Julie Morgan: This is Julie Morgan. It is 7:15 p.m., on February 21, 1990. I am interviewing for the first time Donald McBane. Don served in Vietnam one tour during August 1969 through August 1970. This interview is taking place at the home of Julie Morgan in Lubbock, Texas. This is part of the Vietnam Archive Oral History Project at Texas Tech University. When did you first find out you were going to Vietnam and what were feelings about it?

Donald McBane: Well, let's see. As far as first finding out about my orders for Vietnam when I was at Ft. Benning, Georgia but as far as finding out really was the day I got drafted because virtually everybody that was drafted was going so, uh.... October 1, 1968, my birthday, was the day I got my notice from the draft board that I had been drafted. I was living in Buffalo, New York at the time five miles from the Canadian border and thought seriously, thought some about going across ... the border (chuckle) which many were doing at the time. But I was working for the Boy Scouts. It was a job that I had decided I wanted. I thought about it and said, yeah, I had been on the job at that point for about a month so I didn't have a lot of experience of whether I was going to like it or not, but from what I had seen of it so far I liked. Thought, ‘yeah, I don't know of anything else I would rather be doing at this point.’ So going across the border was not really an option. On November the nineteenth was the day I was inducted and then got my orders to go to Vietnam in July of '69 and went on August 7 of '69 and feelings about
it I was never particularly pro-war. I had been in the ‘68 election, between Nixon and
Humphrey, was kind of split which way. I could see advantages with both of them and
realizing that whoever I voted for there was a good chance I was voting on what was
going to happen to me as far as the draft and so on. Thinking about the two of them and
really didn't see much of a difference between them. Couldn't see that either one of them
was going to keep me from going to the war. But I was never pro-war, in fact, I was one
of the few people in my unit in Vietnam that on National Moratorium Day in ’69 that in
fact did wear a black arm band which was not a popular thing to do. But, I guess it was a
mixture of the job I wanted, the only way I was going to have it was to go and serve.
Having grown up I was in Boy Scouts all my life and was do your duty to God and
country thing so it was a bit of that. It was also my father had, who was a college teacher,
got out of going to WWII because of a deferment in teaching, and I guess a little guilt that
the family had not participated in WWII or Korea, so, it was my turn. And, on the other
hand, I could have gone to graduate school when I finished, as many others did, but by
the time I'd finished college in ’68, the third of June, decided no I had had it with school. I
absolutely was not going to go on to graduate school as a way of staying out of the war,
but I wasn't leaving myself open because of any great desire to be drafted. (laughing) It
was certainly not something that I wanted either. So feelings about the war at the time ...
not in favor of it, somewhat against it but hadn't participated in any anti-war activities at
that point. Now I did when I got back. I did participate in a couple of those Vietnam
Veterans Against the War activities but not prior to that.

JM: Where did you participate in these events?

DM: Oh, when I got back home in Pennsylvania, upstate New York, there were
these local chapters that staged the whole local things trying to get news media attention.
But there were veterans who were against the war as well as veterans who were in favor
of it. Nothing, nothing big that got much attention but it was a way of saying, you know,
there are two sides. Not everybody that served, was gung-ho in favor of what we were
doing there.

JM: What type of basic training did you receive before going to Vietnam?

DM: Bad.... (laughing) My basic training was at not Ft. Benning, it was at Ft.
Bragg, North Carolina. Home of the 82nd Airborne, which they tried to recruit
everybody into. Eight weeks, the advantage was having been inducted on November
nineteenth, we were about five weeks into basic training when Christmas came up and so
quite surprisingly, totally unexpected they actually gave us two weeks off so we could go
home for Christmas and New Years. Far being so, it was nice while we were doing it but
the bad part was when we got back they expected that we had kept ourselves in shape as
though we had not been away. Meanwhile everybody had been off partying so, it was ...
the first week back to basic was real hell. But basic training, there's not much you can say
about it. Basic was basic and after that went on to advanced, AIT(Advanced Individual
Training) in Ft. Dix, New Jersey which was specifically designed to train people,
specifically to go to Vietnam, on what kind of things to do. Although I was a college
graduate, I ended up receiving 11 Bravo MOS, which meant I was infantry--rifleman. At
the end of AIT training phase, probably 75% of the company received orders
immediately to go to Vietnam and there were a few of us that received orders to go to
NCO school. And essentially got drafted again. One more type of training which
something I did not volunteer for, I only volunteered one time in the army. I followed the
old sage advice ... don't volunteer. And, so, went through AIT training then went down to
Ft. Benning, Georgia for NCO school; but when I got there they had assigned more of us
than they had space for the week we arrived so it ended up there were about, I think there
were about forty of us that were being held over to start training the following week.
Most of the guys were assigned around KP duty every day. I was fortunate that I got
assigned to go to truck driving school and for the week that we had before our session
started I went over and learned to drive, a ten ton tractor trailer, one of the big rigs. It's
come in handy when I've been moving. I knew how to back up a truck and so on and it
was nice at the time because it was a week of when everybody else was out on KP we're
out driving trucks around and getting our license to do that. Then while I was doing that I
developed Bells Palsy which is a paralysis of the facial muscles on one side of the face,
which meant that I was not involved in the physical training (PT) program and firing the
rifle; I couldn't do because it was the muscles on the right-side of my face and I was
right-handed so I couldn't sight the rifle. So, a number of the training activities I was not
involved in. In fact, actually I came down, started suffering Bells Palsy while I was in
truck driving school but I didn't say anything about it until I finished truck driving school
because I figured I got it pretty good here and then as soon as truck driving school was
over... the day that we graduated from that I went to the infantry infirmary and got
checked. So, I was three or four weeks into NCO school when they called me in and said,
‘Hey, Don, we're sorry. You've been doing a nice job on things you participate in but
because you're limited on physical activities there are a number of things you just haven't
done. At this point you've missed enough of the training you're either, you've really got
two options; you can either recycle and go back and start the program over again, or you
can drop out of the program and go get your orders but chances are your orders are to
leave for Vietnam.’ But I had no desire to, even if I were going to Vietnam, I did not
want to go as sergeant. My impressions was that sergeants were among the first ones on
the front. And that did not sound like a position that I wanted to be in. So, I said, ‘Thank
you very much, I'm really sorry that this has happened.’ I never wanted them to know that
I never wanted to be drafted in the first place, and I said, ‘Yeah, yeah... let me out.’ So for
a week and a half I ended up being the sergeant major's jeep driver. So my truck training
came in handy, because I was now licensed to drive a jeep as well. So for a week and a
half I sat in an air conditioned office and twice a day drove the sergeant major out to go
to lunch, and in the afternoon you were to drive around the base just to make sure that
everything looked normal and then go back to his office, so for a week and a half was
probably the cushiest job I had in the army. And then I got my orders to go to Nam and
that occurred at ...I had, I think it was two weeks off from the time I got my orders until
the time when I had to report to Ft. Lewis, Washington to go overseas. I had driven my
car down to Ft. Benning and so I was driving back and got up to Baltimore where I had a
friend from college who lived there and stopped at his house overnight, which was the
night that Neil Armstrong and friends landed on the Moon for the first time. So, I
remember very well where I was when man landed on the moon. Then went on home the
next day because I lived in Philadelphia at that time which was upper part of Philadelphia
and a couple of weeks later in Ft. Lewis a long way to answer what basic training was
like.

JM: Where were you stationed at in Vietnam?

DM: In Vietnam, I was Delta Company, 1st Battalion, 22nd Infantry, 4th Infantry
Division. Which was II Corps, which operated in the area of... basically called the
Central Highlands. It included, An Khe, Pleiku, Qui Nhon area. (figure. 2 in appendix).

