

Wisconsin Veterans Museum
Research Center

Transcript of an

Oral History Interview with

DAVID R. WILLIAMS

2nd Combined Action Group, 1st Company, 1st Platoon, Marines, Vietnam War

2004

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Williams, David R., (b.1947-). Oral History Interview, 2004.

User Copy: 2 sound cassettes (ca. 96 min.); analog, 1 7/8 ips, mono.

Master Copy: 2 sound cassettes (ca. 96 min.); analog, 1 7/8 ips, mono.

Transcript: 0.1 linear ft. (1 folder).

Abstract:

David R. Williams, a native of Madison, Wisconsin, discusses his experiences serving in the Da Nang area in the Combined Action Program in the III Marine Amphibious Force during the Vietnam War. Williams recalls the protests happening while he was at the University of Wisconsin-Madison before he moved to Lake Tahoe (California). He recalls his disbelief at being drafted and put in charge of twenty-five men. He discusses attending boot camp at the Marine Corps Recruit Depot (San Diego) and being sent to Camp Pendleton (San Clemente) in cattle cars to get fire arms training. He talks about advanced training and then Combined Action Program language and cultural training at Camp Pendleton. Williams recalls being restricted to base when Richard Nixon was in his nearby compound. He recalls the general mindset that the war was winding down. He discusses being flown over to Vietnam and training in Hoi An and that he was too big to be a tunnel rat. Williams talks about being mentored by officers and mentions two problems: there was no training book and soldiers were assigned individually rather than in a group. He remembers his assignment to Da Nang with the 2nd Combined Action Group, 1st Company, 1st platoon and that the soldiers did not trust new guys and would give them extra equipment to carry. Williams describes the villages he rotated through and recalls moving every day and being on ambushes at night while the villagers had a curfew. He discusses the Popular Force, low-rung Vietnamese military who were farmers by day and not very good soldiers by night. He describes training them in radio, paperwork, and simple medical things, and developing trust with them. Williams recalls general R and R and his trip to Hong Kong. He describes a typical duty day setting up medical visits, building schools, and daylight patrolling. He describes equipment: PRC-25 radios, dust-off helicopters, AK-47s, claymores, demolition kits, C-rations, M-16s, .50 caliber machine guns, and the C-47 (nicknamed Puff the Magic Dragon). Williams talks about life-saving scout dogs. He describes the Vietcong and booby-traps, recalling the guilt felt when his executive officer and a corporal were killed by one. Williams analyzes the similarities between the Iraq and Vietnam wars. He talks about medical progress and medevac. He reports that the Vietnamese he dealt with were hard-working and just wanted to be left alone. He recalls the soldiers' reaction to the bombing of Sterling Hall and the animosity directed at Madison (Wisconsin) and war protestors. He remembers U.S. socials and a great Air Force PX in Da Nang. He reveals that soldiers would paint their dog tags black and lace them into their boots so if their legs got blown off they could be sent home. Williams describes going to a hospital with a fever of unknown origin and being amazed at the severity of injuries. He expresses worry that friendly natives will be exterminated in the Middle East after the U.S. pulls out like they were in Vietnam. Williams talks about learning not to ask what Vietnamese food was made of

because eating rodents and puppies is better left a mystery. He recalls being humbled by the self-sacrificial quality of the villagers' hospitality. He discusses alcohol and smoking being rewards in the Service. He addresses the dishonesty of U.S. leaders, and mentions his surprise that McNamara hasn't been assassinated for it. He talks about flying back to the Great Lakes Naval Training Station and declining to reenlist. He remembers the callousness of Madison towards its veterans. Williams recalls going to cheer the troops' homecoming in 1991 and joining the Veterans of Foreign Wars Post to support other veterans.

Biographical Sketch:

Williams (b.1947-) served with the Marine's 2nd Combined Action Group, 1st Company, 1st platoon in the Vietnam War. He started service in 1969 and was discharged in 1971. Now a retired university police officer, he resides in Iowa City, Iowa.

Interviewed by Jim Kurtz, 2004.

Transcribed by Kim M. Van Den Bosch-Jones and Susan Krueger, 2008.

Abstract written by Susan Krueger, 2008.

Transcript:

Jim: Today is December 23, 2004. My name is Jim Kurtz. I'm interviewing David R. Williams, who is a retired university police officer. Dave, where do you live now?

David: I live in Iowa City, Iowa, just south of Cedar Rapids. It's the home of the University of Iowa, who defeated the Wisconsin Badgers back --

Jim: You're giving us more information than we need Dave. (laughs) Dave, where were you born and when?

David: I was born December, 1947, Madison, Wisconsin. And was raised and educated in Madison, through the public school system. Originally went to Lincoln School up on Gorham Street and eventually they kicked me out of there and got to go to Central Junior High School and at that time junior high was seventh, eighth and ninth grade. Started senior high school, tenth grade, and my folks moved to the west side of Madison by Vilas Park. My sister continued at Central and I transferred to West and graduated in June of 1966.

Jim: Okay. Did you go in Service right after school or did you—?

David: No, I attended the University of Wisconsin for two years.

Jim: Okay. And—

David: And was not politically active but I was aware of the politics of the nation and the protests in Madison.

Jim: So you were there during some of the early protests.

David: Yeah, in fact, I was attending a class one afternoon in the Social Science Building on Observatory Drive and the big Dow demonstration was across the street at what at that time was --

Jim: The Commerce Building.

David: Commerce Building and couldn't figure out what was going on. I mean, there were people with you know, bloody noses, and so forth. It didn't take long because of all the protests and I understood some of the things that people were protesting, but didn't really pay a lot of attention to it. And after two years at the university I had an opportunity to go out and work in California at Lake Tahoe.

Jim: Did you know that if you left school that you were vulnerable to the draft?

David: Yeah, at the time it didn't seem that I, you know, could go back to school and that it would all go behind me.

Jim: What kind of a job did you take out in Lake Tahoe?

David: I worked at a casino hotel on the north shore of Lake Tahoe and ended up being in charge of the room service. It's a place called the Cal Neva. The Nevada-California line goes right through the lobby.

Jim: That's neat.

David: Oh, I was making money and having a good time and then I got a draft notice.

Jim: When did you get this draft notice?

David: In 1969.

Jim: So, do you remember the month?

David: Mm, I probably should, but I'm thinking it was May.

Jim: So I'll just put down spring.

David: Spring, yeah.

Jim: When were you to report?

David: I was supposed to report to Sacramento. That was the nearest --

Jim: So you didn't have to come back to Wisconsin to report.

David: I had transferred my draft office and so forth. I mean they kept pretty close tabs on you.

Jim: Yeah.

