Kim Sawyer: This is Kim Sawyer conducting an oral history interview with Mike Mercer on January 12, 2001 at 2:50 p.m. in the Special Collections Library. This interview is part of the Lubbock Area Vietnam Veterans Oral History Project. Mr. Mercer could you please give us a brief biographical sketch? Tell me when and where you were born. Where you grew up?

Mike Mercer: I was born in Plainview, Texas. I grew up (CD skips) Silverton High School. Attended Texas Tech and if I remember right it took me about six and a half years to get out. The last two years of that the Dean kept my student identification on his desk. Because if I came again, I would not be at Texas Tech anymore. I think they finally gave me a diploma to get rid of me (laughs). Graduated in July of 1966. Married in August of 1966 and was drafted by Lyndon Baines Johnson in November of 1966. In fact, November the 7th. That’s basically a short history of where we lead up to Vietnam.

KS: Could I ask you what it was like to get your draft card?

MM: Getting my draft card was nothing unusual in that. Everybody at the time that had any health at all was being drafted. Except all the big old bruisers that I played football in high school. Seemed like all of a sudden they were very ill. They asked me what was the matter with me. I told them I was hungry and they promised to feed me (laughs). That’s just how that came about. One of the amazing things that I remember
graduating from Tech is I read on the wall over at Plant Science Building. It was one of
the very newer buildings on campus at the time. Brown and Root. I don’t know if people
are familiar with Brown and Root, big construction company. All over the world. They
were offering graduates of Texas Tech $30,000 a year in the bank of their choice for a
tour of one year in Southeast Asia, which meant Vietnam. Dumb me, I graduated and got
drafted and went to Vietnam for $167 a month. I stood guard for those very same people
that I could have gone and worked with. That’s another mistake.

KS: Where was your basic training?

MM: My basic training was Ft. Bliss, El Paso. During November, December,
middle of the winter. Very enjoyable climate for working out. Right off the bat, they
found out that I could do push-ups. So, I was immediately selected as a squad leader.
One morning during training, I woke up and the other three squad leaders were A-W-O-
L. I still to this day do not know where they are. I finished my basic training with the
highest rank you can get out of it. A private E-2 or something like that. Came out of AIT
at Ft. Leonardwood, Missouri, which was a combat engineer training. Whenever I
entered basic training since I had a college degree, they allowed me to apply for OCS
Officers Candidate School. So, I did that to keep me out of the infantry. I knew I could
probably stay out of the infantry if I did that. Whenever I arrived at my AIT unit, which
they allowed me to select engineers. Therefore, I ended up at Ft. Leonardwood. When I
got there then I dropped the OCS program, which you were allowed to do. Which left me
with just my two-year obligation, not the three plus that it would have taken with OCS.
Made it a little hard on me for a few days until they realized what I was doing and then
everything was cool. Graduated from Bridge Building 101. Private First Class.

KS: What made you decide to drop your OCS?

MM: I didn’t want to lead in a war. I already knew that I didn’t want to. The
people that I was serving with, were people that most of them didn’t want to be there
anyway. Just visiting with most of those guys, they were people that were outcasts or in
trouble with the law. There was nothing wrong with the people basically. We got along
beautifully and they ended up making great soldiers, but I didn’t want to do that. I didn’t
want to make a career out of the military. That’s why I dropped the OCS program. The
way I was allowed to be in combat engineers, which kept me out of the infantry. I knew
what I was in for anyway. Of course, orders came down at the end of your AIT training
at Ft. Leonardwood. 98% Vietnam bound. 1% to Germany or other places. The other
1% weren’t old enough to go to Vietnam, so they were stationed at Ft. Riley or
somewhere else until they got old enough. We were given about a 30-day leave, straight
to Vietnam.

KS: Could you describe some of your basic training and advanced training? For
instance, what kind of weapons were you trained to use. In basic training we had the M-
14s. We didn’t have the M-16s. We were trained in hand grenades, M-60, machine
guns. Hand to hand combat and all that stuff. I thought the training was probably about
as good as you could do to prepare a guy for what was going to take place. I don’t know
how in the world they do it now days. I don’t see how they could have done it any better.
In fact, I suppose they probably do it a lot worse. Probably not as prepared, would be my
guess.

KS: Did any of your officers or trainers, had they had any Vietnam experience to
relate to you?

MM: Yes. Nearly all of my officers had been. Particularly our NCOs, our staff
sergeants and Sergeant E-7. I’ll think of it later on. He would be the one right under the
captain. Some of them had two tours in Vietnam even at that time and it was 1966.

KS: What kinds of things would they tell you?

MM: Nothing really. Not really. They were very smart to tell you not a whole
lot about what was going to go on over there. Or what it was going to be like. They were
just there to get us ready. Not more than that. There’s no way you can really tell
anybody about it.

KS: How close did you pay attention to the news media? TV newspapers about
what was happening in Vietnam?

MM: I was always interested in the News and all that. It always kind of
mystified me because I had always thought that it was the right thing to do to a point.
Until years later. I still think it’s probably the right thing for me to do. Later on when I
can tell you why on some of that. Yes, paid close attention to the news media, but it
didn’t affect anything that I did. It affected how my friends, relatives and neighbors
related to me. To some of them, ‘you stupid son of a bitch. You’re stupid. You’re

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crazy’. What are you to do? I guess one of the things that gets me. Do you know who
Cacious Clay is?


MM: Yes. Now, he’s one of the most magnificent, wonderful people celebrated
around the world- conscientious objector. A fighter, conscientious objector. That’s one
of the things that I still cannot stand about the man. I cannot stand what the stands for. I
don’t know how the rest of the Vietnam Veterans feel about him, but it’s one of the
blackest marks. I like Jane Fonda a lot better than him. At least she’s honest. She’s
honest. I think Bill Clinton is probably one of the most wonderful president’s we’ve ever
had. I don’t know why. At least he was honest. So, many of the others weren’t even
honest. I’m very political. I’m apolitical in one way, but very political in another. I’ve
got stuff in my books and we’ll get into that as time goes by. It doesn’t have a thing to do
with Vietnam. It’s aftermath, after affect on people. That’s just all there is to it. Of
course, there’s lot of things like, the seven day war, was back then with Israel. Other
things were going on in the world. You will see whenever we get into talking about
things like ‘request permission to fire’. ‘Permission denied’. You will begin to see
where I’m coming from is no way to win. Those are all news media. All political deals
that have nothing to do with warfare.

KS: How did you family react when they found out you were drafted?

MM: My dad was always very silent. Probably the biggest, most wonderful
person ever in my life. It took us until he was 70 years old to say ‘I love you’. But he
finally made it. I thought he never would, but he finally did. He’s never spoke to me
about Vietnam. Most of my family never did. I don’t talk about it much either. In a
way, this is an opportunity for me to say something. My wife wanted to come. I said,
‘no I don’t want you around. If you want to hear it you come listen to it. You can do
that’. It’s one of these things that I don’t know that it affects anybody but me. I came
back from Vietnam and my Uncle said we’d talk about it, ‘Well, that wasn’t a war.’ It
wasn’t a war then why did he see people die? ‘It wasn’t war.’ It was from my
perspective, just wasn’t from a lot of people’s perspective. My wife was a war protestor.
My wife, now. Didn’t surprise me. Doesn’t surprise. Wouldn’t be surprised if I
wouldn’t have been. I know my kids wouldn’t go on that kind of situation whenever the
Gulf War came along, I was violent... I have articles written in here years ago about the
Gulf War deal. I was violently opposed to it until Congress voted to go to war. Kind of
made it a little better. I guess we're still not through. We’re still not through in Vietnam.
We’re less through over there in the Gulf Bay Area. I think things like that just kind of
keep bringing things back to a degree. Now where were we?

KS: Anything about your basic training that you want to bring up that we didn’t
cover?

MM: Yes. Well, basic training was all-good. It was straight through, hard work.
We had one weekend off, I believe, at the end of it. About a day and a half between basic
and AIT if I remember right, might have been a little longer than that. Right on to Ft.
Leonardwood. There we trained on building bridges and frozen rivers. M-14s again,
rocket launchers, hand grenades, mine detectors, explosives. Lot of classroom stuff that
had absolutely nothing to do with what I ended up doing in Vietnam, which is kind of par
for the course on most anybody.

KS: Was your advanced training was it helpful? Did it relate once?
MM: Yeah, it just helped to prepare a person for what was going on. It was hard.
I really hated it for one reason. Because it was so cold. The wet cold in Missouri was
really bad. In my eyes you’ll see a black spot in one of them. You see a black speck
down there. It’s rocket propellant that I got in it from firing a rocket. Whenever we were
firing those and it took about three days. They had to pull some stuff out of my eye. In
the main part of it, the thing that I hated worst about it was the barracks. The barracks
were old wooden barracks. I don’t know if Tech has anymore of those old wooden
barracks or not. Used to have some here on campus.

KS: I don’t think I’ve ever seen any.

MM: They were two-story, cramped bunk to bunk, with about two feet between
them and coal stoves. In the wintertime it was real cold and they’d keep the coal stoves
going. Somebody had to stay awake all night and keep them burning. They say they’d
burn down in about five minutes. The air that you breathed from that was not good.
Other than the rest of it, I didn’t have a problem with it. We had quite a few people go
AWOL. The training was rigorous enough, where it was hard for me, but I was always
able to pass everything. Make at least marksman on everything. I always ended up being
the squad leader and always ended up being the guide-on carrier, which would be your  
fourth squad. When you step up one and you’re the one carrying the one carrying the  
flag to all the parades and all that. My squad was always number one squad. As far as  
competition among the squads we were always number one. One thing that I guess that  
happened to us, that is different from anybody else. One day the, Gosh, I don’t know if I  
remember the term for them or not, CIG? CID? It’s like the Central Intelligence, but  
except it’s for the Army. I want to say CIG, I’ll think on what they are. Anyway, they  
rounded up a whole bunch of us and took us over to our barracks and interrogated us for  
about three or four hours. Because supposedly, we had stolen some M-60 machine guns.  
They had turned up missing in Ft. Leonardwood. Which is kind of common I found out.  
They literally tore our barracks apart and everywhere we had been. They did disappear  
from our unit. Nobody could have got them if we had them. They made us believe that  
somebody had taken a couple of M-60 machine guns because they were missing. That  
was kind of unique. We had a good day long deal over that. Somebody else stole those  
guns.  

KS: So, they found out who?  
MM: I don’t know if they ever did or not, but we never heard another thing from  
them after that one day. It was quite intriguing for them to be questioning ‘what’d you do  
with them guns’?  
KS: Was there ever any injuries? I know you mentioned yours.  
MM: Well, I got my eye. Yeah we had some guys with some sprained ankles  
and maybe a broken foot or two. Nobody shot on your line of fire missions and things  
like that. We never had anybody hurt. Most of the guys time you’d got to an advanced  
training you were pretty tough anyway. I’m surprised that more of us didn’t get hurt,  
building those bridges across those frozen rivers and tearing them back down and all that.  
All that heavy metal that we had on hand, I’m very surprised that more people didn’t get  
hurt.  
KS: When you were trained to build bridges, how did they teach you to do that?  
You were given actual blueprints?  
MM: No. You have, engineers have specific bridges that are like pontoon  
bridges. You have them like truckloads of parts and pieces. You put them together like
an erector set. You can just go right on across the river and just float a pontoon bridge
and piece it together and bolt it together and everything as you go. We also had some
bridges that were carried by tanks and by armored personnel carriers and things like that
for short span bridges. But if we were going a long ways across we’d build a pontoon
type bridge. Four men would grab a section of pontoon bridge and go put it out and bolt
it in. Put the side rails up and everything just keep going on across the river. We had to
finish them in so long. Build them across and then take them back down. We might do
that two or three times in one night. Pretty big sized rivers too. 150 yards across, maybe
200. There were several different kinds. Some of them were just on small, for
infantrymen or something like that. Some of them were big enough for trucks.

KS: The ones you were trained these would be the exact; you’d make the same
kind in Vietnam?

MM: I never did. Never did see one built. That’s just the way to train people to
work as a unit. I saw a couple of bridges in Vietnam, but they were nearly all what were
carried on APCs. They were fold out bridges. You could fold them out in front of you.
If they used any of the pontoon bridges, I never did see one.

KS: Anything else about training that comes to mind?

MM: I hate parade marching. I hate parades. As far as that goes. I hate to spit
and polish. I was good at it, but I hated it. I hated to spit and polish. One thing I like
about Vietnam, I didn’t have to spit and polish. I just detested it, still detest it. I didn’t
like it. But I could make them boots shine.

KS: What were your duties as a squad commander during training?

MM: Just to be sure that my guys had all their stuff done and shaped up and
ready to go. In other words, they were all there. That they all got fed. They all had their
bunks and their space in line and straightened up. That was the main thing that I had to
do. That was basically it.

KS: Did you have any problems with discipline?

