

Interview with Gary May  
Interviewer: Donte' Shelton  
November 5, 2009

**Interviewer's Notes:** I made the mistake of calling Mr. May "Doctor". He later informed me that I should call him Mr. not Dr.

**Q:** Alright, my name is Donte' Shelton, and I am here to interview Dr. Gary May. You served in Vietnam right, sir?

**A:** Yes, I was a Vietnam vet, and I was there with the marines in 1968.

**Q:** The Veterans History Project is a project that we have to do for our Oral Traditions Class. I believe it's a four hundred level class under communication studies; and we have to interview a veteran and get his experience, and it is also an experience for us, you know to get an understanding, of the people that serve. It doesn't necessarily have to be a war veteran; it can be a civilian that lived during that time period.

**A:** Right.

**Q:** ...to pass down the tradition and the accounts of the people that experienced that time period, because it's very important to our history, and it's very important for us to know. I mean, hate to say it, but once those people move on or pass on, those stories are still going to be there...

**A:** Right.

**Q:** ...and without those accounts, the future generation will have no idea of what World War II, Vietnam, or Korean War or anything like that, so it's very, very important to us.

**A:** Yeah, I think it's a good idea to develop a record an oral history record.

**Q:** So, tell me, Dr. May, can you explain how you became involved in the military?

**A:** Yeah, first of all it's "Mr. May"; I did catch that earlier, and I'm not a Dr.

**Q:** sorry.

**A:** How did I become involved? How did I join? Well actually, like most Vietnam veterans or many Vietnam veterans, I grew up in a World War II household. My dad was a World War II combat vet, and while military service was not a frequent topic for discussion in the family, I was aware that dad was a combat vet of World War II as were some of his close relatives and friends that would visit the family. So, I was aware of and around veterans growing up. Again it was not a major part of my life other than it being in my level of awareness, and combined with that experience growing up, was a sense that I had at that time and I'm talking principally about mid 60's that as a young man, a healthy young man, I had an obligation to give something to my country The powerful words from Kennedy's inaugural address rang heavily or sharply in my mind "Ask not what your country can do for you, but what you can do for your country." I have this sense of obligation to duty and that generally took the form of military service. I didn't think that any other alternative like a public service job or anything like that would satisfy that obligation, and I immediately went into the military. It turned out that my high school basketball coach was a marine reserve officer, and I talked with him about my plan, or lack of plan really, at one point, and the uncertainty about what my future held. He suggested that if I was unclear, you know do I want to go on to college or do I want to join the work force, or do I want to join the military? I didn't have

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good answers to all of those things. The draft was going on then; he said, well, his advice was if you're not sure, then he recommended the military to get a sort of a broader world view, to learn some skills, and as he put it, "to get that out of your way," so that you can fulfill your obligation and not worry about the draft; after completion come back to the community and decide what you want to do. That made sense from really a practical perspective. As a young teenager and which is the case with most teenagers, I think, we're not totally practical when we're at that phase of our life. The pan of my motivation wasn't particularly practical, although it was a very powerful appeal, the psychological and social appeal of that image, of that very well chiseled handsome always marine and the dressed blue uniform, which was prominently featured on all of the recruiting material that I had seen by that time. That was very appealing to me, and how I wanted that identity, and I wanted to be like that silhouette or that photograph on the recruiter's pamphlets, and really those were the things. There was this sort of ambiguity about what my future held and the advice from my basketball coach about getting this "out of the way" and then the broad emotional appeal of being like that image depicted in the recruiting material. The motivations weren't necessarily in that order; they frequently co-mingled, one trumped the other one time, and another trumped the others at other times. That's what really got me going.