David: And I ended up going to Sacramento and they said, "Well, you're going to Oakland for a physical today." "Oh." [David said.] So, I got on a bus with about, well, several hundred other guys. I think there was over 400 to begin with in this cold, damp, drafty building in Oakland, California. And I ended up being in a group of 104. There were -- they hadn't found anything wrong with us. And then, they had us count off by fours and I was the twenty-sixth number four. And they said, "All the fours can leave." And I'd seen a lot of people during the day be sent away, be sent back home, and I thought, "Well, lucky us!" At which time I found out that we were twenty-six being drafted into the United States Marine Corps that day.

Jim: What was your reaction to that?

David: Well, I had a car, I had an apartment at Lake Tahoe, I had personal equipment. And I guess disbelief would have been the general feeling. But I had to make some phone calls and by the end of the day I was in charge of twenty-six guys. I don't know why they kept picking on me but I was probably one of the older. And so I was handed a big stack of service record folders. And was instructed to guard them with my life 'cause the other twenty-five guys didn't really want to be where they were at, either. There was a lot of disbelief in the room in this group. We ended up at the Oakland Airport and I think the flight to San Diego was about five hours later, so I had a two-page single-space typewritten series of orders that I was told to read out loud, which I did. And about every third was about not consuming any alcohol while we were at the airport. And after complete reading this form to the other twenty-five individuals I'd advise them that if they have any questions, see me in the bar. I didn't realize but I was the oldest by several months and I could get in the bar but they couldn't. So, obviously, some of them did 'cause there was some drill instructors in San Diego that were not pleased about the condition of some of them.

Jim: So, you were in -- did you know that it was possible that you were going to go in to military right away that day when you reported?

David: No. I was just a kid enjoying California and I guess I had thought it could happen but I figured it wouldn't happen.

Jim: So then you served from spring of '69 to what was your end date?

David: Spring of '71.

Jim: Okay, so far as—

David: That was May, May of '71.

Jim: Okay. Do you -- where were you sent for boot camp?

David: The Marine Corps Recruit Depot is in San Diego, right next to the San Diego airport. So a lot of times when you'd be ordered to do something you couldn't hear the order because of overhead airplane noise. It was a penalty phase of my life that—but I wasn't alone. There was a lot of other people. What did you say?

Jim: Is there anything else that stands out from your boot camp experience other than the fact that you couldn't hear the drill sergeant?

David: Yeah, there was always the threat that you'd be re-cycled if you didn't keep up. It was kind of the, I don't know that they called it teamwork at the time but it

was important not to have to repeat some of the training. The goal was to graduate from boot camp and then life would be easier.

Jim: Mm-huh. When you were in boot camp were you trained on the M-14 or the M-16?

David: Both.

Jim: Both.

David: Probably the M-16 was perhaps a half a day. And all the fire arms training was done up at Camp Pendleton, which is a half an hour ride, oh two hour ride up in vehicles they called cattle cars.

Jim: Yes.

David: They were unique vehicles.

Jim: Could you describe what a cattle car was for people who don't know?

David: Well, it's an enclosed trailer with seating but it's not like bus seating. It's like a Cattle car. It's an open area and if the tractor trailer had to go up and make some curves or stop or if you had to accelerate rapidly, you'd slide all over the place. It was about as basic a mode of transportation, but you could get a lot of gear in with each person. There was a wide door. It was a tractor-trailer but it was very similar to a cattle car.

Jim: Okay. When you completed basic training, what happened?

David: I was assigned to advanced training in Camp Pendleton, California.

Jim: What did that consist of?

David: That was another six weeks of training. A lot of exercise, a lot of drills. It was on the Pacific coastline. There were a lot of opportunities to go camping

Jim: Mm-hmm. So you got a chance to see what it was like to camp in California.

David: Yeah, more or less.

Jim: Was that as good as being up at Lake Tahoe?

David: No. No, it wasn't.

Jim: Does anything stand out from that experience?

David: Yes. Richard Nixon lived on a compound in San Clemente, California. And oftentimes when he was at the, I don't know if they called it "the Western White House" but when he was in California, half the base would be restricted to the base and I never quite understood it. I suppose if you know since the United States was at war, I really don't think that there was any naval force that would attack San Clemente, but it was the community immediately north of Camp Pendleton so they would restrict half the base. If he was there for ten days, half the base would be restricted for half that time.

Jim: Did any of your duty assignments change or you were just there to be available?

David: I think it was -- there was more symbolism than substance.

Jim: Okay. When you were going through this training were you led to believe that you might go to Vietnam?

David: Depending on who you talked with. A lot of people said the war is winding down. The political mindset of the country is such that people are -- there's just nobody that's going to go to Vietnam. And other people said, "Don't believe anything that you hear." I talked to an aviator, he was a Marine major and he'd just returned from his second tour in Vietnam and he said, "Nobody's going back. Everybody's coming home." And I got my orders for what was called WestPac, Western Pacific, which meant you were going to Vietnam. I think two days later. So nobody knew for sure.

Jim: Right. A lot of rumors and stuff like that. Did you have a chance to go on leave before you went for WestPac?

David: Yes. I flew back to Wisconsin and said goodbye to some old girlfriends and my family that lived in Wisconsin.

Jim: Was there protest going? This was '69 so this was probably getting towards Christmas, or the late fall and early winter of '69. Was there anything going on protest-wise here?

David: A lot of protests in Wisconsin.

Jim: What, uh --

David: At the university.

Jim: Yeah. Did that affect you in any way, personally or emotionally?

David: (Pauses) Well, some close friends of mine from high school had been in the Service, both the Army and the Navy and the Marines and I tried to get some

counseling from some of them. A lot of people who had been in the service were very bitter at the treatment they had received. It was a very divisive time in our country and I also had some friends that protested the draft and disappeared, went to Canada.

Jim: Did that ever occur to you that that was an option?

David: No.

Jim: Okay. So then you completed your leave. Where did you -- what happened then?

David: I had orders to go back to Camp Pendleton.

Jim: Okay.

David: And I was recruited to join or to participate in training for a specialized group called the Combined Action Program, which I had no idea what it was.

Jim: So did you receive some training for this?

David: Yes.

Jim: What was the training?

David: We initiated language training and some cultural training, learning more than infantry. It was more about the culture and how to deal with people and how to -- And that lasted I think two weeks.

Jim: So you learned Vietnamese in two weeks?

David: No, Jim. No, that was just an initial and they'd have people that had done tours in Vietnam, both infantry and in this Combined Action Program. And you'd sit down with ten or a dozen guys and explain how things worked. But this was an opportunity. It was overall part of the Vietnamization of the war.

Jim: Sure. Did they have any Vietnamese participate in this program?

David: Not in the United States, no.

Jim: So two weeks and then did you go on to Vietnam from there or did you have other training?

David: I departed south California, flew to Alaska, stayed twelve hours in Elmendorf Air Force Base.

Jim: Did you go by commercial transport?

