

Wisconsin Veterans Museum
Research Center

Transcript of an
Oral History Interview with
TOM MURDOCK
Infantry, Marines, Vietnam War
1999

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Murdock, John. Oral history interview, 1999.

Master Copy: 1 video recording (ca. 105 min), analog, 1 7/8 ips. mono.

User Copy: 2 sound cassettes (ca. 105 min.), analog, 1 7/8 ips, mono.

Abstract:

James Murdock, a Westfield (Wisconsin) veteran, discusses his Vietnam War service with Company B, 1st Battalion, 7th Marines, 1st Marine Division and provides in-depth discussion of several operations in which he participated. He describes enlisting in the Marines, practicing amphibious landings at Okinawa, and being sent to Chu Lai (Vietnam). He describes Operation Star Light where his unit was on a search and destroy mission for Viet Cong units, ammunition, and food supplies. Murdock relates information about Operation Utah including helicopter landings in a rice paddy, night survival techniques while waiting for artillery support, sniper attacks, and receiving the Vietnamese Cross of Gallantry for successfully marking targets. He comments on Operation Indiana, the differences between training and combat, taking prisoners, booby traps laid by the Viet Cong, and the resourcefulness of Viet Cong soldiers. Murdock discusses Operation Black Ferret where journalist Dickey Chapelle was with his platoon. He compares Chapelle's actions while marching in the jungle to those of a top sergeant and mentions the booby trap that killed her. Murdock returned to Vietnam after an emergency leave, and touches upon training replacements on the use of the 3.5 rocket launcher, promotion to corporal, and discharge from the service.

Biographical Sketch:

John Murdock was born in Terre Haute (Indiana) and enlisted in the marines in 1962. He was sent for basic training in San Diego (California) and Okinawa (Japan) before being sent to Chu Lai (Vietnam). In Vietnam, Murdock participated in Operation Starlight, Operation Utah, and other maneuvers. After several years in the service, Murdock returned to Indiana where he struggled to find steady work as a printer. Murdock later began working for the prison system, and settled in Wisconsin working at a prison in Oxford (Wisconsin).

Interviewed by James McIntosh, 1999
Transcribed by Elizabeth Hackett, 2009

Interview Transcript

McIntosh: We're talking to Tom Murdoch, the 12th of November, 1999. Where were you born, Tom?

Murdock: Terre Haute, Indiana.

McIntosh: And when did you enlist in the service?

Murdock: Easter vacation, I joined the United States Marine Corps, the 120 day delay program. Went in August the 13th, 1962.

McIntosh: Where did they send you?

Murdock: MCRD, San Diego. Marine Corps Recruit Depot, San Diego, California.

McIntosh: And did you have any specialized training at all?

Murdock: No.

McIntosh: Just the regular (??) then?

Murdock: Regular (??).

McIntosh: And how long was your training?

Murdock: Boot camp, and all that—

McIntosh: Roughly.

Murdock: It was eight weeks, and then you get infantry training afterwards. I came home on leave on December the 21st, I believe. What day was that day then, the 23rd?

McIntosh: Okay, and then after that week leave, then what?

Murdock: Hmm?

McIntosh: Where did you go then?

Murdock: Went back to California. Take the company I was in, we trained to go overseas and go float phase.

McIntosh: What was that last?

Murdock: Go on the float phase. It's—

McIntosh: Oh, the float phase. [inaudible]

Murdock: Third Marine Division. Works out of Okinawa. And they put you onboard ship, and you're getting ready to move to Hong Kong, Japan, all around.

McIntosh: What were you doing aboard ship?

Murdock: Basically, you know, getting ready to fight.

McIntosh: No mission there?

Murdock: No mission, no mission. It's a phase that you go through—we went through before the Vietnam War started. It was supposed to be infantry-ready to go into any area before they get you aboard ship.

McIntosh: Did they train you in Okinawa?

Murdock: Yeah, just basically infantry training.

McIntosh: No different than it was then at San Diego?

Murdock: No.

McIntosh: Okay. And from there you left to go where?

Murdock: Came back Stateside after the float phase. And I wound up in First Battalion, Seventh Marines, and went temporary additional duties to the brig. And while I was at the brig, working there, I was called back to my company, given three days to get my affairs in order, and was shipped to Vietnam. We went to Okinawa again, and then from Okinawa to Vietnam.

McIntosh: By ship or by plane?

Murdock: Ship. Went over, yeah.

McIntosh: The whole division, or just—

Murdock: Yeah, the whole division. They took two—not all—battalions. They took every battalion, and formed one. The short-timers, who had less than a year to do, were from one battalion. The battalion I was in had more than a year to do, because you had to do thirteen months in Vietnam. So we were sent to Vietnam, the others were left at home.

McIntosh: Okay. Where did you land in Vietnam?

Murdock: Chu Lai, air strip.

McIntosh: Where? Where Chul—Chul?

Murdock: Chu Lai.

McIntosh: Chu Lai?

Murdock: Chu Lai air strip.

McIntosh: Okay, and did you stay there, or did you move into the jungle from there?

Murdock: We had to turn around Chu Lai air strip, but we did go out and do front line, top post, and we went out from there on missions. Our basic mission was protection of the air strip.

McIntosh: [inaudible] battalion in Vietnam?

Murdock: Yes.

McIntosh: Now, a mission is the one thing, did they have search and destroy or just the clean-up thing?

Murdock: First mission we went on was mop-up, we had was, Operation Starlight. And Operation Starlight was—excuse the expression—a botched mission. And we were sent in to mop up after the big battle was over, looking for VC [Viet Cong soldiers and guerilla insurgents]. Most of the missions we went out on were search and destroy, went out looking for VC, and ammunitions stockpiles, weapons, anything you could find.

McIntosh: What's the first mission that you would say was botched up? What did you do then?

Murdock: Well, first mission we went on was Starlight. You had what they instituted, or what they called—I believe [inaudible] hell of it to get in. Instead of pulling a frontal assault on something, you would fly over, and then, come in from behind. And what happened was—the lead chopper was the most important one. He's supposed to know where to land. The lead chopper landed in the wrong spot. He landed right in the middle of the VC. And once you start the vertical assault—once the vertical assault started—you've got no choice, he said, keep pushing them in. And they finally beat the VC back. And our job was to go in and look for—get the wounded, and any VC or any weapons we could find.

McIntosh: [inaudible] how did the mission go, how did it—?

Murdock: It was good. We didn't have any fire-fights, because we "seeded" [bombing enemy troops, combatants] the ground. And—

McIntosh: [inaudible]

Murdock: Not on that mission. We found a lot of them on others. That one there they just pretty much left the area because they'd gotten it pretty bad in the west.

McIntosh: [inaudible] how long [inaudible]

Murdock: Let me tell you something.

McIntosh: [inaudible] A week, a day, three weeks?

Murdock: No, we spent like a month or so sometimes. Sometimes we'd be just a couple of weeks. Each mission was different. Each mission was supposedly planned out and well thought out. Some of them just didn't work out.

McIntosh: [inaudible]

Murdock: Well, we went out on Operation Utah. That's where I got my medal at. First company in, landed in the rice paddies. There was no shade field with wood around, and then the rice paddy—these guys landed right in the rice paddy. If the area had been circled by Marines and ARVN troops, and what they didn't know was [that] we landed right in the middle of the VC. It was—North Vietnamese regulars, the grey uniforms. They had—

McIntosh: Was it true that their uniforms were different?

