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The Vietnam Archive  
Oral History Project  
Interview with Gary Smith  
Conducted by Richard Burks Verrone, Ph.D.  
December 4, 2003  
Transcribed by Brooke Tomlin

**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.

1           Richard Verrone: This is Dr. Richard Verrone; I'm conducting an oral history  
2 interview with Mr. Gary Smith. Today is December 4, 2003. It's a little after nine a.m.  
3 Central Standard Time. I'm in Lubbock, Texas at the Special Collections Library  
4 Interview Room on the campus of Texas Tech University and Mr. Smith is in Shawnee,  
5 Kansas. Gary why don't we start with some biographical information on yourself, could  
6 you tell us when you were born and where you were born and a little about growing up.

7           Gary Smith: I was born September 30, 1951 in Noblesville, Indiana in a little  
8 hospital there. Let me see, I grew up in the [Carmel] Indiana area and Florida. The  
9 biggest thing in my growing up was my mother died when I was 11 years old. I was the  
10 fifth sibling, I had three brothers and one sister, two brothers and one sister were born  
11 before me. About 16 years apart and then as, back in those days, accidents do happen and  
12 I think I was the result of an accident because about 15 years go by and then pop up. I'm  
13 born and I have a little brother that is two years younger than me that was born. Anyway,  
14 after my mother died, my father who was quite [old], both of my parents were quite old,  
15 my father was unable to take care of me and my little brother, and my sister ended up  
16 taking care of us with her family.

17           RV: And she was 16 years older than you?

1 GS: She was probably about 18 years older than me and she raised us up until, oh  
2 probably about the time I was 17 or so and then I started living with my brother because  
3 he had a business that I was helping him out with. Then I graduated from high school at  
4 Carmel, Indiana and went on to, putted around a little bit working at a gas station, and  
5 then I was drafted and I joined the day before I was drafted so I could get guaranteed to  
6 be a military policeman.

7 RV: Tell me Gary, you grew up in Noblesville or was it in another town?

8 GS: Well Noblesville was where the hospital was. I was born in Hamilton  
9 County; I guess is the best way to put it, Indiana, which is right north of Indianapolis.  
10 With the exception of about five years, my first five years in Florida and then we came  
11 back and lived in the northern part of Indianapolis and after my mother died I moved in  
12 with my sister and her family in Carmel, Indiana and I was in Carmel until I, which my  
13 mother died when I was 11, stayed in Carmel until I went in the Army.

14 RV: Tell me a little bit about your childhood memories. What do you remember  
15 most? Did you have jobs as a child and what was school like for you?

16 GS: School was pretty much just something that I had to do, it wasn't something I  
17 looked forward to or enjoyed. I didn't really apply myself into doing homework and  
18 things, as a matter of fact, because I didn't apply myself it cost me. My senior you had to  
19 have Government to graduate and one of the requirements for passing Government at  
20 Carmel High School was you had to do a term paper, well I had never done a term paper  
21 and that's hard to believe now. I've gone through college and I've got a bachelor's and  
22 I've done a bunch of term papers but at that time, intimidated and it was also known if  
23 you went to night school at Broadripple, where David Letterman intended high school,  
24 you could pass Government class there without doing any term papers. So I failed out of  
25 Government at Carmel and in the next semester I took Government at Broadripple night  
26 school and got the requirement and was able to graduate, but that's kind of stupidity on  
27 my part, not applying myself. I worked a part-time job after school and that interfered  
28 with studies. You know I wish somebody had said, hey apply yourself and push yourself  
29 and your going to do studies and not mess around and do a lot of work.

30 RV: Now tell me about what you father did for a living.

1 GS: My father was, when I was growing up, was a service station attendant and  
2 maybe a part-time mechanic, I'm not sure how then. That's all I remember him ever  
3 doing until right after my mother died he got a job as a janitor at a high school and he was  
4 working as a custodian until he had, I guess a stroke, and that was maybe a year or two  
5 after mom died and I think he just did part-time jobs, lawn work and things like that.

6 RV: What kind of jobs did you work? You said that you did work after school?

7 GS: Yeah, well now my sister's husband had a tree removal service and a tree  
8 transplanting service too. I work that in the summers and in the winters I did things like  
9 clean up all the wood. All the trees that they removed they would cut them up and split  
10 them and I would do things like stacking the firewood to make sure that they got the  
11 correct size of firewood when they were delivered to a home. After my sister and her  
12 husband split up I started working at a golf course and worked as a ground attendant and  
13 then I worked for my brother. He had an ice cream service that, it was like a Dairy Queen  
14 on wheels, it was called Mr. Softy and I drove a Mr. Softy truck around and then after  
15 that I worked as a filling station attendant until I went in the Army.

16 RV: You mentioned, you talked about your Government class, what were your  
17 favorite subjects in school?

18 GS: History, I would say History was really my favorite. I took wood working, it  
19 was ok; it was not something I was really good at. History, I always had an interest in  
20 what was going on in History.

21 RV: Was that because of any influence in your family was it just something that  
22 you were interested in personally?

23 GS: I think it was just something that I was interested in personally.

24 RV: Tell me about your family and your brothers and sisters. Were you all tight or  
25 what?

26 GS: Obviously David, who is my little brother, we were pretty tight up until after  
27 my mother died and my father had his stroke. My big brother had just moved back to  
28 Indiana, he started taking care of David and I stayed with my sister, which there was a lot  
29 background on that too. My sister and her husband and my little brother David didn't get  
30 along. David was the type or rebellious person. I can say I wasn't comfortable at the time  
31 either but they could only take care of one so I opted to stay with my sister and David

1 went to live with my brother. Saying that, my sister was a wonderful lady, she had four  
2 other kids and her husbands business was not all always thriving, especially if it's not  
3 seasonable, so there were a lot of hard times. Then, my brother, he had been in the Air  
4 Force 11 years and he was a salesman, he was a photographer, a professional  
5 photographer in the Air Force. When he moved back to Indiana he started doing odd jobs,  
6 then he got a job as a photographer at a local tv station and then I have another brother  
7 from the first group. I didn't really get to know him, and he died when I was two years  
8 old. One story has that he committed suicide; another story is that it was just an  
9 accidental gunshot, self-inflicted type of thing. Then, my younger brother is typical; we  
10 were just typical kids.

11 RV: Tell me about military experience in your family. You mentioned that you  
12 had a brother that was in the Air Force, anyone else in your family, uncles, anything?

13 GS: Well, in my youth, Bonnie's husband, ex-husband, was an influence,  
14 especially since I was living with him, he had been in the Marines, but nobody else had  
15 served in the military. Well I take it back, I had an Uncle Billy from my mother's family  
16 who after we left Florida, and I was only about five or six years old when we left Florida.  
17 So I didn't see them at all but I had two uncles and two aunts that had been in the military  
18 during World War II. I didn't know this until way later but my father had worked in the  
19 Civil Defense, going around and air raids and that type of stuff. I don't know of any other  
20 military service involvement with any family members.

21 RV: Now, of course asking I was wondering about that kind of influence on you,  
22 and you going into the military. What role did that play for you?

23 GS: Probably none and then, I don't know, growing up and we lived down on old  
24 farms, matter of fact we lived at, before my mother died, we lived in a farmhouse that  
25 didn't even have an indoor toilet. We always used the out door john and we were poor.  
26 My mother was working as a short order cook and my father was working as a filling  
27 stations attendant so we didn't have to take handouts or anything and at the same time we  
28 sure didn't have a whole lot of frill. Spending our time, we had a sub-division that was  
29 near by and I can remember we played Army. I remember going out in the woods and  
30 just, you know, playing like we were soldiers, playing army for long periods of time. I  
31 think that had a little influence because I had a positive aspect about the military when I

1 went in. I had a buddy, an acquaintance that was going in the Marines and he tried to get  
2 another buddy and I to volunteer to go into the Marines, and we didn't do that.

3 RV: Why not?

4 GS: I don't know, yeah I do, because I didn't see any reason to volunteer. I  
5 figured I was going to do two years, the draft was two years, volunteering was three.

6 RT: What year was this Gary?

7 GS: 1971. My draft number was, I think, something like 12. So this would have  
8 been 1970 and at times when we'd set around drinking beer and playing poker. "Hey you  
9 know you're going in and I got to go in, I am going to go in as a Marine. Why don't you  
10 go on in and join me and Tim, you do the same. We'll all go in on the buddy program."  
11 We weren't that good of buddies that I wanted to do that. But like I say, I saw it, as a  
12 three-year commitment versus a two-year commitment, but it just wasn't the thing to do  
13 back then either.