David: Yes. Flew on to Yokota, Japan and then on to Da Nang. It was all I think on Continental, had most of the contracts.

Jim: Did you know anybody that was on this flight?

David: No.

Jim: What went through your mind on this flight or did you just sleep or did you find another bar in all these places?

David: I did in Japan. I ran into a guy that I had gone through basic training with and he was stationed in Japan so he took me to some terrible taste in beer, whatever it was, but if you get it cold enough. And actually before I went to Da Nang I got routed through Okinawa. From Japan to Okinawa to—

Jim: Did you receive any training in Okinawa?

David: No, that was just—

Jim: What was your thoughts about going into Vietnam?

David: I was very apprehensive. I mean there was a lot of senior enlisted people that said, "You're going to get more training. Don't worry. You're not gonna be stuck out in some rice paddy somewhere." But very apprehensive and just becoming acclimated to the weather. Becoming acclimated to -- for some reason the military goes overboard trying to use abbreviations and so forth. That can be very confusing to everyone. Some of the organization names and—

Jim: What time -- what month did you arrive in Vietnam?

David: In May of 1970.

Jim: So you were there for the rest of your military career then basically?

David: Yep. Basically, they figured that I wasn't a likely candidate to re-enlist.

Jim: (Laughs.) You made that real clear!

David: Well, I felt there were --

Jim: Other things to do.

David: Much more worthwhile things to do with my life. But pretty much, I was -- my opportunities were limited because they didn't figure it was worthwhile giving me

an optional MOS [Military Occupational Specialty], and to be honest, they were downsizing. I mean, by 1970 pretty much the writing was on the wall.

Jim: So you were just there kind of to fill a hole until --

David: Then I attended language school and that was in Hoi An, which is south and west of Da Nang.

Jim: Okay. How long was that?

David: Three weeks. And we worked daily with Vietnamese language people and customs. We were trained -- living out in the village is a lot different than living on a firebase or being shuttled into some area. And that was -- I guess they attempted to teach us about 200 Vietnamese terms. Although when we got to the village, or when I got to the platoon that was in the village, a lot of the terms were Americanized and there was a bastard English Vietnamese language. But it was good training and, I mean, you learned a lot about map reading. Things that you kinda took perhaps not as intently but there were more important.

Jim: Did you have any practice in map reading? Do you go through field problems and stuff like that or was it classroom?

David: Yeah. Some of the things, fortunately, I was not one of the smaller people in the unit so I didn't have to learn about being a tunnel rat. It's amazing how much air you can fill in your lungs and say, "I can't fit in there." (jokingly)

Jim: (Laughs) So you were given that opportunity they just looked at you and say you're not a tunnel rat.

David: Yeah, I was too big.

Jim: So they were training some Marines to be tunnel rats though. Is that correct?

David: Well, they were training them what to look for. I mean, the whole part of the training is tripwires, and booby-traps and things to be—

Jim: So was this weaved into your language school or was this a separate training?

David: I think this was an effort on the part of the non-commissioned officers to give you as much information, I mean they were generally second or third term, tour guys. And perhaps it wasn't on the written criteria but they cared enough to pass on those—kind of a big brother "this is something you wanna look out for and if you see something over here," because they've already experienced -- You know a lot of that information wasn't in a book. It was handed down. And that was probably one of the unfortunate things about the whole military effort, that you had to. There was no book. I mean, a lot of the things were trial by error and

there was no continuity of units, the people there as individuals on their individual timetable. It wasn't like your platoon of twelve or fifteen guys were gonna start the first of the month and be outta there in six months or nine months. Everybody was on their own individual little cycle and I thought that was, later on, I mean you just accepted it at the time, but later on I think that was a problem.

Jim: What were your first impressions of Vietnam when you arrived?

David: I thought it was a very beautiful country.

Jim: Did you have any impressions of smell, heat?

David: I was in Da Nang so there was humidity. You could see the mountains out in the distance. But if you were down on the beach, some of the most beautiful coastlines. Very lush vegetation. But any time you start thinking, "Well, isn't this a beautiful place?" someone would remind you that an awful lot of people got injured and killed daydreaming.

Jim: When -- so what was your first duty assignment then after you completed the training?

David: I was sent to a village and then joined up with a platoon that was the Second Combined Action Group, Second Company. I'm sorry, First Company, First Platoon. So our name was Combined Action Program, 2 dash 1 dash 1.

Jim: What was the last one?

David: Platoon.

Jim: Oh, it was a platoon, 1st platoon, ok.

David: Second Group, which was primarily in the Da Nang region.

Jim: Were you part of one of the Marine divisions that was there?

David: Actually, we were in the 3rd Marine Amphibious Force, three MAF. But the First Division was very prominent in the Da Nang area.

Jim: How were you received when you joined this platoon?

David: With a great deal of apprehension.

Jim: Could you explain that please?

David: Well, you don't trust the a guy. It was nothing blatant but you don't know what experience the new person has. I mean, basically you have eight or ten Marines

and a corpsman and somebody shows up and all they've got is a backpack and an M-16. You don't know if they're qualified, what experience level they have, can they—?

Jim: Okay. Did you receive any kind of a briefing in the new unit?

David: Yeah. Map reading, here's where we are, we have twelve villages in our area.

Jim: Did they take you around and introduce you to the village chiefs or how did—

David: Probably the next day.

Jim: How big an area did these villages -- were they in miles?

David: It was on one shore of a stream. It wasn't that there was anything set up in grids. It depended on the terrain.

Jim: So it was kinda like along the Yahara River, where there's Stoughton [Wisconsin] and there's different towns and villages.

David: It was probably eight kilometers by twelve kilometers.

Jim: Okay. But they were all based like on water?

David: Well, there's mountains and valleys. And of course the valleys were primarily agriculturally used.

Jim: So these villages were primarily in the agricultural areas?

David: I got twenty-seven minutes here.

Jim: Yeah, why don't we --

[End of Tape 1 side A]

Jim: I asked if you -- if agriculture was the prime economic activity in these villages?

David: Yes. There was rice, bananas, bamboo, and I guess, you would call it marketing. Some people, it would be their job to transport and sell the agricultural products.

Jim: You said you were received with apprehension. Did that change and how did it, what happened to change how you were treated?

David: I think it was a matter of time. There was a lot of people who would transfer

around in military units and in the first couple days you'd just say, "Who's this group?" It just takes time and you sit down and explain, "I got off the airplane three weeks ago." And, "How do you guys operate?" And usually one of the less desirable jobs is any extra gear that you might have to hump. You don't want to be the ammo humper for the guy with the M-60 machine gun because you gotta carry more than -- You don't -- If you had an M-79, which is the grenade launcher, you had to carry extra weight. And it's a lot different weapon than the M-16, so that was kind of a transitional. Somebody said, "You know, Bob is the M-79 guy. And maybe he'll, if he feels good about you, he'll show you how, some of the shortcuts or the techniques." But being a radio man, any job that required extra work or extra gear to haul around, usually got passed on to a new person.

