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The Vietnam Archive
Oral History Project
Interview with Willis Fred Marshall
Conducted by Richard Burks Verrone, Ph.D.
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Transcribed by Shannon Geach

NOTE: Text included in brackets [] is information that was added by the narrator after reviewing the original transcript. Therefore, this information is not included in the audio version of the interview.

Richard Verrone: This is Richard Verrone and I'm conducting an oral history interview with Mr. Willis Fred Marshall. Mr. Marshall, you are in San Jose, California. I am in Lubbock, Texas at Texas Tech University in the Special Collections Library. It is January 3, 2003. The time is 11:06 Pacific Standard time, 1:06 Central Standard time. Mr. Marshall, if we could let's start with some basic biographical information on yourself. Tell me when you were born and where you were born.

Willis Fred Marshall: I was born September 15, 1944 in LaGrange, Georgia.

RV: Whereabouts in Georgia is that?

WM: It's about 75 miles southwest of Atlanta.

RV: Did you grow up there in LaGrange?

WM: I spent a couple years there. I lived mainly in Georgia until I was about 16 years old, then we moved to California.

RV: What are your memories of your times there, this first 16 years in Georgia?

WM: Well, it's a lot different than California. I was an outdoors type kid. Spent a lot of time in the woods, fishing, camping. Spent a lot of time with my grandparents in La Grange, Georgia. I had a very normal, uneventful childhood basically. Pleasant '50s.

RV: How many siblings did you have?

WM: I have two brothers and a sister.

RV: Were you in the middle?

WM: I'm the oldest.

RV: You're the oldest. What did your parents do for a living?

WM: My mother despite graduating top in her class, never went to college. She worked during World War II to support my father who went into the Navy. He got a bachelors of science and chemistry at Mercer University in Macon, Georgia. He subsequently got a master's degree in engineering at Georgia Tech. He worked for Martin Marietta in Towson, Maryland for a while, then came back to Georgia Tech for quite a few years in the electronics lab.

RV: Your mother stayed at home?

WM: Yes, she stayed at home and helped raise the family. She also worked part time as a secretary, an office assistant.

RV: Was your father's Naval experience a really big influence on you? Do you remember him being in the Navy?

WM: No, I have no memory of that at all. It was no influence at all.

RV: What kind of job did you work while you were young?

WM: Nothing particularly, like I said I lived in Georgia until I was just 16 years old. So I had little work experience.

RV: When you were 16, where did you guys move?

WM: We moved to Sunnyvale, California. My father got a position with Stanford Electronics Labs in Palo Alto, Stanford University.

RV: How long did you stay there?

WM: Still here.

RV: You stayed in California.

WM: Yes, still there, same house.

RV: Tell me about your high school years. What do you remember most about high school?

WM: It was kind of a disjointed experience for me. I went to three different high schools. Didn't have a rather consistent experience in terms of curriculum. It was kind of awkward changing schools several times. Coming to California, that was kind of a curiosity. I have a southern accent and didn't really fit into the scene out here that well, but I adapted like all good southern boys can do. So, nothing really spectacular. I had

good, to average grades. Was on the cross country and track teams, but nothing spectacular.

RV: Were you a good student, academically?

WM: Yes, I was pretty good. A's and B's mainly.

RV: What were your favorite subjects?

WM: I enjoyed history and science and creative writing.

RV: So you were on the track team, any other sports?

WM: Track and cross-country.

RV: Cross-country. You didn't play basketball or football or anything like that?

WM: No, I made the basketball team one year, but the day after I made it I broke my wrist. Kind of a short circuit to that career.

RV: Did you have aspiration to go to college? Was it expected for you to go to college?

WM: Definitely. I was expected to go to Stanford. Didn't quite work out. Didn't have the grades. That was partially a result of my moving around a lot and again having a kind of disjointed experience. But yes, I had planned to go to college from early on.

RV: Where did you end up going?

WM: I went to Foothill Junior College in Los Altos Hills, California for two years. Then I transferred to San Jose State.

RV: What was your experience like at Foothill?

WM: It was just college prep. Basic education, undergraduate stuff, got all of that out of the way before transferring. That was the beginning of the Vietnam experience. I remember standing out in front of a teletype machine when President Kennedy was assassinated. I was walking past the journalism building and the teletype started ringing. I stopped and looked at it. Sat there just awe struck watching the events being printed out there in front of me on that teletype machine. That's my one big memory from college in those days.

RV: What year did you actually enter college?

WM: 1962.

RV: '62. You graduated in '66?

WM: No, no I didn't graduate until '69 because the Army took some time out of my life.

RV: Yes. Tell me that was your memory of Kennedy was that at Foothill?

WM: Yes, that was pretty riveting.

RV: Were you still interested in history when you got to college?

WM: Yes, I was an English Major at the time. I was planning on being an English major at the time, but I was also a history minor. Those were my two favorite subjects.

RV: Did you find yourself a decent student in college?

WM: Yes, I was pretty good. My first year was kind of rocky but I was pretty much straight A's after that.

RV: Did you play any sports?

WM: Not in college. No I worked full time also at a discount store while going to college my first two years.

RV: When you went to San Jose, did you work there?

WM: I worked for one year while I was at San Jose State. One of the reasons I ended up getting almost drafted. I couldn't find enough units to take. My units dropped down to 12 units. That's when the draft board came calling.

RV: Ok, so you went under full time hours basically? As soon as that happened you got a call?

WM: Yes.

RV: Tell me about that time. This is in 1966?

WM: Yes, '66.

RV: How aware were you of U.S. foreign policy? What was happening in Vietnam?

WM: I had kept up with it quite a bit since high school. I first became interested in what was happening over there in high school. Of course that was '62. Our really heavy involvement hadn't quite begun yet. It was a current topic of conversation. I was quite familiar with our apparent aims over there. I had done a little bit of background reading on the Indo-China War with the French. Tried to make my self as conversant as I could with what was going on over there, although the media presentations at the time

tended to be more sensational. As I recall our government spokesmen (my phone's running out) weren't too forthcoming at the time.

RV: Let's pause it here just for a sec.

RV: This is Richard Verrone and I am continuing my oral history interview with Mr. Fred Marshall. Today is February 18, 2003. It's a little after 5:00 Central Standard time. Mr. Marshall is in San Jose, California and I am in Lubbock, Texas. Sir, let's pick up where we left off. You had just basically gone under hours at San Jose State, in 1966. The Army came calling. You had decided to enlist versus getting drafted. Tell me first before we go into your training. We were talking about what you knew of American policy in Vietnam and what was happening in 1966 in the world. How aware were you or can you describe what you knew of what the United States was trying to do in Southeast Asia in '66?

WM: I was reasonably aware I guess. As well as I could be at that time. I understood our need for being there. I thought right from the beginning though that the government never really did a good job of articulating just why we were there. It was rather clear to me. They seemed to keep changing their point of view from one of victory to one of containment to one of stalling the inevitable to whatever. I was generally in agreement with the aims of the government at the time.

RV: So you didn't have a problem with policy at the time?

WM: No.

RV: How did your family feel about you enlisting?

WM: Well, they weren't overly happy about it like I said in my questionnaire. Since I was a legal adult there wasn't much they could do about it at the time. I tried to explain to them, I'm going to get drafted so I might as well enlist and be able to choose what I want to do, what training I want to get. I told them right off the bat, as odd as it sounds I wanted to volunteer to go to Vietnam. But I wanted to get some language training first, which required taking a variety of tests before I even enlisted. They weren't too happy. My fiancé wasn't too happy about it either, but she understood.

RV: Did you get a sense at the time in the United States since the war was on and we were fully engaged in 1966, that young men were expected to make that decision? To either decided to go or stay home or go to Canada or whatever.

WM: Well, a lot of kids went to Canada, including some friends of mine. It was probably about the same as before the Civil War when there were similar situations going on, draft riots and everything. I had a few friends that enlisted. I had a few more that got drafted. I had two acquaintances at the time that did go to Canada. It was quite a bit of concern about that of course. I know a lot of kids stayed in college that didn't even want to be there, taking courses they didn't really want to take because that was one of their few options. I'm sure a few resurrected some old medical problems that might have kept them out. It was quite a topic of discussion. I was also working full time at a discount store. All the other guys there who were about my age, they were quite concerned about it. Oddly enough they never got drafted. They weren't going to school. They were draft age, but for some reason their numbers never came up. It was just kind of a crapshoot. You never knew what was going to happen from day to day.

RV: Did you decide you just simply didn't want to take that chance? You wanted to control your destiny?

WM: Yes, about week before final exams in my fall semester I got a letter from the draft board. I went to the draft board and said, "Look, you've got me called here right in the middle of a final exam". They said, "Well, not much we can do about it". I said, "Sure there is". Let me take the exam and call me next time. They finally did. They said, "We'll get you next time". So I finished my finals and went up to the U.S. Army recruiting center in Palo Alto and began the enlistment process.

RV: How did you decide? First of all, you said you volunteered to go to Vietnam, tell me about that.

WM: Well, I kind of planned it out after I made the decision to enlist. I talked to the recruiter before I enlisted about what my options were. He said with my background and my education to that point, I was only a semester away from graduating, that I might consider Army intelligence school. So, I had to go to Oakland Army Base to take a test to get into intelligence school, intelligence training. Which required I had to be interviewed about world politics and history. I had to write a long essay. Take a test,

kind of a multiple-choice thing about history and politics and what not. Military history. I passed that quite easily and then I had to go back to take a test for language training. I had taken Latin and French and Spanish in high school and college. I had a pretty good idea how languages worked. So I almost aced that test. Once I had passed those two tests then I went back and enlisted because I had things planned out at that point. As it worked out things fell into place fairly well after I enlisted.

RV: Tell me what happened after you enlisted.

WM: Well, I went to basic training at Ft. Polk, Louisiana, which was a lot of fun.

RV: Was this March 1966?

WM: Yes, the barbed wire kept the mosquitoes out pretty well though there. After that I went to Ft. Holobird, Maryland in Baltimore, U.S. Army intelligence school. I was trained in combat intelligence techniques. Then went to Vietnamese Language School at Ft. Bliss Texas, actually Biggs Field Air Force Base, next to Ft. Bliss for 47 weeks of Vietnamese language training. Then I went to Vietnam.

RV: Let's go back to Ft. Polk, tell me about your basic training. What do you remember about that, besides the mosquitoes?

WM: I remember the weather was bitter cold in the morning and hot and sweaty in the afternoon. I was born in Georgia so I was little more used to the humidity than a lot of the other Yankee boys that were there. It was pretty intense. It was pretty much like I expected it to be. A lot of in your face yelling right up front. Just tends one of the goals of course is to kind of break down your individuality and build up your team spirit and camaraderie and kind of an all for one and one for all thing. That was very effective. I thought the DIs put on a good act. They acted real tough and brutal and mean. But off duty they were just like anybody else. You could get the sense that this is not fun for you or us either, but we need to prepare you for possibly getting killed. We don't want anybody else to get killed because we didn't train you properly. We didn't train you how to use your weapon properly or proper tactics or camouflage or whatever because everybody has to do his job. They were quite concerned about that. It was kind of odd at graduation. I still recall this big Choctaw Indian drill sergeant whose name I forget. I guess I could find my yearbook and look it up. He was almost in tears at that point. He knew a lot of guys were going to Vietnam and others were going on to advanced infantry

training before they went to Vietnam. He was almost in tears I telling us good-bye. He'd been to Vietnam and he knew what it was like. Served at least two tours as far as I recall. The guys there, they had their minds and their hearts in the right place. They weren't just going through the motions. They were really trying to keep guys alive. Most of our DIs had been to Vietnam at that point.

RV: What do you remember them telling you about Vietnam?

WM: Oh, boy. They were an infantry unit so they had some pretty brutal tales to tell. Not to the point of shocking and scaring people, but that was kind of unavoidable given the context of what they had to say. Just that it was quite different. It was a different kind of war, different kind of expectations of anything that we've been involved in. They just worried all the time about who could they trust, where could they go? There being no front line as in a conventional war. They just had to be on their toes almost constantly. They just couldn't relax. Of course when I got her I found out that was entirely true.

RV: Did you feel like they had prepared you well?

WM: Yes, definitely in basic training at least. In terms of tactics and teamwork and marching and military etiquette and code of justice and weapons training and all of that. Of course after basic people that were going into the infantry went on to advanced infantry training at one of several bases, Ft. Hood or Ft. Leonard Wood and places like Ft. Benning, Ft. Bragg. As far as the basic training went there was no social engineering back then like there is now. There were no women. Standards were very high. Either you cut it or you didn't. You were encouraged to make the grade. I don't recall any of our guys dropping out. I'm sure it's quite different today from what I read about current basic training, I'm glad that the people that are being trained today aren't going to have to go into some place like that. I'm not sure they could do it.

RV: Really? Did you adjust personally to the military lifestyle ok or was it difficult for you?

WM: Yes, I didn't have any real problems with it. You have to do a lot of subjugating your own individuality out of necessity in this situation. I didn't have any real adjustment problems with it.

RV: What would you say was the most challenging aspect of your basic?

WM: Giving myself a shot in the leg.

RV: Really?

WM: Yes, our DI was real competitive. [He told us] the other platoon yesterday, they had all but five of their guys give themselves a shot. We want everybody to do it today. I wasn't too happy about that. Some of the night hikes weren't a lot of fun. The PT courses especially when they got warmer in late spring weren't a lot of fun. The general environment was not a very healthy one. It was much like Vietnam, it was hot and humid, especially toward the end of our training. It was pretty rough but I was in reasonably good shape at the time. I did a lot of track and cross-country in high school. I kept myself in reasonably decent condition. I managed to survive. In fact I was our platoon's number one trainee. I don't know how that happened.

RV: Really?

WM: I have a little trophy in the basement around here somewhere.

RV: Was that a leadership position?

WM: I was what they called a platoon guide. I was in charge of our training platoon. I had to get everybody out in the morning and lined up and do roll call. I had to do all the marching around and everything else. If something happened, no matter what I got blamed for it. That's military way.

RV: How did you feel being in that leadership position?

WM: It was ok. The original guy got drunk about two weeks into the training and got canned. I still remember I was a squad leader at the time. I remember the DI coming in and said, "Well, old Smith here (or whatever his name was) he messed up big time. We need a new platoon guide; you Marshall come here. Its' like the Army, "I need two volunteers, you and you". It was all right. It was ok, because I got a better bed out of it.

RV: Tell me about the weapons training that you had.

WM: We got trained on the M-14 at that time, which was a big heavy thing. It was very effective I thought. I'd never fired a weapon in my life at all. Even though I was from the south, everybody was supposed to have pick up trucks with gun racks and everything. Well, you're from Texas; you know that. It was very effective. If they could take some body like me that had no familiarity with weapons whatsoever and qualified as

an expert marksman, so that's pretty good. We were told to baby these things. We learned how to clean them, take them apart and the whole bit. Carry them safely, the whole thing. That was the only weapon we had there. We also had training how to throw grenades. That didn't take too long though. I had further training in Vietnam, kind of on the spur of the moment, different weapons.

RV: When you did get to Vietnam, did you look back at your basic and say, "Ok, yes they did a good job. I'm applying this stuff now". In terms of basic discipline, basic unit order and military etiquette and things like that. You felt comfortable within the framework of Vietnam. Of course the command structure is totally different in basic. It made you fit in quite easily.

RV: So after you finished at Ft. Polk you moved to Ft. Holobird in Maryland to the intelligence school. How did you get selected for the intelligence school?

WM: Like I said, that was my choice. I selected that upon enlistment. Like I said you had to pass a test to get in to there. You had a basic intelligence test and some other things. So I qualified for that.

RV: You knew all along this was where you were going as far as your advanced?

WM: Yes, I had kind of a selfish motive involved. I wanted to get into something that might get me at least a few college units when I got out. And it did. Again I didn't have any aversion to going into the infantry. I could have ended up there anyway. As long as I was going to go in, to reiterate, I just wanted to do something that was more my choice instead of somebody else's and make the best of it.

RV: How long were you up in Maryland at Ft. Holobird?

WM: I got there in March; I wonder when did I get there? I don't; even remember.

RV: I have here May of '66.

WM: I guess I was there from May to August of '66.

RV: Can you tell me about that training, what you underwent?

WM: It was combat intelligence training, which was geared toward Vietnam toward the end of the training. At first, just basically how to find out, what we call order of battle. How different foreign Army structured their military. Then we moved on to how the North Vietnamese structured theirs. Map reading, military terminology, little

practice in interrogation. Just basic information that would help you understand the enemy. I ended up as an interrogator and an interpreter in Vietnam. This all came in very handy. I could easily make the translation from what I learned there in terms of how to ask certain questions of enemy soldiers. What certain types of weapons might mean. Just little hints. Kind of like a detective story almost. Kind of like, what to be alert for, what to be aware of when trying to build up an order of battle on your enemy, which is just basically a file a dossier on different enemy units, tactics and what not. The more you kind find out about them like I said somewhere in my questionnaire the more you know about them, the better chance you have of blowing them up before they get you. It was very effective training overall.

RV: Was it a lot of classroom?

WM: Yes, it was mainly classroom stuff with a few field activities thrown in. It was mainly just classroom training.

RV: Tell me about what you think was the most effective? I know when you went to Vietnam you were an advisor you were an interrogator. What was the most effective thing that you learned there in your advanced that you took with you to Vietnam?

WM: Basically I ended up an intelligence analyst. Just knowing what to ask, knowing what to look for in terms of how the enemy is structured. The North Vietnamese Army is pretty much structured like ours. Broken down from division to regiment and brigades and right on down the line. Just knowing how they were structured and organized, their chain of command it eventually allowed me to understand their structure and their order of battle. Just able to ask intelligent questions of Viet Cong and North Vietnamese prisoners and defectors. Nothing really specific stands out. In general, background training.

RV: Did they give you history of the country and history of the units?

WM: Yes, a little bit. Some of our instructors were Vietnam veterans at that time. Both the enlisted men and some of the NCOs and the officers. We got a little bit of background on the conflict here and some history of the country. Of course it was probably more slanted toward the government point of view, which was all right. They did try to bring you up to date on what was happened in there and why.