**Q:** Mr. May, What was the public's perception of the war at that time?

**A:** I enlisted. I graduated from high school in 1967, and I committed to the Marine Corp before I got out of high school. At that time, they had a delayed entry program, and I have an early birthday. My birthday is in January, so in January I went to my local selective service office and registered as was required, but not long after that I got really involved with meeting with the recruiter, and I joined on a delayed entry program while I was still in high school. I think the general mood about the war here... I grew up in this region of southwestern Indiana and I think the mood about the war, was generally supportive overall. Although I think in retrospect, I think there's evidence that most of us overlooked at the time, that the support was beginning to erode. At that time the war had been dragging on a while; my community had experienced some injuries. Young men were injured in the service and surrounding communities experienced some death and the reality of war and consequences were, were apparent, but I think generally people had this broad accepting view of our engagement in Vietnam and generally thought it was the right thing to do at that time. From my perspective, I really had no clue as a high school senior, nor did I care much about what the hell was going on in Vietnam. I knew something was happening in the news, and I just tuned into that, but as far as whose side we are on, what we are trying to do, I didn't have a clear vision about that, and I didn't go to tip the war from a no win to a win single handedly. I was pretty much oblivious to the war, because there were things about the image and the uncertainty of my future.

**Q:** So, you just really weren't too concerned with what the community or the public was thinking at the time? What can you do being fresh out of high school and maybe going off to Vietnam?

**A:** Yeah, at that stage in my life, as I can reflect on it, I think I was far more concerned with what people thought of me as an individual, than what they thought of the war, and by extension, my role in the war. Again, that image, I can't overstate how important that image was to me and you know the thought of how people would look at me and have a positive attitude, because the way I looked was pretty important to me at that time in my life.

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**Q:** Alright Mr. May, Where exactly did you go when you left America?

**A:** When I left the U.S. I arrived in Da Nang and in South Vietnam. I went over a with whole bunch of other troops in a military; aircraft. During the war some troops arrived pretty much as individual replacements for units, and many of them arrived in civilian aircrafts that were contracted by the Department of Defense. I flew over in the belly of a C-131 air force aircraft with other people in my unit. We were sent in early 1968 to replace the heavy casualties the U.S. had sustained in the Tet offensive in early '68. But we landed in Da Nang, it was in the middle of the night and I recall it was dark, very dark and black outside, and it was a long arduous trip. It wasn't the most comfortable mode of travel, so we were all pretty fatigued when we got there, and we had experienced a sort of spike in our stress level prior to landing. The pilot or co-pilot came onto the intercom and said that we might be going into a hot landing zone, which meant that there may be mortar fire and small arms fire, so that all made us quite tense. Our introduction into the theatre of combat, and here we are thinking we are going to land in the middle of some kind of mess, and it was really a quiet landing and nothing bad happened, and we got off the plane and got sorted out by squads, who belongs where, and we just really went and found a place to curl up on our sea bags to sleep a while. Then at first light we were convened under the leadership of major... and it was majors if I recall who gave that standard welcome to Vietnam speech and "we were in for an adventure" and that sort of stuff. Then after that, later that same day, we were loaded into the backs of trucks and hauled out from Da Nang out to what would be considered to be the suburban areas or rural areas surrounding Da Nang. We set up a battalion area, a battalion of a thousand marines all total. Had to do some assembling tents, and so we did that for a couple of days, and then shortly after that pretty soon after that, quite frankly we started patrols and that was quite an adventure because, you know, we were all there as replacements for casualties from Tet, and we were hastily thrown together group, The marines have a saying that all marines are fundamentally grunts or infantry men, so I had been trained and many others had been trained, in schools such as Amtrak Mechanics School or an electronics school and tank driving school. They brought us all together and staged us at Camp Pendleton and sent us to Vietnam as infantry men. None of us really knew about infantry men, and some of those early patrols were quite... I suppose if you were a hovering camera looking down on what was going on you might think you were watching a Keystone Cops movie as we prepared to go out onto patrol; didn't really take long to get intuition that you could rely on to know what's happening. I had an advantage in that regard in that I had grown up in a rural area, and I was pretty active, and outdoors person. You know, did small game hunting and fishing. I was out a lot and knew my way around, you know could work my way through a woods or a thicket and that became very helpful to us as we began to do those patrols. But they happened way too soon to suit me. I wanted... to get settled a little bit more before we went out and did this stuff. As it turned out, on one the early patrols, we were combined with another group of allies, that included Australian troops. The Australians fought alongside U.S. troops in Vietnam; we were out with these guys, and it turned out we encountered some insurgents, some Vietcong, and grenades were thrown, and shots were fired. I caught a little piece of shrapnel in my right arm, so here I am, you know, brand new in the country, a teenager, and here I am shedding blood on of foreign soil, and man, I thought, Man, this is really real, and it's really getting real fast, but I lived and survived that to join my company and we continued to engage in their activity at least for the next several weeks, before I was wounded a second time and medivacted out of the country.