MM: No. Most of them knew. In training they didn’t make it a big deal for us,
for leadership on that end. The Sergeants were kind of a Momma to all them boys. All I
had to do was be able to answer that they were there or they weren’t there or hustle them
on out there and get them lined up. Never had any trouble.
KS: Did any of the soldiers that went AWOL were they ever caught?
MM: Don’t know.
KS: You don’t know?
MM: Don’t know. I’m sure they were. I know they went looking for them. The only one guy that I know of that was recycled out of our unit, there was some that didn’t make it that recycled, held back and all that. This one guy from over here at Floydada, we went to college together and I can’t even recall his name right now. Great big guy. At that time, I weighed, believe it or not about 150 pounds. I got to 200 pounds in basic training. They fed you well enough. In Vietnam when I got back I weighed about 160 and did until I was 40 years old. He was too heavy to carry. He wanted to finish so bad, and he just couldn’t. His feet wouldn’t carry him. They recycled him and he finally made it.
KS: Is that fairly common for people not to make it through the program?
MM: Yeah, if you’re just too much over weight. He wanted to, but he just couldn’t drop enough weight fast enough. I talked to him and he finally made it, dropped off enough weight. He wouldn’t give up. He would not give up.
KS: When you completed your advanced training, how long of a period did you have before you were sent to Vietnam?
MM: About 30 days. About 30 days. I’m pretty sure it was.
KS: Where did you leave to go to Vietnam?
MM: Ft. Ord, California, does that sound right?
KS: I think I’ve heard of it. Now were you on a commercial charter?
MM: Yes, commercial charter. Yeah we were on a commercial charter. We had processing out, I believe at Ft. Ord and I can’t remember. We came back into San Francisco. Is that Oakland? Oakland may be where I left out from and came back to Fort Ord. I might have some orders, we’re talking about that. I know I came back to San Francisco when I came back. I can’t remember where we left out. We did leave on a charter plane. A really good one. 300 something of us. Seemed like it was a 747. It was a big plane. Flew directly. We landed in Hawaii and Guam and then Bien Hoa. I don’t know. We got off in Guam. They were evacuating the island of Guam at that time for, let’s see. You don’t call them a hurricane over there.
KS: Typhoon?

MM: Typhoon. There was one coming in. The sky was green as could be. I got to spend time back on the island of Guam in the last ten years. I got to go back to see a lot of that country again and work over there for a while. I kind of enjoyed that. One of the more interesting things that happened on the airplane, we got about half way between Guam and Vietnam, the plane suddenly turned up on it’s side and dumped all, we were eating and everything. Dumped it all on one side of the plane. I was happened to be sitting on the up side, outside and I looked up and there came one of our fighters going the other way. Dang near had mid-air collisions. Kind of woke us up with that deal there.

KS: Did the pilot say anything? Do you recall what they said afterward?

MM: No, they never did say. Said, ‘Sorry about the inconvenience.’ (Reading from journal) ‘The 747 began to tilt. The left wing was going down. I grabbed my steak as my tea ran across my lap tray. Sitting or more or less standing next to the right side window I could see the jet liner go by on what would have been a certain collision course. Radar picked the fighter up just in time. Our last meal before arrival was now spread over the left windows. We had begun to settle back into our seats before I realized we had already started to be sucked into the Black Hole called Vietnam.’ That’s just the first thing. You now that’s kind of how it went whenever you get over there and they open that door and Vietnam comes in. You’ll never forget it as long as you live. The smell. The place. Every time I smell something similar to it now, it takes me back. Good memories of that believe it or not. Not bad, but good more than bad. The heat and everything was so atrocious after being in the wintertime and all that. Phew! It was hot.

KS: You arrived in March of ’67.

MM: March of ’67.

KS: Talk a little bit more about your first impressions when you stepped off the plane. Can you describe?

MM: The smell, the heat was the two things that really. Was just a hard smell. The heat was the worst thing. The next was kind of the chaos of the situation. Loaded us into a bunch of deuce and a half trucks. We went out to the, oh, what’d they call it? I’ve got it written down here. ‘The hard smell, let me know
was in, then the heat struck me right between the eyes. The flight attendants with
tears in their eyes embraced each of us as we disembarked. What a sorry looking
lot we were as we mixed among those dark, hard bodies, with war costumes and
weapons. ‘That’s basically we were all pale because we hadn’t been in the sun
that long. Of course, it was a Court Marshall Offense to get sunburned in
Vietnam, because it took you out of work. ‘They whooped it up and laughed as
we were fresh meat and they were short-timers,’ and that’s basically how it was.
‘Down through Long Binh we cruised and the children were the first ones to stick
daggers in our hearts and they were always the ones, always.’ I’ve got poems
about the children and that was the hardest part. ‘They were all sizes, ages, round
eyes, slanted eyes with their emotions locked up tight. They’d come running to
the road as soon as they saw us. Hoping for something, anything. Food, money,
cigarettes, candy. They survived on what they could beg or steal. We hardened
ourselves against the children because they reminded us of how vulnerable we
had already become. Some of the men began to hate the children. They did not
realize that their hatreds came from not being able to help them.’ The guys, later
on would throw C-ration cans at them and see if they could hit them. But that’s
what the kids were wanting anything they could get. ‘We rode into the
replacement camp where we would be assigned duty and be picked up by our
respective units. As night came, the dark sky was lit up with white phosphorous
artillery flares from the firebases that sent surrounded Long Binh. The ammo
dump, a mile away, was drawing heavy mortar fire and small arms fire. That’s
basically how my first night at Long Binh ended up like Christmas on the 4th of
July. ‘The canteen opened and the Vietnamese band played country western
music. I was learning how to suppress my emotions, which would be one of the
requirements to survive.’ That’s basically it, very dark you didn’t have a clue
what was going on. You didn’t know whether the enemy was right here or over
there or what. To us guys we didn’t have a clue. None of us knew where we
were going form right there for sure. All of us had orders for a final unit, but
hardly anybody ended up with a final unit. You were at a replacement unit to be
assigned to different units.
KS: When did you find out exactly where you were going?

MM: About the next day. What difference did it make? Nobody knew where you were going. What kind of a unit you would be in or anything. You didn’t have an idea.

KS: What unit were you assigned to?

MM: 18th Engineers. 168 Combat Engineer. I ended up first duty with 557 Light Equipment Company. All those were stair stepping down, in the chains of command. We spent about two or three days at the 168 Engineers headquarters filling sandbags while they were putting us out to other units that they would reassign us to. I was real lucky; I had a Captain from West Point. He would come selecting his recruits. The 557 Light Infantry. He wanted me. He said, ‘I’m going to give you a field commissions. You’re going to be my right hand man. You can type can’t you?’ I said, ‘No I can’t type.’ He said, ‘Well look out there and pick out what kind of equipment you want to run then.’ That’s how I got my assignment- what do you want to do? Our equipment company was running, believe it or not rock crushers. Crushed rock with them. I mean from solid granite boulders, big as that desk to pebbles and we would bring it down small enough to pave with. We crushed several different sizes of rock. This size and \(\frac{3}{4}\) in, \(\frac{1}{2}\) in, into some pea gravel. We’d separate them out and we had a quarry which we blasted this rock faces off. Set 3,000 or 4,000 pounds of dynamite at a time, drill holes above it and then blast it of. If you get the right blast, then the pieces would come out smaller. Then we had a single jaw rock-crushing unit. I suppose that we supplied rock for Bien Hoa all the places. Di An all the places around.

KS: For roads? You said it was used in paving roads.

MM: For roads. For building mess halls. You know it was so wet over there if you had any kind of rock or something to keep out of the mud. Maintenance areas, new roads, air strips all that kind of stuff. I’d never run a crane in my life, but I said a crane will be alright. Three days later I was operating a 10-ton crane. Then I graduated to a 20-ton crane. I ran the rock crushers and all that stuff and I could load the trucks faster than anybody else
could. That little bitty crane. Hell, they didn’t have a dang bucket on it. It would hold about ¾ yard of material. We could flat load the trucks with it. Every time we went to blast, I’d have to crawl that crane out of the quarry. It would take all of half a day, moved 2.5 mile per hour, walking speed, less than walking speed. If I’d go down and run it across the rock, well, I’d break the track. That’s basically how it all started.

KS: Where was the quarry?
KS: Yes. That’s where it was?
MM: O.K. That’s it. About 15 miles, I’m going to say east, my guess is where it is. A little place, I don’t have any way of telling you right where it is. There’s some stuff here that might. Di An is, let’s look at the map here. Di An was North of Bien Hoa. Wait a minute. Where did I fly? I flew out of Saigon, Di An would have been West of Bien Hoa, I believe. No. D-I A-N, there it was right there. Maybe that’s where it was. Yeah, that’s it. Anyway, that was the main base, but we had this quarry all to ourselves. We had a perimeter; we’d have infantry and some of the air cav. We’d have some tanks and APCs and things like that for protection. Along with us standing guard. At night, we had lighted perimeter. We kept it lit up at night.
KS: This was your base at Di An?
MM: Yeah, it was out from there. Di An is where the 168 was based out of. They had a big perimeter there too. Our company, [557] Light Equip Company had a perimeter too, of its own and we were like 20 miles from anybody else. Maybe further than that. I’d show you in pictures better, later on. It was in a rice paddy. Those rice paddies on three sides, jungle on one side. And just where you could see for miles and miles. We would real regularly draw mortar fire and real regularly would draw sniper fire, in our unit. That went on for about 6 months. We were at the quarry and blasting and everything. There’s a little train that came by. This little train was kind of a narrow gauge train and two or three times a week it’d come by. It had these boxes on it. Boxes. Boxes. ‘Why
are they all over the boxes?” They were caskets. They weren’t our caskets but they were caskets [with South Vietnamese war dead]. We hired Vietnamese to run our rock drills to have enough help to where we could. They low and behold carried enough dynamite off, stole enough dynamite to blow that train up. And we caught them. We caught the ones that did it. They blew that train off the tracks. After I’d been there about 3 or 4 months. It happens. We’d catch them stepping off how far a mortar round had missed the ammo dump, pretty regular. You didn’t know who was your friend, who was your enemy. They all seemed pretty innocent enough to me. Big old mamason that had their teeth rotting out from the betelnut. Thirty years old looked like 65.

KS: How was your base protected?

MM: We had a berm, which would be probably six foot high, overlaid with sandbags. Within that burm we had bunkers. Then we’d have machine guns where we could crossfire between all of them. Then we’d generally get along with that. We’d have a couple of tanks, a couple of APCs assigned to our unit. Armored personnel carriers and a couple of tanks. Then we could always call in artillery. Always call in puff the magic dragon and all that stuff. It wasn’t but about four or five times in that month that we really had to call in a whole lot of help. Sure does make for colorful nights. We would have a short round every now and then. Our firebase was, I don’t know if you’d know it or not. You’ll have a base camp and then you’ll have firebases around this base camp, to protect the base camp. We were just a sub, like over here. So, the only way they could shoot and help us, a lot of time, is to shoot over us. You don’t want to shoot over them, you want to shoot to. If you have a short round it’s going to come in on you. And we’d have a short round every now and then because they couldn’t fire far. You know they’d not put enough load, enough charge in the shell [to reach over your position.

KS: Was anyone ever injured or hurt?

MM: We never did have anybody hurt from it. Just destroyed the mess hall and doing other things like that. If you’re underground it’s not too bad. [About the children ½ Vietnamese and ½ American]. Just for instance, this’ll tell
you (opening journal) this is what struck me about the kids. The kids from the
slides you’ll see is later on is where they really got to be a deal. Whenever we are
out in the jungle and Dan Long or Bora Nora. ‘Bodies too thin at the checkpoint.
Papaya on a stick or peanuts their fare. Some have no homes or sign of a parent.
They sell their wares or beg for handouts. Their eyes hurt and crush your bones.
Some grown men make jokes and lash out, men of valor can’t stand the pain.
They throw C-ration cans to hurt and maim. Not one day older, slant eyed kids
for years, that are at the road waiting for me to come back. Living on the streets
is their war game. Maimed by the war and forgotten in the pain. Their eyes do
not carry any of their names. The shame of the heroes are these eyes in my heart.’
79th Engineer, I don’t know where that one came from. I forgot what we were
talking about.

KS: Could you describe your typical workday at the quarry and how long
you would be out there?

MM: A typical workday there was pretty neat. We even had a mess hall
and all that kind of stuff. We didn’t get all hot meals, but we got quite a few. Our
workday would generally start about 7:00 in the morning and we’d get about an
hour lunch break. I’d go to the quarry, load trucks, move rocks, pile rocks, get it
organized for the next convoy that’s coming in to pick rock up or work with the
guys with the C4. C4 came in bricks about that long [10"] and about that thick
[1"], about that wide [4"]. If the rocks were too big and we needed to reduce their
size we would stick a block of C4 on them and wire them all together we might
set off a couple hundred pounds of C4 at a time. We’d get it all ready and rig it
out and do the blasting for that to reduce the size of those rocks. If we weren’t
doing that we’d be up on top helping with the rock drills. We’d drill a couple of
hundred holes, 30-40 feet deep in the granite and make one blast. Everybody
would have to be completely to the far end of the compound. A lot of times it
would throw rock and come back over and spin when we made the big blast. If
we weren’t doing that we were working on maintenance or trying to fix the rock
crusher or something was always going on.

