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The Vietnam Archive
Oral History Project
Interview with Frank Gutierrez
Conducted by Kim Sawyer
January 24, 2001
Transcribed by Tammi Mikel Lyon

NOTE: Any text included in brackets [] is information that was added by the narrator after reviewing the original transcript. Therefore, this information is not included in the audio version of the interview.

1 Kim Sawyer: This is Kim Sawyer conducting an oral history interview with
2 Frank Gutierrez in the Special Collections Library on January 24th, 2001 at 1:25 in the
3 afternoon. This interview is part of the Lubbock Area Vietnam Veterans Oral History
4 Project. Mr. Gutierrez, can you tell me a little bit about your early life? When and where
5 were you born?

6 Frank Gutierrez: I was born here in Lubbock and except for my military service,
7 I've been in Lubbock all of my life. I went to Lubbock schools, of course, graduated
8 from Lubbock High School in 1967. Of course that was the war was going on already. I
9 was 17. Some friends of mine decided that they were going to volunteer for military
10 service, so I didn't want to be left out, so I persuaded my father to sign for me so I
11 volunteered for the Army when I was 17. Immediately after graduation we were off to
12 boot camp to basic training at Fort Polk, Louisiana. So basically speaking, from
13 graduation on, I wasn't around here. So, my 19th birthday, I'd just turned 19, and that's
14 when I was assigned to go to Vietnam. So, I spent most of 1968 in Vietnam. I came
15 home Christmas Eve, 1968 and finished out the balance of my military obligation at Fort
16 Sill, Oklahoma. They tried to get me to reenlist, but there's no way.

17 KS: So you volunteered before you graduated from high school?

18 FG: Yes. They had what was called delayed enlistment, and all around me, my
19 cousins, my friends, they were getting drafted. So, volunteering seemed like the

1 reasonable thing to do because they were going to get you one way or the other. So, in
2 being that my friends were also volunteering, it seemed like a good thing to do. Plus, I
3 have an uncle who was my role model, who if it were not for him I probably would not
4 have even thought about joining the military. But, he had been in the Army, he came to
5 Texas Tech, and I wanted to follow his lead and be like him. So, it wasn't difficult for
6 me to consider joining the Army because I liked him and the way he was and I wanted to
7 be like him, so it seemed like the logical thing to do at the time. I suppose that if I had
8 known more about what was going on over there, the reality of the war, I may not have
9 been so eager to volunteer. But, I think that I was determined to go there, voluntarily or
10 under conscription. One way or the other, I would have wound up there. That was just
11 my mentality at the time, best that I can recollect. I wasn't scared of the potential of
12 going to Vietnam. It's just that it was something that I felt like I had to do.

13 KS: How closely had you followed events that were happening there while you
14 were in high school?

15 FG: Well, being in high school, not very much except what I managed to catch
16 on the evening news. Because some of my cousins were over there at the time in about
17 '65, '66, that's the only reason that I knew there was a war going on. But, as far as
18 having an in depth awareness of the war, I was very naïve; let's put it that way.

19 KS: What was your family's reaction when you told them your plans on
20 enlisting?

21 FG: My father did not want to sign for me, but eventually he did. As parents, I
22 know that they didn't want me to go because the war was going on, but I was thinking
23 more about myself than what they were thinking. So, it didn't bother me at all that they
24 were opposed to my volunteering before the service. Now I wasn't volunteering for
25 Vietnam, I was just volunteering for military service. They didn't like it.

26 KS: What made you choose the Army?

27 FG: Because of my uncle; I never considered any other branch as far as I could
28 remember. Maybe if my friends had decided to join the Marine Corps, I may have joined
29 the Marine Corps. But, the peer pressure was what guided me for the most part as to
30 where to go. Plus, at that time, the schools were allowing recruiters to go in and make
31 presentations to the students so that it was as a result of a presentation by a recruiter that

1 we talked about it and the other guys, I think the other guys were a year older, so that
2 they didn't have to have their parent's permission, so that they were going to go and
3 volunteered, and I wanted to be with the, part of their group. That was the reason that I
4 felt like I wanted to go.

5 KS: Do you recall any of the presentations that these recruiters gave, what the
6 content or what kinds of things they said to students?

7 FG: Probably recruiter jargon in order to get people interested. Like I said, I was
8 very naïve and as far as what they were saying to persuade us to volunteer, I don't
9 remember because it was mainly the peer pressure that was compelling me to volunteer.
10 So, whatever they said, it worked for me.

11 KS: Did they mention Vietnam at all?

12 FG: Well, no. They didn't mention it. As far as I remember they didn't mention
13 it. If they would have mentioned it, I don't think that would have discouraged me from
14 wanting to consider volunteering. What I liked was their appearance. They were in
15 Class A uniform. They were very professional in their presentations, and I liked that.
16 That had a lot to do with it. On the contrary, I suppose that if there had been a veteran
17 that would have come in and would have said, "Don't join. There's no direction to the
18 war. There's guy's getting killed every day in different ways," I may have thought about
19 it differently. If I'd had a veteran that said, "They're spraying herbicide over there that's
20 going to effect you in years to come," maybe I would have thought about it. But, nobody
21 was saying anything against the war at that time. I'm sure they were there because I
22 knew some of the guys had been in Vietnam in the early '60s, on up until 1967 when I
23 volunteered, and they were coming back. But I suppose that because everybody was
24 being criticized, ostracized by the general public, that they withdrew, and they weren't
25 saying anything. They should have because I think that they would have convinced some
26 of us not to go. I know you understand that within the Latino culture there's a certain
27 machismo, you have to be a part of this military service and it's part of being a Latino, a
28 Mexican American, you have this macho attitude about weapons, about being in a war
29 situation. It was already part of my attitude to be like that. So, it wasn't difficult at all to
30 get in there and do what I was supposed to do.

1 KS: So after graduation, you immediately went to your basic training or did you
2 have a little time?

3 FG: Things changed. In my senior year, I flunked government. So, my
4 commitment to the Army was to go to basic training right after graduation. Since I didn't
5 graduate, I had to stay behind and complete the course. Immediately after I finished the
6 summer school of course, I was on my way to Fort Polk, Louisiana. So my friends were
7 already a month and a half ahead of me, and they were going through basic training in
8 Fort Bliss, Texas in El Paso and I went to Fort Polk. So, we lost track of each other there
9 for a little while.

10 KS: Could you tell me a little bit about your basic training?

11 FG: It was rigorous. I enjoyed it, because it was everything that I expected,
12 being yelled at, being cussed at, physical activity, the training, learning how to march,
13 learning how to salute, and military code, Uniform Code of Military Justice, so I enjoyed
14 that. Thinking about it, I think it was the discipline that I enjoyed because everybody was
15 on the same page. The instructors were very professional. They were all Vietnam
16 veterans and so they knew what was going on. As a matter of fact, in my basic training,
17 there was a man by the name of Howard Scoville. He was my drill sergeant and he was
18 very, very professional, and they would tell us, "This is the way you're going to kill
19 Charlie, this is the way you're going to do things in Vietnam, and this is what Charlie's
20 going to try and do to you, so you need to be aware of this. Well, Sergeant Scoville was
21 so dedicated and so gung ho, he went back to 'Nam and he got killed. His name is on the
22 wall, and years later I researched my year book from basic training; out of the 200 or so
23 guys that I trained with, I think it was 25% of them got killed, and his name was also on
24 there. He believed in it, and he went back, and he died over there. Howard Scoville. If
25 you ever have a chance to scroll through the names on the wall, he's on it.

26 KS: Could you describe your typical day in basic training?

27 FG: Up at four o'clock in the morning, do the four S's; are you familiar with
28 that?

29 KS: No.

30 FG: Shave, shower, shit, and shine.

31 KS: Gotcha!

1 FG: It was either physical training, running, and then breakfast, or vice versa. I
2 don't remember exactly, but we ran and did physical training, and then classes during the
3 day and then more physical training. As we got into the different levels of training and
4 then on to the weapons training and things like that, there was not a dull moment.
5 Basically speaking, training was professional. The food was plentiful and nutritious. The
6 drill instructors, I guess you could say at that time they were mean. But, they had a job to
7 do and that was turn us into soldiers and they did the best to train us. I owe a lot to those
8 guys because eventually we wound up using the training that they put us through. It was
9 rigorous. It was consistent. It was with everything that we were going to experience in
10 Vietnam, everything in mind that we were going to have to know in order to survive.
11 That was the main thing.

12 KS: You mention that most of your instructors had had experience in Vietnam.
13 How much effect did that have on you and your fellow soldiers? Did that make you want
14 to really pay attention to what they were telling you?

15 FG: Yes, yes, because it was coming from guys who had been there and they
16 knew exactly what was going on. I think that they wanted us to know these things
17 because they wanted us to survive, and that was the whole point of the training was to go
18 over there and win the war. So, they did their best to teach us. They wouldn't share
19 bloody details. I remember that very clearly. They wouldn't share any bloody details or
20 any kinds of battles. They just would grill us on the physical training and the importance
21 of following orders and the UCMJ [?] concentrated on that. But as far as actual war
22 stories, I don't remember them saying anything about that, and I can understand now
23 why. They didn't want to share because they might persuade us not to go through that.

24 KS: What were you and your fellow soldiers, what were your thoughts and ideas
25 knowing that you were headed to Vietnam? Did you know at this point during basic
26 training that that's...

27 FG: Well when you're running and you're training and you're doing physical
28 activities and the drill sergeant is saying, "This is what you're going to do to Charlie, this
29 is where you're going to kill Charlie," everybody was trained for that. At that time, this
30 is 1967, about 90 to 95% of the guys that were training were going to go. We didn't

1 know. We knew that the possibility of going was very high, but we didn't know for sure
2 so that all the training was designed for eventually winding up in Vietnam.

3 KS: Anything else you would like to add about basic training? Any incidents that
4 stick out in your mind? Any problems with discipline with any of the recruits?

5 FG: No, no. The guys that I trained with, about 250 of us, we didn't have any
6 discipline problems. We had a few that were stragglers that had been drafted and just
7 didn't want to be there, but eventually they got in line. They had this thing called
8 recycle, that if you didn't meet the requirements or if you didn't meet the minimum, if
9 you didn't meet the minimum requirements, they sent you back to start the training again.
10 With that in mind, very few soldiers were strippers so to speak. So, they got with it and
11 they didn't want to be left behind because we would be sure that they would know that
12 they are holding us up. I suppose it was part of the psychological aspects of the training
13 that you trained as a group and you go there as a group. It was teamwork.

14 KS: After basic training, where was your advanced training?

15 FG: I did advanced training in Fort Gordon, Georgia. Let me see, now. I did
16 advanced training there in Fort Polk and then I went to an additional month in Fort
17 Gordon, Georgia and finished that in December of 1967 and received orders to go to
18 Vietnam and went home for two weeks with orders to report to Oakland, California. So,
19 I went home for a couple of weeks. At Fort Gordon, I remember that in the last days
20 before graduation, everybody got drunk; the whole company got drunk. MPs came in
21 and threatened us, officers came in and threatened us with getting recycled. I don't know
22 what triggered it, but I do remember that everyone was having a party and I think because
23 we'd just gotten orders to go to Vietnam and at that point we just didn't care about the
24 consequences. We had this big party and I remember that the MPs went out and the staff
25 officers went out and they yelled at us for a while. That was it. Everybody went home
26 eventually. They didn't do anything. I suppose that under the circumstances, they
27 expected us to do something because it was about 200 guys and getting orders at the same
28 time to go to Vietnam. We knew that there was a high probability that we, it was a sure
29 thing once it came that we were going, I guess that we felt that we needed to party for a
30 little bit and get it out of our system.

31 KS: What about weapons training? What kind of things were you trained on?

1 FG: Basic training was small arms. I trained with an M-14 and got to throw a
2 grenade a couple of times. Basically that was it in basic training, learn how to use the M-
3 14. When I got to Vietnam and then I was there a couple of days and I was assigned to
4 an infantry unit and once I got to the infantry unit, the 25th Infantry Division and I was
5 assigned to a line company and as soon as I got there I was issued a brand new M-16.
6 Right before we got to 'Nam at Fort Gordon we got some training on the M-16 right
7 before we graduated, so we did get some training on that, and that was it. The rest of the
8 weapons I learned on the job in Vietnam.

9 KS: You mentioned you had I think two weeks before you went to Oakland to
10 depart. What was that like before you went as far as interactions with your family, with
11 your friends?

12 FG: I don't recall too much of it. I did have a girlfriend at that time, and I made a
13 mistake and got engaged if I remember so that once that was done, I was not so eager to
14 go to Vietnam because I found her. So, I wanted to be around her. As a matter of fact, I
15 wound up reporting a few days late to Oakland, California as a result of that. But, I will
16 say that the letters from her and then the thought of coming home to her just kept me
17 going. So, as far as that's concerned, some good did come out of it even though I got
18 dumped after I came back, so that was part of the process. I think she was a year older or
19 two years older, so she was more mature. She may have known what she was doing,
20 though.