RV: Can you remember anything they were telling you about how to actually interrogate a Vietnamese?

WM: No, we all had kind of a general training in interrogation tactics, nothing specific. I just kind of learned on the job. One thing that was helpful was again learning how to read maps, especially topographical maps at different scales. That came in really handy. As part of my job, I ended up being a mapmaker and kind of an aside in my unit. Being able to tread the maps of Vietnam when we g there, the topographical maps came in very handy for me because it would often help me do some back tracking with the prisoner. When you were coming here, tell me about the land you came through that you crossed rivers or see any rivers or see any bridges or mountains or power lines or anything. Sometimes it was helpful to be able to kind of follow the map trail back from where the guy probably came from. Then send in people to check out that area. So the map work came in very handy in that regard.

RV: Did you know exactly that you were going to Vietnam? You knew for sure?

WM: Not yet. While I was at Ft. Holobird I applied for language school. I had already taken the test. While I was there I got my orders to go to language school at Biggs Field, Texas.

RV: Is this something that they asked you to do or is this something that you said I need to be better?

WM: Something I wanted to do. I did want to end up in Vietnam. I figured as long as I was going to be there, let's learn the language. I knew an intelligence job either as an analyst or an interrogator or something else. I thought I'm pretty good at learning languages. I have the facility for it so I wanted to go ahead and do it. Plus also I eventually got 30 units of college credit out of it.

RV: Wow!

WM: That came in handy.

RV: Sure.

WM: It made my time in Vietnam much more intense and understandable. I got so much more out of the experience because I could speak the language fairly well.

RV: How many weeks were you in training?

WM: Forty-seven weeks, seven hours a day.

RV: Wow! So did you become pretty fluent?

WM: At that time yes. You had to pass a test at the end of the course. If you didn't pass it, you didn't get sent to an MOS where you had to use the language. It was very well taught. We were taught by a Vietnamese man, not by Army personnel.

RV: I was going to ask you that. So was it the same instructor the entire way through?

WM: Yes, Mr. Tran Van Bich.

RV: You remember?

WM: Yes, we went to his house a couple times. He had a little apartment there in El Paso. He wanted to be in Vietnam in the Army. He kept saying I wish I were there, but the Vietnamese government sent him to the United States because he was fluent in English and Vietnamese. Our government at that time was understandably having hard time finding any Americans who could speak Vietnamese so they had to rely on native Vietnamese speakers. Never knew what happened to him. I wrote him for about six or seven months after I left there. Eventually one of his letters came back "Moved and address unknown". So I never knew what happened to the guy.

RV: Did you feel like you received good training?

WM: Yes, it was very good. Some of their guys there I still remember they could barely speak English. I don't know. They had no hope of ever learning a tricky language like Vietnamese. It's not Latin or Greek based. They just did miserably. Some washed out along the way. Some didn't pass the test. There were two different levels of training. There was a 47-week course and a 36-week course. There was a shorter course too, but I don't recall how long that was. I do remember a lot of people leaving in the middle of training. They just didn't make it. Some of the assignments, I remember one guy in our class, he was a Marine, he got posted to the Swedish [actually American] Embassy in Sweden. That's really intelligent. Another guy was sent to Fitzsimmons Army Hospital in Denver. I remember wondering at the time, why did they have to learn Vietnamese to do these things?

RV: This is right out of Biggs Field?

WM: Right out of there. All the guys in my class, except this one Marine, two of the guys didn't make it. They didn't pass the course. You had to take an oral test, a

taped test, a written test at the end. If you didn't make the grade, you didn't go. I remember two of our guys; they just didn't make it. They didn't work very hard while they were there. I don't know where they ended up. They didn't go to Vietnam, at least not then.

RV: Is that where you found out at Ft. Bliss, Biggs Field that you were going to Vietnam?

WM: Yes, I mean after we spent a year doing that, we better go. Yes, we got the orders about two or three weeks before the end of our course. We had a month leave before we went.

RV: What did you do for your month leave?

WM: I was married at the time; I got married between Ft. Holobird at Ft. Bliss or Biggs Field. I hadn't seen my wife hardly at all so we just took a few little short trips in California, did little meaningful things like write a will and that kind of stuff. I was realistic about the whole thing. So, no real memories from that period about anything special I did. I just spent a lot of time with my wife and my family.

RV: How did you feel about going into a combat zone, going to Vietnam?

WM: It's what I asked for so I didn't have any illusion about what it was going to be like. I was kind of apprehensive of course. I don't really recall being scared, a little nervous. I felt that was the best place for me at the time.

RV: What about your wife and your parents?

WM: They weren't overjoyed. My parents were very supportive of government policy at the time, as was I. They tended to be, "We're really proud of you. This is great". I'm sure on the inside they were hurting a lot because we knew some people who had lost sons in Vietnam. I'm sure on the inside they were very nervous about it, but they didn't want to tell me that of course. They didn't say, "Please don't get killed". I said, "I'll try not to".

RV: Did they back U.S. policy at the time?

WM: Yes.

RV: How did you get into Vietnam? Did you fly civilian air over?

WM: We went over on a civilian airliner, I forget-- it was CWA [I think it was TWA]. Just a big old Boeing 707. Landed at Bien Hoa, went from there.

RV: What was the airplane ride like over there? What do you remember about that?

WM: You're flying into your future. You haven't got a clue what you're doing. There's no sense of camaraderie. The guys on our plane, they weren't part of a big unit. Big divisions in the units they all went over together en masse. They were usually on ships or in a whole fleet of aircraft and arrived at their specific division base, like 25th division or 1st air cav or 101st airborne or whatever. Guys in our plane were just all going over to a whole number of different units, either MACV units or returning from leave or who knows what. So there was no sense on the plane of this gung ho camaraderie that guys who were in the same unit would have. I was on the plane with three guys that I had spent the whole time at Biggs Field with. In fact I knew two of them from Ft. Holobird. So we'd been together for along time. After we got there and were sent to our different advisory teams I didn't see them again until we came back on the same plane a year later. We all looked quite a bit different at that time. We had a lot of things to talk about. We flew from Oakland, from Travis Air Force Base, not Oakland. We left from Oakland Army Base to Travis Air Force Base. We flew from there to Alaska to I forget some base in Alaska. Then from there to Kadena Air Force Base in Japan. Then from there on to Bien Hoa, Vietnam.

RV: How did you feel when you arrived at Bien Hoa? What was your first impression of the country?

WM: God, it was hot. Felt like I was back in Ft. Polk. We got there in the middle of the night. We walked across the tarmac into a Quonset hut terminal there. We knew we were in a combat zone because you could see flares in the sky and what not, a little bit of tracer fire going up in the air or coming down from helicopters up in the distance. Little muffled artillery and mortar rounds in the distance. So right off the bat we knew we weren't in Kansas anymore. I just remembered how hot it was and how humid it was because we'd been on the air-conditioned plane for a long time. It just hits you in the face.

RV: What would you say was the morale of the troops around you?

WM: Good. There was no reservations or no griping or whining. A lot of Bravado at that time. We didn't know what it was going to be like. So everybody's got

this kind of bravado type attitude. We're going to kick butt, and kill the Viet Cong and everything else. My whole time there, at least in my little unit and the other guys I worked with in other units I was always impressed with the high level of morale and confidence.

RV: Did you think that was true? I mean you've been through Vietnamese language training, some intelligence training, you knew probably maybe the country, the culture a little bit better than the average soldier over there probably.

WM: A little bit.

RV: Did you feel like it was realistic, what they were saying?

WM: Yes, for the most part. I had no frame of reference to consider otherwise. I think it was sincere.

RV: Did you still have the same feeling as to what the United States was there?

WM: Yes, I had no qualms about it, no reservations about it. To me, it was no different than Korea. It was an invasion of a fledgling democracy, rather imperfect of course, by a totalitarian Communistic dictatorship. It was very cut and dry to me. I had no illusions about it whatsoever.

RV: What were the first few days like, what did you do?

WM: They took us all to what was called a replacement depot. The next morning they made sure we all had the right uniforms and equipment and everything that we brought with us from the States. If we didn't have a certain item, they'd tell us where the PX was. Then my first day was spent shoveling human waste from the latrines and burning it. This was a lot of fun. You take guys that are just in the country, and they're not acclimated to the climate and in October it's hot and dry. It's about 100 degrees and rather humid, but there's no rain at that time. You take these guys that aren't acclimated yet, because the people that came in there were from all over the place. We're out there burning human waste in big giant iron pots for our first duty in Vietnam. "Here welcome to Vietnam". A lot of guys passing out from heat stroke and everything. Nobody really seemed to care at this point. I just remember finishing that and going to the library which was just basically an air-conditioned trailer. I didn't want to read, I just wanted to get cool and drink a lot of water. We did that for one day. The next day me and these three other guys that came with me from Biggs Field we were taken into Saigon to a billet

there, a hotel for enlisted men. We spent the night there. The next day we got up and we went to some installation near Tan Son Nhut Air Base, which was the headquarters of the 525th MI group, where we got our orders to go to a specific advisory team. A couple days later we split up. My friends went their separate ways and I went back to Tan Son Nhut and got on a helicopter with some other guys and flew out to advisory team 70 and spent my year there.

RV: Tell me what your impressions were of Saigon.

WM: Oh, man totally chaotic. I had never been out of the United States before except for some time in Mexico. Saigon, I was surprised how nonchalant everybody seemed to be. It didn't seem like a wartime zone at all. It was heavily busy, heavily commercialized. Traffic flowing everywhere, zillions of little motorbikes and mopeds everywhere. The only thing people seemed to know about them is where the accelerator was and where the horn was. Just totally chaotic. Didn't feel afraid at all. Even though we'd been warned. Unfortunately you can't tell who the enemy is there. It's a different kind of situation. At first we were very alert. The people seemed very friendly and open to us even though everybody's trying to sell you something. It was just a very bustling, busy place, neon flashing and everything. It didn't really seem like this was the center of a war. But at night, we quickly found out. The daytime is ours, the nighttime belongs to the other guy. We'd go up on the roof of this building at night. It was about six or seven stories tall. In every direction all you could see is flares, helicopters flying over. The war is just right outside the city. It looked dramatic, but there may have been some small ambush or something going on or somebody blowing up a culvert or whatever. You can't tell that sitting on the roof at night seeing all these flares all over the place and tracer bullets going up and artillery round popping in the distance.

RV: So the next morning you get on the helicopter and you're assigned to advisory team 70. Where did you go exactly?

WM: It was about 40 miles north of Saigon in Binh Duong province near the capital city of Phu Cuong in Binh Duong province. A little village called Lam Son. Vietnamese 5th infantry division, which is _____. It's division headquarters. There was a little compound there that was built by the French when they were in Vietnam. It's

called Gosney compound. It was named for a U.S. colonel that was shot down and killed in a helicopter attack about three years before that. There were about 70 guys there.

RV: 70 ARVN?

WM: No, 70 Americans and a few Koreans that we had there too. All of our guys were either Marines or Army. Our function was "advisor". I never knew how I was going to advise people who had been fighting a war for 10 years before I got there.

RV: That's a good point.

WM: Basically we were just there to assist there in any way possible, logistically, militarily, share information and what not. The division had three regiments. One was just down the road and then one was further north in Bien Long province. Another was up further north in another province. This is III Corps. The country was divided into four corps regions. I, II, III, IV from north to south. In III Corps there were other Americans in our advisory team 70. Probably about half of us were at division headquarters. The other half were assigned to three different regiments out in the field.

RV: Tell me about what your living quarters were like and where you were housed in all of that.

WM: I'll send you some pictures if you want.

RV: Sure.

WM: It was a little concrete hut built by the French but no glass but screens all around, door front and back. Electricity sometimes. Each one housed anywhere from six to ten men depending on who was there at the time. Concrete floors. No fans, we had to buy our own fans. All in all it was rather comfortable. That's' in my questionnaire about my Boy Scout camp when I was younger. But overall compared to living conditions of a lot of our men, especially the infantry it was almost luxurious. At first, you said my God, I've got to spend a year here. After a while it became home. We had little metal Army cots. That was it. Little metal Army cot. Anything else you wanted to get, if you wanted to have a footlocker of any kind of shelves or a table you had to go scrounge around in the local towns and buy one from somebody or have somebody make you one. One of the Vietnamese was a good carpenter that worked down at the interrogating center where I was. He built me a chair and a table. I paid him for it of course. It wasn't too bad. Didn't spend a lot of time sleeping, but overall it was ok.

RV: Do you remember how much you paid for your chair and table?

WM: Haven't got a clue. It wasn't money, it was cigarettes.

RV: The great American barter.

WM: You did a lot of things there with cigarettes. You wanted something done, you give somebody a couple of cartons of Salems or something. Old Marlboros and they'll do about anything. I didn't smoke but I bought a lot of cigarettes.

RV: So you had six guys in there?

WM: It varied. We had anywhere from four to eight or nine. Some guys would come through there on temporary duty and stay a few days. We had about five or six guys that were there the whole time.

RV: Were these other intelligence officers?

WM: No, just other grunts like me. Some of them worked for. Rodney and Scott worked for G-2 with me. A couple of the guys worked for G-3 transportation. A couple guys were just assigned to our team as guards and clerks at the base command post.

RV: How did you all get along?

WM: Just fine. We're all in the same boat there. At no time during my year in this little compound did recall any ill will animosity, fight nothing like that. Between the NCOs, the officers the enlisted men, there was just a great sense of camaraderie and purpose. Some of us didn't like some of the officers very well, because they were basically incompetent jerks. But everybody else got a long really well. We had a good esprit de corps, as the French would say I guess.

RV: No racial incidents or anything?

WM: Nothing of the sort. One of the guys in my building in my hooch as we called them, was a black guy from Washington D.C., Richard T. Gilliam. We became good friends, we wrote for several years after we got back. There were several other black guys there, a couple of Hispanics. There were quite a few Koreans that came and went on the base from time to time. They were mainly officers. Everybody got along just fine.

RV: You said there was some tension between those who drafted or enlisted versus?

WM: Most of the guys there were regular Army like me. We never really knew who was who. We never would have cared in any event. Because like I said, we're all in the same boat. We've got to make it work.

RV: Any discussion of fragging or anything like that?

WM: Nothing, never. That's something that's kind of overblown too. Nothing like that.

RV: Did you guys have enough supplies, everything that you needed?

WM: We usually did. I worked with the G-2 office. We could have used a working typewriter from time to time. In terms of just basic supplies we didn't have any shortage of it. Sometimes we had to literally go out and steal stuff.

RV: Really?

WM: Yes, from other Army units. For example, there came a time when we needed a ¾ ton truck and we didn't have ¾ ton truck to haul supplies and to haul prisoners around in. We weren't authorized to have a ¾ ton truck. So me and two other unnamed individuals, one of whom was a captain kind of got in the jeep one day and drove over to III corps headquarters in Bien Hoa and there was this ¾ ton truck sitting there. We stole it. I drove it back and we took it to the Vietnamese military paint shop and had it painted in Vietnamese Army colors and gave it Vietnamese numbers on the bumpers and everything else and that was that.

RV: Did you find that the barter system or stealing or the barter system was a good system?

WM: Well, that wasn't stealing. That was just creative requisitioning.

RV: Right, exactly.

WM: The barter system worked quite well. In fact when I wanted to have some work done on this particular truck I'd have to go down to the Vietnamese motor pool and pay them off in cigarettes. Since the truck didn't really show up anywhere in anybody's records we had to smooth over that hesitation with a couple of packs of Marlboros and everything was just fine.

RV: So tell me what your basic duties were. Can you describe a typical day?

WM: Yes, I can describe a typical day. After a night of not much sleep, we had no particular working hours. You know we didn't clock in or anything. I worked for the

G-2 section there, the intelligence section at the division level. We had a major who was a complete idiot. Two captains and a lieutenant, both of whom weren't bad, and about seven enlisted men. Our job was to "coordinate" intelligence gathering activities with the Vietnamese intelligence section, which was on the other side of the wall in our ramshackle, rundown building at headquarters. My job at first, since I was the only one there that spoke Vietnamese was to translate a lot of the manuals that we had into Vietnamese. I never knew why. We also had four or five guys there that were intelligence analysts. We divided up our division's territory into sectors. Each one of us would concentrate on a particular sector in terms of gathering information about enemy units and troops, VC and NVA in that particular sector. At the end of the week, we'd sit down and get the information we had and share it among our selves and with the officers and see if we could spot any trends, decide what information was reliable. Then we would write a weekly intelligence report, an intrep. We would send that to the Vietnamese next door and they would send theirs to us, which I would then have to translate. We would also ship ours up the chain of command to III Corps. We'd gather information from captured documents that the troops would bring in, interrogations that we would perform, captured weapons that we would analyze. We could tell who they belonged to. "What kind of weapon is this"? We'd look at our order of battle, must like back at Ft. Holobird. Ok, now what unit was supposed to have this weapon? What did this prisoner say? It was like a detective story, putting together a big puzzle. We would keep a file on every unit, on every division, every brigade, regiment, squad that we would get information about. Gradually over time just kind of build up a picture of the names of the enemy soldiers in the unit and what kind of weapons they had. There were not two days kind of the same. Some days I'd be on the base, some days I'd be on a helicopter out in the Iron Triangle or up at Loc Ninh or even perhaps in some neighboring company. I'd be at Bien Hoa sometimes picking up information about a unit that we'd need. There's a lot of variation there. Interrogate prisoners sometimes. Type reports, go through weapons and look for markings. Sometime the NVA would scratch their name on their weapons or scratch their unit on their weapons. They weren't supposed to of course, but they could be stupid just like we were. We'd have to check all that stuff out. Get information from wherever we could. National police, I would go to the National

Police sometimes with my Vietnamese counterparts and interrogate prisoners there. “What have you heard about this? Discuss specific incidences and goings on”. You never knew what was important and what was not. Then we had to make a prediction about “ok, the North Vietnamese 273rd regiment, where do we think they are. What do we think their strength is. Where do we think they’re going”. Those kinds of things. Of course since there were no front lines in enemy positions and headquarters shifted constantly. It was constantly moving chessboard. It was quite challenging. There was an intellectual aspect to it that I liked, either way that was back at the base or out in the field or whatever. I spent a lot of my time at the Vietnamese division interrogation center, which was kind of half interrogation rooms and half barracks and half jail. I guess that’s three halves. So, no two days were alike. I had no real hours. I got up and went to work as soon as I could. I stayed as late as I needed to. I had guard duty every other night for six hours a night. It was unpredictable. A phone call might come in. Marshall, they need you over at 1st air cav. They’ve got a prisoner get over there”. This kind of stuff. The unpredictable nature of it was kind of nice. It kept it from being monotonous. You knew that it wasn’t the same thing day in and day out. There were no hours. We worked on Saturday and Sunday. Sometimes we didn’t even know what day it is or what month it was. That was kind of a funny thing. They would say it’s Thursday and it’s not its Sunday. “You’re kidding me”. It made the time go faster. The lack of monotony in that regard, tremendous variation in daily routine. So I enjoyed that.