14 RT: I guess when you were in high school what was going on in South East Asia  
15 was probably headlines and how much did you keep up with what was happening?

16 GS: I really didn't. I didn't do a lot of reading in newspapers back then and tv I  
17 didn't see that much tv because I was working in the evenings after school, if I wasn't  
18 working I was trying to spend time with my girlfriend. I remember things coming up. I  
19 remember when Kent State took place. I felt that, and I think this is wrong now, but at  
20 that time I felt that what I had heard the National Guardsman had reason to believe that  
21 they were being fired on, and that they had reason to use deadly force. I had a girlfriend  
22 who was very strong willed and said no and we got into arguments about that. As far as  
23 Vietnam went, I don't think we discussed it. The funny thing about my Government  
24 class, the one that I flunked out on. Mr. Gunnerson was asking classmates what they  
25 thought about the Vietnam War. I guess some people were giving answers and maybe I  
26 looked like I was in a daze or I wasn't paying attention or something, you know how  
27 teachers call on you at the wrong time. Well he asked me, "What do you think about it?"  
28 I said, "I really don't know what to think about it, but I figure I'll be the one out of this  
29 class that will probably end up there." Now that seems like trying to, you know, pretty  
30 good foresight, prediction, because I think I probably was the one out of my entire class  
31 that went through 'Nam, as far as I know. I know a few others that have been in the

1 military and a couple of them retired Officers so they may have been in 'Nam and I  
2 didn't know it. We had one person out of our class, or out of our school that was killed in  
3 Vietnam but that was back in '66, '67, I think.

4 RT: What years were you in high school?

5 GS: I was in high school from '65, no, that wouldn't be right.

6 RT: You graduated in '71?

7 GS: I graduated in '70.

8 RT: In '70, ok.

9 GS: Started senior year in '69 and it was freshmen through senior so that would  
10 have been '65. Boy that just doesn't sound right.

11 RT: Did you understand what the United States was doing in South East Asia or  
12 were you just kind of laying back from thinking about that stuff at all?

13 GS: I was, you know again, I wouldn't have spent much thought on it and I won't  
14 say I was a typical teenager. I'll just say I'm a teenager that was disposed to the idea, you  
15 know what is going on right now in my world, but I also knew that there was a war over  
16 there and I believed that it was to stop Communism. And I felt that Communism was a  
17 threat to our way of life.

18 RT: Do you remember President Kennedy at all? Do you have memories of him?

19 GS: Oh yeah, yeah I do.

20 RT: What are your memories of him?

21 GS: I remember him being a very charismatic, oh, outgoing type of president.  
22 Very caring type of president and I remember the assassination when it happened.

23 RT: After that, with the assassination and the trauma that caused the nation, did  
24 you find yourself paying attention more to government and politics or this was right  
25 before you go into high school?

26 GS: I really didn't pay attention either way. Now when Kennedy was killed I was  
27 in sixth grade. Again, I remember Johnson assumes office and I remember '68. '68 being  
28 a very traumatic time when we had the riots going on up in Chicago and Bobby Kennedy  
29 getting assassination and I remember Martin Luther King getting assassinated.

30 RT: You were in high school at the time?

31 GS: Yeah.

1 RT: What was the mood there at your high school?

2 GS: I don't, you know I don't remember a mood. I don't remember anything  
3 going on. 9/11 occurred here, I was out in San Francisco at the time, I had to transport a  
4 prisoner back here and we flew out the day before and when it happened we were due to  
5 fly back that day. We got stuck, needless to say for a couple of days and I was really  
6 surprised. I went into bars or places like Outback Steak House to eat that night and there  
7 was nothing. You heard it on the news but you didn't see anything in the people and I  
8 was thinking boy California people are really, you know, I guess they don't care. I got  
9 that opinion and I thought well maybe that's typical for the entire nation except for  
10 what's going on up in the East Coast. It wasn't until I got back here and started talking to  
11 some friends and my wife and I found out there was a whole lot of commotion going on  
12 here, big gas lines and everything else. I'm thinking that's pretty much what was typified  
13 back then, it was just, it wasn't a direct impact on anybody. At Carmel we were a  
14 predominantly a white school so Martin Luther King's assassination really didn't impact,  
15 the Bobby Kennedy, I don't think we were big into politics. Now, I do remember one guy  
16 who was a jock, which this guy was strictly someone that loved to party. But for some  
17 reason he wanted to lead a protest and I think what he was wanting to do was have people  
18 walk out of class. The protest at a neighboring school happened to shut down some of  
19 their classes because of lack of funds or something and he wanted to call attention to it by  
20 Carmel High School walking out. It got nipped in the bud, never happened but that is the  
21 only political thing that I can remember that was involved in school at all.

22 RT: Did you play sports in high school Gary?

23 GS: I tried once, let me see, it was my freshmen year, at that time we called it  
24 Junior High School. I thought freshmen were in high school, but it wasn't, it was in the  
25 Junior High. I tried going out for wrestling and never got to wrestle a match, I was  
26 always second fiddle and I wasn't that good at it anyway but I was trying to get into it. In  
27 my seventh grade, seventh or eighth grade, I went out for football and that was trying to  
28 please my sisters husband who was a big sports enthusiasts. That just didn't work out, I  
29 didn't even understand the fundamentals of football and my size, I didn't make it.  
30 Basically, no, I didn't do any sports.

1           RV: Were there any aspiration by yourself or expectations from your family that  
2        you would go to college after graduating from Carmel?

3           GS: Well my brother, by that time I was living with my brother and he was scared  
4        of me being drafted and he told me, he says, "I'll pay for your college if you go to  
5        college." By what everything I've told you so far, I didn't do that much in the way of  
6        studying or anything so my grades were marginal, at best, and I would have never figured  
7        I could of gotten into college with my type of grades. I failed one or two classes, again  
8        those weren't real important classes but I just didn't feel I had the chance to go. Now, my  
9        brother John, he was concerned about Vietnam, he was concerned about me getting  
10        drafted and having to go. One time he told me, "Gary, I'll pay for your college, go to  
11        college, don't worry about it." I told him, "One, I don't have the grades. Two, I don't  
12        have the desire. Three, you don't have the money." I said, "I don't really think that is the  
13        thing to do, going to college." That was before the draft lottery was announced so I had  
14        no idea whether I was going to have a high number or a low number on the lottery.

15          RV: Were you all scared about the draft or were you kind of indifferent about it?

16          GS: I think we were all concerned. Yeah, it came up in discussions. I remember  
17        one guy who is a year older than me, actually maybe two years older than me, but he  
18        graduated the same time I did and he came up on the lottery and he remarked, "Boy, I  
19        dodged that, I got a real high number." Then I had a buddy who was a year younger than  
20        me and the next lottery around he had a medium number because he ended up going in.  
21        We discussed it, it was something that was in the conversation, and again I don't think we  
22        dwelled on it that much. I knew when the draft lottery was being conducted for my year  
23        group. I remember my girlfriend calling me and telling me, and I remember listening to  
24        the radio as they announced the numbers, and I remember my number being, and I think  
25        it was 12, and I threw up my hands and said, "Well that's it, I'm going." My girlfriend  
26        called me and was in tears about it, you know, yeah we were concerned.

27          RV: So you went ahead and volunteered?

28          GS: I did. Ok, lottery was announced in July I think, got my draft notice thereafter  
29        and I was drafted January 1971. My brother in January had gone to a Recruiter in  
30        Broaddripple. It's in the suburbs of Indianapolis and talked to the Recruiter and the  
31        Recruiter told him, "I can get him into the MP's if that's what he wants to do" and I had

1 desires to be a cop. I had an incident that happened early in my teens where I really  
2 screwed up and, any rate, my brother knew my desires about being a cop and he had  
3 talked to this Recruiter and this Recruiter said, "Oh yeah, I can get him in MP's but it will  
4 cost him another year." John gave me the Recruiter's name and number and it was about  
5 three or four days before I was supposed to be drafted. I went down there and talked to  
6 the Recruiter and he says, "Gary, I can get you in but you're going to have to go into  
7 tomorrow." Which was the day before I was drafted. "Normally before the draft, we  
8 could give you six months deferment and you'll go in six months later." I said, "Well,  
9 I'm already planning on being drafted, that's no big deal." So I went in a day early. He  
10 said, "You get MP-4." I said, "Sounds good to me." One extra year, and again, I think, I  
11 was probably just in a daze that everything was going on and that my brother thought it  
12 was a good idea so that is why I did it.