KS: Were there any problems with the equipment?
MM: Yes, there was, but everybody improvised pretty well. Whenever we would break things down, me had a machine shop with us. We had a portable machine shop. We could build nearly any kind of shaft or things like that. Carried a lot of bearing and stuff. There was a time or two that we went plumb to Saigon for parts. We’re lucky enough to pretty well nearly get all the parts that we needed. Whenever I broke pins for the track on my crane we had to make those pins there because we couldn’t get them anywhere. We had to lathe down the steel rods and do that. We tend to close up shop about 5:00. Mess hall is about 6:00. About once a week we’d have some kind of USO show or something come in. We all had beer. Lot of times there was just a Korean beer. Full of formaldehyde. Maybe some Aussie beer full of formaldehyde. We’d have a USO show or something come in every couple of weeks or something like that.

KS: Do you remember any of the performers?

MM: No. I couldn’t tell you about any of them. Most of the time we was tired and didn’t care anyway (laugh). Donut Dolly showed up, that’s what they called the girls that brought the donuts. They’d show up about once a month, twice a month bring us a snack. Alright, I appreciated their job that they did and all. The people that came around and did the shows did an excellent job under some very adverse conditions. Some of their shows were pretty good. As far as who they were I couldn’t begin to tell you. I don’t have a clue anymore.

KS: What about your living quarters on base?

MM: We had pretty good little old living quarters. We had cots. That’s basically what we had. We had mosquito nets and we were able to make rock and concrete floors. We had tents to start with. We rolled the sides up on the tent. The first six months I was there it rained everyday. The last six months it never did rain a drop. You’d be able to tell by the pictures, how much it rained. It just rained, rain, rained every damn day. It’s going to damn rain. What’s the forecast? It’s going to rain. It’s not going to rain today. Yeah, it’s going to rain. And then it’s raining. It rained. They just have their monsoon season, that’s what it’s going to do. We were able to finally get some tin and some wood and we built what we called a hooch. I’ve got some pictures of them. Anyway, instead
of making a solid wall on it you made it deliberate, where it was like outside. All it would do is keep the rain from blowing in on you. But it would do that and it would make excellent cover.

KS: Were they comfortable enough?

M.M. Yeah, they were comfortable enough. I didn’t have a bit of problem with it. We had girls to polish our boots. The Vietnamese would come in, pay them and they’d do your laundry, take care of our boots. A buck and a half, two bucks a week. Some of them were our enemies and some of them weren’t. They’d cut our hair; they’d do anything you wanted them to do. It was kind of a ‘life of Riley’ for about six months. Then it kind of went south (laughs).

KS: You mentioned the monsoons. How did that affect your work at the quarry? Did you ever have weather delays?

MM: We used pumps to pump the quarry out quite a bit. Most of the time, we’d have a shelf or two that we would work on nearly all the time.

KS: A shelf?

MM: A rock shelf. Water would rundown in the low part of the quarry and we could work in a different area or something. It didn’t bother us that much. Roads would get a little bad, but not all that bad. Most of the time when it rained, it would rain like an hour and that’d be it.

KS: What about enemy fire on the quarry?

MM: You know you’d look up and everybody would be under something except you. You were up here with this noisy machinery and you’d look up and all of a sudden everybody would be gone. What the heck is going on? They were all under something. You’d know to get your rear down and on the ground. I’d draw sniper fire. Occasional mortar round stuff like that. You got to where you didn’t worry. It was like the first six months you’re scared to death. The second six months you don’t get that. You’re looking for a fight. That’s basically how I think how about everybody pans out after a while. You get to where you don’t worry about it. If you get scared, you get scared. That’s it. Until it gets to where the ground shakes so close to you, that you wet your pants if you’re too scared. Then you get scared.
KS: Would you wear a helmet when you worked?

MM: Sometimes yes, sometimes no. Depending on what had been going on the last few days. It was so hot, you couldn’t. A lot of time you couldn’t. The way we worked you know you couldn’t keep one on anyway. A lot of us were upside down and everywhere else. You know depending on whether you was working on a rock crusher or what you were doing. We left the compound most times without gear on. There was a few places we could go in Bien Hoa where we didn’t even take weapons. Didn’t even carry a dang weapon. Didn’t have anybody with us to carry a weapon. We’d take a jeep into town, stay a few hours and come back.

KS: You felt confident?

MM: Yes.

KS: You were at the quarry you mentioned for six months about was that you assignment.

MM: Yeah. I’ve probably got it written down here somewhere. They began to pull us out of the quarry, a bunch of us. We went back to Di An and I went from there to Quan Hoi. I don’t really know where that was. This is basically how it was that first six months (reading from journal). ‘I took down a warm Korean beer and listened to the Vietnamese band and the girls in the G-strings bumped and grinded to another tune. I could see white phosphorous flares in the night, a mile out to the North of our perimeter. Some infantry unit was engaged in sniper fire while we tried to enjoy the USO show as best we could. These must be the bravest women in the world to come out here and do what they do to entertain the troops. They either have a tremendous hope for a career when this is over or the pay is just good enough. Oh well, they always end up with officers anyway. Maybe if I could get enough beer down, I’ll sleep through anything that might happen tonight. On my way back to the hooch I watched the fire fight. I could see Puff out there spitting down his ribs, white fire. I lifted the mosquito net and rolled on my cot. An M-14 chamber locking made me instantly roll to the floor. The first burst ripped the roof of the hooch and I could hear water draining from the shower barrels. One clip, than another fed the rifle as I crawled toward the bunker. The muzzle flashes lit the air enough I could see it was White letting off steam. I was crawling around on the ground hoping he would go shoot off somewhere else. I could hear the NCOs trying to
talk my Indian friend out of that rifle. I don’t know what was caught in his craw that
night, but the firewater had given him plenty of courage. The rest of us were scared, but
for some reason we were all laughing at what was a very dangerous situation. The red
man was mad and he wouldn’t put that damn gun down. Finally, when the ammunition
went out we grabbed him, took away the rifle and quietly began to cry. He had received
his ‘Dear John’ letter that day. We hid him from the officers who were too scared to
come out until the commotion was over. Maybe everything would be all right in the
morning. I think we all wanted to cry, but most of us had forgotten how. We had trucks
to load and load with crushed rock and 15,000 pounds of dynamite to detonate in the
morning.’ That’s basically how.

KS: You mentioned that you had convoys of trucks coming into the quarry were
those on a regular schedule? Would you know when to expect them?

MM: Most of the time, a lot of the time, I never knew that they were coming. A
lot of times we knew that there was going to be like 10-15 trucks show up today. Or
within a certain framework of time. We always tried to stockpile all we could stockpile.
That’s all we could do. All of it was always used somewhere.

KS: Did you know where it was being used?

MM: Sometimes, yeah. We knew that it was going to some unit, somewhere
down the road. Bien Hoa or Di An or somewhere or to go fix a road somewhere. An
airstrip, we’d kind of know that. That’s basically it. A lot of times, no. We didn’t have a
clue.

KS: You mentioned the train incident that was blown up. Could you talk a little
bit more about the events surrounding that?

MM: Well, this little train would come by pretty regularly all the time. On the
day that it blew up, it got on by us and they blew it off the track. We sent a couple of
squads of our guys. A couple of infantry squads went down there and they tracked it out
to where they could catch a couple of guys. Brought them in there and they nearly beat
them to death. One of the guys there really was upset about it. We had to pull him off of
it. Anyway, found out they had been working for us and stealing the dynamite to do it.
The day that that happened it was just a really bright, nice, sunny day. I’ve got a poem
about it. It probably sheds more light on it (flipping pages in journal). What’d I do with
it? The reason I do is because you need to know what the boxes were and about the boxes. Came by again today. I’d always wanted to do this. Never learned how to type. Never learned how. I did all this. I typed all this and I got a job over in Mississippi about ten years ago and learned how to run a computer. So I built this all myself. All that’s my doing. ‘Everyday it came bound this turning. I knew not where. I think it was going home for wherever it went would be the end. A little train chugged as we stood on the bunkers and watched it roll by. Where did it come from and where did it go? Maybe it went to a Pagoda for one last prayer,’ because there was a little bitty Pagoda on the hill. ‘But, I bet it went some place deep in the ground. Stacks and stacks on car after car the caskets passed by. No one knew their loneliness or wondered why anymore than I. Their journey was merely over at last.’ That’s kind of how we all saw that train. It was loaded with Vietnamese dead, is what it was. It did have some supplies. You know it was a supply train too. It’s just one of the things that was the end of that one until they got the track repaired. Something like that going on all the time.

KS: Any other incidents or anything else you recall in your time at the quarry?

MM: No, not really. Let’s see. Let me think here. Everything else took place on down the road, more or less.

KS: After the time there you moved to Quan Loi? What were your responsibilities?

MM: Whenever we left the rock quarry, turned to remount. My very next assignment was a bulldozer. I had a D8. We took the bulldozers by road convoy from Di An to Quan Loi. Kind of an all day drive. Got up there and there wasn’t but just a handful of us on top of this hill in Quan Loi. If they ever wanted to overrun us that would have been the night to do it. But, no hell, they waited until we got dug in good. Couple, three months. Before they would try anything. Got up there, just about dark one night, set us up a small perimeter. Infantry was there, everybody was coming in. We had air cover, al the way up. It was the top of a mountain, Quan Loi. I suppose at one other time, it might have been an airstrip there, I don’t know. But, anyway immediately we fell out and started building, pushing back jungle was the first thing I did was push jungle. We’d push jungle for a week solid. Built a few roads. Dug a lot of bunkers. Dug hospital bunkers. In other words, we’d take a bulldozed and dig up a hole as wide as this
room, a little deeper than this and they’d use it for a hospital. They’d take whatever
timber they could find and kind of make a pretty good sized hospital or a command post
or something out of it.

KS: How much land could the bulldozers clear in one day typically?

MM: 20 or 30 acres. If we’d really get after it. We had only two on the base at
the time. We had buddies. Another guy and me would take turns running the bulldozer
so it would run pretty much all the time. Push jungle and they strung wire and then they
started putting up a regular perimeter like you would anywhere with staggered foxholes
with machine guns for crossfire. Concertina wire, fugas, claymores the whole shooting
range. This was a big place. They set it up covering two or three square miles. Ended
up building our airstrip. I can show you that. Pushed the jungle way back down the hill
and then we’d build roads. Then whenever we got into a situation where we were
building on an airstrip, I don’t know if you’ve ever heard the term ‘laterite’. A laterite is
a real compactable clay soil. It is gummy, but it doesn’t stick to things so bad. About 10
miles out from Quan Loi we found a deposit of this laterite. We would take a bulldozer
out there everyday. We’d load up and we’d have to have a mine sweep of the roads and
everything before we got there. We had to have infantry and some armored units and
everything else there for protection. We’d go out and we would sometimes we would
have a front-end loader to help us load the trucks with. When we didn’t we would just
load the trucks by driving the bulldozer out on top of the trucks. In other words, you
would park two trucks, side by side, and then you could start you a hole underground.
And you’d make a hill and you’d just bulldoze it out over until it filled up the top of the
truck and you were actually out over the top of the trucks. They’d drive off and back two
more in there and do it again. Just do it day after day, load after load. This was a base
for the airstrip at Quan Loi. We spent a couple of months digging laterite and they would
hauls it in and build the airstrip.

KS: Is that a common substance used for that?

MM: Over there it was a common substance used for that kind of a deal. I found
two or three caches of Vietnamese, I think B-40 rockets and found some artillery shells
out in this same area and everything. We went by the Montagnard villages. One day on
our way out a Lambretta, I don’t know if you know what a Lambretta is or not, but it’s
kind of like a golf cart. It loaded about 15 Vietnamese in the back. It had a motor, kind of like a motor scooter. Three wheel type deal and the called that a Lambretta. One of those hit a mine in front of us. The biggest piece of any of them, I believe was that big it left strung in the trees and everything. We had two of our trucks hit. In fact, I got my life saved by one truck. They passed me on the road and they hit, well it was detonated by hand from some Vietnamese in some tunnels right off the edge of the road. Blew this truck up. If they had stayed behind me, I was in a jeep, it would have killed me. My Sergeant was with me. We were going out after we had guard duty that night or something that’s why we were late running out. So, it was always something like that.