RV: Let’s go through some of these activities. Can you describe them for me, just briefly what you did, or not briefly. Just basically tell me what your impressions were. Let’s talk about first you said, you typed up these manuals, which you thought was pointless.

WM: I only spent a few days on that because I could just tell Major Anderson that I’m finished and he couldn’t tell the difference one way or the other because he didn’t speak the language. Bu there were just a few manuals that he thought it might be helpful to have translated into English and translated from English into Vietnamese. He was probably just also just checking me out. “Can he do this”? Of course he couldn’t tell anyway but he could take them over to the Vietnamese next door and say, “Did he do

it right”? That was just a very minor thing. That was just the first thing I remember that I did.

RV: My question was leading to, were there a lot of tasks that you felt like were not very useful for you to be spending your time on? Did you feel like you were assigned to things that were very time worthy?

WM: I was kind of left to my own devices. There was supposed to be an officer in charge of me specifically, but there wasn't until just maybe a month or so in my tour. There was me, and I was only a Spec-4 at the time, E-4. Two Vietnamese sergeants, Sergeant Mai Cao Vo and Sergeant Tran Van Nguyen. Basically I was just kind of left up to my own devices. As long as I checked in every day and see if there was anything that the officers that Lieutenant Small or Major Anderson wanted me to do specifically then I was a kind of on my own to pick and choose what should I do today? Should I go down to National Police and see if they have any prisoners that we need to talk to? Should I go down to LPW Center and see if they picked up anybody last night. The division had a reconnaissance platoon; they called the recondos. They were led by a Special Forces lieutenant. We didn't see them too much because they were always out in the boonies. Every once in a while they'd bring in a captured prisoner or they'd bring in some documents to be translated. So there was always something to do. I was kind of on my own in terms of prioritizing what I need to do on a particular day. Again that helped break up the monotony quite a bit.

RV: Tell me about the prisoners and your interactions with them, the interrogations and things like that. How would you go about it?

WM: If I knew there were prisoners there. Sometimes the Vietnamese would bring people in and ship them out again without us knowing about it. Although, they were usually pretty cooperative. We would get prisoners in a variety of ways. Some would just walk in and say, “I surrender” or “Chieu Hoi”. We dropped zillions of leaflets out in the jungle and the woods in Cambodia and Laos. In fact, I still have a couple in the basement here- safe conduct pass. Sometime that would be very effective. They would just show up at a police station or Army post or someplace. Any prisoners up through let's see we were division level. We could basically handle any prisoners, many level units. Our section, our G-2 section was mainly interested in prisoners from company

level on down or small unit stuff. Anybody from higher-level units we would ship off to III corps at Bien Hoa for interrogation. We would get prisoners or returnees or Chieu Hoi, the various Vietnamese units. The three regiments of the 5th division would capture prisoners frequently. North Vietnamese and Viet Cong. Sometime National Police would capture prisoners that they thought were significant. They weren't just some low level guide or something. This is somebody that we might want to talk to. They would ship them over to us. We had them in this building. The whole Vietnamese base was built by the Japanese in World War II as a prison camp. It was pretty grim place because the buildings were kind of ramshackle, tile roofs, brick walls, and barbed wire ceilings. Ceilings were barbed wire. They had gun slits, firing slits in all the walls. The slits flared inward, not outward. It was a very grim place. We had four or five really cramped, dim cells there. I keep saying IPW, interrogation and prisoner of war center, which was in the far corner of the base about half a mile walk from our little compound. I guess I spent more time there than anything else. I didn't do any interrogations on my own at first. I didn't have any specific training, some general training at Ft. Holobird. But I was allowed to sit in on them. I understood enough Vietnamese to make it on my own. If I had a question I just asked one of my two Vietnamese counterparts, Sergeant Vo or Sergeant Nguyen. I was surprised that usually how civil these things went. I was kind of apprehensive that there would be torture and beatings and things like this from these Vietnamese guys who were pretty angry at what the Communists had done to their country.

RV: Were you prepared for such things and how to react to that?

WM: I was prepared for that. I also was prepared that I knew I couldn't interfere, which bothered me. I didn't approve of that. It rarely happened. A couple of times there were a few slaps and a punch in the face on one occasion that I recall. More often the prisoners that came in that were picked up, these guys they didn't want to be there anymore. A lot of our guys did. Most of them would just tell you anything you want to know. We'd have to see if they were lying. All the Communists units, even down to the very smallest squad they have a political officer who is there to watch his own men, group think with these guys. They were very forthcoming. If nobody would talk, if the guy would just sit there and say he wouldn't talk then fine. We'd put him on a truck or a

jeep the next day and send him over to Bien Hoa to be interrogated over there at III corps headquarters. Most of the people I talked with they were amazed, especially the North Vietnamese, amazed to see an American sitting there with Vietnamese.

RV: Really? Why was that?

WM: Well the Communists propaganda machine is quite intense. You know the Americans are here to kill and rape and murder and take over Vietnam etc. When they saw me sitting there with Vietnamese guys who were obviously my friends it was kind of unnerving for them. I'm sure in many cases they thought, "You know maybe somebody's lied to me". I always put them off guard because we get these guys and I remember taking prisoners out of the Iron Triangle on several occasions and it's be a big operation or a big battle going in there. We'd get on a helicopter go up there and pick up their prisoners from the American or Vietnamese unit, depending and bring them back to where we were. Quite often we had a couple of little boxes there in the room full of Reese's peanut butter cups and toothpaste and soap and things like tat. We'd get those things out and these guys were filthy and they smelled bad and they had a horrible experience on their own. They'd just been bombed and shot and blown up and we'd bring them up and they were just scared to death. So what did we do? Want a peanut butter cup? In many cases they had never seen before, a bar of soap, toothpaste, washcloth. You go clean yourself up. Sometimes that was all it took. When they became aware that we weren't going to hurt them, weren't going to torture them. We're not going to toss them out of a helicopter. Although I don't deny that some of those things I'm sure happened in other places. Most of our interrogations became basically just conversations. When we thought we had enough information we shipped them on off to III corps headquarters. It was quite interesting. You see most of the Americans over there, they never got to sit right down with an enemy soldier. They could shoot them coming over the wire or blow them up or gas them out of a foxhole or whatever or a tunnel. In terms of just talking to them one on one, man to man that was a unique experience for me at least because every unit of course would have its interrogators over there. I had a great sense of pride in that. Here's the enemy. I'm sitting here and he's sitting over there. He might hate my guts, but he's on my turf now.

RV: Did you get a sense that they hated your guts?

WM: Not really. Some of them did, especially the NVA officers who were really heavily of course indoctrinated and hard corps Communists. They wouldn't say a word. Wouldn't even give their name, rank and serial number. We could tell right off the bat who was going to be cooperative and who wasn't. If somebody wasn't there wasn't much point in keeping them around there. We had Vietnamese truck driver soldiers that ran basically a shuttle between our place and Bien Hoa headquarters. Sometimes they would get sent to higher level Vietnamese unit. Most of them just went to Bien Hoa to III Corps headquarters, to be interrogated there or just imprisoned. "You're not going to talk" (chuckle) "War's over for you. You get a cot and three square meals a day. Good luck". I don't know how many interrogations I did. I had to type all this stuff up though and submit it up the chain of command. Dozens and dozens over the course of the year, everybody from VC to North Vietnamese colonel at one point who just walked in one day to a National Police station and said, "I surrender". That was the highest one I remember. It was quite an experience. Again if something is very few soldiers ever get a chance to do. We tried to do it in a kind way. My philosophy was "I'm going to catch more flies with honey".

RV: Was that your call? Or was that your Vietnamese counterparts call?

WM: Both of ours together. They were nice guys too. Sometimes we'd play good cop, bad cop on occasion. Sometimes that would work. Our basic goal, our standing orders were "what unit are these guys in? Where are they"? As best you can find out, what is this? Just basic questions, "What is their strength? What is their mission? Where have they been? Does this guy remember any places that he can identify from side or a hamlet or anything else"? Usually they didn't know. Often they didn't know. Whatever they did know, the names of guys in your unit. What kind of weapons do you have? How many rounds of ammunition? How's morale? How's your food? If they came down the Ho Chi Minh trail as they often did, we could trace them down the trail. We'd get some young kid in there 16 or 17 years old, "What did you do"? I carried 122mm rocket warhead or rocket shell down the Ho Chi Minh trail in a pack on my back. "What were you supposed to do when you got here"? "Go back and get another one". "I didn't want to". So he would turn himself in and things like that. Some of guys were kids. They were just teenagers. They were younger than our soldiers.

They were illiterate. They were just commandeered and shanghaied into the Army. Like I said in North Vietnam if you go, you don't go to Canada. You don't go to China. We often felt a lot of sympathy for some of these guys. They were just kids. Just basically were slaves. You will take these weapons to South Vietnam and you will get killed maybe. When you're done you will come back up here and get some more. Some of them rode bikes, some walked. Some came down in trucks. It was quite an education to me to see how these people fought and how they lived and everything else. Again a lot of them were just astonished that I as an American was just a normal guy. I didn't have any anonymity toward them. I didn't hate their people, hate their country, didn't care much for their government and their military commanders. But they had nothing to fear from me personally. That was good. Sometimes we'd get a lot of prisoners in at one time in an operation. We'd have to call in support from other advisory teams or from III corps. Sometimes they'd send other interrogators over there. Both American and Vietnamese. We'd just kind of have a mass interrogation. We'd sit down and try to figure out what it all meant. We did have some success though that we're kind of proud of. During the Tet Offensive we had a prisoner who was picked up by the Vietnamese and we brought him in. It was a lot of fun because we couldn't turn any of the lights on at that time. We were doing everything by flashlight. It turned out this guy was from our old nemesis, the North Vietnamese 9th division, 273rd regiment. Eventually we got him to tell us, where is your regiment. He just pointed. He just pointed. He said, "We're about 500 meters over there in those woods".

RV: Really? Out the window or on a map?

WM: Basically across the wall and across the end of our landing strip and across the little field there with some wood. He said, "We're right over there". As far as I know, that was kind of scary. Again the main North Vietnamese unit in our area of operation at that time was North Vietnamese 9th division, which had three regiments, the 271st, 272nd, and the 273rd. They were the ones we really tried to keep tabs on. They were right there, at least his regiment was.

RV: What would you do with that information?

WM: We took the information and I gave it to my Lieutenant Petrero, a Notre Dame graduate among his other faults and he took it back to Captain Pochert and Captain

Pochert took it back to whoever our commander was at the time. He got on the phone to 3rd corps. In a few hours there were F-105s just coming in there and bombing the heck out of that place. Our soldiers went in the next morning and sure enough there were a lot of dead North Vietnamese in the area. Then we had another prisoner during the Tet Offensive that Sergeant Vo and I were called over to the 1st air cav, which had a base about two miles away. They had a prisoner and they didn't have anybody that could talk to him. During the Tet Offensive their Vietnamese interpreters and translators they went home on leave. So they called me and Sergeant Vo over there. We talked to his guy for a while. We found out what unit he was from, I can't remember where he was from. Their unit, which was a new unit that I'd never heard of, their mission was to attack the Marine base. The Vietnamese Marine Base at Hon Quan near Saigon. So we go that information to them to be on the lookout for that. This unit ended up being intercepted between where we were and Saigon. So that attack was prevented. So we did have some success from time to time. Sometimes we were just kind of spitting into the wind. The information until late was probably of no tactical use to anybody at least at the time. But on those two occasions we did all right. Figured we saved some lives and maybe even our own.

RV: How would you verify your information?

WM: Well, from the prisoners we would crosscheck it with other information. Because like I said we kept a file on every unit. The local VC units and especially the North Vietnamese 9th division and all of its units. We had it broken down pretty good. We would cross check it with previous information and documents that we had. If we found some inconsistencies, "you say that your unit was over here by the Dong Nai River but we got another guy from your unit two weeks ago and he said they you were up by Loc Ninh". Sometimes they'd admit, "You're right. I'm wrong. I lied". Often checking information was not our responsibility. That was III corps responsibility or division's responsibility. Here's the unit. "Here's the information we think is reliable. If you want to make sense of it, fine". Usually the guys were telling the truth. They didn't have a reason to lie. The war was over for them. A lot of them especially the North Vietnamese foot soldiers they didn't want to be there anyway. The officers they rarely talked except some occasion where they just surrendered. If they were captured they rarely said

anything. Sergeant Vo and I had to fly up to Loc Ninh, which is right to the Cambodian border and pick up a Viet Cong Lieutenant who had surrendered. Officers were wonderful because they could give us a lot of information that the enlisted man, he would not know. The enlisted men, they wouldn't know tactics and strategy and missions and things like that. They wouldn't even know where they were going or what they were going to do when they got there until somebody said, "Open fire". The officer's they had although of intelligence. We had to fly up there and get this guy. When we got up there our helicopter had a malfunction and couldn't take off. So we had this Canadian air force Caribou, horrible plane, terrible thing sitting there. He was going to Vung Tau. We said, "Ok we'll fly with you to Vung Tau on the coast. Then we'll try to get a helicopter back to Tan Son Nhut and then get another helicopter back to Lam Son". Helicopters were like the bus system back there.

RV: This was with your prisoner?

WM: It was kind of neat. So we kept this Viet Cong Lieutenant in uniform. He had little epaulets on his shoulders and everything and a pith helmet and the whole bit. A little brass star in the middle, the North Vietnamese Star, but he was VC. We got on the helicopter in the caribou and took off. Flew to Vung Tau and got a helicopter back to Tan Son Nhut. We got back there and the last helicopter going our way, going back up to Lam Son had already gone. So we had to spend the night there, sitting in this little shed, like a big fancy bus stop with wooden benches in it. Here we are sitting in here all night with this VC lieutenant who is obviously a VC, Communist officer. We got a lot of crazy looks from other people, especially other Army officers. Who are you and who I this guy? We had the ID and we had our orders and everything. This guy was just amazed. He just at there in front of the hut the whole time and watched all this incredible variety of airplanes coming and going and helicopters coming and going. He was very cooperative. We got him back the next morning. He gave quite a bit of helpful information about the Viet Cong operations in the northern part of III corps. We just added that to our files and documents. We did have a few fun times.

RV: That was one of them?

WM: That was one of them.

RV: Tell me the basic difference that you noticed between the Viet Cong that you interrogated, that you talked with and the NVA?

WM: The Viet Cong at least the ones I talked with. Again I can only speak from my personal experience. I'm sharing what I have to say about these guys could easily be contradicted by other people at other places. But the VC that we talked to seemed to have an inferiority complex that the North Vietnamese were going to treat them like dirt. I think I made the comment somewhere in my questionnaire that their fighting skill was somewhat overrated. The VC in our area mainly acted as guides for the North Vietnamese Army. Of course the VC are local people. They bury their weapons and plow their fields during the day and throw grenades at night. For the most part, I found the VC pretty cooperative, rather forthcoming. Since they were in South Vietnam, they could see that the Americans were literally there to help the South Vietnamese, for the most part, they had nothing to fear from them on a personal level, militarily yes. We'll kill them if we could. But when they surrendered they were usually very forthcoming and very cooperative. They felt a high level of camaraderie and kinship with the South Vietnamese because they were South Vietnamese. Sometimes that would override any political considerations. North Vietnamese, the enlisted guys as I recall, usually were pretty cooperative, pretty forthcoming. Some of the NCOs and the officer's they wouldn't say a word. We couldn't get a word out of them. Sometimes they'd have papers on them, we'd at least know their name and unit and whatnot. For the most part, they were far more resilient to questioning than the VC were. Plus they had a better lifestyle for the most part. The VC they lived like pigs a lot of the time. They were the ones that lived in tunnels. They had kind of a loose command structure for the most part. The VC did have some large, military type units. Most of the ones in our area at least, our little part of the world were just mini guides and get supplies and third rate kidnappers and terrorists and those kinds of things instead of being a main force fighting unit.

RV: Could you tell a physical difference between the two?

WM: Not really. The VC often did wear their proverbial black pajamas, as did many of the NVA. But the NVA also had a variety of kind of light green and khaki uniforms. They were part of a much more rigid, structured command. More structured

than the VC were, just local people. Often operating just small cells. Almost to the point of being a para-military unit. That was just in our area. Other parts of the country the VC did have pretty sophisticated fighting units and did a pretty good job. Of course they were good at infiltrating. They were the sappers and the saboteurs and what not. They were a lot of the ones that caused so much damage in Saigon during the Tet Offensive, because the NVA didn't know the area. They relied on the VC to tell them where to go and where to be and where to hide and what not and where to steal food. What village you could kidnap people to carry your equipment for you and everything else. Then further north up in I corps the NVA operated more or less on their own. They didn't need the VC because they were very close to North Vietnam as it was.

RV: What kind of weapons would you find on them or would they bring in with them?