Murdock: Yeah. They wore the grey uniforms, with the pith helmet.

McIntosh: Those were the regular North Vietnamese.

Murdock: Yeah.

McIntosh: And what did the communist [inaudible]?

Murdock: The black pajamas.

McIntosh: [inaudible]

Murdock: Yeah. Well, give my word[?] the black pajamas, but the ones that was—you know, black pajamas, was all the people who lived around there, they fought for the VC. But they was South Vietnamese. The North

Vietnamese regulars were the ones that came down from North Vietnam, they'd come in through Laos around, and they wore the grey uniform with pith helmets.

McIntosh: They were better soldiers?

Murdock: Yeah. They was well trained. These guys off the choppers fighting for their lives, and long as the Marine Corps petition (??), they took the high ground. The trouble was, this was a mission that was planned, but they didn't have a resupply schedule. We went out on these missions, you went out lightly loaded, because you didn't want to carry all this stuff back that you wouldn't use. So they got on the high ground, they ran out of ammunition and got pushed back off the high ground. Our company was called in to back them up. When we landed, we lost a helicopter going in. Our company commander says, "We're not taking the high ground, we've got the edge of the hill, and we'll stay there and protect the helicopter," because it was in the rice paddy. And what we done when it started getting dark, was pulling lines in away from the hill, away from the woods, and made a tighter circle. And we had to wait for artillery to be moved up, closer to us, because we was out of artillery range, and later that night, we got artillery in, and they ringed us around all night long with artillery to keep the VC out for us.

McIntosh: What kind of artillery? 155s?

Murdock: Yeah, 155s

McIntosh: The best artillery weapon in the world, I think.

Murdock: Yeah.

McIntosh: [inaudible] for many years, that's [inaudible]

Murdock: Yeah.

McIntosh: Okay. So, you were there. How long did you stay in that jungle?

Murdock: Stayed there overnight. The next morning, we had a resupply. Yeah, we had resupply that night, but the choppers were—couldn't land. They had to fly through to drop everything out, into the rice paddies. We had to keep people away from the landing zone. They just flew in, dumped their load, then took off, because VC had the high ground, and they was just cut burn (??) ten choppers. They wanted them down. And the next morning we went up, took the higher ground again. The VC had moved off.

McIntosh: [inaudible] chopper [inaudible] how much punishment they can take?

Murdock: Sikorskys, yes. The—

McIntosh: Hueys?

Murdock: Hueys—

McIntosh: Were they easier to shoot down?

Murdock: Well, I wouldn't say easier to shoot down. We had what we called a Baby Huey. It had copper phosphide on the landing struts and machine gunners hanging out the windows.

McIntosh: [inaudible]

Murdock: And these were great for ground-air support. But as far as troop transport, I think the Sikorskys were the better.

McIntosh: Were they bigger?

Murdock: Yeah.

McIntosh: Yeah.

Murdock: They took a lot. They had—think they called them a “pineapple squatter.” They flew out of—they came out of Hawaii. I mean, I was stationed there at Chu Lai. And the choppers took a lot. They took a lot of hits, and they had some good pilots.

McIntosh: How many men did they carry? [inaudible]

Murdock: You know—the squad, I think it is. There's quite a few civilian (??).

McIntosh: The squad (??).

Murdock: Something like that.

McIntosh: Did you get a chance to fly on both?

Murdock: No, I just flew in the Sikorskys. Yeah. That's what we had there. We had the Hueys, or the Baby Hueys, we call them, for the ground-air support.

McIntosh: And how about [inaudible]?

Murdock: We used Sikorskys. Yeah.

McIntosh: Yeah. Tell me about getting the medal.

Murdock: On Operation Utah, a friend of mine offered me a cigarette. And I took the cigarette. And, well, I smoked Belair, he smoked Raleighs. He gave me the coupon, the last one in the pack. I reached into my pocket to get my lighter out, and when I did, I heard a rifle go off. And I looked down here, sand flying (??) under my armpit. And I knew this bullet had come close to me, felt like someone had flipped a rock and hit my flack jacket. I looked down—there's a hole in my flack jacket. Now this can't be a former flack jacket, absolutely (??). Didn't go through my flack jacket, just bounced off. So I looked around, and I knew it hit something else. I picked up my rocket launcher, and it had gone through the end of my rocket launcher, and then hit my flack jacket, off my flack jacket. Well, I got out of there, because there was a sniper on the hill, who had us zeroed in. And I had to break out a pocket knife and start cleaning the birders out of the barrels so that I could shoot. And the more I thought about it, the madder I got. That's just, "I want me some shooting. I want to get back at these people." And they sent me out three times in open terrain with sniper fire to mark targets for air strikes. And they gave me the Republic of Vietnam Gallantry Cross with mount star flag.

McIntosh: What weapons did you [inaudible]?

Murdock: 3.5 rocket launcher.

McIntosh: No other weapon?

Murdock: .45.

McIntosh: .45. [inaudible]

Murdock: Well, when I went in to the Marine Corps, the first company I went in to, they sent me to weapons section. And they asked me what I wanted to go into, rockets or machine guns, and I said, "Rockets." They put me in machine guns. And I'd spent almost three years in machine guns. But I had taken all the MCI courses—Marine Corps Institute courses—on rockets and flamethrowers and done all the training with all this stuff. And I said it took two battalions—I mean four in one (??)—to be sent to Vietnam. Well, we was overstaffed in rank, overstaffed in everything. And going in to Vietnam, they made me a rocket gunner. So I went in to Vietnam, I carried a 3.5, and—

McIntosh: Your company carried a BAR [US Army M1918 Browning Automatic Rifle]?

Murdock: No, we carried—going in to Vietnam, we carried the M14. And the M14 has a selector switch for keeping on any M14. And the rifle squads designated their—what you would call a BAR man—an Automatic Rifleman—and they would put a selector switch on him, white rifle.

McIntosh: So when you were tagging around with your rocket launcher—

Murdock: [laughs]

McIntosh: What did you find?

Murdock: What did I find?

McIntosh: Did you see anything?

Murdock: No, we just called in air strikes on the hill.

McIntosh: Right.

Murdock: First one in was a jet, laid napalm out on top. And the second time out, it was busy on another—well, it was an L-shaped hill, and they was over here attacking it, and they didn't see where I marked the second time, so I had to go out a third time and lay open terrain with just a knee-high rice paddy back to hide behind, until they gave me the word to shoot, then I turned around and put my lock on top. And then the Hueys come in and—

McIntosh: [inaudible] Tell me about marking the spot.

Murdock: Well, that's a 3.5 rocket, nine pounds, and it shot white phosphorus. We had a white phosphorus round that we shot. Problem is, this white phosphorus round would go out, hit, blow up, and spread white phosphorus and smoke 35 yards in any direction. And that's what we used to mark the targets for.

McIntosh: So you're marking—when you had to mark the hill, did you choose the distance away from you?

Murdock: Yeah.

McIntosh: Okay. How far?

Murdock: About 350 yards. It will go further than that, but—

McIntosh: I see. But I mean—what I'm trying to get you to say, your distance from the previous marking.

Murdock: My distance was 350 yards. That's what I was shooting.

McIntosh: Only other way.

Murdock: Yeah.

McIntosh: How did you decide to mark the spot?

Murdock: The commander decided. He'd tell me where he wanted a round, I went out and put the round in that area.

McIntosh: Did you consider the map prevented you from [inaudible]?

Murdock: Yeah.

McIntosh: Okay [inaudible] right here.