We’re always drawing sniper fire from the rubber trees. Rubber trees would line the roads on both sides. A rubber tree plantation looks like a pecan orchard does here except it’s trimmed up higher and its darker on the inside. 50-60 foot tall trees. Just as far as the eye can see. You can’t see black pajamas very far into it. By the Montagnard and the Montagnards kids were really something really neat to be around. We fed them. We dug holes deep enough where the water would come in and they would bathe. They’d look at the Playboy magazines. We kept thinking what’s the deal with thesees little bitty kids looking at all these naked women. It wasn’t that they were looking at. They’d never seen a book with colored pages. And it was in color and it was a treat. One of the little kids parents was killed while we were there and I got him to talking to me. I got an interpreter flown in and they went back to the village and found the tunnels under ground. They had quite a little deal over it. I could tell the kids were real sad about it from their stories and stuff from what all transpired. In the compound itself up at Quan Loi after we’d been there a month or so, it began to get to where at a certain time everyday, we would get mortar fire. You could set your clock by it at 4:30 by damn every evening you’re going to get mortared. Everyday and you might as well set your clock by it. It was just harassment.

KS: What kind of preparations would you make for that?

MM: Not anything. We had bunkers. We had good bunkers. We would crawl in the bunkers and we were right next to the ammo dump. That’s what they were always trying to hit. First thing, at 4:00 it would finally get to where every dang helicopter we had in there would leave out because they knew we were going to draw mortar fire.
They’d get then off the ground rather than let them sit there and take it. They’d come back in and try again and I’d just go on. Week after week, it might not be two rounds, it might be 25. There was a couple of times they tried to overrun us from the front gate. They never got very far. Light up the perimeter called in Puff the Magic Dragon a time or two. Called in a lot of artillery, air strikes most of it was at night. We had good protection. We had quad 50s. You know what a quad .50 is? It’s 4-.50 caliber machine guns made out of bullets like that one over there set to fire automatically. They’ve even got kind of a lawnmower type motor on those things. Once you start them and you get them set, you set them about this high off the ground and they will fire one after another. One, two, three, four, one two three, four. And it will move and follow the terrain from left to right or whichever way you want to go. They will cut down trees this big around in just a few minutes. That kind of an operation. You got several of those, you know you’ve got a lot of protection.

KS: Did you feel that the base was adequately protected for the most part?
MM: I don’t know what else we would have done. We really got to be here? Yeah. Hey, Mr. Custer, you know we’re always talking about Mr. Custer; I’m going to go home.

KS: Now, your bulldozer was that the Rhome Plow.
MM: I didn’t have a Rhome. I didn’t have a stinger on mine. I was with the guys with the Rhome plows an awful lot, but mine didn’t have a cab and didn’t have a stinger. There was another unit that I was with and I was TDY with them lots, but I didn't have a stinger on it. You wouldn’t really call mine a Rhome plow.

KS: TDY?
MM: What does that mean? Assigned to a different unit. Let’s see Temporarily (laughs) I don’t know.

KS: You’re attached to a different unit.
MM: You’re attached to a different unit yes. Temporarily. Temporary duty to another unit. When I went to An Loc [Loc Ninh], I was TDY. The only armored engineer unit, that I suppose still exists and I don’t remember what the name of it is. I went up to An Hoc and began to dig it back out after it’d been overrun. This is basically if you want to think about how it kind of was up there (flipping through journal). This is
An Loc, I’m not real sure where this was. A little bitty outpost, north of Quan Loi. This is Christmas 1967. It’s basically a lot of how I feel and what I think and what went on. Lots of dead people. Heads cut off, put my life on the line many times just picking up live rounds. This place the say there had been over 600 killed up there a few days before we moved back in there and reestablish contact at this outpost. Pushed jungle and all kinds of stuff up in there. This is kind of how I wrote my story about that place. ‘Larry was winding debt cord around some barrel tops when I approached. As soon as he saw me we embraced. We were friends at Advanced Engineer training. When our training was over he went to Officer’s Candidate School and I shipped out to Vietnam. I passed up OCS test and was accepted, but I turned it down knowing it would add another year to my tour of service. I didn’t want the responsibility for the lives of the men under my command. Here we meet again, by chance, at Loc Ninh. L-O-C N-I-N-H. On the Cambodian border. West, Northwest of Saigon. Conversing at length I discovered he had been in country for only three weeks. I felt sorry for him, because I would DEROS out inside of 30 days. I couldn’t tell you at what DEROS means, but I know that’s the right term.

KS: Day eligible return. I know what you’re talking about.

MM: Rotation. Something like that. ‘By blowing the tops out of the barrel Larry was getting ready to put fugas in them for around the perimeter. Possibly to fry some NVA. Larry returned to his work as a bomb builder and I unloaded my bulldozer and met with Lee and the Captain of the Engineer unit.’ Lee as my buddy that me and him shared a dozer together. Lee Elder was his name. ‘Loc Ninh had been overrun the week before and I was TDY with the only armored engineer unit in Vietnam. We’d come up to Loc Ninh from Quan Loi to retake and secure the compound. It was almost dark as we fueled and made our plan. Lee went to work on the left side of the airstrip and I went at it on the right. Pushing up a burm along the edge or the airstrip burying the armored personnel carriers and tanks as I came to them. The tank crews were appreciate and kept me in beer while I worked into the night. Finishing the make shift burm I went to work clearing a field of fire by pushing back the jungle and the rubber trees. A Tet truce was in effect.’ Now this is the TET. This is ’67 Tet. ‘Tet truce was in effect tonight, but none of us could tell it because of the sniper fire and the occasional mortar round that
kept the nerves on edge. Sometime after midnight on Christmas morning our captain
picked us up and we followed him to his tent. It was half buried in the ground. There he
shared his stash of North Vietnamese Cognac and wished us a Merry Christmas. We
slept on the ground and at dawn, we began to clear the airstrip. Decomposing bodies,
live mortar rounds and ammunitions everywhere. Lee dug a pit for the bodies at the end
of the airstrip. We began to smooth the runway. Exploding the butterfly bombs and
mortars as we went. I became quite deaf that day and as the day wore on I found myself
picking up and moving B-40 rockets from my path. Live mortars that had been strung up
with the tank piano wire between the trees were being cleared by a mine unit. They
experienced casualties that day. The captain wondered just who the heads on the stakes
in front of me belonged to and remarked how distinguished they appeared. All
indications that they were to discourage our entrance to the tiny compound. It was the
final fortress to be overrun the week before. A pit at the end of the runway was filling up
and some said as many as 600 NVA had been killed here last week. Late on Christmas
night as we rested and waited we could see the North Vietnamese regulars passing by on
the road. Our requests to open fire were denied time after time as we were under a TET
truce. It would have been nice to have Jane Fonda or Cascious Clay along to keep us
company. Maybe a Congressman or a President might find this amusing, but we didn’t.
Hog tied from home and destined for failure we stilled ourselves against a bitter
homecoming than I realized was coming. Now that I think back how much easier it was
there at Loc Ninh, than at San Francisco, Lubbock, or Silverton, Texas.’ I don’t why, but
I imagine that 90% of Vietnam Veterans feel the same way and would give their
eye/teeth and go back. I don’t know why, but I would. I’d have gone back the day I got
back and never come back.

KS: Was that common, you said you requested permission to fire and it was
denied because of the truce.

MM: Because of the truce.

KS: What was your reaction to that?

MM: Stupid. Stupidity. Because they’re going to go down the road and shoot at
us. It was stupid. ‘Hot and humid as everyday was at Quan Loi we were pushing down
trees along the road to the East of Quan Loi to give our convoys a chance to slip through
without close contact with Charlie. The village to our left was being moved close to our base as Charlie had been mortaring us daily from the village. We could not fight back with heavy civilian casualties. I knew in the afternoon that we would level the village so the people could not move back. Sergeant McNealy was manning the radio and keeping a check on the infantry patrols to see if we had enemy activity in the area. It was quiet with the bulldozers shut down for a quick noon break. The stream along the road was clear and I could see the fish. One hand grenade and we had lunch. Much better than C-rations. The children are not here for lunch today so we know Charlie is near. They’re probably watching us now. We are not really what they want. They want the ammo dump at Quan Loi. Suddenly machine gun fire sprays the area. I dove under my dozer and wet my pants. Bullets bounced off the blade and the left side of the bulldozer tracks. McNealy on the radio on a flash reported the sniper fire. Then I heard Waters bulldozer crank and a blade raise. Out from under my bulldozer I could see his bulldozer rolling in the direction of the steady incoming fire from evidently only one machine gun. In a minute I heard foreign screams as Waters plowed his way through the mess until the gun fell silent. It was so quiet as my body began to quiver. As the adrenaline flow began to subside, I don’t know what kind of stuff Waters is made out of. I wish I was like him or maybe he’s been here too long. One more time some GD idiot saved my ass. Different things about guys like Waters. He was from Oklahoma.

KS: What was his name, first name? Do you remember?

MM: I don’t remember.

KS: Was your bulldozer protected in any way? Any armor?

MM: No, we didn’t have a cab or anything like that. I’ve got pictures of it you’ll see it. It looked very much like a civilian D8 bulldozer. That was really neat. Boy, he had one control and two analysts for your tracks. A couple of blades. We could tilt the blade and raise it up and down and we could tilt it from side to side. What you could do without anything with it. It was a good one. For that part of it. You’d get mortared all the time. This is a poem I wrote about rats. You know when you went underground the rats went with you. They didn’t like the mortars any better than we did. That’s they way it was. We always hated it, ‘Damn, they’re going to get with us down there again aren’t they.’ ‘So tired for sleep I woke up with that creep and this bunker mud so deep. Afraid
only to reach up on my chest and see if that big rat was on my breast. We had made
friends, me and that beast. Tired rat and me were trying hard to get along. Mortars
falling, Quad 50s firing. Claymores on the perimeters were requiring. Puff the Magic
Dragon was spitting red and white fire into the pit. That’s white phosphorous flares hung
all around the campground like the sun. We are hit up on the North end tonight. Seems
like it’s a different side each night. That rat on my flack jacket all right. I’m so glad we
like each others plight. For years and tears he’s made me weep. Now at least I can get
some sleep.’ (laughs).

KS: Did you have any other contact with the wildlife besides rats or insects?

MM: Scorpions. Always in your boots. You’d better check them out everyday.
We run across some pretty good sized snakes and stuff like that, but we didn’t run into
things like, I guess the infantry did a lot of times. Didn’t run in to lions and tigers and all
that kinds of stuff. We didn’t have anything like that. Our normal day, going out to the
laterite pit and all that. We had to be back in before dark. We all always had some guard
duty or KP or something to pull just like anybody else did. Wasn’t anybody that was
alleviated from that.

KS: How long would you work before you had a break? A week or what was
your schedule between?

MM: Up there it was just pretty solid even Sundays and everything. We’d get a
little bit of break, maybe on Sunday or something like that. It wasn’t that hard a deal.
We were in the dry season. It was hot, but it wasn’t stifling. Wasn’t anything else to do.
What else are you going to do? We had kind of some make shift tents and we had beer
occasionally. The first Captain that I had was real good. He would fly us in steaks and
beer and ice. Boy, we had ice. We were really alright. He’d come to the field and pay
us. The last three captains that I had, not one of them came to the field, to even pay us.
They’re supposed to come pay you. It’s by law. They’d send NCOs with money to pay
us. Believe it or not you got paid whether you were under fire or not. When the pay
officer came, by damn, you got paid. You had to sign for your pay. No matter what was
going on.

KS: No matter what was taking place?

MM: Yeah!
KS: Was that once a month, once a week or what?

MM: Once a month it was real strange. I always thought it was kind of stupid.

Sign for your money and get going. It’s a beautiful place up there though. I’d give my
eye/teeth to see it again.

KS: What about contact with friends and family back home? Would you write
letters?

MM: Yeah, I wrote letters probably twice a week. I got lots of letters from home.
Lots of cookies. A little further and far between whenever I got up to Quan Loi in that
area. I loved helicopters. I got several helicopter rides. Going on R&R I went to
Hawaii. Met my wife. My mom and dad even came up.

KS: How long was that for?

MM: About a week. Yeah. That was nice. Got to fly out on a chopper back and
forth. I got to go several other trips. Go pick something up on the chopper. My last trip
out going back into Saigon to fly out of country, I got to take a C-130.

KS: Transport plane?

MM: Open back. I’m not real sure if it was C-130, but anyway you just had to
hold onto the nets to keep from blowing out. I landed on the airstrip that we built. It was
pretty interesting. Interesting little trip. Quick. I think I just knew that damn plane was
going to crash. That was the worst thing about coming home. Landed in Lubbock,
Texas, in the sand storm. Couldn’t even see the ground from up above. It was so dirty
that day. Man, they’ll never get this thing on the ground. It wasn’t near as bad as getting
spit on in San Francisco. Lower than and treated like an asshole. Had to fly home in
these uniforms to get paid for it. Had no idea that really most of us didn’t have a clue, as
that’s how we’d be greeted.

KS: How close did you follow what was happening in the United States when
you were there?

