Wisconsin Veterans Museum
Research Center

Transcript of an

Oral History Interview with

Michael A. Weynand

Wireman, U.S. Army, Vietnam War

2015

OH
2043

OH 2043

Weynand, Michael A., (b.1947). Oral History Interview, 2015.
Approximate length: 2 hours 22 minutes
Contact WVM Research Center for access to original recording.

Abstract:

In this oral history interview Michael Weynand, a Neosho, Wisconsin resident discusses his military service in the United States Army during the Vietnam War. Weynand begins by talking about his childhood, an early love of photography, and his decision to sign up for military service during the Vietnam War. He briefly describes his basic training and arriving in Vung Tau, Vietnam by ship. Weynand discusses the various missions and expertise of his unit – 11th Cavalry – and goes into detail about his work calculating artillery trajectories. He talks about working in intelligence and the lack of accurate records of the missions that he was involved in, including into Cambodia. Weynand comments on the reporting of journalists and the resistance from the troops to having reporters in the field. He discusses attending annual conventions for those who served in his regiment and the last friendships made during service. Weynand also talks about the reception that he received when he returned and the impact of the war on his life. He describes in detail his work as a mentor to veterans in his area, volunteer work in his local community, and experiencing post-traumatic stress disorder. Lastly, Weynand tells a story of going to a mass while in Vietnam and the impact that religion had on his service.

Biographical Sketch:

Weynand (b.1947) served in the United States Army from 1966 to 1972, serving in the Vietnam War. Weynand is a village trustee for the Village of Neosho, and has performed many public services including being a volunteer firefighter and serving as a mentor for other veterans.

Interviewed by Helen Gibb, 2015.
Transcribed by Helen Gibb, 2015.
Reviewed by Jennifer Kick, 2016.
Abstract written by Helen Gibb, 2016.

Interview Transcript:

Gibb: Today is Wednesday December 9, 2015. This is an interview with Michael Weynand who served with the Army during—from twenty-third of May, 1966 to twenty-second of May, 1972 and this interview is being conducted in a conference room at Dodge County Administration Building in Juneau, Wisconsin. The interviewer is Helen Gibb and this interview is being recorded for the Wisconsin Veterans Museum Oral History Program. Okay, so let's start with where and when you were born.

Weynand: I was born April 19, 1947 in Sauk City, Wisconsin. I was basically born on a farm just outside of there but lived most of my life in the community.

Gibb: How big was the community that you lived in?

Weynand: Well the community was, I think, about 3,500 people or something back then. It was—like a lot of these small communities that we live in—it was retired farmers and other people that made up the community but it was great place to grow up in.

Gibb: And family—brothers, sisters?

Weynand: I have one brother and one sister. My brother actually served in the Navy—he was what now would be considered a Navy SEAL. It was prior to when they had that program but he loved to swim and his job in the Navy was basically underwater demolition. I used to always joke with him, I said "You know, it's crazy to do stuff underwater but when you're dismantling bombs or setting explosives underwater, that's absolutely crazy." But he loved the water so that would fit him well. He actually was on the USS *Forrestal* when they commissioned it and they went over to Gulf of Tonkin and that area shortly after it was commissioned. But my sister is fourteen years older than I am, my brother is twelve years older than I am, so I was the baby of the family.

Gibb: So when did your brother go in to the—

Weynand: He was in the military in the early sixties, mid-sixties. I don't know exactly the period he was in but he was in pretty much when I was in high school. Even maybe in grade school a little bit.

Gibb: Was that an influence at all on your joining or did you have other military influences?

Weynand: Actually, no. Not really. Being that he was twelve years older than I was, I mean it was like, okay, he was doing his thing and I was too young to really be that concerned about the military.

Gibb: So what were you concerned about, what was your day-to-day life like when you were in school.

Weynand: I think I had a pretty much typical childhood, I mean, I went to a parochial grade school but when I got in high school I got very interested in photography. I pretty much through my four years of high school was the school photographer and got to a point actually where I think about my junior, senior year I set up a little studio per se in my parent’s basement and took portraits and so forth. And I can recall that—I don't know if I did all the cheerleaders but I approached them all and asked them if they'd like their portrait taken. And we'd go out in the countryside and I'd do outdoor portraiture. So I really got into that and then in my senior year the guidance counselor and I worked and I, eventually after I graduated from high school, became the first state indentured apprentice in portrait photography. I got a first I guess but the guidance counselor really set it up and I had—honestly I don't remember but it was probably about half a dozen job potentials at different studios, mostly in Wisconsin and I picked a couple best and interviewed with them, including one in someplace in Illinois and I ended up—the one I chose to perform my apprenticeship with was in Hartford, Wisconsin.

But that was—in 1965 was when I graduated, the Vietnam War was just starting to build up and things like that. And in hindsight I give myself a little bit of credit because what I'm insinuating is that I had a good job, actually had a choice of who I wanted to work to—work for and yet, at the ripe old age of probably about eighteen, somewhere around eighteen, I thought to myself, "You know, in the Civil War you could literally buy your way out, you could hire somebody to go into war, if you had that kind of money.” There was always ways of getting out of the military during major conflicts that the United States was involved in. Course, during the Vietnam War, people stayed in college, they got deferments of whatever, some high-tailed it to Canada. But in my mind I felt that if I didn't go in the military, I would always wonder who went in in my place and was that person killed in action? Were they seriously wounded that they'd carry for the rest of their life? I guess way in the back of my mind I thought, "I'll never know this person but I'll always feel that I should have gone in, that I should have done my part." I wasn't particularly patriotic but I just felt, you know, there are moralistic things that you just gotta do.

So my option was really: "Do I sign up for three years active or—" and the draft was getting a lot of individuals, "—do I just allow myself to be drafted and you’re two years active?" I took the logical conclusion that "I'll just be drafted, if I like it I can always re-up anyway." So that's what happened. I got asked by our government, a nice little letter, if I would be happy to join the military. I said "Yes, absolutely." Going back a little bit when I was somewhere around five years old, I think, I was playing about two blocks away from home and back in that time you'd call it, I was picked on. I went home, probably had a couple of tears in my eyes and at that young ages, even though I didn't really comprehend what my father was teaching me, he taught me something very important which I've used for the rest of my life. The same thing I think that influenced me with going in the military and that is, if you cower and run, back away, it's a little hard to do, maybe, the first time, but it gets easier and easier and easier. And pretty soon, you're my age and you look back say: "All’s I've done is backed away from challenges." And that's not what we're brought in this world for.

So when military time came up I wasn't going to cower. I knew I was going to step forward. I tend to write stories and different things. Actually something we can get into here in future, working with veterans. I wrote a little—not necessarily a poem—but a little dissertation. I can't recall exactly but basically it says "Jesus Christ did not cower. He knew that he could. He said 'I will' and he gave his life for all of us. Veterans do not cower. They step forward, they say 'I will' and they become involved in the military and become veterans.” That has been my philosophy generally speaking. There are strategic times to back off. But if you learn that in you that that's your only thing that you know how to do is to run away, you're going to lead a real sorrowful life. And I try and get that message in with the veterans I mentor. "Don't be afraid, step forward. If you get in deep doo-doo you learn by it, it's a good lesson learnt. That's what life is also about, learning lessons as you go on with life. Hopefully applying what you learn by your mistakes in the future by doing it the right way the second time around.” But that's one of the main reasons that my father taught me early—go in, learn, you don't know if you're gonna—you know, I was injured in combat but I honestly, I'm not one to like to go to parades and be exalted as being a veteran. I'm just proud of myself that I can look anybody in the eye and say "I did it. I was not afraid, I went in and for the sake of myself, for the sake of my country, I did the right thing."

Gibb: What did your family think about this whole decision to take the draft?

Weynand: Well my father actually was about my age when he was—during World War II but he had a job that required him—basically he was exempted because he was working on equipment stuff for the military and they needed him ‘cause he had training and experience that not many people had. He was actually—a little later on—one of the first people that ever run what was commonly referred now as CNC machine—computer operated machine. I remember he used to come home and he was a fairly quiet man but he would grumble about these stupid computer mach—operated machines and they had—they ran by tapes. He said "I could do it—" I remember one comment was something to the extent of "I can do it faster manually than the stupid computer can do it." Well, that was the beginning and now a lot of the machinery is run by computers but back then he was sharp enough, he was intelligent that—out of Gisholt Machine Company that was in Madison, he was picked as one of the few that really had good under—moxie, comprehension of what needed to be done. He helped work the bugs out on the first CNC equipment.

