country. He enlisted in the Horse Cavalry in 1936, my father. He got out of the cavalry; he spent three years in the Horse Cavalry in Texas, Brownfield, Texas. He got out in 19--, must have been ’39 or ’40, and then when Pearl Harbor happened, they day after Pearl Harbor he went down and joined the Army Air
Corps. I remember years and years afterward, I said, “Dad how come you didn’t go into
the cavalry again?” I guess his unit got turned into the first cav or something, he says, “I
didn’t want to be a grunt,” and I said, “Well, you never told me that,” and he said,
“Would you have listened to me if I’d have said that to you?” I said, “No.” He said, “I
decided to go Army Air corps, I figured it’d be safer,” and I said, “You never told me
that.”

SM: Well, when you, the interim between joining the Marine Corps and actually
leaving for boot camp, how did you spend your time, what did you do?

AG: Oh, I just did the same, I hung out with my friends, I went swimming, I
played baseball that summer with the Connie Mac team. I just did my regular summer
teenage stuff.

SM: Did you pay much attention to the news?

AG: Actually, I did. I started paying more attention to the news and I started
paying more attention to where the Marines were at, what the Marines were doing and
everything in the paper I started reading. Anything about the Marine Corps I started
reading, and I guess that's when I started thinking, well I’m probably going to be going to
Vietnam, but I had some stupid idea that since I could read and write maybe they
wouldn’t make me an infantryman, of course that was quickly dispelled. And I went in
on the buddy system. I’m sorry I didn’t mention that. My friend that I ran into, his father
was killed there, he and I went down up and joined up in the buddy, I don’t even know if
I would have joined the Marines unless if he would have gone with me. We both enlisted
that day together, on 120 day delay, it was a buddy plan, we both got to go to boot camp
together basically.

SM: Was that the promise that was made, that you would just go to boot camp
together?

AG: Yes, you’d just go to boot camp that was it. The buddy plan, was just, that’s
what the Staff Sergeant Valentine said, you can only go to boot camp, we can’t guarantee
you guys will stay together in the service, so that’s what we did. This guy's name was
Terry Walker, and a good friend, real good friend of mine. He and I still are in contact.
He never went to Vietnam. He was a Seagull in the Marines; he was on an aircraft
carrier, Admiral's aide.
SM: An Admiral’s aide?
AG: An Admiral’s aide, yes.
SM: Well, who do you think got off better? Which duty was better being the Admiral’s aide or going to Vietnam?
AG: He definitely got rank, he was a sergeant when he got out, and well he didn’t qualify with a rifle, I don’t know if you know anything about the Marines, but Marines well, you’ve got to qualify with rifles, and he didn’t qualify. And they sent him to Sea school, he was real smart, very smart, much smarter than I was and he had a slick chest and I always thought that Marine Corps would not let you disqualify the rifle, but he couldn’t see, I mean his glasses were this thick. To this day we still laugh about that, he says, “I don’t even know why they even took me, Tony. I could barely see.” But he didn’t qualify with rifle, and pictures I have of me and him, he doesn’t even have a shooting badge, and that’s almost unheard of in the Marines, so don’t ask me, I don’t know whether they needed bodies and that’s why the kept us there. Maybe, because after Tet, that’s something I would really like to find out why, or how, maybe that’s some kind of new policy they had during that time period, but he was slick chest the whole time he was in the Corps, never qualified.
SM: How long did he stay in, just the three years?
AG: He was the three years, I got an early out. I got out about a year before he did. We ran into each other, I’m probably getting ahead of myself here, but we ran into each other, I went on R & R to Hong Kong and I went down to the docks there and there’s a launch coming off this carrier and there he is standing there. I mean it was such a pure chance meeting in Hong Kong IN December of ’69, after I’d been in country six months, and he was in his dress blues and took me out to the carrier, showed me around, showed where his bunk was. Its funny that you should mention about which one of us had the bet – he wanted to go to Vietnam in the worst way and do what I was doing, and I just told him you’re crazy or stupid but if you want to trade jobs with me, I will be gladly be on that carrier being the Admiral’s aide and you come and be an infantryman. I remember getting angry at him, I said, “You don’t want to go and do what I’m doing Terry,” and it just, I’m glad he didn’t go. I’m really glad he didn’t have to go, but it was funny when he said that he, “I thought we were going to do this together, and I was going
to go revenge for dad” and this kind of stuff, I’m doing that stuff, you don’t have to be
doing the shit. It was pretty amusing though. I want to go, and so let’s trade places.
SM: Well, why don’t we go ahead and talk about your boot camp experiences
and if you would just describe what it was like leaving home and getting on the bus and
arriving. Where did you go to boot camp, you said San Diego?
AG: San Diego, yes.
SM: What was it like?
AG: It was San Diego. We left Albuquerque, I guess we flew out of there, must
have been around dusk if I remember right, because I remember when we got to San
Diego it was dark, and they had us wait. There was a Marine there, I’m not sure, he must
have been a drill instructor because he had his campaign hat, Smoky the Bear we called
them. He had us stand in line, then we got on buses, they pulled up in buses, we got on
the buses. I had no idea how many of us there were, one or two busloads probably. I
remember we got onto the bus, and the driver turned around and said, “You guys just
made the worst mistake of your lives.” And I think I started thinking then maybe I had
made a mistake. Anyway, we drive into a Marine Corps recruit depot, probably around
midnight, it must have been eleven or twelve at night, and the drill instructor starts to get
on our bus and then he starts screaming at us to get off the bus, get off the bus. We had
to get out and, they have these yellow footprints, stand on the yellow footprints, of course
the drill instructor’s in front of us, and above him was two or tree of the UCMJ, I’m not
even sure to this day which ones they were, but he pointed to them, “You’re now in the
United States Marines, but you’re not Marines. The UCMJ is now your law and me,
basically. We can get you, if we can’t get you any of the other UCMJ stuff, we can get
you on the Cam de cummi cummi or something like that, so forget everything you’ve
learned, right then, forget everything you’ve learned, forget all your past life, forget your
girlfriend, your mother. I am your mother, your father, your professor, everything,” and
we went through the, we went to get haircuts right away, they shaved our heads. Yes,
they gave us sweatshirts, utility trousers, tennis shoes and covers, and then they, we had
to pack up all of our civilian stuff, put it in boxes. We went and took showers, that’s right
we went and took showers, came back, put all of our, and they marched us to our
Quanson huts. It was probably two or three in the morning, and of course an hour later
they came in there and started get up and get out, and the first week there was mostly processing. It was a lot of paperwork, a lot of inoculations, getting all our 782 gear on, you know our web belt and our rifle, all that crap that we had to carry with us, our sea bag, and it was just a blur. I look at it now, I was in pretty good physical shape because I was, I ran track when I was in Albuquerque in high school, I played baseball, I was in real good shape. The physical part was easy for me, I could run three miles no problem, but it was the mental thing, where they were trying to, they were trying to break us down, which is, I look back on it now and I understand why. But it was, I learned quickly to not stand out. I tried to get to the middle of the formation, whatever they tell me to do I tried to do as quickly, I didn’t even want him to know what I was, because I saw what happened to people. They would smack people, they wouldn’t beat people, but they would smack you and hurt you with just one little blow, so I didn’t want that to happen to me, I did not want that. They were very loud, they were very profane, I think when I try to describe boot camp I tell people to go see Full Metal Jacket, see that scene there, that’s definitely 1968 when I was in boot, that’s exactly the way it was, except for the barracks there. That’s the way they talk to us, that’s the way they trained us. I mean, that drill instructor in that movie was exactly the way we were talked to, lots of profanity, lots of you’re maggots, you’re not Marines yet until I say you are. It was just very disciplined, learning how to think as a team, and my dad was pretty loud so even that didn’t bother that, I knew how to polish boots. I was pretty good at doing all that stuff because my father was usually on my case, but he was, like I said, it was bore. I remember, it was only eight weeks then, boot camp. The Marines, I didn't know until years after, the Marines had cut back quite drastically on their training regimen because they needed bodies, so it was eight weeks of boot camp, I guess the most fun thing in boot camp for me was going to the rifle range. I never shot a rifle, and I ended up being a marksman or sharpshooter. I was really good at five hundred meters, I could put a bulls-eye, I was bad off-end, I was a lousy shooter off end, but if I learned it was pro, and I just, it was an M-14 I qualified with. I loved that weapon. I thought that was the most fun in boot camp, going to the rifle range, learning how to shoot. Drill instructors, they did their jobs, they were loud, I remember, years, I guess when I got to Vietnam that I realized they would yell us to get in our face a lot, and I realized that it was that loud noise that when
incoming came in, they would scream at us and when I got to Nam and realized it's those
loud noises that make me hit the deck. They were good at their jobs; they were really
good at their jobs. It’s funny, I remember their names, Collins, Soto and Ross, staff
sergeants, all staff sergeants, and I could still see their faces and hear their voices.
They’re definitely high on my list of what I expected in the Marine Corps. They were
very disciplined, they looked good all the time, they cared about us, even though at the
time I didn’t realize they did, but they cared highly about us and getting trained the right
way and to go do the job we had to do.
SM: Had they been to Vietnam?
AG: Yes, all of them had been to Vietnam, all of them.
SM: Did they talk much about their experiences?
AG: Yes, but not until, it’s funny, they didn’t really talk about it till the end, kind
of toward the end, when we’re getting ready to graduate, they told us, “We’ve trained you
the best we can, you just need to listen to your leaders in Vietnam. You’re going to go to
the infantry training now, just listen to those people. You guys are fine, you’re Marines
now, so just hold high the banner. This is the first step for you guys staying alive there,
and you just need to listen, listen to your leaders and remember your training.” And I’ll
never forget Staff Sergeant Soto, little short Hispanic guy about that wide, who could do
close order drill better than anybody ever said, “You guys ever see me any where else in
the world you just come up to me, and I’ll buy you a beer no matter where we’re at,” and
I actually ran into him in Vietnam, believe it or not when I was coming home. It was
very interesting, took him to this NCO club for a beer. Amazing, and he remembered my
name; to this day I’m stunned.
SM: He remembered you by name?
AG: He remembered my name, Goodrich, he remembered my name, and I was
completely amazed because, they were shoving platoons through there, every eight
weeks, and he was there for three years, he told me he was there for three years, and he
remembered my name. I don’t know, I said, how do you remember my name? I
remember all you guys’ names. Truly amazing, truly an amazing Marine, very Marine-
like, good man, real good man.
SM: Three DI’s per platoon?
AG: Per platoon, yes. And we were platoon 1074.

SM: Was there much competition?

AG: Yes, there was. We had competition drill, shooting; PT, and they gave each platoon that won flags. We didn’t win any, my platoon was bad at everything except PT, we won the PT because we were punished all the time.

SM: For not winning anything else?

AG: That’s exactly it. In fact, Staff Sergeant Soto, here’s the man who said, “You know, you might not win any flags,” because we were lousy shooters, we were lousy on the drill field, we were lousy in inspections, he said, “but you’re going to be the strongest Marines that ever came out of this damn place,” and sure enough we kicked ass in the PT, so.

SM: How about other types of competition, when you guys went through, especially?

AG: Pugle sticks, that kind of stuff. I liked the obstacle course too. I love running the obstacle course and pugle sticks, they pitted, I did pretty well in pugel sticks, that was fun. I think that was fun, I thought the bayonet trading was fun. I thought they had close to hand to hand combat where you had to choke a guy until he passed then you let him go, and if the drill instructor or the instructor saw you weren’t doing it right, he’d go down there and show you. They actually got us behind the eyes, you would pull up until he went limp and then you’d let him go, very realistic stuff, realistic as hell. I’m trying to think.

SM: Did they explain why they were doing that?

AG: Yes, because they said when you go to Vietnam, you might have this opportunity to be in hand to hand combat, you’re going to have to learn how to kill that person, and they showed us how to kill people with cartridge belts, he says anything that’s laying around, you better be able to pick it up and use it. Now, knives, they taught us judo, that kind of stuff, the choking drill, matter of fact I still remember exactly what you do, tuck your head, and make sure they don’t even grab you, and that was an eye opener when they were teaching us that, and these guys, if you weren’t doing the position or the move right, they would get off the stand and come down, this is how you do it. Do not fuck with me, Private, because is what you need to do, you’re going to have to want
to kill these people if they come into your position and you don’t have anything to pick
up and they were, it was good training, good training.

SM: When they would show you, would they demonstrate on the person who you
were trying to?

AG: Yes, well it depended, because some guy would say I’ll just choke you a
little bit, and they’d see that and say, this is how you do it, and they’d do it to both of
them. It all depended on what they were feeling like, or what they saw what was going
on.

SM: So they weren’t going to allow anybody to shirk?

AG: I got pretty good at choking people, and so did the buddy, my buddy.

SM: Now, when you went, since you were on the buddy system, did you and
your friend, were you like on the same team, were you literally buddies in boot camp?

AG: Yes, buddies in boot camp, exactly.

SM: So you would choke each other?

AG: Yes, choking each other, right. We still laugh about that too when we talk on
the phone.

SM: Indoctrination films, especially concerning what was going on in Vietnam
and also just about the Marine Corps, or the Cold War, the Soviet menace?

AG: That’s an excellent question. I know we had to take Marine Corps history
classes, and I aced all those. They talked about fromm the beginning they told us all the
double Medal of Honor winners and Chestie Puller and we had to say, good night Chestie
Puller at night, but I’m trying to think of films they showed. I’m sure they showed us
some films in Vietnam, but I don’t even know if I was awake during some of that stuff,
but I think I remember a film that talked about the Communist threat, and that's why we
were in Vietnam, a Department of Defense film, black and white thing. I know we saw
some films on, you knew we had films on first aid and digging the terrains and that kind
of thing, but I don’t remember too many films in boot camp, I really don’t. The one I
remember about the Communist threat, I remember that one barely, that’s why we were
going to go help the South Vietnamese beat the Communist threat basically.
SM: Back to the competition stuff, was there much team on team or was it pretty much just either the platoon was participating and against other platoons for this ribbon or streamer?

AG: Yes, there would people out there grading each platoon for the streamer, but there was not really.

SM: There was no internal, squad on squad, team on team?

AG: No, except for the pugil sticks, I remember we all got together, right the individual. It’s funny, I remember Staff Sergeant Soto used to get us out and he would ask us individually, “Why do you want to kill gooks?” I remember that distinctly, and you would have to say, I want to kill gooks because they’re Communists or because they’re killing Marines, and he’d say, he would look for a certain answer. “Why do you want to kill gooks?” I realize then, even at eighteen, that they were trying to de-humanize the enemy, I’ve heard that before. I didn’t realize until he was saying that, why do you want to kill gooks and go down the line. I want to kill them because they killed a Marine, because they’re Communist, because they’re godless, all the propaganda we were taught, and I think that was a way for us to de-humanize them for us to be able to kill them, although somebody asked me once if I had to hate the Vietnamese to kill them. I don’t think it had anything to do with it Steve, I, with me it was staying alive. I never thought about hate, it wasn’t a big hate thing, it was just a matter of staying alive and seeing a target out there. But overall boot camp, I didn’t realize how cushy I had it at boot camp until I got to Vietnam, you got six hours of sleep a night, got three square meals a day.

SM: The food was decent at boot camp?

AG: Yes, it was good. I thought it was good because I was hungry all the time, not as good as my mom’s food but.

SM: Many people drop out of things?

AG: It’s funny, funny you should mention that. We had two guys go over the fence the first day, the first day. You know in San Diego, MCRD is right next to the airport and they went through the fence, and believe it or not, when we were graduating, they were coming in in shackles, these two guys, they had them cuffed up and we were laughing at them, you dumbasses, man. But I guess we had some disciplinary problems, then they had a thing called motivation platoon, they would go to. These guys would
basically go down to the beach and dig holes in the day and fill them up at night, and they
would do this, I had no idea how long they would do this, but they would get motivated
and then they’d get sent back to the platoon. There was the fat farm, these guys would
go, they’d usually do PT all day and eat lettuce and skim milk at night. I didn’t, one of
the things about Marine boot camp, if you got sent back you would have to go through
the whole thing again. That’s one of the things that motivated me to get, whatever it takes
to get through this, so I don’t have to do this again. We had guys that were second and
third time, we had a guy in our platoon that came in about halfway through, this was like
his third attempt to try to get through boot camp, I guess they would bring them back to
the point where they dropped out or something. But it was hard to get out of the Corps.
You could not fake, I mean we had guys saying they were crazy or drug addicts and stuff,
and they’d just send them to motivation platoon, nobody got out, it was interesting,
motivation, fat farm, correctional custody, but there weren’t too many crimes committed
in boot camp, but these guys would go do their time at these places, then come back to
boot camp.

SM: No suicide attempts?
AG: No, none. We had a guy that ran the three-mile run, and he had a 104
temperature after the run. I don’t know if he had pneumonia or something, but drill
instructors pointed these guys out, see this guy's motivated, look what he did, and he’s
laying there dead. One motivated Marine.

SM: Did he become a recycle, did he have to go?
AG: I don’t know. He went away we never saw him again. It was towards the
end of must have been like the sixth or seventh week we were finishing up our final PTs
and stuff, never saw that guy again. Boot camp was good in the respect that it taught me
teamwork, I think that’s where they started instilling in me, you had to trust the guy next
to you, if one guy dropped out, I remember we’d go on runs, if one guy dropped out, we
would run around the guys until he got up and joined us. One man would fuck up and
everybody would get punished, and that came real, I was confused until I got to Vietnam
and realized, you had to watch out for the weakest man in your platoon or your squad,
because you’ve got to count on each other, and Marines were real heavy on that, that
you’ve got to trust the guys next to you, or you’re going to die, and I didn’t really realize
that until I got to Vietnam and saw it played out over and over again. You’ve got to be
very aware of your strengths and weaknesses of the people on your team, and your own
and the whole teamwork thing, the whole thing about pulling together.

SM: How ethnically diverse was your platoon?

AG: Pretty much. We had, I’m going to say, there were 75 in my platoon, boot
camp platoon, I’d say twenty of them were blacks, hell, I don’t know, ten or fifteen
Hispanics, the rest white guys. There were some Native Americans too in there, I know
there were some guys from Albuquerque went with us, a few native Americans, four or
five of them, pretty diverse though, pretty diverse. A lot of guys from the South, a lot of
the white guys were from the South, I don’t know what that is, Texas, Alabama,
Mississippi, all the black guys for some reason seemed to be from Detroit and Chicago,
up north somewhere, from what I remember talking to them.

SM: Were there any conflicts or any tensions between various racial groups?

AG: No, I didn’t see any at all, not at all.

SM: ’68 would have been about the time too, when there was some movement, of
course, in the United States, black power and things like that so that’s why I asked?

AG: Right, no, I didn’t see it all. Now, whether they nipped it in the bud quickly
if they saw it, the drill instructors, but no, I didn’t see that at all.

SM: And what would you say, well I guess, you’ve already really said it, I was
going to ask you what you thought would be the greatest challenge you faced in boot
camp, and I guess you thought it was the mental breakdown part.

AG: Yes, it was the mental thing about trying to, paying attention all the time and
then, the whole sort of drill, you had to really make sure, they said left face, you better
make a left face. I don’t know, it’s that whole getting to that mindset, I guess of being a
Marine, or being a killer I guess. I remember the whole kill kit bill thing with the
bayonet, but like I said the physical part was okay, it was that mental, long days, short
nights. I just thought the mental aspect of it was tough.

SM: Did you ever go like on a bivouac or out in the field for boot camp?

AG: No.

SM: Did they ever discuss patrolling and other issues like that?

AG: No.
SM: You got that when you went to advanced infantry training?

SG: Yes, yes we did.

SM: Where did you go for that training?

AG: It was at Camp Pendleton, and that was right after we graduated, this is November of ’68, infantry training. We all went, in fact it was basically the whole platoon just went to Uniform company, there were three or four platoons, I forget how many in the company. We got our MOSs, I have to tell you this, the day we graduated, everybody was assigned their MOS, and I guess out of the 60 or 55 that were left, 50 of us were infantry, 03’s and five were other things, and the drill instructor’s just laughing like hell. “How many of you guys were promised Air Wing?” Half the people, “well you’re not getting Air Wing.” But 50 of us, I think it was around 80 or 90 percent of us were 03’s.

SM: Now you said that you lost I guess close to a third?

AG: Yes, well I think, I want to day fifteen ore twenty, fifteen or twenty of the guys dropped out, never came back, or didn’t get through the fat farm. There was a couple of, I’m trying to think of injuries, and I don’t think there were any injuries, might’ve had a guy break a leg or something like that, but it was mostly disciplinary stuff. Actually the cops came and arrested a guy I think in boot camp, I think that did happen. In fact Terry and I’ve talked about that, that was early, you know, it was one of those where nobody knew anybody, and I think the cops came and arrested some guy, he was a wanted felon I think. But anyway in November graduated from boot camp, got bused up to Camp Pendleton for infantry training and that’s where we learned how to do fire to maneuvers and that’s where we humped, we went up and down mountains, we dug in at night, we fired all the weapons we could.

SM: What was your personal weapon in Advanced Infantry?

AG: It was the M-14.

SM: Still the M-14?

AG: Yes, M-14.

SM: Did you get at least some familiarization training with the M-16?
AG: No, well actually, yes fan fire with M-60 and the M-16, yes. But, yes we got to fire all the weapons, the law, got to fire the .50 cal, we got to throw grenades, but the –14 was still our individual weapon.

SM: And these were fully automatic M-14s?

AG: Yes, actually they did that, the selector switch.

SM: Any enemy weapon familiarization, AK-47s?

AG: Yes, there was, in fact I still have my, one of the things I want to donate is I still have my little notebook that I took notes, yes they actually showed us the AK-47 and showed us the RPG, didn’t fire the weapons, that’s the thing, because an AK makes a different sound and in Vietnam I learned it very quickly. But basically there was a, there was a village we had to go through, with pop-up targets, and they had trip wires, and that was quick little one or two day thing, it wasn’t very good, I didn’t think.