MM: You were kind of limited. You get *Stars and Stripes* in Vietnam. You get
the radio, whatever radio we got in Vietnam. U.S. Armed Forces Radio. What do you
expect? We knew what was going on, we just didn’t want to believe it. This is how I
feel about Vietnam. I guess I’d better get this in now or it might not ever make it. I titled
this: ‘Dogs must Die’. I guess that’s kind of how I feel now. ‘Unilateral negotiation
between the United States and North Vietnam, under the direction of Henry Kissinger
have been final for a long time. With the flight of the last of our troops and the
Ambassadors staff from Vietnam, the lie would be revealed at last. Written into the Paris
Accord was a promise that if North Vietnam invaded South Vietnam in massive force,
the United States would retaliate.’ It’s written in there. ‘I knew back then, and I knew
back then before that, as I know now, that the Peace Accord was just a farce. Just a face-
saving action with no regard for a South Vietnam or its people. I knew in their heart,
from the time Kissinger left Paris that last time, all was lost and the politicians were
saving themselves. Snow job complete with newsreels and TV? It was a horrible feeling
knowing all those lives lost in the war would be for nothing. And the politicians had
hidden themselves behind a unilateral peace agreement. To let South Vietnamese down
the way our leaders did and turn their backs on all those troops dead, wounded, living has
been hard to take, much less to live with. I will never forget the people of South Vietnam
and the pitiful disaster we brought them. Humbly, I know how they hurt and someday
before I die, I will repent at the Wall for our losses and theirs.’ I went about five years
ago. Five hours before I walked to the wall, I couldn’t even see it. It took me five hours.
I loved it. It was well worth it. ‘I will ask myself once again why my government
refuses to stand up and share the blame. Never will I let my son serve in an undeclared
war for this country. If Congress had not voted for to support Desert Storm, I fear those
veterans very easily could have ended up the same shape as the Vietnam Veteran. I’m
not sure it’s not going to happen to them, yet. Though Desert Storm is supposedly over,
or is it? Many dogs die, many of those soldiers died and many feel like they died like
dogs and are treated like dogs because their leaders are dogs.’ I wrote that in 1992. So,
that’s how long that is. What you do is just stuff that we shouldn’t have done that we did
and hopefully learned our lesson. I’m afraid they didn’t learn a lesson, got to finish it.

KS: When you were drafted, what were your feelings of why the United States
was involved?

MM: I figured we were there to fight Communism and at least I thought it might
come out like Korea. Any of those things, you’ve got to stay long enough to educate the
people and get an economy. If you don’t you just, why are you there is the first place?
That was kind of my philosophy all along on that. The deal was I felt like that if you
were drafted by them you needed to go. Not right. Don’t know that that’s totally how I feel now. I think that Bill Clinton to be probably as honorable man as George Bush. May not be the same. Smoke it like he meant it. Not to sure that George Bush really thinks what’s going on. I guess that’s why I have a hard time. Military people are all right but I sure wouldn’t want to be one of them.

KS: I was going to ask you about a few things about your time at Quan Loi. You mentioned the Montagnard Village. What kind of contact did you have with them, or what was that?

MM: Pretty close. They were real. I’ve got some pictures of it. The Montagnard people are taller than the regular Vietnamese by that much. They’re hunters and gatherers. If they plant a field, they’ll just burn off a spot or clear that spot, plant something and they’ll never hoe it or anything and then next year, they’ll just do another different spot. They had hogs that lived under their houses. They built their thatch houses up on a platform and the hogs and everything would live under the house. Evidentially they were pretty fierce fighters because a lot of our people really liked them. I never had enough contact with the military side of them. Out from Quan Loi, 8-10 miles we’d go out there and we’d arm these guys. We’d give them Concertina wire, Claymore mines and all that stuff and expect them to be able to hold it. We’d come back in a few days and half them men are dead and gone. The Concertina wire is gone, the Claymore’s gone and our arms are gone. Unless you’d stay there 24 hours a day we’d pull back in our perimeter at night for protection. They couldn’t do that. So, it didn’t work out. They were different. They wore loincloths rather than most of the clothes that you know about. The women carried wood on their head. Piles of wood on their head. The men carried spears and bows and stuff like that. They were just a bigger people. They seemed to be kind of fun loving. They would come up to us. Every now and then one would just show up. You’d turn around, it’s kind of like they were ghost people or something. You turn around and they’d be right there. I mean right by your head, no idea where they came from. No idea.

KS: How did you communicate with them? Did you learn any languages?

MM: No, we just trade stuff. I never did learn enough of their languages to say anything.
KS: You also mentioned that you dug bunkers or helped them out in some civic actions. What kinds of things did you do? Any civic action projects with your unit?

MM: No. Might have got that wrong. Most of the time if we were in villages outside, we were destroying those villages. The reason that we destroyed them is because we were drawing fire from those villages. We would take the people and move them into a safe area. Then level that ground. Because if we left it, they’d be back there that night and they’d be mortaring us again from it. Now, whenever I was talking about digging up bunkers and stuff those were for our people. Our hospital corps, our medics and stuff. There was one time whenever we were going from Quan Loi to Loc Ninh, we jumped the bulldozer off fought a fire with it, A forest fire type thing. The jungle was on fire. They started a fire with fire, shooting. We went out and put it out. We built roads to and from, but it wasn’t a big help to those people. Now, are you talking about the Concertina wire? Yeah, we would string that Concertina wire and we took a bunch of stuff like that. We did push them up some herms for their perimeters and stuff like that. As far as civic action, no that’s the worst thing we could have done for those people. Got a bunch of them killed one time. There was a couple of times that we would start out of the compound and we’d receive a little fire or some of our Vietnamese friendlies would tell us don’t go. Don’t go. So, we would send out patrols and a lot of times we made contact. Quite a firefight would ensue just right out there. I’ve got slides I think that show some of it. If you make allow. They would go on all night long. Break all contact and come back in. I was real lucky, there wasn’t a lot of casualties where I was. Saw a lot of casualties, had some guys hurt on our. I was very fortunate.

KS: Is there anything else about Quan Loi you’d like to add about your time in Vietnam in general?

MM: I’m sure there’s a lot. Got that crossbow there, took it off of Montagnard at Quan Loi. We ended up with a beautiful camp base up there. Real well protected. In about 1978, what’s I want to guess, pretty close to that. Had a crop duster, farmed in Stratford, Texas. A crop duster and just so happened he happened to be a helicopter pilot in Vietnam. Just so happened he was stationed at Quan Loi when it was overrun. We lost a whole compound after I left.

KS: How soon was it after you left?
MM: I guess about a year, maybe two years. I understand and what he told me. I’ve got. I was kind of thinking I had what he told me about that thing. I’m trying to remember, it’s written down somewhere. I’ve got money from over there. Here’s some other things about rats and all. I was trying to think when he told me that the base was overrun. I was so shocked because it was so well defended. I got this to say about helicopters. I really like them (flipping in journal). ‘Without windows and doors, no restraints we fly. Up over the trees, rivers and craters we fly. West, northwest toward Quan Loi. Up from the Mekong Delta to the Mountains along the Cambo/Di An border. This Cobra gunship makes me feel safe. The chopper is the one place I feel secure here in the dead zone. Safe at last, 2,000 feet above the trees. But it will be short term and I will be sucked back into that world I cannot escape. Leaning out over the doorway I see down on the convoy there in Ben Cat, half way up to Quan Loi. Further up the road we enter the air space above the old, French rubber tree plantation. Beautiful French homes in the center of the plantations are often the headquarters for the Viet Kong forces. French people there can pass freely from our side to theirs. Topping out over the 155-fire base at Quan Loi, I could see the progress we had made in building the airstrip and securing the compound. Two months ago we made a mad dash up on the road from Di An and grabbed a few acres of real estate in the middle of the night. That first night, should have been our last. Why old Charlie let us get dug in, is beyond reason. This noble mountain has become my own. I’m back from R&R with dread. How lucky can you get? I should have been blown away a long time ago.’ I think that’s kind if how we all felt. Somebody shouldn’t have survived.

KS: Tell me about when you arrived back in the United States, in San Francisco?

MM: First of all, whenever we left Vietnam we left with just some real short-sleeved khakis on. First place we landed was in, was that big, Mount Fujiama, in Japan. Mount Fujiama, could see it. The very next place we landed was Anchorage, Alaska. Ice was about a foot deep on the ground (laughs).

KS: Is that March? Is that when you left?

MM: Yes. Then we flew on into San Francisco. I don’t know whether it’s Ord or whatever it is there. Of course, they quickly checked us out there. Got a 30-day leave before I ended up in Ft. Benning. I spent the last few months in Ft. Benning, Georgia.
Anyway, got a taxi ride to the airport and never been treated so rude in all my life. Military uniform, could have cared less whether we were alive. People wouldn’t look at you, speak at you or nothing. I don’t know why. Still to this day, I don’t know whether people were still in so much turmoil in the United States that they didn’t know whether to be for you or against you or what the people around them would think. It was a pretty pitiful trip. Quite eye-opening. No ‘hi’, ‘bye’, ‘thank you’, ‘kiss my ass or whatever’. It was just a year wasted. Even from Uncle Sam really. Damn. Quite a let down, that’s why I imagine most people just as soon been back over there. At least you knew who your friends were.

KS: After San Francisco, where did you go next?

MM: Well, I got to come home. Spent about a month at home, Silverton. From there I ended up at Ft. Benning, Georgia. I spent about five and a half months, whatever it was left from May until November. They wouldn’t let us out. So, we ended up spit-shine. Son of a gun, again. Wasting time to get out. They kept trying to talk us into re-upping. I wasn’t going to re-up. I spent most of my time driving 2 ½ ton trucks hauling airborne. It was an airborne base over there. Whenever they were jumping out, they had to make three jumps in a day, and all that stuff, we’d end up hauling them back to re-pack their parachutes and get back on the airplane. Get back out and jump again. They added Special Forces, taking them out on overnight to [?] or whatever, training missions and stuff like that. Got to see Georgia, though. Callaway Gardens, but it was a waste. My time in there.

KS: Is there anything you want to add about your service in Vietnam?

MM: Probably do it about like I did. Might not come home might be the difference. A few of our guys in our units did not. They went. They made you come home. Some of them our guys, we know because I saw them, whenever they went to the unit, what do you call it -- the replacement units to go back out of country. I saw a couple of them. They had Vietnamese girlfriends of wives or whatever and they stayed over there. I don’t know if they ever came home. No one would. They may still be there. They had nothing to come back here to anyway. Just as soon stay.

KS: Have you been back to Vietnam?

MM: No.
KS: Would you like to go back?

MM: Yes. In a heartbeat.

KS: Are you involved in any Veteran’s Associations or groups right now?

MM: No. I never have. I don’t think, now this is how I really feel. I don’t know how the rest of Veterans felt, the Veterans of Foreign Wars like WWII and all that were just total rejection. That’s how I feel about it. That’s how I feel like we’ve been tended to. Vietnam Veterans themselves, I don’t know of any of it anymore. If I did it would be different. On the internet, there’s a few, even my units have deals. But I never have. I never have even felt comfortable at parades. I don’t know why. Guilt, whatever that goes with it. I feel very comfortable at the Wall. I really loved it when they brought the Wall here. The Moving Wall. I thought that was marvelous. That was very good. I was so impressed by the number of people that went. You could sit over there and watch. Real happy about it. But as far as Veterans Foreign Wars Relations, no. Converse every now and then with some of them on e-mail. Have we got time to look at pictures? Or is time about up?
KS: This is Kim Sawyer continuing an interview with Mike Mercer, on the 12th of February, at 3:35 in the afternoon at the Special Collections Library at Texas Tech. Mr. Mercer has brought some slides today and he’s going to describe each of those.