But anyway, in regards to your question, he hadn't served. My mother's brother, my uncle, was in Pearl Harbor that the Japanese bombed it and he got tossed of the ship, literally, he was on the deck, and landed in the water which unfortunately was full of burning oil and other petroleum so he was seriously burned. So he was in the hospital in Hawaii and eventually brought him back to the states for more medical treatment. I don't know how many years he went through the medical treatment but again, PTSD as I mentioned before the recording here, was something that they had different names for but it was the same thing. I like to study history, the Civil War—I still haven't studied all of it, the big battles—but you know there's different terminologies: World War I I think was some kind of trench disease or something like that, they had different names but my uncle definitely had PTSD. Not too many years after WWII he committed suicide in Watertown, Wisconsin. He went down by the river and committed suicide. I know it was PTSD he just couldn't—I'm sure he went through a lot. So my mother knew more about combat and I think they were quite concerned. But I was of age, and that was what I chose to do.

Gibb: Did you speak with your brother about it at all during that time?

Weynand: No, my brother was just like newly married and stuff like that. He was actually in the state of Washington for a period of time so we didn't really talk too much. Actually, both my brother and sister I got to know better after I was out of the service and got a little bit more like them and their age levels.

Gibb: Okay, so where did you go? Where was your basic training at?

Weynand: Well it was interesting too because they were building up, as I said, for Vietnam War and I had my basic training in Fort Riley, Kansas, which if you're ever there is just basically little bit of soil and a bunch of rocks and in very cold temperatures. And I'm thinking "This isn't what they said Vietnam is like." Yeah, we—I remember in our training we were asked to dig fox holes and your pick would ricochet—I mean, you went in about an inch or two into the soil and the pick was ricocheting off rocks that were basically like mountainsides or something. So you know through a half a day of digging the foxhole if you were six inches down you're doing good. But I stayed with the 9th Division; they got the call to get ready to go to Vietnam. I did go for AIT [Advanced Infantry Training] training in New Jersey and my first per se MOS was as a wireman. And unlike now when you see somebody working on telephone wires in a nice bucket truck and all strapped in, we learned by having basically a—what was called gaffs. They were little things you strapped on your ankle area, lower leg and they were little pointed, you stuck your foot down hopefully digging into the wood and being able to climb up and down poles that way. I quickly learned what it is, the term was called "gaff out" which meant your gaffs didn't hold you and you would sliding down the pole. So you learned after the first time that you better make sure that you're gaffing in good. And I learned basic electronics and how to string wire and do that kind of stuff in combat areas.

But then I went back to the 9th Division after my training and they were in the process of packing up, getting all the equipment, basically like a five ton truck was—bed was just loaded with boxes and equipment and everything, all strapped down, canvassed over. The first people that go over to Vietnam take the unit over, are normally called boat people and I was one of the boat people for the 9th Division. Which in itself is interesting because you're on a little hammock-like thing in a bay and the middle of the ship has open areas where the cranes lower everything into the base of the ship and you don't wanna to be too close to the edge because sometimes its swinging back and forth as it's getting there and it's banging next to where you were supposed to be sleeping. It was interesting but life is always interesting in different ways.

When we landed, we landed in Vung Tau and that was actually an old vacation area for Russians during the Soviet strong period so a lot of the richer Soviet Russians would hang out there until of course the Vietnam War. Anyway, we landed on Vung Tau in the same way as you saw during World War II with landing vessels full of guys, shoulder to shoulder and nose to back. And what still is interesting and reflecting on me was that there were helicopters strafing the beach behind the beach, making sure we wouldn't get picked off when we landed on the beach. At the same time the 9th Division band was standing in the middle of the beach playing patriotic music and I'm thinking "Those guys have to be scared, you know what, or it isn't as serious a situation as possible." But they were playing their music as we landed on the beach and then we were transported to base camp. During about that time we were landing there was—

Gibb: Sorry, when did you land? What month?

Weynand: Oh boy. I would have to defer on that. I can't even remember. I can look it up but to me—real honestly, when you're in combat it could be a Sunday, could be a Tuesday, it could be January, it could be April. Particularly in Vietnam, if the weather don't change a whole lot—I mean they had the monsoon areas but I didn't know what day it was or week or, you know, much of anything. You were just concerned to live through that day and approach the next day. But anyway, we landed and they transferred us to the 9th Division—base camp I should say, and then about that same time the larger battles were starting to evolve and happen. And the 11th Armored Cavalry Regiment—which is just a regiment, like 9th Division was much bigger than a regiment—was involved in some pretty serious early-on fighting. The 11th Cav really—I don't think they had a good definition of what the 11th Cavalry could do because it was completely like armored, all tanks and self-propelled howitzers and things like that and it was like going through the jungle and everything "This ain't gonna work." But they did ship it over there and they realized the 11th Armored Cavalry self-propelled equipment, tracked equipment, was very heavily armored as far as weaponry goes, per capita of individuals. Even though I had an M-16, we had M-50s and M-60s hanging off the vehicles and tanks and all that kind of good stuff. We started getting recognized as being a very good asset in combat situations—I can get into that a little bit later. But what happened was they were involved in battles and lost some individuals so they needed to replace people.

I had been in Vietnam, I'm going to say maybe about six weeks or thereabouts and they basically said "Hey Weynand, we're transferring you." Got on helicopter, landed where the 11th Cav was just starting to develop their base camp, I believe it was. And as we landed, they had a military formation and they were handing out basically Purple Hearts and other awards not necessarily getting the ribbons or anything but recognizing those that were injured and so forth. The first thought I had was "Oh my goodness, what am I in right now? Because these guys just got out of a battle, they've been—about to receive medals and everything for the heavy action they were in" and I'm thinking "Oh lordy, am I going to have a good time over here." I was assigned to the first Howitzer and there was self-propelled artillery piece, 155 millimeter. There's three squadrons in 11th Cav, each squadron had one battery of artillery. And I started out—as the terminology is—as a "gun bunny". But when I was in high school I always thought math was so easy. I had taken the higher calculus and that kind of stuff and I was carrying—I carried on for a whole year—I don't know if it was a whole year but I was averaging about ninety-nine and two-thirds in higher analytical math. And I think they saw that on my record and said "I think he can operate calculating the trajectories of artillery rounds."

So after humping artillery rounds which–155 millimeter rounds ain't light, I much preferred being in the command vehicle calculating artillery trajectories. What was interesting there is they had been assigned computers that supposedly the military said will speed up the ability—cause when you move to a place along your end, you've gotta have survey points so you know where you're at. You don't know how to launch artillery until you know where it is you are in order to get it to where you need it. Anyway, they had a computer and it had tubes in it and it never worked. There was always tubes busting and stupid thing never worked. We had like our, I think it was sergeant, had gone to school on how to operate these computers. The good news is, we had a little trailer behind our vehicle that hauled a generator that was exclusively supposed to be used for operating this computer. Like I said, it never worked, so I had my parents, I think, or maybe I ordered it somehow but I purchased a hammock and if you went kitty-corner across to this nice little canvas covered trailer—cause once you're in position they take the generator out of it—it was like a nice shady area to take a nap and believe me sometimes you went for forty-eight hours so if you could get fifteen minutes worth of nap that was fantastic, you conked out. Anyway, I had a hard time because when I was on duty doing stuff sometimes the officers would come and borrow my hammock. So sometimes when I wanted to take a little snooze, if there's a lieutenant laying in it, I'm not going to shove him out you know, wasn't the smartest thing to do. That was one of my little innovations over there.

Interesting thing about Vietnam and artillery was that during Civil War, World War I, World War II, Korea, chances are the artillery shot within maybe a forty-five degree radius back and forth because there was a front line. In Vietnam there was none. Our howitzers were pretty cool in the fact that they're light tanks and the artillery to rotated around so you could be shooting rounds to the north and five minutes later shooting rounds to the south. However, I guess it was cause my general mathematics skills, their way of calculating during World War II and Korea was using slide rules and a chart and calculating through the chart and slide rules, the trajectory and so forth. And that worked—when they're only shooting in a short radius. When you did 360s there's human error and actually the design of the calculations were wrong. I recognized that and the problem in Vietnam, at least with 11th Cav, all the batteries had a problem setting up because there's a tolerance—your air factor could only be so much and I believe it was like three degrees or two degrees, something like that. When you're calculating over 360 degrees, that's a minimal factor and if you couldn't come up with that initial set-up factor when you get to a new position along your end, you couldn't fire. And I don't know what the requirement was that you're supposed to be operational within like ten minutes or something and these guys—other guys were going like half an hour or whatever. They couldn't get accurate enough computations. I recognized right away that there was this air factor so I came up—I jokingly called it "Weynand's Fudge Factor"— I could get set up within five, seven, eight minutes and after first couple of times "Boy, was he lucky." You know, they'd say that but that's what they thought.

And then over a period of time, they thought "What the heck is he doing that the other guys ain't doing?" So they actually brought in guys from other artillery units to learn what I was doing. Well you can't teach people analytical math in the middle of a combat zone, very easy, but I tried to. That was my little—I don't think it actually went into the annals of U.S. history or anything but it did help our unit and helped really literally win the respect from other military units and stuff. In the fact that we could get set up and be ready to fire artillery in a much shorter time than other units could do. It was one of the neat things about the self-propelled howitzers, because they could quickly set up and fire in 360 degrees, they didn't have to be lifted and turned and that kind of stuff. That was where a part of the respect for 11th Armored Cavalry came. That was one of my little contributions I guess you would say.