WM: The standard arm back then was the AK-47. We would not usually capture prisoners with weapons. On a few occasions they were brought in with their weapons. That was almost always the ubiquitous AK-47. Occasionally there'd be a few grenades. Of course these are almost all Chinese, Russian, Czechoslovakian. They made very little of their own armament. But we didn't get many prisoners with weapons. We did get thousands of weapons though after an operation after a battle. Sometimes we'd have to go out and collect these ourselves, sometimes prying them from somebody's cold, dead fingers. Sometimes one of our units, our Vietnamese unit would find an arms cache because they would all just bury their weapons in advance in a certain spot. Often we'd get them after big operations or after specific battles. Another aspect of our job because anything captured by the fifth division ended up in our little building and we had to check them over. We'd like to know, what has the enemy got? Anything new or just the same old stuff? Every once in a while, a new type of anti-personnel mine would show up or there was a certain point when they started getting in these 122mm rocket launchers, they started showing up at a certain point when I was there, at least showing up in our area. That was something new to us. Those things were fun. That's part of what I keep calling the order of battle, what kind of weapons these people had, sometimes you can tell what their tactics are by what their weapons are. This unit for example may have a lot of Bangalore torpedoes. Great, they're a sabotage unit; they're in there to blow something

up, what? Other units might just have machine guns and AK-47s. They're more of an attack unit. Some units just have a lot of mortars. They had .82mm mortars, which could use our shells. We had .81mm mortars so they could capture our shells and drop them down their mortar tubes. So, that was fun for them. So weapons analysis was a lot of fun too. We had Russian gunner's, quadrants, and flamethrowers and a variety of rifles and machine guns and .50 caliber machine guns. Just all kinds of stuff. Again some units would have certain markings. Sometimes it would indicate what unit it was. We'd have to try to break the code. Ok, where did this guy say he was from? This was his commanding officer and he was from what unit? This is the code. Again it was more the detective story aspect of it. All the weapons the Vietnamese sometimes would like if we got a lot of the weapons from a particular unit, particularly North Vietnamese, they put them on trucks and drive them around. They put banners on them that said see, were fighting for you. We're trying to do a good job and defeat the North Vietnamese and all kind of patriotic slogans on these trucks and drive them through local towns and villages showing up with the captured [weapons].

RV: Did you ever come across any Chinese troops?

WM: No.

RV: None?

WM: Never had any indication there were any Chinese in Vietnam. The North Vietnamese and the Chinese don't get a long very well, never did. Never had any indication there were any Chinese or Russian or Cubans or North Koreans or Klingons or anybody else down there beside the North Vietnamese. There may have been, I don't; know.

RV: How about any Pathet Laos?

WM: No, never had any contact with them. Never got to Laos. I won't mention Cambodia, but never got to Laos, never had any contact with them at all.

RV: So you never went into Laos?

WM: No.

RV: But you did go into Cambodia?

WM: No comment. I might have been here. The border was kind of fluid.

RV: Were you instructed to basically not answer questions like that as long as you are out of the service?

WM: No, I don't know if I was in Cambodia or not to be honest about it. I really don't.

RV: You would just go out and do your operation; you might or might not have been there.

WM: We were told go here, land at these coordinates, pick up this stuff, pick up this person. Sergeant Vo on a couple of occasions said, you know Marshall I think we were in Cambodia, but I don't know.

RV: What would you say were the strengths of the NVA and VC?

WM: Their tenacity was always impressive. They were indoctrinated and conditioned for one simple thing. They were going to win the war. It didn't matter how many men we had. It didn't matter how many B-52s or battleships or whatever. Ultimately they would win simply because they would persevere and we would eventually quit. And that's what happened. They were incredibly tenacious at least on the officer level and on the soldier level too. A lot of their guys, they were just as sincere about their cause as we were about ours. I was always impressed with their ability to die for their country. We'd find these tunnel complexes and everything. We'd talk to these prisoners who had an absolutely hellish time. Their whole unit had. They'd be blasted by B-52s, which do funny things to the environment. They'd come out of their holes and fight. They'd walk hundreds of miles. They'd carry all this garbage on their back. They'd live like pigs. They had just a very eclectic unit and they'd still fight. I was always very impressed by their resilience and their tenacity, at least the ones I talked to.

RV: You had a lot of face-to-face contact with them. What would you say were their weaknesses?

WM: They were treated like dogs by their own officers. Each unit had a political officer. If anybody says or thanks anything out of the ordinary, even within their own units, they didn't seem to be highly valued. Why a lot of them surrendered. Probably we had as many people just surrender and said, "We quit" as get captured. In terms of weaknesses [actually means strengths] they had good leadership. They had good weapons; they had good training. Their weaknesses might be a tendency to be sometime

over confident to make an attack or make a movement that they thought they could get away with. Like in the civil war, the southern troops would often just charge the union lines, it didn't matter if the union was dug in or not. Kind of an arrogant way. Sometimes I get the impression that they would do that too. Since we're going to win, then we can't lose. We'll just go out there and show ourselves and make an attack in the daylight or what not. We won't bother to cover our fires or something like that. I think they made some bad moves like that from time to time. Underestimating us. I think that may have been one of their biggest weaknesses is underestimating the abilities and resolve and power of the American military. We're just the imperialist's running dogs their masters said we were. We're soft. We're a bunch of drug abusing alcoholics. I kind of got the impression from interrogations and from reading captured documents and things there was a tendency to underestimate us as often as we underestimated them. It was kind of a learning process for both sides I guess.

RV: Were their documents real propagandistic in nature?

WM: Oh, geez. I've got bunch of them in the basement. In fact, I'm going to be coming through Lubbock next summer. I might just drop all of this stuff off and give it to you people.

RV: You should do that. We could defiantly preserve it for you here.

WM: I don't need it. We would have leaflets; safe conduct passes that we'd drop in their territory. Around Christmas time and Easter time especially these little slips from their side would magically return up in our areas. I got one from Christmas that was written in terrible English. It basically said, "Why do you Americans persist in fighting a war you cannot win. Don't let Johnson and McNamara kill you. Your family is home now under a verdant, blooming pine tree". A Christmas tree I guess. "Don't let them see you in a coffin or a pine box. Surrender now to the victorious people's Army and we'll treat you well". A lot of things like that. I've got some North Vietnamese and Viet Cong awards certificates. If you translate them, they're kind of hilarious too. This stilted, sullenest type propaganda stuff. You know, "congratulations to (fill in name here) for resolutely smiting the imperialists running dogs" and stuff like that. But that's their style.

RV: Did you think these guys actually bought that? Did you feel like they were hard core Communists?

WM: Well the officers were for the most part except for one Vietnamese colonel we had. I go the impression for the most part they bought into that.

RV: They were true believers?

WM: This was their culture. Yes, true believers. This was their mission in life to unite the world under this socialist's banner.

RV: How about the Viet Cong?

WM: Well I think the Viet Cong were just kind of waiting for a payday. We'd been sitting down here since 1954, after Dien Bien Phu and after the truce. We buried our weapons and we've been good little communists. We've done what you told us. When do we get paid? At least the ones in our area. There are many good books written about the VC, Douglas Pike, *Viet Cong* and a lot of others. The VC in our little area were just mainly guides.

RV: You mentioned Douglas Pike, he was here for quite a few years, before he passed last year. Did you read his stuff?

WM: I've read some of his material. I read part of his book, years ago. Quite a guy.

RV: What did you think of that writing if you can remember it?

WM: Very accurate, very realistic I thought. He did a really good job of research.

RV: Did your opinion of the American effort in the war change at all over this year that you had some much contact with the enemy?

WM: My opinion changed in terms of when are we going to win this thing? Here we are piddling around with a third rate country. Yes, they've got a big Army but what? We've got tremendous power and we never used it. We kind of got involved in this philosophy of incrementalism. We'd send a few more troops over and they'd match us. We'd send a few more troops over and they'd match us. I felt from the beginning if you're going to fight a war, win it. Go all out. The sooner you win it, the fewer people get killed. The less damage is done. I was disillusioned by our philosophy or tactics of incrementalism. Once we got to the point like I said several times in my questionnaire it was obvious that we weren't going to try to win it. We were just going to have a truce like in Korea that's worked really well (laughs). I got disillusioned in terms of our

tactics, not what President Reagan said was the nobility of our aim. But the way we went about it, a lot of us were thinking, when are we going to stop screwing around and win the war? It's been going on for 10 years now. We just keep piddling around. We don't seem to learn from our mistakes.

RV: Why was that going on do you think? Why do you think that was happening?

WM: I don't know. This was the first political war that I recall in U.S. history. Although politics enter into all wars. We just never seemed to be able to articulate a strategy, to have consistent political leadership. The North Vietnamese seemed to be quite successful at dissent in our own country as all of our college students here were demonstrating for years with no knowledge with what was going on at all. It's still puzzling to me, even after all these years, as I'm sure it is to many people. Why we wouldn't, couldn't win the war. Of course it was a different kind of war. How you define victory is of course sometimes an exercise in semantics. I feel we could have done a heck of a lot more damage to North Vietnam than we did. We didn't have to defend ourselves by going into Cambodia and Laos. The propaganda came out and all the newspapers say, "We're invading Cambodia and Laos". No we're not, we're attacking North Vietnamese troops in Cambodia and Laos. What's the problem with that? We never seemed to be able to, on the government level, to articulate our aims. To answer questions about tactics and strategy and things like invading Cambodia, this kind of stuff. I never could understand why is it so hard to say what we're doing and why and what's going on. Why do all of our mistakes and screw ups get publicized, but the incredible brutality and viciousness of the enemy sometimes never even makes it into the paper. The Tet Offensive hailed as a huge Communists victory. They got slaughtered everywhere in the country but that got turned into a big victory by the media and nothing else. The butchery of the North Vietnamese in Hue going into the city with lists of people and taking them out and executing them with a bullet in the head by the thousands, burying them in mass graves. I didn't see any protests and demonstrations over that. There was a town, My Lai got a lot of attention and rightfully so. That was an aberration and the people involved with that, they should have paid the price and they didn't. But here was a little village up in northern III corps in Binh Long province when

I was there called Song Be. The people in Song Be had recently incurred the displeasure of the North Vietnamese by picking up their village on mass and moving to a safer location near a South Vietnamese outpost. The North Vietnamese didn't like that. So they went in there one night and threw grenades into every hut and shot and killed everybody they could. Meanwhile, on a mountain base, a mountain position a couple miles away there was a South Vietnamese ranger unit that saw what was going on, but could not get there to do anything about it. The North Vietnamese slaughtered hundreds of people in this one village. This got three lines of print in Time Magazine in an issue the following week. Now if it had been Americans that had done that it there have been full scale Congressional Investigation and demonstrations and what not. But the Communists did things like this as a matter of policy all the time. Horrible brutality, kidnapping whole villages, shelling refugees, the whole bit. Somehow they were never brought to task for it. They seemed to be giving a pass because their ultimate aims were noble for some reason. I found that quite aggravating, still do quite honestly after all these years. Our screw-ups, and rightfully so, were highlighted and publicized and questioned. But those of the enemy which were consistent and far worse on a consistent, daily basis, all of our little college protestors back here, chanting, "Ho, ho, ho Chi Minh". Do you know what the guy is doing to people? Do you know what they've done since the fall of Vietnam in '75? Nobody seems to care.

RV: Right. One of my questions was what did you think of the media coverage on the war? You've talked about that a bit here.

WM: Pathetic. Even when we were there, pathetic. I still remember Mike Wallace, and Peter Jennings having a conversation on TV some years ago. They were both Vietnam correspondents. Peter Jennings asked Mike Wallace, "If you were on patrol with one of our teams and you saw that there was an ambush. You saw the enemy up ahead, would you warn our men?" Mike Wallace said, "No I wouldn't. That's not my job as a reporter." I said this guy is morally bankrupt to equate our men with these other guys is just inexcusable to me. I don't know the press coverage over there it was managed by the government I guess as well as possible. Since is the first war in living color on your TV screen at 6:00 every night, this was the first war that Americans had ever seen like that. They'd never seen wounded and dying soldiers with his guts hanging

out. These horrible wounds and men crying pain. That's war. It's terrible, it's horrible. That's what war is unfortunately. I saw a lot of horrible things too. I saw dead bodies and heads blown off and arms lying on the ground and feet and you name it. Eyeballs.

RV: How did you deal with all that personally?

WM: I just kind of put it out of my mind. This is bad. That could have been me. That could have been Sergeant Vo, thank God it wasn't. It was extremely unsettling at first. I managed to just kind of put it out of my mind and not let it bother me. If it starts to bother me, it's going to really interfere with my ability to do my job and my ability to stay alive. I just kind of put it out of my mind. The media coverage of the war and people like Jane Fonda and all that still rankles me to this day. As well as the treatment of Vietnam veterans as a whole and the whole media portrayal of Vietnam veterans in general. Even to this day, it's still unsettling to me.

RV: You've talked a little bit about the political leadership or the lack thereof, what about the military leadership, Washington and then back in country in Vietnam?

WM: Of course a lot of that stuff, I don't know anymore than what you read in *Time* and *Newsweek* and *Life* and saw on the evening news.

RV: That's ok.

WM: General Westmoreland, he seemed to be a very capable man, great, great very capable realistic leader. General Abrams I think he followed the same vein. I think a lot of lower echelon commanders, division commander, company commanders, commander in III corps at the brigade level regiment or whatever. Some of those guys including some I knew quite personally basically were just out to build their resumes in some cases, just get a body count and lie about it. There have been many movies made about this. Most of which don't reflect any of my experiences. I think a lot of our lower level leadership in many cases wasn't too good. On the other hand, a lot of our officers and men, they're the best soldiers we ever had as far as I'm concerned. They're the best we ever produced, to go through what they went through over there and to come through unscathed with their integrity intact. I have nothing but pride in those guys. Our military because of political considerations as far as I'm concerned was never able to prosecute the war from simply a military point of view. There's always political considerations. If we do this, what is France going to think? Who cares? If we do this, what are the

Chinese going to do? Who cares? We did not give military considerations, tactical consideration I don't think the priority and impact we should have without second guessing everybody. I'm sure there were a lot of commanders in the field that were hesitant to act on their own initiative. If I do this, am I going to get in front of a Congressional Committee? Is there going to be some reporter with a microphone in my face, second-guessing my every move? I'm sure there was a lot of reluctance and hesitancy in many situations where people didn't do the right thing or the appropriate thing because of the media, because of political considerations or whatever. It was just a screwed up effort from the beginning.

RV: What would you have advocated that the United States have done differently?

WM: Well, I would have put a lot more men in a lot sooner. I would have done a lot more to somehow get the South Vietnamese government to act a little more Democratic toward its own people. I would have done a heck of a lot more damage to North Vietnam. I would have carried the war into Cambodia and Laos because that was the main supply line. We let these jeeps and trucks and tanks and artillery pieces come down this very well maintained network of roads, almost unimpeded for the most part. Again I think overall we applied our power foolishly. In an extended incremental fashion. If we thought right was on our side, if we thought this war was worth fighting, then get in and fight the war, stop screwing around and stringing things out year after year and changing your rationale and changing your point of view. Of course, that's great hindsight on my part, being a little Spec-5 somewhere north of Saigon. I know a lot of guys that felt that way and a lot still do.

RV: We can talk about that a little later as far as over all U.S policy and lessons learned and things like that. Let's get back to what you were doing there in country. Tell me what weapons did you carry?

WM: I had an M-16, which was a piece of junk as far as I was concerned. You had to keep it clean constantly or it wouldn't fire.

RV: Did you have the model 1-A?

WM: I think so. I think it was. We got some training on it when we got there. I had a .30 caliber World War II carbine, an M-1 automatic. I had a grenade launcher, an

M-79 grenade launcher and a Browning automatic rifle from World War I. That was just what I had stacked up in my hooch. I rarely used any of them. The .30 caliber carbine was probably the best. You could drop it in the mud and it would still work. The Browning was really heavy. I only shot that a few times.

RV: I was going to ask you, did you ever have to fire your weapons?

WM: Only a couple times. I'm not even sure it hit anything. We had a couple of incidents that we fought our little warning siren went off a couple times, quite a few times at night. There were a couple times that we thought we saw some people out in our kill zone in front of our berm, our defensive perimeter that shouldn't be there. We'd open up on them, but we'd never find anything. We'd go and send somebody out in the morning. We never really found anything. I only did that maybe two or three times the whole year. Just because alright shoot over there and see if anything happens, this kind of thing. No particular threat. Nobody specifically standing up and shooting at us although that did happen sometimes.

RV: Was this during your guard duty?

WM: Guard duty. There were quite a few instances when we would be roused out of bed in the wee hours of the morning because somebody thought we were going to be attacked. We never were. On guard duty we had every other day, you stood six hours of guard duty every other night. You had two shifts either from 6:00 to 9:00 and 12:00 to 3:00 or from 9:00 to 12:00 and 3:00 to 6:00. Then you'd sleep when you could. Of course you had to go to work the next day. That was fun. There were quite a few times, four or five times overall that I know that somebody was shooting at me because I could hear the bullets pinging off of something, hitting the sandbags or whizzing through the grass or hitting some building behind me there. We were sitting upon top of them berm in a folding chair so we were pretty good targets. I don't think anybody was ever trying to kill me specifically, although they were shooting in my direction a couple of times.

RV: What would you do on guard duty? What was the typical guard duty?

WM: Sit, just sit and listen. We had these night vision binoculars that would come in handy. We'd just sit up there and scan the area. We had several positions around the compound there. Just keep your eyes open, nothing major. There'd be an officer that would walk around every hour or so. "Anything going on?" "No sir". "Keep

your eyes open". That's all we did. We just kept our eyes open and watched for rats and swatted mosquitoes and tried to stay awake. Which when it's really hot and humid and raining like crazy during the rainy season that's not a lot of fun. We mainly sat up on top behind the sandbag berm or barrier. If we had to get inside a bunker that was a lot of fun because there were always full of water and various creatures. You had to look out this little slit and you couldn't see much out there. It was hot, stifling. So we normally sat them on top. That was easily, easily the most tedious part of our whole time was guard duty.

RV: Did you ever get wounded?

WM: No.

RV: At all?

WM: No. I came close. Came close a couple times in couple of incidents, but I got lucky.

RV: You mentioned little creatures, what kind of wild animals did you run into over there?