MM: O.K. We’re going to be looking at slides, probably out of order and everything else. First slide here, is a slide of a small gauge train that came by the quarry, that 557 light equipment worked at for about five months. The train has a bunch of caskets on it and everyday the little train came by with a few caskets on it almost everyday. One of the things that happened to this train. We used a lot of dynamite and a lot of C4 blasting rock. The Vietnamese that worked for us was able to steal enough to blow this train off the track. Of course, we caught the culprits when they got done. They just kind of laid there. That was slide number one. Slide number two is in color, front cover of the book I wrote. Call it *Baby God* cause that’s what I was to all the girls. Slide number three is another picture of the train at Quan Loi going by the quarries to Quan Loi. Slide number four would be a picture of, believe it or not, that guy’s name is Danny Gilbreth. Still remember his name, 37 years and I still remember his name. He’s from New Jersey. He’s from New Jersey. He’s one of them good guys. Got along with all them guys. Really a nice guy. Slide number five, would be a picture of the rock quarry crew. It’s about 110 degrees out there. Standing by a generator and they’re waiting on a truck to come up. The truck would dump off into the rock crusher jaws. The rock crusher is down below. Conveyers that convey the different sizes of rock that are crushed out of it. Beautiful day. Number six would be a sign of a light equipment company 557...
light equipment company. Kind of [?] and what our company was. That’s why we call that the quarry. Somewhere between Di An and Long Binh. Slide number seven would be the living quarters. We called them hooches. Two Vietnamese girls working there in front kept our boots shined and kept our hooches swept out. Pretty neat, until we finally had a roof over our head. The walls were not solid. They were real loose. They just looked solid. (next slide) This would be looking north out of the quarry. We’d bulldozed the terrain back a good ways on that side. No telling what I was taking a picture of there. Probably a plane dropping a bomb out there. Number eight, there’s the Concertina wire and our burm. Shows our burm with bunkers built on the inside where we’d have crossfire every direction from around our quarry. Concertina wire, Claymore mines and so forth out there. Another picture of our hooches, would be number eight. Along there. There’s not imagined numbers on these boxes. That’s about what it is. A picture of a hooch with one young lady there. (next slide) Mario Pusso from New York City, I dreamed that I’d ever remember his name, but I do. Neat young man. That’s Mr. Mercer and that is after we moved from the rock quarry. We moved back into Di An and that was our new quarters there. A tent to a man! Instead of a roof with a head over it. The flatbed truck you see next to it is the one the hauled my bulldozer around there up into the Quan Loi area. As you see the rock crushed around us, that’s the rock that we crushed to build these compounds that we all lived in to keep us up out of the mud a little bit. (next slide) I couldn’t begin to tell you the name of that river, but it’s a river there just outside of Bien Hoa. I say Bien Hoa, but it’d be Long Binh.

KS: O.K.

MM: (next slide) This is a shot of the traffic in Long Binh. Nearly all of it is motor scooter, bicycle and Lambrettas. (next slide).

KS: O.K. This is number 15?

MM: It says 16 here about. This is a blast where we were blasting the rock face off in a quarry. The blast itself is over a half a mile from us. So you can kind of get an idea of the size of it. Everybody got away back from there. A lot of times, it would blow the rock plumb back past us there. Guys weren’t too good about getting out of the way for a lot of that stuff. That one there was probably in the neighborhood of a 2000-pound blast. (next slide)
KS: Number 17.

MM: 17. These are some trucks that came in for rock and I was loading it. I was setting in my crane. Hanging over a 10-ton shovel front when I took these pictures. We were drawing a little sniper fire. The guy was watching from behind the truck there.

KS: What kind of rock was that?

MM: It was granite rock. We tried to break it up into one-inch size, but as you can tell a lot of it didn’t ever get that small. Until we got some C4 a hold of it. Our Air Force was bombing on just the other side over there. You can tell by the smoke that’s coming off of the horizon there. (next slide) Out there’s a picture of the same day, with one of our, I don’t know M15, or something like that dropping bombs just out off the edge of our quarry there.

KS: Number 18.

MM: Number 18. (next slide) Same day, the guy’s still working on it. They’re still dropping bombs. We’re backed up there to the quarry with a truck and dumping off into the rock crusher itself.

KS: We’re on Number 19.

MM: 19. (next slide)

KS: 20

MM: Another battle went on all day long there. I’ll show you why, in a little bit later why. You’ll be able to see the infantry out there that’s been on patrol. Probably run a dump truck (?) (next slide) 18, 19 it’s all the same pictures. Smoke on our horizon. See, this is a truck here with the rocks in the back getting ready to be dumped into the jaws of the rock crusher. (next slide) This is not me in a crane. This is one of the other guys. 10 tone track crane shovel front. I believe it was a Lima crane. Pretty small crane for what we were doing, but that’s the best thing we had going. Loaded many, many, hundreds of trucks. (next slide)

KS: 21

MM: Caught my flags so we were taking a swim. That is me there. Whatever we were about 20 something persons? Slide there, we got in. Everybody’s taking a swim. It rained enough that we had to pump the quarry out. This was on Sunday. We kind of got the day off. Generally, that’s what we’d do. It was real rainy during the
season. (next slide) This is a cemetery. That’s what we would call them. Cemetery along the road between the quarry and Di An.

KS: Slide 22. Slide 23

MM: Slide 23. That’s Danny running the crane there I believe. (next slide)

KS: 24

MM: I believe this is a church I couldn’t tell you. It’s not a Christian church. I believe maybe its Buddhist Church deal along the road between Bien Hoa and the quarry.

KS: 25

MM: Real dark picture there. That was dinner after we had moved from the quarry to Di An. Like I say, his aunt would be Phyllis Dillard (?) (next slide)


MM: This one here is between Long Binh and Saigon. Small little temple.

KS: These were just along the road? You were taking pictures?

MM: Just along the road. (next slide)

KS: 26

MM: This would be in Long Binh. That’s papaya. Papaya. Some riding a bicycle.

KS: 27.

MM: The shorter guy there is named Lee Elder. He’s from California. He’s our only honest to God surfer. The truck you see there, is believe it or not, a 20-ton truck. United States Army wasted about three days taking us over there teaching us how to run these trucks. You notice the tires on these. These were the front tires and the were over chest high. The rear tires were taller than our head. We spent about two days driving those trucks around a quarry that belonged to Vietnamese. (next slide)

KS: 28

MM: This is on, I caught a Pagoda, out from Saigon. This is the closest I ever got to it I believe. There’s a war memorial there at the entrance. There might be another slide here that’ll show it. (next slide)

KS: Slide 29

MM: These are the mamasons that worked with us. We were doing concrete work there. Here we were doing concrete work for the mess hall at Di An. She got
Betelnut real bad. If you had this in real light you’ll be able to see the red in the Betelnut to kill the pain in the mouth. She’s probably 30 years old, looks about 60. (next slide).

KS: 30

MM: There’s that other shot of the Pagoda with the soldier there on the front. I couldn’t begin to tell you what all that means. It’s on the road from Di An to Saigon.

(next slide)

KS: 31

MM: That’s the big quarry that belonged to the Vietnamese. I’m not real sure where it was in relationship to Saigon. I want to say south. Big quarry was where we went to learn how to drive the trucks.

KS: 32

MM: This is what you would hit you harder than anything else in Vietnam is the kids. The kids were all waiting at what we would call a checkpoint. Like, where we were going to cross a bridge, they would stop everybody and kind of poke through everybody’s things and see how things were. Some kind of nuts here. Probably papaya or something like that. They were always trying to sell something. More than likely all of them. You notice this is not Vietnamese eyes. That’s more of an American type of eye. Hard to say. The children were happier than we would have thought they might have been. This right here was called the stolen states. 2-½ ton truck. Probably was stolen at some time, more than likely. It is an American truck, but it’s got Vietnamese stickers on it. (next slide) The second tray, which we’ll probably label as ‘B’ or something like that. First picture are children. These are Montagnard children. These would be, what I deem to be, 10 miles West of Quan Loi. Concertina has been torn down. We tried to make their homes secure by arming them and building them good fences and giving them Claymore mines. It worked about one night. Whenever we left after dark the VC would overrun them and kill the men. Turn them into fighters for them or whatever they had to do. Anyway, Concertina was all cut there and that was the end of that project. (next slide)

KS: Number 2

MM: 2 here. Quan Loi is on the hilltop. This is a hilltop and we went on. I was showing part of the road construction that we started building and part of the perimeter
that they were pushing back. Not too long after we moved to Quan Loi area. A beautiful
country. Red soil. Just as red as you could get. Beautiful country.

KS: Number 3

MM: 3 there is our compound within a rubber tree plantation. You can’t see
much at all there. It’s just shoot through the trees about that direction. (next slide)

KS: Number 4

MM: That’s one’s turned over the other way. We’re gong down a dusty road.
I’m setting on top of a bulldozer I believe. Yeah, I’m sitting in the seat right here. This
is exhaust manifold at the top of your truck. Should be a dog in this picture in the back of
that. The dog was more security for us than anything. They hated the Vietnamese
because they knew the Vietnamese would eat them. Trees like you could not believe how
beautiful these trees were. Everyday we took this road. Everyday that we could get out
of the compound we’d take this road and we’d have to mine sweep it. Engineers would
sweep it by hand for mines. Everyday and we’d still lose about a truck a week on that
road. Very fortunate on injuries. Some, but not too many. (next slide)

KS: Number 5

MM: This is part of the perimeter on Quan Loi hilltop. They had a little bit better
stuff. These are all gun placements right here. 155s. Pretty sure that’s what’s there. And
our bunkers and so forth. You can see how we cleared the jungle plumb away.

KS: All of that had previously been covered by jungle?

MM: All the top of this hill. Oh, yeah. We cleared all that. Another thing that’s
right along there, there’s what we call a fuel dump in that area. About once a week we’d
catch somebody in there stepping off how far they missed with a mortar the night before.

KS: Now what was the fuel dump used for?

MM: The fuel dump was for our fuel. Diesel fuel, aircraft fuel, helicopters. I’ll
show some pictures of that. A whole bunch of helicopters. This is the Montagnard
village. The same one that we were looking at with the children and the cut flower. The
first one in this deal. You notice their houses are on stilts. This was a perimeter, which is
no more. Our diggings was over behind this. We went into a jungle over behind it. We
dug laterite which was very compactable soil for building an airstrip. They lived above.
Their hogs and stuff lived below. Whenever they farmed, they just burned off any area,
planted a seed and let grow. Didn’t cultivate or anything like that. They’re hunters.

Their stature for a grown man is nearly one foot larger than the Vietnamese.

KS: That’s number 6 (next slide). This is number 7.

MM: This is back in our compound at Quan Loi. We’re just sitting in the jungle, I mean in the rubber tree plantation there. Sitting on a bunker having a cold beer. This is Lee Elder and I’ve got a cold beer. One of the other guys there. That could be me right there. (next slide)

KS: Number 8

MM: This is where we are pushing the jungle back. This is my particular bulldozer that I drove most of the time, for about 6 month’s term. You can see how we’re peeling back the jungle. Pushing it back. (next slide)

KS: Number 9

MM: Here’s some more jungle. Hard to see. (next slide)

MM: There were, again, supplies. This is how we got supplied the first of the month. We were at Quan Loi coming up there in the middle. This was the only standing structure on that; it was some kind of French compound at one time or another.

KS: What kind of helicopter is that?

MM: Chinook is what we called it.

KS: This is slide 10.

MM: I got all kinds of supplies in there. C-rations, ammo, fuel. We never really landed. Just get low enough for us to reach up there and unhook it.

KS: How often would they come with supplies?

MM: Oh, 4-5 days, sometimes more than that. See the guy leaning out the window with his.50 caliber. He was doing his job.

KS: Eleven

MM: That’s us pushing jungle back. Pushing the jungle down the hill. That’s Lee. About 110 degrees. Keep all them Flack jackets and all that stuff on. (next slide)

KS: Number 12

MM: This is Quan Loi and helicopters coming in. They’d been out on a firing mission somewhere nearby. Had several of them that would come in that late at night and get the dust and [?].
KS: Number 13

MM: This is another shot of within our compound. Among the rubber trees.

Right back in the edge of these trees is the ammo dump. Every time that the VC would attack us they would send somebody in there with a satchel charge and get that ammo dump. Sometime within a year after I left they got it. I understand that they overran it.

KS: Number 14

MM: I got to take a little helicopter ride. This is a road from Saigon to Quan Loi.

Let me turn the light out and see if you can see better. That right there, you can just visualize what we’ve done there. We cleared back the roads and then all of these little spots here are craters. All along the road both sides are artillery-involved craters. (next slide)

KS: Number 15

MM: In the middle of nearly all of these wonderful rubber tree plantations was a French Hacienda. It had a beautiful, beautiful room. They weren’t bothered, I guess they passed just as friendly as anybody from the VC to our side day in and day out. I’m sure no telling how many rubber trees got plowed down and not telling how many hundreds of thousands of dollars that our United States Government paid for. (next slide) So it hadn’t fed the fire.

