

Interview with Stephen Curry  
Interviewer: Stephen Curry  
1974

After several futile attempts at the historical interview, with several people I could not get what I thought was a good enough interview. So, after due consideration, I came to the conclusion that the purpose of the oral history was that of preservation of the opinions and recollections of those who were around or actually participated in the events themselves. With this in mind, I thought that one of the most important events in recent years had to be the Vietnam War. Out of it has come many important debates, problems, and issues. That is why I decided to do my interview with a Vietnam veteran. The things I wanted to bring out in the interview were important to me, so I decided to conduct the interview with myself. Stephen M. Curry was born in Evansville, Indiana, January 31, 1948. He grew up in the city and attended grade schools there. He graduated in 1966 from Harrison High School. In September 1966, he enrolled at Indiana State University, Evansville, Indiana. In January 1967, he enrolled at Indiana State at Terre Haute, Indiana. In February 1968 [9] he enlisted in the Army serving at Fort Knox, Kentucky, Fort Sam Houston, Texas, Fort Gordon, Georgia, the Republic of Vietnam, and Fort Leavenworth, Kansas. In January 1971 he was discharged and returned to Evansville and is currently enrolled at Indiana State University Evansville.

**Q:** Why did you join the army at this particular time (February 1969)?

**A:** Well, I had lost my 2-S deferment and had been reclassified I-A. I checked with the draft board and they told me I would be drafted in December. So rather than miss Christmas at home I thought I would go ahead and enlist, that way I'd be at home for the holidays and I'd at least get some choice as to what job I'd be doing. I didn't want to take the chance of being assigned to the infantry.

**Q:** What job did you choose and why?

**A:** Well I enlisted to be a medic. Because 1) I had been working as an orderly in one of the local hospitals and 2) at the time I was pretty idealistic and figured if I had to go to Vietnam I'd rather be over there trying to save American lives than taking Vietnamese lives.

**Q:** What kind of training did you receive before you went to Vietnam?

**A:** Well after ten weeks of basic training at Fort Knox, Kentucky, I went to basic medical training for ten weeks at Fort Sam Houston, Texas. From there I was assigned to Clinical Specialist School which was equivalent to a licensed practical nurse. After I finished that I was assigned to Vietnam.

**Q:** Where were you assigned in Vietnam and what did you do?

**A:** I was assigned to the 39<sup>th</sup> Engineer Battalion which was headquartered in Chu Lai which was 56 miles south of Da Nang and the South China Sea. My Job was working in the battalion aid station screening sick call, ordering supplies, and taking care of the pharmacy.

**Q:** Screening sick call? What did that entail?

**A:** Well the line companies would send in the guys who wanted to go on sick call to the aid station. I'd interview them and take care of the minor stuff. Anything I couldn't handle I'd refer to the battalion surgeon or else send to one of the hospitals in the area. 90% of the people I saw over there weren't sick though. They were just trying to get out to work for the day. The other 10% either had gonorrhoea or else wanted something to come down off of the drugs they were taking.

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**Q:** Drugs and Venereal Disease were two things we've heard quite a bit about. Where they as serious as we've heard?

**A:** Well all I can go on is my own experience and if what I saw was any indication then they were pretty serious. For example, Venereal Disease; when I first arrived in country 2.4 million units of procaine penicillin was enough to knock out most of the clap. By the time I left though it was taking 4.8 million units of penicillin plus tetracycline and Benemid Oral (two antibiotics) to knock it out. What was happening was that the gonorrhea was developing a penicillin resistant strain. I think the U.S. would have stayed over there much longer we would have had a strain of VD that could not have been cured by conventional methods. As far as drugs goes when I first got in the country. I'd say that 60% of our battalion smoked grass. When I went on R and R in March 1971 and came back, over night it seemed like 80% of the 60% (grass smokers) were on heroin. It was just phenomenal. I mentioned this to a Lieutenant Colonel of MPs One time, and he said he noticed the same thing. From February 1971 to April 1971 the country was just flooded with heroin. He stated that there was some good evidence to suggest that the North Vietnamese were actively pushing heroin in South Vietnam.

**Q:** Were the drug abuse treatment programs in Vietnam effective?

**A:** Like I said before I can only speak from experience and the one, we had in our battalion wasn't the least bit effective. I think guys turned to drugs from boredom and frustration. You put them through withdrawal and send them right back into the same boring frustrating situations, and they'd be right back on drugs again. I think the only effective drug abuse programs were back in the states.

**Q:** Boring? Frustrating? How can war be boring and frustrating?

**A:** What you have to realize is that only about 10% of the men in Vietnam were actually in the field the other 90% were involved as support troops. In the field you felt like you were actually fighting a war to some extent, so you had to be alert. But back acting as support troops was kind of a paradox. Like you were in a combat zone, yet you had morning formations, to see that you had your boots shined, your fatigues pressed, and your hair cut. When you were off duty, especially in the rear areas there was nothing to do, so people over there turned to drugs from sheer boredom either that or alcohol.

**Q:** Well did you see any action at all while you were over there?

**A:** The only enemy action I saw or had contact with was in January 1971, during the Tet Offensive. Our compound got mortared and rocketed everyday for the entire week. The only battle casualty I treated while I was over there was when I first got in the country somebody threw a frag grenade in the commanding officers hootch and he got some shrapnel in his foot.

**Q:** How did the Vietnamese react to you?

**A:** I believe that they probably hated the Americans as much as they hated the North Vietnamese and the communists. We exploited them. By this I mean we'd go into an area we would hire the women to work as housemaids, PX cashiers, and to some degree prostitutes. Pay them high wages and send them back to their villages to spend through money. This would just cause rampant inflation for the Vietnamese economy. Another thing, most Americans have this ethnocentrism and don't have any respect for the Vietnamese customs, or the people, to most Americans the Vietnamese were either

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“Slants”, “Sloops”, “Dinks”, or “Gooks”. Another thing, some guys would buy a carton of cigarettes for \$2.00 or a case of sodas for \$2.50 at the PX then turn around and sell it to the Vietnamese for twice that amount who in turn would sell them to the guys out in the field for twice the amount they paid for it. The Black Market some people had going was just unbelievable.

**Q:** Is there any incident or experience that is particularly [memorable]?

**A:** Yes, there was this mechanic in the motor pool who was celebrating his twenty-first birthday one Saturday night. He was also leaving for Rand R the following Monday and he had about thirty days left in the country. Well anyway like I said they had this party on Saturday night. Well Sunday morning they came and got me at the aid station to go look at this guy. When I got there, he was dead. What had happened he must have been really drunk when he went to sleep and regurgitated and choked to death. Just another casualty.

**Q:** What did you get personally out of your experience in Vietnam?

**A:** I'd have to say the ability to appreciate little things in life. For example, at Christmas time 1970 my family sent me chocolate candy, some current hot rod magazines, and some jig saw puzzles. I guess altogether it might have cost ten dollars, but it was one of the best Christmas presents ever. There were other things too like hot water and being able to go to the bathroom or take a shower without ten other guys standing around waiting on you.

**Q:** How would you describe the Vietnam Experience as a whole?

**A:** Vietnam as I saw it, was frustrating and wasteful. Frustrating because we, the United States, didn't really understand the people and what they wanted out of life. I really don't think that your average Vietnamese peasant understood the concepts of democracy, communism, or capitalism. Maybe I'm showing my ethnocentrism, but I truly believe all they wanted was to be left alone to tend their fields and go about their own business. Wasteful to the extent the money, material, and lives were thrown away in what appears to be essentially a stalemate over there. As far as I can see Vietnam has still got the problems it had before US involvement, and frustrating isn't it.