**Q:** So, you just got through introducing us to a little bit about your war experience, your combat experience, but I would like to go just little bit deeper into that. May be you can explain how that patrol broke, down or if you don't want to talk about that in depth, about how being in combat may be different from what you expected. How it kinda caught you by surprise?

**A:** Well, in terms of the logistics, most of our activities were at the squad level, and a full marine rifle squad was somewhere around ten members. One of the realities with Vietnam was there were always people that left the unit either it was because of their date of return or more commonly when I was there, because they were wounded as I was, and taken out of the field for a while. So, you know, it wasn't uncommon for us to have a squad comprised of only six people or fewer. I remember one time we go so low in terms of the people in our squad that I was the senior member of my squad, and there were only three of us, and I was the senior and I thought, My goodness, I am not ready for this responsibility. The other extreme of movement or activity would be at the company level; a company is comprised of platoons that would have three or more squads, so you're getting up in the several hundreds of people, tens of dozens of scores of people actually when you get to the company level. The point of the patrols was to, I suppose, the dispatchers and the Intelligence people would say that the point of the patrol would be to see what's going on, and unfortunately, it seems now in retrospect, that the method for seeing what's going on is to put yourself out there as a target to get shot at or encounter booby traps, and that means that's a pretty hot area of our territory, rather than it being a more humane way of figuring out what is going on. We did what we felt we had to do and tried to do our best at it. I was in part because of my outdoorsy kind of acumen... I was the point person for our squad quite a few of the times during my short time in country, and I was ok with that, even though I knew that point was a pretty vulnerable position, and the life expectancy of a point marine in a fire fight was like just a couple of minutes. I felt more comfortable up front than I did in the middle or the other position which we call "tail end Charlie," that's the last guy. I didn't like that at all, you know, I just didn't feel right being the tail; I'd rather be the head at that time. On the particular night that I was wounded, the second time when the wound was much more serious and resulted in the traumatic amputation of both my legs, that happened in a rice patty area not real far from our battalion headquarters, as it turned out. After I was wounded, became a very contentious bit of territory, that region where I was wounded. Many other marines after I was wounded and out of the country died in operation in that area, but the particular circumstance when I was wounded, it was a nighttime patrol which was fairly typical. It seemed like all of the patrols were at nighttime; I was point again, fairly typical arrangement. When you run a patrol, before you would leave, the military intelligence people would brief the squad leader about what the route was that they wanted you to follow, and they would discuss a time estimate, about how long it should take that route. We had run most of the route that night, and I am up front, and the squad leader would give me direction. We need to go thirty-five meters over this way, and then we need to cut over at a forty five degree angle for a hundred meters, so we were doing those maneuvers and finished most of the route, but we were way early in terms of the time estimates, so rather than going back to the battalion area early, where the squad leader would have to say or explain why it is that we finished early with an underlying suspicion on the part of his questioners that he probably short cut the route. He would have to defend and rather than go through all of that, he just said we'll go over here at this tree line and we'll set up an ambush for an hour or so, and then we'll go back to the battalion area, a completely reasonable plan, So during the course of moving from where we were over toward that tree