KS: Number 16

MM: These are the helicopters trying to land at Quan Loi. Dirt storm and they kind of just had to take off until we got enough oil spread on the ground up there and enough [?]. It looks like the wind’s blowing, but it’s not. It’s just off the airstrip. (next slide)

KS: Number 17

MM: These are not rubber trees here. This is what we call the laterite quarry. North, well more west of Quan Loi than anywhere. We had to use some bucket loader some of the time. We got the tank escort here. Beautiful trees. This dirt that we dug was extremely, it packed into a good base for airstrip. (next slide)

KS: Number 18

MM: There’s where we dug down to it on the left, just looking out across it all (next slide)
KS: 19

MM: It’s upside-down, but this is a bulldozer here. Is that smoke right there?
There’s a truck parked down there. We are bulldozing this dirt on the back of that truck
from up above. We would run the bulldozers come out over the tops of the truck and
that’s how we would load most of the truckloads on the dump trucks. We put two trucks
side by side and load them both at the same time with one bulldozer. (next slide)
KS: 20

MM: It used to land down there in the trucks it used to land right on the trucks
off the side of the road there. We were drawing fire that day and so it just kind of held
everybody up right there. Trying to get things cleared out. Probably that very same
Lambretta got blown up. One day, Lord each part of it would be no bigger than a teacup.
The largest piece of a human would be a piece of an intestine. I believe that we are on
our way. We were just going out to the quarry that day. These are our engineers. Some
of our escort, a mine sweep team, stuff like that.
KS: Slide 21

MM: We loaded them up on a bulldozer there safest place you could be. I had
more steel between me and the ground than anything. (next slide)
KS: 22

MM: These are kids along the road, I believe there’s a few children out here. I
think we’ll get better pictures of them a little later. They’d come out to the side of the
road and we’d throw them C-ration cans. Some of the guys tried to hit him. (next slide)
There they are.
KS: 23

MM: Some of the kids really dressed nice. Basically at school, I think. Some of
them really had nice clothes; some of them hardly had any. They’d come out to the road
looking for anything we’d give them. They really like cigarettes more than anything
because they could trade them for more. (next slide) This is Quan Loi and the
helicopters trying to come in and take off. Re-supply or more ammo.
KS: 25
MM: There’s the airstrip at Quan Loi after we begin to get some progress made. I can tell we do have an airstrip up there. That’s one of our support helicopters. (next slide)

KS: 26

MM: There we are pushing some more dirt back out into a laterite pit. I don’t remember that guys name. (next slide) This one here is another shot of the Montagnard village. Look at the size of the wheel on there. It’s unbelievable. Probably six foot in diameter old spoke wheel. I had some kind of an old oxen. I think I’ve got some pictures of some oxen they used. They didn’t have electricity there. If they ever had it was long gone now.

KS: That’s number 27.

MM: This village was just more or less out by itself. (next slide)

MM: There’s another picture of Montagnard village.

KS: 28 (next slide)

MM: There’s a Montagnard village family right there. They’re going out to gather wood. Maybe something that we would call potato. They got some root structures stuff, that look kind of like a potato, but it wasn’t. Maybe more like a sweet potato. The whole family goes along. Notice some of them got [?] some of them don’t.

KS: Slide 29

MM: We’re going to protect them. We’re going to have lights up you know. All that lasted about 2-3 days. They decided they didn’t want to be any part of us anymore. Didn’t blame them. (next slide)

KS: 30

MM: This is the perimeter at Quan Loi. You can see fox holes, staggered built all along here. Like there’s three right here, four. Then there’s a lot bigger ones in between those. If you can’t see, that’s buried in there. We had pushed the jungle way back that way. (next slide)

KS: 31

MM: That’s believe it or not, this is one of our guys with the 557light equipment. Before I was there at Quan Loi, I was really TDY with another outfit the 18th engineers of some kind. There’s enough of us there and we always kept somebody in the bush. You
couldn’t hear anything with the bulldozer running and all that. SO, we’d keep somebody out in the bush with a radio kind of looking the situation over. We didn’t know what was going on. (next slide)

KS: Slide 32

MM: These are the kids, that’s another rock quarry. That’s a playboy magazine they’re looking at. All that wonderful naked bodies. We thought that that’s what they were interested in. Wasn’t it at all. They had never seen a book with colored pages on it. They thought that was so unique. (next slide)

KS: 33

MM: A real sad story, you see. This is how we ate. This is how they ate. I’m going to say this kid right here, his parents were killed. I think this is the one. One day, one of them came to me and they said, ‘VC, beaucoup. Beaucoup VC’. Oh, really, where? Oh. The village. We called in and got an interpreter to come out. They went to a village, through the Montagnard village and about two miles back. They had a little village just off the side of the road. We had lost a couple of trucks there and everything else and had discovered a network of tunnels within that village. His parents had been killed. They spent a couple of days there (next slide). This should be another shot of the Montagnard village.

KS: 25

MM: This would be our way home. It’d be getting late in the evening. You can see they got trees lined up in every direction on both sides of the road just as far as you could see. Black pajamas could run in there and you didn’t see them very far off the road. I don’t know if you know rubber is white. Real rubber is white. We’d get it up and play with it. Take it out just like you do syrup.

KS: Tap into the tree?

MM: Tap into the tree and cut a long gash around it. It would run down into a cup. Beautiful, beautiful, beautiful country. (next slide)

KS: 36

MM: That just shows you how thick and dark it is in there. See those trees just as far in there as you can? (next slide)
MM: This is at the front gate at Quan Loi perimeter. Very first thing in here is a mortar. This one here would be a 155 houser. These two would be 155s I believe. These are shells. These are low rounds of these right here. All the casings that they put into them to go with. Whenever you fire one of these guns one time, you hit the same dust as when we were looking back at that other picture. It raises the dust into the air and it will hang there. If you don’t have any other movement it will stay there and it will do the same thing to your blood and to your skin as it does to the air. It will pick your feet up off the ground and you will be up off the ground. These basically were not for our protection until I got on the trajectory this low. Until I got to shoot straight out. They weren’t for our protection. There were firebases, four firebases around Quan Loi and I don’t know how far out, I’d say this average of five miles out. They would be our cover fire, firing toward our perimeters. We would be their cover fire firing toward their perimeters. One of the guys out there lost his entire squad, but about three or four. I think I’ve got a picture of him, and his bunch. They just let him in there to re-supply. I don’t know if they ever got him re-supplied. (next slide)

KS: 38

MM: That is a quad .50. Quad .50 is a magnificent piece of machinery. You see there’s more barrels on it. Those four barrels fire one shell a piece at a time. Boom! Boom!Boom!Boom! Boom!Boom!Boom!Boom! Boom!Boom!Boom!Boom!Boom!Boom!Boom!Boom!Boom! Boom!Boom!Boom!Boom!Boom! Boom!Boom!Boom!Boom!Boom!Boom!Boom!Boom!Boom!Boom!Boom!Boom!Boom!Boom!Boom!Boom!Boom!Boom!Boom!Boom!Boom!Boom!Boom!Boom!Bo...
MM: We may not be on 1. I think they’re pretty close to what they are. They may be two or three off. This is just I believe a hilltop at Quan Loi. I think this was our first supply area where our company began. (next slide)

KS: 2nd slide

MM: This is where we had pushed the jungle back at Quan Loi. Just showing the area of the hills and everything down through there.

KS: Number 3

MM: Number 3 is another one of them Quan Loi picture of the perimeter. The barrels there are filled with what we would call Fugas. Mixture of gasoline, diesel and so forth, whatever we could gather up. Put them out there on the [?] and get that started rolling down the hill. Get her ignited we had a pretty good little blaze.

KS: Number 4

MM: Four is a hilltop at Quan Loi. I’m on my bulldozer, following a jeep and a tank. Or an APC, no, I believe that’s a tank pulling on out of town there. You can see our dog. Our wonderful hound dog.

KS: What was his name?

MM: I can’t even remember that hound dog’s name. I guarantee you when there was a Vietnamese around he’d let us know. (next slide)

KS: Number 5

MM: This is a rubber tree right at the edge, you notice some rubber trees. Kind of shows you how dark it gets in the jungle pretty quick there. (next slide)

KS: Number 6

MM: That’s Lee Elder, can’t remember that other guy’s name. Cummings. Cummings. Lee Elder and something Cummings. Can tell we got a little dirty that day. Got a little dirty every day. Driving the bulldozer and front-end loaders whatever it was. Have a little cold beer about this time of night, get mortared nearly every night. Fall off in that hole and left him behind. Pretty good place to spend the night. Rats like it there just as much as we did. (next slide)

KS: Number 7

MM: This wasn’t an attack or anything. Slippery road and a guy lost control of his truck. Right along about here we got in trouble a couple of times. (next slide)
KS: Number 8

MM: It’s another picture of quad 50 on the perimeter of Quan Loi. (next slide)

KS: Number 9

MM: It’s a picture of the kids just barely. He slips one out and [?] (next slide)

KS: Slide 10

MM: Ran into a laterite pit. So, far we had scraped up quite a bit of dirt ready to load. (next slide)

KS: 11

MM: We had two bulldozers out there that day. I think one of them nearly turned over I think, might be this picture over here. (next slide) Another picture of this our camp in Quan Loi.

KS: 12 (next slide)

KS: 13

MM: That’s a picture all the way from the quarry at Quan Loi looking back toward the Montagnard village. I suspected the reason I’m shooting that long distance, we’re drawing fire from out there somewhere. We have dug a hole deep enough to get into the water.

KS: You hit the water table?

MM: We got into the water table there. Probably the kids are taking a bath. They loved it when we got there. We didn’t know that they were that short of water. Whenever we got started digging down into the water everyday we go down there and dig them a spot out where they could take a bath. (next slide)

KS: 15

MM: This is a crane crane. This is a helicopter crane and without the tracks it’d pick up a D6 bulldozer. I drove D8, which is a lot bigger. I couldn’t pick it up with tracks off of it. I saw a D6 get dropped from one. You talk about a bullet going north while another bullet was going south when it came loose. It was over the Eastern area of Quan Loi area. That’s right at the end of the airstrip that we go to. (next slide)

KS: Slide 15
MM: This is one of the prettier pictures that you’ll find. This is one to the laterite quarry from Quan Loi. On a magnificently beautiful day before you get out to the Montagnard village.

KS: Slide 16

MM: This is a monk on the road.

KS: Was that common to see a lot of monks?

MM: Yeah. Really, yeah. (next slide)

KS: Number 17

MM: Here’s another picture of just our camp. Kept trying to get pictures of us. Just never could get it.

KS: This is 18?

MM: This after we’ve been there several months and they built a pretty good airstrip and they would get in and land planes there. I believe that one’s a little bit bigger than a Caribou. Must have been, maybe a 130. That right there is about what I flew out of Vietnam on. Or flew back to Saigon on. (next slide) Got it built enough to do that (?).

KS: This is 19

MM: This is our camp. Finally got a pretty good shot into those trees. We were camped in tents and everything back in those trees. The trees surrounded basically the airstrip. Real close proximity. (next slide)

KS: This is 20

MM: This is Lee on the bulldozer. Lee Elder on the bulldozer. (next slide)

KS: 21

MM: Chinook just flying free. (next slide)

KS: 22

MM: I dug that deep old hole there. Basically what it is is a trash pit in Quan Loi. That’s our trash pit, trash dump in Quan Loi.

KS: Was that burning? Would you usually burn the garbage?

MM: Yeah. Whenever you set fuses that load a 155, you had powder charges. If you used a half a charge the rest of it had to be thrown away. So, a lot of times they would be burning up the rest of what wasn’t used. The rest of it was just [?] and
everything that we brought into. I don’t think that we ever buried anybody in this
particular pit. I say that because sometimes it wouldn’t burn. (next slide)

KS: 23

MM: This is just another shot of the camp. (next slide)

KS: 24

MM: These are the kids at laterite quarry taking a bath. Dug down and hit the
water and let it sit there for a little while and it’d turn out pretty good. They sure did like
that fresh water. (next slide)

KS: 25

MM: I had two bulldozers, got one of them a little high. So we grabbed a hold of
the side of it and tore her away from the bank there. Kids thought that was hilarious.
They thought that was a lot of fun (laughs).

KS: A sight to see, I’m sure. (next slide) 26.

MM: Those are trucks that we loaded on leave the Mountain area every night. I
would suspect that we’re drawing fire from out there somewhere. (next slide)

KS: 27

MM: You can tell how we cleared the jungle along the sides of the roads. This is
a [?] right here. Couldn’t tell you which one. I took this one either going or coming from
Quan Loi to Saigon and went down country to go on R&R. (next slide)

KS: 28

MM: Those are just craters. Just to kind of show you what the ground looked
like after we’d bombed them forever and ever. (next slide)

KS: 29

MM: There’s more craters. (next slide)

KS: 30

M.M: This I believe would be Di An from the air. Quite a compound Di An got
to be. Pretty good-sized city. Pretty good city. I got to go back in there when they
towed me to Saigon and then brought me back. (next slide)

KS: 31

MM: This right here would have been, looks like Saigon. It could be Long Binh.
This is how they bunkered our jets in that flew there. Some of the Vietnamese they had
some jets. Had very few as far as I know about. Nearly all of theirs were crop jobs.

Somewhere in all my pictures I’ve got pictures of theirs. As you can tell I’m on 747, either leaving out or coming in. (next slide)

KS: 32

MM: There I am and it’s a wonderful day! Di An after we closed down our rock quarry before we went up to the mountain. Believe it or not we’re mixing cement. Right here is the cement mixer. We’re breaking every bag by hand. Scooping every piece of rock in there that we made from our quarry. And we are pouring the floor for a mess hall.

KS: For a mess hall?

MM: For a mess hall. Yes. A really nice mess hall right there. (next slide)

KS: 33

MM: This is a shot out from Di An I guess we called it a cemetery. (next slide)

KS: 34

MM: There we are loading rock and all that. The guys are [?]. See the big wheel from the handcarts? That’s for pouring cement right out there. Out there were bagged by hand. Almost spent all day doing that. I got a little weight off then.