WM: Well, turkey size mosquitoes, large rats, geckos, a variety of small snakes, some lizards, nothing crucial. There were a few moneys running around a lot of the towns near by. Nothing, no tigers or rhinoceros or anything like that.

RV: Did you guys ever adopt any pets for your unit?

WM: No, didn't have the inclination to do that. No dogs, no cats, no nothing.

RV: How much contact did you have with American combat troops, infantry troops?

WM: Virtually none except when we'd go out on a chopper to pick up prisoners from an American unit. It would depend sometimes if they didn't have a helicopter available because theirs were being used for transporting troops or medical evacuations, sometimes we'd get called to go out and pick up prisoners from America troops, American units. Mainly in the Iron Triangle, north of Saigon there. 101st airborne operated a lot in there and 25th division further to the west we'd sometimes have contact with them. Unless they came in some of their officers and NCOs would come into our little unit to get information specifically very little contact with other Americans.

RV: Did you ever sense any tension between those who were out in the field and those who were back in the rear?

WMW: No, everybody had a job to do. The vast majority of troops in Vietnam weren't combat at all. They were truck drivers and typists and supply and this kind of stuff. Probably at least 80% of the troops there were not infantry. Everybody knew. Everybody had a job to do. I'm sure there was griping about how come I'm living out here in a mud hole and you're back there in that nice, French concrete hut, but I didn't hear any of it. Everybody's in the same boat ultimately. Everybody runs the risk although some guys obviously had more risky lives than others, but we're all on the same team.

RV: How often would you go out in the field? Would it be every other day or so?

WM: It varied. Sometimes during the rainy season, not as often as during the dry season because things during the rainy season it rains a lot and you can't get anywhere. It varied. Sometimes there's be a lot of enemy activity and a lot of prisoners to be picked up, captured documents to look at, whatever. Other times there was no real regimen to it. Sometimes every other day, sometimes every other week. It varied.

RV: Tell me about your contact with, before I talk about the South Vietnamese forces you mentioned there were some ROK troops there.

WM: Just a few Korean troops in our area. Most of them were majors and captains.

RV: What was your impression of them?

WM: Oh, man I wouldn't want to mess with those guys. They were serious. There were quite a few Korean units in Vietnam. The North Vietnamese made every effort to avoid them as far as we knew. They did not want anything to do with the South Koreans because they were pretty mean characters. They meant business. The South Vietnamese could sometimes just be bought off, look the other way. But the Koreans, they had their own up close and personal experience with Communists troops. The North Vietnamese would tend to avoid them. Plus the Koreans being fellow Asians could read signs and notice things that we couldn't. So the North Vietnamese at least it was my impression wanted nothing to do with the South Koreans.

RV: What was your impression of the South Vietnamese troops?

WM: Again I had limited contact with them. The reconnaissance platoon that we had, those guys were absolutely fearless. They suffered a lot of casualties. They spent a lot of time out at night. The two South Vietnamese sergeants that I worked with, Sergeant and Sergeant Nyguen, very well trained, courageous. They both had families back in Saigon. They knew their country was at stake here. They had no illusions about what happened to their country if the Communists won. The other troops, I worked with at the interrogation center they were part of G-2 they were very disciplined and very competent. The soldiers, the grunts like me, the enlisted men they seemed to be very competent and very dedicated. Their non-Commissioned officers at least the ones I had contact with seemed to be very competent too. Very purposeful and serious. The officers they tended to be little bit better educated and too often I got the impression their attitude was what can this do for me? What can I scam here? What can I get from the Americans? They tended to wear a lot of medals. They loved to wear fancy watches. They had a pocket full of fancy pens in their pockets and this kind of stuff. They liked to get stuff and have people do stuff for them. At least some of the officers that I had to work with they tended to be...You still there?

RV: Yes, I am.

WM: They tended to be somewhat mercenary in my regard. Many of them, not all of them. The Vietnamese major that was in charge of the G-2 a section there, he got wounded several times doing things that he had no business doing, but he did them anyway. Several of the officers, the lieutenants in the G-2 section, the Vietnamese G-2 section they were pretty fearless. A couple of them got killed. I know that higher up the food chain you went in the South Vietnamese Army it seemed the less competent a lot of people were. Much like our own Army. There were a lot of Vietnamese colonels and generals that would drop by from time to time. They would have several jeeps and they'd have these fancy uniforms on with gold braids and what not. Kind of like a rock star would today. Just a lot of groupies hanging on them and opening doors for them like they were somebody really important. This would tend to set them apart from the ordinary soldier. Didn't inspire a lot of confidence. I saw that a couple times and wasn't too pleased with it. I did get that impression that a lot, not a lot but a substantial number

though proportion were out to get what they could out of this situation, make the best of it.

RV: Well, the reputation of the ARVN varies depending on who you talk to. You're given the impression that they were pretty confident?

WM: At least in our area. During the Tet Offensive one of the regiments got in just horrific battle. The Tet Offensive and half the ARVN guys were home on leave because the Communists said, "We're not going to fight. Let's have a truce". Of course they lied through their teeth and they got slaughtered as a result of it. Tough on them. During the battle of An Loc which is up north on Binh Long Province during the Tet Offensive one of our regiments was pinned down there for several days. They were already about half strength. It was incredible what I read about it after the battle and what we found out about it after the battle from different reports. These Vietnamese would not quit. They would not retreat. They were heavily outnumbered. They said we're going to hold on here until we get reinforcements. They just fought like crazy for several days up there at An Loc before they got relieved. Stuff like that it never seemed to get in the paper. Heroic South Vietnamese unit holds on and faces overwhelming odds. You never saw that headline. You never saw that. But all over the country and during the Tet Offensive in particular most of the South Vietnamese units, the ARVN units were very low strength. I don't recall any evidence of any of them quitting and running and buckling. They all fought like savages during that time. That somehow didn't fit the media stereotype; you know the South Vietnamese are unmotivated and lazy. I'm sure many of them were because many of them are just illiterate peasants. "Here's a gun son get out there". The ones that I had contact with and the many that I read about and I had information that even *Time* and *Newsweek* didn't have. They acquitted themselves well in so many battles, so many engagements. They never really go the credit for it. Even to this day that's too bad. Last year at my school, I have an English Language development class. I had a teacher's aide who was Vietnamese. He was about 60 and he was in the Army, Mr. Huynh. He told me when he found out that I had been in Vietnam, boy he lit up. We did a lot of talking about what we had done. He had been South of Saigon down in the delta area for most of his tour in the Army. He talked about a lot of the battles he had been in and the friends that he had lost. It was

obvious that his unit whatever it was fought as well as they could under pretty good odds. These people never get the recognition. A lot of them had poor leadership and poor supplies and poor intelligence. Sometimes they were just simply out gunned and out manned by the NVA. A lot of them never got the credit they deserved for being good soldiers.

RV: Do you know what ever happened to Sergeant Vo and Sergeant Nyguen?

WM: Haven't got a clue. I wrote to Sergeant Vo for probably six or eight months after I got home. Sergeant Tran Van Nyguen, he got transferred to someplace else. Even Sergeant Vo lost touch with him. After about six or eight months of writing letters to Sergeant Vo and him writing to me he just stopped. I sent a few more letters but never got anything back. I don't know if he got killed or sent to re-education camp eventually, but that was in the '60s. I really don't know what happened to him after that. Maybe he just lost interest in me or whatever. Never had a clue.

RV: How did you experience the Tet Offensive?

WM: Well, got up one morning and we were told that the North Vietnamese and VC were attacking all over the country. We put on extra guards. We didn't get any sleep for about four days. We had a lot of interrogations of captured prisoners over at 1st Air Cav and in our own unit down at National Police. Our movements at night were very limited even though we did have to do some driving at night, that was always fun. We had that big battle right outside of our wire. I was in Phu Cuong City about four miles to the west, the provincial capital. There was a lot of action on the other side of the river with the jets coming in and dropping Napalm. Our recondo platoon barracks were about a kilometer south of our unit. They got attacked. We spent every night out on our bunkers or down at the IPW center. We didn't sleep hardly for four days. We just kind of cat napped when we could. It was very scary situation too. We'd get reports coming in from all over the country. We heard about the butchery up in Hue. The American Embassy had been attacked in Saigon. There were North Vietnamese tanks coming into Saigon and this kind of stuff. Are we going to be cut off? After a few days things subsided pretty quickly. It became pretty apparent over the next few days as we got reports in from around the country that the Communists had just suffered overwhelming losses everywhere they went eventually. They had a lot of success further north

especially around the city of Hue where they massacred several thousand people. I didn't hear a peep out of Jane Fonda about that, still haven't. It was an intense time. Even though it was limited except for that little battle right our inside of our wire. We weren't involved with the 273rd that was just an Air Force thing basically. They just came in and bombed the heck out of them. So in terms of being in combat and being attacked we made it through pretty much unscathed. Although we did get a few mortar shells and a couple 122mm rocket rounds came in. I don't know if they were shooting at us or just missed their target. It was a tense time however.

RV: Yes, it sounds like it.

WM: It was just so uncertain. It's not like France in World War II, we're here, they're there. That was the uncertainty of it the whole time. When you're driving down the road in the jeep doing something the guy walking down the road in front of you carrying a water bucket, is he who he seems to be. You don't know. It's just that constant apprehension that I guess you call it free-floating anxiety in psychological terms. Tet was a lot of fun. After Tet in the weeks and months after... we weren't cut off out there. We had these things called newspapers and magazines and Armed Forces Television, which didn't work hardly at all. It became apparent after Tet that somebody's got this wrong. There's a lot of dead Communists out there and nobody is talking about that. They're talking about the Communists ability to coordinate an attack throughout the country. My God, telephones and radios can work wonders. Somebody got that awfully wrong. As far as I'm concerned still do. It was a horrible defeat for the Communists. But since we made a big point of saying hey we've got things thing under control. We're on the way to victory, light at the end of the tunnel and all that, then this happens. People can say wait a minute I thought those guys were on the run? Well, they are. There's a lot more of them dead than there were before. I think the media just totally blew that one. I think that was the beginning of the end of our involvement there. After all this time the enemy can still mount a coordinated attack like that. And die like flies as a result but somehow that just shook the confidence in our military back home that there's not going to be any end to this. I think that was the beginning of the end in terms of our resolve. Let's not fight to win, let's just fight to somehow get an armistice. Have a peace treaty. One you say that, once you say we're not fighting to win then you lose. Because the

North Vietnamese who had one of their top leaders who went by the pseudoname of Trouong Trinh, which means march to victory he had written a book about how we're going to win the war. It's very very simple. Here's what we're going to do. We're going to fight, fight, fight, talk, talk, talk, fight, fight, talk, talk, talk. The Americans can't understand that. We're eventually going to win the war. That's exactly what happened.

RV: Did you see any drop off in the number of VC coming in, say there or four months after Tet?

WM: Yes as far as I recall not a heck of a lot happened as far as I recall in the few months after that. It was mainly some mopping up activity. The North Vietnamese had to retreat back into Cambodia and Laos and further north to resupply and replace their dead guys. The VC I don't really know how the VC fared in the Tet Offensive. I know they carried out a lot of small sapper attacks and the terroristic type attacks during that time and even some larger scale military operations, especially around Saigon. But as far as I recall it's been a long time. There was kind of a lull after that in terms of their activity.

RV: We're going to take a break for today and pick this interview up a little bit later. Thanks you very much sir.

**The Vietnam Archive
Oral History Project
Interview with Willis Fred Marshall
Conducted by Richard Burks Verrone, Ph.D
April 25, 2003
Transcribed by Shannon Geach**

1
2 RV: This is Richard Verrone and I'm continuing my oral history interview with
3 Mr. Fred Marshall. Today is April 25, 2003. It's about 9:04 am Central Standard time.
4 I'm in Lubbock, Texas and Mr. Marshall you're in San Jose, California. Let's continue
5 sir. We had been talking about the Tet Offensive and the aftermath of the Tet Offensive.
6 You mentioned that you wanted to add something about that.

7 WM: Yes, there's something I recalled right after we hung up that I had read I
8 don't know when I read it or where I read it. Apparently there was a historical point of
9 view developed after months later in the Tet Offensive that there was quite a bit of
10 friction between the Viet Cong and the North Vietnamese. The Viet Cong of course were
11 indigenous South Vietnamese. This theory-- and again I don't know who to ascribe it to.
12 It made sense. It said the North Vietnamese needed to find a way to eliminate as many
13 Viet Cong as they could because in post war Vietnam, assuming they would win the war,
14 they wanted to have total power. They didn't want to have to share power with the
15 southerners. This particular theory said the North Vietnamese planned the Tet Offensive
16 so that many Viet Cong units would be literally wiped out. They would send them up
17 against units and positions that would pretty much ensure their destruction and basically
18 eliminate the Viet Cong as a post war threat to the North Vietnamese themselves, post war
19 political and military threat. I don't know how much credence to put in that. It would
20 explain as I recall the tremendously high number of Viet Cong casualties as opposed to
21 North Vietnamese, which were substantial too. After Tet as I remember and as I have
22 read, the Viet Cong basically ceased to be any kind of threat whatsoever. I don't know if
23 that's true or not, but in the context of hindsight it makes sense.

24 RV: That's absolutely one of the theories. What was your personal experience?
25 You had some direct contact with the enemy in the after math.

26 WM: As I remember and this is a long time ago. This is the first time I've really
27 talked this much about the war in 35 years. As I do recall almost all of our prisoners after

1 Tet were North Vietnamese. We had very few Viet Cong. We had a few brought in but
2 again a lot of those were picked up by Nation I Police and the Ruff Puffs [RFs/PFs]. It's
3 just what limited memory I do have that there was very little activity in Viet Cong after
4 Tet.

5 RV: What do you think about the Tet Offensive in general? Do you think it was a
6 smart move for the enemy, either directed by the NVA or the VC more on their want to
7 actually do this?

8 WM: As a PR move it was pretty brilliant, because quite a few times during the
9 course of the war, at least when I was there we made these rosy predictions. The light at
10 the end of the tunnel all this kind of stuff. That we were making tremendous progress
11 and we weren't for other reasons. As a PR move it was great. I think at home we'd been
12 domestically lulled into a kind of false sense of security. We had been achieving quite a
13 large degree of success in the battlefield especially up in I Corps against the North
14 Vietnamese. The government PR kind of led on that we had pretty much pacified much
15 of the country. The Tet Offensive showed at least the enemy could operate and mount a
16 coordinated attack, nation wide. I just think psychologically it was a pretty good coup by
17 the North Vietnamese. Of course it was militarily where they got wiped out everywhere.
18 What wasn't publicized was this was Tet Truce. A lot of the South Vietnamese troops
19 were home on leave, enjoying the holiday with their families. Most of the units as I
20 recall and as I've read were undermanned. I don't recall in our area in III corps that there
21 were South Vietnams units that were overrun. There was horrific battle up at a little town
22 called An Loc about 50 miles north of us. North Vietnamese 9th division attacked the
23 town; the Vietnamese unit that was there, the ARVN unit that was there was really
24 depleted because of the holiday. They just fought ferociously for several days until they
25 could get relieved. This kind of stuff never made it in to the papers. The photographs of
26 the Viet Cong are on the U.S Embassy grounds that got the headlines. Militarily it was a
27 horrific defeat. Of course our media, our skeptical media at home turned it into a victory
28 for them. Politically I guess it was. It showed they still had a lot of strength left.

29 RV: Right. What about the progress in the war for the United States? Did you
30 see that this was happening in '68 or not?

1 WM: We didn't have the big picture at all. We didn't get much information what
2 was going on in the rest of the country. We were just concerned with our little area of III
3 Corps there. The larger picture was somewhat obscured to us. I do recall that all of us at
4 least in my little unit were frustrated with the incremental aspect of the war even at this
5 late date that Johnson's was still clinging to this policy of instrumentalism radicalism
6 [gradual incrementalism]. I think that reflected that. He wanted the North I know to
7 realize that these Americans were just going to keep applying pressure until we quit. On
8 the other hand that can be looked at and it was looked t by the North Vietnamese as a sign
9 of weakness. If the Americans really wanted to win this thing, they'd come inhere and
10 win it instead of just gradually turning up the pressure and allowing us to gradually meet
11 that pressure. It was a doomed strategy.

12 RV: Tell me what you think about civilian control of the military?

13 WM: Well, under our form of government of course it's absolutely essential.
14 Like we just saw in the recent conflict and the continuing conflict in Iraq, if you let the
15 military do its thing without having to be second guessed by Congressional Committees
16 things go a lot quicker. But when you have Johnson picking the targets in North Vietnam
17 mainly out of political considerations, let's bomb them here. Let's hit them here. I
18 wasn't aware that Johnson had any tremendous military background at least in tactics and
19 strategy. I know a lot of commanders were concerned, "Gee if I do this and if it doesn't
20 work out then some Congressional Committee is going to get on my case". I just thought
21 it was my little point of view; just kind of incrementalism was a stupid way to fight a
22 war. I remember back during the Civil War, General Jubil Early who was not a very nice
23 person himself said "You want to win it, get there firstest with the mostest". We got
24 there second with just enough to hold on apparently. People forget, they read their history
25 in the articles and say we've got 600,000 men over there. 80% of those aren't in combat.
26 They're support and supply and doing stuff like me. Our combat forces were substantial,
27 were proportionally not that large when you compared to everybody else over there that
28 was not involved in combat support. That just didn't work.

29 RV: Did you keep up with the news from home very much? How difficult was
30 that for you?

1 WM: I didn't keep up with too much news from home. The only newspaper we
2 got was the *Stars and Stripes*. My wife would occasionally send my newspaper clippings
3 out of the local paper here, the *San Jose Mercury* and the *San Francisco Chronicle*,
4 which is a great paper to wrap fish in, it still is. It was mostly irritating stuff. As time
5 went on the liberals on the left who had supported our build up when Kennedy was
6 president up until '63 now were totally against the effort. Interesting thing we noticed
7 that most of the anti-war protests on college campuses stopped as soon as the draft was
8 ended in the early '70s. That was not remarked upon at the time I don't believe. I didn't
9 get too much news from home except just a few newspapers that my wife would send me.