Jim: You said "when humping." Does that mean that what you did is you walked between the villages that you were responsible for?

David: Yes.

Jim: Would you do that on a daily or a weekly basis or how did that—?

David: Yes. We were on the move everyday. We never stayed in one village longer than twelve hours.

Jim: So, where would spend your nights then?

David: Out on ambushes. We had a lot of Vietcong activity and we split the platoon in half and six guys would go out on an ambush and we had co-ordinates and we knew where other people were gonna be because there were other CAP units two miles or four miles or eight miles in one direction or another. And it was important to know who was gonna be out and moving around. And they pretty much had a curfew for the villagers. So anybody out moving around after let's say ten o'clock at night was either us or somebody that shouldn't be out or the enemy. But most of our days and nights was spent with Popular Force troops, and they were the lowest rung of the Vietnamese military.

Jim: 'Kay, what were the Popular Force?

David: They were farmers in the daytime and soldiers at night. They had the worst equipment and absolutely the worst training. They were sometimes referenced to be, well, they were "National Guardsmen." Well, it was much worse than that 'cause they were just males between 15 and 30 years old that lived in the villages and we were training them how to use the radios to call in for artillery. We would train them how to fill out paperwork. Did a lot to help them learn about medical things, something as simple as washing an open wound and, you know, wear little or minimal clothing and it's the same as any industrial area, there's

gonna be injuries, not just from warfare but it's just 'cause human beings are accident-prone.

Jim: What was your assessment of these folks?

David: Well, I didn't trust them. I mean, you had to develop a trust and that's a two-way street. They didn't trust the Marines, the new guys. They had little terms, "a new guy," or "a newbie." They had to develop a relationship with each Marine, too, because there had been some Marines that were cruel and mean and other Marines were generous and caring and compassionate.

Jim: When you mention that some Marines were cruel, did the leadership take any action with those folks that—?

David: Yeah, they'd get transferred out because you had to depend on the villagers to provide information to -- actually to provide you a roof when it's raining out.

Jim: So they were transferred to a line?? unit then.

David: Yeah, sent someplace else. If they were a, I think the term might have been "shippered" (?) but you had to have a -- develop a trust in each other, and a trust with the Popular Forces 'cause they got loaded guns and they're sittin' down the rice paddy a few feet from you. So there was a constant developing of interaction with the Popular Force troops and some of them were better than others. Some of them you didn't trust. You just said—

Jim: Did you have any contact with higher units of the ARVN [Army of the Republic of Vietnam]?

David: Yes. We'd have contact with them. Each company had a compound. And so, we had a -- usually it was a lieutenant who was the company commander and there might be as many as eight or ten platoons. So there would be an area of operation for the company and each platoon would have a small section, a group of villages. And every week or ten days, you could go into the company headquarters and have a little R and R.

Jim: Did the whole platoon go?

David: No. Just one person at a time. So, if you had ten guys, you'd get to go every tenth day.

Jim: What did you do when you were there? Did you just be able to stand down or did you have to do guard duty?

David: Usually you could hang out in a makeshift clubhouse, probably forty feet by ten feet, with steel folding chairs and—

Jim: Were there any slot machines?

David: Well, maybe beer, but there were no jukeboxes or slot machines. It was -- there were a lot of people who had to go into Da Nang for medical purposes or they were gonna do an R and R. You'd get a day or two to get back to Da Nang before you'd go on your R and R.

Jim: Did you spend your entire tour in the Civil Action?

David: Yeah.

Jim: Could you tell me what a typical day or a typical duty day, if there was such a thing?

David: Well, we'd set up a medical visit to one of the villages and usually we wouldn't pick the village until maybe the day before because you don't want your comings and goings -- you know, there's an unknown enemy out there and so, you'd show up at a village and usually they knew when you were coming. It was amazing for a culture that had no cell phones and no two-way radios. They knew more about what was going on than the US people. It's just the way. A rural community knows everything, right? So we'd treat a lot of people who had never had any our corpsman was the first medical person that they'd ever met.

Jim: How did the word get out once you showed up? Were people kind of lined up?

David: They were lined up. They knew we were coming before we knew which village we were going to. I mean, there was a communication system that they had, and there'd be papa-sans or grandparents with a little kid that had a cut or infection, and we would hand out all kinds of medical supplies. I mean Bacitracin was a miracle worker and we'd have school supplies, notepads, crayons, comic books. I mean these people had nothing and anything was something pretty special. And some of the stuff that we had were sent by individuals in the States. A lot was provided by the military. Just providing with what we would assume to be normal necessities of life. And we helped build some schools, so some days we would go work on the schools. So you have one or two guys taking a nap and one or two guys kinda posting the guard and you don't know who the ladies out in the rice paddies really are. They all have the same-style hat, so security was always an issue, but some days we would repair a roof on a school. And they had some small schools that were probably, I think there was about 130 kids that were going to school everyday. Now, it would only be for a couple of hours, but it was more than their parents ever had.

Jim: Did your unit have any role in this education?

David: Yeah. We'd help provide pencils and paper. The Vietnamese government,

although it was quite corrupt still provided some of those supplies for the schools.

Jim: So you'd get medical, schools, general construction. Did you do any daylight patrolling?

David: Yeah.

Jim: What did that consist of?

David: Usually half of the platoon and then we'd meet -- they'd get a report of some activity. Perhaps somebody at one of the villages had seen some activity in some part of their village or just outside the village and we'd go and check. And we'd find caches of supplies. Could be just a shallow hole in the ground, you'd find some food or you'd find some spare uniforms. And then you had a record-keeping system, or if there was some kind of an action the night before, you'd go out and see if there was any evidence of somebody being injured or killed. You know, the other—

Jim: So, in other words, the typical duty day the platoon would split in half and half would be kind of doing patrolling and the other half would be doing either medical or construction in a particular --

David: Or just resting or 'cause you'd been up on patrol.

Jim: All right. And then before you said that when you -- at night six people would go out on an ambush patrol. Two questions there: How was the ambush patrol armed? And what types of things did you ambush?

David: We'd set up an ambush on a road that was -- You've got villages that are connected by these dirt roads and nobody's supposed to be out there. The villagers are all told they have to be, basically, hours of darkness they're supposed to be in their hoochies. And then you'd have various operations. Somebody would decide in Da Nang that we're gonna have to sweep so many thousand kilometers of and look for the enemy.

Jim: You wouldn't do that in the evening though would you?

David: No. Usually the night ambushes you'd go set up the ambush and stay there until four or five in the morning.

Jim: And how were you armed?