Because I had become a wireman which also included running switchboard, I had to have a security level, security clearances and so when I got into the command area of 11th Cav, I also did, I think my MOS [Military Occupation Speciality], when I retired was something like FA Ops and Intelligence because I was in the command area and because I had a higher level of intelligence rating I got to deal with some of the intelligence aspects. Again, I guess maybe I had a dry humor even back then but I was partially in charge of—shouldn't say partially in charge of—I shouldn’t say partially, I was in charge of enemy body count. And we had like a grease pencil and a board that—portable board and we would put cross marks and X's and lines and stuff to be able to remember how to report what our body count was. But sometimes the Viet Cong would maybe be utilizing water buffalo to carry some stuff as they were moving through the jungle so we also killed some water buffalo and in my artistic endeavors I had drawn little water buffalo and how many water buffalo we had killed. And I don't know, I think it was full-bird colonel but when he walked in he was not real happy with me. That was the last time we—I mean body count’s a body count, what the heck if it's a water buffalo, they didn't like that idea so had to wipe off my buffalos.

Gibb: That's a shame.

Weynand: [laughs] In real honesty combat is crazy because there are times where definitely you're in deep doo-doo and fighting to save your life and doing what you can for the unit and other times where you gotta lighten up a little bit. But I always recognized 11th Cav as my real military unit and I'm very proud to have served with them. I had a lot of experiences. Because of our capabilities and we were an independent little regiment, we got requests from 1st Division, 9th Division, 101st Airborne, you name it, I worked with the Australians. Wherever there was combat, they liked us because of our fire power. Point being that one time were out for about three months without seeing base camp. I mean they got a nice tent in the base camp but you never hardly ever saw base camp. And while we were out there the longest duration time, I got—a good friend of mine, a black gentleman who lives in Northern Florida, he and I have been buddies and still every once we'll email each other and send birthday cards back and forth and whatnot. He and I were just like that. He counted the amount of days that we did not have enough water to do anything but drink and swab the artillery tubes. Cause you had to keep the artillery tubes cool. So we never took showers, shaved, literally after that period of time I could take my pants and you don't have to worry about hanging them up because they stood up on their own. We were really grungy.

We come back after roughly three months, I think it was, back to base camp, mid-afternoon, clean up the equipment, square everything away in case we got called again and then take the rest of the day off, take showers, have a good night’s sleep once, whatever. I sort of was ahead of the group, got done cleaning up the equipment a little quicker, so I took a collection to go down to the local pub which isn't much more than a tent I think it was or NCO club or whatever. Maybe it was PX. I went probably quarter mile or something like that, to pick up a bunch of cans of beer. Nice cold beer, hadn't had any of that in so long and we had military fatigues so I put cans of beer in every pocket I had, stuck everything in between my stomach and the inside of my shirt. Carrying everything because they didn't have exactly shopping bags or anything so you carried it any way you could. And I'm doing pretty good, I was walking along the perimeter road inside our base camp and basically there's a road and on this side there’s a perimeter with all the machine guns and everything ready. And I started to walk back and all of a sudden the whole perimeter opened up. And I'm like "Oh crap." So I'm running down the ditch next to the road, running back to my unit 1st How, with the whole perimeter firing and I could only hear two things. I heard all the machine guns and the mortar rounds that were landing outside the perimeter and I could hear the beer squoosh-squoosh-squoosh as I was—it was sloshing back and forth as I was running. So after I think it was said and done I told the guy "I wouldn't open the cans of beer quite yet. I think they're a little shook up." Some of them did because they were so thirsty for a beer they did it but I think the lost about half the can. There were humorous times.

A lot of guys that I've talked to, it's all they remember other things, more heavy duty combat stuff. I always try to look outside the box, as one term would be, look at all aspects. There were some crazy times [laughs]. I remember one time that I actually took a picture of—this guy from Texas, he was crazy, I mean he did things that you'd never expect him to do. I won't even tell you some of the stuff he did but one thing he did was, as much as you could in the middle of nowhere, he dressed up like a girl. It wasn't—how can I put it?—a feminine girl, we couldn't shave and shower, he didn't look too girlish but it was—I took a picture of him and another—I think they were drunk honestly. That's one of the weird experiences. But we also were very involved in combat. Honestly, sometimes—I've got a book of the order of battle for Vietnam and it tells you all the official battles that the military were in. I don't think I've talked to a veteran who hasn't said they were in a lot of unofficial, non-documented battles also. I mention this to my wife too, and being in intel a little bit, I totally—I shouldn't say totally but I have a good comprehension about the information that the average citizen is given through the press about what's going on in combat zones. I can only say that the great majority of the average citizen don't know, and really doesn't need to know, because that jeopardizes. If we blab about everything we did and were about to do the enemy is going to say "Well, cool. I know exactly what you're going to do."

There's a lot that doesn't get mentioned, doesn't get documented, and in fact I got injured over there and I can't find any documentation because I don't think we weren't exactly supposed to be doing what we were doing. I can't get into too many details on it even though it's very interesting. But talk to any veterans, anybody's been in combat realizes that number one is with—going back a little bit here, we had a standing procedure: because we were armored, we had a lot of equipment you could ride on, the press if they were interested a lot of them weren't, but if they were interested in going out into the field, leaving their Saigon apartments and stuff, they would ask for a ride on our vehicles and it was: "No. You don't have the security or whatever" We didn't allow that. The hidden reason is, we didn't want them to report because they interpreted it in their civilian way, what combat was about and the things that were going through. And they didn't—they weren't very good at reporting what was over there. And honestly my mother used to write— very diligent about writing letters. And she would write to me and ask, "Well what about this?" I said, "Mom, don't believe anything you read in the papers because that's not what really is happening." That goes back, I don't know, probably Civil War. I mean, it—there are some good reporters, don't get me wrong but they have to—there are some reporters that really can comprehend well, the real situation but a lot of them as the old adage goes, they sat in Saigon and took battle reports. I've got battle reports and I thought they're sort of humorous because that's a general or a full-bird colonel writing a story to make it sound good. They have to list the amount of KIAs [Killed in Action] and wounded in actions and stuff and yet, it's written in a way that doesn't really tell you a lot about what really went on. That's just the nature of the beast, that's just the way it is.

There are things that—I've had some veterans comes up and knowing what—serving with 11th Cav and being in intel, they ask me—in fact the 11th Cav has—we formed an organization of Vietnam veterans of the 11th Cav, Vietnam and Cambodia and even this last convention I had a guy who happened to be sitting next to me on the table and he said "You know I've heard this rumor for all these years, is it really true?" I said "Yeah." But it's not anywhere in writing, and there were a lot of situations like that but in one particular situation well, I can tell you that in Green Bay the—some years ago they recognized all the veterans in a weekend at Lambeau Field and they had big, vinyl map of Vietnam and Cambodia and that whole area and they handed out felt-tipped markers and you were supposed to put your name and unit and whatever, and my wife asked me, "Well, where are you going to put your name?" And I said, "Well, I'd like to put it in a spot in Cambodia but we weren't actually there." This was not 1970, that was years before that. And I said "I'm going to put my name right by the Parrot's Beak right by the Cambodian border." And as I walked over there, there were two or three other guys from my unit—Wisconsin guys from my unit—standing there and my wife looked down and he had wrote in Cambodia, his name and stuff and you could put a comment. He says, "We weren't really here. Ah-hah." That's a good example of what happens in combat. We weren't supposed to be there but they did come over the border, kill a couple of our guys and run back over. And supposedly Cambodia's neutral but they were basically looking the other way because the whole system of giving—not whole system but one of their main ways of getting equipment into South Vietnam was through Cambodia. And finally our officer said, "No more." We were just told if we got caught or the press asks tell them: "There's no yellow line, we didn't know that we were in Cambodia." Pfft. I mean even back in the sixties, we knew where we were [laughs]. A lot of things happened like that you'll never find in a book. And some stuff comes out eventually. I mention that today but it's known amongst us and it's water over the dam long ago so I'm not so afraid to mention it. But that's not unusual there's a lot of stuff that happened. So, I don't know, maybe I'm off on a tangent here, I don't know—

Gibb: No tangents here.

Weynand: Any questions? What would you like to ask me?

Gibb: Yeah I'm just wondering particularly what you mentioned about the journalists, I'm wondering what you were concerned that they would write or how they would interpret your—you know, what you were doing out there. I'm just wondering if there's something in particular you could talk about that you would be reported on—

Weynand: Well, the officers were given commands. And to look good they better report after battle that they followed the commands of what they were supposed to do. Whether it was completely 100 percent truthful or facts, that were not recorded, they usually made it sound pretty good. But when you're in combat it's not always pretty good. It get pretty darn nasty once in a while. And the little details like that don't go into the officer's report of what happened. Like I said before, you had to report how many KIAs [Killed in Action] and WIAs [Wounded in Action] and things like that that happened but not how they happened necessarily. But that's again, there's two—I always joke, there's two militaries, two armies. There's the one that you initially train in and then there's the real world of military combat.