SM: Was it a Vietnamese village?

AG: Yes, Vietnamese village, they had pop-up targets, and like I said, they had trip wires, they had punji pits, where we had to, basically maneuver our way through this, John Wayne village I think is what we called it. But it was thatched hooches and they had some fake bamboo and that kind of stuff there, that was about it for training us for Vietnam.

SM: Do you remember much the stories that the first, your drill instructors at boot camp, and then your instructors in infantry training?

AG: Our instructors at infantry training were, they were all combat vets, all combat veterans. You know in boot camp, Staff Sergeant Soto was a truck driver, and we had two combat vets, and then Staff Sergeant Soto, the truck driver. Anyway, in infantry training we had a Captain who was actually waiting to get out, he was getting medically retired, but they would get us around, tell us stories, and scare the hell out of us. The Captain was at Khe Sanh, 881, 82, those old fights, Chato, who was one of the Sergeants there, was with the 9th Marines and he was at Khe Sanh and Dong Ha, and in one of the major battles up north, tall guys with glasses. I can’t think of his name, he was with the 5th Marines in the rice paddies, but they would tell us stories about, when you get to Vietnam, you’re going to be re-learning everything that we think we’re teaching you here. They were trying to do sleep deprivation with us. This is what you’re going to be
doing in Vietnam, they would not give us much water, they would try to keep us hydrated, but I think they did a great job of getting us prepared for Vietnam, what we were going to be facing, conditions especially. They couldn’t get, they used to tell us just to keep, stay alert, listen to the people that you’re in charge of, and just do what you’re told and you might survive. They all had hearts, the Captain had like three purple hearts, all these guys had purple hearts, but they were also good men too. That was the first time I saw the look in the eyes, a thousand hearts there they call it, these guys definitely had the look, and that scared me. I think that’s when I first started getting scared about what I was going to do.

SM: What was the biggest challenge in your infantry training, your advanced infantry training?

AG: Well, there the physical part. Damn, we had to carry, in boot camp we didn’t carry anything, and there we had packs and we had our rifles, we had to do formation runs up and down hills, like I say sleep deprivation. They put us out in the hills there and dig a hole, they would go around to make sure you were awake, we’d get two hours of sleep, and eats lots of C- rations, we didn’t do that in boot camp. That was the first time I had C- rations was there, ate lots of C- rations, but it was nice there because on the weekends we got leave, we got to go on liberty, so it was like five days a week and then you got liberty unless you were doing fire watch or Sergeant of the guard or whatever they’re called. But I think there the physical part, I mean they ran us and kept us tired and it was tough, it was really tough. The mental part, I liked in the daytime when we had schools, it was great. We had first aid, we got to set explosives, I love throwing frags was always one of my fun things, shooting the weapons was always neat too.

SM: Now, did you have any live-fire experiences?

AG: Yes.

SM: Of course, just on the marksmanship range in boot camp, right?

AG: Yes.

SM: You didn’t throw any live grenades or anything there, but?

AG: No, but in our infantry training, almost everything we fired was live fire, the laws we got to shoot at targets, all the guns had ammo in them, all the guns we fired. That
was where we got to crawl through the fire and they fired a 30-caliber over our head, and
they had explosives going off in the wire too, that was kind of exciting. It was raining
like hell that day I remember, and they were happy, these guys, this is exactly the way its
going to be in Vietnam. Get under that barbed wire and you’re going to slide through
there, we’re going to fire these two 30 cals over your head. That was amazing, that was
the first I ever heard rounds, I mean in boot camp when you’re in the butts, when you’re
qualifying you could hear rounds going over your head, but its different than an
automatic weapon firing over your head, you can hear that sound, but yes, firing the
weapons in ITR was my kick.

SM: You mentioned that the packs, or the physical aspect was one of the biggest
challenges for you, how heavy, typically was your pack?

AG: I’ve thought about that. They were about half of what we carried in
Vietnam, I’d say thirty pounds maybe, thirty of forty pounds. We carried C- rations, we
carried claymores, usually a couple of flags, but it wasn’t half as much as we carried in
‘Nam. We only carried like one magazine in our weapon, we didn’t carry, like in
Vietnam, fifteen or twenty magazines. I’d say thirty pounds, maybe, maybe thirty
pounds.

SM: So when you got to Vietnam, you started carrying a whole lot more.

AG: Yes, I’d say double that. As a machine gunner I carried the gun, I carried at
least three hundred rounds of ammo, four or five frags, five or six canteens of water, a
claymore, pop-ups, depending on whether the mortar men had enough people to carry
their stuff, I carried a mortar round, C-4, I had a .45 and I carried about three or our
magazines for that, C- rations.

SM: Water.

AG: Water, at least six canteens, I carried in Vietnam, at least six. That was a big
ting, the first thing I was taught there is you carry a lot of water around here, because we
never know when we’re going to get re-supplied, so I carried at least six, never less than
six, sometimes eight, all depended on where we were going, and whether we were going
to have access to clean water or not. I carried eighty pounds in my back, easily carried
eighty pounds. To this day, I look at the pictures of me with all my stuff on my back, I
don’t know how in the hell did we move. How did we hump, me and my friends talk
about that all the time, how the hell did we do this? It was, and the Marines always had
the hand-me-downs too, even when we were going through training, we had the hand-
me-downs from the Army or the Navy. We never had the good equipment, World War II
packs, World War II C-rats, I remember infantry training, ex-1944 some of the stuff we
saw on there, not good with a P-38 to open up the cans. Yes, but infantry training was
pretty exciting, pretty fun.

SM: Any of the indoctrination or propaganda type films in infantry training that
you remember?

AG: Good question, I don’t, I’m trying to think, no, no, I don’t think so.

SM: Were any of the, I guess, films on Vietnam or anything like that?

AG: No, I don’t remember, I really don’t remember any films there, so that was
four weeks, infantry training was four weeks.

SM: How much time did you get off between the end of your infantry training
and when you went to Vietnam?

AG: Actually, I had to go to machine gun school.

SM: Oh, you went to machine gun school, how long did that last?

AG: That was three weeks, and I guess that was the beginning of December.

SM: Now that was pure ground fire machine gun school, or was it also air fire?

AG: No, it was all on a tripod. We qualified on a tripod, at a thousand meters.

SM: Three to five round bursts?

AG: Yes, three to five round bursts, right. I was always always at nine to ten
round burst guy.

SM: Oh were you? Did you get in trouble for that?

AG: Actually, I was a good gunner, so I got in trouble a little bit, but I was good,
I was really good. I could make a fifty-gallon drum dance at a thousand meters effective.
My instructors were pleased with my machine gun ability.

SM: So they gave you a little bit of license there with bursts?

AG: I finally was able to, I said hell I can put nine or ten rounds out there, come
on. But that was, we moved, our infantry training we stayed in barracks, two story
barracks. For machine gun school we moved up on the hill, we had to sleep in tents, and
we had these oil based heaters, this was in December, got pretty damn cold there. We’d
get up in the morning, it was 4:30 or 5:00, and we had to carry our guns to the range and
that was interesting, I got to find out how heavy that gun was.
SM: How far was the typical hike to the range.
AG: I’d say, probably an hour march, we’d march an hour. I don’t know how far
that was, but we’d march in formation.
SM: A couple, few miles, four or five miles.
AG: Yes, that’s what I figured, but that was three weeks long.
SM: Now how did you get selected to become the –60 gun?
AG: I don’t have a clue, I really don’t. I was an O-3 when I got out of boot
camp, when we got out of infantry training they got out there with the little roster, and
they just went down, I always think it was A’s through F’s were O-311s, the rifle
bannock, I really don’t know.
SM: There was no rhyme or reason, they just got selected.
AG: No, I could not understand why, G’s through Qs are machine gunners and
the rest of you guys are mortar men or rockets or flame throwers.
SM: Did you ever have to hump the mortar plate?
AG: No, thank God, no. I carried mortar rounds, but never the base plates, no .
SM: The rounds are enough.
AG: Yes, 60 mm mortar rounds, yes, so that was three weeks.
SM: And again where was that, the M-60 training?
AG: That was also at Pendleton, in fact the same place we had infantry training
except we just moved up to the hills, into tents there.
SM: What was the greatest challenge with that, obviously not the machine-
gunning itself?
AG: Well, I found it great, the machine gunning school, I came out, I think
second best in the school. And I got pretty disciplined, even though I said I liked to fire
the ten or twelve, they guys that taught me was a gunner in Vietnam, two tours, and said,
“You’re one of the best I’ve ever coached,” so I felt real proud. I wasn’t real good with a
rifle, maybe that’s why they made me a machine gunner, I didn't think about that, but I
wasn’t that good with a rifle, I qualified, but I wasn’t an expert.
SM: So it was after you finished machine gunner school that you got leave, twenty-day leave?

AG: Twenty day leave.

SM: And then you were shipped off to Vietnam?

AG: Actually, no. I came home for twenty days, I went back to Albuquerque, actually slept through the Joe Namuth Super Bowl, my mom said, “You sure did sleep a lot less, and finally I have you back you sleep for like three months here,” so twenty days here than we went back to thing called staging battalion, which is what all Marines go through before they go to Vietnam. Now this was the first time that I got to fire an M-16 on a range. When I went through infantry training they had us tear down a –16, we fan fired one, one day. When I went to staging battalion, they actually had us get on the range and shoot at targets. That was the first time that I’d ever done that. We went through a POW camp that we’d had to escape from and they’d come looking for us. We filled out Power of Attorney and stuff, I remember doing that.

SM: Will and testament.

AG: Will and testament. This is where we started seeing films. We did our Geneva Convention cards. They had little classes on Vietnam, the culture, don’t pat kids on the head, don’t sit down and cross your legs and point your feet at them. This is where we saw films: Why are we in Vietnam? What are you going to be doing there? Just typical DOD black and white films, this is Vietnam, this is the history of Vietnam, that kind of thing. I remember it was pretty amusing, I thought it was pretty amusing, so did the people showing the films to us. Yes, we got our Geneva Convention cards, they read all that stuff to us, they told us basically if you get caught, you’re supposed to show them this card, and they’ll laugh and say, well the Vietnamese did not sign the Geneva Convention or something. We went through a booby-trapped village there, that was pretty interesting. They showed us the different kinds of booby traps, the bouncing bettys, the command, they actually took us out to a range, I remember, they showed use these are the kind of booby traps you’re going to encounter. They actually had a guy come in, he was some hide in the tree lines, so that this is command detonated, they had, anyway, all kinds of stuff, trip wires, grenades and C-ration cans falling out of trees. That was pretty good training I thought. Good training, came in handy in Vietnam. That was around,
how about I say ten days, a week or ten days of that, and then I got called out of
formation one day, about ten of us did, and we were selected to go to Vietnamese
language school in Monterrey California. My language skills came in handy again, when
I was in boot camp, they gave us language tests, and I scored highly enough on the test to
go to twelve week Vietnamese intensive language school in Monterrey California.

SM: Twelve weeks?
AG: Twelve weeks.
SM: How effective was that?
AG: Well, it was, I was in the top ten percent of my class and I got a meritorious
promotion to lance corporal. I learned formal Vietnamese, did not help me in Vietnam
because we weren’t in any cities or any universities, so it took me about six months to
learn how to speak bush language basically, which was Vietnamese, French, English,
uneducated, it’s very, lots of slang, and it took me a while to catch on, to get my ear
accustomed to what they were saying to me, but I did well. I like Vietnamese language
school, two reasons, one is learning the culture, we were taught by a Vietnamese woman
who taught us all the cultural, what they eat, this is what you do, the Buddhists and
Catholics. That was a real, real good thing for me to go through before I went to Vietnam,
and I think it gave me a little respect for the Vietnamese people, because I told you in
boot camp why you want to kill gooks, and I figure this woman is telling us we’re
fighting the Communists. We had these, every day we had to learn so many words, then
we’d go back to the barracks and study at night, then they’d come in and do, they had like
a picture, would be pointing to things, and it was basically, where’s the machine gun,
what is your names, what’s your age, basically military terminology. We learned lots to
that, but what the ranks were, how to say hello and good-bye of course, and it was just a
real cultural eye-opener for me, and I got a pretty good history of Vietnam, and history,
from the South’s point of view of course. And I was real pleased at school, to be able to
go to that language school.

SM: The woman who taught you, do you know if she was from, what part of
Vietnam she was from.
AG: She was from the North actually, and I don’t remember her name. She was
from the North, she came South. I want to say she was young, but I could never tell with
Vietnamese how old they were. She was probably 30, I’d say 30 or 35 years old, that was in ’69, and I think she told us, she said that she was from North, but I think she made the move down in 1954 with the Catholics moving, she was a Catholic. When the Catholics moved from the North to the South I think she was a girl when she did that, and she wore Ow Dia everyday. She was a real pleasant, very soft spoken, you know here we are, these tough Marines, but she was probably one of the nicest people I met in my military career I think. But it was just a real good experience for all of us, all the Marines that were there, it was good for us, and I would like to do research on why the Marine Corps did this. We were all enlisted men and they sent us to this twelve-week language, just a quick, and there were no Army, Air Force, or Navy enlisted men there, they were all officers. We had a Special Forces Major was in our class with us, and there were ten Marines, ten Marines and a Special Forces Major. We were all PFCs or privates.

SM: Well had you heard at all about the CAP Marine program before you got to Vietnam?

AG: No, I hadn’t. I knew nothing about it till I got there. And that was good duty, Monterrey was nice, it was an Army base, the food there was excellent. We were the only Marine detachment there. They allowed us into the enlisted men’s club there so we could drink beer on Friday nights. It was just good duty, the barracks were nice. We remember we got into trouble from the General’s, we used to run by the General’s quarters, and his wife complained because we had our chants we would do, and of course we would use swear words as we’d run by so she complained to our Company Commander and our skipper called us and said you guys can’t be swearing over, so then we started running by, we would hum the swear words, and she’d be mad about that so they changed our route, so we couldn’t run by the General’s house any more. It was just, it was fun. It was twelve weeks, I got meritoriously promoted to lance corporal, last day I was there. The night before we were going to Vietnam I went out and got drunk with a couple of my friends, and came over the fence to get back into the base, I destroyed some government property, so I was kept there. All of my friends went to Vietnam and I was kept there for office hours, for 115.

SM: Oh, for crying out loud. What did you destroy?
AG: Oh, I was so out of it, a friend of mine told me when I ran into him a couple of years later, that I had thrown some stuff through some windows there, a surfboard, some trash, I guess I’d smashed a few windows out of the school. Then the MPs came and I was in trouble, so.

SM: Did you lose your meritorious?

AG: Yes, I was a lance corporal for one day. Steve, it’s a matter of, I think it was fate or something because I got to stay two extra weeks in the United States, got to go up to Treasure Island where I waited for hours to go to Vietnam after my office hours. And I started getting letters from my friends that so and so got wasted, so and so lost both of his legs, it was just, that’s when everybody had started whacking me is my friends had gone. I got a letter from my good friend Jim Blackburn’s wife who said “Jimmy was in a huge ambush, he’s in the hospital now, he’s probably going to lose his left leg. Do you know anything that’s going on?” And I said, “I’m not there, I don’t know what to tell you,” but I got several letters from my friends that said so and so was with the 9th Marines, he was killed last week, this is two weeks after they had gone, I started getting these. So I was the only Marine on the airplane when I flew to Vietnam. I got to see a couple movies and flew to Okinawa. That was in June, must have been the middle of June ’69. Yes, that’s when it started hitting me it was real, when I started to hear about my friends being casualties.

SM: I thank you very much, sir. This will end the first interview with Mr. Goodrich.

Steve Maxner: This is Steve Maxner continuing the interview with Mr. Tony Goodrich on the 19th of April 2002 at approximately 2:05 Lubbock time. I am in Lubbock, Texas and Mr. Goodrich is in Albuquerque, New Mexico. This is a continuation of the interview we started last week. Why don’t we go ahead and begin sir, with a couple of follow-up questions with regard to your training and I was wondering, while you were going through advanced infantry training, was there any kind of squad on squad patrolling or any kind of competition that pitted you against another unit out in the field?

AG: No, not that I remember Steve.

SM: Do you recall any kind of unit competitions in advanced infantry training?
AG: No.

SM: Well, we’ve pretty much discussed all of the training in the last interview, why don’t we go ahead and look at your trip over to Vietnam, and if you would describe what it was like when you let, the trip over itself and when you landed?

AG: Did I tell you that I was promoted to lance corporal and I was lance corporal for one day before I got busted back? I was kept in the United States, the rest of my language school Marines went away and I was kept in Monterrey I want to say two or three days, just doing stuff for the CO of the Marine company there and then I got sent up to Treasure Island where I spent about ten days waiting to get manifested on the flight out of the United States to Vietnam. I left about mid-June of 1969, I got on a flight at, I think it was Travis Air Force base up by San Francisco, we flew from there to Hawaii where we refueled and if I remember right, I think I was probably the Marine enlisted man on the flight. There were a lot of Air Force and Army officers on this flight. I remember we got to see a couple of movies, it was different than what other friends of mine had described about going to Vietnam on their flights. Anyway we re-fuelled in Hawaii and Honolulu, flew to Okinawa. The Marines had this policy I guess, I stopped in Okinawa, where they checked my shot records, wanted to make sure all my records were up to date. I was there for three days doing preliminary checking in for Vietnam. After three days I got on a flight, I flew in to Da Nang Air Force base. It was the middle of the night when we came in, must have been nine, ten maybe eleven o’clock at night. And I think it’s the first time that I started getting scared because I looked down as we were coming for our approach to land at Da Nang where I could see tracers and I could see flares being dropped and I really started questioning what I had just done. I landed in Da Nang, got off the aircraft, first thing I remember is how hot it was there, hot and humid I mean just it was like a furnace, and it was the middle of the night and I wasn’t looking forward to seeing the day and how hot it was there, and me a young man from New Mexico where the humidity here never gets above ten percent, it was just like stepping into an oven. The Marines were taken to a bus and taken up to the R & R center, or the inprocessing center and R &R center, I think were in the same area. They gave us a rack to sleep in that night, in the barracks they had there and the next day, we went and talked to an office folk, administrative type there, that had our name on a roster and they told us where we
were going. I was assigned to go to the 5th Marine regiment, I had no idea where they were going. I was assigned to go to the 5th Marine regiment, I had no idea where they were, who or what they were. All I knew was I going to go there as a machine gunner and I was going to be in the infantry. I remember the guy telling me that the rear area for the 5th Marines was an area called An Hoa, I was going to An Hoa combat base and he said they called this place Little Khe Sanh because it was surrounded by three mountain ranges and they used to get lots of incoming there and that scared me. So they took us out to the LZ, one of the LZ’s there, where I got on a helicopter and they flew me out to An Hoa. I checked in to some administrative place there before I got sent down to my company because they saw that I had language skills. I remember talking to the S-2 people, which were the intelligence people, that told me if they, they didn’t have any openings then for any S-2, they had no S-2 slots for people who spoke Vietnamese language, but they would let me know if there was any slots open, and of course they never let me know. I got assigned to Mike company, 3rd battalion, 5th Marines. I went down to the company bunker where I met the 1st Sergeant, and if I remember there were probably eight or ten of us that went down to the company together, I think there were eight of us. Anyway, we went down there, we checked in with the 1st Sergeant, he told us to, gave us a check to go get our jungle utilities, we were still wearing our stateside utilities and our weapons, so I went down and got my jungle utilities, helmets, flak jackets, back pack and an M-16 was actually my first rifle there. I came back to the company area, we slept in these canvas tents, the company was out in the bush, and they were going to wait for the company to come into the rear, they weren’t going to chopper us out into the bush. Actually had pictures of me when I was new. Everything was new. You could tell I was new because I still had polish on my boots and my utilities were clean. My helmet was clean. My rifle doesn’t even have a magazine in it, in the picture I have of me. I remember sitting in the tent that we were sleeping in. There were some Marines in there from the company that came in and started telling us these scary war stories about getting ambushed and taking casualties, and how much we were going to hate it there. We were real stupid for going there and all kinds of things that scared the hell out of us. We were in, I’m trying to think if we did anything, oh yes we did. I remember I got to go out on my first duty, as a marine in Vietnam was to go on a road sweep. They used to do road sweeps between An Hoa and a place called Liberty Bridge.
Road sweep was actually a mine clearing patrol so the convoys could come from Da Nang to us. What we would do was we would go from An Hoa to the Liberty Bridge and then another mine sweep patrol would go from Da Nang to Liberty Bridge. I remember being given when we got out there we reported to a staff sergeant. They gave me the mine sweeping equipment. I was brand new in country. It was one of these, you put headphones on and you’ve got this little metal plate that you swing in front of you on the road. I remember being so dame scared. The guys said just listen for a beep. If you hear a beep then stop. I remember getting out in front of this column of Marines and then behind us were trucks some Amtrax. It took me, probably an hour to go about 100 feet. Every beep I heard on the ground I would stop. They’d go up and they’d go up and they’d check. Nothing. I remember the Lieutenant that came running up and started screaming at me, “What the fuck is taking so long here?” He looked at me, saw my brand new uniform, my brand new boots and said, “What the fuck are you doing here?” I said, “Well the sergeant sent me up here.” The lieutenant called the sergeant up and said, “You get this man to the rear of the column and get somebody that knows what we’re doing or we’re going to take all day to get this damming sweep done.” I was greatful to that lieutenant. I got to the back of the column, drenched in sweat. Probably giggling a little bit because I knew that lieutenant saw me for what I was, which was a new green Marine who had no clue what was going on. That was my first introduction to being out in the bush, I guess you could say.

SM: Was that in conjunction with an engineer unit?