David: Well, we had three of the first generation Starlight Scopes. And typically the ambush would be just rifles and grenade launchers.

Jim: No machine guns, maybe?

David: Well, they're too hard to haul around. So they would stay with the stationary part of the platoon.

Jim: What would the -- where would the stationary part of the platoon be? In the village?

David: On the outskirts of one of the villages.

Jim: So, but they'd be close enough so they could support you if needed?

David: Yeah.

Jim: So that was is -- Did we cover everything that kinda happened in your duty days?

David: Well, there was the -- we had two radios, PRC-25. And if people with walkie-talkies today would see how cumbersome a PRC-25 is. I mean it's as big as a briefcase and the batteries don't last very long and they have big whip antennas. It was a pretty primitive source of communication. But that was your only communication with the -- if you needed artillery or illumination.

Jim: Who would you call back the artillery back to? To your company? Or did you have—?

David: We had options. I mean, there was the company, but if you needed artillery, you eliminate that stuff, you'd have a, everybody would have a little three by five card with what radio frequencies if you needed a dust-off helicopter. Most of the helicopters up in Da Nang were Army, warrant officers. They'd land on anything, fly into anything, and their radio call sign was "dust-off" and I might be "dust-off 17" or something. But the Marine Corps, most of their pilots were captains and majors and they were—they probably got to be that rank because they survived. But the Army warrant officers would fly a helicopter or a gunship. I mean, if somebody was hurt and you needed a helicopter to medevac somebody, you'd call dust-off right away because those guys, in my experience, were more willing to -- And they crashed a lot of helicopters, but that wasn't something that was ever written down. It was passed on from—

Jim: Okay. What was the level or intensity of the enemy contact during your year in Vietnam? And did it change?

David: It changed all the time, because there was a lot of NVA [North Vietnamese Army] activity. They were bringing a lot of supplies. I mean, Cambodia, Laos. There was all kinds of supplies coming down for NVA regulars and they were supplying the Vietcong with some of the cruddiest-looking rifles. You know, there was no finish to the AK-47s that I saw in the field. It was like they made the rifle and forgot the— It was a weapon for killing, not for—

Jim: So, did you get sniped at or did you have trouble with booby-traps or what was the --?

David: We had a lot of booby-traps, and some of them were the wire across the rice paddy dike. And, I mean, that's why you didn't move around too much at night. You'd go out and sit on the perimeter of a village. We'd have claymores set up around us.

Jim: How many claymores typically would you have on average?

David: Probably four.

Jim: That was just another thing that the new guy might have had to carry.

David: Yeah, yeah. Then, if we'd find supplies that we figured were NVA, after you'd document the stuff, we'd blow it up. And we always had a demolition kit or sometimes two.

Jim: What was a demolition kit?

David: Like five pounds. Let's see, they were, I think a brick of C-4 plastic explosives was a kilo. I'm thinking a demolition kit might have had three kilos, and then demolition cord and some, what else, oh—the detonator.

Jim: The detonator, sure. Did your unit ever get attacked by an organized NVA unit?

David: Several times.

Jim: Is there anything that stands out with that?

David: Well, because we were so mobile, it wasn't like a firebase that would get mortared or rocketed. There was an advantage of being mobile but you're also pretty unprotected. I mean, you're not even anything like a foxhole. Maybe you're sitting behind a stand of bamboo.

Jim: Okay. So like you were saying before, so if the mortars or the rockets were not the concern, it was rifles and booby-traps because of the nature of -- Did you guys ever get ambushed when you were out on your daylight patrols or doing the MEDCAP-type [Medical Civil Action Program-type] stuff?

David: Our platoon, in my experience, didn't. But some others did, because they inadvertently come in contact with some NVA soldiers that were -- they were just resting and --

Jim: And you'd walk into them.

David: It was very hit-and-miss. It wasn't organized. It wasn't a planned attack

Jim: When you went through these villages, did you run into any VC operatives? Or, you know, like, did they have a separate structure in the area you operated, a governmental structure, the VC?

David: We'd get information that VC had been in a village the day before. Most of what the Vietcong did in my perspective was, they were just taxing the villager like the Saigon government was taxing them. They'd come in and steal their rice, they'd steal anything that wasn't secreted away or hidden. And our job was to try to train the Popular Force troops to protect their own villages. And I think that was working.

Jim: It was working, okay.

David: There was a communication—if we needed illumination or artillery we could call it in and, you know, when an artillery or illumination goes off, it gets pretty bright out. And we had a tremendous advantage in that respect in these, what do they call them, pop-ups? That was a tremendous advantage for us. With a Starlite Scope, I mean we had some technology. Those people were very inventive. A lot of times the Popular Forces, well, sometimes they lacked courage but they wanted to live.

Jim: How was their leadership?

David: Iffy. If you were gonna be a good soldier you wouldn't stay in the Popular Forces. I mean, the money. The pay was terrible, the leadership was lacking, because you'd go into the ARVN or you'd go into, I mean. It wasn't something that a good soldier would stay in.

Jim: Okay. But with the Vietnamese being very much wedded to their villages and all of that—

David: A lot of them stayed in the Popular Forces because their family depended on them being there in the daytime to be a farmer.

Jim: Okay. So that would trump wanting to be a good soldier?

David: Oh yeah. The Vietnamese are very family -- some of the people, "Why should I leave my village? That's where my people are."

Jim: Do you have any memorable experiences in this year? Did you spend the whole year in this, twelve --

David: Ten months.

Jim: About ten months. Are there any memorable experiences that we haven't covered in that ten months?

David: Well, my interaction with scout dogs. We'd get scout dogs and they'd live with us. And they'd be typically German shepherds. And I was always amazed, the PFs wanted nothing to do with the scout dogs.

Jim: The PFs are the Popular Force, right?

David: Yeah. They're the good guys. But they wanted to be nowhere near the scout dogs, 'cause the scout dogs hated everybody. Everybody Vietnamese. You know, this could be little Tommy, the Popular Force corporal, and he'd say, "No. You come here. I'm not coming there." 'Cause we'd have a dog handler and a scout dog and the dogs somewhere in their training were taught to dislike all Vietnamese. But the scout dogs were great for booby-traps. They were, I mean we'd find booby-traps that were -- and I'm not talking about the physical ones like the spikes and stuff, it was mostly ordnance and grenades or explosives. And unfortunately, it reminds me of some of the things we're running into over in Iraq.

Jim: We gotta stop.

[End of tape 1 side B]

Jim: When I had to put in a new tape, Dave, you were talking about the scout dogs and booby-traps. Did you cover everything that you should there?

David: Yeah, I -- I thought the scout dogs saved a lot of lives.

Jim: Are there any other memorable experiences that you had other than, you know, that made an impression on you?