And that's—they train you for it but they don't really—I don't care how much they train you for it, until you're there and in it, it's a different world. And decisions are made differently than probably the way they taught you to make those decisions.

I think one of the reasons I was actually—after I was back, after my tour of duty I was offered a commission. I could have become an officer and I think that was partially based on the fact that there was one officer that was in command and I just sort of took over for him even though I was Spec/4, Spec/5 something like that at the time. He was—I think his father probably was in the military and he was raised in military grade school, military high school, military all the way but unfortunately they didn't train him on how to handle decisions under pressure. And I literally had to say "Sir, this is what you do now. Sir, this is what you have to say now." The commanding officer was getting on his tail because he was stammering and stumbling with his words on the radio. The full bird colonel I had a heck of a lot of respect for. He literally would fly, hover over a combat zone but if it got nasty, he'd drop the helicopter and grab his M-16 and fight right next to the guys and that was fantastic. So anyway, I had a lot of respect for him and he was sort of chewing on this I don't know, probably a captain I believe. And the captain was just freaking and we were in a combat situation, somebody had to take over. Anyway, I got offered to be sent to officer training school and become an officer and I looked the full bird colonel in the eyes and I said "Sir, I'd rather be a live civilian than a dead officer any day." Because that was early on in the Vietnam War and I knew I'd be right back there anyway and at that point I had served my time or something, somebody else's turn. I only served one term in combat. But proud of that time, but I think it was only fair that everybody stepped forward and not cowered away.

Gibb: So you said you moved around quite a bit, what areas were you based in?

Weynand: Well again, because of our reputation, like the 3rd Squadron went up to the DMZ [Demilitarized Zone] area and they were assigned to I believe to the 101st Airborne or something I believe. But they were up there because they needed their firepower. A lot of times 11th Cav was so—each part of the regiment was so disenfranchised that sometimes we did not—in fact, rarely did we all fight together in the same battle and the same place. At least during the time I was over there. We were—if you find what used to be called Saigon and draw a line around there radius of Saigon and over towards the Cambodian border I think it was sector C, I believe, we were pretty much in. There were times where you know if we were going in between here and there and in between we got enlisted into a battle. I can't tell you exactly where it was but we were in that general area. We did spend a lot of time near the Cambodian border but we were involved in the big operations. During the time I was there was Junction City one and two and different operations like that. I think it was Junction City two, I think we were pulled out before it was all over because we were needed someplace else and that was the whole thing. Actually our full bird colonel sometimes was I guess sort of scratching his head in a way because he was in charge of the regiment but a third of it was over by the DMZ and maybe a third of it was over by Cambodian border and a third of it was over in another combat situation and it was like "Well, okay I guess we got some helicopters here left in base camp or whatever." We were reassigned, like I said, we were under the auspices of the 9th Division, 1st Division, 101st, Aussies—crazy bunch of guys. That's a whole different story.

Gibb: Do tell.

Weynand: Okay. It seemed like the Australians were all at least six foot tall. Crazy bunch of guys, like to have a good time even in the middle of nowhere. And I did have one guy I befriended that asked me if I had taken my R&R period and I said "No." He said "Go to—" I won't name the city but "I'm from—" I don't know, like a suburb of one of the big cities in Australia. He said, "How many girls do you want?" I said "Well, I'll get back to you." But I never really did take my R&R. I stayed in combat the whole time. We could have gone to South Korea, Australia, Hawaii. I think part of my thinking is, "You do something like that and then you go back into combat after that? It was like going back into civilian life and then being brought back again. Nah, I'll stick it out." But I did save up my money so I could buy a pretty new car when I got home. But anyway, I don't know if I really answered your question.

What—I guess if you want to look at it this way, answer your question a little different way, the officers would write up their reports. And they were more cut and dry and didn't get much into the details sometimes like newspaper reporters are looking for. I mean, now and back then they had to sell newspapers and I see it all the time on TV. They will take nothing and make it into something. Or misinterpret, if there is something, on what really is. To read a general's report and try to make it into—when I was in school I also learned how to write newspaper articles, how to structure them and all that good stuff. I could read that "This guy don't even know what the heck he's talking about but he's writing an article which gets into the paper, which if it's a good article gets put through the different systems and three-quarters of the papers of the United States all cover his article. The way people in civilian life actually hear stuff that's going on is—and I mean, that's the unfortunate thing is, we have a democracy there's a freedom of press which I totally agree to but they also have to know what the heck they're talking about and do a fair job of reporting it.

Up to today, I mean I learned that obviously a long time ago, but there aren't too many really good reporters, that really can report the story accurately and some try very hard but a lot of them are just there to sell papers. I can give you examples very easily. Not necessarily military ones but situations where they—a good one honestly happened about a month ago, I don't know if it was on one of these shootings, I think it was one of these recent shootings, a reporter handed a microphone to somebody on national TV and the guy basically said he wasn't anyplace to see anything and couldn't report anything but the reporter asked him questions for five minutes and he had no answers but they had to fill some time. My point being is if that guy had made up a bit of story it would have gone national. And yet, there's no filtration. If it can sell time, it can sell advertisements, whatever, it will be broadcast and if you haven't been in combat, you haven't experienced some of the stuff, you're naive enough to think "Yeah, okay. Coming from NBC it must be accurate." Not necessarily just them but there's a lot of that. And—

Gibb: Did you know what was being reported back in the US. Obviously you were concerned what the journalists were writing, did that mean that you actually were aware of—

Weynand: My mother would send me news clippings out of the newspapers and write about things like that and so I understood that. Another thing also I might mention with my mother, like I earlier said, I had a pretty high security clearance. She wrote me one time when I was in Vietnam, she said "The FBI were checking in on you they were at all the neighbors asking about our family and everything." I forget the exact verbiage because we had to destroy our letters after we read them but I said "Mom, don't worry that was only because I was involved in the higher security clearance, they were checking to make sure I was capable of handling higher security information. They weren't checking on our family. They were just checking on our family." But that was sort of cute. Again, if you don't comprehend what's that kind of situation, you make the wrong assumptions. I'm repeating myself but I see it so many times on TV and reading the newspapers. I don't look at a newspaper—I know how to read an article and get the information out of it and then the rest of it's just assumptions and opinions and things like that.

Gibb: Were—did you have a sort of day-to-day routine or did that change quite often depending on where you were?

Weynand: The day-to-day routine was trying to get a little sleep once in a while, preferably maybe once a week or two trying to take a shower and shave. But as far as my work schedule—I had a twelve hour schedule in which I was on duty. That could be computing artillery trajectories, it could be doing intelligent works or it could be sitting there BS'ing with the guys. I was in a way separated from—the terminology's "gun bunnies" the guys on the artillery pieces—because their schedule was when we got on the radio and said "It's time, five minutes we'll be firing.” they woke up out of their sleep or dropped their lunches or whatever they were doing and made sure they were ready to fire when we gave them their coordinates. But we had twelve hour shifts, twelve on, twelve off. If I recall they were staggered so you had some day time and some nighttime.

It was, again—I guess maybe it's part of my PTSD or whatever, I like to look at the little humorous things because it lightens up some of the other stuff that we went through. As we were talking I was just thinking too, it's off the subject but in the command center our commanding officer got a little Charlie Brown type of Christmas tree and since Christmas was a couple of weeks away. Unfortunately because of the percussion of the artillery pieces, if they were aimed at the right direction, the little Charlie Brown tree on the little green table—it was probably two and a half feet wide by maybe twelve inches, it was a little dinky thing—the tree would get blown over and I always called it the Charlie Brown tree because by the time Christmas arrived it looked like Charlie Brown's Christmas tree, the ornaments were pfft. I mean I think his mom or his wife or somebody had sent it and with good intentions but it looked like Charlie Brown's Christmas tree by the time Christmas was. That's more of a seasonal thing for now.

I could get into a lot of details about a lot of other situations but I want to exemplify the fact that it wasn't like you were in combat 24/7. You were ready for it and sometimes that can catch you off-guard but your ability to react when the situation came up was the important thing and worked as a team, were at your buddy's back. That was understood. I wouldn’t have even wanted to have anybody think that I wasn't watching out for them because those kinds of guys might have been left off to the side a little bit cause you had to work like a team. That was the big thing. Teamwork, buddies, no guy left behind, that was all of our little, call them adages, but that's what we thought. I honestly got a—like I was saying earlier, on 11th Armored Cavalry regiment in Vietnam, formed a non-profit organization some years after the war was over based on one of the guys basically cradling his buddy who was passing away and he said "Don't let them forget us." So we formed an organization and have a convention someplace in the United States every year. Point being is that 11th Cav—I don't know the exact amount of guys that were over there, it was just a few thousand. We weren't like a big division or anything. State of Wisconsin I would say there's maybe a hundred guys that belonged to 11th Cav that I know of anyway.