21 KS: You mentioned you were a few days late reporting. Were there any
22 consequences to that or was that...

23 FG: No consequences. I don't know if you heard this before, but the mentality of
24 veterans at that time was what were they going to do, send you to Vietnam? That was the
25 worst thing you could do to anybody, so there was no reluctance to get off track for a
26 while because you were still going to go. So, there was nothing. Nobody said anything.
27 I showed up and got processed and within two or three days I was on a plane to Vietnam.

28 KS: Do you recall what month this was?

29 FG: This is January.

30 KS: January?

31 FG: January of '68.

1 KS: January of '68? Were you on a commercial charter?

2 FG: Yes. They were flying out of Travis Air Force Base.

3 KS: How many people were on that flight estimated do you think?

4 FG: 350 guys. Oakland, they called it Oakland Army Terminal, huge hangers
5 with rows of bunks and it was thousands of guys there processing, some to go to
6 Vietnam, some coming back from Vietnam. So, it was a 24-hour a day operation there in
7 Oakland. You couldn't go anywhere because of processing and inoculations and issuing
8 jungle fatigues and equipment, some training, very minimum training. Mainly it was just
9 a hurry up and wait situation. I was there three days before my flight came up for a flight
10 to Bien Hoa in South Vietnam.

11 KS: You mentioned inoculations. Do you recall what they were?

12 FG: Malaria.

13 KS: Malaria and those types of things?

14 FG: I remember that. Brand new jungle fatigues, brand new boots, baseball caps,
15 that was it.

16 KS: Did you have any contact with the people that were returning from Vietnam?

17 FG: No. Strangely enough, there was a vast difference, like night and day. They
18 didn't want to talk to us, we didn't want to talk to them. They'd aged, and the same thing
19 happened to me a year later. We were going over there, pink skinned, light skinned, and
20 they're coming back dark and burnt. There was a vast difference. I suppose guys coming
21 back, they just wanted to go home. They didn't care for socializing or spending the time
22 with a green soldier about what was going on over there, so as far as I know, there was no
23 interaction with guys coming back.

24 KS: What was the atmosphere like on the trip over there? Were people nervous?
25 Did you talk about things, what you had expected?

26 FG: Very quiet. Usually GI's are rowdy when you have 50, 100, 150 guys, very
27 rowdy. But, from what I recall it was very quiet. It was a commercial flight,
28 stewardesses on board, and when we got to I think it was either after Hawaii or after the
29 next stop the stewardesses were not there and male stewardesses and I found out later
30 because they weren't letting any females into Vietnam because of the danger. It was
31 strange. When we noticed that, [?].

1 KS: They didn't mention it, you just noticed?

2 FG: Just noticed there was no more stewardesses, just guys. That was in the
3 wake of something.

4 KS: So you arrived at Bien Hoa?

5 FG: Yes.

6 KS: Could you talk about your first impressions when you stepped off the plane?

7 FG: I'm sure you heard. We're stepping off the plane, feeling the heat, and the
8 smell; the smell, the heat, the activity, trucks, planes, helicopters going back and forth.
9 Bien Hoa was a very safe area so that there was, as far as I recall, very little noise, very
10 little combat noise. Upon arriving in Bien Hoa we were put on buses and the buses had
11 screen wire on them and of course right away that says, "Well why do they have to have
12 screen wire on the windows?" To keep grenades out in case they were being thrown in,
13 or to keep guys in from jumping out of the bus. So, it worked both ways. Little by little
14 we started seeing those things, that there was a war going on. But, Bien Hoa was
15 relatively a safe area.

16 KS: So where did the buses take you?

17 FG: They took us to a place called the 90th Replacement Battalion there in Bien
18 Hoa. You go in there for processing, more shots, the dos and don'ts of the country, what
19 to do, what not to do, and I remember very vividly the signs that said, "Stay alert, stay
20 alive," all over the place. The barracks were long. We called them hooches. They were
21 long and there was hundreds of guys being processed and it was located on a hill. The
22 guys coming in country were at the top of the hill. The guys coming home were at the
23 bottom of the hill. So, it was a vast contrast because guys at the top of the hill, brand new
24 fatigues, and the guys at the bottom of the hill, scuffy, scruffy, long hair, bearded, tanned,
25 boots that were almost suede like because they'd been there for a year or two years, who
26 knows how long they'd been there. There was quite a difference, and again, they didn't
27 talk to you.

28 KS: You mentioned they gave you the dos and don'ts. Do you remember what
29 kinds of things they discussed?

30 FG: I suppose it was the military propaganda, that we were guests in the country
31 and things like that, that you're supposed to have respect for the people, and that was it as

1 far as I remember. I know they give us some handouts of the country. Yes, I remember
2 now that we were guests in this country and their customs and traditions, their culture is
3 different from ours so be respectful and mindful of the people in general.

4 KS: Were you given any specific information about Vietnamese culture or
5 language or anything?

6 FG: No. I didn't get any, just mainly the processing. I was there I guess three
7 days and every day we would have formations of everybody that was there. Trucks
8 would come in, deuce and a halves, and there would be names called out, and the
9 sergeant would say, "The following are going to the 1st Infantry Brigade, the 25th Infantry
10 Division, the 1st Cav, 4th Infantry Brigade, 9th Infantry Brigade." So, I was trained in
11 field so I was under the impression that I was going to go to some rear area. But, I was
12 on my third day they called formation and, "The following personnel are going to the 25th
13 Infantry Division," and my name came up and that's when I panicked because I wasn't an
14 infantryman, and I told the sergeants, "I'm not infantry," and they said, "Get your ass on
15 that truck. You're out of here." Once you're there, you're cannon fodder, you have no
16 choice. I was assigned to the 25th Infantry Division and they trucked us, about 20 guys.
17 We went through Long Binh, that's the place where the 90th Replacement was at. We
18 went down Highway 1 through Saigon and then up towards to the Cu Chi base camp.
19 That ride was so interesting, it was a cultural shock, because the way the country is set
20 out, the buildings, the people, motorcycles everywhere, bicycles everywhere, the dress,
21 the women. I got to see a little bit of the French influence on the architecture there. That
22 was only the outskirts of Saigon. Then we went on through Cu Chi base camp and Cu
23 Chi was, as far as I remember, was a very dusty place. See, now we could see the
24 activity, helicopters flying over head, machine gun towers, concertina wire, barbed wire,
25 just a lot of heavy weapons all over the place, tanks at the entrance to the base camp, so I
26 started realizing that there's a war going on. Of course this was during the day, and you
27 could hear artillery going out at that time. It was a kind of slow day. So, we got assigned
28 and reported to the brigade headquarters. Then from there we were assigned to this
29 infantry battalion and I wound up in Headquarters Company of the 2nd Battalion, 22nd
30 Infantry, and as I got into it...well, while we were there they said, "You're being
31 assigned to the Wolf Hounds." That was the name of the unit. When I got there I

1 discovered there was a crack outfit that was heavily into combat. They'd had many
2 skirmishes with Viet Cong and North Vietnamese, and had a reputation for being a force
3 to deal with. It was some wild times.

4 KS: Now you mentioned you had been trained to be a field wireman?

5 FG: Yes.

6 KS: Could you explain what that is exactly and what you did?

7 FG: I had picked that because I felt that it would keep me away from the combat
8 but I was wrong, because field wireman, if a whole battalion or whatever sized unit is
9 there, there's always what's called a TOC, a Tactical Operations Center, and from there
10 you're running wires to command posts from the different companies. So, that was my
11 job.

12 KS: Communications?

13 FG: Yes, communications and of course I was trained in using the radios and
14 setting up the communications. Whenever the battalion moved, we were one of the first
15 ones in there to set up the communications and then once we did that, we were regular
16 infantry. So, we had two jobs. I was wrong about my training. But when I got there, I
17 enjoyed it because it was US Army. I was in base camp approximately two weeks.
18 During those two weeks we became familiar with the area. We went through what they
19 called jungle school where they familiarized you with mines, booby traps, and different
20 snakes, insects, and familiarized you with a helicopter and mode of travel for the
21 battalion and I think we went through a week of that. Mainly for those weeks we sat
22 around, sleep, eat, and then one day sergeant came in and said, "Saddle up, we're going
23 out to the field." So, they started handing out grenades and that's when we realized this
24 was the real thing. When you give 19 year olds four hand grenades and 200 rounds of
25 ammunition each, you're going somewhere. So, it was quite a shock but at the same time
26 it was an adventure. So, they took us out. They had what they called resupply convoys
27 and in formation they told us, "You're going out to the field," and that meant going out
28 with the rest of the battalion on operations. So, in the afternoon, early afternoon, we got
29 on a truck that was going out and resupplying ammunition, food, water, and the battalion
30 was located somewhere in the rice paddies and as we got closer and we could see the
31 perimeter had sandbag bunkers around it and there was a battery of 105 millimeter

1 Howitzers, artillery, and it was a helicopter pad. It was during the middle of the day, hot,
2 and got assigned to where we were at, right in the middle, tactical operations, and got
3 assigned sleeping areas, of course the ground. So, we got settled in and then it just so
4 happened that there were some patrols out and the patrols started coming in and then the
5 gunfire started. As soon as it got dark, there's artillery going out, firing coming back in.
6 We're just there. I think there was like two other new guys, we were just terrified. We
7 didn't know what was going on, we just hear the artillery going off and gunfire coming
8 back in, all night long. In the morning, the patrols would come back in and everything
9 was calm. It just so happened that it was our first day, I think it was our second day, that
10 some what they call Eagle Flights, search and destroy missions, they had gone out on
11 helicopters and they were waiting for the helicopters to come back in, and for some
12 reason two of them crashed just as they were landing in our area, and it was terrible
13 because there was squads on those helicopters and as soon as the blade hit, guys knew
14 what was going to happen and he started running, dropping whatever they had. They just
15 started dropping it. The ammunition from the machine guns started going off. Whatever
16 ammunition's on there started going off. So, we hit the ground and nobody could move
17 for about four or five minutes because of all the hot ammunition that was going off. That
18 was my first day. I got a taste of what was going on on the very first day. Then the next
19 day we moved to another area. We did what was called...by a Slick, a Huey, Huey
20 helicopters, we moved to another area, set up search and destroy missions from there.
21 Little by little I started getting more and more familiar with the day-to-day activities.
22 Mainly during the day it was just hanging out. There was nothing to do except you could
23 sleep, stay out of the sun, and if there was a village nearby I remember we'd often
24 wander off into the village and visit with the Vietnamese, or just doing things we were
25 not supposed to do. During the day, it was quiet and rarely in my first few months, rarely
26 did we have any kind of activity. It was at night. Most of the combat was at night.

27 KS: If I could back up just a moment, could you describe your living conditions
28 at Cu Chi?

29 FG: We lived in, I think they were about 20 by 30 hooches, just lumber. Half of
30 it was lumber, and then the other half was screen wire, tin roofs. They had maybe ten
31 cots. That was it. I think we had lockers, foot lockers. That was it, nothing else. The

1 showers were across the street. They were huge containers for water, and no hot water of
2 course. It was just a square building, and these tanks were on top, and you had four, five,
3 or six outlets. So you were walking around in a towel and some sandals to take a shower;
4 that was it as far as showers. We did have showers. We had a mess hall with hot food;
5 not the best, but it was hot. We got fed. We ate, there was not doubt about the Army
6 feeding us when at base camp; out in the field, it was different.

7 KS: How safe did you feel on base?

8 FG: Well, got to the point where, and this is going to be Tet of '68, we had a lot
9 of attacks during the day. At any time you could get mortared and you would have to run
10 to the bunkers and hope you didn't get hit. There were a lot of guys that got killed during
11 the day because of mortars. They were using them, and we'd get a lot of probes into the
12 bunker when the Viet Cong would come and try to get into the wire and get into the wire,
13 so we were right on top of them so it wasn't necessarily [?] come through the wire
14 because they would come up in holes because of the tunnel system. That's what made it
15 particularly dangerous because we never knew where they were going to pop up. We
16 often wondered how things happened in the night and we never saw what was going on,
17 guys getting their throats cut. Nobody ever knew where these guys were going to come
18 from.

19 KS: People on base, this was happening?

20 FG: Yes, quite often. They were in there, so they knew exactly what we were
21 doing. We knew that there was a tunnel system, but we didn't know how extensive it
22 was. My understanding is, and I think it's in that book that you're reading, that one of
23 the high level commanding officers killed some Viet Cong popping up out of a hole right
24 into division headquarters. They were there. As a matter of fact, I found out later that
25 the Viet Cong were calling in direct fire into the base camp, inside the base camp. So,
26 they were inside the wire so they knew exactly what was going on. They knew exactly
27 what [?]. The first day of the offensive, the ammo dump went up; tremendous explosion.
28 Then, I remember that we were activated and went out as what they called a reactionary
29 force because Tan Son Nhut in Saigon was getting hit and we were 20, 25 clicks or
30 kilometers from Tan Son Nhut. So, some of our units went into Saigon in the middle of
31 the night. Then, a couple of days later, my unit went in for clean up. So, I think we

1 stayed there a couple of weeks and then we went out to some other area, I don't know.
2 See, that's why I'm very vague on details. I was just part of a huge military force. I
3 never knew exactly where I was headed at any one time, and I didn't care, because the
4 main thing was trying to do my part to stay alive and to do my job as a communications
5 guy, and then at night be out there pulling guard and making sure the Viet Cong come
6 into our area. That was quite hairy.