David: Well, if I might digress and make a reference to Iraq, there was a lot of landmines, a lot of booby-traps, and we had a -- our executive officer and a corporal killed by one. And we'd been down this road two hours earlier and not noticed anything. Usually you can see if the surface of the road is dug up, but it was a little bit elevated and the VC had gone in the side of the hill in the road, and we think it was command detonated. In other words, it was some guy over there who sees the jeep coming down the road and then detonates it, and these two Marines were killed. And uh, you know, there's just -- there's a lot of guilt. Why didn't we see— Well, first of all you're scared 'cause you think it could've been me, and then you think I should've done my job better and seen this booby-trap. I mean it's -- it's got to be very difficult for the sailors, and the Marines, and the National Guardsmen, the people over in Iraq because it's a very similar situation, at least, I feel that it is.

Jim: Uh, do you have, let's see we're just talking about Iraq and then we've got to hop back to Vietnam. Do you have any opinion about our leadership, of the country not seeing the similarities? I mean they --

David: Yeah, I'm disappointed. It seems like we're making similar mistakes. In Vietnam in 1970, 1971, I think the decisions had already been made. We're going to wind this down and you can call it whatever you want, Vietnamization or -- but people were winding down and they were losing their edge. There was peace talks going on in Paris, [if you could?] really call them peace talks. There was a lot of concern over POWs. And it was pretty much an attitude when you go into the rear areas, I mean they were throwing away stuff, they were saying, "We're going to be out of here in six weeks, or six months." And they were throwing away supplies. They were—

I've talked to a lot of Vietnam-era guys -- the waste in humans and the -- probably the best reason for there not being many more names on the Vietnam Wall was medical progress. Helicopters, they were able to evacuate people from the battlefield. I mean, if you look at some of the footage sixty years ago of the Battle of the Bulge, those people froze out on the battlefield, bled to death. And then there was a tremendous increase in the response to get people medevaced out to ships.

Jim: Okay, let's hop to what were your impressions of the Vietnamese?

David: I think overall they just didn't want to be part of the regional or the national or the international politics. I don't know that our presence saved a lot of people.

Jim: So in other words you're saying that they wanted to live in their village and that was it.

David: The people I dealt with wanted to remain in their village and be left alone and not taxed by the Saigon government, or not taxed by the Vietcong, and try to improve their own existence of the people in their village. They didn't care about international things.

Jim: Did you see any residuals from the French occupation of the area that you were in?

David: We had a couple of French fortresses. They've been all bombed. But somebody's been trying to run their country for 'em for hundreds of years.

Jim: Do you think that they saw any difference between us and the French?

David: Yeah, I think, well maybe I'm being selfish, but I think they felt we were really trying to help 'em. And they liked the fact we were helping with their schools. But the information got shared, you know, some GI went crazy and killed some of

their cousins or somebody in another village or torched a little hamlet. I mean wars is -- it's not a good thing to be a resident when a war is going on.

Jim: Right. Did you have any impressions of the NVA [North Vietnamese Army] or the VC [Vietcong]?

David: The VC were probably some of the farmers that we'd meet in the daytime.

Jim: Why do you think that they were VC and not --

David: Well, they were both. Whatever was, you know, whatever uniform I should be -- if the Americans are here today I'm gonna be their best friend and their buddy. But the Vietcong were very often thugs. I mean, there's a criminal element in their -- I don't necessarily believe that their motivation was political, it was I can steal something from my neighbor.

Jim: Did you have that opinion when you were there or is that because of your experiences as a police officer?

David: Both.

Jim: Did you have much contact with enemy that you knew were enemy?

David: Yes.

Jim: What was the nature of that?

David: They were shooting at us.

Jim: Okay.

David: And we were shooting back at them.

Jim: Okay. So you didn't have any personal one-on-one contact if they were captured or anything like that.

David: No.

Jim: Okay.

David: We captured some. But it's amazing how many times that they would just disappear. I mean, you'd find a blood trail. But somebody hauled them away or they crawled under—

Jim: Okay. So did the fact that these people just wanted to be left alone affect your attitude about being in Vietnam?

David: Well, one of the things my folks did, they got me a subscription to the Wisconsin State Journal. And when the Armstrong brothers and the other guys blew up Sterling Hall I heard about that on armed forces Vietnam radio and then I got the paper about ten days later and, you know, the incredible destruction. It was interesting, some of the guys in my platoon said, "I can't believe you're from—" They were mad at the city of Madison, Wisconsin. They thought that the activity of the antiwar people and the -- I mean they'd read my hometown newspaper and they'd say, "What kind of screwed up people live in your town?" There was a lot of animosity towards war protestors. Cause we'd find medical supplies and it would be very easy to stamp these things "gift from the students of Berkley" or "gift from—" and some of these things were just bags of bandages. But they'd have a stamp "gift from the people of San Francisco" and that would really irritate the US troops.

Jim: How did this affect --?

David: 'Cause it's great propaganda. I mean, if I wanted to get people really upset, I'd stamp like "gift from the people of Paris, France." It's propaganda.

Jim: Sure. How did this affect you personally, the fact you were from Madison and the attitude of your peers towards Madison, and your own attitude?

David: I think probably at the time my typical response was "well, they're just screwed up." You know, you really -- I didn't have -- it wouldn't be like you're defending your high school or something. It was, well, you know maybe, some of what they're saying is right, but you could get in some (phone rings) pretty good arguments with people just saying well, one of the things that we're in the service for, we're in public service trying to help these people, is so they have an opportunity to collect information and make decisions for their own village. So maybe I was, perhaps I did -- (answering machine comes on)

Jim: I'm just going to turn this -- [one second gap in tape] -- here you got a semi-important call so (laughs). Ah, okay it's interesting, just because when I was in Vietnam I got the State Journal too and it wasn't as good then because I was there in '66, '67 and not as much was happening in Madison. Let's talk about off-duty. Did you have -- what happened when you had some time off?

David: They'd have US socials in Da Nang.

Jim: Did you get to go to any?

David: A couple.

Jim: What -- do you remember anything about them?

David: The Vietnamese bands. Typically, I guess we would call it the lower grade USO shows, would have an Asian band and they'd lip-synch. And it was awful, just awful. And they'd also have bands and they'd have Asian female singers and they couldn't speak a word of English but they'd listen to a song 500 times and they'd— In Da Nang they had, oh what was the name, Golden Gate, it was an Air Force facility, and it had a tremendous PX [Post Exchange]. You could buy cameras, you could buy, I mean for some reason the Air Force, they knew how to run a PX.

Jim: Did you see Bob Hope Show when you were there?

David: No. Other guys from my platoon did, but it was kinda -- we did it by lottery. And I haven't won the Powerball either.

Jim: (laughs) Did you have any -- did you go on R and R?

David: Yeah, I went to Hong Kong for a week.

Jim: What part of your tour did you go on R and R?

David: My seventh month.