Point being is that we I think the last convention we had about 1,250 guys that showed up all from all over the United States. we had that much camaraderie fifty years later and we don't—I mean, yeah, the pretext is we get together and I think the assumption is we talk about Vietnam war and Cambodia and stuff but it's not about that. We literally check in on "How's your kids doing? How's your grandkids doing now?" Give you an example, our organization I think we raised about $1,250,000 in donations for our kids so if the—if you're one of the guys and your kid wanted to go to college and didn't have the money, he'd get money. There were small three and five thousand dollar money awards and on up to I don't know fifteen, eighteen thousand dollars. Didn't get you through college but it sure helped top up. That was part of the camaraderie. When you walk into any of our conventions, there's a sign that greets you. "Together then, together now." [clears throat] You really couldn't say more. If one of us passes, like within the state of Wisconsin we'll do our best to be—[voice breaks]—to be there for the funeral.

So point of that is really we got involved in a life-time commitment and I helped exemplify that by actually mentoring veterans. They need that feeling that even after out of service; they're still part of us. Part of an elite group called veterans and I try to make sure they understand that. I don't care if they're homeless or a multi-millionaire they're part of an elite group, no matter what their MOS is. No matter how many years they served in combat, no matter where they served in combat. It's an elite group and we'll always be an elite group. If you ever—and you're probably closer than I am—because of my injury that I go to the VA hospital in Madison and it is so heartwarming in a way if you see maybe a person in a wheelchair, if he needs help you open the door for him. The camaraderie is there because they're all veterans and we know. They don't have to wear a cap or a shirt to know they're veterans. We know they're there because that's where they're at—the VA hospital. There's a definite camaraderie a definite award that you receive when you're called a veteran. And the neat thing you're proud but you don't want to be highlighted as somebody special. Like I said early on, you're proud that you didn't cower, you stepped forward, said "Yes, I can. Yes, I will." I don't know what else I can say.

Gibb: Obviously you kept that camaraderie afterwards, you mentioned you did have a friend that lives in Florida but were there any other sort of really close friendships that you developed over that time?

Weynand: There are varying degrees of close friendship but as an example when we have our conventions, the 1st Regiment has their area and in that area the 1st How and the first A Company, B Company and da-da-da. So we have our tables and they're all friends. The president of our organization which, he lives in Maryland knows me fairly well. The one thing I did too is I tended to for a number of years I like to do woodworking and liked artistic type woodworking and I ended up well part of the money we raised for scholarships was through a silent auction and every year I like to contribute something and most of the time it's some kind of woodwork. I'm going to say maybe twelve, fifteen years ago I started working on a piece for the silent auction and I know you can't see it but that's our patch.

Gibb: Do you want to just describe it?

Weynand: Well it's—all cavalry units have a red and white background. And then they have some kind of artwork over that. With the 11th Cav, we have a bronking horse which being cavalry exemplifies our history going back to, I think, 1901 or something like that. I start carving a three-dimensional piece and I've done that I'm going to say maybe about three or four times where I've created a three-dimensional art piece of the patch and then we have a silent auction and I've sold it there. The one time I thought I'm going to carve a bigger one. I start carving it and I figure well I'm going to carve the tail and the buttocks area and the hind legs and stuff first and if that turns out good I'll keep going. And I've got a workroom in the basement and my wife came down and said "That's too good for a silent auction." I said, "You know I think you're right." It's all hand carved, okay. Well, some of it's tool work but it's all basically hand carved. Anyway, I carved this horse—my one granddaughter who's a senior in college now and has a art degree but she helped me a little bit with the eyes and the ears and some of those little details cause I'm really not that familiar with horses but it looked pretty much like a horse. Anyway, I carved it and then I created a whole background of the red and white, okay? There's military adage about "Always take the high ground" that goes back even to Civil War you always wanted the high ground cause you'd have better command of the battle.

I put this horse like on a mount, top of the hill, put it all together, took a digital picture of it and I emailed the president of our organization said "Do you want this? Maybe in front of the podium or whatever. If you want I'll build a whole shipping container for it." The thing stood about five feet tall by the time I got done. I meant it was three and a half foot wide and about five foot tall or something like that—same basic dimensions of the patch but a lot larger. He hesitated a couple of times. So our convention was in Washington, D.C. I said—we happened to have a station wagon, I take the back seat out and the shipping container just fit into the minivan's back. Anyway, I brought it there, set it up, soon as the guy saw it he said "That's it, that's going to go to every convention." So I donated it to the organization so when I go to convention my wife usually looks for it, "Have they got it out yet?" But normally it sits in front of the podium and Saturday night they got a big shindig and dance and all that kind of stuff, speeches and then it usually sits in front of the podium. I designated that once we all get to the point where we aren't having our convention anymore, then it will go to the national armor museum [National Armor and Cavalry Museum]. That's a little off-subject again but that's the kind of friendships we have.

I can't tell you how many friends I do have, literally they're all friends. This last convention is an example. Also I had a friend with a local veterans organization he had a whole bag—in fact I think he lives here in Juneau—he had a whole bag of fiftieth anniversary Vietnam veteran pins and basically I think was trying to say, "I was given all of these can you help hand them out?" Well, as the convention was going on and there were meetings and stuff like that I handed out to veterans saying "Here—congratulations, fifty years later" and I had just a few left, had my class reunion, my high school class reunion and there's about three or four of us who were Vietnam veterans that I knew of so I gave each one of them one of the few pins I had left. Part of the camaraderie they're all friends. even if I didn't know them that well because as an example the Howitzers, the artillery supported the other guys that were farther out in the field, so that they could do their job, we'd drop artillery in front of them, artillery round in front of them and things like that. I can't tell you how many friends I had. Dennis was my best friend. We literally would write letters back and forth before the advent of emails and you know explain what the kids were doing, and how they're doing in school and all of that kind of good stuff. That's just—I don't know, I think the one thing that you learn in life is people that call you their friends and people who are your true friends. They normally aren't the ones that verbally, explicitly say "Well, I'm your friend." You don't have to convince me, I know when I have true friends. I know a lot of true friends from 11th Cav.

Gibb: So how long were you in-country for?

Weynand: I was in country for the standard, about a year. And again, it was one of those things where I had friends who had, as one friend told me sat at a typewriter in Saigon that's all he did all the time. I said "Hey, you were still there" Particularly, I think he was there for Tet [Offensive], well that made, you know, the typewriter operators obviously out there on the front lines. Everybody went through it a little differently. Gentleman I'm mentoring now he said "Well I'm only a truck driver. I was only a truck driver." With all the IEDs that are in those roads, I don't care if you were only a truck driver you probably had a life expectancy as long as an infantry man. "It wasn't the hardest job." That's why I said earlier, we've all got PTSD. It's just who will admit it and the degree of it and how to overcome it. I know I had it, I still do but—I didn't go through therapy or anything but I knew that—in fact the employer I had before I went in the service, after I got out of the military, I went back working for him and he fired me. I remember very clearly December thirty-first. I was standing—I could point to you exactly a point where at an intersection of two highways there's stop lights—I was standing there and my friend came up to me, about half a block away from where I worked and he said "How's it going." or whatever, I said "I just got canned." My boss who I found out avoided going in the military in World War II fired me because I wasn't the same as he knew me before I went in the service. I wasn't. I was a heck of a good photographer yet but for some reason he came up with that reason. And nowadays it would be illegal but back then you just bit the bullet and went on.

Actually it was very interesting because a couple of months after that I met a friend and we went into business, we ended up with a chain of photography studios, competing with him and he's no longer in business. Anyway, we all have PTSD and you gotta deal with it. It's there. I have my own method of dealing with it and that was to compartmentalize it. I recognized that was part of my life, "Amen, I'm moving on." I think I did it early enough, got married, three kids and now they're all off and gone and all over the country but some guys have a harder time and some guys won't admit it, and that's the worst. Guys will avoid it by drinking, drugs or whatever, fairly common. They carry the burdens of some of the stupid things that were reported, also. "Child killers." Our medical group actually in their days off would go out and take care of kids and we actually took money out of our pocket to pay for some of the cost of a little clinic, I'd guess you'd call it. The South Vietnamese thought it was like a hospital but to us nowadays it would be a little, dinky clinic. We did things like that. Did that make it in the papers? No.

Gibb: What was the reception when you came back?