Murdock: Yeah.

McIntosh: So, you did that three times in one night?

Murdock: Yeah.

McIntosh: Did they shoot?

Murdock: Well, yeah. [laughs] My rocket launcher's six-foot long.

McIntosh: Okay.

Murdock: This rocket launcher's six-foot long. It's hard to miss. And VNC did not like white phosphorus. White phosphorus does not hurt at all, and the only thing that will put it out is mud.

McIntosh: I know about that. I took care of a lot of patients in Korea, people hit with white phosphorus. Anyways, why didn't they hit you? Have you ever considered how come they missed you? Have you thought about that?

Murdock: No. [laughs]

McIntosh: They would find you sooner or later.

Murdock: Yeah, sooner or later. Big guys out there.

McIntosh: If they knew exactly where you were.

Murdock: Uh-huh.

McIntosh: [inaudible]

Murdock: Yeah.

McIntosh: If you just concentrate a little, wouldn't you think?

Murdock: He begged, but he hid. And we had no flag grip there. And anything, any line on this trail, he was taking them out. We had one guy, got being (??), and he was using a round in a M1 rifle.

McIntosh: Sharp shooters, mostly (??)?

Murdock: Yeah. And we had one guy, and he got in line with the trail leader, a machine gunner, and the guy took a flack jacket into the—thank God he had some good chromium, because he saved that man's life.

McIntosh: Did you have one in the middle of the air there, air range rifle?

Murdock: Did I have?

McIntosh: You have—your company—[inaudible] gunner with the sharp shooter, one of those in the company that—

Murdock: Yeah, we had sharp-shooters, yeah, sharp-shooters—snipers. We had one sniper per company.

McIntosh: The company, based on the—

Murdock: Yeah, yeah.

McIntosh: Okay.

Murdock: This was VC up on the hill. This guy—he was good. [James laughs] He was definitely—and why I—like I said, I went out there three times. And all I had, between me and that hill, was rice paddies, like a foot high, knee high, excuse me.

McIntosh: Uh-huh. [inaudible]

Murdock: One time, we were laying out there behind that rice paddy back, good fifteen minutes, before—they were listening on the radio, and when the choppers were clear and ready, they gave me the word to shoot, and I had to come up off the ground and get behind that, and shoot.

McIntosh: Do you have to stand up to shoot that thing?

Murdock: I stand up, come up to—at least me on it, yeah. The weapon itself has a back-blast area. You have to have something—the area behind it that's clear, so you can't—you can't shoot it from the ground, unless you're shooting downhill, so that the back-blast won't—

McIntosh: [inaudible] Otherwise, though, it's easy to shoot.

Murdock: Oh, yes. So fun to shoot. [laughs]

McIntosh: Oh, really. Couldn't flood (??) it too long?

Murdock: Yeah, it had a sight, like (??) you're looking through a telescope. And it had graduating lines for yardage, and a V-shape, because you were shooting through moving vehicles and all of that. It's quite easy to sight and shoot.

McIntosh: [inaudible]

Murdock: Nine pounds.

McIntosh: Nine pounds. [inaudible]

Murdock: No, gunner carried one, plus the two. And the A-gunner wore a backpack with feet on[?].

McIntosh: So there was three of you, coming out the [inaudible]

Murdock: Yeah.

McIntosh: No, no, it was in on the plot, except you had the squad leader, you had the gunner, and two ammo carriers, or A-gunner [inaudible]. But they carried three rounds each. You had six rounds, all total.

McIntosh: [inaudible] machine gun [inaudible]

Murdock: No, because I was the only one crazy enough that I couldn't do it. My squad leader went out the last time with me. My A-gunner went out the second time and—the first and second time, then the squad leader went out the third time.

McIntosh: Tell me about another mission.

Murdock: Next mission we went on was Operation Indiana. Indiana was landing on Utah Hill to take the Metriditu (??). First—that was Bravo Company, Charley Company was the one that sacked the hill, and they pulled a

bayonet charge against [inaudible] firing downhill, pom-pom guns. It took 75 percent casualty, Utah took 70 percent casualty, because they lost 70 percent of their men, either killed or wounded and on Indiana, Charley Company fixed bayonets and went up the hill to take out these pom-pom guns.

McIntosh: Did they?

Murdock: And they get 75 percent failure.

McIntosh: Did they get back at them?

Murdock: Yep. But that was a heck of a mop-up campaign. That was a—anti-aircraft guns.

McIntosh: [inaudible] what else they say?

Murdock: Yeah. They should have bombed them.

McIntosh: [inaudible] helicopter here.

Murdock: Yeah.

McIntosh: [inaudible]

Murdock: But in the heat of battle, you don't think of these things.

McIntosh: [inaudible] distinct advantage [inaudible] some other things.

Murdock: He's as bad as a bunch of eighteen year-olds, if you think about it. You think about it afterwards, when you're picking up the bodies.

McIntosh: [inaudible] started on their own [inaudible]

Murdock: I guess they paid those guys fifty bucks more than we got, but they wasn't as smart as we were.

McIntosh: Who are they?

Murdock: The lieutenants.

McIntosh: [inaudible] in the war.

Murdock: Fast [inaudible] it was. [laughs]

McIntosh: You think that [inaudible]

Murdock: I don't think they were. Before we went overseas, over to Vietnam, we had a lieutenant, who'd just come out of OCS, and he was a book man. He wanted everything by the book. They had an operator's manual that was made for the M16 machine gun. This manual was written when they first came out with the M16 machine gun. And it told them how they thought it should work. **[End of Tape 1, Side 1]** And we had been dealing with these machine guns for an extended period of time. We had our own system of operation that worked 100 percent better--**[pause in recording]** But he wanted it strictly done by the book. The gunnery sergeant told him that—

McIntosh: Told him what?

Murdock: There's a better way. "This don't work," he says. "No, they work the book, there're going to do it by the book." They took out the six operating machine guns and by—on a live fire mission and brought them back six pieces of junk.

McIntosh: Did they—

Murdock: They went through the book—by the book—and it didn't work.

McIntosh: Six pieces of junk [inaudible]

Murdock: Well, you can't go by the book. It tells you to close the—can't tell you what it is now—close the machine gun up and then feed the belt in. But if you don't get the belt fed in there right, the first round, and you fire it, there's a ejection port, and you get that first round past the ramp where you're supposed to get it in the gun. When you fire that round, the next round comes in, well, you got all these metal links that's supposed to go out the ejection port because you got to lose the bullet in. And it just goms 'em up.

McIntosh: Your gun was blocked? (??)

Murdock: Yeah.

McIntosh: You could never fire one.

Murdock: You got a mess to clean out of there. Because this thing's automatic, you know, 550 rounds per minute, and by the time this thing decides it can't shoot no more, it's pretty well jammed up.

McIntosh: [inaudible]

Murdock: Yes.

McIntosh: So you killed no one (??)

Murdock: No. They sent in (??) the battalion armor—battalion armor called up our gunner sergeant and said, “What do you think you’re doing, damn it?” He says, “I’m doing what the lieutenant told me.” Battalion armor got the lieutenant on the line, chewed him up one side and down the other. Next time we went out, lieutenant said, “Okay, gummey, you show them how you do it.” Went out there with 10,000 rounds per gun, and came back 6,000 ready machine guns and no rounds. And it worked. I mean—it just—so many things that they had in the book that just did not work. And the lieutenants coming out of OCS—

McIntosh: Too inexperienced.