The primary mission that we were doing in that area was called Central Highlands because it's a very mountainous country and primarily we were there simply to interdict supply routes from the north as sending down men and material heading on down further towards Saigon and the populated area. The area that we operated in had a few villages; the 173rd Airborne Brigade was one of the first units into Vietnam, that was the area that they had originally been assigned to. While they were there they moved everybody, all the local peasantry were moved into secured hamlets and meant the rest of the countryside was what was called the free firezone. Anybody that we saw we automatically were free to assume was enemy; because if they were outside the town, they weren't supposed to be there. So we never had some of the moral conflicts that some of the other folks had. There in the Saigon area a friend or enemy, if they were outside of town they were enemy but inside of town there was question, but outside of town we were free to shoot anybody we could see. In fact, backing up any further, I think I took on Christmas Day, I was later on I was assigned to 81mm mortars and on Christmas Day we had a Christmas truce. And I have photograph at home I took through the sighting scope of the mortar which was kind of like looking through a rifle scope. About three miles away the firebase we were setup on, there were several VC out in the rice fields harvesting the rice and we couldn't do a thing about it because we were under a truce. Kind of a weird feeling of being able to spot them and not being able to do a thing about it. Central Highlands was a beautiful area. Absolutely beautiful countryside. (figure 3 in appendix). Generally when the Americans went into an area it would be absolutely green and then we would set up a firebase and have firemissions sometimes for something, a lot times for target practice, and by the time we moved onto another firebase their would be scars on hillsides all around from where we had been blasting away the hillside just for the hell of it. So, when we moved in, very pretty.. but when we moved out, couldn't say the same unfortunately. But one of the firebases was named LZ Niagara specifically because there was a big waterfall right near by. Just beautiful countryside. In the winter months it did get cold but for most of the time we were out up in a fairly decent altitude; we were never down at sea level, very seldom down sea level and so in the wintertime at night it would get cold. Daytime it was never cold, but nighttime it would get pretty
chilly. But from a standpoint of comparing that to almost any other area of country to
have serve your duty, your tour in, it was probably the best area. I Corps right up by the
northern border area had Khe Sanh, some of the other big action. II Corps had a lot of
small action but most of the time it was more II Corps you had finding supplies and
destroying supplies than it was actual action with the enemy. And by the time they got III
Corps in Saigon and IV Corps south of there in the rice paddies and so on. Not only was
it ... you were slogging through the wet swamp all the time which I'm sure was not a
terribly comfortable situation, but again it was not a free firezone. So II Corps was not a
bad area to serve a tour of duty in. Now there were rice paddies. I did get some
experience with that but not the kind that you got in other areas of the country.

JM: Did you have contact with the villagers and how did they react towards you?
DM: Very little contact. I was... spent almost all of my duty on forward firebase. I
mentioned before I went over as a rifleman, that was what I'd been trained in in the
States. When I got over there we arrived at Cam Ranh Bay and the first.. each morning
they would have a formation where they would assign various people what unit you were
assigned to and so on. And I had gone over with four guys that I had been through some
training with and we all went over together and we stood in formation and each morning,
there's a couple of mornings we heard them call out certain names going to mortar school.
We didn't quite understand what this was but we thought this might be worthwhile thing
to look into. School ... school sounds a lot safer than field. Let's find out what mortar
school's all about. And so we did a little checking found out there was a Spec-4 over in
administration who is essentially the guy who deciding where people were going. And so
the four of us went together and found this Spec-4 and found out what mortar school was
and found out a ... guess it was probably more than just a battalion and it was probably
the corps. II Corps, was not getting as many people that had been trained as mortarmen as
what they needed and so they had set up at Cam Ranh Bay a school to train some of the
riflemen to become mortarmen. It was a one week school and said ‘Well, how does one
get assigned to it?’ ‘Do you want to go?’ ‘Yeah!’ ‘Okay, give me your name.’ I
mentioned before there was only one time I volunteered, that was the one time I
volunteered when I was in the army ... mortar school, that sounds good... I volunteer. And
the four of us, a couple days there we got our assignment to go to mortar school for the
week. Not only was it one more week that we were in base camp instead of being somewhere else, but it changed assignment from being a rifleman to being mortarman. Anyway, when I was assigned to the company about a month before I was assigned to the company the mortar squad had been out on a mission and had walked into a ambush and virtually everybody that was in the squad, in the platoon either was killed or wounded. And the company commander decided gee, these mortar guys really aren't trained to be rifleman they're trained to do something else and thankfully he came up with the decision that he would try to keep his mortars on the firebase as much as possible. So I ended up when I got assigned to that company in mortars spent almost my entire tour on forward firebase. Therefore, was very seldom out on sweeps where we... I really never was on a sweep where we went through a hamlet. But the only contact that I had with villagers at all was second or third firebase we were on was LZ Hardtimes was set up at a ... right in between an ARVN firebase and a town and we were right smack in between the two of them. The ARVN base on one side of our firebase and the town on the other and because I had a truck driver's license from the truck driving school when they needed to take a water trailer down to the water pump to get refilled with water or whatever I'd drive the truck. So drove through the towns a few times but real interaction with people almost none. Strange way that my tour worked out; I didn't have that much contact with the local indigenous population.

JM: You mentioned being on a firebase and I heard there were problems with drugs, did you have any problems like that where you were stationed?

DM: Not with hard drugs, no. Again now I mention a firebase and there are... there really are a couple different kinds of firebases. Typically a firebase was much larger than the ones I was on. Ours were normally forward firebase which meant that in most cases at most there was one infantry company that served as a perimeter security. There would be one platoon of 81 mm mortars set up. Sometimes Echo companies orders which were for platoon four deuce (4.2) orders would be set up and a few firebases we actually had artillery set up, generally 105 mm mortars, artillery. But they were never the huge firebases where you had two or three companies on there and whole company of artillery and so on. They were ... so I don't know whether it was the smaller size in that area. I was there from August '69 through August '70, when I got there we had not yet begun any
of the troop pullouts. It wasn't until November that Nixon made the switch ... the pullout switch. I can remember sitting in a... it seems like it was about November. I can remember the night that he did it... We had transistor radios, an Armed Forces Vietnam Network - Radio Network carried his speech and we were all sitting there. No as matter fact it would have been before November, it must have been in, it would have been in September that he made his speech about pullouts because I remember which firebase I was on. There are certain things that stick in your mind and I remember what the hooch looked like when I was sitting in listening to that radio and so it must have been in September, or very early October he came on and made his troop pullout announcement. And that, I think, was the first time where probably a lot of the troop morale started to change in Nam. The people that I directly worked with were the other guys in my mortar platoon. We all knew that we had a pretty cushy job and we're getting left on firebase instead of having to hump out in the boonies with the other guys and perhaps that made a difference. Whatever it was, there was not much of a problem. There was pot smoking but there was, as far as hard drugs, I didn't see it within our specific platoon. Now when we went into back to our base camp, yes, there were drug problems there. When we would interact with people from other companies we would see more of the drug problem but people that I directly worked with there never was a problem.

JM: Did you have any disciplinary problems in your squad?