Weynand: I'm glad you asked that. As I alluded to before, you learn who your real friends are. That was back in the era when Wisconsin had eighteen year old beer drinking. Wisconsin boys in the military had a pretty good reputation, we put everybody else to sleep after you know—real honestly when we were in service and we used to have 3.2 beer—3.2 percent alcohol and excuse my language but I told the sergeant, I said "Wisconsin boys piss out stronger stuff than this." Anyway, we—I had some hangouts from before I went in service and I went to one where a number of my friends were and I think—I had just gotten back, I was still in the service but had couple of weeks, a month off, whatever it was. I got the cold-shoulder by some of my better friends. To me that was a good lesson, they weren't my better friends. I had other ones that weren't sure exactly about how to approach me, I guess you might say, but they were true, they were trying. But some just cold-shouldered me and again, my same attitude: I stepped forward. And that's something that's a medal I will wear to the day I die. I did the right thing. Even if I—you don't know how to deal with me or feel wrong about me, I'm sorry, that's your opinion. I have my own positive feeling about myself. The interesting phenomenon about it is years later Sauk Prairie area put up a monument for the veterans and I was invited. Some of my classmates were going around you know shaking my hand and I think there was a little pin that they handed out. They had realized that maybe they weren't so cool after all. Veterans—we're their heroes. This last summer I had a class reunion and I don't know what they were getting at but they did go around make sure that all of us veterans were—they made record, made sure that all of the veterans were on record from our class. I guess at our next class reunion they're going to maybe recognize us again, I don't know.

I actually try to do a fair amount of reading and one of the books on Vietnam was literally a full book on guy’s letters and notes and stuff of how they're treated when they got back. When we landed in California and particularly it's most of the flights landed back in California, I guess you could say there was coolness. Did I get spit on or called bad names? If I did, I didn't even hear them. It wouldn't have bothered me anyway. Some guys were treated pretty crappy. Again, I move on with life, that's always been my attitude. Part of my attitude is that if people want to be that way, and in many other ways be that kind of person, you aren't injuring the person you're criticizing, you're injuring everybody—yourself by how everybody's viewing you. If you act childish, immature, they label you. You know, even though they may be trying to bring you down, that's an ego thing. Their ego is so low that they want to bring you down to that level and I don't let them. I got more important things to do in life besides bothering if somebody don't like me. And I'm not being sarcastic but so be it. Not everybody's going to like me in life.

As you may have seen, I've got, I don't know, twenty-two years something like that in our local government. I told my wife before I ran the first time "You know I'm going to end up with less friends—and quote me on this—I'll end up with less friends than what I started with but I'll know my true friends." That's been my attitude. I keep getting reelected. I literally I had to say "This is it folks, this is my last term.” I'm going to be like sixty-nine, seventy years old by time my last term is over. Said “No, this is it. Appreciate the time but young people have to be taking over." I did my time. There's another gentleman that is mayor of a community, a good friend of mine that, I just read in the paper, made the same announcement. He said "It's time. I've done my social work, I've done my time. Now it's my time" Being retired, my wife and I want to do more travelling and do things like that without worrying about the burden of what is back home. It's other peoples’ times. I'm—with mentoring veterans and stuff that's a challenging thing to do and I enjoy it so much. Someday, obviously, I gotta give it up. I'm like the old man now with these young twenty-something veterans but I've always got a lot of respect from the guys. They’re good people, even if they stray a little bit from what they should have. They have reasons sometimes for some of their problems, the reasons they stray, hopefully get them back on track. So far, knock on wood, I think I got just about 100 percent record.

Gibb: Yeah, well let's talk about your mentoring, when did that start?

Weynand: Well what happens is that the—each county—not each county but some of the counties in the state of Wisconsin do their own thing. Here in Dodge County, Judge Bauer runs the county program. If a veteran, maybe is caught for a second OWI or most everybody I mentored pretty much either little drug situation, a little drinking situation that they end up in court. They get a choice: do you want to go to jail for a while, whatever the criteria requires them to do, or would you like to be mentored by a fellow veteran. And they get a choice. Judge Bauer will call me up and say "Hey, I got a guy for you." Usually I say "Give me a little history, so I know what I'm getting in to." I've never turned him down. Only one time I turned him down, I should say that, my wife and I were just about to leave on vacation, like within hours, he says "This guy, you got to meet him, like today." I said "Oh man, we're about to go on vacation." He says, "Enjoy your vacation,” there's a handful of us guys in Dodge County, “I'll get one of the other guys."

But the mentoring period normally goes as long as they're on probationary type period. What I normally do roughly speaking, the first quarter of that period is the "get to know you" period. “What's your likes, dislikes, got a job, what you doing?" The second and third quarter period is for working on problems they might have. Things that—like I said earlier, I like to start draw them out and see if they'll admit they got PTSD and get in to that a little bit. I'm no psychiatrist, psychologist but that helps. Then the fourth quarter is basically tough love. Excuse my language but it's "Shit or get off the pot" type time and they need that. Some people need a little kick in the butt to get going, get their life back on track. That’s key to it, get your life back on track. I've got a pretty good batting average right now. Don’t know how much longer I want to do it. I think it's—you know, some are getting a little harder to relate but usually what we're talking about I mean, it's like from Civil War on I mean, call a spade a spade, you got PTSD, you got problems, let's talk it out and see what you can do about it. Right now I'm happy with everybody I've been able to handle, but one that bothers me is the individual that I mentioned earlier that I had to track down, he was homeless in Dodge County and I lost him. I think he left the county. I'm hoping he's doing good, he had some problems but they also got—part of the mentoring program in Dodge county is to admit, "Yeah I got a problem, I want to talk it out. I want somebody that understands me." That's where the veteran-to-veteran mentoring is all about.

I don't know, to me, it's—again I go back, as I mentioned a little bit, I was injured. I wasn't wounded, okay. I was injured which meant basically that it was not an enemy it was an error on the part of our own military. I should have been killed. At the early age of twenty-one, twenty-two when I got out of the service I gave that a lot of thought and I thought the good lord must have had other plans for me. I mean, I've mentioned—on very rare occasion, I mention to my wife and I mentioned it to my sister, very—don't mention it too much but I'm quite proud. Number one, like I said, I chose to step forward and go in the military, and number two I recognized that I was on this earth for something because literally—

it's like being in a car accident and wondering how you actually survived it. It was a similar situation, I should have been dead but I was injured, it was never documented because we were in the middle of a combat situation. I recognized that there was more I should do besides just work and believe me, when I was that age, particularly after I got out of the service, me and my buddies were out partying two to four times a week. Had a bowling team, you name it we sucked more beer, we kept the breweries going. We did a lot. I also recognized that there was more of calling, not just working. The first thing I volunteered to do and mostly all of this was volunteerism, I volunteered to teach high school religion. I wasn't that old so the high school kids related to me pretty good. That was interesting because our sessions were supposed to go like an hour and sometimes the janitor would go by after about an hour and a half, look in the door and go—we used to have great conversations and lot of talk about religion and as I get older I diversified into—after I got married we bought a house where we're still living and there was a major fire in the community, actually it was right next to the fire station and the siren at that time—it was before pagers—the siren kept going on and on and I mentioned my wife "I should volunteer to be a fireman because it sounds like they really need help."

I volunteered for being a fireman, did that for twenty, thirty years during that period of time I also was on emergent medical squad for twenty-one years. Course they both require a lot of training and everything, and I was a volunteer so there was no pay, anything other than classes. You absorb class for. I had CPR saved my name, somebody was walking around because I did CPR, I've had other CPRs that were successful and stuff. The only thing I didn't do was deliver a baby, that was one of my big wishes. I have come home already because we've had calls back then and come home had to tell my wife "I know so-and-so" female usually "a lot better than I used to." We happened to have been on a call, came back to the station, and an individual lady, quite pregnant, said "This is my second maternity and the first one came real fast so if you get a page expect to be delivering the kid at the house ‘cause I won't make it to the hospital." "Oh, sure, sure. That's fine. Don't worry about it." After she left, "All right, we're going to deliver a kid." My wife and I went on vacation on the Saturday morning and about three hours after that our EMS group delivered a kid. And I think on the current ambulance got a little decal I don't know if you look at ambulances they got little decals on, some units do it, with little babies or something that tells them how many they actually delivered. But I missed it. Anyway, I thoroughly enjoyed that. I know they have safe structures but EMS for twenty-one years, usually burn out is about seven or eight years, I went three times. I actually was Dodge County's EMS provider of the year for 1999. I was recognized.

I also went on—I was approached by our village clerk at the time, passed away now, he said "Mike, you come to—" Well when I was in the fire department like an assistant chief, I got the rank of assistant chief, so I was going to village board meetings and stuff, he said "You're here for all the meetings, why don't you run for village president?" I said "Well, all right I'll give it a shot." I did that for four terms, five terms, something like that. After that I said "Okay, that's cool" but then they kept coming back to me, "How do we do this? How do we do that?" We had a case where we had a dam failure. "What do we do?" "Call the DNR, da-da-da, da-da-da." Listed everything, "Get on the phone, tell them we got imminent disaster potential here." I thought "Well crap, I might as well be back on the village board" so I've been a trustee since that time. These ladies here recognize me and gave some stuff to take back to the clerk. She said "You're Mike Weynand aren't you?" "Yeah." "You're a trustee for village Neosho." "Yeah, what did I get into now?" "Here, our current clerk needed this stuff back yesterday." "That's fine, I'll take it home with me. Drop it off."