AG: Yes. Yes, it was, because every time I would hear something they would call the engineers up and they would probe where I had heard. It was very strange like WWII with bayonets. To this day, I have no clue why they put me up there. I guess the staff sergeant didn’t want to do it or something. We had an engineer unit right behind us that was usually flanking, usually a squad of Marines that were on our flanks off the road in the tree lines were along the road. Probably a platoon of Marines infantry behind us. Then behind them there were several trucks, 65s and Amtrax. The company came in out of the bush about a week or two after; I’m not real sure about the time line here. They were choppered in. The first thing that struck me was how dirty they were. They hadn’t shaved. They just looked filthy. The uniforms looked filthy. The weapons of course,
looked clean, that’s the thing that you had to have to stay alive. The guys just looked, I think the term we used was gungy. Just the filth and the look in their eyes too. These guys had the 1,000 yard stare they used to tell us about. These guys had seen things that I was going to see. That was quite frightening also. They had a pallet of beer on ice and they were cooking steaks for these guys when they came in out of the bush. That was something that happened every time that we came out of the bush. They would have a steak fry and cold beer for us. I got assigned to the first platoon. I met my squad leader. I don’t remember his name; I don’t remember too many names. He welcomed me to Vietnam. He’d been there eight or nine months. He said keep my eyes open to look at the guys that have been there for a while just to follow his lead. Said he would try to show me everything I needed to know to survive. There were one, two, three, four of us that went to the first platoon, maybe five. He immediately told us that they had lost a whole gun team and some others. They had taken eight or nine casualties. We were actually taking the places of these. It was tough for me because I was afraid that these guys were killed. I was going to be replacing guys friends or buddies. That scared me too. I was really afraid I might do something wrong I guess is what it comes down to.

SM: You were on a 60-gun team?

AG: Actually no, I wasn’t. Initially I wasn’t. Initially I was a rifleman. That story’s coming up. For the next ten days, we were doing what they call road security. We would go out on the road, on Liberty road between An Hoa and Liberty Bridge and just have outposts. Little bunkers every couple of hundred meters and we’d sit there during the day. At nighttime, we ran ambushes mostly. Some night time patrols, usually ambushes.

SM: Did you make contact on those ambushes?

AG: No. Not the first ones I went on. I did some stupid things. I’ll tell you about the stupidest thing I did in an ambush. My first ambush there. We were at our ambush site. I was on watch and I don’t think I slept the first month I was in country. I was so damn scared. I didn’t eat much either. My stomach was kind of shrunken. I drank a lot of water, I remember that. Lots of water. Anyway we were on this ambush, I was on watch. They used to drop these gigantic flares, out of the aircraft. Huge flares with huge parachutes. They would just light up the whole area. I remember watching
this parachute come down with the flare burning. The flare burned out and this parachute and the flare, which was still glowing, fell 30 or 40 feet away from where our position was. Me and my infinite wisdom decided I’d like to have a parachute. It would be nice to have something. I walked out there. I picked up the parachute with the glowing end of the illumination round and walked right back into the ambush site. As I stepped into the ambush site, my squad leader decked me. Knocked me silly. I could see stars. He said, “We’re not in Camp Pendleton anymore, you stupid fuck. You could have got us all killed. If they would have been out there with a sniper, they could have picked us all off.” He said, “We’ve got to move. We’ve got to move the position now, because of your stupidity. Don’t ever let this happen again, or I’ll kill you.” It was a learning experience for me, to say the least. I look back on it now, and go, “What the fuck was I thinking?” Anyway, that was one of the few times I fucked up. You have a short learning curve there otherwise. You do that more often than once, you’re going to get wasted.

SM: Just out of curiosity, when you first arrived in country and then as you were moving and you got processed into the unit, into your company, into your platoon, what kind of briefings did you get besides that first meeting with the squad leader?

AG: That’s an excellent question. We actually got to go to some kind of in country processing where we went and sat in a group. They got an officer up there with a map that showed us where we were at on the map. Showed us where they thought the enemy. That’s a great question, I haven’t thought about this in a long time, Steve. He showed us where the enemy was; what regiments, what divisions were around us. We were basically surrounded he said. They also had demonstrations. They had demonstrations if AK-47 fire. They showed us what RPGs looked like. They talked about the kind of rockets we might get. 122s and not sure what the other one was. 122s and some other thing. They talked about booby traps. They actually had a demonstration of looking for trip wires for booby traps. They showed us different kinds of booby traps. Grenades inside of C-ration cans. They showed us where they could take an artillery shell or a bomb dropped from an aircraft, that hadn’t gone off how they could set those up as booby traps. They talked about daisy chain booby traps, which is more than one or closely set up in a line. They told us to basically keep your wits about you. Make sure you’re very aware of everything that’s around. Anything that’s out of place, don’t get
near it or step in it or anything like that. Then they had a demonstration by a sapper. A
daytime demonstration. They had this guy come through the wire. Cutting the wire, he
would tie it up. He was only in a loincloth with a satchel charge bag. Came through, I
forget, 50 meters of wire in about 5 or 10 minutes. You couldn’t hear the guy. You
could not hear him. That was scary. I didn’t get any of this training in the States before I
got there. That was like a two or three day orientation. I’m trying to think of anything
else. I think that was it. We had like a three-day orientation there before we met up with
our unit.

SM: What about interacting with the Vietnamese people? Did they say anything
about that? Dos and Don’ts, that kind of stuff?

AG: Not much. I remember not much, but I had that training. Language
training. I learned there. No, not much at all. I remember there was a lot of people that
worked on the base that were Vietnamese. They cleaned things. There was just a bunch
of them that worked on the base. I remember at nighttime they’d have to leave. They’d
come in at dawn or daybreak. The barber was Vietnamese. The little photography shop
there was a Vietnamese guys running it. Little maids or hooch mamasons, I think is what
some of the guys called them. I didn’t interact with them too much in the rear though. I
didn’t interact with anybody until we went out into the bush when I started talking to the
people out in the bush.

SM: Were you told that fraternizing with the Vietnamese civilian women in
particular and prostitutes, that was a no-no? Were you ever told anything like that?

AG: We were told that we could get court marshaled I think, for getting the clap.
I don’t think they ever said anything about fraternizing. If we were ‘caught’, that was
the term. Actually it was a corpsman that told us this. If you get caught they could court
marshal you. But, other than that, no.

SM: What for? For damaging government property?

AG: (laughs) I guess so, I guess so.

SM: That first ten days, I guess where you were working road security and doing
the night ambushes and that kind of stuff, did you guys make any enemy contact at all?

AG: No contact, no contact at all. There was a couple of times on the road
sweeps, if I remember correctly that they guys on our flanks hit booby traps. They had to
medevac. I didn’t see any of that. They were way off the road. I remember medevac choppers coming in and picking these guys up. I think that happened once or twice in that ten days.

SM: How about actually finding mines on the road?
AG: None. No mines.

SM: Were there any Vietnamese villages along this road nearby?
AG: Yeah. You could see they were a couple hundred meters off the road.

There was a few of them, not many. But, pretty well cleared out then. I remember looking at the map and seeing villages on the map and then you’d look and there wouldn’t be villages there. Then I was told that these maps were four or five years old and the villages would basically be located to other places. No, I don’t remember. I saw a few hooches off the road, but very few.

SM: Did civilians use the road for traffic as well?
AG: Yes, they did. Saw lots of kids out there that were trying to sell us everything from cigarettes to cold soda pop to marijuana. Kids, by the tons. They all spoke English very well.

SM: When did you go over?
AG: It was June of 1969.

SM: June of ’69.
AG: Yeah.

SM: When you were approached by these kids selling stuff and you saw other Vietnamese people using this road that you guys were clearing, did you ever get any indication that they were avoiding certain sections of the road or that they were at all concerned that there might be mines on the road?
AG: I didn’t see that. I do remember Marines that had been there for a while, saying don’t trust these kids. They said don’t buy anything from them that’s in a bottle because they put glass in it. Don’t give them anything that they might be able to use to identify you. They said don’t trust them. They were out there probably counting us. Seeing what kind of weapons they had. I was told they’d go back to the vills and then whatever vills there were VC controlled or VC or NVA would come in at night, they would be telling them what we were. What our strength was, that kind of thing.
SM: What did you do after that first learning experience?
AG: After that first learning experience.
SM: What kind of operations did you go on?
AG: We were just doing patrols in the area. Just day patrols. To be very honest, I never knew what we were really doing. We’d go on these patrols and go through villages. Sometimes we would check for I.D. cards, sometimes we wouldn’t. I remember one of the only times that I didn’t make a hump because it was too, too hot and I actually passed out on a hump. We were going up into the foothills of the Khe Sanh mountains on a patrol one day. It was 95 degrees, humidity was about that much. I remember just blacking out. I woke up in the coroner and was pouring water on me. For the most part, I didn’t get teased too much. Everybody said this happened to every one. I got pissed off at myself. Never happened again after that. They said make sure drink plenty of water. I didn’t do salt tablets because I really didn’t need to. When I first got there, I carried four canteens of water and I ended up carrying six and eight, the rest of my tour. That was the day that they asked, I was never asked what my MOS was when I got in country. I wasn’t going to volunteer that I was a machine gunner. About three weeks into my tour, maybe a month, one of the machine gunners rotated home so they asked if anybody here was an O331, of course I learned very quickly, you never volunteer any information. They knew, Goodrich is an O331, we have his rosters right here. I remember my squad leader saying, “How come you didn’t tell us you were an O331.” I said, “Because I knew better.” He laughed. He took me over to this guy, who was the gunner. Another man whose name I don’t remember. Probably the guy that taught me more than anything I needed to know to survive there, dark hair. I have pictures of him. I’d like to find him someday. Anyway, I went up to him and he said, “I’m so and so, you now my assistant gunner, which means you feed belts of ammo into my gun and when I’m moving you’re attached to my asshole. When I move, you move.” He says, “You will not carry anything but a .45. If I’m knocked down, you pick up the gun.” Anyway this guy basically sat me down one night and said this is what you need to do to survive here. This is what you carry. He took my backpack. Took everything else I didn’t know I had. I carried extra utility uniforms, threw that away. He said, “you want to carry three or four dry socks; this is how you carry your C-rations. This is where you
put your frag. This is how you carry your flak jackets.” The guy actually sat me down
and said, “This is what you need to carry. This is what you need to not carry.” He said
that we were a team. This whole thing about an FNG country, everybody doesn’t want to
get close, he said that doesn’t work with me.

SM: Well, you’ve got to keep that gun fed.

AG: Yes. I had to keep the gun set. That’s exactly what he told me. He said,
“You see the belt getting short you make sure you clip another damn belt on there.” He
said as an A-gunner, I’d have to carry I think 400 rounds is what he told me. Which
would be four belts. Like I said, he said, “Just carry a pistol. You don’t need a rifle
because you won’t be using it.” So, I said o.k. Shortly, after that I’d say a couple of days
afterward we got called back to An Hoa, where we were told we were going to go on a
combat operation up in the mountains. The company had just come out of the mountains
before I got there. They were not happy. They said the mountains were scary. There
were lots of enemy there they said. You couldn’t see ten feet in front of you anyway. I
got the whole story about be very careful up there because you never know what’s going
to happen. My gunner and I got together the night before we went up. He said, “This is a
combat operation, this is going to be your first one, just follow me. Do what I do, pay
attention to what I do. This is what you’ve got to look for. This is the way you’ve got to
comport yourself. Ration your food and your water as much as you can. Carry as much
ammo as you can. Carry as many frags as you can. We’ll get up there and we’ll do just
fine.” I have a picture of me sitting on the LZ the next day getting ready to go up on this
operation. The choppers landed, the 46s. I remember I had an upset stomach that
morning. I was very scared. He said, “There’s no doubt we’re going to go up there and
hit something. We’re going to find some enemy. It’s not going to be like we’ve been
doing for the past two weeks down here.” So, we got choppered up, Operation Durham
Teach. End of July to about the middle of August is how long the operation lasted.

Years later I found out that we were basically chasing a couple of divisions of NVA with
a battalion sized operation from our side of the Que Sanh mountains. There was a
blocking force to the south of us, by the Americal. I think another Marine unit. I know
the Americal was down there doing a blocking force. We were supposed to get up in the
mountains and basically chase the enemy down the other side of the mountain to the teeth
of the Americal. I should tell you the night before we went up there, they did an arc light on top of these mountains that we’re going to go to. My gunner said as these bombs are dropping, it was just an awesome sight, to see the whole sky lit up on the top of this mountain. A few minutes later, a few seconds later the ground would start shaking, you could hear the rumble. It was just a truly amazing sight. He said, “That’s where we’re going tomorrow.” I said, “Will there be anybody up there when we get up there?” He said, “Probably.” Anyway, we chopper up into the mountain right where the dropped those big bombs from the 52s. Get out of the chopper; he trained me to be the last guy in the helicopter. The 46s had that back ramp; he says, “We want to be the last two on the chopper, because we want to be the first two off. If this thing gets hit,” he said, “there’s a hot LZ we want to get the hell off this thing. Besides they need automatic weapons to get off there quicker than the rest of the platoon so we can lay down a base of fire.” So, that made perfect sense to me. So, I did that my entire tour in Vietnam. Always the last one on, the first one of. We fly up there, wasn’t a hot LZ. They were actually able to land these choppers up there on top of this mountain ridge. We got off eventually. We got the whole company on this ridgeline. We started humping. We humped that day probably for six or eight hours to our position on another mountain. I remember how the heat, even in the mountains, it was hot as hell up there. I remember just trying to gain footing. It was just tough. It was hot as hell. It was hot. It was humid. There were lots of bugs. There were a lot of little animals scurrying around. There was lots of noise. Lots of jungle noise. Which my buddy said that’s good, because if there’s lots of noise, you knew that the enemy wasn’t around. When it’s quiet you’ve go to watch out for yourself. I remember going up the side of these mountain and they were vines rabbing onto your gear, onto the gun, everything. You would fall, slip and fall back, knock people down. It was just a miserable hump. My first killer hump in Vietnam, nothing like I went through in training, nothing. Anyway, we get to the top of this other ridge. We got to our objective for the day. We set up guns. We set up good field of fire, actually by the LZ. We had a small LZ that probably wasn’t wider than maybe 30 feet across. I remember the choppers came in for resupply. The front wheels would hover; the back wheel would touch down. They would drop the ramp and they would throw out C- rations and ammo
to us. The chopper skills were just amazing of these guys. A 300 or 400 foot cliff on both sides of this little LZ we had up there. That’s where I gun was set up. I remember that. That was around the same time that man landed on the moon. Somebody had a radio up there. I remember he said, “We just landed on the moon, the United States, just landed on the moon.” There was no celebration. Everybody said, “Well fuck so what?” We wish they were here and we were there.” That was July 20th I guess. July 20, 1969. It was just one of these, nobody cared. I didn’t even see the moon landing until ten years after the war. After I got home from the war. That was just one of the weird things that happens.

SM: Did that seem surreal to you?
AG: Yes. We used to call the United States, the World. That’s exactly what it seemed like to us. It seemed so far away and so out of our range of what was reality and what wasn’t. Very surreal. Like I said, nobody gave a shit. Nobody cared. The guy said that and everybody just kind of grunted. So, what?!

SM: Did you get other news sources while you were in country?
AG: Occasionally we would get stars and stripes out in the bush. Other than that unless guys got letters from home with news clippings, no. We got very few sources of news where we knew stuff was going on around the world.

SM: When the 60 gunner, that you worked with, when he emptied your pack and told you these are the things you need to carry with you, and most of it’s probably going to be ammunition and frags and stuff like that. How much would you estimate you were carrying at that point?
AG: Pound wise. For years, I’ve thought about that, I would say not less than 60 pounds, probably closer to 80. We carried claymores. Everybody carried a claymore. We carried to pop-up hand illuminations. At least, two of those. At least two pounds of C4. I probably carried four to six frags. Four or five hundred rounds of machine gun ammo. The mortar men needed people carried more, sometimes I carried an extra 60 millimeter mortar round. Of course, my pistol. I had on my helmet and my flak jacket. I’m trying to thin of what else. Anything that they needed help carrying, I helped carried. I know that the hundred rounds of machine gun ammo was seven pounds each. If I carried five of those, there’s 35 pounds right there. Illumination, sometime smoke
grenades. Sometimes willy peter or thermal grenades. Depending, I’d say close to 70, 60
or 70 at the minimum.

SM: And your water?

AG: Water? Yeah. Six canteens of water. We were weighted down pretty
much. It was interesting the way they showed me how to our backpack we could take
off. Anytime we hit any kind of fire, we would drop our backpacks and leave them,
wherever the hell we were and then make our maneuver toward wherever we were going.
Most of our equipment, most of our ammo was underneath our pack. The flap jacket
weighed a ton. Those flap jackets we had; I thought they were worthless until I saw a
guy get his life saved because it stopped shrapnel. They would get wet and they’d be so
damn heavy. They were heavy dry, but they were really heavy when they got wet. I
remember being in the jungle, out in the bush if you get a scratch on your hand or on your
arm or face and how it would fester because there was no way you could clean it. We
called those gook sores. To this day, I still have scars on my arms and my legs and I
think my back, too. There was no way. Corpsmen would clean it quickly. They’d say
pour water on it, but we hated to use water for something like that. Water was a
commodity. One of the things, you didn’t give it away.

SM: Right, You drank it.

AG: That’s right. You used it to drink; you didn’t use it to brush your teeth. You
didn’t use it to wash anything. It was to drink. I learned that quickly too, from my
gunner. That water is yours you save it for you. Anyway, back to Durham peak, this is
where I got into my first firefight. We were running patrols, stayed in this one position
for several days. I remember we were running patrols from our little ridgeline to a
ridgeline that was higher than us. It was a pretty good trail that had been well used where
we had our position. We found some spider holes and some tunnels up there also. We
knew that the enemy was close. We knew that they were close by. One day we were on
a patrol. I should probably tell you my lieutenant’s name was Lieutenant Williams. The
only platoon commander’s name I remember from Vietnam because he was so good.
Lieutenant Williams. He’s now a Federal Judge in North Carolina. I just contacted him
about three year ago. We were on patrol one day going up to this mountain, actually with
the mountain ridge that kind of overlooked all the other mountains. Highest point from
where we were at. We were on patrol one day, we stopped. The Lieutenant told us to stop and we were going to take a break and we saw one of our platoon members, a Native American guy from Arizona saw a line of Vietnamese about 200 meters from us going up this denuded hill. It was just flat and there was nothing growing. There was 15 or 20 of them humping up the side of this mountain. We all got in line, Lieutenant had us all get on line and we opened fire. We actually ambushed these guys. It was pretty amazing. We fired everything. We fired logs at them, bloopers, machine gun fire and M-16 and M-14 fire. Everybody was firing on line. Probably 20 of us, 25 of us. After that was done we called in an air strike. They came and dropped napalm and 250 pound bombs. Of course, after that was all over we had to go check out the area. My machine gunner, we did not carry a tripod in Vietnam. I don’t know if I told you this. A tripod was built onto the gun. He actually showed me how to use the gun with a bipod. I never shot the machine with a bipod when I was being trained. He also showed me how to do it with a strap. Basically off hand what he called floating the gun. That happened later that day. He told me watch what I do. This is how you have to change your aiming. You have to change they way you lay on the deck. This how you shoot the gun laying flat on your belly with the bipod out there. Basically taught me that day how to do that. I remember feeding ammo into the gun and picking out targets for him. I’d say 20 meters to the left and he’d go right over there. He was a great gunner. A great gunner. I remember picking targets out. The enemy was running around on the hill. They had no idea where the fire was coming from. You could see them getting hit. You could see them actually getting blown apart. We had an RPG, not an RPG a lawman who actually took this guy. You could actually see him fall apart, arms and legs going different directions. We got no return fire. These guys had no clue what was going on. After all this was over we called the air strike in. We had to go check out the area. I remember the first thing was the smell of the napalm and the smell of the burnt flesh. That always stuck in my mind. We found, I want to say three bodies and they were shot to hell. I mean there were big gaps, big holes in them. One guy had no face. His face was missing. We found no weapons, but backpacks with rice, some medical supplies. Lots of blood trails. Lots of blood trails everywhere. We knew that they were going to a place that we were going to have to go to. The next day, we actually came back from our patrol that day. I think we
found some documents too on a couple of these guys and the Lieutenant had them. Came back to our position gave all the stuff to the skipper of the company. There were some intelligence guys there that radioed back what we had found. The next day the skipper decided to send two platoon patrols down the same trail, up the same ridge. This was probably mid-morning. The first one by the way, was just one platoon. This is a two-platoon patrol. They sent us over. We were the lead platoon. I remember walking through the area where we had ambushed these guys and you could still smell. You could still smell things there. We started getting sniper fire. The first time I’d ever had rounds going over my head that weren’t being in rifle range. Very distinct sound. I remember everybody of course jumps off the side of the trail facing outward. They call guns up. My gunner gets up, I’m right behind him. We run right to the front of the column. I’m feeding belts into the gun. He’s doing it off hand, the floating of the gun, with the sling over his shoulder. We’re just chewing up the jungle in front of us. I thought it was great. I thought it was just fascinating and just fun as hell. I realized I was paying to much attention to what was going on in front of me instead of paying attention to the rounds I was feeding into the machine gun. I did not clip a belt on as the belt got smaller. We ran out. He smacked me. Screamed at me as he opened up the breach of the gun said, “Goddamn it I told you.” As I pulled another belt off my shoulder, which I should have done anyway, I realized that we were being shot at. I remember rounds hitting around us. I remember hearing rounds go by my head. I remember him screaming at me. It was that moment that I realized that somebody was trying to kill me. I realized that this was real. This was not training. This was the real thing. I remember I pissed my pants that day. Anyway, I got the belt into the gun. They were still shooting at us. To this day I have no idea why they didn’t hit us. I remember seeing rounds hit all around us and going by us and whizzing right by my ear. We got up and moved forward and they disappeared. The enemy disappeared. The gunner was pissed off at me, as he should be. “You know you don’t be paying attention to what’s going on there. You’re job is to make sure this gun does not quit.” I remember firing my .45 after I put that second belt in there. He said, “You did the right thing with the bushes there, you did the right thing.” As I was feeding the gun, I was firing my .45 pistol into the brush around us. That scared me. I knew then that I was going to have to change my thought pattern if I
was going to get through the war. I had to concentrate on what I was doing. He kind of congratulated me, said I did a great job. “When we moved, you moved right with me. I appreciate that. Just make sure you concentrate on your job with the gun. That’s all you have to do. Don’t worry about anything else.” I learned another lesson that day. Thank God that wasn’t a fatal one for anybody in the platoon. I remember shaking like hell. In fact, I did that after every firefight. I remember getting sick and throwing up. I knew that it was real. I knew that people were going to die even though nobody died that day. Went back to the position that night. The next day I don’t know whether it was two platoons or the whole company went on the patrol. We knew that something was going to happen so we went back up that hill again. We were the lead platoon again. We topped this ridge and everything exploded. Everything blew up. I remember being knocked down, knocked out. Knocked into a bomb crater. There was automatic weapons fire, RPGs. I even think they were dropping mortars in on us. We were ambushed badly. The second platoon, which was behind us, were in the middle of the kill zone. I remember waking up, my head was ringing, I couldn’t hear. All I remember is the light, bright lights. Lots of dust, lots of smoke. Being scared shitless. My gunner, I had no idea wherever he was. He got knocked off the trail also. I remember just being scared. I remember hearing screaming. When my hearing started coming back hearing screaming and I had no idea what to do. I didn’t know what to do. When I looked down the hill, I saw this Marine, big black guy, machine gunner from the second platoon running up the hill with a gun. With a machine gun. Firing on both sides of the trail. That’s when I saw guys in pith helmets. They were shooting at him. He got up there, killed I want to say six or seven North Vietnamese and he got shot and killed twenty yards in front of me. He basically broke the ambush up single-handedly this guy. His name was Hayes. Larry Hayes. I live today because of him. I’m sure they would have killed all of us.