7 KS: How much did you know about the tunnel system? Was that discussed, or
8 was that something that they told you about prior to you getting to Cu Chi?

9 FG: Yes, they pointed that out in the jungle school that there was a tunnel system,
10 but of course at that time we didn't know how extensive that was. We just knew we kept
11 hearing things. It goes all the way up to the Cambodian border and it goes all the way to
12 Nui Bao Dinh, the black Virgin Mountain the highest point in that area. That's all I
13 remember hearing about. Of course you've heard about tunnel rats, guys going into
14 tunnels. So, we had numerous tunnel rats, but we never knew exactly where or how
15 extensive or where the entrances were, the entrances were, we just didn't know. I didn't
16 know. It doesn't mean that I didn't want to be there.

17 KS: How long would your time out in the field last? You mention that you
18 started out by going on resupply missions. Did you have a set amount of days you could
19 spend out in the field? Was it consistent?

20 FG: No. Sometimes we were gone for a few days, sometimes weeks, sometimes
21 months. But, most of our time was spent out in the field on operations as part of battalion
22 search and destroy missions. So, it varied from a few days to months before we came
23 back into the base camp. It all depended on how the operations were going or if the
24 officer decided that we needed rest. To me it seems like periods of rest were more of a
25 reward or morale booster because there was no rest. You hardly ever got a full night's
26 sleep. If you slept, you slept two hours at a time out in the field, two hours at a time at
27 most because you constantly were on watch. In base camp you got to sleep a little bit
28 longer because it's more secure and because there's constant lookout for mortar fire and
29 patrols going in at night so it was a little bit safer in base camp, although some of us
30 preferred – I preferred – to be in the field because you were more in control of the area. I
31 know I liked being out in the field as opposed to being at base camp because base camp

1 was, especially the infantry units, we were always getting hit with mortar fire. And, I
2 remember that our area was a target for rockets, for 122-millimeter rockets. They were
3 Russian made rockets they were firing; powerful. They did some damage to us. I
4 remember they hit an infantry barracks and a few guys got killed. There was a reason a
5 few of us preferred to be out in the field because of the Viet Cong using the rockets on
6 us; where they came from, I don't know. I know that the mortars, I know that they would
7 bring the mortar tubes out of the tunnels, pop off a few rounds, and then they're gone.
8 By the time we got permission to fire back, they were already gone. So, it was chaos. To
9 an extent, it was chaos. We just didn't know. It was frustrating I remember. It was very
10 frustrating because we didn't know where they were at, how many of them at any given
11 time. That's how come in the Tet Offensive of 1968, there was over 1000 Viet Cong that
12 were in one place at one time. They got slaughtered by the three quarter Cav, an armor
13 unit of the 25th Division. They went into Tan Son Nhut and just annihilated them because
14 they were in one place at one time. That was the mentality, that if you had an opportunity
15 to make contact, heavy contact, then you went all out; fighter-bombers, artillery, just all
16 out, because it was payback time.

17 KS: Could you describe, you mentioned that when you were out in the field, the
18 activities seem to take place during the night, is that correct? What was your typical day
19 like? How would you start the day? Did you receive briefings on what to expect?

20 FG: I didn't, we didn't. I'm sure the sergeants did and people in charge. We
21 never did. I never did. I just followed and did my job. The routine was once at first
22 light, if there's a cook, the cook would fire up the little stove and scramble some eggs and
23 people would eat scrambled eggs out of a paper plate. Otherwise, it was C-rations. Then,
24 you just try to sleep because the day's going to be hot and then you're going to have to
25 face the night again so you don't know where they're going to send you or if you're
26 going to be on the bunker line or in the bunker. You just never knew. So, you tried to
27 sleep as much as you could during the day. We'd use our liners, blankets, camouflage
28 blankets for cover and just try to sleep because it was precious because at night, you
29 didn't want to be sleeping and sometimes you couldn't sleep. It got to the point, Kim,
30 and I remember this very clearly, most of the time we had an artillery battery, four guns,
31 four 105s and they were constantly firing. It got to the point where I could actually sleep

1 during the firing missions, and it didn't bother me. Of course it didn't bother the rest of
2 the guys but it didn't bother us to have this constant boom, boom, just of outgoing fire.
3 When it was incoming, of course it was different. It got to the point where we were so
4 exhausted, we'd just sleep during firing missions and it didn't bother us.

5 KS: Did they give you ear plugs or any kind of protection for all of the...

6 FG: No. In training, yes, you had earplugs. Over there, I don't remember
7 anybody having earplugs. It would cut loose and it was so exciting that you didn't even
8 think about the noise. The noise was tremendous. Whenever there was ground fire, it
9 was tremendous. It effected me. But, as far as something like that, thinking about it, you
10 just cut loose, just bear with the noise. Of course you'd be numb. The thing to do was
11 keep your mouth open so you wouldn't get your eardrums busted. That was key. But,
12 that was fun thinking about it, being under fire and firing back, it was exciting. Of course
13 we were scared, but if you weren't scared it was foolish not to be scared. But, all of us
14 were scared; not cowardly, but just scared because you know what is out there. Years
15 later I found out that we're in the middle of the North Vietnamese Army, so that kind of
16 bothers me now because at that time, we never knew how close we were to those guys
17 and that's how come my friend Balentine, he filled me in on that, and he told me that we
18 were in the middle of the North Vietnamese Army!

19 KS: Did you ever see the enemy?

20 FG: I didn't. I saw them dead. I mainly saw dead Viet Cong, never...well, the
21 ones we saw and that I remember seeing alive were always running. As far as
22 actually...I never did. None of us mainly did, live ones, because my involvement was
23 mainly at night, so I never was actually able to see, and didn't want to, because there was
24 so much noise and so much fire power that was being used. Then, for example, if they
25 were attacking us, they would always count on the gunships, the helicopters, and they
26 would do a job firing their mini guns and artillery, firing point blank. So, whatever
27 wounded there were would be taken off or whatever casualties were inflicted on them,
28 firepower has a tendency to blow up a human body into a bunch of pieces. There was
29 nothing. So, some of the times they would take their dead. A lot of times we'd just have
30 to come in and clean up the place, mass graves and things like that. The only live Viet
31 Cong I ever saw were the prisoners of war, what they called the Chu Hoi.

1 KS: I wanted to ask you, what was the procedure or protocol for firing? Would
2 you have to call and get permission if you were fired upon, or how would that work out?

3 FG: In the base camps, yes.

4 KS: Or out in the field?

5 FG: In the field, it was different because if you saw something, you just cut
6 loose. That happened a lot, and again, it was mainly because we were so tense. So, if you
7 heard something and you saw some movement, you cut loose, call in artillery, cut loose
8 with grenade launchers, and then wait until morning to find out if there was anybody
9 there. There was a lot of unnecessary rules and regulations. I didn't feel it was very lax.
10 One thing for sure in the field, safety was first and foremost because you wanted to make
11 sure that the firing was not your own guys. We had a lot of friendly fire, guys getting
12 killed by our own guys, and it was just trying to conduct operations in the dark and trying
13 to get accurate grid coordinates, and for firing missions in the dark, it's very difficult, so
14 guys got killed by our own gunfire.

15 KS: What kind of precautions were taken to avoid these kinds of things?

16 FG: Making sure that who's going out on a patrol, knowing exactly who's where
17 and what, when, signal flares. A certain color meant you coming in, a certain color
18 meant you going out, so those were the extent of the safety precautions. We had some
19 very good, very good squad leaders and officers that knew what they were doing. I was
20 just an infantry guy, a private 1st class. I was just a rifleman. The guys that were there
21 longer, had been there for a while, they were experienced fighters and they loved it. So,
22 they would always look out for us because they knew more. I was there a year and I was
23 with the infantry for eight months. So, the heavy fighting was being done by the guys
24 that had already been in there from anywhere from six months to a year, so we had a lot
25 of good fighters who knew what they were doing and they would make sure that the rest
26 of us were safe. I'm very grateful for guys like that because they're fearless, very good,
27 knew what they were doing, and they inflicted some heavy casualties on the Viet Cong
28 and the North Vietnamese. I know this because over the years I've tried to keep up with
29 what happened and I've been in contact with guys that I knew that presently...there was
30 one guy, we were friends there in Vietnam named [?]. As a matter of fact, he came to
31 Tech and got his Ph.D. in psychology and was working with veterans in the VA hospital

1 and in Waco. He was able to fill me in on a lot of these things that happened. He was a
2 little bit older. He'd been in Vietnam longer. He'd been in combat longer. I saw him
3 here and over the years he's filled me in on some of the things that happened because it's
4 a haze as to what happened because it may sound strange, but seeing movies about
5 Vietnam helps me to understand more because you're one small space. You can't be out
6 looking. You're not aware of what's going on. So, seeing it from a different perspective
7 you understand what's going on, and all the noise, and all the commotion and all the
8 yelling the screaming and you don't know, and you don't want to know. It was
9 very...like I said, by watching these things, one movie in particular gave a lot of insight.
10 It was Platoon, because of the reality of that movie and seeing it at that level. It helped.
11 My role was just doing my best to do my job and fire back when fired upon. I didn't
12 know what was going on. All I could see was the firepower, and it was awful.

13 KS: What was your friend's name, the one that you mentioned that got his Ph.D.?

14 FG: Fernando Garza. He's from Corpus Christi and he may still be at the VA in
15 Waco, Texas.

16 KS: You mention that you were more focused on what was happening with
17 yourself and with your unit. Were you a bigger picturer of things as far as the politics?

18 FG: Didn't know didn't care.

19 KS: Didn't care? Was that standard among...

20 FG: Yes, yes, because it all keeps coming back to the warnings, stay alert, stay
21 alive, and that was it. You had to. Things as simple as falling asleep on guard duty could
22 get you killed. You had to, because if you wanted to make the enemy...the veterans, the
23 guys that had been there longer or had had more combat experience, that was what they
24 kept stressing, just stay alert, you'll make it home. Just do what you're told to, don't take
25 chances, don't take a risk unless you absolutely just know that you have to. Otherwise,
26 do your best to stay alive.

27 KS: Out in the field, or even back at base, did you have any time off so to speak?
28 What did you do for R&R?

29 FG: Drink beer!

30 KS: Drink beer?

1 FG: And I mean that, because that was an outlet. That was a way of unwinding.
2 In the base camps, I know where we were at, we had an enlisted men's club where we
3 would go and listen to rock and roll music on the juke box and do our best to forget about
4 the war. It was always plenty of beer. Beer was .25 cents a can.

5 KS: Was that American beer?

6 FG: Yeah. No, it was .15 cents a can in MPC, Military Purchase Currency. They
7 were always well stocked. On occasion a band would come in. On occasion they would
8 put on a film outside for us to watch. Otherwise, that was it because it was just if you had
9 free time. As far as entertainment, that was the hang out at the EM club, drink some
10 beers, and listen to rock and roll music, and wish you were home, things like that. That's
11 one thing that stands out in my mind is the music.

12 KS: Any bands in particular or songs that you can think of?

13 FG: Of course the Beatles were prominent. Some how the music fit in with
14 Vietnam. For example, the Animals had one called "We Got to Get Out of This Place,"
15 "Strawberry Fields," Otis Redding, "Sitting on the Dock of the Bay," things like that that
16 just brings a lot of memories about actually being there in Vietnam, James Brown music,
17 of course the Rolling Stones, Steppenwolf, "Born to Be Wild," you can just hear it
18 blasting all over the place, and of course there was the radio station out of Saigon,
19 KFBM, that was very popular that we all listened to because it was all rock and roll
20 music. You've probably seen or may have heard about the movie, "Good Morning,
21 Vietnam?" That is true. I don't know if before they started playing rock and roll there
22 was classical music and all this other music, but all we heard was rock and roll because
23 that's what we wanted to hear. So, every day you could hear radios just blasting.

24 KS: Did you listen to it out in the field as well?

25 FG: Yes, you weren't supposed to! I remember radios being confiscated,
26 especially at night, obviously, bring attention to yourself or let the enemy know where we
27 were at. Transistor radios were not allowed in the field. But, in base camps, you could
28 just hear the stereos blasting all over the place. It was fun to listen to all the music
29 coming from all over the place, and of course the blacks had their own music. But,
30 generally speaking, regardless of background, we all listened to rock and roll, [?] rock
31 and roll [?]. So, that music brings to mind a lot of memories, listening to it now. Like I

1 said, "We've Got To Get Out of This Place," reminds me about the replacement station in
2 Long Binh where there's three or four or five hundred guys in one place, all brand new,
3 and we don't know what our destiny is and we're listening to this music and the song fits,
4 "We've Got To Get Out of This Place," if it's the last thing we ever do. There's some
5 other songs that remind me, and I'll think of the names as we talk.