But anyway, also co-founder of our local historical society who now I think society is about twenty-five, thirty years in existence. I got together with another individual, sat at our dining room table, threw a couple of bucks on the table and said "Okay, let's see what we can do." Thirty five years later we actually were recognized by the state historical society with a regional convention, some years ago when I was president and we're very active. Got a—I negotiated sale for a dollar of our museum building and bought it obviously was at the meeting last night. I'm not that involved anymore other than the fact that we provide quarterly newsletters and I've been writing. Each one has a specific history. Of lately our little community was part of the Underground Railroad during Civil War, along with Merton and some of the bigger areas, Fond du Lac and different communities there but we were one of the overnight stay areas. And in fact at that time we had a local doctor, we had a number of Methodists very anti-slavery back then and if a slave, escaping slave, was not in good health he would try and doctor them back and in our cemetery which I'm also cemetery sexton there is a plaque, a gentleman, a slave that passed away that is buried in our cemetery.

So that was one of the—I wrote an article on the Niagara escarpment. Ever been to of Niagara Falls? Well, if you go there that's part of an escarpment—if you study rocks and all that good stuff—however it curves through the Great Lakes and comes down here into Dodge County on the east side of the Horicon marsh and stops right near the village of Neosho. So I wrote—actually we were talking last night we got a number of compliments on the article I wrote on that. I just wrote one on—the last one, well—I got two of them that we haven’t published yet, one of them is on the plank road. There were only eight plank roads that were ever built in the state of Wisconsin around 1850, 1855 era. One of them is old Highway 67 which was partially organized by the same person that organized the Watertown plank road that goes from Watertown to Milwaukee. The concept was to have good roads to go to the Michigan—Lake Michigan docks, okay. And I wrote about the plank road that ran from Oconomowoc to Mayville with the idea of going to Fond du Lac but it didn't get that far because of financially—I mean it was a bad idea. In the tundra of Russia where the concept was started it worked great but during the springs they got slimy and they couldn't even use them and they rotted. It only lasted a couple of years.

Anyway, latest one is on how the village of Neosho got its name. It's Native American but I researched that and it's N-E-O-S-H-O. N-E-E or N-E is Native

American for water and in the Sioux language, Sauk-Fox language, all the Algonquins, Indians and they spoke different languages but they had a lot of commonality and N-E—there's Neosho, Missouri, there's Neosho Falls, Kansas. I meant there's a lot—they're always spelled the same but N-E meant water. There's a lot of conflict and decisions about what the last part, the -osho part means, from "clear". If you go on our website which I also oversee it has in there that our ancestors, previous administrators, chose the term "Clear water" and some Native American languages it means, "murky", "muddy" and a number of different definitions, Native Americans nowadays they interpret it differently but anyway, I wrote a newsletter on that. That's why I love history, I hated history in grade school but besides my brother I've got a Christian "Weynand" which is a direct relative that served in the Civil War in the Battle of Nashville and stayed there ‘til they secured Nashville for the rest of the war. But that's where it got me turned on a little bit, I never liked history—Napoleon and all that kind of stuff—got United States history and I thought "Yeah, that's sort of cool." To have a relative like that, actually the son of the ancestor that came over from the Prussian part of Germany. I do our family history tree too.

Going back to what I was saying I've tried to always give of myself, a little bit. Normally before I commit to anything it's like when the kids were in the house and stuff I would sit down "Look, it's going to take a little time away from me being with you guys if I do this." Include my wife, but they've always been very positive "Go ahead, do it." And I've done other things too but I could go on and on. To me, I won't mention any names but there is a guy running for president right now that just brags about how much money he has. And yet as I mentioned to my wife, there's a couple of people, Gates, in the computer industries that just made oodles and oodles of money, most of them are giving it back – even if it’s third world or whatever—but they're giving the money back. What the heck are you going to use with all of it? Not brag how much you have, it's what you did with your god-given abilities to make the money to help others. That's sort of been my philosophy, if you have the talents, the abilities and the time, why not? That's what we're here for, I feel. I mean I could go into my definition what wars are and the fallacy of human beings that get us involved in wars. I got a whole philosophy on that but that'd be another couple of hours.

Gibb: I mean, I would like to ask you a bit more about the mentoring ‘cause I do think that's a really—it sounds like a fascinating thing to be doing. I'm wondering, you said you talked to different veterans from different conflicts and I wondered if there's similarities, differences between the kind of mentoring that you—

Weynand: Combat is combat, no matter where you're at. As I put it basically—because when I first got out of Vietnam was going to join the VFW [Veterans of Foreign Wars] and the World War II veteran he told me, "It was only a conflict, it wasn't a war." I said, basically "Screw you guys." And I joined later when they realized that my point being, any time there's shrapnel, any time there's bullets flying, I don't care what the terminology is, it's combat. That's been my philosophy. As far as mentoring guys, you're talking the same language, what's the difference if you refer to what I said earlier if you're a truck driver in Vietnam or you're a truck driver in Afghanistan or anyplace. If you're in combat, you're in combat and your experiences may be different but usually somewhere along the line you go through the same emotions, same fears, all the same things. Like I said, I like to read books, I've read where civil war veterans have written letters back and those letters were preserved and in one case I was reading a book and the letters I had my wife read it and I says "I could have wrote this." Identical, same things. The loneliness, the fears, same thing. I mean, that's why I've been successful mentoring younger veterans. I don't know, if you have more questions, I don't know how to tell you—

Gibb: It's actually just interesting—

Weynand: Each mentoring is a little bit different based on what they tell me about themselves, what their experiences were and so forth. It boils down to about the same thing, they just got to recognize it. That's like I said, going to VA hospital, I don't care how old they are and what conflict, war whatever they're in. I respect them and they respect you the same way. Cause you all been through generally the same thing.

Gibb: Why do you think they come to the mentoring, why is that—apart from the fact that it's a choice between jail or—[laughs]

Weynand: Well, yeah, that would probably be the main thing, rather sitting here—this is one of the main meeting areas. But I think, some of them I think probably said "Well, okay. It's an easy way out." But eventually, hopefully by the time I'm done with them, they really recognize, maybe in the back of their mind they realized when they said "Yes" to the judge, "I really need some help." Most of them do tell me that they wanted—they want to be able to talk veteran to veteran because they know we understand. And that’s the key thing. Some of them have seen psychiatrists, psychologists or whatever but it's like talking to that wall. They don't understand. That's just a little bit of human nature.

I mean, as—it sounds like a crazy comparison you may go to a grocery store or a Wal-Mart and go down an aisle with all the cereals and pick the one you want to eat for tomorrow. But do you really understand what a third world individual when they're wondering where they're going to get their next meal, not even knowing what it is for sure that they're going to be able to eat. It could be that dog that's running down the street or whatever. You can't tell me and I can't tell you what that's like. Unless you have somebody that has gone through it talking to you and you've gone through it. Then there's that comprehension, that understanding. One of our fallacies in human nature is that we tend to feel we can comprehend things that we have not experienced but we think "Oh yeah, I know exactly what that person's coming over like." No, you don't understand what they went through.

That's why veterans have to talk to veterans. They know, they understand. And even if they don't quite understand, there's the feeling that there's a better understanding, better communication. Even once in a while, even myself I sort of like gotta nod a little bit but they feel I understand them and that's the important part cause they're talking to another veterans. That's a key thing. I don't know if I quite answered your question.

Gibb: No that's great. Have there been any sort of challenges in particular in doing the mentoring?

Weynand: I think the biggest challenge is scheduling to be able to—you don't work out of your house or anything. And they usually try to work out of a neutral place and these veterans aren't always from the Dodge County they just got caught in the legal system in Dodge County so we have to have neutral places. This is one of them I like this place I've had to go out of county to mentor even though, you know, it was a Dodge County case. That gets sometimes a little challenging but as far as challenges, no. Like I said, I first try to get to know them. Then we talk about the issues, then we get to the tough love. I guess one of the biggest challenges if I could nail one thing would be for each of the veterans to recognize that they have PTSD and that is affecting your life. And you gotta understand that and control and, you know—otherwise, I guess we're only here one time. We're only here for so many years. We gotta have the best life possible. And if PTSD is drawing you down, has a major effect on your lifestyle, you gotta learn how to fight it, control it, somehow or you're going to be on your deathbed and say "What the hell did I do?" And that is something that sounds a little gross but we're all going to be there someday and there's two people—

[end of file 1]

[start of file 2]

Weynand: —you're going to answer to when you're there—yourself and the good lord. And hopefully have good answers for both. And getting very serious about it, I've told my wife and I guess I'm making it public now but when I'm on that point, I told her, I said "The biggest thing is to be able to say 'I did, I stepped forward'. Don't know exactly everything else I'm supposed to do in life but I did as much as I felt I could in the right way." I don't know how much else you could say. So anyway, I tend to get off track here a little bit [laughs].