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line, I was going across rice patty dikes and one things you learn very quickly in Vietnam is that you didn't travel in paths that looked like they invited travel, because those were paths that were more likely to be booby trapped or mined, so I was not walking along the top of the dike I was going across it perpendicular and it turned out one of the places that I chose to cross was a spot that had been mined. I stepped on what was a pressure detonated mine, some of the fellas that caught up with me in the medivac system later told me when I stepped on it and it released, it triggered the explosion, and I was thrown up into the air. I don't know how far, but I have fairly vivid memories of some of the things that I saw at the time including, you know, this image of my left boot with my foot still in it taking off from my body at about a forty-five-degree angle from the explosion. I landed in kind of a position that you would have if you are in a chase lounge chair, leaning back a bit, my back was against the rice patty, and I wasn't fully aware of the extent of my injuries initially. When I started to get up, I lifted or pulled the trunk of my body forward to get up, and it was quickly apparent to me that I didn't have any counter balancing weight at the bottom, because my legs were gone. I couldn't get up, and the members of my squad quickly came to me, we did not have a corp. man or a medic with us that night. They took a couple of web belts including the one that I had on and applied tourniquets around my legs, my residual legs. I also had a pretty nasty looking shell fragment wound in my right bicep, so they were attending to that, and the squad leader ordered the radio operator to call in the medivac helicopter, very routine stuff. I mean, I've been a part of all that before, not as the evacuee, but as one who was aware and involved in what's going on. I got angry with the squad leader, because he was close enough to me when he was talking to the radio man; I'd could easily hear him, and he said "Tell 'em to send a doctor; out he's hurt pretty bad," and I got mad because I knew from experience that if you had to dispatch a doctor it took longer for the helicopter to get out there, because you know, doctors. You gotta go wake them up and get their wits about them and get them in the helicopter so they can come out to the field, and I said, "Hell no, don't do that just get me the hell outta here." That didn't work; I waited, and the chopper and the doctor came out, and I remember them putting me on the stretcher and carrying me to the helicopter. I remember the helicopter lifting off from the field, and the doctor seemed to be more concerned about my right bicep and neither of my leg stumps. I don't know what that was all about, unless he was fearful that I might become a triple amputee if they didn't take care of that arm right away... anyway I blacked out for an unknown period of time. It must have been fairly brief because as I said we weren't very far out from Da Nang, and I remember landing in Da Nang, I remember when the chopper came down at the helipad at the field or Naval Aid Station in Da Nang, and I remember them taking me out of the helicopter again on a stretcher carrying me into what most of us call or identify as an emergency room, but there was triage room. I had my high school class ring on my left ring finger, and I remember they were cutting that off in addition to the amputations and the arm issue. I had shell fragment wounds in all of my fingers from the shrapnel that was in the mine, and they couldn't slip my ring off so they ended up cutting it off, and you know we wore the metal dog tags at that time, that has your name and religious preference, blood type and your service number. They were asking me to repeat all of that information to help prevent me from going into shock. I remember them taking the scissors and cutting my clothes off of me, my shirt, my slacks or dungarees. I remember them then taking me into the operating room, and I remember it was kind of like a scene from M.A.S.H., the tv show M.A.S.H., where they have those sandbag reinforcements around some of the medical facilities. I don't know it was sandbags, but I remember as I reflected on that from the very early days afterward, it