10 RV: Were you able to make any MARS calls home to your wife, or was it just
11 letters?

12 WM: No, just letters. That was the good thing. We got to write free. We had
13 free franking so I wrote almost every day. It was just "Hi, I'm still alive. I love you".
14 That was it. I still have all my letters, the ones that she sent to me. I think that the fun
15 part of that, not fun but touching part was getting letters from total strangers. Like in our
16 conflicts today there are many organizations that just send letters anonymously to some
17 soldier. I got quite a few from people around the Bay area and all around the country too
18 that just randomly sent my unit. The mail clerk would say "This one to you". I thought
19 that was kind of nice. Just total strangers writing a letter to say, "You might not want to
20 be where you are and it's probably pretty awful but we support you". I thought that was
21 a very, very, very powerful message.

22 RV: How often did that happen?

23 WM: Maybe once a month. Not very, very frequently at all.

24 RV: In general looking at your units and everything what did you guys do for
25 your entertainment and recreation?

26 WM: Not familiar with the terms in that context. We didn't have anything at all.
27 We had a little bar on our post. We had two softball games that I recall during the dry
28 season. Of course during the rainy season you couldn't even get to first base. Played
29 cards, that was about it. Talked, there would be nothing to do of a fun nature. At least on
30 post or in the nearby towns. All of us stayed out of the towns and the little village of
31 Phu Cuong. The provincial capital of Phu Cuong down the road. We didn't go there

1 except to buy food occasionally in the little hamlet at Phu Loi, which was outside our
2 gate. There were a bunch of bars and places over there that some of the main line troops
3 the bigger units went to. We stayed on our little post. We had nothing much to do.

4 RV: Why did you stay on the post? Were you advised not to go into the town?

5 WM: No. But we didn't have a 9:00 to 5:00 job. Sometimes we'd work all night
6 depending on enemy activity. It was just difficult to schedule that. Most of my guys we
7 weren't drinkers, we weren't smokers. We didn't have any affinity for the bar fly type of
8 lifestyle. We just didn't patronize it.

9 RV: Was alcohol any kind of problem or did you see a lot of abuse of that?

10 WM: Not on our post. We had an officer's club, which was just kind of a little
11 hut with a bar in it and an NCO club. I don't ever recall ever seeing anybody drunk.
12 People drank a lot, mainly beer. I don't ever recall seeing anybody drunk or talking to
13 anybody that was drunk. Or having anybody in our office come to work drunk. You had
14 to stand guard duty every other night. If you were sleeping on guard duty because you
15 were drunk, you were in serious trouble. Our commanding officer of our little post, a
16 colonel, can't remember his name. He made no bones about that. You show up drunk
17 for duty and your ass is in a sling. He meant it. Again in our unit most of us had some
18 college. Some were college graduates. I think we were smart enough to realize, I didn't
19 drink then still don't. Most of us were smart enough to realize that even though it's
20 relatively quiet here, you never know what's going to happen. We need to have a clear
21 head. I don't recall any of that a problem at all.

22 RV: I assume then that there was no drug use?

23 WM: Never an inkling of that whatsoever. Only time I found out about that is
24 when we got back to the States.

25 RV: Let me ask you about your spiritual beliefs. Did they change at all because
26 of your experience there that one year?

27 WM: No, no. It intensified it up to a point probably. I was Christian still am,
28 Baptist. At first, I had a few doubts as everybody does when you're put into a totally
29 different situation than you're used to. Where has God gone, all this kind of stuff? I
30 remember we had a memorial service for one of our field advisors who was killed. The
31 division had three regiments in our part of III corps. Each of the regiments had several

1 battalions, three or four battalions. During the four years up to the date and the month
2 that I left, we had 144 men that had served in advisory team 70, both where I was and out
3 in the field. The field advisors of course, they had the dangerous job. The regimental
4 training officers and the people that worked directly with the ARVN infantry units. Of
5 the 144 men that have served in advisory team 70, up through October '68 the month I
6 left 45 had been killed. That was about 25% fatality rate. I remember we had a memorial
7 serviced for one of the guys who I knew, but whose name sadly I have forgotten. The
8 chaplain mentioned, and I still remember this and I don't know why. The chaplain
9 mentioned in his comments that God is not the author of death. He wanted to explain
10 what he meant by that. Just in case any of us were backsliding in our faith because we
11 had developed the attitude of why am I here? Where had God gone? Why is this
12 happening? He was a pretty sharp guy. He put this thing in a large historical and
13 scriptural context. Never forgot that, no matter how awful things are here or anywhere
14 else. It's not God's fault. God didn't do it. God didn't create the conditions for it. He
15 didn't make the decision that led to this.

16 RV: Did you believe that then?

17 WM: Do your duty. Don't worry about that. Yes.

18 RV: Did it help you?

19 WM: This wasn't the first war in human history. Yes, it gave me a little bit of
20 morale strength at that particular time.

21 RV: How much access did you have to the chaplain?

22 WM: Very rarely, we had a chaplain that came by. Very infrequently like I said
23 the main line units they had their own chaplains of course in chapels. We had none.
24 Occasionally a Catholic priest would come about a semi-regular basis to offer mass to the
25 Catholics. The only time we ever saw a chaplain or priest basically was when we were
26 playing taps for somebody.

27 RV: Going back to the recreation, entertainment question, did you guys listen to a lot of
28 music?

29 WM: Not really. We had Armed Forces Radio Station over there, came in pretty
30 good where we were because we were about 40 or 50 miles from Saigon. I don't recall
31 listening to too much music. A lot of us had tape decks because reel to reel these little

1 reel-to-reel things you could buy back then. My wife sent me several tapes of music
2 from home. I would play my tape-recorder. We mostly listened to that. We had no
3 theatre or anything like that. We had movies occasionally shown on a sheet in our mess
4 hall.

5 RV: Do you remember any of the movies you saw?

6 WM: No, I don't recall seeing that many. Most of them were not very good.
7 Abbot and Costello and the Three Stooges, garbage like that.

8 RV: What about songs, do you hear any songs today that take you back to that
9 time?

10 WM: Yes, I think I mentioned in my questionnaire *Homeward Bound*, by Simon
11 and Garfunkle which was not about the war at all it was just the line, "I wish I was
12 homeward bound". These was a song it was an instrumental record back then by Paul
13 Mauriat and the French Orchestra called Love is Blue, which was kind of popular at that
14 time. My wife still cries when she hears it.

15 RV: Because she listened to it when you were over there?

16 WM: Yes, that was one of her favorite songs when she was back stateside
17 waiting for me. It just kind of made her sad.

18 RV: Did you ever get to attend any USO shows?

19 WM: No, I think I said in my questionnaire, nobody paid any attention to the
20 advisory teams. We were just a little footnote. Oh yeah the advisory teams ought to do
21 something for them. But we had a couple of little USO shows that would come through.
22 Just some candy striper type things. Some cute young girls and a couple of singers.
23 They may came into the mess hall and sing a song and shake hands and give us a candy
24 bar or something and then leave. Bob Hope dropped by about 50 to 70 miles away one
25 year. Most of the officers got to go see Bob Hope, but the enlisted men of course, those
26 who actually did the work, we didn't. Fess Parker showed up one day (Davy Crockett)
27 and Arthur O'Connell whom I recognized. He walked in the mess hall one day. Great
28 character actor. A lot of great roles and some good film. He walked into the mess hall
29 one day with his aide. I just looked [and said], "Arthur O'Connel" and he walked over
30 and said hi. It struck me because he sat down and talked to me for a while. There was
31 almost nobody in the mess hall. Just me and a couple guys. He talked to me about 15

1 minutes. He said when I get back home, I'm going to call your wife. Gave him my
2 phone number, gave him her phone number and he did. He went back home and called
3 her. I got an excited letter from her a week or so later, "This guy called me and he had
4 seen you and spoken to you". That was a really a good morale booster for her and for me
5 too. Fess Parker I can still remember how huge this guy was. He was just monstrous. I
6 doubt if anybody nowadays would know who they were.

7 RV: What did those visits by celebrities mean to you and what do you think it
8 meant overall to the military forces serving there?

9 WM: I thought it was a tremendous morale booster. Somebody that didn't have
10 to be there would put themselves in danger because anywhere you were in Vietnam you
11 were in danger somehow. You never knew when. These people put themselves in
12 danger just to come say hi to us and to come to our little outpost instead of going
13 to the 101st airborne or the Screaming Eagles or 82nd airborne or one of the Marine
14 division, would come to see us. That was really important. Like I said the advisory
15 effort was and is basically an ignored aspect of the war.

16 RV: Why do you think that's so?

17 WM: Well, nobody knew we were there. We were pretty much anonymous,
18 rightfully so. The big main line combats units rightfully and justifiably got most of the
19 attention. But if you peeled back the curtains and looked deeper into the war effort you
20 would see all these advisory teams spread around the country doing important work.
21 Recently since I've got involved with this interview stuff I've looked in several big
22 bookstores for the first time near home, Barnes and Noble, Borders, places like that.
23 Looking in the Vietnam War section in almost none of the books can you find any
24 mention of MACV and the advisory teams. Not in the index, not anywhere. It's like the
25 teams never existed. Even today it'd be difficult to find out about that. There are a
26 couple of websites, one of which has gone off the air that listed all the advisory teams and
27 where they were and what they did. Other than that I've seen very little mention of the
28 advisory effort, which went on for quite a long time under a couple different names.

29 RV: It was the earliest experience the Americans had in Southeast Asia.

30 WM: Well, it was totally unique experience. Nothing like this had ever
31 happened. Of course in World War II we had men in the Philippines and things like that

1 but that was mainly to for insurrection and gather intelligence. It was a quite a different
2 activity. I still to this day have no idea how many men were involved in the advisory
3 effort, all the different teams around there. I don't even know how many teams there
4 were-- I think hundreds.

5 RV: There were thousands of men involved in the advisory effort over the years.
6 Tell me about the relationship you formed with your fellow advisors there for that one
7 year.

8 WM: Oh, boy. That was pretty powerful. Sergeant Mai Cao Vo and Sergeant
9 Tran Van Nyguen were the two Vietnamese sergeants that I worked with. Sergeant Vo
10 most of the time. Sergeant Nyguen came in later in my tour. I would see Sergeant Vo
11 almost everyday. He had never worked with an American who spoke any Vietnamese.
12 He spoke much better English than I did Vietnamese although both of our skills improved
13 over time. He was just shocked that he got to work with an American that spoke his
14 language fairly well. So we spent a heck of a lot of time together at the IPW center up at
15 the G-2 office, on helicopter trips and riding around in trucks and jeeps and what not.
16 Fiddling around the little hamlets and villages talking to people. Great guy, he had a wife
17 and daughter who lived back in Saigon. He had this little Honda 50 putt-putt motorbike,
18 which he was very proud of. Just a great guy. Kind of a short stocky little guy. Great
19 sense of humor, optimistic, friendly. A man with complete integrity as opposed to some
20 of his officers. Just a great guy. We got to be pretty good friends. It was really hard to
21 leave him. In fact, when I left I probably missed him more than any of the Americans
22 that I worked with. I spent the most time with him basically at least during the day. We
23 wrote for months and months and months after the war ended. The advisory team moved
24 up the road to another location a few months after I left. He told me what a hole that was
25 compared to where they had been. I guess in early '70, late '69 early '70 the letters
26 stopped. I never heard from him again. I don't know if he got killed or captured or just
27 said, "Why continue doing this"? I don't recall writing to Sergeant Nyguen at all. He
28 was kind of a standoffish guy. Friendly but he wasn't as sociable as Sergeant Vo was.
29 But Sergeant Vo was a great guy. I've got a lot of pictures of him still. I have about 800
30 slides of the camp and all my activities there.

31 RV: Did you ever take any R&Rs?

1 WM: How am I going to say this? I was scheduled to go to Bangkok, but I
2 forget. Something happened. I can't even remember what happened. Something
3 happened. I think it was Tet Offensive. Something happened in the area that I couldn't
4 go. I don't even remember the reasons I couldn't go. My idiot lieutenant went, but I
5 didn't. That was good because the guy like I said was an idiot. ROTC idiot. We had a
6 little in country R&R facility at Vung Tau, an old French resort city on the coast. I went
7 there twice for one day. It was ok. They had a nice little hotel there for American
8 soldiers and nice buffet with real food. Actually had real milk instead of filled milk,
9 which had no milk fat. They put coconut oil in it so it would keep better I guess. I
10 remember having real milk. We were just really shocked by that. They had a beach there
11 that we could ride a bus out to and relax in the sun and play at the beach. Saw the China
12 Sea. Not much to do, shuffleboard, cards that kind of things. It was a pretty safe place,
13 very beautiful an old French villas there in Vung Tau. Very nice area. I went there
14 twice. The first time I went my wallet was stolen out of my room. I think by the maid.
15 The second time I went I had a drunk American soldier break into my room about 2:00 in
16 the morning during a thunderstorm and thought it was his room. Wasn't even his hotel. I
17 had to drag him downstairs and call the MPs. It was just nice little break. These were
18 my two days off in one year. Two official days off.

19 RV: Were you resentful for the fact that you never really got to get out of the
20 country?

21 WM: Not really. A lot of guys went to Bangkok and Tokyo, none of the enlisted
22 personnel in my unit as I recall left the country for R&R. We didn't begrudge anybody
23 else going on R&R especially the guys in the combat units who rarely got any breaks
24 either. I don't recall any of us going anywhere. If they had they would have come back
25 and talked about it. I remember that. We didn't really begrudge it. To me it slowed
26 down the pace of my tour there. It was better just to keep busy, keep going, keep focused
27 and let the time pass quickly instead of stop it and let's take a break from the war and I go
28 down to the beach for a day or two and then lay on the sand and then come back and pick
29 up where we left off. I just kind of preferred to keep things moving.

30 RV: Is there a particular humorous incident that you recall from that year?
31 Something that stands out in your mind?

1 WM: Question 75. Tom Bacon, a good buddy of mine back there he had this
2 Rick Little was a real big, big deal back in the States at the time. I don't know how old
3 you are, how much of this you remember.

4 RV: I know Rich Little.

5 WM: Rich little as an impersonator. He was really good in the '60s and '70s.
6 Bacon was a good impersonator too. We had these two sergeants in our unit, Sergeant
7 Anderson who died last year and Staff Sergeant Robert Scannel. They each had unique
8 personalities and voices and mannerisms that would really set them apart from the crowd.
9 Bacon just loved to impersonate these guys. Whenever we would get kind of tired or
10 down or ticked off about something, Bacon would break into one of his impersonation of
11 Sergeant Anderson or Sergeant Scannel. Other than that I don't recall a lot of humor.

12 RV: How about a particular brave action that you witnessed? Does something
13 stand out in your mind with that?

14 WM: Only that I heard of from what other members of our team had done out
15 with the battalions and the regiments. Their bravery under fire, this kind of thing. Our
16 local headquarters unit had what we call a recondo platoon, which was led by an
17 American first lieutenant named Callant I think it was. They got in several good
18 firefights in the area with Viet Cong units. Occasionally North Vietnamese, because
19 these are the guys that would lay out in the woods at night and listen and kind of sneak up
20 and try to find enemy base camps and stuff like that. They had several rather bloody
21 fights and that kind of thing. Other than that we were kind of divorced from any kind of
22 situation that would provoke bravery.

23 RV: Tell me about your impression of and experience with the Vietnamese
24 civilians.

25 WM: They were resilient people. Some kind of war had been going on for a long
26 time in their lives. They were creative. They were resourceful. They were trying to be
27 optimistic. Make the best of a bad situation. I spent quite a bit of time on the road. Not
28 quite a bit of time, at least one or two day s a week where I spent at least part of the day
29 out in a hamlet or at the National Police Station or in a village or something looking at
30 sabotage damage or talking to villagers about any information they might want to give to
31 us. You had to be careful about that. You never know who you're talking to. If you talk

1 to somebody and they're willing to tell you what they've seen or heard the guy standing
2 next to them might be Viet Cong. That person that's trying to be helpful and do
3 something positive for his society and the war effort might end up being shot in the head.
4 You had to be really careful about that. I enjoyed the people. I never had any act of
5 incivility or lack of kindness from any of them. We had Vietnamese women that would
6 come in and do our clothes; they just wash our clothes in buckets and hang them outside
7 on bushes and lines to dry. They were all very pleasant. We'd go into town; we could go
8 into Phu Cuong sometimes to buy these long French baguette bread sticks and things like
9 that and fresh fruit if we could find it. We felt totally safe among them. They were very
10 pleasant. I remember one time I was driving back from Bien Hoa alone in a jeep. The
11 radiator overheated and I was on this little one lane road. I knew where I was but I was on
12 this little one lane road all by myself there in the woods. Here comes this Vietnamese
13 farmer walking down the road with his black pajamas and his conical hat. He asked me
14 what [was wrong]. I remember the conversation was in Vietnamese. I told him I
15 overheated here. I need a bucket- something to carry water in. He went over to another
16 little hut, house and came with a big tin can, a big can. There was a creek right there so I
17 went down the creek and got some water and refilled the radiator. Thanked him very
18 much and didn't have anything to give him. Usually you give them cigarettes or
19 something like that. I told him I was very appreciative and drove off. Even situations
20 like that a total stranger willing to stop and help out. I was just always pretty impressed
21 by these people. They had to put up with so much because the Viet Cong would harass
22 them at night and kidnap them all the while claiming to be the liberator and destroy their
23 villages and kidnap them to carry ammunition and weapons and what not. They lived
24 under horrible conditions. We'll never know how many of them got killed in the war,
25 which we tried to avoid of course. Sad fact of war is people die. I have nothing but good
26 positive memories of the Vietnamese people, especially the kids. I remember at Vung
27 Tau there were all these little kids fishing. We had a couple little rock walls along the
28 coast, along the beach there where the beach was kind of rocky. There were all these
29 little kids fishing down there. They were always willing to come running up. They
30 always wanted chewing gum of course. Chiclets, Chiclets and this kind of stuff. They
31 were always very polite and fun. I never had any apprehensions around any of them at

1 any time. I just felt sorry for them. Like I said in my questionnaire as time went on it
2 became apparent to me at least in my mind that we were going to botch the whole thing
3 through a lack of will and abandon these people. That was a sad thing. After I got home
4 and the Communists did take over our media didn't make a big deal of all the tens of
5 thousands of people that had to be "re-educated" and were put in prison camp. Never
6 know how many of these people that I met, where did they end up? Did they end up in a
7 prison camp or worse? Overall, I was always enjoying being with them.