6 KS: What about USO shows? Did you have an opportunity to see any of that?

7 FG: Let me see. Well, we had I think they were Filipino bands that came out in
8 our EM club I think twice. They entertained us real well. In the bigger base camps, they
9 had better shows. I remember in Long Binh when I got there, at the EM club there was a
10 group, and this musician imitated James Brown to a T. I mean, exactly like James
11 Brown, so that was very exciting. He had everybody jumping up and down. They were
12 good. Bob Hope I missed because I had gotten my orders to come home and he was
13 doing a Christmas show in Long Binh and that's where the 90th Replacement Battalion
14 was at so that I almost didn't get processed to come home because of everybody being at
15 the Bob Hope show. This was on the 23rd of December, and I was on my way home. So,
16 there was a slow down of processing, but we got out of there right on the 23rd and the
17 show was going on. But, I could only see the crowd. At that point I didn't care, I just
18 wanted to get out of there.

19 KS: You mentioned Long Binh. You were at Cu Chi and then you moved to
20 Long Binh?

21 FG: Yes. In the summer of 1968 I was with my unit. We were out in the field
22 somewhere. We were in this nasty place. We couldn't fill sandbags because the mud and
23 dirt was just mud, caked mud, and the reason I say it was nasty because it was jungle and
24 we just moved in, and over the communications system my name came up and they said,
25 "The following enlisted men are to report back to Cu Chi, to Charlie Charlie," and my
26 name came up. So, I got on the helicopter and I went back to Cu Chi and in the next day I
27 reported to battalion headquarters and they had like 200 other guys that they had come in
28 from different units out of the division and we got on trucks and went back to Long Binh
29 to work in an ammunition dump. I think as best as I've been able to piece it together that
30 there was a lot of casualties during the Tet of 1968 there at the ammo dump and there had
31 been a lot of guys that got hurt, so we were replacements to work in the ammunition

1 dump. So, I wound up in it was called the 3rd Ordinance Battalion down in Long Binh.
2 The facilities were a lot better. The work was hard because we had to be loading and
3 stacking and tending to the ammo dumps, high explosives and all that, which I did not
4 mind because in comparison to being out in the boonies, working in an ammo dump to
5 me was all right. Then, when my platoon sergeant found out that I had been in an
6 infantry unit, he assigned me to ride shotgun on convoys back to Cu Chi to a place called
7 Tay Ninh so that I was running ammunition back to Cu Chi, back to the place I had been.
8 This is were my friend Terry Balentine comes into the picture because when I went
9 through, I remember the convoy stopped in Cu Chi and our destination was Tay Ninh.
10 Tay Ninh was the base camp and had units of 1st Cavalry and our convoy had to stop in
11 Cu Chi because there was a fire fight on the highway and we could go any further. So I
12 went back to the area I had been in and the battalion I had been in and it was deserted,
13 and the guys that were there told me that everybody had been activated because they had
14 been ambushed and 150 guys killed in one whack, several wounded, so that everybody,
15 everybody, cooks and everybody had been mobilized and sent out to the field. This was
16 in the summer of '68. When I visited with them and then I went back, made it back to
17 Tay Ninh, dumped off the ammunition and we rode the convoy back to Long Binh, I
18 worked there and then my platoon was assigned to go to Tay Ninh to work in the
19 ammunition dump in Tay Ninh. It was about 50 miles from Saigon right on the
20 Cambodian border, right next to the Black Virgin Mountain so that there was a lot of
21 activity there. It was a smaller base camp, and so we were busy. We were providing
22 ammunition to the cavalry units, all the other infantry units, and then at night we were
23 tending to our own bunker line. It was a lot of heavy fighting going on at night, and on
24 the mountain there was a lot of fighting going on. We're right next to it. We used to sit
25 back and watch the war, watch the shooting from the top to the bottom, and from the
26 bottom to the top, fire coming in. It was exciting. Then we had our own bunker line to
27 protect. We were busy every day, the gunships were busy everyday. There was some
28 heavy fighting going on. That went on for the balance of my tour. This was September
29 of '68, yeah, September of 1968 is when I went to Tay Ninh and I worked there
30 September, October, November, and December of '68 I got my orders to come home.

1 KS: What were your responsibilities? You worked in the ammo dump. What
2 kinds of things did you personally do?

3 FG: My job was to keep track of what was actually in we called them pads.
4 Towards the end of my tour I was assigned to blow up stuff. We collected obsolete
5 ammunition, artillery shells, smoke grenades, all kinds of ammunition. We'd collect that,
6 load it up on trucks, and then take it out into the jungle and unload it, pile it up, and then
7 put C-4 charges around, plastic explosives around it and blow it up.

8 KS: Was that standard practice to destroy ammunition?

9 FG: It was done because we were providing ammunition to the enemy because
10 [?] but that was SOP for the Army at that time. Plus, the Army didn't want to take
11 chances on an artillery shell blowing up in the tube or the smoke or anything blowing up
12 in somebody's hands. So, the best thing to do was just take it and blow it all up. So, I
13 did that for the rest of my time. I worked with what was called an EOD specialist,
14 ordinance something specialist, that that was his specialty, handling high explosives. So
15 my job was to be a part of the group that would load up the ammunition and then we'd
16 take it out into the jungle and stack it very neat. He and I were the last ones. He pulled
17 the fuse and jumped into the jeep and ran back into the base camp. By the time we were
18 back into the wire they'd close the gate and turn back and watch our explosions. It was
19 huge explosions, colorful because of all the different kinds of smoke grenades and
20 different ammunition that was going off. That was our job.

21 KS: Were there ever any accidents in handling the live ammunition? Were you
22 really concerned about your personal safety? Did you have specific...

23 FG: There was no time. There was no time. I mean, mind you I'd been in an
24 infantry unit and for me this was relatively safe rather than being with the infantry unit.
25 Guys in the infantry, you were in a war situation because if somebody, the Viet Cong
26 would sneak in on occasion, throw in a mortar on an ammunition pad and the whole thing
27 goes up, but that never happened. I was there until the very last week or last night in
28 Vietnam, there in that hill so I never knew what happened. We got hit, and I left the next
29 day. But as far as to the best of my knowledge, I don't remember anybody getting
30 seriously hurt. There were some guys hurt when we were all in one place at one time. Of
31 course the ammunition falling off the truck and crushing a civilian. I remember some

1 guys were trying to change a flat on a big truck and the pressure ring blew off and blew
2 the guy's head off. There were things like that. One time they were in the tunnel system
3 and they ordered a flame thrower and the colonel was going to test it and he strapped it
4 on and somebody was messing with the belt and the belt came off, so there was liquid
5 gasoline spraying all over the place, and he came down on his rear end. Fortunately
6 nobody was smoking at the time. So, there were things like that. As far as somebody
7 getting shot accidentally, not in my unit, because everybody was very careful. In
8 thinking about it, we didn't have accidents, guys shooting somebody else accidentally or
9 gun going off, it just didn't happen because we were always very careful about it. Just
10 imagine, 18-19 year olds with heavy weapons and all kinds of different firepower. You
11 had to be extremely careful. You had to pay attention to what you were doing because it
12 was your own life and those were the guys [?]. So, we were always very careful about
13 what we were doing because it was bad enough having to deal with the elements and
14 getting sniped at which happened very often, that we didn't want to increase the
15 possibility of getting killed by our own mistakes, so we were always very careful.

16 KS: Was there any incidence of racial tension that you observed?

17 FG: Oh yeah.

18 KS: Could you talk a little bit about that?

19 FG: There was of course the black power movement. In the field we didn't have
20 racial tension. There's no such thing as racial tension in the field because everybody's
21 armed, everybody's on equal ground. You have to get along because if you don't, your
22 own guys would blow you away. In the base camps is what I remembered, not in Cu Chi,
23 the 25th Infantry Division. I saw it over in Long Binh. There was a huge military depot.
24 That's where I saw it more because there was more blacks and there was more soldiers,
25 more support units, and you may have come across this before, at the height of the war in
26 '68 there was half a million troops, but only 50 to 55,000 were actually in combat. So
27 everybody else was in the rear areas. Racial tension that I saw, well, I didn't experience it
28 personally because being of Mexican background, I fit in with the whites and with the
29 blacks. So, I never was exposed to any kind of...I knew that it was there. I knew that the
30 blacks were very hostile, especially when Martin Luther King was assassinated in April
31 of '68, especially hostile. As far as them actually doing something, we just knew it was

1 there, the potential for riots was there, the stockade was full. They called it LBJ, Long
2 Binh Jail. It was full of guys that were there because of drugs, killing somebody, killing
3 a civilian. I heard, but I haven't come across anything about it, but I heard that there was
4 a riot there in 1968 where the guards actually turned the machine guns on our own guys.
5 I've never heard anything else. I remember that there was some talk about that in 1968 at
6 the stockade. The stockade was very dangerous because of the dope dealers and all the
7 different people. They just didn't want any part of the war and they preferred to be in
8 prison than fighting. Have you come across anything?

9 KS: I've not, but that's something that can be looked into. That's interesting.

10 FG: Yes, because it did happen, and racial tension was there but it was not in the
11 field to the best of my knowledge and experience, not out in the combat areas. It just
12 didn't exist because there was no...it just didn't exist. You could be right next to the
13 black guys and the white guys, and everybody was your friend, everybody was your
14 brother, because you had to be because you've got to deal with the enemy, you've got to
15 deal with your buddies. So base camps, I remember there being some hostile situations
16 but nothing that you could say that was a riot; not during the time that I was there.

17 KS: You mentioned drugs. How prevalent was that? You hear stories as far as...

18 FG: I think that that's been taken out of context because sure there was pot in the
19 field, but as far as heroin, cocaine, I never saw anything. I only heard about it, and I
20 knew that a lot of the guys that were in Long Binh at the penitentiary were because of
21 drugs, and as far as that stereotype of drug-crazed Vietnam veterans, it's a stereotype. I
22 didn't see any of it. I know that there was a lot of marijuana. That was more of an outlet,
23 more of a recreation thing. As far as the other stuff, it existed, it doesn't mean that it
24 didn't exist, but as far as it being a problem, I don't think so because I didn't see it.
25 Maybe it was available at bigger base camps or at rear areas, but it was happening. I
26 know guys were sending marijuana back in their personal belongings. For example, I
27 remember one guy [?] sent them home, [?]. I just wanted to get out of there. I never
28 messed with it, didn't care for it. It's bad enough being there, and then to complicate it
29 with something like that, I just was not interested.

30 KS: How often did you correspond with friends and family back home?

1 FG: Weekly. I tried to write as much as I could. I didn't write as much as I
2 wanted to, but I got plenty of mail and that kept me going. My girlfriend wrote two or
3 three times a week, my parents wrote at least twice a week, and different people write. I
4 would write as often as I could, just maybe at least once a week. It wasn't a priority. I
5 didn't want to worry my parents. That was the thing. I didn't want to worry them
6 because I knew that they were seeing a lot of things on TV and we were in some bad
7 situations but I didn't want to compound their stress by me telling them about what was
8 going on, so I tried not to share or say anything, just the usual, "I'm okay, everything's
9 alright, how's the family," and there was nothing about, "So and so got killed, we were
10 ambushed," nothing [?]. I was to the point that my information would indicate that, "Do
11 you want your family notified in case you're wounded," and I said, "No." Wounded,
12 why should you...if I'm killed obviously they're going to find out, but not if you're
13 wounded. Why complicate it, because I knew that they were worried and I just didn't
14 want them to be even more concerned about what was going on; not that they didn't care,
15 but it was bad enough me being there. Now that I'm older and now that I have a family
16 of my own I understand where they were coming from, and they must have been a bundle
17 of nerves. That's how I know my mother was.

18 KS: Were you wounded in Vietnam?

19 FG: Well, my hearing was effected by a mortar round. I cut my hand during a
20 mortar attack. No, I came close to getting shot a lot of times, mortars nearby, but never
21 stopped a round. Gosh, I remember many times being out and just hearing the rounds
22 going over your head, zipping by. Many occasions we knew that they were shooting
23 directly at us because we were either on top of a bunker and somebody would take a shot
24 100 yards away or 200 yards away and I knew it was shooting at us. You could hear the
25 rounds going right by us. So, no, I was very fortunate, very blessed, not being hit. I was
26 always near where rounds fell, mortar rounds especially, and always near the rounds that
27 were coming by or stray rounds, it was common, every day thing, so you get used to it.
28 You get used to crouching. You learned not to make yourself a target because being out
29 in the rice paddy and the jungle where snipers could see you, so you just try to be
30 camouflaged at all time and try not to stand out so you wouldn't make yourself a target.

1 KS: What was your opinion of your leadership, the American leadership, more
2 directly in the field? Did you find your tactics were successful or adequate? Did you
3 agree with the way things were being...