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reminded me of M.A.S.H tv show. They're moving my stumps around, and lifting, and looking, and poking, and posing, and then a bizarre thing began to happen, flash bulbs began to go off; they were taking pictures. They would lift up one of my stumps and take a picture, and I just remembered being totally puzzled by that, and of course, I was in no position to ask about that at that time. Later I enquired about that and learned that they did that fairly routinely with wounded marines. They were taking color photographs and used those to train medics and corp. men state side to prepare them for what they would be encountering when they went to Vietnam. You're talking to today's unit is on amputations, here are some photographs of the types of amputations happening in this war that you're going to see. Corp men or medics, I was in the operating room for an unknown period of time that first time, and the next thing I remembered was waking up in what would be prevalently an intensive care unit. Very groggy, very confused and disoriented initially. I didn't know where I was, and the first sensation that I recall, was just heavy pulling on what used to be my legs. It was almost painfully heavy. By the time I got thawed out enough to move my head around a little bit, I could look down and see that they had put kind of a lady's hose or stockings over the residual stumps, and they had the fabric at the end gathered, and they had like a little clothes line that went down over the end of the bed like a pulley and I thought that's interesting. I couldn't see over the whole configuration, but that's what they were doing, applying traction or pulling that soft tissue down over the remaining bone to keep it stretched out, so that I could have a good closure on my stumps. If they wouldn't do that the skin would retract and they would have to take more bone and I would end up with a shorter stump than I did otherwise. So, I woke up and figured out some of the mechanics they had applied while I was in la-la land. The first human being I remember seeing in that setting afterward was a Red Cross volunteer by the name of Lucy Caldwell. Lucy Caldwell, I later learned, was something of a wounded marine institution in Vietnam; she was many times against military advice, worked as a volunteer at aid stations, not just with marines, but other combatants as well. Lucy was there, and she was a very benevolent, kind gentle woman, and her job was to help guys deal with the shock of serious injury that many of us had experienced. She was there, and we had a bit of a brief conversation. She said, you know, "Your parents are gonna be really concerned about you, and by now maybe getting some early reports that you were seriously wounded and that they're not going to know much else." She said, "How about you write a letter to them," and my hands were all bandaged because all my fingers had shrapnel, and I said "I can't even hold a pen; I can't write," and she said "Well you dictate it to me," and that was the hardest thing I ever had to do in my life up to that point. Here I am blown up and talking to this stranger, you know, conveying heart felt feelings and trying to mask confusion and fear in a note to my parents, and I got through that. When we finished that, I don't know how long that took, it seemed like it took forever, she said "Is there anybody else you want to write to?" I said, "Well, I do have a girlfriend back home." We did that process again, and I dictated a letter to my girlfriend, and in that case, I signed it. I felt that my hand would work enough for me to scratch out something like a signature, if you look on the signature on my consent form, you would see that it's not very precise even now with no impediments, so that's how that went. I was in Da Nang for a few days, three or four. I started the medivac process back. The first stop in that medivac process was Clark Air Force Base in the Philippine Islands, they had a hospital there. I was flown by jet from Da Nang to Clark. I spent about a week to ten days there, I'm not real sure about the time frames on all of this and from there I went to Guam, there was a Naval hospital in Guam on the island of Guam, there I was feeling much better by then, I was able to be reasonably ambulatory in a wheel chair, I still

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had to have the contraptions to have the pulleys and the weights in my stumps, because they were still open. One of the things that happened as a result of the explosion in addition to the shell fragment wounds and soft tissue wounds, I had a collapsed lung, so they were treating that by keeping the blood pumped. My stumps were closed in Guam and that really made a big difference in terms of how I felt and how active I could be. I was a lot more active after that. Did you have a question?

**Q:** I did, I am sorry; [laughter]... I just wanted to you real quick, did you at all feel, I don't know, maybe sort of upset like at your squad leader, maybe like he should have just went on ahead and went back to base early?

**A:** I don't harbor any ill will toward him. I've never seen the man since that evening, but you know by that time even though I got there in about February 10 and I was wounded the second time on April 12, I wasn't there for very long at all. It was really, really clear to me, as I said; we were a thrown together unit, none of us really knew what the hell we were doing, and you know I was senior person in my squad as I mentioned... a nineteen year old kid with no kind of experience in life beyond high school and here I am the leader of men. So, you know, he did what he had to do, the best way he could. I don't have any ill will towards him; the ill will that I had was more defused and focused on this whole decision-making process that got us involved in Vietnam in the first place. I went into the marine Corp totally naive about what we had gotten into and what we were doing in Vietnam. I came out still mostly uniformed. but very engaged in finding out, because I felt like we had been screwed, quite frankly, and it had nothing to do or very little to do with individual people such as my squad leader or his Lieutenant or anyone else in that low level chain of command, but it had everything to do with corporate greed and corporate interests. There were rumors that we lost five marines last night guarding the freakin' uh Micheleon Plantation the Micheleon Rubber Tree Plantation. We lost three guys when they had to escort a Shell Oil tank, and you know there was this overlay of corporate greed and corporate disregard that resulted in or contributed to the deaths of our marines; that was the focus of my concern and anger more than on individuals.

**Q:** To just maybe go away from, I guess the more I would say upsetting part about your experience, do you have any memories that were maybe good?