DM: No. When I went over after I got out of mortar school when I was assigned to the company initially as one of the second assistant gunner on 81 mm mortar. Uh, and then there were three people who were in the fire direction control center - the FDC. And they were the guys who would figure out ... a fire mission call would come in ... they were the ones would have to figure out okay, how many... what angles do we have to fire at. Where are you located at.. where are we.. what angle do we send the round to get it to you or get it where you want it...what elevation is to point out how much powder charge is needed and so on. And I spent about three months on a gun squad and then moved in as second assistant in FDC. And then within, I think, three weeks the guy who was number one went back to base camp. Later on, the guy that was number one at that base camp, later on he got killed in a situation. But I had moved up to number two and then within six months at the time I had got into country I had moved up to number one so I was the
top person in that FDC. Which in normal operations meant nothing. At that point I was still only a Spec-4 although the job was never to be filled by anyone less than a sergeant E-5, preferably a second lieutenant. And here I was a Spec-4 holding down the job although I was not the first Spec-4 to do it. But, when we were just set up on the firebases as far as there was normally a platoon sergeant that was in charge of the platoon and that was the person who had to face any of the disciplinary problems. However, whenever we were called upon for a firemission then I was the one that was in charge if something went wrong... it was my ass that was grass. Then I was also the one that was in charge in setting up training and conducting training for the guys. So, there where times that I did have to control things but I was never ...I never had a problem with anybody. Again, I think partly because everybody realized we had a cushy job the way we were set up and nobody wanted to do anything to screw that up. The other companies, their mortar squads were out humping the boonies when we were, Charlie company would come in would provide perimeter defense and Charlie Company Mortars would come in with them but they would be out perimeter defense and our Delta Company Mortars would be left on firebase set up as mortars while the other company went out humping and so we knew we had a pretty good job. Well, the way that we were going to keep that was two ways: one, to keep the company commander convinced that this was the way to do things and; secondly, to keep the other people that had a say in the unit convinced that it was smart to keep Delta Company Mortars set up because Delta Company Mortars knew what they were doing and if you called on them for a firemission we could get the rounds out more quickly than anybody else and get them out more accurately. So, in doing training, the guys took training quite seriously, never had any problem during that. And consequently, we did become very proficient of what we were doing and partly because we did more training and other partly because we were set up much of the time that we had the opportunity to do more training than anybody else did. And... so, it was kind of a self-feeding mechanism. We were in a situation that gave us the opportunity to train, the fact that we had training made it easier for us to do the job. The fact that we did the job well everybody liked and we got to stay where we were. We recognized, hey, we had a cushy job. We were motivated to do the training again. So, I think there were some self-feeding
mechanisms that were unique to the particular unit that I served in that made it everybody trying to stick together to do the job... so discipline was not a problem.

JM: Was there any racial tension?

DM: Really not. I'm sure our, our platoon had I think, we had about 18 people, 18 men in the platoon and we were split almost just about half and half, white and black. As I recall, I can't recall that there were any Hispanics. We didn't follow the movie mold when you have to have a Puerto Rican and you have to have a Mexican and you have to have a.... it's pretty much white and black. I'm sure that the black soldiers had some resentment because as I can, as best I recall we never had anyone in FDC or anyone in charge of the gun except white guys. I don't recall that we ever, that a black was ever in charge of anything. Although we did have two, three, three of the four platoon sergeants that I served under were black. So, we did have a black in leader of the entire platoon but within the subleadership positions under him never did we have a black, I'm not sure why. The interesting thing was that it was split, we had probably five, five or six guys who were there from Michigan and then we had another group of probably eight, seven or eight who were from Georgia, and North and South Carolina, mostly North Carolina and Georgia. And typically the southerners both black and white would stick together and the northerners black and white would stick together and it was more, a Yankee, a regional thing than it was a racial thing within our particular platoon. I'm sure that was again a fairly... again because the company had been through this particular situation where virtually everyone who had been in the mortar squad was either wounded or killed and so virtually an entirely new mortar platoon was put together in about a month and I was one of the last ones to get there in that group. But we were all FNG's about the same time and learned our way around each other. I think there was probably some feelings of equality that we felt, it just would seem that we all knew that we were all equally ignorant and at the same time, I'm sure the black soldiers had some resentment over the fact that they didn't get leadership positions but it was never expressed. There was never anytime when I felt racial tension within my platoon.