13 RV: Thinking back today, looking back on it, do you have any regrets about that  
14 decision or did you think you did the right thing?

15 GS: It was the right thing. Yeah, I regret one thing. I regret that I did it to try and  
16 thinking that I was going to stay out of harms way. The macho thing says that I should  
17 have been, go then and enlisted for infantry or something like that, but no. The way my  
18 military career turned out, I had fun the whole time I was in the Army, even in 'Nam and  
19 that's kind of a sad thing too because... (Sorry, I just put my hand on my dog's tail and  
20 he went after my hand like he was going to bite it. He's very jittery; it's my daughter's  
21 dog.) Anyway I don't have any regrets on that. I enjoyed it and it was the right decision.

22 RV: Well tell me about how did your family feel about you, I mean they knew  
23 you were going to be drafted, how did they go about you volunteering and going ahead  
24 and signing up?

25 GS: I think everybody was for it. Nobody wanted me to go in but going to Canada  
26 was not an option and I didn't get in college, so the only option was to go in and  
27 everybody was for it.

28 RV: How did you feel, I mean there is a war going on, you're volunteering and  
29 you did mention earlier that if you were going to be a MP, and then I guess a Sentry Dog  
30 Handler, you knew you would be going to Vietnam or thought you were.

1 GS: Well I didn't know I was going to go to Vietnam until I got to my advanced  
2 individual training at Fort Gordon, Georgia. Volunteering for the Army, I didn't know I  
3 was going to go but I had pretty good idea because I thought everybody that goes into the  
4 Army is going to go to Vietnam.

5 RV: Especially in 1971.

6 GS: Yeah. Now we had heard talk that President Nixon was winding down but the  
7 peace talks were still in his stalemate. Things weren't progressing. I felt that, yeah, there  
8 was a good chance that I was going to go. I was scared. I was scared about going into the  
9 Army, I was scared about Drill Sergeants, I was scared about the unknown, you know,  
10 what are they going to do, beat me to death? I wasn't in good physical shape, hell, I  
11 wasn't athletic, I was slightly overweight, and I smoked a pack and a half of cigarettes a  
12 day. I ate some of the junkiest food there is, and I just knew that the military was going to  
13 not be a fun thing to do.

14 RV: Well go ahead and tell me about Basic Training. You went to Fort Knox in  
15 Kentucky, is that right?

16 GS: Yes. Went to Basic Training, well ok, when we were inducted in  
17 Indianapolis, went through all the tests, got sworn in, and loaded up on a bus and shipped  
18 down to Fort Knox. The bus driver was a Greyhound bus driver and he stopped in  
19 Louisville at a Burger King and I get a kick out of every time I see this Burger King,  
20 because I've been stationed in Fort Knox two times after that. But we stopped at the  
21 Burger King and this was our last chance to get civilian food so you knew everybody was  
22 going to eat and basically we're hungry anyway. So as we're unloading off the bus I was  
23 sitting at a window and I am seeing into the store and I saw one of the server counter  
24 people and I could read her lips and it was "Oh, shit." Watching a 100 people get up, 50  
25 guys get off a bus and I thought that was pretty humorous and then we got down to Fort  
26 Knox.

27 RV: So you think about that server or the counter girl every time you go by there?

28 GS: That was a, well it was traumatic for her at the time, and I think it is  
29 humorous. It's kind of funny that I could read her lips and understand what she was  
30 thinking. I got down for Fort Knox, the Induction Center, probably about 10:00, 11:00.  
31 They got us into a room, gave us a small briefing, offered everybody breakfast, which we

1 had just an hour earlier eaten supper and being fat and lazy and not knowing better we  
2 went ahead and ate again, I'm sure. They took us over to some old wooden barracks and  
3 bedded us down and then we got up the next morning and started getting moved around,  
4 shouted at, and told how to stand in formation, and what our numbers were, and that we  
5 were getting no mail. Starting going through the ring roll of getting uniforms, getting  
6 shots, getting hair-cuts, and started to learn military life.

7           RV: How did you do with the military discipline?

8           GS: At that point, I guess I did ok. I mean I just went along; I went with the flow.  
9 I wasn't one to buck the system even though I think I was paid to ride it. At basic training  
10 you tend to do stupid things; you're busy, you forget things, hell I forgot the combination  
11 of my locker one time at basic training my first night. You're supposed to write a letter that  
12 night, the first night of basic and the drill sergeant said, "Write a letter and nothing more  
13 than just giving them the return address and getting sent out and I'll pick up the letters in  
14 the morning and I expect everybody to have one letter." So I had it in my locker. Well we  
15 formed up in the bay after that morning and I realized I didn't have the letter. I went and  
16 tried to go back and find my locker, I couldn't find my locker. I tried to get the  
17 combination to work and it wouldn't work, ended up I was at the wrong locker, I had to  
18 go down one or two. The Drill Sergeant says give me 100, or no, he said something like,  
19 "Do you know what the floor is for?" I said, "Yes." He says, "Well give me a 100." That  
20 was beyond my recognition, hell I probably was lucky if I could do ten. The same drill  
21 sergeant, I remembered when we got formed up at the Reception Station to march over to  
22 the basic training, I wore wire rimmed glasses, that was just a popular thing to do, my age  
23 group. Nobody had said anything in the Reception Station but as soon as we got into  
24 Basic had a Lieutenant yell at the Drill Sergeant, "You tell that hippie over there to get  
25 those damn glasses off." The Drill Sergeant comes over and says, "Get those damn things  
26 off and keep them off and you'll never wear them again." I hadn't gotten my prescription  
27 glasses yet from the Army so I went for a few weeks without glasses.

28           RV: How could you see?

29           GS: I could. I was able to see fairly good, long distances I wouldn't be able to see  
30 but I could read and everything else. My vision wasn't that bad. I wasn't shooting real  
31 good, I wasn't a good marksman, and again I think even Basic Training, I didn't really

1 try I didn't really apply myself I was just going with the flow. Well it got down to time to  
2 qualify with the M-16 and you had to qualify or you got sent to Remedial Training or you  
3 got sent back to another training unit. I told the Drill Sergeant, I said, "I can not see the  
4 targets and my glasses aren't in yet. What do I do?" The Drill Sergeant says, "You put on  
5 your glasses only to shoot and as soon as you're done shooting you get those damn things  
6 off." So I took my wire rimmed glasses out there, put them on when I was starting to  
7 shoot, and took them off. It was somewhat like Roddy McDowell did in the Longest Day.  
8 I remember he put on his glasses to shoot and then told the Sergeant, "I got one, I got  
9 one."

10 RV: So you qualified?

11 GS: I qualified. I didn't do so well on my PT test in Basic. I couldn't ever pass it.  
12 At that time PT tests were based on, I think, five events. Oh, let me see, it was grenade  
13 throw, run, dodge, jump, a mile and a half run I think, low crawl, and the bars. I was  
14 worthless when it came to throwing. I'm probably more like a girl when it comes to  
15 throwing a grenade. If I made the distance I didn't make the accuracy. I had failed on my  
16 first PT test. They set up a Remedial PT Test the day of our graduation and I had been  
17 practicing with grenades but I hadn't faired that well, I mean it was just; again, I just  
18 didn't do that well. The Drill Sergeant said, "Can you pass the PT test?" I said, "I think  
19 so, I think I can." He says, "Well we're not going to take a chance. Give me your id card,  
20 your dog tags." So I gave him my id card and dog tags and one other guy who could pass  
21 the test took my id card and dog tags to the PT test and took my PT test as I went to the  
22 graduation and set up chairs. I was not allowed to walk across the stage to get my  
23 graduation because I hadn't passed the PT test yet.

24 RV: But on the books you had.

25 GS: Yeah. So somebody, whoever it was, took my PT test for me while I sat in  
26 the gym and watched my classmates graduate.

27 RV: How did that feel, Gary?

28 GS: It felt like shit. At that time, I'm starting to realize, wait a minute I haven't  
29 done what I am supposed to be doing. I hadn't accomplished something.