Gibb: Two questions about the PTSD actually because obviously you came back before it was a term that was used by the Veterans Administration, that sort of thing. Do you—I mean you obviously—were you exhibiting symptoms that you now attribute to PTSD and what did having that definition and having that terminology to use how did that—?

Weynand: Well, PTSD's a term. Different terms, different eras, different combats. But yeah, I used to wake up, sometimes two, three times a night with one specific dream. I won't get into the details of it. But after I got married and part of the getting to know each other period before our marriage was that she understood, I was a veteran, I had some problems, no matter what. But after our marriage we'd be eating breakfast or whatever, she'd say, "You had that dream again didn't you?" I said "Yes." That was the end of it. She could tell apparently I was animated or spoke out or whatever. I wasn't like some guys that, you know, beat up on their wife or anything because they think that was the enemy or whatever. But yeah, I had numerous dreams and again, I had—that was a point in my life I was starting to have children, I didn't want that, I had to learn how to mentally control whatever it was. Later on they came up with PTSD, it was nice to have a term for it but I knew something was bothering me and the key thing was, like I said, I wanted to control it. So I tried to segment it away and said "That was my life then and it's not my life now. I got kids, I got a wife, I got a job, I've got other things to focus on." But it's there. I can almost tell you a story of almost exactly what my dream was about at this point but that's boring. It's there. I know it. That's part of life.

People that get in car accidents have PTSD, people who have other major traumatic experiences have the same thing. That's part of human nature, probably centuries old. Just part of us, that's the way our mind works. But you gotta understand that and control it and work your way out of it. Get a good view of life, don't let your mental abilities or lack of abilities control your life. You gotta control it yourself, do the best you can. If I walk out of here and get hit by a car, so be it. Can't control that but as much as you can control life, it's up to you to do it. If you don't do it, don't blame the other guy. It's you. You gotta do it. It's that way at work or whatever, it's sort of been my attitude. I mean, most of my life I guess what's helped me a little bit is most of life I've managed people, I've been supervisors and department heads and all that kind of good stuff. I've always had to deal with people. The last twenty years or so I was mostly human resources, manager, safety manager, and that area. You're always dealing with people and people are fun cause we all look a little different and we all think a little bit differently and honestly the one thing, I mentioned to my wife after going to church last Sunday, "You know if there's one thing that I know I don't have the ability and never will have the ability to do while I'm on earth is to be able to look everybody in the eye and totally understand their mind, their heart and their soul." We don't have the capability. We're inferior because of that so you gotta make do as best you can with your capabilities, your mental, physical capabilities. I wish because in my mind I could help veterans and others more if I could see inside you better. Maybe hopefully when I'm up there and not down here I'll have better vision than we do.

We don't realize human beings are weak in so many ways. Honestly, I used to also help—I still do periodically—help usher at our church and I guess there's a couple of us use humor and I said once after one of the masses were over I mentioned to another usher, I don't know what we were talking about, he says "You know, God must have one heck of a sense of humor cause look at what he made." [laughs] My point being is he made—we are made imperfect, we all are different, we gotta realize we're all different. And as we go through life we go through all different kinds of different experiences. PTSD is just a microscopic part of what our life is all about and all our life experiences and things that we experience. Don't let—I like to talk like that—don't let PTSD be your encumbering portion of your thoughts, that it takes away from 98 percent of your life. You know and your other thinking. I've seen that kind of situation, people just can't—you know, they drown themselves in alcohol or something to escape but that's not the way. Look it in the face, look it in the eyeballs, and say "Dammit, you're not going to control me anymore." That's what I try and get over to the veterans I'm mentoring. And so far I think they've got the message.

Gibb: I just have one other question about—you were Christian before you went out to Vietnam? You went to church and you were religious?

Weynand: Well I was raised in a parochial grade school. Catholic—was the server. Did all the normal things Catholic kids do. Can't say I was overly religious but there's a recognition, you know, as a kid you're not that concerned. My assignment a lot of the times for serving was the early mass in the Sunday or weekday morning and I got up like at five-thirty in the morning. Yeah, I went through all that.

Gibb: I'm just wondering how that was maybe impacted while you were in Vietnam, if you maintained going to mass—

Weynand: In a way it's interesting because my parents were very Catholic, religious, they went to mass at least every Sunday. In Vietnam, I probably went to mass maybe twice and that was because there's no priest in existence. But as far as—actually, again, when I got a little older and worked with CCD [Confraternity of Christian Doctrine] and high school religion and that kind of stuff, I came up with a little story. I can recall literally being in command center, priest sticking his head in or coming in and he says—never knew he was going to be there but all of a sudden he came and said "You think—would some of the guys be interested in having a mass?" "Sure." So passed the word around and the priest again had a little olive drab, green table about yea big, set that up, he asked "Anybody previously been a server?" Couple of us raised our hands. But my point being, if you're Catholic and gone to masses, I have mentioned to numerous people: "There was a priest out there in the basic garments, little, dinky alter, in the back—" for some reason, I don't know maybe it was geologically from a volcano or something but there's a huge rock. I did think about it at the time but later on I thought, "You know that was because he didn't want to get shot in the back." But there was the rock and then the priest and a little alter and he asked all of us just to lay our weapons down. Most of them were M-16s and we had a mass. The story on that basically is I have mentioned in high school religion and other places—did you know, you walk in to these beautiful churches, all the mosaics, all the carvings, all the stained glass windows and I didn't get as much out of any of those masses as when we were out in the middle of boondocks. That was so crystal clear, one on one, no distractions, no choirs, no nothing. It was just the basic mass and the honoring of God.

And we don't—in a way that experience led me into another one. My wife is part Native American, she's also Catholic but we were visiting my father-in-law and the relatives and my father-in-law passed away about four and a half weeks ago now but he obviously was Native American—Choctaw. And on a Sunday, my brother-in-law, sister-in-law and everybody decided "We're going to go to church." He and I sat outside, because he was basically Baptist but never went. And we talked. And from that point on I have the greatest respect for Native Americans and how we've you know previously, historically, looked down on them. Yet they have such a pure beliefs. Now their beliefs don't match the Bible, but they're interesting things. Most people don't know this but I just recently came across that, do you realize that in their hand-me-down language, they didn't record anything but for centuries they have passed the story down about the great flood. It's in the Bible and here they are Native Americans and there's still arguments about where they originally came from but wait, a minute, that's just one instance. They have, to me, a purity of belief. Now they didn't know exactly how we define God but they believed in a supernatural spirit, sometimes a couple of spirits but they believed something beyond that. This was before the missionaries got to the United States and our government tried to convert them into regular Americans, not Native Americans.

It's given me a whole different concept, a more pure look at—I don't care if you're Christian, Jewish or whatever. Of that concept, even if—and like I said, I'm now focusing on reading books on early mankind as much as we could define it. The hieroglyphics and things like that and how they believed there was something better than them in that sense. There was somebody beyond our earth, how we were just a part of the overall scheme of things you might say. I've—I not only have respect for Native Americans but it really is pure. We don't infect ourselves with—I may sound now a little contradictory but they didn't have church choirs as we did in Vietnam. My wife sings in church choir, don't get me wrong, it's beautiful but that's not the essence and to me the mass in Vietnam was that way. It's one of those things when after it's over you say "Whoa, that was a little special." I'll never forget it and honestly out of the sixty something times I go to church a year—seventy, whatever it is, I hardly remember any of them, but I remember that one because the purity of it. The honesty, the clearness of it, and that's one reason why I started teaching CCD after I got out because I guess you might call it sort of an awakening. Again, I wander a little bit. Gives you an idea.

Gibb: That is really interesting. I'm not sure if there's anything else that you wanted to touch on that we haven't already.

Weynand: I've said a lot more than I thought I would.

Gibb: [laughs] Yeah, that does tend to happen. It's okay. We're always prepared, plenty of tapes.

Weynand: The one thing that I like to—as much as I could cover like today, is cover some of the aspects of being a veterans that normally the guys like to talk about their combat experience and yes that obviously an important aspect of it but there's a lot of other things that go on in their life and in combat that are as important or more important. I think if I could close with the one comment is what I said earlier—I am proud that I did not cower. I could not live with myself if I went through life cowering, running, backing away. I accept challenges and I accepted being a veteran and I am proud of it. I don't brag about it but I'm proud I did it. I didn't run, I didn't hide. That's what life is about; you gotta handle the challenges that are there. Amen.

Gibb: Great.

Weynand: And thank you, I appreciate being here.

Gibb: Thank you for doing the interview with us, we really appreciate it.

Weynand: No problem.

[End of interview]