JM: Okay, you told me you had some slides to show me and I thought maybe we could talk about them for awhile.
DM: Okay, this first one is actually a picture of Cam Ranh Bay where I arrived and that's the forward. The bay actually there right on the right-hand side of the picture. very sandy beach area. When we got there, actually arriving at Cam Ranh Bay was one of the scariest times actually on my tour. We came in it was probably 4:30, I guess 4:30 in the morning, still pitch black as we were coming in and the flight was a commercial airliner was not a military airline. ... and, as we got close to getting ready to land they turned out all the cabin lights so the only lights on were the indicators out on the wings. Immediately, the indication was, ‘Hey this is serious guys,’ it really was. And then, so we were flying that way for about three minutes, and suddenly the plane took a real sharp dive off to the left. I've never... I've never banked in a commercial airline the way we did in this thing and really just took a sharp dive and later the captain came on and said, ‘Sorry about that but we had an unidentified object ahead of us that was on our immediate path and if we didn't move we might not be here now so sorry if...’ and then landed and so thinking, yeah, we were now, this really ... we were really at war-really very quickly delivered that picture. And then they, we got off at five o'clock in the morning ... hot ... this was August, and it was hot at five o'clock in the morning and we boarded an army bus to go over to the depot. And, got there they put us in formation standing outside a little shack waiting for and I can remember very clearly one of the nicest things that really stood me in good stance throughout my entire time in Vietnam. It was still dark and standing there waiting for something, waiting for somebody to come out and tell us what we're doing next and looked up and right up above the shack immediately above it up in the sky was the constellation of Orion. Now I had gotten very interested in astronomy in high school, and through scouting and so on. And I looked up and saw Orion and said, ‘You know that's the same sky I know from home.’ And immediately gave me kind of a feeling that this is a far different place but it's the same place and it was a thing that later on we had starlight scopes that were the night vision kinds of things and we never used them for that. We requested one and got it out and so there were a couple other guys ... a Richard Zaleski, was a University of Wisconsin at Madison graduate and a couple other guys were college graduates and also had an interest in astronomy. So we got hold of them and had them to send out a starlight scope that we used to look at the stars. Not what it was intended for at all. But the sky was a very
calming influence for me for the entire time I was there. So that's Cam Ranh Bay. This shows you an 81 mm mortar there on the right. Just to get an idea, we've been talking about being in mortars that's what it was. Let's see that's Joe Huffman from St. Louis in the center of the picture and Marty Lemieux from Michigan on the left-hand side and you can see in the background, this was, I don't remember which firebase this was offhand. But, it's you can see nice green mountains. Typical situation. This is an aerial view of LZ Niagara. I mentioned there's one that was located near a firebase and this is the one. And gives you an idea of exactly what our forward firebases were like. Around the perimeter are a number of small hooches that were bunkers that would have generally six men per bunker that would serve as sleeping quarters and then also guard post at night. And those were positioned all around the perimeter where you would supposedly have be able to cover each other and put down a field of fire when anybody was trying to come and overrun you. You notice in this particular situation it was not a perfect circle and there were some spots that were not quite covered as well and typically that was the situation. They never quite worked out as symmetrically as you hoped for. On the other hand, there were a couple of firebases, I could remember we were set up on the very first firebase I was on and later on a couple of other times where it occurred we started digging a bunker and then either a company commander or battalion commander or some idiot would come along and say you got to move this thing two feet and you'd fill in the hole you had just been spending two days digging and dig a new hole. Very frustrating at the time. Then through the center is kind of a path that you can see wandering through there and that was just sandbags that were filled and put down so that during rainy season and a lot of times these things would be full of mud and you can see it's clear of nothing but dirt so in order to have a decent path to walk along why we created a path out of sandbags. The center of it is the TOC - Tactical Operations Command and artillery is set up in the very center of it. And, yeah, there are.... I spot one, two, three ... yeah, three, four, it looks like they had four 105's set up on this firebase. And, then the normal operation at this magnification it's hard to spot them. Somewhere on there, are some 81 mm mortars set up but I can't spot them right offhand. And then the cleared area over here on the left hand side was basically a helicopter landing area.. But, it gives you a little ... and Niagara was actually one of the largest firebases we were ever on, most of them were much smaller than this.
This is LZ Beaver. And as you can see we were set up near a river. We were on Beaver longer than any other firebase. It was a really nice area. We were close enough to the river we were able to go down most afternoons and go swimming in the river. Put out some security, try to make sure we weren't ambushed. The cleared area behind the sign was the chopper landing area and you can see just off the left of the sign is a water tank and that was typically a firebase would have two or three water tanks and that was your supply of water. Then off to the left here you can see a bunker and typically you can take a couple of metal engineering stakes and build a place to hold the rucksacks and so on. This was one of the most developed firebases that we were ever on. As you can see there was actually a paved walk on this one. The brass casings along the side are actually empty artillery casings. And, this was, we were set up on this firebase, we arrived there in.... let's see we got there the, I think the last week of October and we left there two days after Christmas. So I was there for both Thanksgiving and Christmas on this one firebase. And incidentally regulars ‘means not words’, that was the battalion motto for the first battalion infantry. This was much more developed than any of the other firebases and we had a firebase beautification project, it would have made Lady Bird Johnson real proud. It was decided that while we were set up on this since we had, let's see, there were one, yeah just one 105 artillery, 4-deuce mortars and 81 mm mortars were set up on this firebase. But since it was set up in a real scenic area this was the only time that I ever saw General Creighton Abrams out on a firebase the guy that succeeded Westmoreland was the head honcho for the whole thing. And he came out for inspection and once the battalion found out that Abrams was coming out then it was time to make the firebase look pretty so we then.. we had details to go out and pound these brass casings into the ground and they got some tarmac sealer and put down a paved walkway. And then, once we had built up our on bunkers, this was an interesting firebase we had. Let me give you an idea of what is firebase life, for our ... we had the Delta Company Mortars set up here and about eighteen of us and we'd been there for about three weeks and realized we were likely to stay there for a while. It was a big firebase, you had a lot of interior space... so we talked to the battalion commander and asked permission and he said yeah, go ahead and build another extra bunker. Now it's kind of unusual for guys to want to spend time building an extra bunker. We dug a hole and filled the sandbags and so on and created the
bunker. We built our own little enlisted men's club on the firebase. The artillery guys for
their fire protection patrol and also tactical operation control for the firebase both had
electric generators set up and would run the electric lights and so on. Well, we were able
to arrange with one of them to do a little trading and we got hold of some of their
electricity and we strung a line over to our new EM (enlisted men's) Club. So we had
electric lights, we had a television where we could get Armed Forces Vietnam Television
and we had radio and we had, got two or three, I remember very distinctly we had a ...I
can't remember the name of it ... the game where you spell things out and you have a little
tile ... yeah, scrabble, we had a scrabble game and a couple of other board games there and
during the day when, since we were not on perimeter guard, during the day when you
didn't have anything else to do, if we didn't have to do training or something, hell, if you
weren't on KP or whatever why you went into the EM club and so there were times where
life on firebases could be pretty easy. (End of Tape One). This is the artillery. And again
it gives you an impression that we were set up on this firebase for a while. Notice on the
right hand side a strange windmill operation that's a wind powered washing machine. We
decided or they decided we didn't have access to it but that was the way they washed their
clothes. It was a garbage can with a windmill attached to it to do the agitation for the
washing machine. This was a very well developed forward firebase. And this was very
similar to the kind of ... this was the engineers' bunker. I forgot the engineers were also set
up on this firebase. And this was their, they just had the one bunker. It gives you an idea
of each bunker was generally well, pretty well protected with sandbags all the way
around and then across the roof you would normally try to get some kind of steel grating,
put that down, put steel grating down, then put a row of sandbags across that and spread
plastic across that and a couple of more rows of sandbags and plastic to keep the rain out
because during rainy season we did get a bunch of rain. And as I mentioned, we were on
this same firebase at Christmas and this was the Christmas spread that our... we had a
mess hall set up and they did one hell of a job both at New Year's, I mean at
Thanksgiving and again at Christmas. They weren't able ... they didn't do all the work
there because the actual mess hall was just a cooking tent, no one ate in there, it was just
a cooking area and they didn't have it big enough to do something super big. But they
flew this stuff out from base camp so we had for both Thanksgiving and Christmas all the
turkey and ham and fresh fruit. They set it up and we started eating at noon and they just
left it set up where all the rest of the day whenever you felt hungry you were free to go
back get more. And, I got a guarantee they did one hell of a job for us. At least those two
days they made us feel a little better. We had a number of people's families that sent us a
little plastic Christmas trees and so on. So you'd have a Christmas tree set up in the EM
Club. The nice thing about Christmas as opposed to any of the other time of the year,
since people were sending packages and we would all, write home and people, families
would write back. Well, what do you want for Christmas? And universally we would say
booze ... and there was plenty of booze available at Christmastime. Since we knew we
were on this firebase for a while not having moved why we could get glass bottles and
not have to worry about it. Unfortunately we did leave the firebase two days after
Christmas and the booze we hadn't completed at that point we had to leave for the guys
that moved in on the firebase after us that were staying. But we consumed our fair share
in the mean time. And this is the ... looking down ... now down river on the left hand side.
Again at the same firebase to give you an idea of the size. The armored vehicles are....
this was the only time that we had them, they're called dusters. And they could, as
opposed to artillery, which would normally - most of the time - fire at least somewhat of
an angle and generally firing at least three miles away from the firebase. The dusters were
essentially perimeter defense weapon and they would fire direct fire straight out in front
of them. We didn't need them fortunately. The other reason that I selected this picture,
typically, if you watch ‘Tour of Duty’ or any of the movies about Vietnam, a number of
times you have probably seen some kind of latrine set up. Typically, what we would do
on our forward firebase would get ammo crates from either the artillery or the mortars.
They would come out in wooden ammo crates and you would knock them apart and you
would be able to get wood to build things with ... and somebody would build a little box
shape to sit over a bottom of a barrel, a diesel fuel barrel, whatever ... and then take a few
sandbags put them around the top to make a kind of a toilet seat, instead of sitting on bare
wood... and that was the toilet but being as our firebase was full of men and the thing that
I have never seen represented in any of the. various movies and so on. Notice here in the
foreground is one fore lone artillery shell with some white lime right around it ... that was
the urinal on the forward firebase and you just stand there and take your best aim ... that
just served as kind of an aiming spot ... that was a Vietnam urinal ... thought it might be interesting to include in the Archives. (laughing). And this is again the same firebase looking down you can get a better idea of ... this was a large river valley, very pretty area again that's Joe Huffman from St. Louis. Let's see, this was LZ Chippewa and these were ‘donut dollies’. Girls from the American Red Cross that would come out and they'd bring out simple little board games and different things. Generally, we would not see them on a firebase, normally, they stayed in the rear of the main base camp areas. But, once in a while they would come out and whenever they did it was a very pleasant diversion. Nice to see American women once in awhile and so it was very popular to have the donut dollies come out and visit us. Just to prove that yes, indeed, it did rain at times and we did have a rainy season. This was LZ Rock. This was the smallest firebase that I was ever on. This one was manned just by our one platoon of 81 mm mortars and I think I've got another picture here coming up shortly. This was just off to the side of a major firebase. But there were two small hills one off to each side of the main firebase and in order to.. they both had higher elevation than the firebase.. in order to try to get protection to the main firebase why they set us up on top of this thing where we were out there, eighteen of us, were by ourselves in a cleared position where everybody knew where you were and only eighteen to defend yourselves. This was a time when it was a little scary. Let's see that's Whitey, I can't think of Whitey's last name. He's from Michigan. This is LZ Augusta, to give you an idea, I talked about firebases didn't always end up being the nice circular shapes you tried to have them. This one was set up.... I was standing on a high spot at one end which was the helicopter landing pad area and there was this low saddle through the middle and then at the far end another high area. And actually 81 mm mortars were set up in that high area and I'll show you just in a minute in another picture where I was located. You can see the long tubes that are sticking up in the center. Those are 105 mm artillery pieces. This was our bunker up on top of that little thing that was at the far end of that previous picture. And as you can see looking off into the distance very green nice pretty areas was right after we had moved in. You notice off in front of the bunker it just fell away extremely steeply. You can see the plastic from here. By the way, we were talking earlier about a lot of guys being from Michigan or from Georgia .... on the left is Homer Kendrick, a sergeant from Georgia, then Herb Thorton from Michigan, Tucker
was from Michigan and Marty Lemieux was from Michigan ... so you got three Michigan