Murdock: Too inexperienced. We had a lieutenant over there that liked to go around at night in Vietnam and check the line. He caught somebody sleeping who need a croft [fenced area around a foxhole] and then cut a hole, then jump in the hole with them and—

McIntosh: [inaudible]

Murdock: No, he don’t.

McIntosh: He get hurt?

Murdock: Yes.

McIntosh: Bad decision.

Murdock: Yeah.

McIntosh: [inaudible]

Murdock: And then say, “Hey, you just got your butt beat—better than being dead.” Well, he made a mistake one night of crawling out in front of the lines—

McIntosh: Got shot?

Murdock: And crawling up on this guy while a firecracker got down on the line. The guy looked up in the hole, see the man moving out in front of him, and one shot, right through the neck.

McIntosh: That’ll happen.

Murdock: Oh, yeah. We had a lieutenant—he's a nice guy, really, knew (??) his name.

McIntosh: [inaudible]

Murdock: He *was* green. He went—we had blown the tunnel. And C-4 [byproduct of butane, highly poisonous, also a very stable plastic explosive] creates a gas, which is deadly. And he decided he wanted to go down to the tunnel because they didn't seal the ones they wanted. One of the former [inaudible]. They got to my friend, he came out, but he wasn't right. That's gassing.

McIntosh: [inaudible]

Murdock: Yeah.

McIntosh: After they saved him?

Murdock: Yeah.

McIntosh: [inaudible]

Murdock: Yeah. See, he was supposed to seal the tunnel, but didn't.

McIntosh: Oh, they knocked it down. Okay.

Murdock: Yeah. This lieutenant didn't know about C-4. C-4 creates gas. He won't go in there and check this tunnel out. But it would expose him if we do. So I have to tell the people in there. He went walking in there with a friend of mine, while they, they got hit first, my friend, and he wasn't right in the head after that.

McIntosh: Did he say it hurt?

Murdock: Yeah. And the lieutenant was dead—the gas killed him. But—

McIntosh: Did you [inaudible]

Murdock: We ran across quite a few of them, yes.

McIntosh: That's the first time I [inaudible]

Murdock: We had engineers assigned to us—that was their job. They carried C-4 explosives. Their job was to blow tunnels or munitions, whatever we came across—to be blown up. They—

McIntosh: When you found a tunnel, you marked it, and then they [inaudible]?

Murdock: No, we just call them up there, they'd do it right then and there.

McIntosh: Picked it up and put it in there?

Murdock: Yeah. Couldn't mark it off and walk away.

McIntosh: That's right. That's right. You know what [inaudible].

Murdock: Bad luck to them. They was—

McIntosh: [inaudible]

Murdock: One tunnel we tried to blow was quite extensive. Going into the tunnel itself was, you know, on your hands and knees. Once you got inside, it was one side of the hill to the other—you could roll a semi through this thing, that's how big it was. But the trouble of it was, it was all clay. And they use up twenty-some pounds of sealant trying to seal that thing. And all it did was make it bigger. [James laughs] That clay don't collapse. The clay just did not collapse. All it did was make the whole thing bigger.

McIntosh: Did you take any prisoners?

Murdock: We took quite a few prisoners.

McIntosh: [inaudible]

Murdock: We'd find them in tunnels. We'd find them hiding in the villages. If they didn't have papers—

McIntosh: They were prisoners.

Murdock: They was prisoners. You had a certain age group, and if they wasn't ARVN—which means, you know, from South Vietnam, they had to have papers to be in the army. They would have those papers—

McIntosh: [inaudible]

Murdock: Because of the VC system.

McIntosh: [inaudible] what was the deal there? You'd search them first?

Murdock: Search them first. Tied their hands behind their backs. Depends upon how many you had. You'd tie rope and hook one man's hands to the next guy's neck, so that you had a parade.

McIntosh: Then you would take them back?

Murdock: Yeah.

McIntosh: Okay. Someone would interrogate them back—

Murdock: Yeah, we had an ARVN interpreter with us in our company. And he would interrogate them.

McIntosh: What were the general conditions of the troops [inaudible]? Would you say they were healthy or not healthy?

Murdock: The whole country was skin and bones.

McIntosh: [inaudible]

Murdock: Yeah.

McIntosh: That's what I found in Korea. [inaudible]

Murdock: These guys would go out and take a sock full of rice and fight you for a month. And a sock full of rice—now how could you be healthy eating just nothing but—though I'll tell you what to do, just take a handful, or not a handful, but a lot of it, and put it in your mouth and swallow it.

McIntosh: [inaudible]

Murdock: Yeah. Actually swell up in their stomach and they wouldn't be hungry no more. They'd fight you for a month on a sock, a sock-full of rice.

McIntosh: [inaudible]

Murdock: No, they was not that good at shots. I mean, there was some good shots. Don't get me wrong. But—

McIntosh: They were obviously resourceful, as you could (??)—

Murdock: They was very resourceful. They used our own munitions against us. They would take out mortar shells and bury the fins, leave the warheads stick out on the ground so it's made to the top of it, and then you got a good booby-trap. We ran across a dozen mortar shells. We marked it, moved back to damn six [US Marine Corps Vietnam military slang] the machine gun and set it off because we didn't want to touch them. These people would pick them up and carry, put them in there—

McIntosh: Were booby-traps a big problem?

Murdock: Definitely.

McIntosh: When you had to move into the jungle, you had to take some kind of precaution.

Murdock: Mm-hmm.

McIntosh: So that the—

Murdock: Yeah—

McIntosh: [inaudible]

Murdock: No.

McIntosh: [inaudible]

Murdock: Nope. Booby-traps weren't landmines. Booby-traps was usually grenades or some or you know—some form of a church fire (??).

McIntosh: Yeah, that's right.

Murdock: It—your lead man—your point man had to be real sharp. And when you moved, you moved in a column. You always followed your point man. You didn't go either side or—you always followed the lead man's—

McIntosh: [inaudible]

Murdock: That's it. That's it. The trouble of it is, though, you might be following him, and you get caught in an ambush, you had to dive into the ditch. Well, you want to make sure when you dove in the ditch it wasn't full of funky stings [US Marine Corps Vietnam era slang for insects, snakes, scorpions].

McIntosh: It says here you were frequently shot up.

Murdock: Yep.

McIntosh: [inaudible] territory.

Murdock: Yeah.

McIntosh: [inaudible]

Murdock: Yep.

McIntosh: [inaudible]

Murdock: Mm-hm. When we went out on missions, we would run across the—we'd pull them out of the ground, and build a nice little bonfire with it.

McIntosh: [inaudible]

Murdock: Oh, yes.

McIntosh: [inaudible]

Murdock: Bamboo grew wild. And they would take a sharp machete and cut it at an angle [inaudible] you'd get this nice stick, okay? You take—cut it up [inaudible] not that long, you cut it at another angle again. So you've got two sharp points, one you stick in the ground, the other sticking out. And bamboo head is hollow on the inside. If you really want to get nasty with it, you took a nail, and they would pull them into a pit, and use the pit for bodily functions, and take these things out and stick them down these tubes. Well, when you fell on this, when you pulled the tube out, you leave this metal in, this nail or whatever. Bamboo was—we just used it for everything. You could take a bullet, stick it up through the tube, put a nail on a stick, marry the tube to the stick, and then you'd put a piece of wood on top of the bullet. He stepped down on this piece of wood, the bullet would go down and hit the nail, go—

McIntosh: [inaudible]

Murdock: Yeah. That was their big thing, was—

McIntosh: [inaudible]

Murdock: Yeah. They could set these things up anyplace. They'd walk over them all day long, because they take the stick out, when they're—used them, they could stick it right back in. Pull it out, and—boom.