4 FG: I wasn't in a position to disagree, but the one thing we did agree on as
5 soldiers was that there was no goal. There was no end to that. Of course later on you
6 find out that's where we failed, having a direct mission of winning the war. We were just
7 trying to comply with what was Kennedy's policy, and then Johnson and then Nixon, and of
8 course there's the argument that says that we were perpetuating the war by corporations
9 that were wanting there to be war to be making a profit off the ammunition and all the
10 things that come with having the war. I don't know, but I do know that one of the things
11 that I believed in at the time and firmly believe in right now is patriotism; my country
12 right or wrong. I firmly believe in that. I know at that time that our mission was to fight
13 communism. Communism, per se, still exists, but socialism doesn't, and that's what we
14 were fighting was the Russians, the USSR's goal of dominating the world with socialism
15 and we stopped it in Vietnam. It may have taken 20 years, but we stopped it. There is no
16 more USSR. There is no more aggression of that nature as was experienced in Vietnam,
17 as was experienced in Afghanistan. It doesn't exist anymore. So in that regard, we did
18 our job. It took a while, but that was the mission as far as I remember. That was the
19 mission, to eliminate and to fight communism. At that time I didn't know that there was a
20 difference between socialism and communism. In my mind, they were all communists.
21 But like I said, we did succeed as far as that's concerned.

22 KS: Did you have access to any American newspapers or military newspapers
23 while you were in Vietnam?

24 FG: Sure they were there, but I didn't have any interest in them. Gosh, that's a
25 good question, because I don't remember. I think maybe a few times when my parents
26 sent me the Avalanche-Journal. Stars and Stripes, I know that it was provided to us and I
27 know that we had to know what was going on in Vietnam. One thing that we shared that
28 we did keep up with, that I remember keeping up with, was the siege of Khe Sanh. They
29 were under siege, and that could have happened to anybody. The only reason it didn't
30 happen in our base camp was because we were so close to Saigon and because the
31 Saigon-Tan Son Nhut air base was there and so there was a lot of fighter-bombers there.

1 Khe Sanh was in the middle of a valley and was surrounded by a valley so that the North
2 Vietnamese were bombing them with artillery and heavy guns. See, where I was at, we
3 didn't have to face that. The highest, to the best that I recall, the highest firepower that
4 they had using against us was the rockets, and that was it. I've heard some guys say that
5 there were some tanks, that the North Vietnamese had some tanks down in Tay Ninh.
6 They knew that to be true. But, that was the extent of their firepower that they used
7 against us.

8 KS: You mention early on that while you were out in the field at times when you
9 would venture out to the surrounding villages, how much contact did you have with
10 Vietnamese civilian population?

11 FG: I found it, for me, it was interesting because as a child I made several trips to
12 Mexico and being in those villages reminded me of Mexico to an extent. I liked hanging
13 out because I wasn't white and I wasn't black so they accepted me more readily than they
14 would accept other GI's. They were very polite, and they would share their food. To get
15 away from C-rations, they would go eat with them. The military officers frowned upon
16 that. They didn't want us to fraternize with the civilians. We just would go in the
17 villages, especially if it was a small village that we knew that there wasn't any Viet Cong
18 around. Danger was all over the place, but if we could reason that we would be okay
19 then we would hang out, spend some time over there, try to communicate as much as
20 possible, and that was it. The thing that I think that may have reduced fraternizing with
21 the Vietnamese was the fact that they didn't want to take part in the fighting. The South
22 Vietnamese Army was the sorriest ever. I'm sure that maybe at one time they fought or
23 wanted to fight, but I never saw it. They were hanging out and partying and drinking
24 beer while we were going off to do the dirty work. In that sense, we despised them. I
25 don't remember ever establishing a close relationship with the male Vietnamese. I think
26 the only one that I ever established a close relationship with was with a guy that had been
27 a Viet Cong and was one of our advisors, one of our scouts. Otherwise, I despised them
28 simply because they didn't want to fight for their own country; I just couldn't see why
29 not. Of course now we know different.

30 KS: Was your unit involved in any civic action projects?

1 FG: I know that the medics would go into the villages and offer minimal medical
2 care to the villagers and peasants. That was it. Because of the way the war was gong,
3 because we couldn't trust them to provide anything, that's just the way it was. It was
4 their fault because of the way they treated us. On many occasions we'd find people that
5 worked on the base camp, we'd find them out dead on the jungle after a firefight. They'd
6 be cutting our hair during the day and then trying to kill us at night, so that was hard to
7 deal with. Other than that, I had to deep, very deep hatred of Vietnamese and it took me
8 a long time to get over it and it took me a long time to even accept them as a people. It
9 was part of the training. Remember what I said earlier, training was, "This is how you're
10 going to kill Charlie," and sometime in the late '70s I was working on a program that was
11 after the war ended and there were refugees coming to the United States and I wound up
12 working on a program and we were tending to some clients who were Vietnamese. That
13 was hard to deal with because at one time I thought they were trying to kill me, and now
14 here I am trying to provide services to them. So, I had a very difficult time. But, [?]
15 because they'd been in Saigon, and I accepted that.

16 KS: What do you remember most about combat, about being out in the field?

17 FG: Gosh, the level of excitement. Sure, it was frightening, but it was exciting.
18 It was very, very exciting, the epitome of being [?], especially if you get out alive
19 because it was so many...there's no set pattern to combat. There is no set time, there is
20 no predictable outcome. Plus, the nature of the war, the style of the war, guerilla warfare,
21 we had superior firepower, they had their often times obsolete weapons. So, we had them
22 outgunned so that in my role, as a soldier, it was more being right in the middle and
23 watching fighter bombers come in and drop bombs, helicopters coming in and just
24 blowing up the villages and artillery, Air Force gunships, they called them Snoopy, they
25 had many guns on them. They would come in the night. B-52 bombings, we had a lot of
26 that where I was at. So, whenever large groups of Viet Cong would get together, North
27 Vietnamese, I knew they were there but I never saw them. There was a saying, "Spend
28 artillery like a millionaire." In other words, lay out 100, 200, 300 rounds. The whole
29 idea is to blow them away because frustration of not being able to see them, not being
30 able to have some solid contact...the unit I was with was very famous for taking care of
31 their job, wasting Viet Cong. We were very good at it, and the Viet Cong respected our

1 unit, and we respected them. But, ours was a very difficult job because we were on the
2 route from North Vietnam to Saigon and in thinking about where we were at and
3 knowing now that we were in the middle of the North Vietnamese Army sends chills up
4 my spine because we were right in the middle of it. They chose not to attack until [?],
5 and that's after I had left. That's where some of the guys that I've been in contact with,
6 that's what happened was it wasn't Viet Cong, it was North Vietnamese soldiers. For
7 me, it was oh, just Viet Cong.

8 KS: Did you come in contact with any wildlife, insects or snakes? Was that ever
9 a problem out in the field?

10 FG: Any what?

11 KS: Wildlife, any problems with snakebites, insect bites?

12 FG: Not me, I saw them.

13 KS: You did?

14 FG: There were a lot of snakes and insects. I never got bit, but they were there.
15 We would see them. We knew where they were at and we would see them. You can't be
16 squeamish in the jungle. You have to learn to wake up with bugs crawling over you,
17 things slithering around. It was a part of being there. As far as I know, there was some
18 tigers. Of course there were monkeys all over the place. Other than that, I didn't see any.
19 I know we shot a lot of water buffalos because they'd be out roaming around in the night
20 and we didn't know it, so we wound up blowing up a lot of the water buffalos and
21 monkeys, dogs, things like that. But, they were there.

22 KS: What about insecticides? Did your unit use insecticides?

23 FG: We had bug spray. We had mosquito repellent that didn't work. That was it.

24 KS: What about Agent Orange? Did you...

25 FG: We'd get sprayed with that. The area, virtually all of South Vietnam was
26 sprayed with Agent Orange. Do you know why they called it Agent Orange? The barrels
27 that they were shipped in had an orange ring around them, so therefore there was an
28 Agent Orange, Agent Blue, Agent Green. Agent Orange was the main herbicide that was
29 sprayed in the area that I was at. One time the Department of Defense sent me a letter
30 saying that I had been in an area where there was 22 million gallons of Agent Orange
31 sprayed. We'd see the helicopters flying around and this mist, planes going around and

1 spraying stuff. We didn't think about it. So, we were breathing the spray, and when
2 you'd go in the jungle you could tell that it was dead. It was a defoliant. But, we were
3 never warned about it. There was no precautions about being around Agent Orange, or if
4 they were spraying for us to cover up. Nobody ever said anything.

5 KS: You mentioned a letter. When did you receive this letter from the
6 government?

7 FG: Sometime in the '70s.

8 KS: So it was after your service?

9 FG: After my tour because then there was an empty...the military's being
10 accused...veterans would complain about physical ailments, saying that it was directly
11 related to the spraying of the herbicides. So then, after a period of time, the Department
12 of Defense started sending out letters to – I know I got one – stating that you were in this
13 area, and this area we sprayed so many million gallons of Agent Orange. So, I know that
14 I was there. I remember breathing that stuff and being in it whenever it was being
15 sprayed. The opinion of the VA right now is that if you set foot in Vietnam, you were
16 exposed. As to the extent, it all depends on where you were at, what you ate. They're
17 still hurting from that. One of the biggest problems I understand right now is that all the
18 ordinance was left unexploded in the jungle, since it's been 30 years, 25 years since the
19 war, whenever there's an unexploded shell that explodes, it stirs up the chemicals in the
20 ground so that the effects are still being felt. Over the years, I've read articles about the
21 medical problems that they experienced and birth defects and things like that. I know
22 that I was exposed and I presently am going through the Agent Orange screening at the
23 Veteran's Administration for regular physicals and checkups. There's been some guys
24 that have been awarded disabilities because of their ailments, but it's very difficult to
25 prove. It's very difficult to get a pension, a disability rating out of there because you
26 have to be dead. So, it's a terrible situation, not only for the government but for the
27 soldiers.

28 KS: Is there anything else you would like to add about your time in country?

29 FG: Well, in country I was just a regular soldier, no heroic adventures. I was just
30 doing my job. I know guys that did do a lot of heroic things and perform well under
31 combat. But, it was a time that was complicated. I'm sure it was complicated for the

1 whole country, not just soldiers. I know that sooner or later, there had to be a major
2 conflict of ideologies, and that's what happened in Vietnam. The goal was to eliminate
3 communism and we took care of that job, socialism now as we know it. But, one thing
4 that I am interested in and hopefully I'll be able to provide you some more data later on
5 because I haven't heard anything about it, is there was a place in Fort Sill, Oklahoma
6 called the Special Processing Detachment that was a processing center for guys that had
7 been AWOL from Vietnam. We know that there was a lot of deserters, we know that
8 there was a lot of AWOLs, but Fort Sill, I know because I was there and that's where
9 they had the stockade and the stockade was full of people that were AWOL, either going
10 to Vietnam or coming back from Vietnam. I know that there was some...what did they
11 call it, oh God, I remember because I was there. One time a group of GI's got together
12 and put together an underground newspaper called the Fort Sill Daily Pig.

13 KS: Daily Pig? Okay.

14 FG: And it was articles against the war, articles against the Army. It was put
15 together by some guys that were by the clerks at the special processing detachment and I
16 was involved in it because I helped staple and I helped to distribute them out, and as a
17 result of that I wound up getting transferred. There were some guys that were convicted
18 of subversive activity, and I never heard anything else about it. I estimate that there was
19 maybe 40-50 guys involved. I know that I was singled out because I helped to distribute
20 them in downtown [?] and I was arrested the next day by the MPs and I was transferred
21 out of that unit into another unit, and the leaders, the ring leaders of the whole thing, they
22 were transferred. One of them was convicted, some of them were busted. The whole
23 thing was broken up, and there was never any mention of it again.