30 RV: Did that fire up to do better in the future or...

1 GS: No, not really. Not at that time. I didn't start really feeling like I was needing  
2 to do better and excel until probably, I was a Staff Sergeant by then, actually probably  
3 after I met Sandy. I really started getting fired up about having, you know, make  
4 standards and meet the requirements and everything. I was sitting by, I was doing, and I  
5 made rank by getting by. I mean in my books I was getting by, in other people's books I  
6 don't know, maybe I was that good, I don't know.

7 RV: Tell me about your Drill Sergeants in Basic. Were the Vietnam Veterans?

8 GS: You know I don't remember what his uniform, I'm sure he was. His name  
9 was Drill Sergeant Johnson and he's a, I think a Staff Sergeant, well he was either a Staff  
10 Sergeant or Sergeant First Class, I can't remember now. Hard charging, no nonsense type  
11 of guy who would run you ragged and then didn't tolerate anything. I remember talking  
12 to him about doing push-ups and about doing the low crawl and he gave me Remedial on  
13 that, showing me how to do the low crawl to be able to pass the test. He was a, I don't  
14 remember what else I could tell you. Physically he was a white guy who stood about  
15 5'11, 6, probably 5'11, 5'10, probably about a 150 pounds, lean, mean fighting machine  
16 type of guy.

17 RV: Did they emphasize training for Vietnam, or was that talked about much?

18 GS: Yeah, it was. Well all our Cadences were referred to Vietnam in some way or  
19 another. Anytime that they were trying to instill in you that you needed to know  
20 something it was not only for a test purposes but for survival in Vietnam. Yeah, it was  
21 talked about a lot.

22 RV: Did any of that help you when you did get to Vietnam? Did you think back to  
23 your basic or was it of training?

24 GS: You know, I don't think there was too much in Basic Training that I used in  
25 Vietnam because one; I never fired a shot so my marksmanship didn't apply. I wasn't  
26 captured so I didn't have to use survival intervention. I didn't have to worry about the  
27 Geneva Convention; there was no NBC, Nuclear Biological Chemical, that I had to worry  
28 about and those were the main areas that I remember, and then PT. There was no PT,  
29 organized PT in Vietnam. No, I don't think I used anything in basic training that I can say  
30 I would rely on in Vietnam.

1           RV: Now at the end of basic were you informed that you would be going to MP  
2 advanced training or was this something that you had to request?

3           GS: Well this, I had been guaranteed it. It was written, oh let me see, probably  
4 about two or three weeks before basic training was completed we got orders telling us  
5 where we were going next. It was in the orders, per contract or per agreement, it was said  
6 I was going to Military Police School in Fort Gordon, Georgia.

7           RV: How did you feel about that? Were you excited about doing that?

8           GS: I'm not sure. I think at the time I was more concerned about trying to get  
9 through Basic Training and get accomplished those things. I guess I was looking forward  
10 to it, but the way I was looking at it was, oh great, another eight weeks of harassment,  
11 and being controlled, and no freedom, and things like that.

12           RV: Well what was Fort Gordon like?

13           GS: Let me give you something about Basic Training. When we got into Basic  
14 Training that night that we were told to write the letters and everything. Up to the time of  
15 that I had heard about the New Volunteer Army that General Abrams, the Chief of Staff,  
16 the Army Chief of Staff was trying to get, and it sounds like the military was trying to be  
17 a friendlier, kinder, organization. When we got into Basic Training the Drill Sergeant  
18 says, "I'm sure you've all heard about General Abrams new program of the friendlier,  
19 kinder Army." He says, "It ain't here." You could of just heard a whole bunch of people  
20 groan, I mean we knew we were in deep trouble now, because we had the meanest Drill  
21 Sergeant in the world and we had just found out that the whole world had dropped out  
22 because whatever General Abrams had talked about wasn't here.

23           RV: Did you ever find it later?

24           GS: Yeah, I don't know if we did or not. Fort Gordon, the Drill Sergeants were  
25 more laid back, realized that they were more human, matter of fact, I remember the Drill  
26 Sergeants. Some of the Cadre had a second job of cleaning class rooms and I don't know  
27 how that came up, maybe it was told to us that if you need to pick up after yourselves  
28 don't leave anything laying around because we have to clean up these classrooms after  
29 your done or we have people that do that and it was, I knew that any rate that Cadre had a  
30 second job and the job was being a janitorial cleaning up classrooms. So that kind of gave  
31 me a thing of well hey these people are doing some non-skilled work here and this type

1 of thing. They didn't yell at you as much. We were allowed to go to the PX. I mean in  
2 Basic Training I think I saw the PX once or twice. I do remember getting a pass to spend  
3 a weekend with my girlfriend and my brother and his wife when they came to visit. We  
4 were allowed to go places, leave on weekends, didn't have to be back until Monday  
5 morning for training so we had more freedom.

6 RV: Can you describe the training, Gary? What exactly did you go through at  
7 Military Police?

8 GS: It was law enforcement primarily. We were learning how to operate radios,  
9 how to talk on the radio's, we were taught how to use ten series, we were trained in un-  
10 armed tactics, we were trained in how to use what they call the MP Club. We were  
11 trained on side arms, the 45. We did some bivouac training; field training and we still did  
12 some PT, if I remember right. I just don't remember that much PT being done, not like  
13 basic training. It was a lot of classroom training, learning military regulations, military  
14 law, and with emphasis on Vietnam, again.

15 RV: What kind of emphasis did they put on Vietnam?

16 GS: That you would be involved in this. You would have to use this if you went  
17 to Vietnam. I can't remember exactly when but it was only a couple weeks into the MP  
18 school that they gave us a program on confinement, the dog school, and one other. I can't  
19 remember what it was; I want to say Investigations but that doesn't sound right. Any rate,  
20 they were looking for volunteers to go into confinement or dog school and the other one.  
21 The selling point for me on the dog school was, "Listen guys, we don't think very many  
22 of you are going to Vietnam out of this class, if any, but if you sign up for dog school that  
23 is a guarantee that you're going to 'Nam, and if you go to 'Nam, only one Dog Handler  
24 has ever been killed in Vietnam in the line of duty. To me, that was the selling point.  
25 Again, I'm not real brave about this and you know hey the chances of only one guy  
26 getting killed, that was pretty good odds. So I volunteered for dog school, which then I  
27 knew my chances of going to Vietnam are real good now. When they talked about things,  
28 they talked about guard duty, basic and AIT and they said, "Old guys want to have a  
29 newbie with them when they're on guard duty because a newbie will stay awake. An old  
30 guy will just go to sleep. Again, taking things lightly. Our training was just basically

1 geared for law enforcement with very little on combat operations and none on Sentry  
2 Dogs because that would come later on.

3 RV: Now, did you want to go to Vietnam knowing that if you volunteered for dog  
4 school that you would go?

5 GS: No, I did not want to go to Vietnam. I had no desire to do any travel or  
6 anything. If I could have stayed in Carmel, Indiana I would have been happy.

7 RV: So why then volunteer for one of those...

8 GS: Why, because the odds were better with only one handler being killed. They  
9 didn't tell us how many MP's have been killed in action but I was sure that it was more  
10 than one and I figured odds are pretty damn good. Survival rate if only one handler had  
11 been killed.

12 RV: I thought that you had said they said that most of you in that MP school there  
13 would not be going to Vietnam.

14 GS: That's right, but that was no guarantee either and again you look at your  
15 odds. It's like I said in government class, you know, well out of all the class I'll probably  
16 be the one to go. At that time I'm thinking, hey if only one person goes to Vietnam as a  
17 MP, guess what, it will probably be me so maybe I better go ahead and volunteer for this  
18 class.

19 RV: It's kind of like when you volunteer to actually go into the service instead of  
20 being drafted, you were taking control of your destiny to an extent.

21 GS: But I wasn't looking at it that way, I was looking at it the easy way.

22 RV: Is there anything else that you would like to tell us about Military Police  
23 Training?

24 GS: Nothing I can think of. I've been through two academies, Police Academies,  
25 and reflecting back on my Military Police Academy, they were pretty much  
26 noncomparable. I mean the same type of stuff. Obviously in police academies they're not  
27 going to ram rod you and try to control a big portion of your life, they do control some.  
28 Pretty much they're all about the same, looking back.

29 RV: How much did the MP Training prepare you for your duty in Vietnam?

30 GS: I would say hardly, probably about a little, and that was only the bivouac, the  
31 field operations, and things like that. As far as duty, none. As far as weapons, none. You

1 know Basic Training prepared me for cleaning my weapon and taking care of my body  
2 and things like that. Again, I didn't use, in Vietnam, anything. I was a Dog Handler and I  
3 got my training as a Dog Handler in Okinawa. That's where primarily everything I did in  
4 Vietnam that I learned later in Okinawa.