Jim: What was your impression of Hong Kong when you were there?

David: I was interested in the history and thought it was an interesting part of the world, and the commerce that they have there. They have a lot of tradition. In retrospect I think I would have preferred to have gone to Bangkok, but only from stories that people told me. And when I was in high school our family sponsored an American Field Service student from Thailand. And his name was nutatachai peeannutzanah (??). And he went to Central High School.

Jim: Do you have any idea what --

David: We called him Charlie (laughs). But he went to Central High School for a year. And I've always kind of wondered what happened to him. We never kept track by letters or anything. But I always wondered what happened. And his family was wealthy, lived in the Bangkok area, and I envision one day I'm going to go over there and look for him. And I'm not gonna do that. It's --

Jim: It's over.

David: That's over (laughs).

Jim: Did you have any good luck charms or things that you did in order to -- you thought would protect yourself when you were in Vietnam?

David: One of the first things when I got to Da Nang somebody gave me a bottle of black, it's like fingernail polish. And we'd paint our dog tags black and lace them into our boots. And I've still got the boots that I wore home with a pair of dog tags. And the theory was, if you stepped on a landmine and you lost one or both of your legs, that somebody could find them and mail them home to you. Stupidest thing I've ever (both laugh) --

Jim: Did you have any other superstitions or things like that?

David: There were a lot but I guess I've forgotten some of 'em.

Jim: Were you ever sick or wounded when you were—?

David: I was sick. I was about two months in country and got taken by jeep -- picked up and taken by jeep into Da Nang. And the doctor said, "You have FUO" And I thought, "Oh." Cause you know in boot camp they have all these horrible stories about black syphilis or about some exotic disease. Well I had FUO. And I said, "Okay doc, what does that mean? How long do I have to live?" And he said, "Well it means fever of unknown origin. And you're going to puke and poop for a couple of days and then you're gonna be better. And that's exactly what happened.

Jim: Do you think it was from the water?

David: (background noise) Oh easily, yeah.

Jim: (pause) I don't have a cell phone, so I don't know if that's a buzzer or not.

David: I don't know what it is. (female voice: "hello?") **[gap in tape]**

Jim: -- problem. Okay, so you had a fever of unknown origin. Was the doctor right?

David: Oh yeah, I got better.

Jim: Okay.

David: But the visit to the hospital in Da Nang really opened my eyes up. I mean, we had guys that were injured, but I was just amazed at all the severe injuries: the facial and the head wounds, and the missing limbs, and they don't tell you about that kind of stuff in boot camp or training. They tell you how to use a radio and how to use the cellophane on a pack of cigarettes to cover a sucking chest wound. I don't know if that really works but— When I was at the hospital getting ready to go back to my unit I ran into some guys and I said, "Well, where are you guys stationed?" And they were, you know, having a chow hall or something and they said, "Oh, we're just down the road." I said, "What are you doing?" They said,

“Graves Registration.” “Well what is that?” When they told me I said, “That’s got to be the worst job.”

Jim: Ah, let’s -- we’re getting near the end here. This is kinda an assessment of your Vietnam experience. How did, you know, and this is kind of a series I think, pick up on the ones that interest you, how did the terrain, climate, vegetation, or cultural differences affect your experience?

David: Oh I think the terrain is obviously completely different from what I was used to in the United States. The jungle and the -- just the agricultural activity. It certainly gave me a greater appreciation of picking the right ancestors.

Jim: That’s hard to do, isn’t it?

David: Yeah, that’s why I was fortunate enough to have been born in Madison, Wisconsin and provided an opportunity to be educated in Wisconsin. I mean, even if you meet people from other states and other regions of this county, we’ve got it pretty good here.

Jim: Are there any other things -- obviously you had quite an experience with the Vietnamese culture. What do you think about that? Did that have any long-term effect on you?

David: Yeah, I think they’re overall very hard-working people and I don’t know that our involvement there (pause) helped. I realize that I lot of people that I worked with, when the United States did pull out of Vietnam, I feel that they were probably exterminated. (long pause) They were friendly to us and they suffered in the long-run. Which I think, unfortunately, may be happening again in the Middle East.

Jim: Sure. What -- we didn’t talk about the food. Did you eat American food when you -- on your tour? Did you eat much Vietnamese food?

David: We had standard C-rations. And if you were in the rear and there was a chow hall you’d eat there.

Jim: But you didn’t eat Vietnamese food, is that -- ?

David: Oh yeah. I was going to get to that.

Jim: Oh, I’m sorry.

David: I’d never had squid or octopus or some of the -- in fact, one of the delicacies -- some of the Vietnamese holidays we’d be invited to a village and they’d set up a feast for us. And I learned right away that you shouldn’t ask what you’re eating

Jim: Why is that?

David: Well I'd never had some of the rodents or a puppy dog or, you know, and it's probably better left to be a mystery. (both laugh)

Jim: Did you find this food good or—?

David: Well generally, I mean, it was tolerable. Obviously most of their products were rice oriented.

Jim: Did you --

David: It was out of politeness. You lived in their village and it was a celebration of something and "thank you very much." I mean, it was very humbling to be invited into someone's home and be fed when you know they don't have -- Anyway, somehow they had to give up what their next meal was going to be to feed us. But it was genuine hospitality. And I think I was better off than a lot of the Marines that would just sweep through an area or the people that would be in the rear on a firebase or on the docks in Da Nang. We didn't have a lot of free time and we didn't get some of the problems. I mean, I didn't know that there was a drug problem until I was on my way home.

Jim: Was alcohol used much?

David: Uh, yeah, I mean that was kind of the reward in the service I thought. I mean, that's how it was treated. After the first couple weeks in boot camp you were rewarded "smoke 'em if you got 'em". You know, there was a reward of smoking cigarettes and a lot of people probably suffered in their later life from the introduction to tobacco products.

Jim: Sure. What did -- do you have any impression of the weapons that we used? Did you think they were good, bad, indifferent?

David: I thought that the M-16 was a good weapon if you cleaned it, took care of it. I got to know a guy in Da Nang who was an armorer and when I was at this language school he showed me some techniques to keep the weapon clean.

Jim: Okay, any other weapons that you'd like to discuss?

David: Well the .50 caliber machine gun was pretty effective. Probably the most effective weapon I ever saw in operation was a airship, a Puff the Magic Dragon. And I think every fifth or sixth round was a tracer, and if you ever saw one of those light up at night it was very impressive.

Jim: Puff was a C-47, right?

David: I think so.

Jim: What was your impression of the leaders? I mean, in our discussion here you really didn't talk much about officers. Do you have any impression of how your tour was officered or commanded?

David: Uh, I think there was an inherent dishonesty about "do a good job today even though we're going to pack up and leave in three weeks." I didn't develop that opinion until later on.