24 KS: What year was this?

25 FG: '69, Spring of 1969, March of 1969, in Fort Sill, Oklahoma. It was called
26 the Special Processing Detachment.

27 KS: You left Vietnam in December of '68?

28 FG: '68.

29 KS: '68, and you went back to California?

30 FG: No, I wound up being in Fort Sill.

31 KS: Okay, that's where you came directly after?

1 FG: Yes.

2 KS: Okay. How were you treated when you got back to the United States?

3 FG: Well...

4 KS: Do you recall any demonstrations for instance when you got off the plane
5 your first day back?

6 FG: I got back at night to Oakland. There was no one. It was the middle of the
7 night so there was nobody around. We got processed through in the middle of the night,
8 so I didn't see anything, even when I came home. People were just in different...of
9 course there were no parades and there was nothing. I was just glad to be home. But,
10 once I was here a couple of days, I noticed it. I remember some of my friends who I
11 graduated from high school with said, "I haven't seen you for a while!" "Yeah, well, I
12 been in the war." Then some of my friends that graduated afterwards, they were
13 volunteering or they were being drafted to go to 'Nam. I didn't do anything to try and
14 stop them or to educate them or to make them aware or to caution them about Vietnam
15 because they were going to go either way. One friend in particular, when I came home I
16 was partying and I ran into him and he told me that he was on his way to Vietnam, and I
17 said, "Good luck." I didn't say anything, and he wound up losing his leg over there. So,
18 it was just nobody wanted to talk about it, so eventually I just wound up withdrawing and
19 socializing with other veterans, and eventually there was about 15 or 20 of us that would
20 get together on occasion because nobody else cared about the veterans or what we've
21 been through or what we were experiencing. As a matter of fact, there was a lot of us
22 were having difficulties in trying to get a grasp on our role in Vietnam, especially after
23 1975 when the war ended, and technically it was a loss. So, there was a lot of us that
24 were having problems trying to make some sense out of the whole thing so that we
25 wound up forming a group at the local Veteran's Administration. I think at one time we
26 had, oh gosh, groups of 15, 20, 30 guys that would meet weekly at the VA. From there it
27 grew to...I think now, what happened was that all that data that was being gathered by
28 the Vietnam Veterans that work for the VA, he was indoctrinating it and providing it to
29 the leadership of the VA to where eventually there was some need for treatment and need
30 for vet centers because the way that guys were having problems with drugs or alcohol,
31 [?]. That took a long time to take hold of, to be recognized so that our getting together

1 informally helped a lot of guys, and at the same time it helped the veteran's
2 administration to understand that there was a need for authorized treatment of soldiers
3 that were PTSD, shell shocked, and it's still going, it's still going. There's a lot of guys.
4 After every one, there's casualties. Now there's World War II veterans that are coming
5 out with Post Traumatic Stress Disorder, Korean War veterans, they're coming out. So,
6 there's lots happening. With respect to the veterans and their own PTSD, it depends on
7 the level of combat and depends on the level of what you did, how you did it, how you let
8 it effect you, how determined you are to continuously be a survivor or even now be a
9 survivor of those memories of Vietnam because they're not always pleasant, and it's
10 something that wont go away. See, this is what I learned from my friend Fernando who
11 is now a psychologist. He says, "Don't even try to forget, man, you're not going to
12 forget it. It's there. Enjoy it, and the thing you have to enjoy is the fact that you're alive
13 and there's a lot of guys that are dead. Don't even try, because it's not going to work. I
14 know. I studied this thing, I majored in psychology, got my Ph.D. in psychology. It's
15 something that's always going to be around and veterans are always going to have to deal
16 with it." So, I enjoy it and I try to do my best to let others know about it. I've been
17 wanting to come over here and share some more because Dr. Reckner encouraged me and
18 some of the board members. I wanted to open the door so that other guys like my friend
19 Terry, I'll get some more guys to start. What would be interesting, Kim, would be to see
20 if we can get this one particular unit's history for there to be some record of it because I
21 can only provide a small part of it. But, if you manage to get enough guys just from this
22 one unit, then there will be something to put together from what happened in this
23 particular time. I suppose one of the strongest messages that comes out is that regardless
24 of what our roles were in the war, what we may have experienced, some of us are
25 successful, some of us are comfortable. Sure we think about it, sure we get up in tears
26 whenever we hear Taps and see the flag going by and things like that. It's important for
27 people to know that because it's going to happen again. Case in point, the Persian Gulf;
28 complete opposite. Half a million troops at one time, start the war, you get the support of
29 the whole country, and you win it. You take care of the job. Vietnam was completely
30 different. They built up to half a million troops in 1968. Making the tour of duty a year
31 was a mistake because you're taking experienced, seasoned veterans and sending them

1 home without any kind of deprogramming, if you will. How can you expect to win? In
2 the first place, there wasn't a goal in mind. I don't remember ever being told that the war
3 is going to end by this day, once we take care of this we're going to go home, nothing. I
4 mean, it was just a day to day thing with very little in terms of direction from
5 Washington. The politicians, whatever they were doing, was not for the benefit of this
6 war. The career soldiers were not doing anything, they were doing it for their own
7 political reasons. I know that there's a lot of research that has been done since the war,
8 and there are some more things that have been said and written about clarifying the
9 mysteries of Vietnam. This place is going to be a critical part of the truth about Vietnam
10 because there's a lot of things coming out of here. By bringing all sides into discussion,
11 it helps, it helps. One thing I do like about Dr. Reckner's direction is that he wants more
12 input from the soldiers, individuals. That's part of my goal is to get more guys to
13 participate. There's a lot of heroes here in Lubbock, Texas. You wouldn't believe the
14 kinds of things they went through. My role in Vietnam was very minor. Some of the
15 guys that I know were actually wounded and got 100% disabilities from getting shot six
16 or seven times, or losing both legs, losing a leg. They just never talk about it. They don't
17 think about themselves as heroes or anything or any kind of special person. They just
18 hang out, collect the pension [laughs]. When I told them, "Go to the Vietnam Center.
19 Help them!"

20 KS: I meant to ask you about your time in Oklahoma. Could you tell me a little
21 bit more about the newspapers and what prompted you to be a part?

22 FG: Peer pressure.

23 KS: Peer pressure?

24 FG: By then I knew that the war was not going. Since I got out of line...the
25 public demonstrations were taking place. I was not anti-war; I was more anti-military. In
26 other words, I had come to the conclusion that if the leadership of the military wasn't
27 behind the soldiers, then this rotating troops was just going to continue and there's not
28 going to be an end to it. Plus, we had more sophisticated thinkers that would reason these
29 things out, and knew and had a better grasp of what was going on. I was very naïve still,
30 even after Vietnam. I was very naïve. But, there was these college graduates that were

1 more aware of the politics of the war and were more determined to see an end to it. So,
2 in places like Fort Sill, Oklahoma, it took a hold because...

3 KS: This is Kim Sawyer continuing the interview with Frank Gutierrez on disc
4 two. It is February 5th, 2001 at 1:05 in the afternoon and we're in the Special Collections
5 Library at Texas Tech. Mr. Gutierrez, could you start by talking a little bit more about
6 some of the veteran's activities, recognition activities that you were involved in, maybe
7 late '70s, early '80s?

8 FG: The first event at the national level that I attended with some friends of mine
9 was the dedication of the Wall on Veteran's Day 1982. It was very...at that time,
10 veterans were just starting to be recognized. I had returned here to campus to finish up
11 my degree because I had dropped out in the middle '70s and didn't finish my degree, so I
12 was back on campus and in the Fall of '82 I was in my final classes and noticed that [?]
13 friends there was virtually nothing available on campus relative to the war in Vietnam.
14 So, we became concerned. As a result of the interest, ongoing interest in Vietnam and in
15 veterans after the war, we found out that there was going to be a dedication of the Wall.
16 Of course we'd been keeping up with the project from the very beginning and we
17 traveled to Washington to be there on the day of the dedication. We drove, I myself with
18 three other veterans, disabled veterans, 100% disabled, combat wounds. One of them is a
19 paraplegic, so I made arrangements to take time off from my classes and turn in some
20 assignments so I could go because driving over there, it's at least no less than a week and
21 it takes three days to drive to Washington. So, we drove over there. It was very exciting
22 because it was the first time that there had ever been a national...it was the first time
23 national attention had been directed to Vietnam veterans, and from the very beginning
24 you could tell that this was a major event because it was called national for one. So, we
25 checked into the hotel and started to look around and being curious, we had arrived at
26 Washington in the middle of the night, we decided to go to the mall where the memorial
27 is at and look for it. There were some guys there and we asked, "Where's the Wall?" Of
28 course it wasn't lit and we almost fell into it as a result of there being no lighting. It was
29 a very moving occasion because this was the first time...we were the first ones to see this
30 thing. So we looked around with flashlights and we couldn't actually find any names
31 because there were some people, some volunteers there, but there were just too many

1 people at that hour in the morning to find names so we just left it until the next morning.
2 Part of the events of course had to do with a parade. I'm sure that you heard that there
3 was no parades for veterans and veterans seemed to harp on that a lot and insisted to there
4 being no parades, and this is true. So, this was the first one, at the national level, that had
5 the interest of veterans. There was several hundred thousand veterans in that place and of
6 course there was reunions and all the major infantry troops had their reunions. I went and
7 signed up for the reunion with the 25th Infantry Division and wound up marching with
8 them in the parade. One of the highlights of the whole thing was meeting Master
9 Sergeant Roy Benevides, the last Congressional Medal of Honor recipient. He was in his
10 glory at that time because Regan had just bestowed a medal to him. We ran into him
11 there at the memorial and being from Texas and being Mexican-American, we
12 immediately became a group and so we hung out. It was a very exciting experience
13 because he had the attention of everybody, and since he had just received the medal after
14 a 20 year battle with the Department of Defense or the Army, because of the time that
15 had transpired since the actual deed and not being able to locate witnesses and documents
16 so that it had taken that long to get it. He was very popular as a veteran. Like I said,
17 there was generals and colonels and high ranking officers going down Washington's
18 streets and they would see him and they would stop in the middle of the street and they
19 would get out of their vehicles and they would go up to them and hug them and salute
20 them and do an about face and they're gone. Many women would go up to him and hug
21 him and kiss him on the cheek. They were overwhelmed by his presence. That was quite
22 exciting because by being around him, the attention rubbed off on us. So, and of course
23 the reunion, and what makes the reunion so special at that time is because the parades
24 that we never had and being with the veterans of the 25th Infantry Division and actually
25 being in a parade down Constitution Avenue was very, very exciting to say the least, but
26 at the same time we could see that people actually did respect veterans and did want to
27 recognize veterans at the time. We were overwhelmed because we had not seen this
28 before. We had been ostracized, ostracized and castigated all along for the political loss
29 of the war, and it was quite moving. So, we went to the parade and wound up at the
30 memorial and the whole division marched up to the memorial and saluted it and then we
31 were dismissed, so we hung out there for three days I think, just hanging out.

1 KS: Did you catch up with old friends?

2 FG: Yeah, and I found out about guys that had died that I didn't know anything
3 about, so that was a major event in my life because many of the guys that were there had
4 not been in touch with anybody since the war, so we were very excited of course but we
5 were also very proud of the fact that we were survivors and we were there to honor the
6 guys that didn't come back. That was the main thing. I think I mentioned at that time
7 already there was talk of the three soldier statue that eventually was dedicated in
8 Veteran's Day of 1984. We also made the effort and spent money out of our own pockets
9 to go and to be there for that event because it was also going to be a get together on a
10 national level. So, we traveled to these things, and mainly for my friends and myself, it
11 was mainly a cathartic...

12 KS: At least! Yeah.

13 FG: Yes, because for so long we'd been wondering...one of the mistakes that we
14 made [?] and in the end people were very much opposed to us as veterans, not that we
15 cared that much. It's just that traditionally veterans are always recognized, and Vietnam
16 didn't work out so veterans were blamed for that. But as I said, being around in the
17 middle or part of a reunion, several thousand if not hundreds of thousands of veterans, is
18 the greatest, one of the greatest feelings that there is because we all took part in
19 something that we believed in. We all took part as a result of our belief in the country
20 and duty and honor and all those good things, and we believed in it, and it took a long
21 time in coming but we eventually got the recognition that needed to be bestowed upon
22 the veterans. After the '84 dedication of the three soldier statue, by then there was
23 already discussion of the fact that New York City was having a ticker tape parade and
24 that happened in May of 1985, and we traveled over there and drove...

25 KS: From Lubbock to New York City?

26 FG: We rented a van, and decided to go, and saved our money for [?]. We just
27 rented a van and just went. Of course we stopped in Washington and there was a lot of
28 guys that were there and they were also going to New York City. So, we drove to New
29 York City and we checked into the Reunion Hotel and it was probably, well, on the level
30 of a national event it was very significant because it was New York City. In the past, the
31 veteran's parade had been there after World War I, World War II, and I think Korean

1 Veterans got it. I know the Persian Gulf people did. This was something that is special
2 from New York City because you march from the parade staging area was at Battery Park
3 in Brooklyn, so units were marching across the Brooklyn Bridge into Manhattan into
4 what they called the Canyon of Heroes, so it was very exciting because it was confetti
5 and trash being thrown from windows. There were piles of confetti and different
6 streamers and paper that they'd already thrown from the guys that had been in front of us.
7 So, it was estimated that there was almost a million veterans in the parade, and of course
8 along the sides there were several thousands if not millions of people. But it was an
9 experience because this was New York City!