McIntosh: How did you know about this—keep your eyes open?

Murdock: Yeah. You look for anything that was out of the ordinary. They would get punji pits and cover them with, again, bamboo. They'd make mats out of it—they'd make a mat, put the mat down and put sand over it. Well, if you see holes in the sand—

McIntosh: You'd know—don't step forward.

Murdock: Yeah, they—

McIntosh: [inaudible]

Murdock: [inaudible]

McIntosh: How did you find that [inaudible]

Murdock: No, you'd just walk or take a log and stand it on a rifle and tip it off, you know—jump back, because, you didn't know if there was somebody down in there, or there was a punji pit, or there may be even a grenade in there. So you'd flip it, and get it back. You can look down in there and see what it was.

McIntosh: [inaudible]

Murdock: Yeah.

McIntosh: [inaudible] anything

Murdock: Mm-hmm.

McIntosh: [inaudible] search and destroy mission

Murdock: Mm-hmm.

McIntosh: [inaudible] objective [inaudible] mission was to find [inaudible] or what

Murdock: Well, search and destroy here—the main object was—was looking for VC. Weapons, or even stashes of food, and whatever—you know—hoard—the VC would hide.

McIntosh: [inaudible]

Murdock: They did, they did—but what should I say—when you're out looking for them, they have to keep moving, too. And then stuff would have to come out of the tunnels.

McIntosh: Yes, they did.

Murdock: Yeah. And they would hide it anyplace. They'd put it in the houses, put it in the jars with the rice.

McIntosh: They didn't seem to cook their food?

Murdock: They did cook, but they wouldn't.

McIntosh: They could cook food, but they didn't have any time. [inaudible]

Murdock: Yeah, that's the way they did it. When they was in the villages, they would eat in the villages, or wherever.

McIntosh: Yeah.

Murdock: When they was in the villages, but they went out during the day, they couldn't build a fire, or anything. [inaudible]

McIntosh: [inaudible]

Murdock: Whatever—they're tough.

McIntosh: [inaudible]

Murdock: I believe they had the—

McIntosh: Rocket launchers?

Murdock: Rocket launchers and--

McIntosh: Rockets launchers or anything?

Murdock: They had rocket grenades, and AK-47s. That's—

McIntosh: Submachine guns.

Murdock: Yeah. And I tell you—whatever they picked up, because they liked to get our weapons, because they'd get paid (??). [They] killed an American serviceman. They had the ammunition, a fresh supply of ammunition. So they liked to take our weapons.

McIntosh: [inaudible] booby-trap [inaudible] ambush [inaudible] ammunition

Murdock: I wasn't, but our company was. We had one undeployed (??) man who was killed, and I don't think anybody else got hurt. Everybody else got their flack jackets on, but he didn't have his flack jacket zipped up. And VC jumped out in the middle of the trail and shot three times. The guy went—and he had a flack jacket.

McIntosh: Did they use knives?

Murdock: The VC? No. They did—they cut, you know—let you down. And on and on, yeah, they would use whatever they had.

McIntosh: [inaudible]

Murdock: Yeah. [laughs]

McIntosh: [inaudible]

Murdock: Yeah, bayonets.

McIntosh: Bayonets. [inaudible]

Murdock: We had the—

McIntosh: Fourteen? Fourteen as well (??)

Murdock: It was a sight to freely fire (??) on the M14 at 750 rounds per minute. 20-round magazine takes us a second (??). It was a well-designed rifle, but it was 112. Anybody who wanted to make it fully automatic, could make it fully automatic. And believe me, we made them automatic, all of—

McIntosh: [inaudible] When did you first encounter Dickey Chappelle?

Murdock: It was in Operation Black Ferret, I believe it was. It was a mission to take these photographers out and show them some country. Supposed to be in an area [laughs] where there was no VC.

McIntosh: How big was this group that you were squiring around?

Murdock: Seemed like there was four photographers. There were three men. And first day out—

McIntosh: They were all assigned to your platoon?

Murdock: Yeah.

McIntosh: What did you think of that?

Murdock: Yeah.

McIntosh: What did you think of that?

Murdock: Didn't matter to me, I mean, it—

McIntosh: [inaudible]

Murdock: It beats—

McIntosh: [inaudible]

Murdock: Huh?

McIntosh: [inaudible]

Murdock: The thing though—it was—

McIntosh: [inaudible]

Murdock: Yeah. It was either that, or sit there on the line and be bored. At least we was getting out to see some of the country.

McIntosh: Well, what did they plan to do with these people, just let them follow you [inaudible] or anything?

Murdock: No, we put them in the middle of the column [inaudible].

McIntosh: Some of them [inaudible]?

Murdock: Mm-hm. They knew it was [inaudible]. It was no picnic.

McIntosh: Yeah.

Murdock: And our first day out, we went through a village, and there—I think it was—couldn't see it until got to the other side of the village—there was sniper fire behind us. So we turned around and went back through the village. This time, we tore the village apart for VC and weapons and everything else.

McIntosh: What did you find?

Murdock: No weapons. We did find three VC suspects. And then—not sure what they did, but I think they put them on a helicopter, and flew them out of there, back to the back-lines. We went out of that village and out into overload—you know, a whole flat land, except for what we called a sniper-hill, just a big hill, that sit out there in the middle of this flat land. And they'd taken a hundred stakes or bamboo, stuck it in the ground all the way around and just kept building all the way up, so it's at a 45-degree angle to the ground. And if you charge the hill in a hurry, these punji stakes pitched at the ankle-high, and then you would crawl through into the other part of the—

McIntosh: [inaudible]

Murdock: Yeah. And they had them all around this hill, all the way to the top. If you're a sniper, you got to wait a little. You're going to set up out there everyday—you're looking for somebody to get up to this flat ground. You start shooting at the soldiers, they take the assault—they get hurt. Don't matter to you, because when you're going downhill, you're going away from the funkiest things. You don't trip over them. You don't get hurt. The trick is to get on top of them—you know—you take your time, you can get up there, you go right by it, whatever. Just take your time, you won't get hurt. Because when you're in a hurry, somebody's shooting at you—

McIntosh: Different thing.

Murdock: It's a different story. We had set it on this sniper-load for the night, and we was told, flat-out, no more booby-traps.

McIntosh: Oh, really?

Murdock: Don't look for any booby-traps. This is a sniper-load, they're probably here. And if you find one, it would probably be too late. Don't look for them. We sit in on that hill, got the whole night, got up the next morning, had cigarettes for breakfast.

McIntosh: This was the first day, then.

Murdock: No, this was the second day out.

McIntosh: The second day out.

Murdock: And they started to move off the hill, forming the columns running down the hill and following behind the lead man, everybody just gets in a column. And I'm standing there, and Dickey Chapelle was in this line. We were starting down the hill when a sergeant gone looking for a booby-trap, and he found it. Only trouble was, he found it too late. He turned the trick. He didn't say nothin'. He just took off running, and then the thing went off—it was a grenade tied to the top of a gun mortar shell. And it went off. It went off. Everybody, you know, started dropping down. So I'm standing there, going up and down, wondering what the hell was going on. But I didn't know. And somebody yelled to borders, "Spread out." Well, I'm sitting there. She's wounded, I thought, through the corn, and I moved back. Well, someone came over and checked her, and she's got one piece of shrapnel through the jugular vein. And they say that on the operating table, everything they need right there—you got that jugular vein, you got maybe a fifty-fifty chance. And that's in a hospital on an operating table, wherever. Because it snaps.