5 RV: Did you have any time in between Fort Gordon and shipping out to Japan?

6 GS: Well we had to go to a week Orientation's class at Fort Gordon after we  
7 graduated. That was one bummer, we were a week later going on leave, but we went  
8 through a week. It was interesting, it was a good Orientation, didn't get to handle the  
9 dogs, we just got to see what the dogs could do. If I remember right there was some down  
10 time because boy, I ended up going in and seeing the Company Commander once or  
11 twice about something and, hell, in Basic and AIT you never go. Hell, I never even knew  
12 who the Company Commander, I knew who he was because the chain of command, but  
13 you had no business seeing a Company Commander. That's way above, that's lots above  
14 my expectations so I'm starting to see a more humanistic side of the military. That week  
15 it was Orientation, I met Dog Handlers who were tracker dogs and found out somebody  
16 else has got a whole lot harder life than the measly old Sentry Dog Handler that we were  
17 going to have in Vietnam. Then I went on leave. Took, I think something like 26 days or  
18 something like that leave and then I had to report into Oakland California for shipment  
19 over to Vietnam.

20 RV: What did your family feel about this? Do you remember their thoughts  
21 before you left?

22 GS: Yeah. A whole lot of being scared for me, apprehension, a lot of tears, and a  
23 lot of not talking about it until the last day when I flew out.

24 RV: Ok, so you waited to talk about it?

25 GS: Well there wasn't a whole lot to talk about. The girlfriend probably should  
26 have been discussing marriage plans then, in hindsight now, that wasn't in order. Wasn't  
27 talking too much about future or anything. It was just one day at a time, having fun; it  
28 was like being on vacation. I wasn't really trying to prepare on anything. I knew that on a  
29 certain day, it was a Sunday, I was going to jump on an airplane and head for California,  
30 and so we didn't talk about it. I'm sure with my girlfriend, I probably mentioned things, I

1 don't know maybe, talked about what happens if I get hurt or killed, something like that.  
2 I don't think we dwelled on it.

3 RV: How about your brothers and sisters?

4 GS: Well my brothers and sisters I really didn't spend a whole lot of time talking  
5 to them, I didn't spend a whole lot of time with them anyway. This was during the  
6 summer, my girlfriend was out of school, and so I probably spent a lot of time with her or  
7 with my buddies, so kind of typical teen-age stuff.

8 RV: Well Gary, why don't we take a break for a moment?

9 GS: Ok.

10 RV: Ok Gary why don't we pick up with, you said you flew out of Oakland to get  
11 to Okinawa, is that correct?

12 GS: Yeah.

13 RV: What do you remember about that flight over the Pacific?

14 GS: Well let me jump back and let me tell you about my flight.

15 RV: Sure.

16 GS: Never been in Kansas City in my life, I remember stopping off in Kansas  
17 City and now I am living here. Two, the first time I ever had a beer served to me where I  
18 wasn't asked age and I didn't feel like I was lying about anything. I actually got to drink  
19 a beer on the flight. I remember it was Olympia.

20 RV: This is the flight from Kansas City to Oakland?

21 GS: Well it was from Indianapolis to Oakland and by in the stop. It was neat, I'm  
22 thinking, I'm old.

23 RV: You're in uniform right?

24 GS: Yeah I was in uniform. At that time that was required travel, unlike now.  
25 Then we got into Oakland. I remember Oakland fighting with the Cadre and, you know,  
26 you get put on details and one of the details is KP. One of the big things about being a  
27 Dog Handler, promising things was that, you won't have to pull KP because your  
28 handling fur bearing animals and that's unsanitary when it comes to handling food and  
29 things. Went to Oakland they say, "Well you're on KP." Several of us Dog Handlers,  
30 there was a whole group of us said, "No, we can't pull KP." That got to be a little  
31 discussion and we lost. We were told we would be on KP. After checking everything they

1 says, "Guys you haven't handled a dog for over a month, you've been on leave. Forget it,  
2 you're on KP." So we pulled KP.

3 RV: This is in Oakland?

4 GS: My first time in California I froze my butt off. I remember how foggy it was,  
5 cold in the mornings, and I remember the train yards in the background. Several years  
6 later I went back to Oakland to pick up a prisoner and there is nothing there in the way is  
7 it. I didn't see Oakland Army Depot anywhere, but it was cold in San Francisco that time  
8 we went. I froze that afternoon when we went into San Francisco. At the Oakland we  
9 were put in quarantine the night before we were suppose to fly. Now we were going to fly  
10 to Okinawa for our dog school so we weren't going directly to Vietnam. I remember a  
11 guy and somebody that was probably more mature, older than us, and yet probably every  
12 bit as immature as we were was talking to one of our guys who was a very religious,  
13 straight laced, no he probably didn't ever do anything sinful, is what I am trying to say.  
14 Somewhere it came up that this guy and his name was, Ford. So he got married while he  
15 was on leave. "Did you do it?" I don't know what kind of stupid question that would be,  
16 you know, every married couple does it right, but for some reason that was important and  
17 when you're sitting in a large warehouse with nothing but beds stacked three high, I think  
18 they were three high, and nothing else to do but lay on your bed and talk to the other guys  
19 waiting to ship out like you, conversations come up like that. If you ever saw the *Longest*  
20 *Day* I think there is a scene in there, it kind of typifies that. Well any rate, Ford says, "No,  
21 we didn't have time." Obviously everybody was just struck, "What do you mean you  
22 didn't have time?" That was a joke and ended up, I don't mean joke, when I say joke I  
23 mean, I'm sure he was being quite honest. He was a quiet, I don't know, timid individual.  
24 We went to Okinawa and this gentleman, several times was, tried to get him drunk by  
25 (mumble) and get him laid, I don't know the delicate term is today and it never worked  
26 out. Got him drunk a couple of times but he wasn't going to lose his virtue and more  
27 power to him. I wish I'd been more like him, now retrospect. That was the flight at the  
28 Repo Depot going to Okinawa. It really was non eventful, it was just a flight and it was  
29 over the ocean. That was kind of scary for us all, especially this guy that never flown but  
30 maybe once or twice. I think we landed in Guam before and realized it was hot and then  
31 when we got to Okinawa it was even hotter. They had us parked on the tarmac for a long

1 time before they unloaded us and the Dog Handlers were getting off and then everybody  
2 else was going to 'Nam. It was, I mean, very suffering hot and finally they got the door  
3 open and a breeze was starting to blow in a little bit. That helped a little but not much and  
4 then I just remember it being hot the rest of the time.

5 RV: You said that the plane was continuing on to Vietnam.

6 GS: Yeah.

7 RV: What was the mood like on that plane? Do you remember about the guys  
8 who were actually going into country?

9 GS: No, not really, I don't think we talked. Once we got on that plane I don't  
10 think we talked that much, unlike the flight out of 'Nam. I just don't think we did much  
11 talking or discussing. I don't know; I'm sure it was small talk. We were probably  
12 squeezed in as Sardines. I was used to the idea of military; don't move around. I was  
13 probably ready to raise my hand, I don't even remember asking for a soda and I don't  
14 know if the Stewardess were doing things like that or not. I don't think there was a whole  
15 lot eventful to it, on our part, and I don't remember the guys that were going on to 'Nam,  
16 except for that one that was teasing one of our guys.

17 RV: Well tell me about Okinawa. What was it like?

18 GS: Okinawa is, well it was an island in the ocean. It's pretty obviously saying  
19 that but, I mean, it was everything I pictured an island would be that was civilized and  
20 settled. There were big cities, the base was the typical military barracks, open base, we  
21 had a PX, we had a snack bar, we had the Service Club, the EM Club, and things like  
22 that, training, the school kennels were pretty much what I would expect. In Okinawa we  
23 lived in Sukiran, which I just described, the barracks, and the PX, and the EM Club and  
24 that was typical. We were along the ocean, one of the prettiest sunsets I ever saw was in  
25 Okinawa one night when the sun was going down. We had to go through water rationing  
26 and they shut down the water, I think it was something like two days and on for four  
27 hours or something like that. We had 55 gallon barrels in the restrooms then the latrines  
28 and we used dog pans, our food dog pans from the kennel to flush the toilets. Every time  
29 you had solid waste you grab a pan of water and you pour it in the stool so it will flush  
30 down.