SM: Want to take a minute?
AG: Yeah, yeah.
SM: What happened after that particular incident. After Hayes got killed we swept the area and the enemy, of course, had disappeared like they usually do. The thing that sticks out in my mind is that I lost something that day. I was so damn pissed off. I
was so angry about his death and I wasn’t able to do anything about it. I still feel bad
about it. I still feel kind of guilty because I didn’t do anything. I was so scared that I had
no clue what was going on. I remember we had several K.I.A.s and several W.I.A.s. I
remember putting W.I.A.s. I remember the choppers came in--we blew an LZ at the top
of this mountain to get everybody out that had been hit--about how bloody the LZ was. It
was just drenched in blood. I lost my humanity or something that day. I don’t know
what happened. I got numbed. I numbed my feelings. My anger and fear from that day
on is what carried me through Vietnam. That’s how I survived it. We weren’t ever able
to mourn the deaths that I saw there. That was one of the things that bothered me for a
long, long time. Somebody would get killed. Put them in a body bag and then you’d
forget about it because you had to go do the next thing you had to do. So, I guess I lost
my innocence that day or something. Something that’s always stuck in my mind. That
was a big change in my life that day. For the next few days we chased this NVA.

SM: This will end the interview with Mr. Tony Goodrich on the 19th of April.
This is Steve Maxner continuing the interview with Mr. Tony Goodrich on the 22nd of
April 2002 at approximately 2:40 Lubbock time. I’m in Lubbock, Texas. Mr. Goodrich
is in Albuquerque, New Mexico. This is a continuation of the interview for the Vietnam
Archive oral history project. Sir, why don’t we go ahead and pick up with the discussion
of your perceptions, your experiences after Durham Peak, and if you would just explain
how that impacted you.

AG: Well, we left off where I had experienced my first dead Marines around me,
and also dead enemy and that kind of changed the way I thought about the war. Well first
of all I knew it was serious, I knew that I might get killed there, and I knew that I had to
do things that maybe I wouldn’t, I thought I would ever be able to do to survive in
Vietnam. So I made a decision that after that first fire fight and that first ambush that I
survived to so whatever was necessary to get through the war, so I basically cut my
emotions off and anger and fear drove me through the rest of my tour in Vietnam. I
consider myself pretty lucky, I didn’t get wounded in my tour there. I spent three
hundred and sixty days, I think in Vietnam. The tour then was supposed to be thirteen
months, but when I got there the Marine Corps cut it back to twelve months, and I was
looking through my records the other day and realized they had shaved a month off of our
tour of duty. The company, I’ve done a little research on my company over the years,
and out of my whole company, there was about 70% casualties when I was in Vietnam,
that’s either wounded or killed, KIAs weren’t that bad after the first three months I was
there. It was mostly wounded from incoming or from booby traps, and booby traps were
the big killer of the Marines that I served with.

SM: Was there any kind of memorial service for the killed Marines?
AG: Yes, we’d come in out of the bush, and they would have memorial services
where they’d turn the rifle upside down with the bayonet stick in the ground, and put a
helmet on it. Those are kind of, I don’t know, I guess at the time, they didn’t really mean
anything, because it was usually weeks, if not months after these men had been killed and
taken away in body bags. So they would just, it was something that we all had to do but it
was very uncomfortable for me, in the respect that it wasn’t really a way to mourn these
me, but it was a way for the Marine Corps, I guess to mourn them. But I found it to be
kind of ghoulish, I know that sounds weird but I found it to be kind of ghoulish and kind
of silly and I know most of the Marines me also felt the same way. And it was many
years after the war that I was able to go to the Wall; there I was able to mourn these men.
Yes, they had the ceremonies, every time they came out of the bush, where it was killed
they would have a little ceremony, read his name and rank and if he had been awarded
any ribbons or medals.

SM: Was there a chaplain present?
AG: You know, I’m trying to think. I didn’t pay attention too much. Yes I think
there was a chaplain present, and this would happen usually at our regimental rear, which
was An Hoa combat base.

SM: And would they offer any kind of counseling or anything like that?
AG: No, we were never offered anything like that.

SM: Now, was there a perception amongst the Marines that attended the
memorial services that it was kind of, I guess, pro forma, this was the Marine Corps
going through the motions of something they were required to do?
AG: Yes, that’s actually an excellent observation. That’s exactly what it was.
We, like I told you earlier that my emotions were cut off because I couldn’t dwell too
much on the deaths at the time because we had jobs to do. We had other missions to go
on, and if men did that it would really destroy their combat effectiveness for one thing.
And I’d say that’s a good observation, it was a way for the Marine Corps I think, to think
they were doing something for us, and at the time it didn’t mean anything. There’s an old
Vietnam saying, ‘don’t mean nothing,’ and that’s basically what we said to each other
when we were watching these rituals that would occur.

SM: Just out of curiosity, do you think there was a way that the Marine Corps
could have done it better, that would have, perhaps had more meaning for the men that
survived?

AG: You know, I thought about that question for years Steve, and I don’t know, I
really don’t. I can’t think of anything they could have done because, like I said, we had
to continue with our missions and we couldn’t dwell too much on KIAs.

SM: How about your leaders, out in the field after someone was killed like that,
was there anything offered as far as, I mean, I realize that they can’t sit there and counsel
people, but in terms of any kind of quick memorial, mini-memorial, any kind of?

AG: No, I think that the best thing that we did, was as quick as we could get a
medevac in and get these guys out of there, especially the KIAs. Sometimes we had to
spend nights with the bodies and that was just a little bit too eerie for me, it was just no,
and our leaders, they just told us basically to forget it. We have to do something
tomorrow, we’ve got to do something next week so we’ve go to get, keep your
concentration on what you need to do to get the job done, and I think that was probably
the best advice at that time.

SM: Did you ever get a chance to talk with the other Marines about these things,
like when you were back in garrison?

AG: Yes, actually we did. We talked a little bit about it, talked about how good
the people were. Most of the time it was some goofy black humor thing. It was just, we
talked about how good the people were, we never talked about ourselves, its funny, we
never talked about are we going to be the next one to get it. It was, I hate to say this, I’ve
heard this clichés, but it’s true, I used to think, it’s better them than me, no matter who it
was. We knew that these men that had died, died so we could stay alive, and that was a
big burden, and it’s a big burden even to this day, for me to realize that these men
sacrificed themselves for me and that’s really, really, what is was all about over there.
That you had to trust the Marines around me, the ones that kept me alive, and the ones
that died were the ones who kept us all alive.

SM: In talking to other Marines, did you find that they were using the same
coping mechanisms that you were?
AG: Yes, we sure did. We tried to laugh about the person that was killed. there
was a strange ritual when somebody would get killed. We would go through his gear, and
see what he had that we could take. I got an M-14 off a dead Marine and I wanted that
M-14 and I just took it off the dead body. I figured, hey he can’t use it any more. Well,
we go through his backpack, if he had any C- rations, if he had any extra ammo, anything
that we would need, we would take it our of his pack and put it in our own pack, and
maybe that was our way of honoring them. I know that sounds strange, but I think that
they understood that they would do the same thing if something happened to us, and I
think we all coped that way. We tried to forget about, I guess forget about them, even
though we never did, it was just a matter of forgetting and getting on with business.

SM: What did you guys do after Durham Peak?
AG: We came back to An Hoa, they choppered us out after we went down the
mountain – there’s a couple of things happened on Durham Peak I need to tell you about.
We had a point man by the name of Garcia, a guy from Houston, Texas. His name was
Chico, probably one of the best point men I’ve ever seen. He broke up two ambushes on
Durham Peak, right after Hayes was killed, he broke up two L-shaped ambushes waiting
for our platoon. He was the point man and killed these two Vietnamese. After the
second ambush, we were ordered to go down the hill to see if we could find the enemy
that had run away and they started sniping at us, so we were afraid there was going to be
another ambush and I remember our Lieutenant, Lieutenant Williams called an air strike
within fifty meters of us. We got into this big bomb crater, I guess there were, I want to
say there were twelve or fifteen, maybe more, a little more than that, but we got into a big
bomb crater, he called in F-4 air strikes, and they dropped napalm and big bombs, I’m not
sure, 250's, that literally bounced us around in the inside of this crater, but they actually,
if there was anybody down waiting for us, they took them out. So we felt good about that.
Lieutenant Williams was an amazing platoon commander. He’s the only platoon
commander whose name I remember. He was just a good man, he cared about his troops. He would go the extra mile for us, to try to get us what we needed to survive out in the bush and he could read a map as good as any body I’ve ever seen and in the mountains that was very important because reading the map of a mountain is tough, but to be able to call in an air strike like he did that day was just truly a miracle. He did something that he probably should have gotten a medal for. Also, on that same operation we found a huge enemy hospital as we went down the mountain, chasing the division or regiment of Vietnamese who were in front of us down to the blocking force at the bottom of the mountain. It was big, well stocked, fairly well made hospital complex we found that had left their patients there, the ones that didn’t have legs, there was a couple of guys there, had their legs surgically removed, this guy with an arm gone. Some of them had diseases and we had to carry them down the hill. But Durham Peak, that was about a three week operation, and I got to the bottom of that hill after the end of that operation, just thinking that I still had eleven months to do. It was the first time somebody gave me a calendar I started marking days off on the calendar. After Durham Peak we came back to An Hoa, our rear area, and we went to a place called Arizona territory. It was a strip of land north of An Hoa where there was an operation Arizona in the early part of the war, I think ’66. And it was basically an area where we did just search and destroy missions and patrols, in an area where there used to be rice paddies and used to be lots of hamlets, but there was nothing there. It was a huge conduit for NVA coming down the Ho Chi Minh trail, they used to come right across the Arizona. Out there it was mostly boredom, most of my tour in Vietnam was being bored to death, being too hot, being too hungry, being too tired, being too angry. Went out there this must have been in August and September, we took a lot of incoming out there, there were lots of booby traps in the Arizona, lots of them, and we got overrun one night, in the rain, and I hate rain. That's why I love living here in the southwest, but we got overrun badly in the rain. We were set on these three hills, each platoon had a hill. I’m assuming we were on the north part of the Arizona. There was other units operating in the southern part, and we were at some kind of blocking force. The monsoons had just started, this must have been September of ’69. We were on these hills for three days and then the skipper, our company commander, decided to have us rotate on the hill, the 1st platoon moved over where 2nd platoon was, and 2nd to where 3rd
was, and that night it was pouring rain. I remember we had RPGs shot at us, mortar rounds were shot and AKs, they snuck up close enough to the lines, they were throwing Chi-com grenades at us and shooting at us. And my gun team, they fired at us, a couple of RPGs at us that didn’t go off, we found RPGs right next to our hole that were unexploded. First time I ever used a claymore to take out a, there was a sniper right in front of our hole, fifty meters, we could see the muzzle flash from his AK, and we took him out with a claymore, which is an amazing weapon. Next morning the hill where the CP was, which we were at the night before, had taken a lot of casualties. I have no idea how many men were killed and wounded that day, but it was the same hill that we were on the day before, the gun teams that had taken our hole were either all killed or wounded, so it was another, being in the right place at the right time. Most of the time out in the Arizona I was just patrolling, sitting up on hills watching for booby traps, watching for incoming and basically looking for the enemy.

SM: Now, when you were overrun, was there anybody captured?
AG: No, there were several bodies that we found the sappers that came through the lines and lots of Chi-com grenades that didn’t go off, and actually a couple of mortar rounds and a couple of RPG rounds that didn’t go off. But no Americans were captured.

SM: Did you capture any Vietnamese alive?
AG: No, none alive, no.

SM: About how many dead were there?
AG: I’m trying to think. I think we killed six or seven that night. I think that’s how many bodies we ended up putting on the choppers to take away.

SM: Speaking of the casualties, the enemy casualties, back at Durham Peak you mentioned the hospital where you had to pull the patients out, how many patients were left behind?
AG: I’d say a dozen, ten or twelve.

SM: Yourself, did you get a view of the hospital?
AG: Yes, I did.

SM: About how many patients could it have accommodated?
AG: I’d say at least 50. They had bamboo beds. They had canopies over the beds. There was basically a cave complex in a valley that had water going down right in
there was a stream, operating tables, IV’s. One of the things we found was a
box of clothes from the University of California at Berkley. We found T-shirts at UC
Berkley that were sent from friends of the Vietnamese people or something. Anyway, the
hospital was very sophisticated. I’d never seen anything like it before or during my tour.
There were a lot of bloody bandages around, but it was just truly an amazing piece of
work, and they had bamboo beds, I’d say fifty patients they could work on. We found a
bunch of rice, a whole bunch of medical supplies, a lot of captured medical supplies. U.S.
stuff, morphine, we found morphine syringes, we found IVs, we found, actually, what the
Army and the Marines called B1 units, which is actually units the Corpsmen carry, we
found several of those there, that I’m assuming they either captured from the South
Vietnamese or from us, but it was just.

SM: Or bought on the black market.

AG: Black market too, yes. But it was just truly a piece of work. I was stunned
by the sophistication, stunned by just the, it was well hidden because of the canopy. I
mean you couldn’t see anything from above, and I know after we left they called an Arc
Light, they came in and blew it all away with the 52s.

SM: Now, you mentioned for instance, getting back to Durham Peak for a
moment, that your Lieutenant had to call in an air strike about fifty meters from your
positions, after that air strike was finished, did you guys have to go through and patrol
that area and confirm?

AG: Yes, actually we did. We got up and went through the area to confirm there
was no enemy and no bodies, no parts any of that kind of stuff.

SM: Did you find anything?

AG: No, we didn’t find anything, didn’t find a blood trail or anything like that.

SM: And the only personnel you found in the hospital were injured soldiers, sick
soldiers?

AG: Yes.

SM: And they were just taken back to the rear for processing by intelligence,
military intelligence and stuff?

AG: Right, actually we were on a squad sized, reinforced squad patrol one day as
we were going down the mountain. Our point man heard noise. You could hear a radio
being played, it was Vietnamese music, you could smell, they were cooking rice. We were on a small ridgeline overlooking this little base camp they had before the hospital and I remember, hell, there couldn’t be more than eight or ten of us, I remember the Lieutenant was going to get us all on line, and we were going to assault through this position, but our point man panicked and opened up, and everybody took off and we went down. There’s probably, we’re figuring two platoons of North Vietnamese that left everything there. We found rifle, AKs, backpacks, radios, I mean all kinds of documentation, all kinds of good intelligence information. And they just took off, they just took off down the mountain and we were assuming that they were, either some kind of rear guard, but there were too many of them, in my opinion there were too many just to be a rear guard. I mean our interpreter said he was thinking maybe it was a combination of a hospital and R & R complex or something, because they had bathing pools and that kind of stuff, but we didn’t kill anybody that day. We could have had a bunch of kills and our point man just kind of lost it and opened up and didn’t hit anything.

SM: And you said you think there were about two platoons of people there?

AG: Not two platoons, but we probably took out about fifteen weapons, we took out two mortars, I remember that day, two dozen backpacks, lots of rice, lots of Chi-com grenades, cooking utensils. They had a big pot of rice, a huge pot of rice that was cooking over a fire, maps, we found maps and we found lots of documents that made us think. Well, our interpreter with the S-2 guy said there was at least, they said there were two platoons there, which probably means between forty and fifty Vietnamese.

SM: Was that the largest capture of cached type weapons and things like that that you had?

AG: Yes, it was, in fact we had to carry. We couldn’t bring in choppers to extract this stuff because it was just too thick so we had to carry half this crap down the mountain. I mean, all the weapons were carried down the mountain. We destroyed the rice there, the engineers came in with either c-4 or we pissed on it or something to destroy the rice and the food. We carried all the weapons down the mountain. I carried and SKS, and a pistol that I found and actually a hammock and some other stuff I ended up throwing away before we got to the bottom of the mountain, it just got too damn heavy. But I walked out of there with an SKS and a Chinese 9 mm pistol.
SM: Were these trophies or?
AG: Yes, actually you know what I did, I actually brought back, there’s a helmet
and a belt I got that I brought back to the States with me. I sold my rifle to an Air Force
guy in Da Nang on the way home. He offered me $300 and I figured what the hell, beer
money, the pistol I ended up giving to my platoon commander.
SM: Now is that the one you recently made contact with?
AG: Yes, Lieutenant Williams, he’s a federal judge in North Carolina.
SM: Now, getting back to your time in the Arizona territory, you mentioned that
of course, a lot of patrolling, a lot of looking for booby traps and stuff like that, and you
mentioned being overrun that time, were there many snipers in the area?
AG: That's a good question, no, there weren’t that many snipers there. There was
hardly, well there wasn’t any civilians living out of the Arizona. I mean it was basically, I
don’t wan to use the term free-fire zone, but it was, anything out there that was moving
that wasn’t an American you could shoot at, but no snipers that I remember at all, except
for, like I said, mortars. They were very accurate with their mortars and with their rocket
fire, very accurate.
SM: How often would they hit you with mortar and rocket fire?
AG: Well, it depended. If they did it usually was at sundown or sunrise, and
sometimes it would happen for two or three days in a row, and then it wouldn’t happen
for a week. It also varied in the intensity, sometimes they’d only throw in two or three
and other times they’d mortar you for fifteen or twenty minutes, throw in a hundred
rounds. And of course we were always trying to figure out where they were coming from,
and we were pretty good at spotting, especially at night, when mortars come in at night
you can see the tube, usually.
SM: There’s a flash.
AG: Yes, the flash and the sound. The flash of course is nice to see because you
always see that before you hear the sound. And as far as I’m concerned, mortars were
probably the most terrifying thing that I went through because you couldn’t hear them
until they were on top of you. I remember one day we had just set up in a position for the
night, and you can hear the tubes working out. You could hear bloop, bloop, bloop, and
you could actually see the mortars coming in, I mean you could see them leave the tube
about five hundred meters away from us. There was a tree line, and directly in front of
my position, you could see the mortars arch up and come right down on us, and we were
digging our fighting holes, and it was very tough digging that day because it was mostly
shale, and that hole was about six feet deep in about five seconds. When you’re under fire
that way, you can get very creative and try to get below the tree line. Mortars were no
fun; RPGs were probably my second frighteningest weapon shot at you, sound like a
freight train.

SM: When you were getting hit by those mortars that you could actually see, you
can see the men then as well, the enemy?

AG: No, actually we could see the muzzle in the tree line, yes, and we didn’t
have, I remember our rocket men getting out there with laws. Now a law had about a
three hundred meter, but these guys were actually vertical with the laws, and these guys
are truly amazing. We were firing back at them with laws, and these guys were just
Kentucky winded, I was truly amazed at these mortar guys. I mean our rocket guys,
rockets and mortars I guess were the same MOS, but they were putting law rounds right
on target, and then that night we called in an air strike and took out that tree line
basically.

SM: Now, but you didn’t have a sniper for instance that could come and take
some good, well-aimed shots at these guys?

AG: Well, actually the snipers I saw were usually with battalion, and I saw very
few snipers there, not with our unit. The special people we had with our unit, actually,
when we were up in Durham Peak we had some dog handlers come up with us, we loved
them. The dog handlers were great, the dogs were great, in fact we always wanted the
handler to sleep in our position with us so the dog could be on watch, but those dogs and
the dog handlers were very brave, brave men and the dogs were truly amazing. As far as
we were concerned they were one of us.

SM: Now, what were the dogs best at doing?

AG: Well, walking point. Usually they would walk point, and they were really
good sniffing out ambushes or sniffing out the enemy and the dog would react a certain
way and the handler would usually be able to tell us what was coming up. The dogs were
truly uncanny in that respect.
SM: How about in detecting trip wires and mines?

AG: You know, I don’t remember the dog doing that, but I’m sure he did if he was walking point. The only thing I remember is they were saying there was enemy in front of us, the dog was good at doing that. In the nighttime, we knew the dog was always on alert also, so we never got hit when the dog was on lines with us.

SM: You never got hit with rocket or mortar fire, or anything?