and one Georgian in that picture. This is a picture where you could see exactly what was
in front of that bunker and the lower area was the firing area. Wherever we could we
would try to build kind of a two level bunker... the front area which was a very low level
area with firing ports if we were going to come under attack you would sit in there and
stick your rifle out through the little holes in front and shoot and then the rear area was
actually the sleeping quarters. Typically, six guys, two along each of three walls in bunk
beds, and again the bunk beds didn't get built until a few days after we would be set up,
because that was from the wood that came in the ammo cases for the mortars. So, one of
the advantages of having mortars was that we had wood to build things with. The first
few nights we'd just sleep on the floor and hope it didn't get too wet. Now once you could
build a bunk bed, well you could get up off the floor a little bit. And concertina barb wire
spread out across in front of the bunker ... about half the firebases we ended up using
concertina normally just one strand the way you see it there. A big firebase, a well
established firebase would normally have three or even six strands of concertina wire,
much more well defended but as a mentioned these were forward-firebases much smaller
than Khe Sahn, and all of the.. the types of firebase you see more in the movies, much
larger than what we were on. And this is a picture of that same kind of hillside, just off
LZ Augusta after we had been there for awhile. As I mentioned, we took target practice
and so on. That's the effect of target practice. Nice and green when we moved in, nice and
brown by the time we were finished. But, again you can see just rolling hills, mountain,
very pretty terrain throughout. One of the nice things about Nam, very surprising, I don't
know whether it was just the emotions of being there... I don't think so ...I experienced
some sunsets there unlike any that I have ever seen back here in the States. This was kind
of a nice misty evening but some real really pretty ones. There was one with a moon
rising in the sunset, again mountains in the distance. This one was set up LZ Chippewa
and just a brilliant ...that is not artificial coloring that's the way it looked... it was ...I've
never been through a sunset like that one. So, there was enough light, I can remember
before I decided to get my camera out and take a picture of it, I was writing a letter home
from the light that was coming from this sunset ... it was just really. You asked earlier
about contact with local villages. This was a local village along the route of a convoy. So
this was a typical village that we would drive through on a convoy and you can see thatch roofs but in the background more substantial from back when the French occupied. The French built real housing and so on. But the typical situation was thatch roof and I'm not sure whether this next picture, let's see... No ...I didn't remember whether I put it in or not ...a lot of the houses that we would see besides instead of being thatched were cardboard. They were the pieces c-rations came in. They would open up the cardboard cases and use that to make the walls of their hooches because the cardboard sort of ... was a good barrier against rain. So rather than thatching they used what the Americans were throwing all over their country. Contact with the people, this was probably a typical way of having contact with people that I had along a convoy. You would be moving from one firebase to another by a truck convoy and a number of places there would be.. you would have a regular rest stop set up and you were near a village or anywhere within walking distance of a village why mama san or her kids would come out and hoped that the Americans would throw candy which we typically did. On the other hand, frankly mama san would also be worried whether she was going to get raped but that was the less pleasant side of the truck convoy situations. This was the village of Dap Da Nang and this was a Vietnamese schoolhouse. I guess probably had been built by the French. This was about as deluxe an accommodation as I ever saw. And, as I mention, yes we did see a few rice paddies and water buffalos...there they are to prove it. Most of the time when we were moving from one firebase to another it was not by truck convoy, instead we were moved by chopper and here we were, the guys from the mortar squad waiting for the choppers. This particular mission we were going out to, in fact LZ Augusta which was the one I...kind of the camel-back shaped one where I was showing the hills that were green that turned brown. This was just before we went to LZ Augusta. We were waiting for the choppers that took us there. LZ Augusta was set up as a base camp from which the battalion, to give coverage to the Americans. When we were supposedly going in they had received intelligence from I guess, as I recall, from a village chief who had escaped, there was a POW camp set up for Vietnamese prisoners no Americans were being held there. But, NVA had a POW camp set up for their Vietnamese prisoners, generally village chiefs or people with power. And somebody had escaped from there with pretty good directions as to exactly where the place was. The battalion planned a special
mission to go in and try to rescue the people from this POW camp and LZ Augusta was
the firebase set up to support that one. Since they're trying to have the element of surprise
this was the biggest air operation that I was ever involved in. They had probably about
fifty slicks - huey choppers set up to ferry us in at the time. Each slick would probably get
about eight guys on one chopper. So, they're ready to move something in the
neighborhood of 300 or 400 guys all at one time and take us into this landing zone..
immediately spread out and tried to get to the POW camp before word spread. But as it
turned out the POW camp was there but they had already left. And we did not get to free
any prisoners. This is the way we typically spent a lot of time was if you were moving
from one spot to another. You just sat out there on chopper pad area waiting and
sometimes it would be two or three days before they'd finally get everything together and
they'd tell you get your rucksacks.. we're going and then you would sit there for a day ...
well, I guess we're not going till tomorrow and then you'd wait another day and so on. A
lot of the time in Nam was very boring. If you've ever been in an area and wanted to
know.. somebody gives you a can of beer and you want to know a quick way to get it
cold because they hand it to you warm ... the fastest way to cool a can of beer, if you've
got a block of ice nearby and you don't want to just put the ice in your can of beer... is
take the can of beer and you put it down on the ice and you roll it and in about two
minutes you will have a nice cold beer and that's what these guys are doing. We had a
couple of ice blocks that came while we're waiting for the choppers to take us to Augusta.
They weren't getting us moved out quickly so they brought us some ice and we had some
beer and had to cool the beer and this is the way you do it. Typically on a forward
firebases we would have the opportunity... if we were going to be on a firebase for any
length of time they'd allow us to send back to the rear and buy beer. We had to pay for it
and you could buy your beer ... the beer, let's see as I recall, you had to pay for the beer
but you could get two cases of soda at no charge but if you wanted a beer you had to pay
for that. And so, generally everybody would order their free cases of soda and buy a
couple of two or three, four cases of beer as well and get it out. So, you asked earlier
about drug problem and I said there wasn't much but probably there was an alcohol
problem (laughing) on our firebases. We did try to drink our beer. One of the ways on
forward firebase, I guess I talked about boredom, one of the things that we did, probably
more than anything else that I did in Vietnam was play pinochle. There were a couple of
guys there knew pinnacle, I didn't know it when I got over there but I quickly learned it,
and spent day after day, from directly after the time I got there to the day before I went
back playing pinochle. That was.... a lot of pinochle .... a lot of quarters spent on it. There
is the waterfall that was the namesake for LZ Niagara. You can see it is not as big as
Niagara. And, this was taken from choppers. You see the fun way of flying ... a bit scary
... but the fun way was, generally two guys could do this. You'd sit on the side with your
feet dangling out and the skids, the landing part of the chopper, you could stand on when
it was on the ground but you couldn't get your feet on there for any support when you
were flying. So, it was fun to sit on the side with your feet dangling out especially if you
were flying over... sometimes the guys would fly right about treetop level ...a lot of
thrills, a lot of fun watching, looking at what was going on. On the other hand, you were
always hoping that gee, I hope nothing terribly fast comes up where the guy has to take a
quick bank and dumps me out of the chopper because you were, there was, you were not
tied in at anyway and the best you could hope for was to grab at the doorframe. And, I
guess talking about falling out of choppers; a situation I saw portrayed once, you may
wonder if it was an episode on ‘Tour of Duty’, I think this season. You may wonder was
there any basis of fact for it where there was a particularly hard-nosed sergeant, I think,
whatever rank, maybe corporal. At any rate, he was supposedly interrogating a
Vietnamese prisoner. Took him up in a chopper and was threatening we are going to
throw you out of the chopper if you don't talk. I, in fact, when I was on LZ Terrace, we'll
see some pictures of Terrace later, saw that exact kind of incident happen where the
Vietnamese, a couple of Vietnamese officers, not American, south Vietnamese, ARVN,
took two supposed VC up in a chopper. We were standing there on the firebase and
watched as one of them was thrown out of the chopper a couple hundred feet up in the
air, obviously to his death, in the idea of hoping to scare the other VC into talking. Yes,
that technique was used. Here's a picture of both. Maybe, the other, I guess the other
waterfall was a different waterfall because that's Niagara in the background and there's
the waterfall in front of it. You can see they were right close to each other. Niagara was
not only a large firebase but it was one that I ended up going, I think I was on Niagara
five different times. We'd go there and then we go someplace else. Then we would come
back to Niagara then we would go someplace. Then we would come back to Niagara. I think it was five different times I was on LZ Niagara. And again mention, talking about flying along there's another picture of the countryside and a lot of times being up in the mountains obviously we're near rivers a lot of the time. Some really pretty countryside.
A lot of people think of Nam as being nothing but the rice paddies. Well there was another very pretty side and if things ever get settled there would be a good tourism business that could be developed in the central highlands area. Okay, this is LZ Louis. This was the one I mentioned when I was showing a picture of the smallest part that I said I had ever been on that was a little hillside up at the side that you can see in the far background another little hillside and that's the size of the hillside that I'm standing on here in the foreground and LZ Louis in the middle. This was one of the places that we took sniper fire on the main firebase from the little firebase that you see off in the distance. And there was a sniper that would fire at the main firebase and we called in a couple of gun ship's, heusys and we also had jets come in and bomb that hillside.. try to get rid of the sniper. Weren't particularly successful. In fact, we weren’t at all successful. We never got rid of him. But in the meantime, then at another point, we had several NVA that had gotten on that far hillside and this was while I was.. I and the other 81 mikes were set up on the main firebase there LZ Louis. And we started taking fire and we were firing back and there were also 105 artillery set up on this firebase and one of the rules for 81 mike mortars, the way you fire a mortar is to drop a mortar shell down the tube when it hits this firing pin at the bottom it ignites the various charges sets off the explosion at the bottom of the tube now out comes the shell. And because it's the way that it gets its power is dropped down the tube and hit the firing pin; you can't fire thing straight out at somebody there's no way of getting it to go there. So, it's a weapon that has to fire at a pretty steep angle, you can go up and then come back down. Well, one of the rules is that you'll never have more than one person dropping a round at a time. One person per gun that drops the rounds to make sure that nothing strange happens ... I think the next picture, let's see- ... yeah, the next picture shows the strange thing that could happen. That's a 81 mm round and you notice the round stuff in the back, that's the tubes, each round came packaged in a waterproof casing and the little white thing under there, the center of the round, is a charge. Notice the tailfin of this particular round is bent. The
tailfin is bent because while we were taking this fire one of the guys decided to help out the other guy who was dropping rounds and one guy dropped a round down before the other guy's round could come out and his second round got a bent tailfin from where the first round was coming out while the second one was heading down. Scared everyone shitless. And that's the kind of thing that could happen and the reason the rule existed ...and you asked earlier about discipline and so on. We spent a lot time training to make sure this kind of thing didn't happen. Well, the guy and you've seen a picture of him earlier but I won't identify which one it was. But the guy who dropped the round was not supposed to go drop this round. That was his last day in the 81 mm mortar. He joined the rifle company that day. That was the way you dealt with that kind of a problem... if you can't follow the rules we can't have you here. So he went out humping with the rifle squad. Interesting with the way our two lives intertwined .... once he'd got assigned to the rifle squad then he did get injured later on. He was, he had been in country about a month longer than I had been. His R&R he'd been scheduled for his R&R and he was wounded ...I think it was about three days before he was scheduled to leave on his R&R and I was the next one on the list to have a request in to go to Australia where his R&R was scheduled for. So when he couldn't go on R&R then I got to fill in his spot. I went on R&R a month earlier than I would have otherwise. While I was in Sidney on my R&R I watched a television in a motel room ... watched Nixon announce the American troops were going into Cambodia and watched as he pointed out where they were going and breathed a sigh of relief that he was not pointing out the fourth infantry division. But, by the time I got back into country the fourth had already gone in. Well, had the guy that dropped this round not dropped the round he would not have been assigned to the infantry, had he not been assigned to the infantry he wouldn't have been injured. He would have gone on his R&R, I still would have been in country, I would have been on the initial invasion of Cambodia instead of coming back from R&R and going in to Cambodia three days after the initial landing when there was a lot of heavy shit because our battalion went in. We were 19 miles into Cambodia, which was second or third deepest penetration into Cambodia of any of the American units. They set us down at a spot which they had thought was supposed to be a hospital complex along the Ho Chi Minh trail. And it turned out it wasn't just a hospital complex it was a lot more. It was a