31 RV: And Gary this is in June 1971, is that correct?

1 GS: June 1971. I think water rationing started something like end of June, early  
2 July. It sure lasted a long time and it never stopped until a typhoon came in and that was  
3 typical, that was normal weather. We didn't have a typhoon come through. We were  
4 nasty, smelling, individuals. The funny thing about the water rationing for us was we  
5 went, they closed the EM Club, which was a dumb mistake, I think. They said everybody  
6 could go to the NCO Club. The NCO Club was a very pretty, ornate place, they had  
7 chandeliers which I had never seen a chandelier in my life. They had chandeliers hanging  
8 from the ceiling and we went up there. The usual thing was, you went to the EM Club,  
9 you got drunk, then you called a taxi down to Koza B-C Street, and that's where you  
10 went and chased after prostitutes and also drank a little bit more. When they said we  
11 could go to the NCO Club we went and we were ordering champagne and I don't think  
12 anyone of us really cared to drink champagne, it just wasn't the choice drink, but we were  
13 ordering champagne for the cork bottles and we would shake up the bottle until the cork  
14 popped and aim them at the chandeliers. (Laughter) Oh we were some raunchy people  
15 and they finally got wise to that and they quit giving us champagne bottles with the cork  
16 in it. They would give us the champagne bottles with the cork out of it. So, lost interest in  
17 that real quick and then we probably went downtown. I remember being up in, I was up  
18 on the third floor of the barracks and you had windows open at night because it was so  
19 hot. Guys were firing, had slingshots, they had just come back from Koza and we had to  
20 get up at three o'clock in the morning to go to work. I remember getting peppered with, I  
21 don't know if you know what cracker balls are, but it's a form of fireworks that when  
22 they impact against something, a little ball, a hard ball, when they impact against  
23 something, they explode. Guys were shooting them with slingshots and they must have  
24 been some pretty damn good shots because they were getting through the window on the  
25 third floor and hitting the ceiling and peppering us in our bed. I was on the top bunk so I  
26 was getting peppered; I remember that, I couldn't figure out where it was coming from  
27 until after we woke up and then somebody told us what was going on.

28 RV: Did you retaliate?

29 GS: No, I don't think so. I don't even know if we knew who it was.

30 RV: Gary, let me ask you real quick. You're in Okinawa from June to August '71,  
31 is that correct?

1 GS: Right.

2 RV: Go ahead, I'm sorry.

3 GS: That was just a side note. We got up at three o'clock in the morning. We  
4 went to Tory Station for breakfast, which was a naval station and had breakfast and then  
5 we went out to the kennels and I think we were at the kennels by six o'clock in the  
6 morning. We would get our dogs and we would go out, it would be light by then, and we  
7 would start working with the dogs. We had to do it early enough in the morning because  
8 by noon the dogs would start overheating and we couldn't have that. Everything we did,  
9 tour of duty and everything else was for the dogs, it was not for the humans.

10 RV: Now were you assigned a specific dog at this time?

11 GS: I was. I had a dog named Frisky who was all black, which was kind of  
12 different. It was kind of funny; I ended up with another all black dog when I went to  
13 Vietnam.

14 RV: So Frisky was just your training dog.

15 GS: Was my training dog.

16 RV: Was he a German Shepherd?

17 GS: Yes, he was.

18 RV: Was that the dog of choice?

19 GS: You had German Shepherds and I think they used a few Dobermans but  
20 German Shepherds for their sense of smell, hearing, and able to adapt to different  
21 environments was the dog of choice. You go through training and your dog had to go on  
22 attacks and we did different stages of training. At first, you had to do the Drill Ceremony;  
23 you had put him through obstacle course, PT, things like that. Then as time progressed,  
24 you got into where they would answer and go searching and attacking the agitator. Each  
25 handler had to pull his turn as agitator and one time I was agitator. One of the dogs was  
26 well known for climbing the sleeve, in other words, you would feed him the sleeve and the  
27 sleeve had a big cuff around at the end where your wrist is and that's where you wanted  
28 the dog to hit because that's the most padding. Nothing is going to happen to you if that  
29 works, if you do it right. Nina, I think it was Nina, was known for climbing the sleeve  
30 and getting one handler per cycle according to the instructors. The instructors always told  
31 us that and I agitated one day and had Nina. Nina climbed the sleeve and nailed me on

1 my arm above the wrap. I ended up having to go in and get a Tetanus shot and get the  
2 puncture cleaned out. Dog food, we fed the dogs real horsemeat, they were out of cans. I  
3 remember the Vet Tech use to eat horsemeat and he joked, you know, try to get us all to  
4 do the same thing, I never would. I had no desire to eat horsemeat.

5 RV: Was that kind of a rite of passage?

6 GS: No, I don't think so. That was just something that one Vet Tech did trying to  
7 shame other people into doing and I don't think anybody else did it. It's curious you  
8 mention a rite of passage; I don't think we ever did anything as a rite of passage. Over in  
9 Vietnam we had different stages of being in country, but I encountered later on some Dog  
10 Handlers that did something really weird or so it was told to me and I never had proof of  
11 it or I would have had to turn it in as a crime, but that's another story.

12 RV: Can you talk about that now or do you want to...

13 GS: Yeah, I can talk about it now. The Dog Handler's in Germany, I was at a  
14 physical security site. We guarded a nuclear storage site. We had Sentry Dog Handlers.  
15 Now, their dogs were different from ours and somebody told me when I told them I was  
16 Sentry Dog Handler from Vietnam, said, "Damn, you were a Dog Handler when dogs  
17 were really dogs." What he meant was, they controlled their dogs. They could command  
18 them out; they could stop them from attacking, things like that. They had all the senses  
19 but when it came to attacking they actually had voice command. We had no voice  
20 command on the dogs attacking. Once they hit or once they went for the scent and you let  
21 them go, that's it, they're gone. When you got to the agitator and had to get the dog off  
22 the agitator you literally had to choke them out. You grabbed the dog by the throat and  
23 you had to run your hand around his throat from sideways, in other words stand as close  
24 and out of his eyesight as you can because if he saw your hand going for his throat, he  
25 was going to probably go for your hand. You choked the dog out and pulled him off,  
26 holding onto his collar. At any rate, these Dog Handlers in Germany, one of them said  
27 that they had, and I can't believe it, I can't believe anybody does this stuff, but had a horn  
28 and they were putting it up people's anus, as a right of passage or something.

29 RV: Up the human?

30 GS: Yeah.

31 RV: Ok.

1           RV: You hear some sick stuff when I'm in the job I'm in now in jail but that was  
2 the sickest thing I ever heard. I had mentioned it to the Sergeant that was in charge and he  
3 assured me that he had heard it and investigated it, and found it wasn't true. You know it  
4 was weird that anybody would even think something like that.

5           RV: So back to Okinawa.

6           RV: Yeah, Okinawa, there was no rite of passage. I think I kind of felt a little  
7 better that I got bit by Nina. Here I was, the one handler out of the cycle that got bit, you  
8 know, that was kind of a neat thing. At the time they're treating the wound and giving me  
9 the Tetanus shot I'm sure I didn't think that it was so neat.

10          RV: How many people were in your unit Gary?

11          GS: In the dog school, I would say there were probably about 50, probably about  
12 a platoon size. We trained on an old Japanese Air Field and even then you had to be leery  
13 of going across munitions. It was old, I want to say gravel, it may have been concrete, I  
14 don't know, but it was an old Japanese Air Field. All the shrubs and bushes were growing  
15 up around it. During the water rationing it was hard to clean the kennels. You had to  
16 scrap up the feces and bucket it and you really, I think we just had pails of water and we  
17 would scrub the floors and then rinse it down. Where as, when you had water all you had  
18 to do was use the high-powered hose and brush everything down into the gutter and then  
19 it would go down into the septic system. We finished about noon each day and during  
20 water rationing we were some of the dirtiest and smelliest people, especially if we had  
21 done dipping the dogs. Once a month you had to dip the dogs for fleas and ticks and there  
22 is no way you can, your supposed to pick up your dog, wrap your arms around his legs  
23 and everything and cradle him, and you get to the big tank, it's a concrete tank and when  
24 you put him in there, if you put him in there legs first, he's going to jump out before he  
25 even gets everything on him;. But if you turn him upside down, basically roll him into it,  
26 he's going to get completely immersed. Now you put junk in his eyes and junk in his, it  
27 was kind of junky stuff in his ears to keep the ears and the eyes cleaned out from the dip.