AG: Well, nothing, nothing, and I don’t know whether that’s because of the dog, but I think the enemy, I know that the dogs were big targets. We found some documents saying that they would pay rewards for dead dogs and dead handlers. But I liked the dogs, I liked the handlers and there should have been more of them. And we usually only saw them when we were in the mountains, not in the lowlands, the paddies.

SM: Now, any major contacts in the Arizona territory with large enemy units?

AG: Actually, no, during the daytime nothing. At nighttime, that one time we got overrun we’d get mortared like I said, in the morning and afternoon, but no major contacts, none.

SM: Did you guys do nighttime patrolling as well?

AG: Yes, nighttime patrolling and ambushes, lots of those.

SM: Were the ambushes ever tripped?

AG: Actually, two times I remember we ambushed some, we actually made a night movement to get down to the river. I’m not sure which one it was, the Bui Diem, the Tuy Bong or the two rivers that were around Arizona. We made a night movement, got down to the river, saw a dozen boast crossing the river and we were about two klicks away unfortunately. We could see them, but we couldn’t shoot at them, so we called in artillery on them and took out, we caused a lot of casualties that day. A lot of kills we got that day, but none form our own guns, we had to call artillery on them. Another time we had a thing called a nantose, which was a tracks vehicle that had six 106 recoilless rifles mounted on it. We went down the river one night, and for once the intelligence was right on the money. We took out twenty-five or thirty enemy crossing the river.

SM: Now how long did you stay there in the Arizona territory?

AG: I think the longest we stayed out was forty-five days.

SM: So you’d stay out for a certain length of time, come back to garrison?
AG: Yes, the minimum amount we’d stay out was like three weeks. We were usually out between three weeks and I think the longest time I was out was sixty-two days. We went out right before Christmas of ’69, I think December 20th or 21st, we stayed out all of January, all of February, came back in about the middle of March.

SM: Now, when you were out on these extended types of periods, especially in the Arizona territory, how periodically would you get re-supplied? Was there ever any kind of morale boosting activity?

AG: Well, re-supply was usually for ammo and food, and depending on where we were at, we probably get re-supplied once a week. They’d come out, and of course we ate C- rations, and they would bring water in five-gallon cans and we’d refill our canteens. As far as morals boosters, I remember one of the most surrealistic things I ever saw in Vietnam was at Christmastime, Christmas day. It was raining like hell, we were in the Arizona, it was just muddy and rainy, just miserable and we had a chopper come in, a -46 that was bringing, they told us it was bringing care packages from the States and it was, it was a bunch of mail and care packages from the U.S. and I remember the chopper landed, the back ramp dropped down and there was a guy dressed up like Santa Claus that started throwing packages out. He had this big bell, and he walked out and he was ringing the bell saying Ho, ho, ho, as he threw the bags out, and of course we laughed for about two seconds and then we wanted to take him out. But I remember this chopper just, after it unloaded all the bags, all the mail, all the care packages, the chopper took off and circled our position, and this guy was leaning out the side window ringing this bell and saying, “Ho, ho, ho,” and it was just one of the strangest things I’d ever seen. That, and they day we were on patrol during the Christmas season, and there was a bird dog, which is an observation plane flying overhead that had a speaker and it was playing Christmas carols, and we were on patrol in the Arizona, in the middle of nowhere, raining like, well it wasn’t raining that day, it was kind of overcast because he was still flying. But he was playing Hark the Herald Angels, and Frosty the Snowman, it was just another surrealistic thing. It was just very loud and we thought it was pretty stupid because we thought he was spotting us from where we were at out in the bush, so.

SM: Was he flying like over you?

AG: Yes, he was flying directly over us.
SM: Like he knew where you were?
AG: Yes, absolutely and if I remember right, I think our lieutenant got on the radio and says get the fucking plane away from us, but that was Christmas carols, and I think they thought these were morale boosters. I look back on it now, it’s funny, then we weren’t happy.
SM: So they didn’t have the intended affect?
AG: No, they did not have the intended effect, but the packages when Santa Claus left, the packages we got from home, that was a real pleasant surprise. We got packages form people we didn’t know in the United States, just said to any Marine, here’s, it was the weirdest stuff, they were sending us like shoelaces and deodorant I remember, the package I had deodorant and shoeaces and Kool-Aid. Just stuff that we, there was some stuff we were able to use, and I just wrote a nice long letter back to this woman from somewhere in the Midwest, just thanking her profusely, saying I really do appreciate this. You don’t even know me, it was very, that was a good morale booster for us, getting these nice packages from these people in the States who were at least thinking of us.
SM: Now, that package that you received with deodorant, you guys wouldn’t use that would you?
AG: No, not at all.
SM: Why wouldn’t you use deodorant?
AG: Well, because the enemy could smell it. In fact, I didn’t realize until after I had been there for awhile, the dirtier we were, the more we smelled like the enemy, the better chance we had of doing our job right. It’s just like, Steve, when we were out in the bush, I got to the point where the smaller the unit was, as far as I was concerned, the safer I felt. We used to have battalion-size movements on line through the Arizona with track vehicles and you could hear us coming from miles and miles away, and I was nineteen years old, lance corporal, I knew this was stupid. But I would volunteer to go out in squad size ambush, the smaller the unit, the safer I felt, because if we could act like the enemy, then we had a much better chance of surprising him and for being like him, being able to move quickly, quietly, and concealed. You conceal yourself easier, the less people that there are.
SM: Now, was one of the other attractions, as far as the smaller squad size
patrolling and things like that, you were more effective that way?

AG: Absolutely, in fact, I bet we captured more people because we surprised the
enemy more when we were doing small size patrols.

SM: On the large battalion size missions, did you ever make contact?

AG: Never, and you know what’s weird is, we made contact at night when we
would set in, that’s when we would get mortared, when we’d get RPG’d because there
were, I think the term was clusterfuck, there was too many of us out there. They knew
exactly where we were at. We’d stop at night and they would drop stuff in us all night.

SM: Did you ever encounter any friendly Vietnamese out there?

AG: You know, outside the Arizona, yes. One of the weird stories, I guess, from
my Vietnamese language is when I got to Vietnam, I wasn’t able to converse very well,
because the people in the bush were uneducated basically, and they spoke a pigeon
Vietnamese, French and English, and it took me a while to get, to be able to converse
with these people. Eventually, I was able to be pretty good at it, but one of the first
patrols I went on, where we were told to go out to this one sector outside of An Hoa, and
go to this village, and if there were any males there, they said between the ages of fifteen
and, I think they said forty-five, that we were supposed to bringing them back to the CP
so the intelligence people could interrogate them. We were a good three klicks away
from our CP and we went to a vill, and I was, since I was the alleged Vietnamese
interpreter, I went up there and asked people how old they were. There was one man
who said he was forty-five, at least that’s what I thought he said, so we brought this guy
all the way back to the CP took him to the Intelligence bunker, they guy comes running
out and starts screaming, “Who brought this man in?” Of course, I said I did. He said,
“This guy’s seventy-five years old.” So we had to take this man, I tell you, I had no clue,
because the, he didn’t look like he was that old, so we had to take this guy back out to his
village and apologize. They gave him some money, they gave him some food, and then I
had to escort the guy back out, so that kind of blew my cover as far as being able to get
any jobs interpreting.

SM: Now, did you find any young men at all?
AG: Actually, no, not on that one, but on a couple of patrols we did, and these men were always suspicious, because most of the vills we went into, in fact all of the vills we went to, it was either very old women or very, very young kids. In other words, kids that were ten or twelve or less and women that were in their fifties or sixties or older, or old men. Usually there weren’t that many old men either if I remember right, but any in-betweens, you never saw middle-aged men or women that were between the ages of say, fifteen and forty-five. They were either working for the enemy or they were dead.

SM: So when you were out in the Arizona territory you never encountered any Vietnamese unless they were enemy, period.

AG: No, there was no Vietnamese out there, none. Even though on our maps, there was probably I’d say, five or six dozen hamlets on the map that were marked there was nothing out there.

SM: They had moved them, relocated the people.

AG: Right, they had relocated them and there, none of the rice paddies were viable. It was basically a bombed-out, shelled, denuded area.

SM: Had they sprayed much defoliant in the area, or did they even need to?

AG: Around the rivers they did. There used to be at least fifty to one hundred meters on both sides of the rivers, and I didn’t know it was Agent Orange until I came home. But it was a weird, I want to say like a gray dust, there was nothing growing, either side of the river for about a hundred meters and we walked through it, it smelled funny, it was just very strange. We had no clue that it was defoliant until several years after the war for me.

SM: How about, you guys getting sprayed directly, any birds ever fly over you spraying anything?

AG: No, never happened to me.

SM: How would you handle the insects?

AG: Well, we had bug juice, we had the lousy Army bug juice they gave us, but I think that they liked, the mosquitoes were horrible, It was flies in the day and mosquitoes at night, and it was just horrible. Living here in New Mexico, there’s no such thing as mosquitoes here but it was just, I can’t describe to you how pesky they were. And they were always present, it was either flies or mosquitoes, one or either and it was just a pain
in the ass, let’s put it that way, and the mosquito repellent usually did not work and after
a while you just get used to it, I remember, just got used to it, they were just part of life.
SM: Did you guys ever encounter any snakes?
AG: Yes, lots of snakes, in fact, our point man killed a huge snake once.
SM: Any idea what kind it was?
AG: No, it was a big one, that’s all I remember. I remember he killed it, he
dragged it by us. I want to say it was a Python or a Boa Constrictor or something, and
there were a lot of poisonous snakes. I know that the villagers would show us when we
were able to walk to the villages, they would have them hanging up. We never had
anybody get bit by a snake, but we had guys get bitten and evacuated, medevaced
because of spider bites. We had a guy get bitten in his arm up in the mountains, and it
swole up to about three times its normal size. We had to call a special medevac to get
this guy out of there. It was a spider, lots of insects.
SM: What happened to him?
AG: You know, he never came back to the unit, I have no idea. He was
delirious, he had a fever and the Corpsmen were very worried about him. I have no clue,
he never came back to the unit.
SM: Do you remember who he was?
AG: Somebody from one of the other platoons, second or third platoon.
SM: And how about wildlife, tigers that kind of stuff?
AG: Rock apes, there were apes there, rock apes we called them, way up in the
mountains, these apes would pick up rocks and throw them at you while you were
walking down the trail. They made lots of noise, they had these lizards that we used to
call the fuck you lizards, because at the sound they made, in the jungle, they’d say fuck
you, I mean that’s basically what they sounded like. I didn’t see any tigers or elephants
or anything like that, even though I heard stories from other Marines saying there were
tigers around, and I actually saw pictures years after the war too but most of the time they
avoided us. If there were any big wildlife, they avoided us, but rock apes were a pain.
They were definitely one of the, one of the pains in the ass up there in the mountains.
Like I said they used to throw rocks at us, I remember being asleep in the mountains, it
was so damn dark in the jungle, I was sleeping on my back one night, I remember I
thought I was being woken up for my watch, there was something on my chest, it was a
damn rock ape, scared the hell out of me. I screamed, we were pitch dark, I screamed, I
woke up the entire platoon, and of course everybody, I got harassed about that for weeks,
it was very scary.

SM: How big were these things?
AG: Oh, I don’t know, probably three feet high, maybe between fifty and
seventy-five pounds.

SM: He was just sitting on your chest?
AG: Yes, sitting on my chest, scared the crap out of me. All I saw was his eyes
and I screamed and it took off.

SM: That is so bizarre.
AG: Yes, very bizarre.

SM: Now, did you ever encounter them out on patrol, the rock apes?
AG: Yes, actually it depended on where we were at. If we were up in real thick
triple canopy jungle, they would sit up in, probably the second canopy and throw stuff at
us. They’d throw rocks, they’d throw whatever the hell they had in their hands and that’s
why they call them rock apes, and I always thought it was an old wives tale when I first
got there. Well, we got up there and this started happening, people said see, these are
North Vietnamese rock apes they used to say. It was silly.

SM: They brought them down south with them, to harass the American troops.
AG: Right.

SM: When you were in the Arizona territory and you were out for extended
periods, how would you guys bivouac, was it in the same location every night, or a
different place?
AG: Well, usually, usually we’d move every day. We would get up when the sun
came up, we’d saddle up and move to a new position. Occasionally we would stay in one
position for more than a day or two, but that was very dangerous because if you did that
they would start zeroing in on you with mortars or rockets, or usually it was every day
we’d move from one position to the next, then we’d go out on patrols for the rest of the
day, around the area and at nighttime we’d send out ambushes and LPs, listening posts.
But I would say eighty percent of the time, we were moving every day.
SM: Now, when you did encounter enemy units did you know, or could you tell if you were encountering a Vietcong unit versus a North Vietnamese unit?

AG: The North Vietnamese that we encountered all had uniforms. They wore pith helmets and they had uniforms, actually their haircuts, you could tell by their haircuts, they had high and tights, they had good weapons, AKs and RPDs. the VC were mostly, they were dirtier it seemed like to me, a dirtier, more unkempt, no uniforms, and sometimes their weapons were very crude. They had British Infields and French Stins, a couple of these guys that we killed, or captured. And I remember once we got a guy that had a bar, B-A-R, that we captured this guy with a BAR he was from some village and he was just wearing black, black pajamas. But the NVA were usually more, they looked more professional, they had uniforms and they were a lot more hard core, when we tried to interrogate them, much more hard core. The VC seemed to be very eager to talk to us and give us information.

SM: And would you say you encountered more VC or more NVA?

AG: NVA, I’d say NVA most of the time.

SM: Did you ever encounter any women combatants?

AG: Yes, actually we captured two North Vietnamese nurses.

SM: How about women who were fighting versus there to treat?

AG: No.

SM: I didn’t know if you ran into VC women, Viet Cong women.

AG: No.

SM: As your tour of duty continued to progress, did your attitude about the war ever change or become changed because of events, in addition to what you already explained, that is, the survival?

AG: Well, I think that my illusions about the romanticism of war kind of got destroyed pretty quickly. My trust in the government kind of went away real quickly. We didn’t sit around and discuss the politics of the war. We just knew we were stuck, and we knew, when I was there in ’69 and ’70 we knew that we weren’t there to win, we used to sit there and say, “What the fuck are we doing, if we’re not there to win?” We weren’t taking ground, and if we did we’d give it right back to the enemy. It was basically a war of survival, not of anything else but just trying to stay alive, and it was
frustrating in that sense, I think because we knew that we, nobody wanted to be the last person killed there. And it was just a matter of watching our for your buddy and trying to stay alive so you could get your tour over with and get the hell out of there, but hardly any, in fact I can’t think of any political discussions about why we were there.

SM: But you did discuss the issue that it just didn’t seem like America was there to win the war?

AG: Right, we said, that’s exactly it. “We’re here as fodder basically, so the politicians in Paris can do their flapping of their mouths in Paris at the peace talks while we sit here and get killed.” Nothing was being accomplished, I mean we weren’t like I said, the war was over, it was coming to an end we just didn’t understand why we all weren’t pulled out at once.

SM: Had you heard about the Vietnamization program?

AG: Just a little bit that I read about in the Stars and Stripes, from what Nixon was saying. People have asked me, we did not work out with the Vietnamese that much, did not work out with them at all, the only units that I actually worked with were the Korean Marines, and some, I’m not even sure what you call it, Regional . . .

SM: Regional Force, Popular Force?

AG: Yes.

SM: The rough puffs?

AG: Rough puffs, right. The rough puffs and the PFS, like village militia and they were pretty good, they were eager to learn and they were pretty good at what we were trying to show them how to do things. I liked the Korean Marines, because they, nobody would mess with us when the Korean Marines were around us. They were probably the most ruthless people I’ve ever met. They did not take any prisoners, they did not, even in their own ranks there were, they used discipline a lot in their own troops, they were a frightening group to be around, you wanted to have them on your side, not be your enemy. But they would not take any prisoners, they were ruthless and I liked them because they were.

SM: Now, when you say they wouldn’t take prisoners, you’re talking about combatant prisoners?
AG: Yes, we would capture people, send them to the Koreans, they would basically interrogate them, then kill them. I saw that happen at least three times that I remember. They would interrogate them and then shoot them in the head.

SM: And what did you guys think about that as a tactic of interrogation?

AG: Well, to be perfectly honest with you, we laughed. They were getting information. I never thought twice about it, Steve, never thought twice.

SM: What else would you say about the Koreans that you worked with, they’re ruthless?

AG: Well, they were well disciplined. They loved what they were doing, they all knew some kind of marital arts stuff. The officers and they NCOs were very strict on their men, I didn’t see them kill anybody, I heard stories about that, but they, it seemed like they could go forever. We’d get tired, those guys would be going, I don’t know if they were doing drugs or anything, but they were just, they didn’t eat much, they didn’t much water. Their reason for being there was to kill the Vietnamese and I don’t think they cared who they were killing. It was just a frightening thing to see these guys doing their job, like I said, I’m glad that they were on our side, not the other side.

SM: Back to the Rough Puffs, when did you have an opportunity to train with them?

AG: Well, not really training with them, but just going into vills and seeing them there. The Marines had a thing called CAP units and CUP, but we went to a couple of vills where they were being trained by these Marine squads, and they seemed to be very trainable and they seemed to be very enthusiastic, very friendly, and from talking to my Marine CAP friends there, they said that these people were just magnificent in doing what they had to do to keep the VC out and keep the Americans happy. In my own opinion, I think that we should have gone that way in the first place, these small Marine squads going into these villages to win the hearts and minds of the people. It would have taken longer of course, but I think that would have been the way to go, I really do. I just talked to too many Marine CUP and CAP guys saying it was working. It was just taking time, it just worked because these people got to know who we were, we were giving them medicine, we were giving them food, we were giving them training, and I think that would be the way we should have gone from the beginning.
SM: When did you have the opportunity to go to the villages and see that, do you remember? When during your tour?

AG: Well, you know something, there was a couple of times, I’m trying to think, they had elections there. I remember we had to go out and do some kind of voter security, where they would come up, we’d check their ID cards, and you know what, Steve I don’t remember where the hell that was at. It was around Liberty Bridge somewhere I think, and we went to some vill there where we actually, voter security, we actually made sure that nobody could sneak up and throw frags into the voting both. Well also, we checked ID cards and did that kind of stuff. I also remember another time, around that same time period where we had to go do a, we had to move people from a village to a safe area. I remember going into this village, this was something that really sticks out in my mind. We had to round up all the people in the village, we had to kill all their animals, we had to set all their hooches on fire, burn them down and then we put them on choppers to send them to a relocation camp, I think is what they called them, but I’ll never forget the looks on these people’s faces. We were shooting, the water buffalo, shooting the chickens or pigs, and these kids were begging us not to do this, and that just, that’s always stuck in my mind, as this is not the way to win these people’s hearts and minds, destroyed all their crops, burnt down all their houses and put them on choppers and say we’re going to keep you safe back in some other place. I just never understood that. I had to go around with my M-14 and kill all the water buffalo, and that was tough, it was tough for me to do. I thought about, if this was happening to me, and people came into my town and said okay, we’re going to take all you guys, we’re going to move you from Albuquerque to Santa Fe, we’re going to destroy your neighborhood, and I’d been there for generations after generations, I just knew that was not right, we weren’t doing the right thing there. I have no idea why that order came down, even the Lieutenant our platoon commander was baffled, we did not understand why we were doing this, it was just crazy.

SM: Do you remember about when that happened?

AG: I want to way sometime in the spring, Spring of ’70 because it wasn’t, I remember it started to get hot again, and it hadn’t been rainy in a while, must have been Spring of ’70.
SM: And about where that was?
AG: March or April, or around, somewhere around Liberty Bridge or near Go Noi Ion, in that area.
SM: Now, when that kind of stuff would happen, again, just out of curiosity, the overall tenor, conversation, that you and the other Marines would have, did you talk about these types of issues?
AG: Yes, we were questioning why are we doing this? We even asked the Lieutenant, "Lieutenant why are we doing this?" He would say, "Don’t ask me. These are orders form battalion or from regimental. We’re here to save these people,” and of course that was tongue in cheek, we were kind of giggling as we’re saying, we’re going to save these people by sending them to someplace where they have no idea, taking away from their ancestral land. It was just, we all questioned what we were doing, including the Lieutenant. I remember it was a platoon size thing, it was just, shaking our heads the whole time as we were killing animals and destroying crops and putting people on choppers, and they’re in tears with rage and sadness in their faces, just incomprehensible.
SM: How many villagers did you relocate in that particular instance, do you know?
AG: I’d say there was fifty to a hundred.
SM: Was that the only incident where that happened?
AG: Yes, that only happened one time.
SM: And, now were these things that were occurring simultaneously while you were going in and out of the Arizona territory or did there come a point where you stopped your actions in the Arizona territory and were doing other things?
AG: Yes, actually we stopped, there would be another battalion or another regiment go into the Arizona and we would leave and go to, there was a couple of fire bases, there was a Hill 65, a Hill 52, Liberty Bridge, and we would do these, what you’d call, civic actions, I think that’s what they called these, where we would run MEDCAPS. Actually, I liked doing that. We would go to some vills, especially when we were on Hill 52. It was a village right off the hill, and we would go down with a Corpsman or two Corpsmen and we’d let the villagers come up and tell the Corpsmen what was wrong with them, and that was probably the most satisfying thing I think I did there. The
Corpsmen would go down with their B-1 units and have the medicine and the aspirin and that kind of stuff, and the people would get in line and come up and say well, this is wrong with me, this is wrong with me, and the Corpsmen would take care of them. I though that was, that made me feel real good, when we were doing that, the people were very grateful, and very, I felt we were doing something positive.

SM: That’s such a dichotomy.

AG: Absolutely, and then at night we’d go back up on the hill and send out ambushes.

SM: But also on the one hand helping the villagers so much with the MEDCAPS and on the other hand, in that one instance anyway, destroying the village, it’s such a dichotomy.

AG: Yes, that was all over the place there.