**A:** Yeah, actually I had one totally unexpected experience that I would certainly put in a positive sort of category. One day when our squad was getting ready to leave our battalion area, and we were just going outside the gate, there were other marines around I heard somebody kind of off to my side say, "Hey Gary! Is that you!?" and I said, "Who the hell is that?" I looked over there, and it was one of the guys I went to high school with; he was also a marine, He was a year older than I am and he was an engineer. He was in an engineering outfit, and they would go out on their four wheelers and sweep for mines, so he had just swept that road we were on for mines, and he had just come back as we were going out, so he came over to me and we talked a little bit. We made arrangements for me to come over. He told me where he was sleeping. He said, "So come over whenever you get back in," and I went over and you know he in some ways had the life of Riley. He had a footlocker; he had gotten some alcohol, so you know we had a few drinks that evening, and it was great. It almost felt like being back home again, and you know subsequent to that occasion, when we would be back on our battalion area, some of us would have to go out and pull guard duty to watch the parameter. That was really boring, because you're

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sitting out there all night looking into the darkness for something unexpected or something that shouldn't happen. Well, there was some cannabis that was available in our area at that time, and it was in one of those situations out there in the parameter watch, which is not the best way place to experiment with recreational drugs. Anyway, that's where I was introduced to the recreational use of cannabis, and that was quite a pleasant experience that I had, although I recognized the inherent danger and I didn't repeat that after that one episode, because I just felt too vulnerable. I think that's the same kind of feeling that I had in the patrols, you know, when I said I like being front better than I do being in the middle or in the back, I felt I had at least a better vantage point and better options to deal with contingencies than I would with other positions. I didn't want to be blitzed out on cannabis or looking for something to eat when I should be doing something else, but you know there were good times.

**Q:** A little earlier you mentioned when you were in the hospital you had the nurse write for you. Before or after that incident did you write a lot of letters a back and forth to home?

**A:** Yeah, every day, mail call was a very big deal, and the pattern then was that, when we got there in early February... again it was a hastily arranged movement and it took a while for things to catch up with us, that included mail. I remember being very frustrated for several days when mail would be announced at some hour in a day when the delivery had been made, and you show up and somebody grabs the mail out of the bag, calls out names, and if your name was called, you would go up and get letter or care package, and there were several days that I was there hoping and waiting for my letter, because you know prior to my leaving the states, my parents and I and my girlfriend and I corresponded regularly. I knew there were letters in the pipeline, and it was frustrating that it took them a while to get there. That kind of took on a funny dimension as I was coming back through the medivac system. I was probably in the hospital in Guam when almost a bushel basket full of mail arrived for me; it was all for me and it turned out that a lot of it came from one of the elementary schools, or one of the elementary schools one of my cousins attended. Being from a small town everybody knew Gary May was injured in the war du da du da du, and so I think Jay was in second, third, or fourth grade at the time, and his teacher got all the students in that class to write me a get-well card and that was just funny as hell. Well, that activity spread to other classes in that small parochial school, and they generated quite a prodigious output of letters. I was coming back through the medivac system and when you leave a station to go to another essentially you have to carry everything you got with you; it's not like you call Mayflower Movers, and they load up a van and drop them off. I didn't have anywhere to put these letters, so I ended up regrettably throwing them all away, because I didn't have anywhere to go with them. I wish I could've kept them I kept memories of them and some of the funny things that kids innocent kids say. One of them I remember from one of my cousin's friends said "Dear Gary, sorry you got hurt. I hope you don't die." [Laughter] Real direct and kids, stuff unfiltered. It was funny, sadly though... those are all gone and not retrievable.

**Q:** So, to go back to the time that you spent in Da Nang, Vietnam, can you tell me what the food was like and what your living conditions were like when you were there?

**A:** In the field, the food was mostly at the time called C- rations. It's essentially a compact box that contained tins of foods of various sorts and virtually everything was in a tin. You had a little device that many of put on a little key ring called a C- ration opener that would open the tin. You just ate what was