28          RV: What was it that you dipped the dog with?

29          GS: It was a foul smelling, I don't know what it was, and it was very foul  
30 smelling. Smelled kind of like the stuff that, have you ever seen them smoke a  
31 neighborhood for mosquitoes?

1 RV: Yes.

2 GS: Ok, smells kind of like that and it was a white creamy watery liquid. It was  
3 some kind of chemical mixed in water.

4 RV: I'm sure the dogs didn't enjoy that very much.

5 GS: No, they didn't. You had to hang on the leash, and the leash is only six feet  
6 long so when they come running out they obviously they do everything just like a dog  
7 does, shake from head to tail. They spray you so you end up getting a lot of that dip on  
8 you. Well if you can't take a bath or a shower but once every three days, and only if you  
9 happen to be in the barracks at the time the water was turned on. That was the other thing,  
10 that didn't necessarily happen when you were in the barracks at that time. So we were  
11 pretty smelly. I remember one time we went to Tory Station for lunch and we always  
12 went to Tory Station. We finished working and went to Tori Station for lunch and then  
13 we went back to the airfield just to do kennel clean up or just to trudge around for a little  
14 while, I think to get the necessary hours in so people wouldn't think we were just doing  
15 four hours of work or something. We went up to Tory Station and I was in the front  
16 deuce in a half, got out first, got up to the end of line, waiting to go into the Mess Hall  
17 and I overheard two guys talking in front of me saying, you got to remember we were in  
18 a different uniform. We were in what was the standard OD green, jungle fatigues, you  
19 know, the side cargo pockets, the shirts hung outside the beltline, basically a BDU  
20 uniform. I don't know what the military wears now, what we call BDU uniform, only in  
21 OD green. Everybody else was wearing the standard OD green fatigue uniform which  
22 was a, I don't know what you would call it, a pressed uniform that sits inside your  
23 beltline and totally different material. It's pretty obvious we're a different type of people  
24 and I over heard these two guys saying, one asks, "Who's those guys jumping out of the  
25 trucks?" The other guy goes, "Oh shit, it's the Dog Handlers, let's go, let's get out of  
26 here. Those guys smell terrible." We got into the Mess Hall and I noticed the Mess Hall  
27 started clearing out as we got in there. I mean they, literally people were leaving just to,  
28 you know, get away from us.

29 RV: It's almost like your Burger King incident, the "oh shit", comes back again.

30 GS: Yeah, basically.

1           RV: Gary, let me ask you about Frisky and being around the dog and dogs in  
2 general. Had you been around dogs growing up?

3           GS: I had. I'm going to change to a cordless phone for a moment.

4           RV: Go right ahead.

5           GS: I had been with Frisky, with dogs all my life off and on. We had a dog when I  
6 was a kid and then my sister had dogs, a hunting dog. Then my brother, when I started  
7 living with him had a, I'm not sure what, no it was a German Shepherd. Well at any rate,  
8 I had been around the dogs quite a bit, as a matter of fact I had a funny story about that  
9 myself. When I got back from Vietnam. (I'm trying to shut off this cordless phone and it  
10 won't shut off. There it goes) I got home from Vietnam, my brother and his wife were not  
11 at the airport to greet me and so my natural thing was I want to go to John's house and  
12 say hi to them. I had lived there just before going to the Army so I'd run in the door, I  
13 didn't even knock, I didn't even think anything about it. I opened the door probably two  
14 feet and was ready to walk in and I go, "Oh shit, Reno." I think that was the dog's name  
15 and I closed the door and the door got nailed by Reno, the German Shepherd. I mean he  
16 was an aggressive dog and it just dawned on me just after I almost got nailed, almost dog  
17 bite by him, humorous. Yeah I had been around dogs off and on my whole life.

18           RV: Ok, so when you were training in Okinawa, then I guess in Vietnam, you felt  
19 relatively comfortable around them?

20           GS: You know I felt comfortable with them after I got used to Frisky and then  
21 with Rolf, but I tell you truthfully the first time going in on Frisky, I mean we're talking  
22 about German Shepherd's that everybody talked about how aggressive they were. How  
23 much power they have in their jaws, how they will not accept anybody else but their  
24 handler and how they have been known to turn on their handlers at different times. When  
25 you go into the cage the first time to put a choke chain and leash on them, you have no  
26 idea what to expect. You don't know if that son of a gun is going to turn on you. They tell  
27 you that if the dogs go without a handler for a few weeks, they'll be more than happy to  
28 get out and go with anybody, but again, you just don't know. I can't think of one handler  
29 ever getting bit the first time he went in on a dog, I don't think it ever occurred. Once we  
30 got him out, then you had a pretty good idea that you were ok, that everything was going  
31 to be good to go.

1 RV: How were you and Frisky together?

2 GS: We were fine. Frisky was not that aggressive of a dog. Frisky would not  
3 accept anybody else once I took him out. I wouldn't say he was overly aggressive. He  
4 was moderately aggressive. He accepted me, I felt comfortable to where I could have sat  
5 down and sat on the ground lower than him or you know while he is sitting up or standing  
6 and wouldn't had fear that he was going to turn on me. There are dogs, I know a couple  
7 of dogs in Vietnam that turned on their handlers and handlers got bite. We were taught a  
8 way to take the fight out of the dog if he did ever turn on you.

9 RV: How is that?

10 GS: You really pick them up by the leash and get his front paws off the ground  
11 and start going around in a circle swinging him and then eventually you have swinging  
12 up in the, flying basically while your turning around in a circle and then throwing him on  
13 the ground. It sounds like that is a harsh thing. I've got my daughter's dogs here and Rex  
14 is a aggressive dog, and I've been bit by Rex numerous times, I've realized that if I had a  
15 leash on him I probably would have done something close to that. Probably not as harsh  
16 as throwing them on the ground, but I would have definitely held him up until he quit  
17 wanting to bite me.

18 RV: You said you were relatively small stature; did you have problems with the  
19 strength of doing things like that?

20 GS: Well I never had to swing a dog, I never had a dog turn on me, and both my  
21 dogs that I had, and even the ones that I had in Korea were medium sized dogs, so I  
22 didn't have a problem with it. I weighted 150, probably about 150 pounds then and  
23 Frisky we probably about a 70 pound dog. And again he wasn't aggressive so I didn't  
24 have a problem with that. I know some guys that had a 120, 130 pound dog, I mean,  
25 that's a big, damn, dog.

26 RV: That is a big dog. Were you ever bitten besides Nina?

27 GS: Yeah I was bitten over in 'Nam close to my end of my tour doing something  
28 stupid that we shouldn't been doing. I had never turned Rolf lose. I always believed in the  
29 leash, keeping him on the leash. I had a partner who you met down town at reunion  
30 named Tex and Tex was one that didn't exactly go by rules all the time and he would let  
31 his dog, I want to say it's Sampson, not sure what his dog's was

1 RV: I think I remember talking to him and that was his dog's name.

2 GS: Ok. He would release Sampson to go out and take a break and things. We  
3 were out in a wide area. I mean it was sandy; there was no vegetation. If I remember right  
4 it was POL dump so it was not unsafe. Not the smartest thing to do but it was totally  
5 unsafe, totally unsafe. Nobody was in the area other than Rolf and I and Tex. I said well  
6 hell I'll send Rolf off and I did and I says I'm going to hide from Rolf and see if he'll  
7 come back to me. Why in the hell I did that, I don't know but I'm laying down in the  
8 sand, face down and I hear a dog patter feet coming toward me and I'm thinking oh it's  
9 Rolf and then I realize it's coming from the wrong direction.