10 KS: Did you march in this one?

11 FG: Yes. I think I was with my...with the state, I think it was with the State of
12 Texas because we all stuck together. Let me think. We did march with it, and we did go
13 with the state because my friends were there. We went through there to Manhattan and
14 New York City was dedicating it's Memorial there in Manhattan at Cadman Plaza they
15 had the memorial. They call it Living Memorial where it's inscribed with the actual
16 content of letters that were exchanged between veterans and family members back here.
17 It's situated there at Cagdman Plaza where the buildings, the skyline of...and it was
18 packed and there was a fireworks demonstration, and it was a party. It was a party! I
19 think a year after the New York event, in June of '86 we went to Chicago where they had
20 also a reunion and events for veterans there, and that was also very exciting because
21 equal number of veterans. They hadn't been to Washington or New York or anywhere
22 from the Midwest, so Chicago was their event and it was also a very moving experience
23 because of the quality and the content of the parade. The people in general, very, very
24 patriotic and very recognized veterans today. That was also an event. I did manage to
25 take a good group of photographs and slides that I still have. After the '86 event,
26 Houston had an event in Memorial Day of 1987. My understanding is that they have
27 them every year, but this one was what they call the Great Texas Stand Down and
28 Reunion in Houston, and it was a good event because we hung around with more Texas
29 veterans. There was concerts, there was reunions. It was a great event. We also ran into
30 Sergeant Benevedez again. He was the Parade Marshal. He had him up on a pedestal.

1 So, we got to visit with him again. As a matter of fact, he's been on the Tech campus
2 several times.

3 KS: Oh he has?

4 FG: Yes. He died two years ago. He was on campus the first time I think in the
5 early '80s. We had invited him to come and speak at a veteran's function and he came in
6 and brought on the campus. I believe that the president of the university at that time was
7 Lauro Cavazos and so we arranged a meeting between the president of the university and
8 Sgt. Benevedez, and he also spoke to the ROTC classes. They went bananas when they
9 saw him because I presume that in their military history and then the Medal of Honor
10 recipients and him being the last one and him being there, to him it was an honor and
11 they recognized it. They gave him a speech. He also gave a speech to the Rotary Club
12 that we took him to. Overall, let me see, Houston and then Los Angeles had an event. I
13 think it was 1988. They also had an event in LA and we drove up there and spent about
14 three or four days there. I suppose that the reason we go to these places is to party as
15 veterans. All the veterans come because there has been plenty of tears shed, there's been
16 plenty of sorrow, there's been plenty of tragedy that has happened to veterans, so these
17 events are more for enjoying than for grieving. I mean, sure guys get to reminiscing in
18 memory of the guys that were killed over there, but for the most part we all benefit from
19 it because we were together and we can...well, it's an outlet and we can see that there's
20 other veterans that have also experienced some of the same things and are still
21 experiencing them. As far as the memories of Vietnam, the fact that we hold it dear in
22 our hearts just won't go away. It's not going to go away. Being that there's places like
23 the Vietnam Archive now, it links up all of these different things and it's important
24 because we get different historical aspects of the war itself, veterans and post Vietnam
25 and veteran's experiences after Vietnam. That was the last time I was at a national event
26 as far as veterans are concerned. No, I lie! When the women's statue was dedicated in
27 '93 Joe Gallindo and myself, we flew over there because it was only two of us. So we
28 flew over to Washington to be there for the Vietnam Women's Memorial Project and of
29 course Glenda Goodacre was the designer of that. She was the woman of the hour in
30 Washington, and thousands of ladies were there. It was a good event. They kept looking
31 for guys that they'd patched up. That was the interesting thing because many of them

1 had not been to a national event since the war, so for them it was an event to come out,
2 come out of the closet so to speak, because there had never been a national effort. So
3 they had their parade and they had their parties, their reunions. My friend Joe, being a
4 paraplegic, he was always being stopped, “Where did you get Medevaced? When did
5 you get stateside? Which hospital were you at?” These were the women that had served
6 as nurses that were asking these questions, and as a matter of fact, they did come across
7 some guys that they treated. So, it was quite moving because they had assumed that these
8 guys had died and started describing or relating information that only they would know
9 so they found each other again. It was quite moving. The parade was special because the
10 saying at the time was, “Welcome home, ladies!” So there were thousands of them; I
11 don’t know exactly how many, but there was a lot of them. They had their parties. They
12 had one party called, “From the Delta to the DMZ, rock and roll from the ’60s and ’70s.”

13 KS: A lot of fun?

14 FG: Oh yeah, a lot of fun! So, that was the last time I went to a national event.
15 Of course locally I belong to veterans groups, the American GI Forum, the VFW, and
16 I’ve taken part in some of the events here at the Vietnam Archives. I’ve gotten to know
17 Dr. Reckner and I know several of the board members, and one of the main reasons that I
18 am involved and want to participate is because of a lack of veteran’s participation. Many
19 veterans, I don’t know how many veterans you’ve talked to, but some veterans just don’t
20 care to let anybody know what they experienced, and I don’t blame them. But, they’re
21 there and I’ve got some friends that little by little feel sure that they’ll be contacting you.
22 I’ll give you names so that you can contact them, and I’ve asked them that they need to
23 because everything else is there. We’ve even been at the same table with our former
24 enemies. So, we need to get the veterans to start contributing and putting their stories in
25 there because there are some hellacious stories that local veterans have that need to be a
26 part of this center. So, I’ve been doing that, and those copies that you gave me about the
27 project, I’ve been circulating them.

28 KS: Good, good.

29 FG: Yes, hopefully you’ll get some calls. You ought to hear some of the things
30 these guys say. They just don’t care, and say, “What the hell! Don’t talk to me about it.
31 What do I know?” Look, you went through a lot and you experienced a lot and people

1 need to know what you went through and what you feel. It's important because they're
2 attitude. It's not a bad attitude. A lot of it is survivor's guilt. A lot of it is downright
3 mad because of the turnout; well, not necessarily mad, but very much aware of the role in
4 Vietnam and the historical importance of Vietnam as far as US history is concerned.
5 They're especially tolerant of draft dodgers and the Clinton types, the Jane Fonda's. I
6 know you've heard about the fact that veterans just do not appreciate or want anything to
7 do with Jane Fonda or her husband, Tom Hayden, because of his position on the war. So
8 there was a great dislike of those that chose not to serve or found some way to avoid
9 military service, which leads into my other interests is the minority veteran interest. My
10 experience was that most of the minorities, most of the Mexican American soldiers that I
11 ran into were in the combat units, many in Vietnam. To the best of my knowledge, let
12 me see now, Texas had something like 2,500 killed in action, total. Out of those 2,500
13 there were about 450 that were Mexican American or Spanish heritage, which is almost
14 25% of the total killed in action; very important. At the time, we were only about 10%,
15 11% of the population. The point is, we over represent the casualties. We've
16 always...well, not always, we've always represented the casualties in high numbers, and
17 part of it is because of the loyalty that we had for this country and the patriotism, and the
18 good things that have transpired as a part of military service. The main thing that I can
19 point out that the veterans were responsible for was the civil rights movement in Texas.
20 That was initiated by the American GI Forum in 1949. at that time, veterans were
21 coming home from the war and were looking for opportunities to become mainstream
22 citizens, and many of their encountered barriers or biases based on race or some other
23 bias. But, the main thing, the event that caused the American GI Forum to come forth
24 was that there was a World War II KIA by the name of Felix Longoria who was denied
25 burial in an Anglo cemetery I believe in Three Rivers, Texas. Well there was a doctor by
26 the name of Hector Garcia who had been a medical officer during World War II, lived in
27 Corpus Christi, and took issue of the fact that Private Longoria was denied burial in the
28 cemetery. As a result of that, the event caused for him to reach out to other veterans to
29 organize and approach the lack of opportunities for Hispanic veterans. They did a
30 magnificent job of taking issue with several things in the '50s and the '60s that brought
31 us to this present situation that we have, the Voting Rights Act that was implemented in

1 1964 and along the way they've always been a part of the Civil Rights veteran's
2 movements. Had it not been for them, as a group, we wouldn't have the numbers of
3 elected officials, especially down in South Texas and in the valley, veterans that actually
4 participated in different wars that have become elected officials that continue to promote
5 patriotism and service of minorities. The black experience is something that is very
6 vague. I don't know if you've noticed that. It's very vague as far as determining exactly
7 how many blacks participated and how many were killed in action. It's always been a
8 mystery because other than having their actual personnel files, there's nothing that
9 indicates race. With Hispanics, it's less difficult because of the name. You can
10 distinguish between Puerto Rican Hispanics as opposed to Mexican and Texas Hispanics
11 because of the name. Puerto Rican names are usually hyphenated, and they also have a
12 lot of Anglo names in Puerto Rican communities. They're easier to distinguish, plus
13 there was a lot of black Puerto Ricans. That's something that's pretty vague. Hopefully
14 at some point the Archives can have some input on that because there was a lot of blacks
15 that served.

16 KS: I wanted to ask you, you spoke about all the different events that you went to
17 in the early '80s and on up. What do you think changed in American society? Why were
18 Vietnam veterans all of a sudden getting more recognition that they didn't have as soon
19 as the war was over? In your opinion, what do you think?

20 FG: Well, because we wouldn't go away. They trained us. They trained us to be
21 patriotic. They trained us to expect these things from our nation and our leaders and we
22 held them accountable, and that was it. If the veterans, for example, had not
23 protested...if the Vietnam veterans against the war had not united and taken to the streets
24 in Washington D.C., that war would have gone on for more years. It wasn't that
25 veterans didn't want to go to Vietnam or didn't want to take care of their job, it was just
26 that we lacked the leadership and we had too many rules and too many red tape involved
27 in getting the job done. I think that veterans are directly responsible for having put a stop
28 to that war because it came to a point where just that's it. Then, the lack of recognition
29 caused a lot of veterans to be even more rebellious and caused them to be even more
30 becoming indifferent to what was happening in society, to be associated with anything
31 that had to do with it's political process, local community events and things like that. I

1 think that...well I know for sure locally emotions were triggered off when in 1980, when
2 was it that the Iranian hostages were returned? Reagan had just beat Carter. This was
3 1978? They'd been held prisoners in Iran in Teheran for more than a year, and then they
4 were released. Reagan was the president. Carter was the president? It was '82? The
5 hostages were coming back and they got a parade. A lot of veterans got mad because
6 they said...they got caught, and they're getting recognition because they got caught,
7 simply because Vietnam veterans didn't get any recognitions. They were somewhat
8 upset because of that. So, locally, actually we had a demonstration at the Federal
9 Building.

10 KS: Here in Lubbock?

11 FG: Yes. Whenever that happened, I think it was '82, we had a demonstration
12 because of the lack of recognition of veterans by US government, and at that time, we
13 were trying to establish more services for veterans through we had to initiate letter
14 writing campaigns and different veterans organizations in order to get a vet center, for
15 example, over on 34th Street, and in order to extend the social services that were being
16 made available through the local VA's. The veterans here, as a result of the veterans
17 coming together and demanding and requesting these services, eventually we had
18 different departments established to handle the veterans. That's when the post traumatic
19 stress disorder started to come in the picture. It was after it was officially recognized as
20 an awardable pension related to combat. So good things started coming up and it was
21 directly as a result of the veterans taking issue and become elected to public office,
22 becoming elected to the higher-ranking positions of veteran's organizations like the
23 VFW, the DAV, the American Legion. So, I think in a nutshell, veterans just got tired of
24 all the negative aspects of Vietnam and just said, "Look, I've got to have some closure."
25 So, we raised money for the memorial, it was a private venture all their awards. But, one
26 thing for sure, Kim, is veterans, they may not show how much they care, they may be
27 different, but I know that from what I've seen in my experience, veterans, Vietnam
28 veterans especially, are some of the most loyal, dedicated, brotherhood. There's no
29 question about it. Sure, there's been other wars, but Vietnam was just different because
30 of the way it came about and because of political defeat. Having been a part of it makes
31 it just a different kind of place in history. From where I've been, I don't think the

1 veterans, it's not so much the parades per say but it's more the fact that yes, we have
2 come home and we have been accepted and we are apart of the military history of this
3 country. It wasn't our fault that the war turned out like that. Generals themselves, I've
4 heard them taking responsibility for things they failed to do and things that they did to us
5 that they should have thought about. For example, the spraying of Agent Orange and not
6 telling us about it. From what I've read, generals [?] that it was a carcinogen and they
7 deliberately sprayed veterans. So how do you expect veterans to feel after having gone
8 through that? Military machine almost falls apart. Leadership is very slacking and
9 morale was very, at some points, low because of the nature of the war, the way it was
10 being prosecuted. It was being in the middle of it, it's frustrating not to be able to take
11 some action, like they did in the Persian Gulf. In Vietnam, you had half a million by
12 1968. it took 10 years to build it up to that number. In the Persian Gulf, it took five
13 months to get half a million troops and then they just whopped the hell out of the country,
14 and the war's over.

15 KS: Do you think any of those decisions were based on things that had been done
16 in the past in Vietnam, maybe lessons learned?