SM: Now, how would they handle the med caps in terms of interpreters? Did they have Vietnamese that could speak English?

AG: Yes, we had, usually, you had Vietnamese scouts with us. We either had what they called Kit Carson scouts, or Chieu Hois that would come out with us, but Kit Carson scouts, usually they would come out with us, but Kit Carson scouts usually worked with an America S-2 man, but our platoon had a Kit Carson scout for the whole time I was there.

SM: Did you guys trust him?

AG: As far as we could throw him. No, we did not trust him.

SM: Why not?

AG: I don’t know. There was just something about a former enemy becoming, I don’t know, I just didn’t feel comfortable around him.

SM: What about the Chieu Hois?

AG: The Chieu Hois were weird. For the most part I think that they were tired of the war, the ones that I remember, they got to Chieu Hoi, but for the most part they were kind of older guys. We had a Chieu Hoi in the mountains, if you don’t mind me going back to Durham Peak. We captured the guy there, who was, I think he was in the early 30’s and he said he’d been fighting for fourteen years and he hadn’t seen his family in ten years and he was a Sergeant in the North Vietnamese Army, and I talked to this guy for
half an hour. You could just see this guy’s eyes that he was just tired, he was very tired, he missed his family, he didn’t think they were doing anything good. He was not a hard core, like a lot of these North Vietnamese hard core, they would not get us any information, they’d tell us to fuck off, they’d spit in our face, but this guy was just, you could just see in his eyes, the man was broken. Seeing that I just realized, man this guys had been here for fourteen years, look at the tenacity, look at these guys, the plan was that they can outlast us, this guy just looking at him, he says I’m here fighting for the liberation of my country, but I’m so tired, I’m just tired of doing this. The guy was not, he looked skinny and he looked tired and he looked like he had just had it, and I have no idea what happened to him, they took him away on a chopper. I hope he's still alive somewhere.

SM: Did you guys take many prisoners, that is did you get many Chieu Hois, not just taking prisoners, but did you get many Chieu Hois?

AG: Yes, we got Chieu Hois, a lot of Chieu Hois were wounded, we would shoot and wound people, then they would Chieu Hois laying there on the ground begging us not to kill them.

SM: What was the policy with regard to that though?

AG: Well, with the prisoners we were supposed to, we were supposed to take as many prisoners as we could. It depended on how wounded people were. Sometimes they were just, they were cut in half and they were still alive, you would shoot them just to put them out of their misery. I mean I hate to say that my humanity was gone, but it was then, and to be perfectly honest with you, when we captured that hospital up in the mountains, some of those prisoners did not make it down to the bottom of the mountains. We had to carry them, and we carried them and we carried them and then some guys just got tired of carrying them and we took them out. I look back on that now, it’s just something that needed to be done. But for the most part they wanted prisoners for intelligence reason which I understood, as much information we could get out of these guys that might make it safer for the Marines. I never killed any prisoners, I never killed any women or children. In fact, I think my platoon was pretty disciplined in that respect and I think our company commander and our platoon commander were very pointed in
telling us that we do not do these kind of things, like taking women out or taking children
out, or doing that kind of stuff.

SM: Well, did you guys hear about My Lai while you were there?

AG: Yes, actually we did. In fact, My Lai changed a lot of stuff as far as our
ability to engage the enemy. I remember when My Lai broke in the news in the United
States we were told in Vietnam, okay, the rules of engagement have changed now, we
had to have, I remember they told us we had to have, if we sighted the enemy, if they
weren’t carrying a rifle we couldn’t shoot them. They could carry backpacks, but if we
couldn’t see a rifle, we couldn’t shoot them. We had to get permission sometimes two or
three layers high, just to open fire on people. We would have targets in the middle of an
open field somewhere, we were a klick away, we would want to call in artillery and it
would take us twenty and thirty minutes to get permission and by then they were gone. It
ended up being just screwy as hell, we would have cease fires where we were not
supposed to do any offensive patrols or ambushes and we’d watch them cross the river by
the boatload with ammunition, with food, enemy just up the ass, and we couldn’t do
anything, and then as soon as the cease fire ended we’d be hitting the shit for several days
or several weeks, it was just crazy, I mean it was just real crazy. The rules of
engagement changed and it was a direct result of My Lai, and My Lai angered us. I
remember us sitting around talking about William Kelly, even though we understood
where this guy was coming from, we just couldn’t him understand him lining people up,
women and children and shooting them, I mean, two hundred or whatever it was he
killed, that we didn’t understand. We could understand how somebody could be pushed
that far, we just didn’t understand why, why he was shooting women and children.

SM: Was anybody in your unit, whether it was the platoon, the company, the
battalion, that you were aware of, was anybody ever punished for any kind of serious
misbehavior, serious infractions?

AG: I’m trying to think.

SM: Court Martials or anything?

AG: We had a guy that refused to go out into the bush once, refused to get on the
chopper, put his weapon down said he wasn’t going to go. I remember our company
gunnery sergeant went up to him and was screaming at him, “You’re going to get on that
chopper!” He said, “No”, so the MPs came and took him away. I can’t think of anybody that got into too much trouble.

SM: How long had that guy been in country, do you know?

AG: He’d been there for nine months is what my squad leader told me.

SM: Had he had any problems before that?

AG: No, I guess, well this is what I was told, that he was like the only survivor of his squad. I guess a couple of, before I got there, they were on some operation where he was the only one left, and he just lost it, which is understandable I think.

SM: Do you know what happened to him?

AG: No, don’t have a clue.

SM: Anybody else taken away by the MPs, or court martialled or anything?

AG: No, I, everybody got into trouble a little bit. I mean I was threatened with insubordination a few times but I did my job well so they couldn’t take me out of the bush I guess. But we would get into our typical troubled, we’d go into the rear, and one of the reasons I don’t think they liked us having the rear too much is because we weren’t good rear Marines. We weren’t good garrison Marines, in fact I got to the point where I loved being out in the bush because it was a lot slacker out there. I felt safer there than I did in the rear. I didn’t want to get a haircut I guess, and I didn’t want to shave, but our unit was pretty tight. We were pretty good, we had good leaders though, too, good leaders and good Marines. We were fairly well disciplined, out in the bush especially.

SM: Now, how were you allegedly insubordinate?

AG: I got some cellulitis in my legs that Corpsman was cleaning it out every day with these long Q-tips and my legs were killing me. It was just really hurting, they were infected and the Corpsman every day would come up with iodine and stick these things into these gaping holes in my legs, and he was going to medevac me and I remember we had a gunnery sergeant, Gunnery Sergeant Washington who I didn’t like anyway. I guess the Corpsman gave me a medevac tag to get me, he wanted me just to go to the rear so I could do some meds and get these things cleaned properly. The Gunerry Sergeant came up and say no, I wasn’t going to the rear, and he proceeded to accuse me of being a malingerer and all kinds of stuff and he asked me, “You don’t have nay respect for rank do you?” I said, “No especially not you,” he said, “I’m going to write you up for
insubordination.” I remember the Corpsman, my Corpsman friend was standing there, and he says, “Where you going to get a witness, Gunny, because I’m not going to be your witness for this stuff?” So anyway, we went back and forth, this Gunnery Sergeant, I had no respect for him, he threatened to write me up a couple, and I didn’t care, if he would have written me up that means I would have had to go to the rear, they needed me out in the bush so I knew I could get away with telling him where to go. The guy was, well he was basically worthless, I had no respect for him. That only happened a couple of times though.

SM: How did your leg condition clear up?

AG: Actually, it did clear up. The doc was actually able to get some, they choppered out some meds for me, and some better cleaning material for the doc to go ahead and clean my wounds, or my gook sores, or whatever the call them.

SM: What caused this?

AG: I don’t know. I should probably talk to one of the Corpsman. It was just, it’s just one of the things in Nam that you get, holes, I still have scars in my leg, little holes about the size of a bullet I would say. They would get infected all the, an inch or two into the muscle of my leg, just very uncomfortable, and I don’t know. It was just part of living out in the rice paddies and staying wet all the time. It was just part of the bush life.

SM: The cleaning must not have been very comfortable either.

AG: It was very uncomfortable, very, but it cleared up after a week or ten days, the doc got the right medication out there.

SM: How about other ailments, other diseases you had to deal with?

AG: Well, there was a lot of, what they call FUO, fever of an unknown origins, lots of people had that. We had lots of malaria cases and we had a lot of heat casualties, especially during the summer months, lots of heat casualties, where guys weren’t carrying enough water. Hell, I bet that first summer I was there, when we were in Arizona, we probably had a heat casualty a day for a month. Guys are dropping out, usually the new guys, usually it was the guys coming in from the States, that were new, that just didn't know how to rations their water and didn't know how to make sure that they keep their long sleeves on, make sure they have a cover on their head and just make sure they had enough water. The corpsman were very adamant in telling us make sure
you drink enough water, and that’s why I carried six canteens of water with me. I learned
very quickly that’s what you needed to do to stay hydrated, but other than, there were just
the scratches that would get infected, just little things like that that you take for granted
here, that would just get scratched and they would get infected like crazy, the Corpsman
would have to scrub them out with a brush and try to keep them clean, just little stuff like
that, FUOs. I had those a couple of times, your fever spikes up to 102, 103 then it goes
away, but malaria, I never got malaria. I have no idea why, I did those lousy malaria
tablets every Sunday.
    SM: You did do them?
    AG: Yes, in fact it was a court martial offense not to do them. When I was there,
they would take your blood if you were wounded or got taken out of the bush they would
do a blood test and they didn’t find that quinine, or atrapine, whatever it was, in your
system, they could court martial you. So I did mine. That was one way we kept track of
time, every Sunday the Corpsman would give us one of our, I guess two pills to take and
he would sit there, make sure we took water, swallowed them and we knew it was
Sunday. That’s how we kept track of time, that and the full moon I guess.
    SM: Now, what about a beer ration, did you guys ever get beer out there?
    AG: You know that’s a great question, I think we got beer twice out in the bush.
We were supposed to get two cans a day or something. One was on the Marine Corps
birthday. Marines are amazing about this. November 10, 1969 we were on Liberty Road.
I don’t think we were doing security, we were doing some operation, I think just going,
just sweeps around the area and they choppered out hot steaks to us, well cooked steaks, I
don’t know how hot they were, we had two beers, they brought out baked potatoes, I
remember we had two beers, what else did they bring, oh, cold milk and they tried to
bring ice cream out to us, by the time it got to us though, it was like chocolate milk. That
was the only time I got beer out in the bush. In the rear, we would come on off
operations, I think I told you this, they’d have ice-cold beer waiting for us and they’d had
a steak fried. They would barbeque steak, we’d have a company or battalion, dependent
on how many people were out in the bush, we’d have just a big party when we come out
of the bush. We had one night off basically, and we’d get drunk and each day we couldn’t
finish our steak because our stomachs were so small from shrinking up from eating C-
rations, but that was a good touch. The company 1st Sergeant was good about taking care of us when we came to the rear.

SM: Now, in those instance was there a village near you where you could go out for other forms of entertainment?

AG: No, occasionally when we were in the rear, they would ask for volunteers for security on convoys going from An Hoa to Da Nang, I did that a couple of times, it was fun. You would take the truck into Da Nang and depending on how long it took you to get there, you’d either spend the night there or you’d come back that evening by chopper, but it was fun going into Da Nang, especially since we were well basically filthy dirty, and we carried weapons. We carried all of our ordnance, we had grenades and our rifles, our pistols and I remember in ’69, ’70 Da Nang was so secure that people there had blocks of wood in their weapons walking around Da Nang, instead of magazines and we would get stopped all the time by the Military Police or by officers asking us why were we walking around in Da Nang with magazines in our weapons. We’ve had to tell them, well we’re grunts, we’re with 35, you know, and they just tell us to get out of their face. “Okay, how come you’re not wearing a blouse?” “Well sir, I just came out of the bush with the…” and that was kind of fun, to go around and fuck with the people in the rear there, but they didn’t like us too much because we smelled funny, we were filthy, our hair was usually longer than regulation and we had magazines in our weapons.

SM: And ammunition.

AG: Yes, and ammunition, right. We were dangerous, right.

SM: This will end the interview with Mr. Tony Goodrich on the 22nd of April.

SM: This is Steve Maxner continuing the interview with Mr. Tony Goodrich on the 10th of May, 2002 at approximately 2:35 Lubbock time. I’m in Lubbock, Texas and Tony Goodrich is in Albuquerque, New Mexico. Sir, thank you again and let’s go ahead and pick up today’s interview with a discussion of anything else that you’d like to discuss with regard to your time in Vietnam. Is there anything else that you recall about your Vietnam experience that we have not yet covered?

AG: I think so. There’s a couple of things that I have thought about since our last interview. I think that one of them is what I consider the lack of leadership that I experienced when I was in Vietnam. I went through in the year I was there, I went
through six platoon commanders. Since, I talked to you last time, I sat down and actually
wrote down who I could remember and who I couldn’t. For the most part, especially
toward the last six months of my tour these guys have just been out there to get their
combat ribbon so they could get promoted. They were basically offing people or people
in the rear who had never been out in the bush. We didn’t have too much respect for the
squad leaders and the team leaders that I served with. The only Lieutenant I remember,
there were two good Lieutenants I had. One was Lieutenant Willliams, which was my first
platoon commander. I don’t remember the second guys name. I have pictures of him. He
was an R.O.T.C. guy. He was a P.E. major. I have no idea what his name is. Someday
I’ll find it. For the most part, the other four that I had were very forgettable. For the
most part, they couldn’t read maps. They couldn’t call in air or artillery strikes. They
were scary. One I remember in particular was a Naval Academy graduate who played on
the Marine corps football team for two or three years. Came to Vietnam, called all the
squad leaders together, told us that he was the bushmaster and we couldn’t teach him
anything because he learned everything at Quantico. He lasted about two weeks with the
company. The company commander, after we went and talked to him, got rid of this guy.
What they did with these Lieutenants or they actually had a staff sergeant come in and be
our platoon commander for a little bit. I don’t know what they did with them. I assume
they sent him to the rear. But our CO Lieutenant Claire, 1st Lieutenant, we had was a
good man. He listened to us and he loved us. He treated us the way that we wanted to be
treated. He was instrumental in keeping us alive and keeping these pseudoleaders away
from us.

SM: What was you major complaint about this Lieutenant the only lasted a
couple of weeks that was the bushmaster?

AG: Well, he just didn’t want to listen to us. He basically was all talk and no
leadership. When I talk leader I mean somebody who cares for the troops, looks out for
us to be number one, who leads. Gets out there in front and leads. He was basically the
guy to do it all. Told us he knew it all and we couldn’t say anything to him. Not only
was that ridiculous, but it was also silly of him. I know that we told him he better watch
his back. We always used to threaten people that did not understand. He was just a
dangerous guy. He couldn’t read a map. We had a couple of them I remember that
couldn’t read maps, they would get us lost on patrols. We would try to tell them no, sir we’re not here, we’re here. They wouldn’t listen to us. So, thank God we had a company commander who understood that these guys were going to get us killed or wounded. He was pretty good about getting rid of them. Mostly it was just the arrogance and these guys demanded our respect instead of earning it. I’d been there for eight months, I just wanted to get it over with and I knew what I was doing. We tried to let them know that. Those who listened to us, we liked. Those who didn’t we did not like very much. Did we talk about drugs Steve at all?

SM: Actually, I do want to ask more specifically about that issue, but while we’re on the subject of leadership, what about NCO leadership?

AG: That’s a very good question. When I was in Vietnam the only time I had a platoon sergeant, I think the first six months I was there we had platoon sergeants. I was a lance corporal, an E3, and I was a squad leader. That is usually a sergeant’s position or a corporal’s position. I was about six months into my tour, must have been December or January after I got promoted. I got promoted to Lance Corporal, E3 in December of ’69. I’m not sure it was that month of January. They come up to me and told me I was going to be the next squad leader. I told them I didn’t want the position. I didn’t want the responsibility. They said, “Too bad because we’re giving it to you.” I said, “Why?” Of course, they told me that I’ve got the longest time in the bush here. I know what I’m doing. I was basically one of the survivors of the platoon. Reluctantly I took that mantle of squad leader. That responsibility is heavy. You have to keep your men alive for one thing. You have to try to be able to teach them what they need to know to survive. It was a real burden, I thought. For the most part my squad and my gun team responded magnificently under my paltry leadership I think. As far as staffing, we had a staff sergeant, we had a platoon sergeant when I first got into country, Sergeant Ramos. I don’t remember if there were any other ones. As far as I know, we had a couple of sergeants maybe in the platoon. A couple of Corporals and all the rest were lance corporals or VFC.

SM: In terms of their competence?

AG: For the most part they were very competent. In fact, they were probably more competent than the Lieutenants were because most of them had been in the Marine
Corps for some greater amount of time. They seemed to understand, the enlisted men
corresponded better than Lieutenants did. For the most part, I’d give them high marks. They cared
about us. They went out of their way to try to get us resupplied with clean clothes or
poncho liners or getting us hot food out in the bush, which only happened like twice I
think the whole time I was there. For the most part, Sergeant Ramos especially was very
very good, a very, very good sergeant. A platoon sergeant. He left I think in August or
September. Other than that, the other ones we had were pretty good. I don’t remember
their names. I don’t remember their names. I can see their faces.

SM: You mentioned also that the times certain incompetent leaders might receive
a warning. Were there any incidences of fratricide while you were there?
AG: Not that I remember. Not in my platoon or my company. There were other
companies that it happened in. We heard stories about when we’d go into the rear
especially. I know when I first got into country there was a platoon sergeant nobody
liked. I don’t remember this guy’s name. He was only there for maybe a month. These
guys always said they were going to take him out in a firefight. I really don’t know what
the problem was except that he was an asshole. He would swear at people and he
wouldn’t carry his own weight. Everybody’s be carrying his own gear. Personally, I
don’t know anybody. Even though I can understand how it would happen. There’s an
old term that I learned called the Troop Protective Association. You would basically if
the guys weren’t doing what they were supposed to be doing, the Troop Protective
Association would take care of the problem. I personally never participated or saw
anything like that. I did hear stories.

SM: Now this, Troop Protection Association, this was something that just existed
in Vietnam?
AG: As far as I know yeah. It was usually a squad leader. I heard this from an
other squad leader when I became squad leader. You become a squad leader, you get a
compass, you get the map. You have to be able to learn how to call in air strikes and
artillery. If you don’t think somebody’s doing their job right and somebody’s going to
get killed, basically we were told to just take care of business. I talk about that now and I
look back on it and I guess it was just a frame of mind that we were in that we would do
anything to survive. If that means taking out incompetent American officers, I would
have done it. I would have done it. I was lucky because I didn’t have that many
incompetents who lasted that long. The company commander understood, I think our
frustration with these guys. He would take action before we would. In the long run, I
can thank God.

SM: If he had left that one Lieutenant there for more than two weeks, something
would have happened to him?

AG: We’d have taken him out. I’m sure we would have Steve. I would have had
no qualms. No qualms about it.

SM: This is an interesting ethical dilemma. Because of course, you’re looking at
it from the standpoint of either you’re got to get rid of this guy or he’s probably going to
get you and a bunch of other guy’s killed at the same time, it’s murder. Was that ever
discussed?


SM: You mentioned drugs. You wanted to discuss that since we haven’t really
talked much about it. What was the drug use like in your unit? Both the squad and
platoon level, but also at the company and if possible the battalion level if you have any
information about that?

AG: I remember marijuana was prevalent there. Only in the rear. We never
smoked pot out in the bush. Never. We go into the rear. I never smoked pot until I go to
Nam. One of the reasons we smoked pot, the enlisted men is because we could not get
alcohol. The staff NCOs and the officers had access to alcohol when we’d come into the
rear. We didn’t. You had to be an E5 or above to get hard alcohol. Whiskey or
whatever. They had an enlisted men’s club at An Hoa. It was open for a couple of hours
a day. For the most part we would go there before we’d have to on bunkers. They’d run
out of beer after the first hour. It was usually warm beer. Marijuana was prevalent.
Everywhere. We’d smoke pot in the rear. As we snuck one or two beers or had to steal
beer from officers quarters or something like that. Marijuana, as far as I was concerned,
was a good way for me to forget things. It was a good way for me to relax. I didn’t have
a hangover the next day. I could smoke pot and stand bunkers at night and have no
problem staying awake or staying alert. Out in the bush, there was kind of like an
unknown rule, but a not spoken rule, that you didn’t take it out in the bush. It was just
too dangerous out there. In the rear it was o.k. Most of the time, when the grunts were in
the rear at our combat, we were never hit the whole time I was in Vietnam, whenever we
were in the rear standing line. When we would go out to the bush and the office post, we
called them would stand on lines, they would get hit. For the most part, that’s all I saw. I
didn’t see any hard drugs, like heroine or speed or other things like that. Even though I
heard stories it was there, but that was after the war. Pot was mostly smoked by the EMs
because we couldn’t get alcohol.