8 RV: What about Vietnam, the country itself?

9 WM: I didn't see that much of it. I saw Saigon, which was a mad house. The
10 country's beautiful. I remember when I flew from Tan Son Nhut Air Base in Saigon on a
11 Huey helicopter up to the 5th division. It was the first time I'd been in the air during the
12 daytime because we came in at night to Bien Hoa on our airliner. First time I really got
13 to see the country was when I go up in the helicopter flying with my advisor team. It was
14 just beautiful, just lush and green. Looked like Kentucky for all I could tell. Look up to
15 the north and see Nui Ba Dien, Black Widow Mountain. The country itself was beautiful.
16 It would have a lot of tourist potential if idiots, collectivist's idiots at that, didn't. A lot
17 of rivers and streams. The weather was fun. Kind of like east Texas actually. Hot and
18 dry during part of the year and hot and rainy during the rest of the year. It was pretty
19 country. It was primitive of course. I'd been to Mississippi so I knew what primitive
20 was. It was ok. The only aspect of it that was difficult for me was I had spent the
21 previous year in El Paso Texas at language school. Kind of 180-degree turn between El
22 Paso and Vietnam, so getting used to the climate was difficult. The country was beautiful
23 and had lot of potential in terms of resources and tourism and what not. It was just
24 absolutely peaceful I think I said my questionnaire. What it looked like during the day
25 isn't what it sounded like at night. Night was when all the fun stuff happened at least in
26 our area.

27 RV: Is there anything else you want to talk about before we weave Vietnam
28 about your in country experience?

29 WM: Not that I can think of. We covered it pretty well here.

30 RV: Let me take a break and change out this disk.

31 WM: Ok.

1 RV: So tell me how you left Vietnam in October '68.

2 WM: That was one of the oddest things about this war. In Korea and World War
3 II, the big wars you went over as a unit and you stayed there until the job was done.
4 Many men in World War II were gone for four or five years. In Vietnam it was more like
5 a business effort. You knew exactly the day you would leave. I don't know if that was s
6 good thing or a bad thing. The closer you get to your DEROS date, your date estimated
7 to return from overseas the edgier you get. You hear all these stories about guys getting
8 killed on their last day on their next to last day and what not. So as your time winds
9 down you do tend to get a little bit edgy. It was just kind of an oddball thing. You get up
10 one morning, I got up on October 13 or 14 or 18. I don't remember the day anymore.
11 Got up and the day before I had said goodbye to everybody. We had guys going home
12 probably about once a week. Somebody would leave once every two weeks. There was
13 no party or anything. It was just you'd shake hands all around and hug your buddies and
14 exchange addresses and what not and hope to get together again. The hard part was
15 saying goodbye to Sergeant Nyguen and Sergeant Vo, that was rough. We got through
16 that ok. You put on your dress khakis and you get your bag and you give away all the
17 stuff you don't want to take home. You walk down to the helicopter pad and it's like
18 waiting for a bus. It's like leaving work in the afternoon and going home. You just pack
19 up, at least for me. In big units it was different. On an advisory team you just get up in
20 the morning, you get dressed; you go see the company clerk you sign out. You have a
21 checklist to go through. You have to go have your commanding officer check you off on
22 various things and turn in your weapons. Then you sign out. You walk down to the
23 helicopter pad and you sit down there on a wooden bench and finally your bus shows up
24 with big rotors on it. You hop on the Huey and you fly off to Tan Son Nhut. You get
25 there and you get on a bus and you drive down to the out processing station and you do
26 some more paperwork. Depending on when your plane leaves, you already have your
27 orders to go home. You just don't know what flight you're going to be on. You go down
28 there and you just sit down there and wait. Then you take a bus aback up to Tan Son
29 Nhut air Base and wait until your flight is called. You get on the flight and you go home.
30 You go home and I got back to Travis Air Force Base. It was a strange thing. It was the

1 quietest flight. I still remember it was the Flying Tiger Airlines Convair 880. I don't
2 know why I remember that, but it was. I just remember on the plane how quiet it was.

3 RV: How about when you took off from Tan Son Nhut?

4 WM: There was a little bit of cheering and clapping and whistling. The people
5 on the plane were from all different units. Some were going on leave and some were
6 going on R&R. Some were going home, most were going home. I remember when we
7 took off there was some clapping and cheering and things like that. Then it just quieted
8 down. People were just so relieved. Is it really over? Is this how it ends? Not with a
9 bang, with a whimper. You just get on the plane and you leave. You leave all that
10 behind. It was just an odd sensation that it would end on such a note. Got back to Travis
11 Air Force Base and got on a bus. Went to Oakland Army Replacement Station, in
12 Oakland Army Station [Base]. Signed out there, had physical, drew some blood, spent
13 the night. Our reward was a steak dinner. Everybody that came back got a steak dinner.
14 Hadn't had a steak in a year. Not a great piece of meat, but better than what we had had.
15 You sign out, settle up on any pay you might have coming or any pay you might owe.
16 Guy says, "Where you going Marshall"? I said, 'I'm going about 50 miles south of here
17 to San Jose". They give you a whole new uniform. What do we need a whole new
18 uniform for? I'm out of the Army; I'm going home. They give you a whole set of dress
19 greens. They give you a new field jacket. I don't know why. Something to wear home,
20 you know? So I put it on and wore it home. Next day my wife drove up in our shiny
21 new 1967 Toyota Corona, light blue. Picked me up and drove me home. I hadn't seen
22 her. I saw her at the airport the night before. She was there and my parents were there
23 and her parents were there. She didn't recognize me. It's really strange. We got off the
24 plane and went across the tarmac. I was with two guys that I was in language school with
25 whom she had met before we shipped out to Vietnam because we had gone out to dinner
26 at Senor Picos in San Francisco with these two friends. Lenny Hinkle from Ohio and
27 James Coggeshall from Narragansett, Rhode Island. They had gone onto other advisory
28 teams, but we ended up on the same flight coming home. That was a great thing because
29 Lenny and Cogs were there. We didn't sit together on the plane but we had a stop in
30 Honolulu on the way back. I called my wife from Honolulu; I forgot about that. I called
31 her. First time she'd heard my voice in a year. Got to talk to Lenny and Cogs for a while

1 too. When we got off the plane, we got off together. She had met them once, once a year
2 earlier. She'd known me for years. We'd been married. We came walking across the
3 tarmac together. I still remember this and I still tease her about it too. She said, "Lenny,
4 Cogs, hi! Where's Fred"? I was right there with them. I had lost a lot of weight. I was
5 pretty gaunt. She just didn't recognize me. I just kind of waved my hand and said, "Hi
6 honey I'm home" or something like that. We had a big hug of course, but we didn't have
7 much time together there. We had to get on the bus and go back to Oakland. The next
8 day she came back and picked me up. It was just like a wife picking up her husband after
9 work at the train station or something. She had rented an apartment in Santa Clara near
10 Santa Clara University, \$105 bucks a month. Got some furniture together. One day I'm
11 in the jungle and the next day I'm home. Spent the night. My mother in law worked at a
12 very classy, high-level department store near by, I. Magnin's they're out of business now.
13 A very ritzy place, like Saks Fifth Avenue. She had talked to their store manager about a
14 job for me. The manager said, "Well, have him come in and we'll see what he can do". I
15 went in the next day, 48 hours after I left Vietnam. Here I am in a fancy department store
16 interviewing for a job in the shipping department.

17 RV: How disconcerting was that for you?

18 WM: Well, I was just so overjoyed to be home at that point that the culture shock
19 part really hadn't set in yet. Over the next couple days as things slowed down a little bit
20 and I had a chance to realize, I'm home. I didn't get killed. I didn't get hurt. Here I am
21 in this fancy department store where a blouse costs 90 bucks. I still remember people
22 were very nice to me at first. "You're back from Vietnam. Great, glad you made it
23 home". This kind of thing. Most people didn't want to be near me or talk to me for a
24 while. I guess they were just trying to figure out if I was normal. The media stereotypes
25 of Vietnam veterans were pretty perverse. I settled into that job and worked there. I tried
26 to get back into college, but I'd missed the deadline by a month. The store manager was
27 a friend of the ex-mayor of San Jose, Al Ruffo, who just died three months ago who was
28 on the state college board of trustees. She appealed to him personally. "This guy just
29 came back from Vietnam. He didn't know he was going to get out of the Army this
30 early. He missed the application deadline to get back into San Jose State, can you help
31 him?" He tried, but couldn't. So it took a while to get back into college. So I worked in

1 the basement of a department store for the next nine months or so until I got back in to
2 school, next 10 months I guess. Like I said in my questionnaire I had a hard time
3 sleeping for a while especially when helicopters would fly over and what not. I adjusted.
4 It was just such an abrupt end to my service. It was ok. Spent a year in Vietnam, thanks a
5 lot. Go home and get on with your life. It's just this abrupt sharp cut off there. Your
6 buddies are still 8,000 miles away. Every morning I get up and read the paper just every
7 bit of news that I could find about Vietnam because finding out anything about my unit of
8 course was impossible. But I did look for anything happened in that particular area.

9 RV: So you kept up with the war once you got home?

10 WM: Yes, yes I did. It was always interesting. I had never seen American TV
11 news about the war. At least since I'd left of course. I was wondering sometimes are
12 these guys reporting on the same conflict that I was in. I don't want to get into that.
13 Take the rest of the day. It was a shocking way to end things. I'm happy but still to this
14 day I look back on that. I have a picture of myself that somebody took as I'm sitting on
15 the bus going up to Tan Son Nhut and I'm happy and smiling, clean shaven. The day
16 before I was filthy and grubby and dirty and sweaty. Here I am back in the fancy
17 department store, 48 hours later. I was hoping somebody would ask, "What were you
18 doing 48 hours ago?" "Let me tell you."

19 RV: "I was at war." Do you think that was a mistake the U.S. government made
20 that quick transition?

21 WM: It gave people hope. You're not going to go away for the duration. You're
22 going to go away and there is a limit to this. There is life after Vietnam. Here is your
23 date we're going to give you. If you're still alive, you will go home on this date. So it
24 was a good morale builder in that sense. It probably made some guys, especially the guys
25 in the combat units almost paranoid the last few days of there tour because in the combat
26 unit, if it was your day to go home, they just take a helicopter out and go back to your
27 division headquarters and process out and leave. If you came over by yourself, if you
28 came over as a replacement you might just leave your unit and go home by yourself. If
29 you came up with a unit of course, you'd all go home together. Good sense of
30 camaraderie there, but I don't know. It kind of put the war on a business like basis
31 basically. I guess it had its good points in terms or morale and finality to the whole thing,

1 gives you something to look forward to. On the other hand it may have communicated to
2 the enemy who was pretty smart people, that this is just another aspect of the American
3 war process that isn't very smart. It just tells us that they don't have the will to win. I
4 guess it could be interpreted in that way. Maybe it was.

5 RV: Tell me about your impression of the anti-war movement once you got
6 home.

7 WM: What did I say in my thing here? Contempt. The most ignorant, narrow-
8 minded, intolerant, morally bankrupt solipsistic people in human history and they're still
9 with us. They're still out there protesting the war in Iraq, the same people with the same
10 narrow-minded point of view. Don't seem to have any difficulty supporting butchering
11 dictators and collectivists totalitarian military regimes but worry about our efforts to do
12 something about it. Back at San Jose State as I said in my questionnaire, almost all of my
13 professors were anti-war. They didn't know why. The few that found out that I was a
14 Vietnam veteran, I had one Dr. Fink he was my American Seminar and American
15 Literature professor. I had him twice. He could not conceal his contempt for the war
16 effort, for soldiers. He could not conceal his basic support for the aims of the
17 Communists. I aroused his ire on more than one occasion.

18 RV: Did he know you were a vet?

19 WM: Yes, he did. In a very embarrassing way because most of my professors, I
20 don't care what the course was, they would make the course somehow relevant to
21 Vietnam. This was quite a stretch on many of their parts. But if you're a
22 deconstructionist I guess you can do anything you want. I still remember one was
23 making a comment about the war, about something. I remember at the time we were
24 reading, "She Stoops to Conquer" by Edith Wharton, which is about the upper classes of
25 Boston. Doesn't have anything to do with the war, but he found something in one of the
26 pages that made him think of some aspect of our government policy. He launched off on
27 to this tirade against the war. When he was finished I said, "Excuse me Dr. Fink, but
28 that's not true". I forget what he said. Something about American policy and tactic and
29 what not. "That's not true". "How do you know?" "Well I spent a year there." "How
30 much time have you spent there?" I forget what I said at the time to make my point.
31 After that time he had a hard time concealing his contempt for me. He just ignored me in

1 class, which was fine with me. I contented myself with the thought of I could have killed
2 him but I didn't. We had several professors like that. My wife had a Shakespeare class.
3 Oddly enough unknown to us, we did not know how prescient Shakespeare was. It
4 seemed from her professor's point of view, every play Shakespeare wrote had some
5 connection to Vietnam. Of course we had no idea about this, but according to the
6 professor it did. We had a few demonstrations at San Jose State. I forget when the draft
7 ended. I know when the draft ended the college demonstrations stopped. That was the
8 morally bankrupt cowardly part of it. I don't want to get into this. I just had tremendous
9 contempt for them. I would see people on campus and demonstrations displaying the
10 North Vietnamese and Viet Cong flag. It just made my blood boil. You couldn't reason
11 with them. Some of them had some intelligent points. But you could not reason with
12 these people. Just like from my point of view, you can't reason with all the people today
13 with what we're trying to do in Iraq. They just don't get it. Nothing has changed. We
14 just have a lot of people in our country, for some reason don't like our country. Some of
15 them have intelligent moralistic religious reasons for their points of view. That's fine.
16 That's the way our country should work. When you're basically doing this out of hatred
17 for your own country and your trying to give aid and cover to the enemy there's going to
18 be a line drawn somewhere. I don't know how you draw the line on our pluralistic
19 culture, but seeing all these demonstrations the last few week brought back a lot of
20 memories to people like me. Like I said I got over it pretty quick.

21 RV: You continued to keep up with the war and go with that?

22 WM: Yes, there was a big bridge that Americans and Vietnamese were trying to
23 build across the Saigon River at Phou Cuong. I remember seeing the bridge in various
24 travels in different phases on construction. They finally finished the thing a few weeks
25 before I left. I still remember in the newspaper one day in some months or a couple years
26 later that the North Vietnamese destroyed the bridge. I knew exactly where that was.
27 That was kind of a shock; something we tried so hard to build to help the people
28 basically, it wasn't necessary from a military point of view. It was just to help the people
29 get across the river. The North Vietnamese had blown the bridge up.

30 RV: What did you think of the U.S. Vietnamization policy, turning the war over
31 to the South Vietnamese?

1 WM: Hearts and minds?

2 RV: Actually the withdrawl of troops and letting the South Vietnamese fight their
3 own war. The Nixon policy.

4 WM: You declare the war won and you go home.

5 RV: The Peace with Honor?

6 WM: It was stupid. There was no peace and there was no honor. It's just called
7 quitting. We don't have the will to fight anymore. The American people don't seem to
8 be supporting the war anymore. They're not used to seeing things live on TV every
9 evening at 6:00. Either you won it or you quit. I guess we just quit. That's when the
10 drug use in Vietnam started to escalate in the early '70s. There was lot of idleness going
11 on. There wasn't much to do anymore. Our part in the war was winding down. I
12 thought it was just bailing out. Turning our backs on the people that we had pledged to
13 help. I thought it was a very shameful act, still do.

14 RV: How did you feel in April '75 when Saigon fell, do you remember?

15 WM: I remember that. I remember I was glued to the television. I remember the
16 helicopter flight off the embassy there, the North Vietnamese tanks rolling down streets
17 that I had probably been on. It was just shocking. By that time of course it was logical
18 conclusion to our abandonment of Vietnam. It was shocking to see that happen.

19 RV: Besides the difficulties sleeping when you heard helicopters did you suffer
20 from any other kind of PTSD type incidents?

21 WM: No, I'm not even sure. Since we first talked or since I did this
22 questionnaire last year whenever it was, I've done a little bit more reading about
23 Vietnam. I'm not even sure PTSD is a valid diagnosis in many cases. No, I never had
24 that problem. I never had any problems with Agent Orange. Most people that claim they
25 did, didn't. Like I said in my questionnaire I had a little foot fungus but that took about a
26 year to go away. Other than that, no big deal.

27 RV: What kind of books have you read about Vietnam?

28 WM: The most recent book I've read was written by a guy in Dallas, Texas *Stolen*
29 *Valor*. Incredible book by Glen Burkett and Glenna Whitley. I've got it right here in my
30 lap. It's just about media representations of Vietnam veterans and the media coverage of
31 the war. Especially the awesome amount of fraud in the VA system, the legions of

1 Vietnam impersonators. All these people you still see. If you go to the Vietnam
2 Memorial today, you will see a bunch of rag tag guys in camouflaged clothes sitting out
3 with a cup in their hand saying they're a Vietnam veteran. See them here in town every
4 once in a while. Just the amount of fraud that goes on.

5 RV: Why do you think that goes on?

6 WM: Well, because the Veterans Administrations people don't make any effort
7 of any kind to verify someone who says he's a Vietnam vet is a Vietnam vet. Whether
8 they're claiming PTSD, which is very easy to fake and should get better over the years
9 according to the psychological manuals. Some how in the VA system it doesn't. Agent
10 Orange, people who come in and say, "This Orange Powder drifted over me", that's
11 pretty good for a clear liquid. Just not a lot of follow-up. They make the point that there
12 are thousands, perhaps tens of thousands of imposters drawing veteran's benefits, never
13 were in Vietnam, may not have even been in the Army, claiming disability for something
14 that's easy to fake. They get away with it. It's all very well documented. I thought that
15 was pretty shocking to find out about that. There are other parts of the book dealing with
16 media stereotypes of Vietnam veterans and what not. I'm sure they have an axe to grind
17 too. Had some information that I wasn't aware of.