17 FG: Plus it was the Vietnam veterans that were in charge of that war,
18 Schwartzkopf and Colin Powell. They weren't about to do the same thing as had been
19 done in Vietnam as far as sending soldiers in there without a specific goal in mind and
20 without the support of the people. That was the beauty of the Persian Gulf was that the
21 whole country was behind it, and the people that were assigned to prosecute it by Colin
22 Powell, they were combat veterans and they knew exactly what they had to do. One
23 thing for sure is that they knew that they had access to the firepower that was necessary
24 to put a stop to the threat of Saddam Hussein and his forces. They didn't finish the job.
25 They didn't get rid of Hussein and we have to live with that. I think that was the history
26 of Vietnam. Nobody wants to repeat it. Nobody wants to...well, for veterans of course
27 we have to accept the fact that it was a political loss, the only war that this country ever
28 lost. Politically and militarily, we know that 90 to 95% of the battles we won, casualties
29 inflicted and all that. But, I think this country changed to where, well, on this campus we
30 found it necessary to have a demonstration and then several years later a friend of mine
31 was teaching history here and invited me to speak to her class on Vietnam. So, I showed

1 some slides and did a presentation; as a matter of fact, I did about three or four student
2 groups. One time I spoke to I think it was a history class, a monster class, and we got a
3 standing ovation for the things that we shared.

4 KS: What time period was this?

5 FG: About '86; late '80s because Yolanda, her name, Yolanda Garcia, we've
6 known each other since we were kids and she came to Tech and got her Ph.D. in history
7 and is teaching in the Dallas area. For me, it was a lot of fun to be able to share some
8 thoughts, but I was quite surprised when they stood up and gave us a standing ovation. It
9 was myself and two other guys that spoke, and they got up and gave us a standing
10 ovation. I said, "God, this is great! Thanks!" It makes you feel good because you've
11 done something worthwhile and they appreciate it. Moments like that is when the loss of
12 the war, whatever personal sacrifices we went through were worth it because you come
13 into a classroom and share that with kids and come away feeling good and they come
14 away having learned something, it's worth it. So in that sense, that's why we do these
15 things to learn. You help to eliminate that void that's often found because of the lack of
16 veteran participation, the lack of personal histories from veterans that are necessary in
17 order to make this whole thing complete. You had the generals, you had the admirals,
18 you had the academia, the academics involved with politicians and all that. But, in any
19 war I suppose, the job isn't done until the infantry goes in and sweeps up and cleans up
20 and takes names, in any war, and I think that's what's happening with the Vietnam War.
21 All the other ones are coming together. Veterans sharing more of their feelings and their
22 thoughts. It's hard, mind you. It's very difficult, especially when dealing with the ones
23 that didn't make it back. But, remembering the individual sacrifices and what others did
24 and what we did collectively, you have to accept that because that's what it means when
25 you raise your right hand and you swear that you're going to uphold the Constitution of
26 the United States, that's what that means, win or lose, right or wrong; my country right or
27 wrong. That's what that means. I got a kick out of the Persian Gulf, the reserve guys that
28 were complaining because they had to leave school to go and fulfill their commitment in
29 the Persian Gulf. Man, that's what you're paid for; bye! That was a lot of fun because
30 there was nothing you could do. You had to go. But, it ended quickly and I think one of
31 the reasons was because the ranks of soldiers were filled with people, soldiers, men and

1 women from all levels of society, every kind of background in America was represented
2 so it seems to be in order to avoid the turmoil, the possible turmoil in America, it was
3 decided to put an early end because you can just imagine, gosh, if we only lost 58,000 in
4 Vietnam, the Persian Gulf, the possibility of high numbers of casualties was there and
5 that was everybody's worry. Fortunately we got out in less than 500, something like 430
6 or 440 killed in action. So, I think that part of it was because we had all elements of
7 society involved as opposed to Vietnam War. It was class, blacks and browns, poor
8 whites from Kentucky and the South doing the fighting and others were getting
9 deferments and going to school and figuring ways of staying out of the war. There was a
10 lot of that. But, I don't hold it against any guy that found a way to avoid service. I can
11 agree that it was hard times. I can agree that maybe this was just their way of handling it
12 was just to run away from it, avoid it all together, but there was a lot of guys that paid the
13 supreme sacrifice. I think for everybody that's necessary to point that out for everybody,
14 regardless, because for example, as a veteran, how can I be overcritical of those who
15 didn't serve if what we're doing here is for everybody and when it comes to the
16 classification of being an American citizen, we're all equal regardless. Sure there are
17 some problems. Sure we have some long-range solutions that are in the picture, but at the
18 same time this is what it's all about to be in this country. Having been in
19 Washington...have you ever been to Washington?

20 KS: A long time ago.

21 FG: Having been in Washington with hundreds of thousands of veterans at one
22 time is what it's all about, and that's where everything else is insignificant; that's what
23 it's all about. As long as that happens, [?]. As a minority I have to wave the flag because
24 there are some people that cant accept the fact, or can't accept allowing others equal
25 access to everything that this country has to offer. Some people have a problem with
26 that, and it's their problem. Being patriotic and insisting on voting rights, civil rights,
27 what have you, veteran's rights, and waving the flag, you get a lot more done just by
28 simply having that flag and standing under it. Somebody asks, "Well why are you doing
29 this?" "This is it, right here; need I say more?" So, that's why the movement of veterans
30 after World War II, the movement of Hispanic veterans after World War II is very
31 important because men were paying the ultimate sacrifice on battlefields in Europe and in

1 the Pacific. Afterwards, they started thinking, “We’re a part of this. We paid our dues,
2 and we’re a part of this,” and gave rise to the GI Bill, housing, all kinds of good things
3 that everybody should have. As far as being a veteran, a Vietnam veteran, I wouldn’t
4 have it any other way. I think there was a question in your questionnaire, “Would you do
5 it again?” I’d do it differently, and if I could keep somebody else from having to go
6 through the experience, definitely. I think most veterans would do it again, but would do
7 it differently. See, that’s the main thing. Yes, we would, but...

8 KS: But.

9 FG: Under different rules, and that’s the main thing because in talking with
10 different veterans, and I agree with them, that it just wasn’t approached right. It just was
11 not. There’s the argument about corporate America wanting to prolong or leading the
12 war in order to stimulate the economy and there’s some validity to that. Bankers have
13 been known to encourage the military intervention in places like Nicaragua for example
14 when they sent the Marine Corps in there to stabilize the country because Standard Food
15 Company needed to have a secure area so they could bring bananas to the United States,
16 so they sent the Marines in. There’s so many different things. But, I think the beauty of
17 Vietnam, if there is such a thing, is the fact that people will continue and will not allow
18 themselves to get into this mess like that. It was a mess. It was definitely a mess, not
19 only for America, but for the Veterans. It’s still going on. This place right here, it still
20 goes on. There’s a lot to come, I think. What else do we need to talk about?

21 KS: I just wanted to ask you, did you find that other Hispanics that you served
22 with, did they mostly volunteer? You were talking about patriotism being instilled as a
23 value in families. Did you come across that?

24 FG: For any Latino culture, you have this machismo thing about being in the
25 military. I suppose its part of anybody’s culture. But, for a Latino culture, it’s especially
26 important, and it’s especially important here in this country because it’s probably your
27 only opportunity to let this country know that some of them may not welcome us as
28 readily as others would. But, by the very fact that we have served this country, that
29 allows us...we’ve earned the right, let’s put it that way, we’ve earned the right to see
30 these different things. We’ve earned the right to feel this way. It’s important for young
31 people within the minority community to realize this because were it not for the veterans,

1 than we would not have been able to have a successful come forth of things like voting
2 rights, things like civil rights. But, being that we were actually in the trenches, actually in
3 combat, actually upholding the beliefs of this country, gives us even more standing if you
4 will to be a part of this culture. Veterans, in that sense, veterans are extremely important.
5 Now if we could just harness all that energy at a much better time. The veterans are so
6 opinionated. You get a group of five, ten veterans, you're going to have a fight and
7 you're going to have some disagreements. That's the beauty of this country that that's
8 just the way it is. But, on the other hand, I remember we were in a hotel. I think it was in
9 New York City, or Washington, I don't know. I think it was Washington because the
10 donut dollies, Red Cross girls had just started coming out. [?] because you remember
11 them from another time and what they did, and just having them around that was so
12 special. But, one of them said, she said...she was in the middle of a bunch of veterans
13 and she said, "I feel so safe!" "What do you mean?" "I feel so safe with all these guys,
14 all these heroes, all these guys that protected us, all these guys, I feel so safe." "I suppose
15 you should." There was a comment...comments like that are extremely important
16 because, well, one for example that I experienced in Washington in 1982, it was the
17 dedication of the Wall. Washington was at it's best, meaning law enforcement personnel,
18 everybody was at their best welcoming Vietnam veterans, and veterans were also at their
19 best because this was something we never had before. But, I heard some comments
20 about being right there in front of the capital, because years before veterans, in protesting,
21 had thrown their medals across the fence at the White House and just dumped them. But,
22 I overheard some guys that said that, "There's enough of us here that if we really wanted
23 to, we could take this capitol," and it was a chilling thought because it was so true. But,
24 that's not what it's all about for veterans, taking over the country, even though there was
25 enough there would have been some...like King of the Hill. You take the hill, you take
26 the capitol, and you're it. That's just the way, it would have been a coup de etat, and
27 there was conversation that we could take this place, right now, we could take it, just by
28 doing what they taught us what to do, we could take this place. It was just the thought!

29 KS: I wanted to back up a little bit. You mentioned you were a student at Texas
30 Tech in 1970. Is that correct?

31 FG: Yes, '71-'72.

1 KS: I just wanted to learn more about the anti-war protests here on campus, the
2 political climate during this time as far as students.

3 FG: Tech had no political climate as far as I know because it was very
4 conservative, very apathetic, let's put it that way. But, that doesn't mean that people
5 didn't have anti-war feelings. The best of my knowledge, I don't recall that the students
6 themselves actually had an anti-war protest. I don't recall. I do recall that there was
7 some outside elements, non-students and students and minority students that organized
8 the anti-war march that we held here. As far as I remember, there was only one.

9 KS: Were you present at that?

10 FG: Yeah.

11 KS: Was it on campus?

12 FG: Yes.

13 KS: Would you describe it? Do you remember where it started?

14 FG: I believe it started down Broadway and came up Broadway to Memorial
15 Circle and had a gathering at Memorial Circle with banners and flags, of course, and,
16 "Stop the War! Stop the Killing!" things like that. But, I think because Tech is mainly a
17 conservative campus, you're not going to get that. It still is, which is good. But, it was
18 critical at the time because other campuses were experiencing some extreme violence and
19 some very chaotic events that took place in the war. I suppose liberal campuses, I don't
20 know if you'd call it that, but here at Tech it was very subdued. Veterans that had served
21 early '60s, middle '60s, late '60s had blended into the student population and they just
22 wanted to get a degree and get out; I know because I was one of them. I remember some
23 guys that were students that graduated that were drafted when they were graduated.
24 There was one that I'm hoping will call you or give you his name and you can call him,
25 but he graduated...let's see, he grew up in Levelland, went to South Plains College,
26 transferred into Tech, graduated 1968, got drafted, and went to 'Nam. Let me give you
27 his name. His name is Elyseo, E-L-Y-S-E-O Solis, S-O-L-I-S, 747-0151. As a matter of
28 fact, I saw him earlier before I came over here and he told me [?] that I was going to give
29 you his name, because he also has an interesting situation. Oh, the anti-war movement;
30 very subdued. It was mainly minority students that were taking part in this thing because
31 it was mainly minorities filling the ranks of the combat arms. So, the more sophisticated

1 students, the ones that were paying attention to what was coming out, were deducing that,
2 “Hey, we’re paying a heavy price for this war and we need to get the hell out.” That was
3 the reason that the minority students were in an uproar. I remember my friends being so
4 opposed to the war, but I just didn’t care. I was just so glad to be out of the war. Going
5 to school, it just didn’t phase me that they felt so strongly about it. I think I mentioned
6 earlier that we agreed about the protesting and demonstrations going on over here, and
7 then over there, and we just read about it and we’d say things like, “Well let them come
8 over here and protest and see what they do!” It wasn’t going to happen and we didn’t
9 care, and I think that that’s still the attitude of some veterans. They care about the fact
10 that they served, they care about the country, but they don’t necessarily care about talking
11 about it or taking steps to be able to assure themselves that at some point they have an
12 opportunity to make it part of this place. That’s the challenge for the Archives I believe,
13 is the linking up the war with the veterans. I know that the board of directors has some
14 good representation, and I know that they’re always encouraging veterans to come in. I
15 don’t know if the campus scares them or just the whole thing, not that it turns them off,
16 it’s just that it’s difficult for them to get a grasp of the fact that historically it’s important.
17 I’ve heard some veterans comment that, “Why didn’t they care then? Why didn’t they do
18 it when we were younger and coming back and things were different?” So, that’s the
19 controversy. The controversy goes on.

20 KS: Well is there anything else that you wanted to add about any of your
21 experiences?

22 FG: No, I’ll think of some more stuff. I wanted to give more than a political
23 effects of Vietnam. I’ll save that for later. I do want to spend some time in bringing in
24 those notices, fliers, and different things that I kept. Feel free to call me, Kim, we’ll talk.

25 KS: Okay. This concludes the interview with Frank Gutierrez. Thank you.