SM: Well, your base camp that you would come back to, where you could I
guess, to use a colloquial expression, let your hair down and relax and either drink a beer
or smoke marijuana or whatever. That base area that you would come back to did that
change locations very often or was it always the exact same place?
AG: It was the exact same place, it was a static position. An Hoa combat base in
the An Hoa valley. The year I was there that was where the 5th Marine regimental
headquarters was. To be perfectly honest with you, I probably spent my first eight
months in country, or I say six months were out in the bush. Maybe two months in the
rear. I don’t even know if it was that much. We did not come into the rear often and
when we did we only stayed there for three or four days at the most. Usually it was like a
day or two and then we’d be back out in the bush. To be honest with you, toward the end
of my tour I felt safer out in the bush.
SM: Why so?
AG: I don’t know how to put it. It was slack in the rear. I don’t know how else
to put it. Like I said a static position. We’d have to go stay in bunkers and these bunkers
had been there. They were prime targets for RPGs. The grunts would come in and we
wouldn’t stay in the bunker we would move next to the bunkers where we would set our
position up. We were afraid that we were going to get taken out by RPGs or mortars.
For the most part, I felt safer in the bush. I felt safer in the bush with a small unit. Squad
size was a great size out in the bush or atrols for ambushes because we could move faster.
We could move quieter. I always thought that we were fighting like them. If we were
fighting like them, we’d have a chance to maybe surprise them instead of the other way
around. Another thing is too. You probably know this from interviewing other Vets.
The Vietnamese own the night there. I used to love to go out at night because you always
knew they were going to be moving around or doing something. I mean we had a
battalion size or maybe it was a company size movement one night. We were going to go
down to the river and set up an ambush because they had intell that there were going to
be a bunch of North Vietnamese crossing the river. Unfortunately, military intelligence
sometimes isn’t quite right on. We got to the river and about a click and a half away
there was probably 50 or 60 boats going across the river and we were too far away. We
had to call artillery on them. By the time the artillery got there they were already gone.
We were making a movement to have a company or battalion sized ambush. I’m not sure
which. If we would have gotten to the right place, we’d have had a good turkey shoot. It
was something that we always were hoping we could do. Unfortunately, they moved us
to the wrong position. Nighttime for me wasn’t as scary as for other guys. My last six
weeks in country I was a Hill 52 artillery firebase. I used to volunteer my squad for
ambushes every night if I could. I used to have the new guys coming form the States call
me names. Like “Lifer, What are you doing? The war’s over.” I just shook my head at
these guys. Going your setting yourself up for the shit that’s going to happen. I would
get us off the hill as much as I could. It was just a target. The hill was a target. If I could
get out there in the bush at night, away from the fire support base I knew we could stay
alive. I got lots of grief from these new guys. I hope they understand. I wanted to
survive. Maybe more than they did. They came in with a bad attitude. In April and May
of 1970, these new guys came in thinking the war was basically over. They didn’t have
to worry about getting killed and that attitude I have no idea who and where they were
getting that attitude from. It was scary. That scared the hell out of me. I was probably
more worried about getting killed the last month I was there than the first month. I used
to talk to God and say, “Don’t do this to me my last month here. You should have killed
me my first month.” I think I was probably more paranoid and more hyper alert my last
month than the first month I was there.

SM: These new guys coming in in April or May in 1970 with this different
attitude, had there been any kind of, I don’t think it would necessarily come down in an
official form through the chain of command, but was there any kind of emphasis or
scuttlebutt coming through the chain of command about well, let’s make sure that we
limit the number of American losses. We are scaling down the war. We are pulling
Americans out. We are Vietnamizing turning more of the war over to the Vietnamese, South Vietnamese Army. We need to minimize American casualties?

AG: You know, I never thought about that. I’m sure there was. I tried to think about that. I don’t think so. I think these guys were being told that we were pulling out like you said. The scuttlebutt was we were getting pulled out the 5th Marine regiment was the next one leaving. I heard that from March of ’70 until I left. That we were getting pulled out, we were the next one. That was a huge scuttlebutt that was going around. You know, you’re in the Marine Corps for so long, you realize a scuttlebutt is just that. You don’t believe anything until it happens. There was a lot of guys coming in saying, well I heard a story in Okinawa that the 5th Marines were the next one leaving. We’re leaving next month, we’re leaving next week. It was just silly. It was just silly as hell. These guys did not have the right attitude. I didn’t think so anyway.

SM: A final question about the drug issue? Were you guys tested for drug use at all? What was the command response to the apparent significant use of marijuana by general enlisted?

AG: You want to hear something funny? That’s a good question too. The Naval intelligence, I forget what they’re called, NID or CID or something like that actually sent out some undercover guys that were obviously under cover. They were clean. It was very weird we were on hill 52, in fact, they sent a CID guy out. I think they’re called CID. It might have been Naval intelligence. Anyway they came out, this guy was in my platoon for I want to say three days or four days. We knew exactly what he was there for. He was asking questions about where he could get pot. The guy was so damn obvious it was ridiculous. Here’s another guy, the Troop Protection Association said, “This is none of your business you out to get the hell away from us.” He lasted three or four days and they took him off the hill. I thought that was highly amusing. It wasn’t even. The guy was obviously looking for somebody to bust for pot. I look back on it now and I laugh like hell thinking about this young guy. Couldn’t have been more than 20 he was a corporal. He came out. He didn’t have any bush time from what we knew and he was just too obvious. Asking us where he could buy pot. He would call it the wrong name. I remember the term was tuk fen that was the Vietnamese term. We’d ask kids for tuk fen. This guy had some other term, I never heard of. We just laughed at him
and said, “We know what you are. We know what you’re doing here.” He would deny everything. He lasted, like I said three or four days and then he got choppered away. I think that the officers knew that we were smoking pot, but as long as it didn’t interfere with our abilities to do the job and as long as we weren’t doing it out in the bush, I think that they just let it slide. A lot of them drank heavily. It was just a way to forget about the war, I think.

SM: In terms of job effectiveness, you mentioned that you wouldn’t smoke pot in the field, but what about cigarettes?

AG: I didn’t do it, but the guys did smoke cigarettes.

SM: Out in the field?

AG: Yeah, out in the bush. I always wondered why there wasn’t better discipline as far as the smoking cigarettes out in the bush.

SM: Yeah, because you could smell that.

AG: C- rations had cigs. But they had those lousy, three or four cigarettes. I always wondered about that myself, but nobody ever said anything, so I didn’t. The whole idea don’t light three cigarettes with one match or you’re going to get shot in the head with a sniper, but yeah that’s a good question, Steve. I don’t know. I really don’t know why that discipline did not work well out in the bush.

SM: How about your trash? You guys were out on patrol out in the bush for a week or two or four or whatever. How would you guys handle your trash?

AG: For the most part we would bury it. If we were eating C- rations we would flatten the can and we’d bury things for the most part. I don’t think we carried anything out, because anything we could get out of our pack made our load lighter was always better. For the most part, we’d dig a hole. After we’d leave a hill we would dig a hole and bury stuff. Flatten the cans. There were these certain C-ration cans that were the same size as a frag, they could stick in there. Pull the pin on the frag, stick it inside the can and set booby traps up for us. We would flatten all the cans and bury everything.

SM: Did you have any major encounters? Any major engagements with the NVA or VC the last month you were in country?

AG: The last month, no. I talked to you the last time. There’s a couple of incidents that I remembered after I talked to you. About getting overrun in the rain. I
hate the rain to this day. This is probably in late Fall of ’69. We were out in the Arizona. The company had moved to these three hills on the far eastern side of the Arizona. Each platoon had a hill. Any time we stayed in a position more than a couple of days, we knew something was going to happen. It was just a matter of being able to target us. If we moved everyday that would be fine with me. We stayed in this position for some reason for two or three days, we were never told why. One day the platoon commander told us the CO, the skippers wanted us to rotate hills, first platoon moved to where the second platoon was. Third where the first was. We were on the same hill before we moved around the company commander, the CP. We moved to another hill. That night it rained. Right after I got off watch, must have been around one or two in the morning, they mortared us. They started popping mortars in on us. RPGs and zappers came through and overrun the hill that we were on the night before, where the CP was. Obviously, they knew that the skipper was there because of the radios. They overran the hill that night. I remember RPGs hitting around our position and exploding. I remember my ears ringing. We saw a muzzle flash in front of our hole probably 25 or 30 meters. It might have been further, but it sure seemed close to us because you could hear the rounds going over our position. This guy was right where our claymore was. The only time I ever blew a claymore in Vietnam. We blew the claymore and the guy with the AK quit shooting at us. I’m assuming we took him out. The next morning after the sun came up. This probably lasted an hour. Lots of light, lots of explosions, lots of noise. I remember concussions in our holes. All of us were concussed. There were several explosions around our hole where our platoon sergeant was screaming at us if we were o.k. One officer was screaming at us. We were telling him shut up because we didn’t want the Vietnamese to know where we were. We were throwing frags that night. We never moved. There was movement all around us. It was probably one of the scariest times. In the rain you can’t hear anything. It was just very surrealistic. Anyway, the next morning when the sun came up, the hole that we had been staying in, around the CP, the gun team that was there were all killed or wounded. To this day, I’m just amazed that if we would have not moved that day to the position that we were in that would have been us. Took several K.I.A.s that day. I actually have a picture of the medevac that I’ll give to you guys. I’m going to say there were three to six Marines that were killed. We probably
policed up four, five, or six bodies and probably a hundred Chicom grenades. There were
several around our hole. Several Chicom grenades around our hole. It was an RPG
round that didn’t go off that hit right next to our hole. Thank God for the rain because the
Chicom frags did not work very well when they got wet. My butt still tightens up when I
think about that night. I think that’s one of the reasons I live in New Mexico because it’s
so dry here. I do not like, I don’t like the rain. My wife knows when it rains here,
especially during the summertime when it gets a little bit humid, I get up and I’m up all
night checking the doors, making sure everything’s locked, going outside and that’s
directly related to that night. Incoming and booby traps were probably the most prevalent
ways of getting wounded or killed in Vietnam while I was there. Incoming was always
an exciting time. Especially mortars. Mortars you couldn’t hear. There was a couple of
times during the day you could see mortars coming in. That was there was frightening as
hell especially when you’re trying to dig a hole to get into to get below ground level.
That happened often. It was probably more often than I can remember. Booby traps. I’d
say half of our casualties in my company were from booby traps. They were everywhere.
You couldn’t get away from them. Even if you had a good point man, there was always a
way that you could get wounded from command detonated bobby traps or they used to
have these fox mines that were made all out of wood and explosives that you couldn’t
pick up with a metal detector. It was just a matter of luck whether or not you were going
to get blown up by a booby trap. An incoming is the same way as long as you get to a
hole you usually had a pretty good chance of surviving an incoming. Loud noises still
bother me. I could be walking down the street and have a backfire happen. Not as bad as
it used to be. I was pretty fast and I could jump underneath something very quickly when
that happened. For the most part, I think that I was lucky because my first three months
in country was probably the heaviest combat I saw. I learned what I needed to do to
survive. I remember more about my first three months than my last nine months, let’s put
it that way. I think that was a defense mechanism. A way for me to cope with what was
going on around me. It’s interesting when you get into a position where you realize that
you’ll do anything to survive. One of the things that I remember when I came back was
being able to out in the bush; I know this is probably going to sound strange. I’ve talked
to other vets. I could sit there and just relax and you could see. You could smell, see
your senses were heightened would be the way to put it. I could always tell when we
were going to get incoming or there was somebody there that was going to come through
the line; we were going to get sniped at. There was a sense that you learned while you
were there that was just eerie. I don’t want to call it seeing angels, but you developed
another sense, a sixth sense, when you knew something was going to happen. It was just
odd. It was very odd and very eerie, I thought. I think that had a lot to do with me
surviving too. I knew when that feeling came over me, that I had to be alert and I had to
be ready for anything. I think all of us that survived their year there had this thing. It’s
been something I’ve never been able to describe.

SM: Very strange, very strange. It sounds like your talking about gut instinct. In
some respects.

AG: Yeah. Yes.

SM: Did you feel that was progressively developing during your time there?

You’re instincts would become more finely tuned? Your reaction to certain events would
become better?

AG: Absolutely, Steve. You could tell that something wasn’t right. No matter
how something looked, you could tell something just wasn’t right there. There was a
feeling a gut feeling. 99% of the time that gut feeling was much more accurate than
getting military intelligence telling us something. In fact, the squad leaders would talk to
each other about how you feeling tonight? What’s going to happen tomorrow? On these
patrol somebody would have a bad feeling and we knew something. We all kind of
picked up on it, when somebody would say I’m not feeling right about this tonight. Or
right about what’s going to go on tomorrow. I just think it made us better at our jobs. I
think that we were a lot more alert, a lot more ready for things to happen. It was tough.
We were always tired. Always hungry. We were lucky if we got two hours of sleep a
night. It was just a matter of exhaustion. That exhaustion is hard to explain to
somebody and that hunger and the feeling of just being pissed off and angry and scared
all at the same time. Just wondering whether you’re going to get to the next minute. All
those emotions. I never really slept there. I don’t know of anybody I know that was in
the infantry that slept. It was just you’re right underneath sleep. You’re ears are open
and you can wake. A sound that doesn’t make sense you’d wake up immediately.
You’re fully alert. I remember firefights, Steve, and incoming and people getting hit by booby traps and the adrenaline would flow, sometimes for days. That night that we got overrun in the rain. I don’t think I slept for 72 hours. I remember being fully awake. I remember going on patrols a couple of nights after that, but I did not sleep at all. I don’t think I ate much either. I think that the Marines were pretty good about seeing this stuff happen. Usually after something like this would happen, you would pull out and go to the rear. Go to some safer area for a couple of days. They were pretty good about doing that. Not always, but they were pretty good about doing that depending on where we were.

SM: You’re gut feelings, your instincts. Was listening to them something that your NCOs would foster? Say, they would pursue your opinion on things and would actually listen?

AG: Yes. My first squad leader in fact told me that I would be learning this. My first gunner also told me you’ll be learning these things. That there’s going to be certain times when you feel a certain way, you need to let your squad leader know how you’re feeling about things. It wasn’t something that you can learn in training. It was something when you got there. I was a little skeptical when I first got there. How in the hell. I’m just learning. I’m scared how can I learn how to just relax and take in everything in your senses? They’re telling you something. It was just a matter of training your mind and your body to listen. It’s hard to explain, but I was told that by the squad leaders and by the sergeants when I first got there. You will learn these things. They will help to keep you alive. Just odd. Very strange. I’d love to be able to talk to other combat vets from other wars to see if they felt the same way.

SM: I think the answer would be yes.

AG: Really, o.k. I can imagine that, I can believe that.

SM: Like you said, there was no way they could train you for this. This was just something that had to develop in country, in combat.

AG: I think it’s that survival thing. You know you’re going through training and you know you’re going to be able to go home that night. You’re going to go sleep in the rack. You’re going to have your hot meal. As good as the training was I had, I don’t think it was adequate enough to prepare me for what I experienced in Vietnam. I think
any grunt will tell you that. When you’re in combat situation and you’re under fire, the
training does kick in. You do your job. It’s still hard to describe. Your training did kick
in, but you also learned, as you were under fire about how to do things and how to do
them quicker than you did in training. How to trust the men on your left and right. I
think that was the biggest thing for me. I wanted to keep my buddies alive because I
wanted to stay alive. There’s the whole thing about altruism is kind of a misnomer. I
don’t think there’s anything altruistic there. We all wanted to stay alive and I knew I had
a better chance of staying alive and not getting hurt if my buddies were doing their job,
just like I was doing mine.

SM: Has your heightened sense of your heightened instinct, did that help you at
all when you came back? Have you had experiences since the war where you just
followed your gut and end up being right?

AG: Yeah. Actually it has. Sometimes it’s gotten me into trouble, but before we
go to that can I tell you about something that happened?

SM: Yeah, yeah. I was just curious. Oh, absolutely.

AG: I know one of the things in that questionnaire that asked me about tactics.

One of the things, I don’t know if it’s tactical or strategic, but I remember one of the
things that really stood out in my mind being a 19 year old lance corporal was going into
these villages. We went to this village; we rounded up all the villagers that had been
probably on this land, for who knows how many generations. We told them we were
going to ship them to a safe area, a strategic hamlet, I think is what they called it. We
would shoot all their animals. We would burn down all their hooches. We’d destroy all
the rice paddies. I remember going in and shooting water buffalo and watching the anger
and the fear and just the anger in these peoples faces against us. Kids on their knees
begging us basically not to kill their pets. I was given the job because I was carrying a 14
to kill the water buffalo. We’d killed all the chicken, all the pigs, all the water buffalo.
We put these people on helicopters and flew them away to a safe area. We all thought
what are we doing? These people hate us now. I thought that was one of the stupidest
things we could have done. I know there’s some plan there. I could never figure it out. I
remember all of us from the platoon commander all the way down; we were given orders
to do this. We followed the orders and we all went what the hell did we just do? These
people are going to hate us. They’re going to go over to the other side. We’re going to
destroy this village basically to save them. I’ve never understood. I did read a little bit
about it after the war about the Marine Corps had these CAPs that I thought were a good
idea. The Army commanders did not want us to do that because it would take too long. I
like the idea of having squads go into villages, live with the people, train with the people,
eat the same food, get to know them, get to really win their hearts and minds. I thought
that was a brilliant idea. The Marines were never able to convince the higher ups that
that was the way to go. From what I’ve read they said it would take too long. I always
thought that was a huge mistake on our part to go out and move people off the land they
had been on for years and years and years.

SM: Yes, sir. Did your unit ever engage in any kind of civic action besides this
refugee creation and resettlement?

AG: We didn’t do it specifically. I know guys that left our platoon and our
company to go work in these CAP units or these CAG units. CUP units I guess they call
them too. For the most part, no. We were just strictly infantry. The only thing I
remember is we did a security once for election day. They would bring out the poll
workers and the ballot people. They would put people on trucks and truck the villagers to
a central area. Wherever the hell that was and we would stand security to make sure
there wasn’t any intimidation or any of that kind of stuff. That’s all I remember. The
only thing I rememeber we did civic wise. I guess you could call our MEDCAP. We did
a couple of MEDCAPs I thought was interesting. We went to vills. We were on hill 52.
It was vill right down off the hill. We’d so down there Sunday and we would allow the
Vietnamese people to come up and our corps mean would work on their injuries or their
sores. Any medical problems. I thought that was very positive for me to think gee, we’re
actually helping these people here. They appreciated it too. I thought that was something
we should have done more of also. They were called MEDCAPs. You’ve probably
heard of that term. Other than those MEDCAPS and that voter security thing we didn’t
do much of that at all.

SM: Was there anything else before your last week about your time in Southeast
Asia?
AG: No. I was ready to leave and I was worried about the new guys coming in. That was the last month there.

SM: During that last month did you actually get some time to train your replacement?

AG: Yeah. Actually I did. The gun team leader became the squad leader. I don’t remember this guy. I can see his face. The guy who became the squad leader, I remember training him how to call in artillery orders or air strikes on the map with the compass. How to use the compass, that’s basically it. I don’t remember this guy’s name. That was probably the only training I gave to him.

SM: What did it feel like when you’re basically down to your last day or so?

AG: I was ready to leave. In fact, I was so ready to leave, I wanted to hide so I wouldn’t have to do anything dangerous. You know it’s funny, Steve. We’re all ready to leave and I remember getting on that chopper and seeing my buddies cheering me basically as I took off. I was so glad to leave. They were glad to see me leave, but I felt guilty about leaving those guys there. It was really hard. I wanted to leave and I didn’t want to leave. I felt responsible for them. I remember them saying just get back home. We all just want to get out of here and go home. Don’t worry about us. We know what’s going on. It’s that thing about I want to get out of here and I don’t want to leave you guys. It was tough. It was really tough for me to leave those guys behind. They were like my family. I mean closer than that. Something that I guess I still feel kind of guilty about. 25 3:36

SM: When you actually did start out-processing did you have to go through any kind of special tests or anything like that?

AG: No. The thing I remember, the amusing thing was when we go to Da Nang, before we could get on the chopper we had to go to a little, it was inside a tent I think. They had military policemen come in with dogs. Drug sniffing dogs, which I thought was amusing. They had a dummy up on the stage. They had a stage there. They took a little pack of marijuana and they stuck it down in the dummies crotch and let the dog tear the crotch out of the dummy. So, what they told us was, they had these amnesty booths, I think I what they called them. Curtains. You could walk into this little booth and they had little slots. Any paraphernalia any contrabands you had, you could drop into the slot.
Which I thought was just freaking awful. A lot of guys did dump stuff off. Once that was done they had the dogs at the tarmac because you were getting on the aircraft that would be there but basically weren’t doing anything. It was kind of a dog and pony show. As far as saying you have one last chance to drop off your contraband. If we catch you with anything you’ll have to stay here. Other than that there were no piss tests. They went through our sea bags, I guess to make sure we weren’t bringing home ordinates. Like claymores or frags, that kind of stuff. The only thing I got, I got an AK47 bullet. One round. It was in my pocket. I have no idea how I got through everything. I brought it back with me. That was it. They went through our sea bags to make sure we weren’t bringing back any ordinates or and rifles that kind of stuff. The little drug dogs.