McIntosh: It's the carotid artery that—

Murdock: Yeah.

McIntosh: [inaudible]

Murdock: Mm-hmm.

McIntosh: The brain doesn't take that much, but the carotid artery—

Murdock: Yeah.

McIntosh: [inaudible]

Murdock: Mm-hmm.

McIntosh: [inaudible]

Murdock: [inaudible]

McIntosh: [inaudible]

Murdock: Same day, she was dead, and then they—there were several injured. I think she was the only one killed. Everybody was wearing flack jackets. Even with flack jackets on, your legs are exposed, and you have here to here, you have to roll your clothes up because of shrapnel up underneath the armpit into the lung. They took out Dickey's [inaudible] wounded, and they got rid of the other photographers [inaudible].

McIntosh: [inaudible]

Murdock: Yeah. [laughs] And the next day, we didn't have nothing happen. It was only a three-day operation. First two days—well, first day out, we ran into a sniper, the second day, in the morning, this happened, nothin' happened the rest of that day, then the next day, we just walk home.

McIntosh: Did you talk to her at all?

Murdock: No, I didn't have the chance to.

McIntosh: [inaudible]

Murdock: No, she just walked right in front of me as the thing went off.

McIntosh: [inaudible]

Murdock: No, she was barking orders like a top sergeant.

McIntosh: [inaudible]

Murdock: No. [laughs]

McIntosh: Really.

Murdock: Yeah, “Hey, just move outside we’re gonna get hit!” [laughs]

McIntosh: That’s right?

Murdock: Yeah. She can bark orders like a top sergeant, I tell you. [laughs]

McIntosh: [inaudible]

Murdock: That’s the trouble.

McIntosh: She’ll go back and forth. [laughs]

Murdock: Yeah.

McIntosh: [inaudible]

Murdock: That’s her picture there, looking for—and that’s me sitting, right there. [laughs]

McIntosh: [inaudible] is this [inaudible] any different?

Murdock: Not really. It was sitting—guard duty on the perimeter of a few IAWs worth of outgoing search-and-destroy missions and—we did have [inaudible] for a while, just across the river. These—for years they get in these boats—and go back and forth across the river. And the way they paid these guys, was that C-4, they take the engineers [inaudible] C-4, and set off charges in the river, and the fish would come up. These guys would reap the harvest of fish. [laughs]

McIntosh: Tell me about the flack jacket, was that standard-issue [inaudible]?

Murdock: We had the old-style flack jacket—was a double roll of fiberglass plates.

McIntosh: So it was a double roll of what?

Murdock: Fiberglass plates.

McIntosh: Fiberglass plates.

Murdock: Yeah, and it was supposed to stop **[End of Tape 1, Side 2]** a .30 caliber round, up to .30 caliber on one of them, that's 30.06—talking about the carbine **[pause in recording]**--It would stop a .45 round, but I'd just take the plates out of my flack jacket and test-fire the weapons once a month, and I'd use the plate for my target, and it bounced around on the ground. It did penetrate it.

McIntosh: Oh—

Murdock: The .30 [caliber]—the M-1 round wrapped (??)—it would go through them but it slowed them down.

McIntosh: [inaudible]

Murdock: No, that's what we used over there, there is another tactic they had, but it's not—

McIntosh: [inaudible]

Murdock: No, no. Not as rigid as the fiberglass plates. The fiberglass plates, you couldn't just up and bend down as easy as—

McIntosh: [inaudible]

Murdock: Oh, yeah. They fell off, even when a fire-fight broke out.

McIntosh: Did you have to get back (??)

Murdock: Back-end test.

McIntosh: That was the difference, don't you think?

Murdock: Yeah.

McIntosh: Did you ever get hit with anything?

Murdock: Yeah. Had one hit my jacket when I was out there.

McIntosh: [inaudible]

Murdock: No. If it had been a direct hit, it would have gone through the jacket.

McIntosh: Oh, really. How about you?

Murdock: No.

McIntosh: Guess you didn't know any better [Tom laughs]. Any change since you went to Vietnam? Was it not enough change (??) [inaudible]

Murdock: No, it's (??)—when I went over, we relieved the expedition right there. We were more or less one of the first ones into Vietnam.

McIntosh: Tell me about that.

Murdock: Yeah, and—everything basically, it was the same. I mean—where I ran into a problem was, I came home on emergency leave to help with my grandfather. Then I went back. While I was on leave, my whole company had been transferred to Da Nang, and then split up amongst the companies up there in Da Nang. I went back to my original company that was all reservists gone active, to get rid of their military obligation. And I don't think much of the reserve training. [laughs]

McIntosh: It was inadequate?

Murdock: Very inadequate.

McIntosh: [inaudible]

Murdock: Uh-uh.

McIntosh: What did you have to train (??).

Murdock: Experience and knowledge. I was trying to teach my A-gunner—because I knew I was getting close to going home—the 3.5, about—and my squad leader wanted to argue every point with me, and I had the knowledge that he didn't—

McIntosh: That's correct.

Murdock: And experience. We went out to test-fire our weapons, and I took this 3.5 out there, and it was in a heavy wind. I told my gunner to kneel down, squeeze the barrel, so it's facing downhill range, you know, so it's supposed to be protected, and just stay in this kneeling position. And then I just walked up behind him, lay my elbows on his shoulders, beside me and my weapon, because this thing is six foot long. But by him doing this—and this is all in the manual. And I fired, hit the target. And my spotter says, "You can't do that." I said, "Why can't I?" "Because it was very dangerous." And I said, "Yeah, right. It's in the manual, how to do this." And he just kept trying to argue. This was—I said, "Yeah, Charlie's [US Marine Corps jargon for the Viet Cong] out there shooting at you. What's one man compared to the whole squad?" And this man was not

hurt. The 3.5 rocket is point base detonating weapon, meaning it has to hit on the spot. The detonator's not going to point. The detonator's in the body of the rocket. Oh, I got to explain this to my A-gunner. And my squad leader says, "[inaudible]" And I said, "Okay, then where's the detonator? Show it to me." He said, "Well, I can't, without taking the rocket apart." And I said, "Answer me this question, then. So why does it have a blue lead safety pin in the body of the rocket." He says, "That's a safety device." I said, "Yeah. When your fire thing goes back, the blue and red lead safety pin ejects itself and that arms the rocket. That means the firing pin's in the body of the rocket. Now where's the detonator at?" He says, "It's in the front." [laughs] The rocket was built to penetrate through steel. You had a safe charge cone on the inside, then you had the warhead, and the cone inside this warhead. The safe charge was off, going down the—in the rocket—going through this point in front of it. And that goes through steel, the cutting torch. The detonator has to be at the back. It cannot be in front. If it was in front, it would go backward. We want it to go forward.

McIntosh: He didn't pay attention.

Murdock: And he—I could not make much headway. He just didn't understand this.

McIntosh: [inaudible]

Murdock: I was a lance corporal, he was a corporal.