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in the tin; they also had features that included an ability to heat the C- ration, you know, cut vent holes at the bottom of an empty can and put a little sterno tablet in there and light that and heat your food, but it was really basic stuff canned ham. I am talking about cans that are about the size of off the shelf moist cat food that you buy at the supermarket these days. That was generally the size of a can. Occasionally very occasionally though, when we would be out in the field, there would be, what seemed to me to be a big convoy of trucks that would come out, and they would set up a portable kitchen or more like a portable steam table out in the field where they would prepare or warm up a fairly complicated meal, of roast beef and potatoes and vegetables and hot rolls. That was a real treat when I got that, but that didn't happen very often. Mostly, we ate out of our backpacks and the canned food that was rumored to be left over from WWII. I don't doubt that, but I don't have any confirmation for that either. In the hospital system, to contrast the field, where I spent the majority of my time and my experience, hospital food was hospital food. It was better than eating canned food or C- rations, not as good as what mom cooked at home. Generally, the living conditions were tolerable; I recall there were a lot of good times in terms of relationships in the hospitals on my route back to the U.S. I made some good friendships and still maintained some of those friendships today. People that shared an experience similar to mine, injured in the war serious enough to be discharged, and talking about and figuring out and fretting about our present circumstances about the future. It was interesting and enjoyable frankly for me to do.

**Q:** Can you also tell me about your living conditions? How you bathed? How you slept? How were those conditions?

**A:** Bathing in the field either occurred when we were in our battalion area. Some rudimentary showering that we had access to. If we were out in the field for an extended period of time, bathing occurred to the extent of bathing in a body of water a creek or a river. I remember one time we had been out for several days; the executive officer had us sort of set up at a riverbank and in shifts guys would go into the river, and we had soap and we just passed it around to clean ourselves as we could. One of the pitfalls, though, was a lot of the guys came out of the water clean with leeches on them, so that created a problem for the medics, for them to get the leeches off and make sure that the site the leech had latched onto was sterilized, so as to prevent any infection. Sleeping was kind catch as catch can; marines have typically what they call shelter halves with them if they are out; a shelter half is what the name suggests half a shelter. I carry half and you carry half; when it's time to go to sleep, we get our halves together and make a semblance of a tent, and both you and I crawl underneath the tent and then the next day we take it down and put our shelter halves back up and go on our merry way. More times than not, though, we slept a fox hole, or we had an opportunity be in kind of an interior location at an encampment. We just slept on top of the ground, with flak jacket and a helmet. You didn't get undressed when you went to bed; you slept with all your clothes on, because you didn't know when you might be roused from your sleep and have to get serious about protecting yourself, so it's a not restful sleep, and something I couldn't do now at my age, but as nineteen year old, I got by ok with that.

**Q:** So just to go along with the number of experiences that you've had in Vietnam, can you describe your interaction with civilians while stationed in Da Nang?

**A:** My encounter with civilians was pretty secondary. I didn't have any sort of relationships. I didn't speak a word of Vietnamese, and I didn't meet any Vietnamese people that spoke a word of English. That's not to say they weren't there, but I remember pretty clearly on a one-day patrol, we were going into a village which we did, a lot. Everybody knew what happened when we went into a village, we'd go ransack the people's houses and look under beds and check out their rice supply, looking for enemy weapons. We were going into this village, and the senior man of the village usually referred to as the Papa San was at the perimeter of the village, and as I walked past him, I was point again and was the first one in our group he encountered. As I'm walking past him, I looked up and our eyes met, and what I saw in that man's eyes was this profound resentment, and this question, "What the hell are you doing here?" He didn't say a word to me nor did I to him, and I recognized that what I saw in his eyes came from me more than it did from him, but that was really a memorable experience for me, because he knew that after we left, after an hour or so, that village was going to be a wreck There were lives disrupted farm animals or pets even scattered all over the place. These damn arrogant U.S. marines came in and did just what the hell they wanted. Because they got the guns, they were able to do it. In sports they call it a "game changer," that was kind of a game changer for me what I saw in that guy's eyes. Again, I recognized that was more me than him; that's what I described early as increasing information, not much increase in sophistication my part about what the heck was going on.

**Q:** So, when you were passing through that village looking through that man's eyes and you know you could tell that he knew that when your team left, would come into the village and the village would be a wreck, and you were just talking about the fighting would continue through village?