18 RV: What are the myths of the Vietnam soldier?

19 WM: Oh, boy. Where do you start with this? God! Most of the Vietnam War
20 was fight by the poor and by minorities. That's not true. That's not true at all. Hispanic,
21 and blacks, for example, in Vietnam were actually less than their proportion of draft-aged
22 people back home. That's just not true. This class war stuff. The best and the brightest
23 didn't go and all that. That's just not true. 80% of the guys that served in Vietnam were
24 high school graduates. That's far higher than World War II. Due to the socio-economics
25 of it this class warfare crap M.I.T. in '92 compared the socio-economics of 58,000
26 Americans killed in Vietnam to 58,000 randomly chosen contemporaries back in the
27 States by rating the or home of record compared to per capita income. They discovered
28 that 30% of the soldiers killed in Vietnam were from the lowest 1/3 of the income range.
29 But 26% of the combat deaths in Vietnam came from the highest 1/3. This wouldn't be
30 expected if you bought into the media bias that it was a class war. That's not true. It was
31 not a class war. The war did not take the highest toll on minorities. We had very highly

1 educated combat force. The desertion rate was for lower than World War II. This drug
2 use thing. There was a lot of drug user in the last couple years of the war, that's when
3 things really escalated. The use of drugs I think I pointed out quite succinctly in my
4 questionnaire was actually lower in Vietnam by .05 % than the use of drugs in the Army
5 overall. That's not true. There was a myth that the Vietnam vets came back and couldn't
6 get jobs. The homeless vet, which is still here. I see people on street corners and
7 freeway interchanges in San Jose they say Vietnam vet. They're 30 years old. People
8 give them money. It irritates me. Vietnam veterans are no more likely to be unemployed
9 than men who didn't serve in Vietnam. This is getting to become ancient history now. In
10 fact have a lower unemployment rate than those who didn't serve. That's not true. In
11 fact almost anything that the popular culture thinks about Vietnam veteran is not true.
12 Vietnam veterans did not shoot up with drugs to dull the horrors of combat. American
13 soldiers did not desert. American soldiers did not have high rates of incarceration when
14 they got home. Most Vietnam veterans are just like me. They came home and they got
15 on with their life. Most Vietnam veterans, the Washington Post did a survey. I don't
16 know what year. Did a survey on Vietnam veterans and 74% said they enjoyed their time
17 in service. They didn't agree with the statement that the United States took unfair
18 advantage of me. Most Vietnam veterans said they benefited in the long run by going to
19 Vietnam. 91% who served in Viet were glad they served their country. The facts, which
20 are easily verifiable runs completely counter to stereotypes that still prevail to this day.
21 Last October on Halloween at my school we had the kids wear costumes to school.
22 There was a kid that was dressed like bum, a beggar. One of my former students who
23 should know better. He had a sign. "Vietnam vet will work for food". Devon and I we
24 had a nice conversation about that. What does he know; he's just a 12-year-old punk?

25 RV: What about his parents who dressed him like that?

26 WM: I don't know where he gets this. Again, you still see this attitude like I
27 think I said in my questionnaire. I had several parents that removed their students from
28 my class only because they knew I was a Vietnam veteran. Never talked to me. Just told
29 the principal that I want my child out of this man's class because he's probably a dope-
30 head crazed mass murder. A baby killer. I just thought that was so disrespectful. Didn't
31 have the courtesy or the guts or whatever to talk to me. I still remember one woman did

1 apologize to me. I still remember this. I was teaching fifth grade at Parker School in San
2 Jose in '76. A woman had her daughter removed from my class. They reason the
3 principal gave was that I was a Vietnam veteran and he didn't want to cause any
4 problems. The woman never talked to me. I still remember we had some kind of a field
5 day activity day toward the end of the year. This woman and I ended up working in the
6 same booth together, selling Cokes or something. She then apologized to me. She said,
7 "I shouldn't have taken my daughter out of your class. I should have gotten to know you
8 better. I was just kind of worried about her being in the same room as a Vietnam vet".
9 She did have the courtesy and sensitivity to apologize. Several of the parents simply did
10 not. These things still persist until this day. You go to any veterans event, any big
11 veterans event. You'll see this little rag tag brigade of people that claim to be Vietnam
12 veterans who are of course not old enough to be Vietnam veterans hanging around in the
13 or camouflage uniforms and their scraggly beards and what not claiming to be the real
14 thing. They'll be the ones the reporters flock to. No the guys over there in suits with
15 gray hair coming up in nice cars having worthwhile jobs. The media will still talk to
16 these people. Hardly a week goes by without somebody somewhere in this country being
17 unmasked as an imposter, just a plain liar. You've probably read about these and heard
18 about these things too. I have a couple websites I check it frequently. One is called Fake
19 Warriors. Hardly a week goes by without somebody in some rather high profile position
20 or job someplace being unmasked as a liar about this or her Vietnam service. I don't
21 recall that happening in World War II. I don't think we had any World War II service
22 imposters. We sure had them. I found one here in San Jose, last Memorial day. Our
23 local paper profiled three veterans. I guess it was Veteran's day. They profiled three
24 veterans. Anybody with a computer can get on line and look at several different
25 databases to see if this person was in Vietnam. Oddly enough the comments made me
26 think two of the men the paper mentioned they were Vietnam veterans. But in their
27 comments neither of the men that were in Vietnam talked about their service there. It
28 was Just "Proud to be an American", this kind of stuff. The one guy who turned out not
29 to have served in the Army at all, let alone Vietnam was very strident about "I fought in
30 Vietnam and I risked my life and I saw all kinds of horrible stuff. It haunts me to this
31 day, blah, blah, blah". There are several databases you can look at one line. I put their

1 names into the databases. Sure enough the two guys that were very reticent about their
2 military service were indeed Vietnam veterans. The other guys name showed up
3 nowhere.

4 RV: Did you actually expose him or did they print it otherwise.

5 WM: No, I sent an email to the author of the article. Never heard back. I didn't
6 say this guy was a total fraud. I said, "For some reason this guys name does not show up
7 in the data bases of Vietnam veterans" which are admittedly sometimes incomplete. This
8 literally does make my blood boil. There have been many high profile cases. Brian
9 Dennehy the actor, he's a Vietnam impostor. There are lots of people who should have
10 known better. That's why the name of this book is called *Stolen Valor*. That's one of the
11 main thrusts of he book. We somehow can't get past this Vietnam stereotype. Even
12 today 30 something years later we still have people that are lying about their service and
13 getting tax-free government benefits that they don't deserve. Many Vietnam veterans
14 did get PTSD and did suffer from Agent Orange. I think even those problems have been
15 blown out of proportion.

16 RV: You're a middle school math teacher right now is that correct? You're
17 around these young folks, what do you tell them about Vietnam?

18 WM: Nothing.

19 RV: What would you tell a younger generation about the Vietnam War?

20 WM: I tell them to find out on their own. Almost every year I show my slides of
21 Vietnam to the students, especially in sixth grade. I have an English Language
22 development class, which is about half Vietnamese and I show them my slides too. I just
23 tell them what I'm going to tell you is based on what I experienced. It's my point of
24 view. You need to realize other people have different points of view that don't agree
25 with mine. You know as you get older, make up your own mind. American students at
26 any level never study Vietnam or World War II for that matter. American high school
27 students and college students as I can tell almost completely ignorant about history. They
28 don't have a clue about anything that's happened in this century. We've basically
29 ignored this century. We teach up t the 20th century. We spend a lot of time on the
30 revolution and what not, the Roman Empire to the detriment of knowing about the 20th
31 century. They're tremendously ignorant about it. The Vietnamese students know that I

1 was in Vietnam and I speak Vietnamese. Word gets around the school that Mr. Marshall
2 was in Vietnam. Sometime a kid will ask me, "Were you in the Army?" "Yes." "Were
3 you in Vietnam?" "Yes." "Did you kill anybody?" "I don't think so." I don't talk about
4 I unless I'm asked. We only have two veterans at our school. Both of us are Vietnam
5 veterans. Most kids have never met a veteran. Most kids have never met anybody in the
6 services. You go to many countries and you'll see soldiers standing around on street
7 corners. I ask my students, "How many of you have even seen a soldier in uniform?"
8 Nobody. It's an alien occupation to them. I don't talk about it unless somebody asks me.
9 I just keep it very simple. A kid asked me about two weeks ago. He'd heard. "Were you
10 in the Army?" This was when the Iraq thing came up. On my window in my room I
11 have pictures of every man killed in Iraq and all their names. I print them off of a
12 website everyday. I add to it everyday. Every kid in the school walks by that everyday. I
13 have little sign up above with an American flag that says, "All gave some, but some gave
14 all". Here's the list of all the dead. These are people. They have faces. They're not just
15 a name in the paper. One of them went to the high school that a lot of you are going to.
16 Two of them were born in San Jose. I'm very blatant about how I support the troops. A
17 couple of kids have asked me, "You were in the Army weren't you?" "Yes." "Vietnam?"
18 "Yes." I usually let it go at that. But when I show my slides to my students, to my ESL
19 students this year, toward the end of the year when there's nothing else to do. They're
20 just astonished by it. They've never heard any of this. The Vietnamese kids have heard a
21 lot about the war from their parents and their grandparents who escaped all that horror.
22 Sometimes in years past I've had a few Vietnamese students tell the class what did you
23 do to get there. What did you parents do to get to this country? Jose, your parents took a
24 bus from Tijuana right? Maximillian your parents came up here from El Salvador right?
25 Now, Chong, how did your parents get here? Heroic stories, treks through Cambodia and
26 Laos and leaving the country and jumped ships and being attacked and beaten and raped
27 and beaten by Thai pirates. Living in refugee camps in Malaysia and Hong Kong. Just
28 horrible stories of heroism. I like to let the Vietnamese kids through the parents and
29 grandparents side tell their story. I don't have anything relevant to tell the kids. I just
30 want to them to know that a lot of people suffered to enjoy life in America.

1 RV: You've made it very clear about how you feel about your experience and
2 your service there in Vietnam. Is there anything that you would change about your
3 service or your experiences there?

4 WM: No, like I said on my questionnaire it wouldn't be in my power to do any
5 changes. Things worked out as well as to be expected there. I enjoyed my time there. It
6 wasn't a life affirming experience or anything like that. I wouldn't trade it. If I had to do
7 it again, I'd do it again. I'm proud of my service I think I made the best of it. I think my
8 unit had a useful role and justified our existence there. Again the advisor relationship,
9 the advisor type of service I think was pretty much unique in U.S. military history. I'm
10 just proud to have been a part of that.

11 RV: What do you think was the most significant thing you learned while you
12 were there for that year?

13 WM: What did I say on my questionnaire? Life isn't fair. I think we already
14 knew that. That's pretty much it.

15 RV: How do you think the war has most affected your life?

16 WM: Oddly enough in an ironic way, it's enabled me since I still speak some
17 Vietnamese it's enabled me to be a better teacher to my Vietnamese American students.
18 Came around full circle.

19 RV: Let's talk about the U.S. government and lessons learned from Vietnam,
20 what do you think went on? Do you think that there were lessons learned from Vietnam
21 or are we still learning them or did we turn our back on that experience?

22 WM: Well, I don't know. I'm not that smart. I don't operate in those high
23 circles. I think one of the big improvements that we've made since then is now the
24 services can plan together and coordinate together and work together instead of being in
25 their own little separate bailiwicks. I think we saw the effects of that just in the last few
26 weeks in Iraq. Everybody worked together and supported each other. In Vietnam it
27 really wasn't that way. The Marines had their thing and the Navy had its thing. The Air
28 Force had its thing. There wasn't a lot of coordination sometime among and between the
29 services. I think that's some truth. I think the lessons basically learned from Vietnam as
30 we saw in the last few weeks was if you're going to get in a war, then get in a war and get
31 in there with full force and get it over with as soon as possible to minimize the loss of life

1 and destruction. End it quickly. I think we learned that lesson. We applied it in Iraq in
2 the last month or so. Other than that I'm not sure that we've learned anything. It's
3 interesting to see these Iraqi soldiers and the ____ in Iraq with these RPG9 self-propelled
4 rocket grenades. Exactly identical to the ones used by the Communists in Vietnam. We
5 still to this day don't have anything in our arsenal like that. Just a simple cheap reliable,
6 low tech, works like a charm. Burns through a foot of reinforced steel or concrete. It's
7 just interesting to see those things. I have pictures of myself holding those. One of my
8 jobs as I said before I was to analyze captured weapons. Those things are still around.
9 Our military still doesn't have any equivalent weapon. We have bazooka type things and
10 wire guided rocket launchers, but they're real high tech and don't work half the time. I
11 just think sooner or later. Wars are won by guys on the ground with good weapons. We
12 have that now. Seeing those rocket launchers just made me think that bad guys still have
13 those things and they still kill a lot of ours. We don't have anything like that to kill them
14 with. We just rely on bombing and heavy artillery and things like that. At least in terms
15 of service coordination I think we've made a lot of progress. Again the will to win, if
16 we're going to fight the war, let's know what we're fighting for right up front. Let's not
17 screw around for years and be unable to articulate why we're there like President
18 Johnson's did or didn't. I think in terms of will to win, fight it to the conclusion, don't
19 quit. Service coordination we have learned some lessons. Also this embedding of
20 reporters thing is pretty good. I think that was a good strategy by the Pentagon. You've
21 got reporters right there with the units unfiltered. There's not a lot of room in there for
22 media skepticism and criticism and backstabbing. The Monday morning quarterback
23 type stuff like we had in Vietnam. In Vietnam the reporters were just out on their own
24 basically. I never saw a reporter in Vietnam, probably a good thing too. But still
25 remember I may have mentioned it before Morley Safer for CBS, somebody asked him.
26 He was in Vietnam as a reporter. If you were with an American patrol and if you for
27 some reason saw a Viet Cong ambush up ahead would you warn the men? He said, "No
28 that's not my job as a reporter". That let me know right away the moral leanings of these
29 guys.

30 RV: We talked about books about Vietnam what about movies on Vietnam?

31 WM: Never seen one.

1 RV: Is that by choice?

2 WM: There have been quite a few movies about Vietnam Apocalypse Now and
3 Platoon and few others. I have purposely not watched any. There's two I thought were
4 pretty straightforward. *Bat 21* with Gene Hackman and *Flight of the Intruder* about some
5 guys trying to bomb a missile installation in Hanoi. Because there's enough cynicism in
6 the movies to make it realistic. All these other big Hollywood Epics especially anything
7 by Oliver Stone I know that most of what's there does not reflect reality. At least not my
8 reality. There's not point in getting myself all worked up about it. I purposely ignored
9 all of that.

10 RV: What do you think about Vietnam today?

11 WM: I don't know. I think the people are starting to make a few stirrings for
12 freedom. I know that Northern Vietnam is a lot more tightly controlled than South
13 Vietnam. I've had quite a few students over the years go back to Vietnam. I've got one
14 there now. When they come back I always ask them. Most of them have never been
15 there before; it's their first trip. They kind of say it's a free wheeling happy-go-lucky
16 place, at least the Southern part of Vietnam is. They were always very entrepreneurial,
17 very commercial, what not. The country's got a lot of potential. The government from
18 time to time the politburo does seem to have a few little twitches of opening things up a
19 little bit. They still arrest Buddhists priests. They still tightly control the population. It's
20 easier to come and go now. Their economy at least at the higher levels is still collectivist.
21 The country's got a lot of potential. They got to look around them and they've got to see
22 other southeast Asian countries just making money hand over fist. Korea, Malaysia,
23 Hong Kong. Well not Hong Kong anymore. Even those little hole in the wall like
24 Brunei. They're getting rich. Thailand is pretty prosperous. Here they are with a per
25 capita income of under \$300.00 still while the rest of Southeast Asia is making a pretty
26 good go of it in the modern world. I think time will kind of loosen things up. I hope.
27 There aren't many Communist societies left. Maybe the dustbin of history will await
28 them also. I have thought about going back from time to time. I know a few guys that
29 have gone back. I don't really have any desire to do that right now.

30 RV: Why not?

1 WM: I don't know. There are no happy memories to see. I'm sure the places
2 where I was have been bulldozed or destroyed or become civilian housing by now. I just
3 don't have any desire to do that. Hard to say why. I don't have any desire.

4 RV: Have you ever been to the Vietnam Memorial in Washington D.C.?

5 WM: Yes, as I mentioned in my questionnaire I was there in July. July 8, 1995.
6 Quite a sobering experience. Except for all the rag tag brigade hanging around. They're
7 everywhere all these Vietnam pretenders hanging around.

8 RV: Were you more keen to checking those guys out?

9 WM: No they were kind of off in the fringes hawking t-shirts and bumper
10 stickers and what not. The Wall itself of course I'd seen many pictures of it, knew what
11 it looked like. Just never seen it in its totality. It's just this big black slash in the ground
12 there. People making rubbing and flags everywhere and pictures. It was just a very
13 sobering experience. Like I said we lost 40 something guys out of my unit when I was
14 there. I did not know any of their names. It was kind of hard to find anybody's name on
15 there since they're chronological. It's just a very sobering experience to be there. I took
16 off my hat and shed a few tears there. Very hard to talk to my wife and kids for a minute.
17 They were very respectful too because they knew how much it meant to me. First the
18 thing was built and said, "This is the monument we're going to have". Basically I thought
19 it was kind of an insulting monument. But when you get there and see the real thing, see
20 the sweep of it, it's a sobering thing. I think it's also inspiring to see it.

21 RV: Well is sir there anything else that you would like to talk about that we have
22 not covered in our series of conversations?

23 WM: Can't think of any things. Pretty comprehensive.

24 RV: We'll go ahead and end the oral history interview now with Mr. Fred
25 Marshall. Thank you very much sir.

26 WM: Ok, I appreciate it.