SM: Did they catch anybody with contraband when you were processing out?
SM: What was it like on the aircraft coming back?
AG: It was great. We left the ground and the whole airplane exploded into cheers. We cursed. Cheering and cursing. Cursing Vietnam. Looking out that window and seeing Da Nang airbase fade away. I was exhilarated. It was a terrific feeling. Everybody in the aircraft felt exactly the same way. It was like a huge burden was lifted off of us. I can’t describe it. It was orgasmic almost leaving Vietnam.
SM: How did you get back into the Unites State? What was that trip like?
AG: The Marines flew us to Okinawa just like we flew over. They flew us to Okinawa where we had to take off our tree suits, all of our jungle clothes. Everything that we wore we had to take off and throw into a bin. Those of us who had our uniforms in our sea bags that survived Vietnam in the storage area, we got to put our uniforms on in Okinawa. That’s where we got all of our ribbons and medals. We were issued all that stuff there. We put it on our summer uniforms, I guess that’s what we were wearing then. You’re supposed to stay there for three days. This was in the middle of June, ’70. I had to stay there a week because they were flying back prisoners from Vietnam from the Da Nang brig and from the LBJ. I got bumped off four days worth of flights before I could get home. I spent a week in Okinawa. It was because of the prisoners they were bringing back from Vietnam flying back to the brig from the stockades in the United States. I had
fun. I went out and got drunk, got laid. Basically slept in. They were pretty slack on us not really doing anything while we were there. I got a haircut. Got all cleaned up to come home. I knew I was getting out when I came home. They asked me right before I left, they had my orders 5th Marine Expeditionary brigade Camp Pendelton or I could get out. Of course, I’d have to work and I signed to get out of the Marines. Flew back to it must have been Travis Air Force base, where we refueled. We flew straight from Okinawa to Travis. Travis, we got in two buses. They bussed us down to Norton. Norton Air Force Base, I think. Steve, I’m not sure. From there, we were bused down to Marine Corps Recruit Depot in San Diego where we went to Separations Company. We stayed there for five days processing out basically. We got to eat in the same mess halls. Getting out of the Marines, the same place I went to boot camp was very odd also. We ate in the same mess hall as the recruits. They were on one side, we were on the other. We used to cat call them. “You guys don’t know what you’re getting into.” The drill instructor would yell at us and we’d laugh at him. There was probably a hundred of us spent five days in San Diego getting ready to get out. They told us about our GI bill benefits. They told us about us being in inactive reserve status. They asked us if we wanted to reenlist. They made sure everything was in order. Got our last medical check up. Dental check up. Just made sure all of our paperwork was in order. On the fifth day, we left MCRD and everybody went their own ways. I flew form San Diego to L.A., then from L.A. back to Albuquerque. One of the things I remember, I really remember sitting in the L.A. airport waiting to come home in my uniform. Everybody wanted to ignore us. Nobody wanted to sit next to us. We sat in the airport waiting to leave and it was just like we weren’t there. I just felt like I was an outcast. It was just this odd, strange feeling. Maybe I’d seen too many WWII movies where people have done things like, “Can I buy you a beer or something?” It was like we were invisible. I was surprised by that. People gave us the strangest looks, the ones that did look at us. I thought that was kind of weird. Flew back to Albuquerque. My mom was there, my brother, my aunt and uncle. My father was in Korea at the time. He was still in the Air Force. My best friend was there. He met me there. That was June, middle of June 1970. It took me a while to readjust. I don’t think I’ve ever readjusted completely. My sleep habits for the first ten years I’d say were like in Nam. I still wake up at 3:00 in the morning Steve, thirty-two
years after the war. Three or three thirty every night. I came back and I drank heavily
the first two years and I smoked lots of pot. The reason I did those two drugs especially
is because I didn’t dream. I could actually pass out. Not really sleep. No dreaming. I
hated the dreams I had about Vietnam. I did that until about 1980. It got a little bit better
after ’80, but not too much. I worked in bars. I had several jobs doing everything from
cab driving to janitor to bartending to dealing marijuana. I probably would last a year or
two with a job, then I would quit the job or get fired, one or the other until 1980. The
first 10 years after the war are kind of a blur to me also. I don’t remember too much. I
bought a motorcycle. I used to like to go to bars and get into fights. I was confused to
say the least. I know that we weren’t well liked. My first year back I went back to the
University of New Mexico. Took a couple of classes. We were told in our classes that
we were baby killers and rapists. The mainstream Veterans organizations, the VFW and
the American Legion, I tried to go down and join those. We were told there that we were
losers and drug addicts. They basically told us you guy’s war wasn’t a real war. We
don’t think that you are deserving of us. That was fine with me. I just walked out of
those places. That was fine. We were ostracized from society. I felt like I had done
something wrong. I was told that I should feel guilty. That I should feel ashamed. I
guess I bought into that. I mean, I grew my hair out. I didn’t let anybody know I was a
Vet. I kind of dropped into my own peer group, trying to fit in with them and I didn’t. It
was sad, I guess. I look back and I was so Goddamn angry. I was so angry at the way
the war was. There were too many of my friends that were dead and there were too many
of them wounded. There were too many of them still there and that angered me. My
own peers made me angry, too, because they didn’t want to listen to anything I had to say
about the war. The ones that really angered me was the treatment by me and my Vet
friends by the WWII guys. Specifically in the American Legion and the VFW. They
thought that we were less than them. We hadn’t seen any combat. That really hurt. That
really, really hurt me. I got really angry at them. I didn’t join the VFW until three years
ago. Now I belong to the VFW and the American Legion. It was that whole sense that
we were outcasts. We were not welcome. We had done something wrong. I had a huge
problem with that because I know I didn’t do anything wrong. I bought into it. Like I
said, I tried to after a couple of years, I wouldn’t tell anybody I was in Vietnam.
Whenever I applied for a job, I wouldn’t tell them I was a Vietnam Vet. I just didn’t want anybody to know. Even though I wanted to say something so bad. I wanted to tell them. I wanted to tell them what Vietnam was about. I joined a Vietnam Vets Against the War, but in name only. I still have my card, in fact, that you guys will get that has my name on it. I still had misgivings. My friends are still there. They’re still getting blown up. They’re out there doing their job. I can’t get out there and say Ho Chi Minh is going to win. There was a huge tug there, too. Basically I was in name only in the VVAW.

SM: When did you join that?

AG: I’d say 197-. It must have been after I dropped out of school. ’71 probably. I went back to the University for two semesters. I dropped out because once people found out I was a Vet, then I was a target. ’71 I guess it was. They had what you call a chapter on campus. They were too radical. I was confused. Let’s put it that way. I was very confused. I wanted the war to end so my friends could come home, but I couldn’t get out there and spout the anti-war shit that I heard. I know they had no respect for me as a vet. I remember going to an anti-war rally one time on campus. This was probably in late summer or early fall. It must have been late fall because it was the first semester I was back. I wanted to speak. You could get in line to go up to speak. They asked me who I was and I said I was a vet. The guy told me I couldn’t speak because I was a Veteran. I was a baby killer. This guy said, “You’re a baby killer. You should have gone to Canada. We’re not going to let you speak.” I turned around and walked away. I should have punched the guy, but I didn’t. I figured Goddamn they didn’t even want to listen to me. I’m on your side. I want to end the war. I just didn’t understand the movement. I didn’t understand why we were looked at with such disdain. I guess a lot of it too for me, for the most part it was apathy towards it too. People didn’t care. They wanted to forget about the war and about us. That hurt. I used to go to bars and we’d find each other. Veterans would find each other. We’d sit there and get drunk. I’m sure people looked at us weird then. Basically we would get mindless together. We’d get drunk or get high. Didn’t talk about the war very much. We’d sit there and talk about what we were seeing in the country and how we were being treated, what was going on. Why can’t we express our feeling about our friends that are still there? It was just a big
confusing time for me. I couldn’t get a beer. I was only 20 years old when I got out too.
That was when I got a fake I.D. pretty quick.

SM: The other Veterans that you’d met on campus, had they had problems with
the anti-war movement as well? Or members of the mainstream anti-war movement? I
mean as part of the VVAW, you’re part of the anti-war movement.

AG: Yes. I’m not sure. I guess they were more political than I wanted to be.
They hated Richard Nixon. I guess I did too. I hated LBJ too. I wasn’t willing to work
politically I think is one of the reasons why I didn’t stick with them too much. I guess
that’s about it. I think back on that time period. I think about my anger. Basically my
anger drove me. I wasn’t very fearful of things here. Even though I thought when I came
back I might have to start shooting my own country. That was kind of scary. In 1970,
right before I left Vietnam not only did the U.S. go into Cambodia, but in Albuquerque at
the University of New Mexico they called the National Guard out and they ran some
students through with bayonets. I remember in the Stars and Stripes a few weeks before I
left ‘Nam there was a three inch headlines saying nine student stabbed at UNM. I
showed my friends going this is my hometown. This is where I’m going you guys. I
started thinking my God. They killed people at Kenn State. They shot these kids dead at
Kenn State. They’re running bayonettes through people at the University. I’m going the
war’s coming home. That scared me, Steve. I was real scared that I might have to come
back here and start doing to my own countrymen what I’ve been doing to Vietnamese.
That just did not settle with me well. Did not settle too well at all. I did buy a gun when
I came home. One of the first things I did was went to a pawnshop and got a .45 that I
carried with me in backpack at UNM for two semesters. I felt safer. After that first year,
I got rid of the gun. I did not trust myself to use it in a situation where it needed to be
used. I was afraid that I might go off the deep end, so I got rid of the gun after the first
year.

SM: As you were taking classes there, what was the response of the professors to
your Veteran’s status or did they know?
AG: The one class I remember specifically, I took an English class. We got to
write about anything we wanted to write about. Of course, I wrote about Vietnam. There
was another Vietnam Vet in the class I met. We wrote about Vietnam. We were told
basically, I remember this teacher was a TA, she was from England. Heavily anti-war. 
Basically, she would tell us that we were plagiarizing, or not telling the truth when we 
were writing about Vietnam. I might even have a paper or two, that if I could find, I’d 
like to give you guys too. I remember this class was tough to take. The people in the 
class, once they found out we were vets, we got so much shit. We were basically told 
that we were cowards because we went to Vietnam. We had no business being there. 
We were called everything. My buddy and I would just leave the class. We would get 
angry, leave the class and go outside. Sometimes we’d smoke pot out there, right outside 
the class. That was hurtful. That just tore me up. I felt like a stranger in my own 
hometown.

SM: Want to take a break?
AG: No.

SM: What about your family? How well could you interact with them about your 
experiences. They didn’t really want to talk about it. My father, like I said was in Korea. 
I showed my mom my slides, I remember and she didn’t ever talk to me about it. It was 
just something that everybody wanted to shove under the rug. Nobody wanted to listen to 
anything I had to say or we had to say. It was just like I had gone away on a camping trip 
or something. Even my best friends from high school didn’t want to hear anything about 
Vietnam from me. It was a disappointment. I thought I had to something to say. 
Obviously you’ve got to have an audience to be able to say anything to. My mom aged 
20 years. I came home that was the first thing I noticed about my mom, she had gray 
hair. She never had gray hairs before. Her face had lines on it, I had never seen before. I 
didn’t realized how much I affected her during my tour their. She saved all my letters I 
sent her. I’ve read those letters since then. I’m amazed. I thought I didn’t tell her 
anything, but some of the things, Good Lord, I’m telling my mom this? That this ambush 
happened, I sent her articles out of the Stars and Stripes about us getting overrun. I 
always thought I’m going to protect her. I got home and I remember talking to my 
brother and my dad about how much mom would worry. She watched the news every 
night, anytime the Marines were mentioned. Anytime that I Corps or An Hoa was 
mentioned she was always wondering that’s where Tony is isn’t it? I aged her. I feel bad 
about that to this day. I know that she prayed for me and I know that she was premature
gray because of my tour there. I think she didn’t want to hear, not that I wanted to tell
her. I don’t think she wanted to hear what I had done. What I had witnessed. Even
though since then we have talked about it. About 25 years after the war, I think I finally
got around to talking to them.

SM: What went through your mind during some of the key events after you left?
The Paris Peace Accords in ’73? Then the release of the prisoners and ultimately the Fall
of Saigon in April of ’75?

AG: The first thing I need to tell you, in August of ’70, when I got my first letter
from a buddy of mine in Vietnam that told me a guy named Dan Bennett was killed along
with a corpsman that I both new. I never wrote back to my buddies after that letter. The
whole thing about if I would have stayed there, these guys wouldn’t have gotten killed. I
just cut ties right then. I didn’t talk to anybody on my tour until 1996 or ’97. I decided
that I couldn’t talk to these guys anymore. I didn’t want to hear anymore. I remember
writing my friend a letter back saying I don’t want to talk to you anymore. I don’t want
you guys to write any more letters. I didn’t talk to this guy until two years ago. The guy
who wrote me the letter and I apologized to him. He said I understand. I cut my ties with
my platoon and my friends there in August. The whole Paris Peace thing, the whole
Secret Plan that Kissinger and Nixon had in ’72. All those events angered me, more than
 anything else. I knew the war could be ended all they had to do was just end the damn
thing. I just thought it was just a way for us to save face in some way or another. I don’t
think I voted for anybody only because I didn’t think there was anybody to vote for. I
saw the government as the enemy. I think to this day, I probably still think of them that
way. I lost faith in the government. I lost faith in the country. I lost faith in God, all
kinds of things I had believed in as a young man. That was gone. It still affects me today
I guess. I’m not real trustful the government tells me the truth. I think it goes back way
before my time in Vietnam. I think it goes back to the Kennedy assassination. That’s
another story. I just lost a lot of faith. I lost faith in everything that I believed in before I
went to Vietnam. I remember ’75 when we pulled out of Saigon. I remember that being
on live TV. I was looking at the bar tender. I remember how sad I was. I wasn’t angry
anymore. I was saddened by the whole bug op we did. I thought about all the
Vietnamese we left there that we said we could get out and we left them there. That was
so damn sad. To this day I can see those Marines on top of the embassy getting into that
chopper. I can see them punching people in the face, knocking them away from the
chopper. I can see the aircraft carriers dumping helicopters overboard. I can see the
Vietnamese flying out. They’re jumping out of their aircraft over the water. Just
abandoning those people. That has always stuck in my craw. That we abandoned these
people after telling them that we were going to help them. When the tanks rolled into the
presidential grounds, I remember that too. I was thinking what the hell was this about?
Was this for nothing? Did my friends die for nothing? Did I go through this for
absolutely nothing? I think I shut down my Vietnam side for about 20 years after that
whole debacle. I didn’t want to see hear or read anything about Vietnam. My distrust in
the government increased. I guess it never has decreased since then. I’m real distrustful
of them.

SM: You said that things were kind of bad for that decade, the 1970s. When did
tings start turning around for you?

AG: I think, when I got married in 1990. I finally found a woman who didn’t
give a shit that I was a Vietnam vet. Her father was career Navy. I knew her for 10 years
before I could trust her and myself enough to ask her to marry me. I went through
probably 50 relationships with women. Especially early on, they’d find out I was a Vet
and they would drop me, which hurt. I met Judy and she basically pulled me out. I was
wallowing, pretty much in my pitty and my depressions and my anger and everything. I
had gotten into a couple of motorcycle accidents and I had done some real stupid things
that I had survived here. Just doing stupid, stupid things. Going to bars and trying to get
in pick fights. Trying to punch out police officers and just being a complete reprobate. I
met Judy. We got married in 1990. I went back to school at the University and got my
Bachelor’s degree. There was a professor there that I met, who was also a Vietnam Vet.
Twenty-three years in the Marines. Actually Dr. Frankum had contacted him. He was
the first Vet -- this was 1990 or 1989 -- that actually sat down with me and talked about
how we felt. Our emotions. No war stories, no laughing about this and that just how we
felt about the way we were treated. What it was like in combat. What that first firefight
was like. The first time I sat down and talked to somebody one on one like that. That
kind of brought me out of my denial. I think I was in denial for 20 years. That was a
coping mechanism for me. This guy helped me. He helped me understand. He started giving me books to read. He was 23 years in the Marines. He had four Purple Hearts. Three tours in Vietnam. He was there in 1954. He was the history professor at UNM. Still a real good friend of mine. He was a good counselor; he was also a good listener. He started giving me books to read. Marine Corps operational histories. Histories of Vietnam. Histories of the Vietnamese people. History of France and the Vietnamese. I never knew any of this stuff. I think that helped me understand. I think I was looking for this understanding about what I had gone through. More than that I think I just wanted to understand why decisions were made. Why we were there in the first place, which I never knew. I think that has helped me cope with my feelings now. I think it’s also helped me try to understand the way that I feel and the way other veterans feel. In 1995, when I was in graduate school, three hours short of getting my master’s degree, getting ready for my oral comps. I lost it. I started dreaming about Vietnam again, which I hadn’t done. I started drinking heavily again. I had really moderated my drugs and drinking. For some reason Vietnam just came smacking me right in the face. I woke up one day after a real three day drunk. My wife said you need to get some help. You need to go out to the VA. I was reluctant to do that. I didn’t think there was anything they could do. I went out there for her, not for me. For her. I got out there and met some great counselors there. They told me first, I had to go to substance abuse because I was just tearing up my body from the alcohol I was doing. After that substance abuse program was just three weeks. They did a PTSD assessment and they said that they wanted me to go through a program out there. A 12-week program. I thought about it for about three months and then decided o.k. I’m going to do this. I have time to do it now. The opportunity’s there. I still didn’t believe I had posttraumatic stress because, I know this is going to sound weird. I didn’t think I had seen anything combat wise. It’s kind of silly when I look at it now. I said o.k. I’ll do this. I went to the program it was terrific. It made me understand why I had lived my life the way I had been living it. I tried to understand my emotions better. They gave me coping mechanism that I could use. It was Godsend and a lifesaver. It saved my marriage and probably saved my life. I’m sure that I wouldn’t be alive today if it wasn’t for the VA. The people out there were very sensitive to us. They were sensitive to what we had gone through. I understood that I did
have this thing called posttraumatic stress. One of the reasons that I was reluctant to go
through the program was because I had told them the first day I met them that I wanted
them to cure me. My name therapeutis, as I call her, said well we can’t cure you Tony.
We can show you how to cope with these tings. You’re always going to have them. That
scared me. I didn’t want to have this all the time. They were able to put me on anti-
depressants. I go out there now, once every two months to talk to my shrink. I go to the
Vet center now, once a week. I’ve been doing that since 1995. Being around other
Veteran’s who feel the same way I do has helped me just tremendously. I guess my
feeling of loneliness in this whole thing after I came home, that I was the only one who
was feeling this and I was the only one who had gone through these things after the war.
Then I met other people that had been doing it. There was nothing wrong with it. I mean
we’re not evil people. I mean I paid my taxes. I worked hard. I’m not one of these
wannabes, these guys that wear their camouflage things around and do their gigs trying to
be wannabe veterans. The VA has done a great job. The vet center I go to is one of the
best things I’ve done. It’s not necessarily a struggle everyday, but it’s something I have
to be aware of constantly. They taught me that there are certain emotions. Certain
anniversary dates that are going to make me feel a certain way. Now, I can see them
coming and I can cope with them much better. I have people to talk to. I think that’s a
big thing with me. People to talk to and anti-depressant drugs that do the job. I just feel
lucky as hell that I have a wonderful wife that loves me. Also I have other Vet friends
who can understand and give me their opinion and their coping mechanism they use and I
just feel very lucky.

SM: When you started to that program did your attitude about your service in the
war change?

AG: Yes. It really changed, Steve. I always felt ashamed. I felt that I had done
something wrong, like I said. Then I realized it. I always thought that I had done
something wrong. The whole guilt thing about why did I survive? And why did all these
good men I knew didn’t make it. The best people I knew in Vietnam died. Why did I
survive? I’m not this great, good person. I came to realize after to talking to my
therapist out there and going through the PTSD group out there, I must have done
something right because I’m here. I’ve come to realize that I’m here for a purpose. I’m
not sure what it is yet, but I survived. I have to keep the memory of the men that I loved
in Vietnam; I have to keep their memory alive. I have to try to live my life as good and
as honorable and as peaceful and with as much integrity and dignity as these men would
have lived their lives. My guilt isn’t about survival anymore. My guilt, which is not as
severe, is about me not doing certain things. I’m not guilty about anything I did in
Vietnam. It’s more about if I had been a little bit quicker, a little bit more aware. But
that guilt has been fairly well coped with. I feel that my service to my country, but
especially to the men I served with was well worth it. I would do it again Steve in a
millisecond if I could serve with the same men I did. For a long time, I never thought
that. The good thing that came out of Vietnam for me was the people I served with. We
were the best. These men were the best people I’ve ever known. I tried to explain that to
my wife. My wife and my friends and it’s hard. I love my friends. I love my wife.
These guys, we went through something that I can’t describe. I’ve always been loyal to
them. If they ever wanted me to do anything now, I would be right there next to them.
That to me, is the best thing that’s come out of Vietnam. Just that feeling that we did
something that most people haven’t done. We did it with honor and integrity. We
weren’t the horrible things that we were told when we came home, that I bought into. I
lost the faith, but I’ve gotten it back now. Semper Fidelus is that term that the Marine
Corps uses our motto. I wasn’t always faithful, even though I should have been. I’ve
gained that faith back I think. I have to honor the men who did not come back with the
one who came back or were seriously wounded. I just feel lucky that I didn’t get a
scratch on me physically. I know now that my ego, my psyche was bent, but not broken.
I consider myself very lucky and fairly happy and I’m living life the way I wanted to. I
think that what you guys are doing out at Texas Tech is very important. I think the
American people need to hear from us now about what we did and what we went
through. I just feel privileged to be able to contribute to the Oral History Program at
Texas Tech.

SM: Thank you. Thank you very much. What do you think we should take away
from that war as a nation? What are the important lessons we should learn?

AG: I think that we need to make sure that when we go to war a couple of things.
First, we have to have the American people behind the war. Second thing is, we need to
get the men and the women now, who are fighting that war whatever they need to get the job done. Whatever the need to get the job done. I think we need to have a specific mission. We need to have this mission clearly articulated to me. We need to have a way to articulate when it’s over. Then to be perfectly honest, to paraphrase Ernest Hemingway, they need to kick out all of the people that got us into the thing in the first place. I think that we have to be very careful when we send our young men and women into war. To this day Steve, anytime we’ve gone and done any military thing as long as we’re talking about it before I don’t want us to do it. Once, that trigger is pulled, once we make that decision we have to get in there and do the job. We have to give our fighting men and women the tools to do the job as quickly with as few casualties as possible. Then we’ve got to get the hell out of there. This is my own opinion. I realize that we have to have clearly articulated goals. We have to accomplish those goals. I’m very weary about this whole war on terrorism, but that’s just something I have to worry about.

SM: Is there anything else you’d like to discuss today?

AG: I don’t think so Steve. I just want to thank you again for your professionalism, your sense of humor, and your patience.

SM: Thank you. NO, it’s been a tremendous experience. Thank you for sharing it with us.

AG: This is something I’ve wanted to do for a long time. Now, people can access. I think that as your oral history archive grows I think it’s going to be a tremendous resource for scholars and for veterans too. I’ve already gone online and read a few of the oral histories you’ve already done. You guys are doing a great job. Keep up the good work.

SM: Thank you. Let me go ahead and shut off the equipment and put an ending to this. This will end the interview with Mr. Tony Goodrich. Thank you again.