KS: Hard work isn’t it?

MM: I weighed about 150 pounds before I came back. (next slide) Hard work is better than a lonely job(?).

KS: This is tray D.

MM: The very first picture there would be Di An. D-I-A-N. Right at the edge of the compound. Coming and going and they got to fly for a change. (next slide)

KS: Slide 2

MM: The second one there is a picture out of the quarry. It’s a convoy of C-130 supply aircraft going. Probably going to Di An, Long Binh, back and forth. (next slide)

KS: Slide 3

MM: Jungle (laughs). After that I couldn’t see anything. (next slide)

KS: 4

MM: Big river in Bien Hoa. Bien Hoa and Long Binh were together, that’s right.

This is how you see the river, how far it is across there.
KS: Is that a bridge going across there?

MM: Yeah, that’s a bridge and we’re stopped at a checkpoint. Generally they wouldn’t let traffic go but one way at a time anyway across the bridge. (next slide)

KS: 5

MM: This is back at the quarry and it’s a Pagoda on a hill. It’s looking out across the railroad tracks where the little train got blown off the railroad tracks. If you’ll look, there’s lots of soldiers right there. They’re on a sweep. Right out across them rice paddies. It’s amazing what they’d dig out of them rice paddies (laughs). Machine gun there’s close enough to blow us away. Never saw them.

KS: Did they ever come across people?

MM: Never made it. Never made it. At night, we had the really bright lights that shined out from our perimeter of course then we had plenty of protection within our perimeter. Somewhere here there’s probably pictures of light poles and stuff. (next slide)

KS: Number 6

MM: That’s a picture of my current family. They’re all good people. All of them graduated from school and are all grown up. All got good jobs, couldn’t ask for anything better. (next slide)

KS: Number 7

MM: This is a picture of a horse in front of a cattle trailer. My dad, my wife, my two daughters and some [?] farmers. This was at my farm. I quit farming in about 1985. (Next slide)

KS: Number 8

MM: There I am in about 1983 or four at wheat harvest. Wheat harvest was my favorite time of the year. Don’t believe I’d reap my corn without wheat harvest. I had five combines and I was ground man that kept them all going. Didn’t have time to get up on one myself anymore. I had 3,000 acres of wheat the last year. (next slide)

KS: Number 9

MM: This would be me at Washington D.C. at the Vietnam Wall. That’s my kid on the statue at the main pavilion.

KS: Do you remember what time period?
MM: This right here was in about 1994.
KS: Was that your first trip?
MM: Only trip I’ve ever made. Went in after midnight one night, went to the Wall and flew out the next day. (next slide)
KS: Number 10
MM: This picture is my wife and my sister at a place called Sintosa. Sintosa is North of Pampa on the banks of the Canadian River. I worked five years for T. Boone Pickins on this hot ranch. I planted over 10,000 trees a year. I planted grass that you wouldn’t believe made our muddy creek and everything down there. Sintosa in Mandarin Chinese means Peace and Tranquility. Beautiful day. (next slide)
KS: Number 11
MM: This is me and my dad at a farm sale. He’d just had cataract surgery, so that’s why he had the real dark glasses on. The county judge of Briscoe county at that time.
KS: What’s your father’s name?
MM: Fred. Fred Mercer farmed forever and then he was county judge. He didn’t do re-reelection because he had a stroke right before he died. (next slide)
KS: Number 12
MM: There we are again, us two there. (next slide)
KS: 13
MM: This is working my cattle back before the farm sale and we were having to track it. A dog, a horse right there. It’s 1979 World Champion tie down calf, world champion. Been to National finals twenty some odd times. We’d call him a cousin I guess. He was married to my cousin. Until they got divorced, got two or three kids. (next slide)
KS: Slide 14
MM: Since I travel now, this is part of my job. I take pictures, that’s a cross up there in Gruene, Texas. (next slide)
KS: Slide 15
MM: This is just part of the country side in Texas. (next slide)
KS: 16
MM: Countryside in Texas. (next slide)

KS: Slide 17

MM: This is out of a plane going somewhere. (next slide) You’ve got me.

There’s another picture of that cross. I didn’t know those were in here.

KS: 19

MM: That’d be Gruene, Texas probably. (next slide)

KS: 20

MM: That’s my wife. That’s about 13 years ago. I don’t know anything about marijuana, but I drew that on her shoulder. That was for a Halloween party (laughs). (next slide)

KS: 20

MM: There she is a few years later. Ski daddy took our family skiing. (next slide)

KS: 21

MM: These are pictures like that if you come to my office today this is what you’re going to see on my wall. Pictures like these. (next slide)

KS: 22

MM: You’ll see pictures like that. That’s a windmill at the Tea Boone Picket ranch. We decorate them. You could see them from the highway anytime you go north. (next slide) There’s another one of those pictures of that cross. (next slide)

KS: 24

MM: This is a picture of the Wall in Washington D.C. (next slide)

KS: 25

MM: That’s another picture of the wall and what do you call that spike there? The Washington Monument.

KS: 25

MM: The Washington Monument, yeah right. (next slide)

KS: 25

MM: That’s another 1984 wheat harvest in the Texas panhandle. Silverton, Texas to be particular. (next slide) Another Texas day, another Texas day. I know why these are in there because I made particular shots. I had these shots, I had these slide put out in particular for redoing my book and stuff. (next slide)
KS: 28

MM: This is Lubbock, Texas about 1999. As I travel I try to get some pretty neat shots in Lubbock. (next slide) That’s it.

KS: Is there anything else you wanted to add?

MM: Let me go get those other boxes we’ll look at a few of them.

KS: This is tray E.

MM: The first of it, least we moved back to the quarry. These are the hooch girls that kept all the boots. You’ll notice the boots are all lined up and shined. Couple of bucks a week, do all your laundry and polish your boots. What a deal! (next slide)

MM: That was inside of our hooch. (next slide) The second one you can’t see anything. (next slide)

KS: Slide 3

MM: Three is our quarry. That’d be getting ready for a blast. No, these are Rhome plows. These are Rhome plow guys. I was with them quite a bit. You’ll notice my bulldozer didn’t have a cab on them. These have a cab on them. They’ve got an angle plow. Of course, my plow will do just about everything there’s will do.

KS: Now, was the cab for protection on these?

MM: The cab was for protection. Hot sun of a gun! I didn’t want a part of it. Couple of them whenever we went to An Loc, whenever it was overrun, they took them across the border [into Cambodia] and asked me to go, I said no thanks. They went across and never came back. I suppose that they ever came back, but I don’t think that they came back with them. (next slide)

KS: Slide 4

MM: That’s one of the rivers there out of Bien Hoa. (next slide)

KS: 5

MM: This is a Vietnamese quarry. A lot bigger than ours. That’s the one where we were running the 20-ton trucks. (next slide) There’s one of them 20 ton trucks right there.

KS: 6 (next slide)

KS: 7
MM: Beata, Beatle, Beady. He was another one that helped me work on my crane.

KS: What was his name again?

MM: Beady I think.

KS: Beady.

MM: I can’t remember his first name. (next slide)

KS: Number 7

MM: Crippled plane. A helicopter carrying a plane, believe it or not, by the edge of the wing there. Got shot down and I’m saying it’s probably one of our Piper cubs that’s carrying it. Did our marking for our marked hot zones. (next slide)

KS: This is 8. Number 9

MM: I heard this guy didn’t make it. A fuel loader. I don’t know this for a fact and I can’t remember his name, but I heard he didn’t make it. I heard he lost his fuel tanker and the whole deal. We got split up whenever we left the quarry, he went a different direction. (next slide)

KS: Number 10

MM: Dinner again there at the rock quarry. (next slide)

KS: 11

MM: There we are. See our hooches? See how fancy they finally got? See? Used to have tarp roofs. Now we got tin roofs and louvered sides. You go inside and you can see out, but it doesn’t rain in. High power electricity as you can tell.

KS: This is onsite at the quarry?

MM: That’s onsite at the quarry. We’re doing a blast there. Blasting rock, crushing, to go to the crusher. (next slide)

KS: Number 12

MM: Here’s our masons running the rock drill at the quarry. I suppose they’re the ones that stole the dynamite. Dig a hole 30 foot deep, cram it full of dynamite, throw a cap in the top. We did that for a whole shift. There might be 300 holes like that at one time. Blast it all at one time. Well, I don’t know how they did it. They’d stick a stick of dynamite here, stick a stick of dynamite there. There we are running up there in the quarry. (next slide)
KS: 15
MM: There’s our pile of rock now. By dang, that’s worse than Alcatraz. (next slide)
KS: 15
MM: More quarry pictures. (next slide)
KS: 16
MM: This is our protection at the quarry. That’s an APC. Armored Personnel Carrier. Most of our was Big Red One. Cav. (next slide)
KS: Would they patrol around the perimeter of the quarry?
MM: Around the perimeter. Yeah. (next slide)
KS: That’s number 17
MM: Just rock and this rock. (next slide)
KS: 18, 19
MM: Must have been close to Christmas. This was getting a ride into Saigon to leave out on R&R. I remember this particular trip. We were passing another convoy and some Lambretta and some trucks and stuff along the road. (next slide)
KS: This is 20
MM: Mamasons at the quarry digging holes, packing dynamite. (next slide)
KS: 21
MM: I guess this is an amoeba. Closest thing I can tell you. (next slide)
KS: 22
MM: Another shot of a blast on the quarry. This is across the road. (next slide)
KS: 23
MM: There’s an outhouse. One of our outhouses. Favorite bathroom. (next slide)
KS: 24
MM: I’m getting ready to leave out of there for Quan Loi. (next slide)
KS: 25
MM: That’s the Rhome plows and our convoy was just here. You can tell there’s a rock that we crushed up. See we did make some pretty good rocks. It was all about the same size. Whenever we finally got it off.
KS: That’s the smallest you would crush it down?

MM: No. No. We’d crush some much smaller than that. (next slide)

KS: O.K. 26

MM: Mama San at one of our tents there. (next slide)

KS: 27

MM: At night the sky was lit up all the time with white phosphorous flares. Never could get a good picture of it. They wasn’t able to show anything. (next slide)

KS: 28

MM: There’s our camp at Di An. (next slide) We left out of there. I don’t know why. Dumb. Dumb. Dumb. Dumb. This is stuff you don’t do in a combat zone. I don’t know why. I think we had a new captain. Don’t call a formation in a war zone. One hand grenade, what it does. You just don’t do that.

KS: Slide 29

MM: If we ever had a formation any time other than before or after that it was no more than squad size-8 men.

KS: And that was standard practice?

MM: Standard practice. I don’t know why they just have some damn safe because they didn’t get it all the time. A lot of times they did get it in there when we weren’t ready for it. (next slide)

KS: 30

MM: This was our rock crusher there at the quarry. See this wheel here, that’s what created the ability to crush up rocks and then spit them out. Had two jaws down in here that the rocks would fall into. We had moved the rock crusher away from the wall getting ready to transport it somewhere else at this time.

KS: Were these powered on fuel, gasoline?

MM: Diesel. Diesel engines set right here. Huge. You get the wrong size rock in there and you couldn’t crush it. When we would take bars and break it and lift it back out and rock that until it could get a grip on it. Busted them. (next slide)

KS: Slide 31

MM: There I am swimming. (next slide)

KS: 32
MM: There’s Danny Gilbreth running the rock crusher. (next slide)
KS: 33
MM: There they are! This is how they hauled it around.
KS: Water buffalo?
MM: Yeah, water buffalo. These are more oxen. You see the mama sans out
here would drive them and the papa sans were up here on top. Papasons might take care
of the kids. Mamasons did the work. Mamasons did the work, papasons did the
bargaining. Just how it was. We were looking across our Concertina fence here at them
coming by on the road. (next slide) Combat pictures aren’t here, maybe they’re in the
next one. I know there’s some more, but I don’t have it. These are family pictures from
a few years back. Kids in a track deal.
KS: This is tray F.
MM: Yes. Quan Loi. Right out at the edge of Quan Loi. (next slide)
KS: Slide 2
MM: A [?] helicopter at Quan Loi. (next slide)
KS: Number 3
MM: Chinooks trying to land at Quan Loi in a dirt storm. (next slide)
KS: Slide 4
MM: Packing down the dirt on the airstrip. Packing the airstrip at Quan Loi.
(next slide)
KS: Slide 5
MM: Jungle at Quan Loi. (next slide)
KS: Number 6
MM: Jungle at Quan Loi. Rubber trees. (next slide)
KS: Number 7
MM: Pushed back the jungle at Quan Loi. (next slide)
KS: Number 8
MM: Going to the laterite pit at Quan Loi. (next slide) Same thing
KS: Number 9
KS: This concludes the oral history interview with Mike Mercer. Thank you.