**A:** The way it normally worked when we would sweep through a village, I don't recall a single episode where we found somebody who was clearly identified as an enemy, or where gun fire was exchanged. The typical play out of going through that village, was that we would go into each of the individual houses and many of the houses... if not most had altars little prayer altars inside the house. They also used them for cooking, and we would poke around and look at all the openings there to make sure there wasn't a gun stashed away, more than looking for people or threatening people, but we were looking for things like grenades that were hidden away or weapons. I can say that I never, when I was there, I never ever witness deliberate intentional ill treatment of civilians. Some reports about civilian military interaction, there are these horror stories that are unconscionable about things like rape and murdering people. I never witnessed nor was I a party to any of that during any of the time that I was there. The village would be a wreck after we left; urns of rice would be turned over, because we would have turned them over to look for weapons in there. Beds and structures and facilities inside the house would be all upset and torn apart; if they had animals that they raised for food, they would frequently get out of their closures while we were there; animals were everywhere running all over the place, and that was kind of a chaotic trail we left behind. But civilians, apart from their having been profoundly insulted, would be left intact and unharmed physically by our presence.

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**Q:** How did you entertain yourself out in the field?

**A:** One of the unique realities of Vietnam, contrary to popular depictions about what war is like, was very much an individual effort to keep yourself alive and keep yourself safe, but clearly, we all, I mean units, cared for other members in the unit. It was pretty rapid pace during the time that I was there; it wasn't a lot of time to be bored or to need some kind of diversion, because there was always something happening. You were trying to recover from something that had already happened in terms of getting your sleep, trying to get a decent meal and that sort of stuff. There wasn't a great challenge or demand to keep oneself entertained at that time. A lot of times when guys were down, we were down from assigned activities. We would do things like writing letters that was letter writing time, cleaning our equipment. You don't have to be too close to a combat theatre to appreciate the value of your rifle, so we wanted to make sure they were clean and in good working order. It was those kinds of activities that we engaged in during times that we weren't out in the field or doing something else somebody said we needed to do while we were in the battalion area.

**Q:** Can you tell me about your after-service experience? What it was like when you got home? Did you keep in touch with some of the people you worked with out in field? What was the reception you got getting to see your family, your after-service experience?

**A:** It was really difficult for me coming back with a disability to cope with the difference. The irony here is that I left my hometown in pursuit of that independent image of the marine, and I came back with two artificial legs and a side of crutches I was walking on. It was quite a turnaround from where I thought I was heading and where I ended up. People in their own way were supportive. I was really edgy when I came back. I was angry, not at any person, but as I said earlier, angry at the process that led to all of the death and destruction and damage that I had seen. I was interested in what I can do to prevent that, over the years, I have maintained contact fairly continuous, contact with two people, one of the fellows from Ohio who was with me the night that I lost my legs. I see him almost once a year, and the other I see less frequently, but he's a fellow I spent a lot of time with before I went to Vietnam, because we were in boot camp together. He's my age now, but that's still young [laughter]... from Salt Lake City. I see him less frequently, but if I travel out West, I usually try to hook in a side trip to Salt Lake to see Larry. Just recently, in the past year, kind of out of the blue, I got a call from one of the guys I spent quite a bit of time within the Philadelphia Naval Hospital, a guy from the Erie, Pennsylvania area. He found my name somehow through some registry, and I got a phone call from him one day and immediately recognized his voice, because he has a distinctive voice and that feels good to maintain those important primary relationships. In addition to that, since about 1992, I've been going to the regular reunion of my Vietnam unit. Last summer we met in Oklahoma City, and most of those guys I know less well that I named and of the three that I named only one of them the Ohio guy, comes to the Reunion regularly. That's a good reminder in some ways of what we went through years ago, but it's really empowering to see where we are now and those of us who didn't die have done reasonably well in terms of keeping our lives together, We have families, we have kids. Increasingly the guys that I see at these reunions are now retired, and I'll ask them jokingly "How the hell did you manage to do that at this age, and I haven't yet?" It's certainly not all bad, and I've repeatedly said that my experience, as awful as some people may think it was, it's not something that I would wish on my worst enemy. But I wouldn't take two million dollars for it either. Yeah, it's just part of my life, and I am proud of where I am, of what I did. I think it's

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awful that we have wars generally, and I am doing what I can to move us away from that to try to settle differences.