training complex. We recovered little wooden models of airplanes where they were training. This is the kind of airplane to hide from, this is the kind of airplane to shoot at, it goes slow enough you can shoot it down. We recovered all kinds of medical gear, training gear, and tons of rice; all kinds of stuff. The unfortunate thing is 19 miles is beyond the artillery range of even the 105 fire artillery. We were so far in I don't think we were... heck, I'm sure we're not even in range of the navy guns. So, we were set up on a firebase that was out of range of anyone else. It was the only time that we were set up that way. You did not want to be set up in that way, cause if you got in trouble there wasn't anybody that could come to your aid. And we got into trouble. Last night, they announced it was our... that we were going back to Nam the next day. The only time in my life that I was glad to go Vietnam. But they announced we were going to leave Cambodia. We were set up in real dry, extremely dusty, dry flat area; although there was a river just half a mile from where we were set up. I did go down, didn't go swimming, it wasn't that big of a river. But we could go down and at least take a bath. I was down to the water point a couple a times. And they had announced, I guess it was four or five days after I had gotten there, back from my R&R... they announced the next day we were going back. They basically had finished as much as they could of destroying the stuff we had gone there to destroy and they had received word that there was a build up in the area of NVA forces and they wanted to get us out of there. They didn't get us out quite in time. That night we came under attack. They had sappers that came in and exploded satchel charges on our firebase in Cambodia. Did get in through the wire. That was one of the few firebases where both Delta Company and another company, Bravo Company mortar's 81s were also set up on the same firebase we were on different sides of the firebase. The 81, the Bravo Company guys were set up on the side where the actual attack came in on the perimeter line and a couple of those guys were killed. Couple of friends that I knew quite well. We were also, they had RPG's and they had 60 mm mortars, which was what the NVA typically used; a little smaller than the 81's that we used. So, we were taking not only direct fire and satchel charges and rifle fire and RPG’s, and everything was going on that night. And it was a night attack. So, we were out there; the ground was extremely hard and no one, although people had been trying to dig bunkers and most of the forward positions, the perimeter positions at least had enough sandbags set up that they had
something to hide behind. Virtually nobody had overhead cover, which you just couldn't
dig down far enough into the soil to build a bunker the way we normally would. So, all
the stuff coming down from overhead and no overhead protection it was not fun.. And, of
course, with the mortars, although it was a cushy job most of the time, the one time that
mortars are not a cushy job is when you are taking incoming on your firebase, because
your job is to be out there at the guns because the principle mission with mortars is close
support, support your firebase. So, where the rifle guys are down in the bunkers firing out
the firing holes the mortars are out standing out next to their guns firing mortars. That's
why a couple of guys from Bravo Company did get killed. They were just out in the open,
they had no cover at all. There were, I guess, I think around the closest round was about
20 feet away from me. There was some on our side of the firebase, but not quite,
fortunately not on top. Nobody in Delta Company was injured. But then in the next day
they did get us back to Nam. We were quite glad. Let's see, okay, here's a picture of LZ
Terrace. LZ Terrace was an unusual firebase. Very unusual from the standpoint that I
mentioned before that a firebase would not only try to be circular well, right up in the
center of the picture, the kind of bald spot up, well there are two bald spots, there's one
that is obviously the side of the cliff and there is another at the top of the hillside. The top
of the hillside's bald spot is LZ Terrace. And it's just a very narrow ridgeline and that
firebase was probably fifty maybe seventy feet wide at it's widest spot and real long.
Extremely long, skinny firebase. This as ridiculous as it seems and as ridiculous as the
shape of this firebase was; this is one of the firebases where we had to fill in a bunker that
we had started to build and move it about three feet. Really pissed everybody off. It
tactically it made no difference; it was strictly was to make this thing look better because
the whole reason this firebase was built was a bet between a battalion commander and
some other commander that said, I'm not sure what level commander. But there were two
of them and they bet whether or not a firebase could be built on top of this ridgeline. So,
we went in and built it to prove that yes indeed, a firebase could be built in such a
ridiculous situation. You can't see it in this picture but just off to the left of this scene
there is another ridgeline and this was another firebase where we took sniper fire. There
was one sniper set up on this ridgeline next to this one. And generally he would come out
somewhere around ten o'clock in the morning and then again about three o'clock in the
afternoon, fire a few shots ... rifle shots and then that would be all we would hear from him. And again we had several air missions ... we had eight, let's see the 81's were set up and 4-deuce mortars were set up. There was...I don't think we had any artillery on this firebase. We were trying to blast everything we could out of this hillside and we kept on taking sniper fire. I was originally set up, Delta Company was the one that went in originally to set up this firebase and built it. In fact, we went in before I went on R&R. This one was abandoned, then we came back to it later and this was one of the last firebases that I was on. Next to the last firebase that I was on, which was the time that we were taking sniper fire was right towards the end of the tour. So, after we had finished building this and we're taking sniper fire the rest of Delta Company was sent out, all Delta Company was sent out to go up the neighboring ridgeline and try to get this sniper and Bravo Company was to come in and take over this firebase. Bravo Company, as I mentioned, is the one that had a couple of guys killed in Cambodia and they had not had time to replace anybody that knew what they were doing as far as fire direction control. So, I was the only person from Delta Company that stayed on this firebase when the rest of the company went out to hump up on that ridgeline. I stayed and for a couple of weeks I worked, for a week and a half, I think it was, I was there training a couple of guys from Bravo Company in making sure that they knew what they were doing fire direction control. Meanwhile, since I'd, a couple of times .... we had, this was I guess, I think about our third company commander that I had been there with .... he didn't like me. He was determined that I was going to join the rest of the company. Here I was the only person from his company that was not under his command at this point. Particularly to be me, I was not a person that he particularly enjoyed. He was not a college graduate and we did not see eye to eye on a number of things. So, he was determined to get me out there. But Bravo Company needed me and the Echo Company commander, the guy that was in charge of 4-deuce mortars was the one in charge overall on this particular firebase. Finally, the Echo Company commander wanted to make sure that Bravo Company mortars knew what they were doing before they were going to let me go out there and join my company. Well they finally had gotten our company...they started them off way behind this other ridgeline and they'd worked for about a week coming up behind the ridgeline. And they were about ready to go up this ridgeline that was parallel where the
firebase was, where Terrace was at. And the company commander said, ‘I want McBane out here now.’ And the Echo company commander finally agreed yeah, the Bravo guys now, they know what they're doing so you'll go join your company. I had no particular desire to go out there and join them. I told you that I was not terribly in favor of the war and I wasn't about to do something stupid, I mean, at this point I was about three weeks from going home. The last thing that I wanted to do was go out and play macho man. I knew I had a cushy job staying on the firebase. So, the first day the order had come and I was supposed to go to, go down to the pad, have all my gear ready be at the pad and a chopper would come in, somebody was dropping off supplies and they would take me over and I would join the company. They legitimately never did get me the information ... didn't tell me ahead of time. When the chopper came and somebody called and I had to come down to the pad, well I came down and I didn't have any of my gear. Where's your gear? Well, it's back at the bunker nobody told me anything. Okay, go get it we'll see if we can get another chopper in here this afternoon. Well, fortunately they didn't get another chopper in that afternoon. So, being a college grad and putting some of my skills to use... I thought well, you only told me to be ready this afternoon. So, I went back and I unpacked all my stuff again. So, the next day late in the afternoon a chopper came in and order came out to get me down to the pad, I got down. Where's your stuff? Oh, I unpacked, I thought you couldn't get me out yesterday I thought I was supposed to stay here again. (Grumble from the pilot). So I got to stay there that day. I ended up it was five days before they finally got me out to the company. They did finally get me out there but I put up a good fight. Used my college background. And, so, but fortunately by the time I got there they had gotten to the top of the ridgeline so I didn't have to go up this thing. And, let's see, I think the next picture .... Oh, okay that's a picture on.. taken from the middle of this firebase. And this flat area they had brought in a bulldozer and actually bulldozed part of this thing flat enough that chopper's could land on the thing. They could actually have a pad. And you can see in the hilltop area there and you could see how narrow this firebase was and that's up there right at the top is where my bunker was located on off to the left-hand side, the side actually that faced where the guy was trying to ... the sniper was. Then ... Okay, these pictures are little bit out of order. But, I mentioned that we had been off this firebase and then came back to the firebase. See
anything in this picture? Looks ... anything strange? Probably not ... but there is a booby-trap in that picture. Right in the center if you follow the piece of wood that comes from the left, the lower left corner up to the center, as you get just to the center and look off to the left there's a brown leaf and a green leaf and then something shiny in ... right in there. That something shiny that's in there is a grenade. This was a tree stump that we had blown down, engineers had blasted away, whatever, when we built the firebase the first time. Then when we abandoned the firebase the VC had come in or NVA I don't know which. Had come in and had planted a number of booby traps all over the firebase. This was one that had a trip wire that went across the path just off to the right of this picture. And fortunately Whitey, one of the guys that was in our mortar's, had a picture of him earlier, he's the one that almost set this thing off. He spotted it before he stepped on it. And we were able to disarm it. Gives you an idea of how clever it can be and what you typically see in... you look at John Wayne's Vietnam movie 'Green Beret' s' and so on. You have these massive booby traps that if anybody with half a sense looked up in the trees that would see this humongous thing. Well, this is what a booby trap was more likely. You had to be really very careful in spotting one. Now, back to the story I was telling before about the sniper and finally getting to the top of the hillside. This and I told you we had fired 81 mortars at it, we had fired 4-deuce mortars at it, we had air missions, we had had this.. LZ Terrace was set up within range of the artillery that was back at LZ Niagara and the artillery on Niagara had fired at this place. We had not gotten rid of the sniper. This was the sniper's bunker. And you can see why we had never flushed the guy out of there. He had about a foot and a half, two feet of protection on top of this little spider hole. Except for the time that he was firing at us he could hide back in there and I think that thing could have probably survived a direct hit from any ordinance that we had and he would have been perfectly safe. And, so, they knew what they were doing in fighting a guerilla war. Okay, I told you when we were in Cambodia we had captured lots of medical equipment. There is some of the stuff and you can see that some of this was manufactured in France, some of it was in China, some of it was from the United States. And you can see they had sterilization equipment, x-ray equipment, quite well advanced little hospital complex sat up right where we did our little tour of Cambodia. And this is down at the bottom of the hillside of Terrace. We were up to the top of Terrace before.
Well, this is down along that river valley ...uh, after we had come down off of where the
sniper had been located. This was humping along down at the foot of that valley. (End of
Tape Two, Side One). The interesting thing with this, it reminds me of seeing picture of
the river, to give you an idea of the kinds of inane things that we also did at times ...
reminds me a... I was good friends with the 4-deuce mortar guys; when I say 4-deuce that
stands for 4.2 inch mortar. And, at the end of each month you had to account for how
much, how many rounds you had used. And based on the number of rounds you used one
month that set how many you were going to be allocated to use the following month. The
theory was; if you weren't firing much this month you probably aren't going to fire much
next month. Despite the fact you might be on a different firebase, an entirely different
situation yet your ammo was allocated based on how much you fired the previous month.
So it got to the end of each month you always wanted to make sure that you had fired at
least as much as you had fired the previous month. Use up your allocation so that you get
at least that much the following month to protect your guys. Not so much for our own
protection as the company that we were supporting. If they ran into to something and they
needed help we had to have some ammo and if you didn't use it up you weren't going to
have as much the following month. So, we got to the end of the month and that particular
month neither of the 4-deuce or the 81's had fired a whole lot. We had a bunch of ammo
left we were going to have to do something with. Well, down the river, about two miles
away from Terrace, there was an island out in the middle of the river. And, there was
nobody on it, it was free territory, we were able to.. so we called in, I got together with
the guy that was in charge with the fire direction control for the 4-deuce. And both of us
had been ... neither of us had been firing mortar guns for about six months by this time.
So, we were doing the plotting, and all the calculations and math stuff involved but we
weren't actually out there sighting in the gun and firing and so on. We were out of
practice so we thought of an interesting challenge. You against me. Which one of us can
land a round on the island first. So, we called in and we said we could spot from LZ
Terrace ... we could spot what looked like some enemy activity on this island. We would
like to have a firemission on the island; and we would probably need to fire a number of
rounds please keep the air clear, don't send any choppers or anything through the path
between the island and our firebase. Because we expect we were going to firing for
awhile. And then he got on ... he calculated where the island was and figured out what it was going to take to fire his 4-deuce and I did the same calculations figuring what was going to take. And he working alone on 4-deuce and me working alone on the 81 firing off rounds trying to hit the island. And we both zeroed it in about four rounds. And then we just said well, let's see if we could make it a former island and we fired off all the remaining ammo that we needed to use up our allocation. Trying to destroy the island. We didn't get rid of the island but we did get rid of all the vegetation on the island.