McIntosh: [laughs] [inaudible]

Murdock: See, that was the problem. When I was transferred, [inaudible] over, I couldn't get promoted, because we was overstaffed alone (??). Then they transferred my company, and I come back to a new company—it's all reservists on active—they're going to take care of their fellows, they won't take care of me. They're all getting promoted. That's exempt (??). I went up to my squad leader, I said, "I want to request mast." He said, "What is it?" I said, "No. Just go tell the team sergeant I want to request mast." He went back and told the platoon sergeant. Platoon sergeant said, "Let's call the room, see what's the matter. Why you requesting masts, out of rank." He said, "You're not promoting in your M.O.S." I said, "Fine. Tell the unit commander I want to see him." Went back, the unit commander called me in, says, "I see that you were requesting mast over rank." I said, "That's right." He said, "We're not promoting in your M.O.S." I said, "Fine, tell the captain that I want to see him." I went back to see my captain. The captain called me in, says, "Son, why you complaining about requesting mast over rank? They're not promoting in your M.O.S." I said, "Fine. Tell the battalion commander I want to see him." I walked into the battalion commander's office. He's got my file

laying out there in front of him. He says, “What’s this—you were requesting mast over rank? They’re not promoting in your M.O.S.” I said, “Sir, which one are they not promoting in?” He said, “What do you mean?” I said, “Everybody who comes in to the command of the Marine Corps—they made it 0300 basic riflemen. I’ve had an 0351 and 0330—machine guns and rockets.” I said, “I just want to know which one of those M.O.S.s you’re not promoting in.” [laughs]

McIntosh: [inaudible]

Murdock: They’re from Pennsylvania and Michigan. I told him flat out—I’m with a bunch of reservists on active. I’m not saying that I’m not shooting anybody in my company that was sent M14 rifles. But I said, “I won’t shoot anyone in my company with M60 machine guns, 3.5, because I spent four years with weapons section.” And I said, “You’re telling me not to look at my M.O.S, that my clean record book and all that doesn’t mean anything. You’re just not promoting in my M.O.S. [inaudible]I’m carrying three M.O.S.s—they’re only carrying one. You tell me they [inaudible].”

McIntosh: You were promoted to what?

Murdock: Corporal. I came home a corporal and discharged.

McIntosh: Tell me about the M60 machine gun.

Murdock: Technically it fired 550 rounds per minute for military weapons. The older guns—I understand the real old drive ones have gotten rid of the—there was mainly a operating rod and spring guide, there was also mine space (??) move it inside of the operating drive rod and spring guide, and when that broke, the spring would crawl up inside the machine gun. But you usually could tell if you fired the machine guns long enough, when this operating drive rod and spring guide would break.

McIntosh: It had to do with a pin?

Murdock: Yeah.

McIntosh: [inaudible]

Murdock: You check the weight of the 762 round casing.

McIntosh: [inaudible] caliber?

Murdock: No, the thirty caliber M1 round or 3006, is a bigger casing. The 762 is a smaller casing, but just like basically the same bullet. You couldn’t fire the M1 round—yeah, the 3006 through the M14, you should fire the M14.

You didn't get it in, the M1 wouldn't operate real good, but if you got it in there, you pop the trigger and try to angle, you could get the 762 to go off.

McIntosh: In your company--how many men had the M60?

Murdock: The M60? We had six machine gunners.

McIntosh: Who?

Murdock: Six machine gunners, yeah. Three squads, yeah. Three platoons, plus a weapons platoon. You had—you went out as a reinforced company. Each platoon was assigned two machine guns, and two rockets. So you had two machine guns for each platoon. And two—

McIntosh: Did you recover any of the barrels from the machine guns? It must have been very hard to carry around.

Murdock: I had trained on the .30 caliber, air-cooled, but the M60 is a much better weapon.

McIntosh: [inaudible]

Murdock: You could carry it, you could fire it from the hip, you could fire it from the shoulder. You had [inaudible] you didn't need to track a lot.

McIntosh: [inaudible]

Murdock: One man to operate it.

McIntosh: Tell me about the medics.

Murdock: Thank god for—

McIntosh: [inaudible]

Murdock: Thank god for [inaudible] chrome, we had—

McIntosh: [inaudible]

Murdock: It seemed like it was more that one, but I—

McIntosh: [inaudible]

Murdock: But one platoon, I think it was.

McIntosh: [inaudible]

Murdock: No.

McIntosh: It's not [inaudible]

Murdock: Aerodynth Bank Resort (??).

McIntosh: [inaudible]

Murdock: Chu Lai.

McIntosh: Chu Lai

Murdock: Mm-hm.

McIntosh: [inaudible]

Murdock: Yeah.

McIntosh: [inaudible]

Murdock: Mm-Hm.

McIntosh: [inaudible]

Murdock: It's bad to carry (??)

McIntosh: Really? [inaudible]

Murdock: Oh, yeah. He had to—he was the doc there.

McIntosh: [inaudible]

Murdock: They earned their money. They've earned it.

McIntosh: Some of it sounds medical [inaudible].

Murdock: Yeah.

McIntosh: [inaudible]

Murdock: Yeah.

McIntosh: [inaudible]

Murdock: Well, the VC liked to be [inaudible]

McIntosh: Move to the next target.

Murdock: Yeah, yeah. Farmers, doc, whatever. And it was the next target[?]. They liked to take them out. So—yeah. They earned their money. And like I said, there's a lot of people alive today because of it.

McIntosh: Did you get a chance to use your .45?

Murdock: No.

McIntosh: [inaudible]

Murdock: No, I ran out of ammunition on Utah—

McIntosh: [inaudible]

Murdock: About 3 ½. Right there, in the foxhole, only 14 rounds of .45 all month long. And the next time I went out, I had a lot more for that .45.

McIntosh: That was your only personal protection, right?

Murdock: Yeah.

McIntosh: Was that .45. Thirty-foot, ten-foot knock-off.

Murdock: Ten—six-foot.

McIntosh: Right. That was your protection.

Murdock: That was my personal protection, the .45. I went and picked up three more magazines, ammunition to fill holes, plus another fifty rounds. I wasn't going out unarmed again. After running out of ammunition and laying there all night long, listening to them 155s whistling in over our heads.

McIntosh: What about eating on the front?

Murdock: We carried out what we ate. They only sent us out two rations per day.

McIntosh: Rations in particular—what did you get?

Murdock: C-rations. When we got there, we tell the herd (??). I don't know what the name of it is, we called "Lay-out" (??). They get about that high around here—come out in the spring. Well, they got a tree over there in Georgia like that—it gets a pretty good size. And the tree was about the height of a man—you could pull it out of the ground. And there would be a tuber on

the bottom. You come up over this side, and cut off the tree on this side, and we take these buggy stakes, and throw them into the—you know—pile and we fire them up. Well, if you took this tuber and tried to cut it like you would a potato, it tastes like it's chewing on wood—it didn't have any taste. But if you took this thing and threw it by the fire, let it heat up by the fire—

McIntosh: [inaudible]

Murdock: No, just like you would a baked potato or whatever. Just throw it in there, and let it sit in there for a while and pull it out. You could cut this thing open and eat it like a baked potato. Tastes like burnt potato. One guy—he really thought he was something—he took one of these things and gouged a good side of this out, put it in—you know—in one of them canteen cups, took some cream out of his C-ration package, dumped this cream in there, put a little water in there, and mixed it up. Tastes just like mashed potatoes. I mean, we lived off the land when we could.

McIntosh: [inaudible]

Murdock: No, we didn't—

McIntosh: [inaudible]

Murdock: No, we didn't get close to the river.

McIntosh: I thought you said [inaudible]

Murdock: Yeah, it was out there on a [inaudible] but that was just for a short period of time.