Jim: So what did you think of the NCOs [non-commissioned officers]?

David: Most of them were experienced, well, in my case all of them were experienced. And you could learn something from everyone. You didn't have to like 'em, but they had seen or heard or done things that might keep the rest of us from making the same mistake.

Jim: So, the comments you made about the dishonesty, about doing a good job and all that, are you talking about the company grade, the 3rd Marine amphibious force, or the president, or Westm -- of course Abrams was there when you were there.

David: Well, the guy who I disliked the most was McNamara. I've read his book and I've seen him speak a couple of times. I thought he was -- you know the old saying about shit flows downhill. Well, McNamara was dishonest to the American people and to the troops, and to be quite honest I'm wondering how he has survived. I mean, I can only assume that there is some pissed off soldier or Marine or Air Force guy that says, "Well, Vietnam screwed up my life and I'm going to take this guy out." I mean, I'm amazed this guy hasn't been assassinated. 'Cause he knew he was lying and a lot of people lower down on the chain of command didn't know they were being lied to.

Jim: Ah, did you understand your mission and what the US was -- your personal mission when you were in Vietnam, and did you understand why the US was in Vietnam?

David: Um, I thought I did. I thought we were helping, you know, I was aware of the domino theory and how we had to stop communism and this was a stop-gap measure, and that if we didn't stop communism in Vietnam then it would take over the whole south-east Asia and (pause) I guess that's what we did, but an awful lot of people suffered. I mean family members and the -- it's not just the soldier that's involved, it's the whole community.

Jim: Sure. Were you properly trained for your experience in Vietnam?

David: I think I was. I think I had extra training. I've met a lot of guys who were in the Army that felt that they weren't properly trained, and guys that were in the Navy that said they didn't get any training at all.

Jim: 'Kay. How did your Vietnam experience effect your life after you left the military?

David: I think I was more patient.

Jim: Did it change your attitude towards government, authority?

David: Yeah, I learned a little bit about compassion that probably the average 22-year-old doesn't. I certainly learned to appreciate things that we had, that I more than likely would have taken for granted.

Jim: Would you say that your experience was negative or positive?

David: A little bit of both.

[end of tape 2 side A]

Jim: Are you glad that you had an opportunity to go to Vietnam?

David: Well, it's nothing that can be changed. I mean, it's a major life experience, and military service was a major life experience. Uh, (pause) yeah, I'm glad that I experienced that. I gained a lot of personal knowledge. And I also learned that people have enjoyed war and killing each other for generations so it's -- it wouldn't be appropriate for me to condemn the Vietnam War era. But when you look at history, the Second World War, the First World War, some of those battles were won by accident.

Jim: Yup. What do you think about Vietnam now? You mentioned Iraq a couple times in our conversation.

David: Well, I think there was an awful lot of -- there was probably more negative out of that era than positive. We learned how to evacuate injured people but we lost an awful lot of our generation to alcohol and drug use and there was a lot of people trying to escape.

Jim: Was, uh let's see -- when you talk about losing a generation are you talking about veterans or just the society in general?

David: Society in general.

Jim: Okay. When did you come home?

David: Well I came -- was flown through Japan and ended up in the naval -- flown into Glenview, Illinois. I didn't even know there was a naval air station in Chicago. And then was, I guess the term is mustered out from the Great Lakes Naval Training Station. And I remember being called up to a staff sergeant's office at the Marine Barracks at the Great Lakes Naval Training, and he said, "I've got an opportunity here, and I'm going to offer you thousands of dollars to reenlist, you know, just another six years." And I thought, "You've got a couch in here and a padded chair and carpeting and this is the nicest office I've ever seen a staff sergeant have. But I'm going to respectfully decline your gracious offer." And he said, "I had to try." (both laugh)

Jim: How were you received when you came back to Madison?

David: A lot of the community didn't want anything to do with veterans. Or at least, that was my perception. And I think that went on for a long time. And I remember in 1991 there was a homecoming for the troops because, again, in 1971, 1974 everybody was still an individual. And a lot of times you were reluctant to say that you were a veteran. Madison was, I think, very callous towards its veterans. And in 1991 a bunch of friends of mine that played golf and had gone fishing, and we were all Vietnam era veterans, we made sure that we went up and stood there and waved at the troops coming home from Kuwait or wherever they were, because we didn't have a homecoming if you will. And I was really hopeful in 1991 that that would --

Jim: Be it?

David: That would be it. And that's not the case.

Jim: Ah, did, when did --

David: And I also learned that a lot of the peace activists were good-hearted -- they weren't mean-spirited. They were very frustrated but a lot of them were very good-hearted people. And are today.

Jim: Would you become a peace activist or are you a peace activist, given your experience?

David: Probably not. Some of the peace activists that I've met were so unrealistic.

Jim: If you had a son or daughter that was eligible to go to Iraq, what would be your advice to 'em? They aren't in the military right now, so they don't have to be deserters or anything.

David: No, no, I hadn't thought about that. I guess, uh, I would support -- I wouldn't tell them what to do but I would support whatever decision that they made. But my, I think if I were to guide them I'd say, "Go and try and do a good job."

Jim: Okay. Uh, when did you start -- was it 1991 when you first came out as a veteran, as it were?

David: Yeah. Yeah, I think that's about when I joined the VFW [Veterans of Foreign Wars] Post.

Jim: Did that help you?

David: No, I -- not really.

Jim: So why did you join the VFW Post? I mean we talked about it before, but other than being nagged by a guy is there any -- ?

David: I thought it was a good experience and I wanted to support other veterans. I think I was in many ways fortunate, but there's a lot of troubled veterans and I guess I wanted to be supportive to some of them.

Jim: Okay. Do you -- have you discussed your Vietnam experiences with other people?

David: Not until this past year because of, well probably two years, Tom Colby's enquiring about my experiences and how the combined action program was, oh, I thought it was successful. But then they just, they let it kind of die for thirty years. And I think they're trying to reestablish that kind of a concept, that you can't just go in and drive tanks down main street. You gotta help the people help themselves. Maybe that's too (pause) optimistic.

Jim: Yeah. Uh, do you have anything else that we should discuss? We've talked a lot about your experiences that -- your subsequent police service. Was that in any way driven by your Vietnam experience?

David: I don't think so. At the time when I got out of the Service I said, "I never want to be in uniform again, and never want to be where bosses or, you know, a military type of work situation." And I became interested in public safety and law enforcement, and survived that too.

Jim: (laughs) Good. Well, that ends the number of questions I have. Is there anything you'd like to add that we haven't talked about?

David: No. I enjoyed the opportunity to share this with people and with you. And I'm glad we're not looking forward to the road conditions that some of the states east of us are. I watched the news this morning --

Jim: Okay.

David: I said, "We don't need eighteen inches of snow."

Jim: No.

[End of interview]