(laughing) How inane some of the things are which we went through. And here's the hero of our story. (chuckle) This was me at the end of just before we boarded choppers to go back, the end of that little. This was a couple of guys, possibly a hand rolled joint on the left, I can't tell you for sure. But, at any rate, this was out in the bush at the bottom right along the river there at the bottom of LZ Terrace. And gives you an idea of the kind of dense foliage. This is where we were set up for our night situation and that was their post. And, one of the things that was different about operating in the central highlands from operating in the rice paddy country is the fact that a lot of times when you were set up you did not have anything close to a clear field of fire in front of you. You couldn't see more than two feet in front of you. Not just when you go out on a listening post where you'd be supposedly out in a spot where nobody could see you. Here was a whole company and you had virtually no vision one, two feet in front of you. That was one of the things a little different about life in the central highlands. It was a nice area, it was a pretty area, but tactically it was a miserable place to operate in. That is Lau in the background and I can't remember Bob's last name, he was also from Michigan. Lau obviously was not from Michigan. Lau was a Kit Carson scout. He was a former, believe he basically had the rank of lieutenant colonel in the NVA and had come over through the Chu Hoi program and converted and said he was now faithful to the American viewpoint of the thing and he was the scout with our company. Here we were set up, Bob Austin, Austin was his last name, and here we were and Lau was giving Bob a haircut. If the scout wasn't doing anything else at least he could cut your hair. And here we are. The happiest line that I was ever in, back at Cam Ranh Bay waiting to go home and board the freedom bird and come back and see the United States. End of slides.