McIntosh: That's all right. [inaudible]

Murdock: Okay. Anyway [inaudible]. We was just out there for a short period of time. That was in December, no—no, December. The weather was—company's out there on New Year's Eve and—

McIntosh: [inaudible] Christmas?

Murdock: Yeah, we got a hot meal, and—

McIntosh: [inaudible]

Murdock: Yeah.

McIntosh: Did you see any USO entertainment stuff?

Murdock: No, they was there, but I never got to see them.

McIntosh: I was in there [inaudible].

Murdock: I do.

McIntosh: [inaudible]

Murdock: Uh-uh.

McIntosh: Did you get any beer?

Murdock: Yeah, we got a ration of beer. Thought it was a can a day or so.

McIntosh: Was it?

Murdock: Something like—I don't remember now.

McIntosh: Didn't carry it out in the field.

Murdock: No.

McIntosh: Not in the field.

Murdock: And you wanted it cool. Didn't carry it out there cool, out in the field. You had these canteens, and wherever you got water, you had to put these—

McIntosh: Tablets in there.

Murdock: Yeah, iodine tablets.

McIntosh: [inaudible]

Murdock: Ugh. I used to have her send me—we tried coffee at first, put coffee in there. But those canteens in those canteen boxes during the day, you know, they got lukewarm, but it just didn't—I used to have those things—Kool-Aid and stuff in there, mixed with the—

McIntosh: [inaudible]

Murdock: Anything to kill the taste of that iodine.

McIntosh: Really?

Murdock: That iodine was *rotten*. And water was always *hot*, so—

McIntosh: Did anybody get sick in your company?

Murdock: No.

McIntosh: Not with malaria?

Murdock: Not that I know of.

McIntosh: Did you take your pills?

Murdock: Yeah. Going around. "Pill day!" [laughs]

McIntosh: [inaudible] the diarrhea [inaudible]

Murdock: To a certain extent, yes.

McIntosh: You know, when you get thirsty, you drink whatever you get--

Murdock: That's about it. And then you wanted to watch out when you got into the villages.

McIntosh: Oh?

Murdock: Yeah, because the VC would come through these villages and kill people for illegal wells.

McIntosh: [inaudible]

Murdock: Yeah. We'd go into the villages and the villagers sit there, you know—you look at the wells and they'd—

McIntosh: Were the villagers pretty much terrified of Americans?

Murdock: No, most of them was decent to the Americans. We ran across—some of them were VC sympathizers. We found one girl who was sixteen years old, pregnant, and her husband was a VC. She had three boys—I think the oldest was ten—eight, nine, ten year olds. And he was out setting Claymore mines against us.

McIntosh: Oh, really?

Murdock: Yeah. Yeah. Sixteen year old girl. Pregnant. We made a—

McIntosh: What did you do?

Murdock: We went into the village first. The village, you know—speaking of the villagers—pretty [inaudible]. We went through this one way, it's like walking into a refrigerator—you knew something was up. The VC could be interpreted—one of the people take the cave (??).

McIntosh: [inaudible]

Murdock: Yeah, and—the villager told him that they was told not to use this trail. He didn't know what was going, but he was supposed not to use the trail. So we sent out an ambush boat at night and he set up along the trail and he caught these whores sitting up on the lines.

McIntosh: They probably tried to booby-trap it.

Murdock: So we brought them back, and we completed the interrogation of them there for our company and then they were sent back to wherever. I don't know. After they left us, I don't know where.

McIntosh: [inaudible]

Murdock: I would imagine they did. I don't know. Wherever—they didn't have too much patience with us.

McIntosh: So, tell me about your experience in the States?

Murdock: I think it was, yeah. We made it for about four years. I mean, I was a little in my fourth year in when I went over. The people that came after me, I—something else. I come back to the States and—was cooking in the staging-out barracks, where people were eating loads of [inaudible]. I couldn't figure out why people who were brighter (??) than the discharges were running through the front gate. Some of these people have eighteen years in, and they was driving and running through. I mean, I'm walking. [laughs] And I surely and purely figured it all out. I counted too many lucky stars over there. I attacked a booby-trapped hand grenade, attacked a toppled punji stick and punji stick-trap, just a little rotten grenade that was rusty, sticking the pin out. [laughs] They had these [inaudible] dropping parachute flares. It was in canisters, little canisters about that long, and about that big around. They would put them in a tube, and then they had this thing that they put over there, fire it out and when they was done with them, they'd take this tube out and spill it onto the plane. On Utah Hill, that thing comes flying down, it does hit a foxhole, get down in there. And I hear this tingling noise, and I hear this thud and clunk. The next one, when I could see, this thing had landed on one side—on the other side. It hit me. It didn't kill me. [inaudible] The grenade went off, and everybody around me was wounded, or in her case, killed. And I stand there, clean as a whistle. I had a bullet go through my rocket launcher and bounce off my

flack jacket. When it come time for me to re-enlist, I grabbed my discharge, and ran from the front gate.

McIntosh: You thought that was—that's it.

Murdock: That's it. That's it. [laughs]

McIntosh: What did you do when you got back home? Where did you go back—to the same place?

Murdock: Terre Haute.

McIntosh: What did you [inaudible] civilian life?

Murdock: Well, I had—I graduated high school, you needed three things to do a job. One—a high school diploma. Two—a suitable trade. Three—the military behind you. That's why I volunteered. I went to a vocational high school and studied to become a printer. So when I got out of the Marine Corps, I went back to do the trade I was trained for. Unfortunately, Xerox forced all the job shops out of business. So I went back to Terre Haute, and got a job at a laundry and breakfast club (??), printing there. Yeah, printing there. And you have to understand, that's one of the methods that used to work. Every six months, you come up for a raise. Instead of giving you a raise, they laid off and then send you to another department. You're supposed to—when they laid you off from this department, you're supposed to be back up front. And see the personnel department, which is another department. Well, after six months, my boss called me in and said, "We're going to have to lay you off." And I said, "Listen, Gass (??)—I was looking for new jobs anyway. I'll look a little harder." I didn't like the stuff I was printing anyway. Stuff that was designed to ruin people's credit ratings. I didn't like that. So I went to get another job, and moved on from there. Did get back in—[End of Tape 2, Side 1]

McIntosh: You moved to Wisconsin?

Murdock: Yeah. I wound up with the Bureau of Prisons. While I was in the Marine Corps, they got—well, I went to work the brig. I was trained in brig duty. When I came back Stateside, I went to work in the brig there for a while, preparing for Vietnam, and [pause in recording] we had a prison in Terre Haute, so I applied to the prison, got a job there. They opened a new prison up here in Oxford, so I transferred up here, and finished my time living in Oxford, then retired from the Bureau of Prisons.

McIntosh: Did you join any veterans groups?

Murdock: I was a member of the VFW down in Terre Haute. When I moved up here there was no VFW [inaudible].

McIntosh: Do you keep track of any of your ship mates at all?

Murdock: Yeah, there's one friend—he was from Wisconsin. I was from Indiana. When we got out of the service, we both went back to Indiana. He got married, and he's living down there, and he's happy as a hog—and I moved to Wisconsin, and I'm happy. [laughs]

McIntosh: [inaudible]

Murdock: Yeah. We kind of switched roles there.

McIntosh: All right. Well, I think I'm running out of questions to ask you.

Murdock: Mm-hmm.

McIntosh: Okay. That's a good interview.

[End of interview]