JM: What was it like when you came back to the States? What was the reaction?
DM: Yep, let's see came into Ft. Lewis, Washington and twenty two hours after we landed in Ft. Lewis I was back at SEATAC Airport in Seattle to fly home. That was twenty-two hours to adjust to leaving Vietnam, leaving the Army and being back because I was ... when I got back I was out.. processed out of the Army in Ft. Lewis. I had less than five months left on my two years so instead of being assigned to another stateside Army installation I was released from the Army. Got a flight in order to qualify for the military, the standby flight out of civilian airline to come home... in order to get the military standby situation you had to be in a military uniform. So I flew home in uniform and really absolutely nothing of any kind happened to me either at SEATAC airport or Chicago where we stopped or Philadelphia airport. And I took the train from Philadelphia up to Trenton, New Jersey, which was a mile from where I lived and got out and nobody had spit at me or anything the other stories that people talked of. My mother was a registered nurse and I knew that she was going to be on duty the night that I got back up. And I got into Trenton about five, I think it was about five o'clock in the morning I got up there. So, I got a taxi and figured I'll just take the taxi ride home and I know where we hid the house key out in the garage, so I'll just get the key out of the garage, let myself in the house and be sitting there when she walked in in the morning. And, what I remember out of that whole coming home trip was that I got the taxi and up to that point now I had been sitting next to people and not really talking at all. I got in the taxi to go from the train station home still in my military uniform and thinking well, if I were the taxi driver I'd be asking about where you've been kind of thing. And, he didn't ask and I thought well, I'm going say, I'm just coming home from Nam - ought to get some kind of response. Nothing. And that was my coming home story was that was nothing and it was indeed nothing.... it wasn't spit at but it wasn't welcome home either. And I remember that taxi ride that was the awkward part to me.... it was not saying anything and it just seemed awkward.