10 RV: It's Sampson.

11 GS: And I'm not Sampson's friend because I'm not his handler. I just laid there.  
12 One of the things they taught you in dog school was you're not a Dog Handler until  
13 you've been peed on or bitten. Well the philosophy there is a dog does not see you unless  
14 he sees movement, that's how he focuses and if you lay perfectly still or stand perfectly  
15 still, we were told if you ever hear the words loose dog you stand perfectly still, don't  
16 move so the handler gets his dog back. I'm laying there, I hear Sampson and he's by my  
17 ear and then I hear a growl, well I put my hand up and I got my hand in his jaw. One of  
18 the other things we're told about controlling a dog is to grab his lower jaw and they can't  
19 bite you than as long as you have control over his lower jaw. I didn't have control of the  
20 lower jaw, I had the upper jaw, my thumb got bit so I had to go in and explain that to a  
21 medic about how I got dog bit. It wasn't anything serious I think it just tore the webbing  
22 between my thumb and my forefinger but the thing about being peed on or dog bit, they  
23 said that if a dog can't focus on you, more than likely he'll go up to you and pee on you  
24 because he doesn't realize your anything but, you know, a tree. We had several practical  
25 pranksters and it happened numerous times in the kennels, to a point that is almost like a  
26 false alarm with a cop, you know you get so use to it that you don't even react. People  
27 would lose a dog and then everybody would freeze and then somebody would sleep up  
28 behind you, and grab your thigh, no calf, with his hand and then growl at the same time.  
29 That puts a little fear into you and you're thinking oh shit I'm dead meat now and it's just  
30 a person that is doing it, did that as practical joke a few times, not a cool thing.

1           RV: Gary, how do they pick the dog and assign the dog? Was it according to your  
2 size or was better experience?

3           GS: You know what, I really don't know; I doubt that very much that they did it  
4 by size or anything. Most of the dogs, like I mentioned, we had a couple of really big  
5 dogs and I noticed...In Vietnam one of our biggest guys, got that, got the biggest dog and  
6 maybe that was consideration but for the most part we were all pretty much the same size  
7 and the dogs were all pretty much the same size. All the dogs' colors had to be earth tone,  
8 you know, the brown, blacks, with maybe a little bit of white in it. We had one dog in  
9 training that was all white. The story was that, you know, these are donated dogs and this  
10 dog was donated to the military when it was all black, the people really wanted to get rid  
11 of this dog and they had him dyed black and the military didn't realize it until after his  
12 hair started growing and it had already been through training and he was already suited  
13 for military use so they just kept for training purposes. He was an all white dog.

14           RV: Tell me about the Japanese in Okinawa. How did you all get along with each  
15 other?

16           GS: We didn't have any dealings with the Japanese. First of all, we never  
17 considered them Japanese at that time. At that time Okinawa was a US possession, it was  
18 not Japanese, that's the way we looked at it. There was no Okinawans that I remember  
19 working in the kennels, where as in Vietnam and Korea we had the locals doing the  
20 cleanings of the dog kennels. Well obviously in training they want us to know how to  
21 clean the kennels. I don't remember locals in the PX commissary or well never went  
22 commissary, PX snack bars or anything. I don't know if they were there or not. I just  
23 don't remember. Now, we did go downtown, we went to the red light district down town  
24 which was called Koza BC Street. I went to Na Ha one time to a jewelry store. One of the  
25 guys heard that you could get cheap jewelry there. The dealings with those people was  
26 strictly, they were Pro American Military. Their livelihood was based on us so I would  
27 not think anything. I didn't think we had any bad dealings with them. Obviously they  
28 were after our money and that was it so they had no thoughts either way about us.

29           RV: Do you remember what they told you in training about preparing for,  
30 working your dogs on the ground at Vietnam, what specifically they told you?

1 GS: Well, specifically Vietnam, no, I don't. Your dog knew when he was going to  
2 work and when he wasn't. I mentioned that we had dogs with choke chains; you also had  
3 a collar. Whenever we moved the dogs around we had to put them in muzzles, especially  
4 if we were in a vehicle, back of a duce in a half. You always muzzled your dog because if  
5 you had more than one dog then you're going to have a dog fight, but choke chain was  
6 the standard procedure until you were on your perimeter or your area of guard duty and  
7 then you would put a collar on to take the choke chain off.

8 RV: Can you describe what a choke chain is for people who will listening to  
9 this...

10 GS: Sure, choke chain is chrome covered; small link chain with two large rings at  
11 each end of it and the chain will measure probably about 15,16 inches long, maybe even  
12 longer depending on the size of the dog's neck. The choke chain is used anytime you  
13 want to control the dog your going to tighten the choke chain to where it puts pressure  
14 around the dog's neck and the dog knows that he knows, you know, ok I better go where  
15 the least resistance is. It's, I don't know how else to describe it.

16 RV: Ok, you were saying then about...

17 GS: Ok, you put the collar on and then take the choke chain off and the dog  
18 knows that this is work time, this is time to go to work and we mean business now. As  
19 soon as you take that collar off that reverses back to, ok, this is fun and leisure now.

20 RV: Is there anything else that you want to say about Okinawa and the training  
21 there before we...

22 GS: Well Okinawa, I saw my first spy plane. They were taking off out of Na Ha,  
23 or not Na Ha, I can't even remember the airport now. I thought that was pretty  
24 interesting. It was...

25 RV: Was it a U-2?

26 GS: Yeah, that's what it was.

27 RV: I bet that was impressive.

28 GS: Yes, and they were taking off early in the morning while it was still dark and  
29 we were driving right underneath them going out to the kennels. I ended up being  
30 proactive about Vietnam, military wanted to make sure our teeth were in good shape so  
31 we wouldn't have to have any kind of dental work done while we were over there. I went

1 in one day and they said, "Ok, we're ready to pull out your wisdom teeth." I go, "I don't  
2 want them out." I knew that there was going to pain involved and I told them, I says,  
3 "I'm not in pain now, they're not bothering me." The guy says, "They're going to bother  
4 you later on, there going to bother you when you get into your 30's. You're better off  
5 getting them pulled out now." I said, "I'll get them pulled out after I get back from  
6 Vietnam, why in the hell do I want to go through a bunch of pain getting them pulled out  
7 now and may not ever come back from Vietnam." I said, "No, I'll take care of this."  
8 Ended up it was when I was 32, 33 they were bothering me and I ended up getting them  
9 cut out. Another one of those things maybe I should have done what they wanted to do  
10 early in my life.

11 RV: Did you say you were getting Pro Active about Vietnam or were you just  
12 saying that about the dental business?

13 GS: I was saying that about the dental, I mean we knew we were going to 'Nam. I  
14 wasn't watching tv anymore, and then I was before. I wasn't listening to the radio. I think  
15 I was probably reading the *Stars and Stripes* a little bit more, but again, I don't think I  
16 had changed and realized that you know, what was lying ahead of me. I wasn't worried  
17 about. I was concerned but it wasn't something that was just overriding and dominating  
18 my thoughts.

19 RV: What about the rest of the men in your unit?

20 GS: Truthfully, well I had a couple of friends and we never sat around and talked  
21 about it. We spent more time wondering if we had enough money to make it down to  
22 Koza or if we were going to survive the taxi rides. The taxi drivers were notoriously  
23 crazy. Just wasn't a whole lot of thought given to it.

24 RV: Was there a lot of drinking and things like that to kind of ease the  
25 anxiousness perhaps?

26 GS: There was a lot of drinking going on but it wasn't to ease the anxiousness. It  
27 was just the typical young men wanting to just experience. In my case I was experiencing  
28 some freedoms that I hadn't experienced before. I was allowed to drink. I was allowed to  
29 farazz around with wild women. I was able to cuss; I smoked for a long time. There were  
30 freedoms there a lot of us had never had and we were partaking of them all and I don't  
31 think that was anxiousness. I just think it was young men that once they found their

1 freedom they said, by gosh let's take advantage of it because we'll never see this type of  
2 life again. I've never thought about it before, I have regrets about living that type of life  
3 and then thinking back there are times when I think no, I wouldn't have traded it.  
4 Hindsight says I should have lived a better life and I would of probably changed but I  
5 don't regret it though, I don't know if that makes sense or not.

6 RV: Yes, it absolutely does, it does. Ok, is there anything you want to say about  
7 Okinawa before we...

8 GS: Um, let me see, about Okinawa. Yeah, went out of Okinawa broke. I  
9 remember that. We left on August 12<sup>th</sup>, paydays are at the end of the month and on of the  
10 things that we did, we figured we weren't going to be able to spend any money over at  
11 Nam because all we were going to do was work, sleep, and that was it and that we were  
12 going to be fighting the VC as soon as we got off the plane so there was no need for  
13 money. I spent every last dime I had in Okinawa.

14 RV: What did you spend it on, do you remember?

15 GS: Probably booze, women, and cigarettes and food, probably in that order too.  
16 It was, I mean, there wasn't a whole lot to do in Okinawa. I take it back, there was a lot  
17 of things to do in Okinawa but nothing that interested me at the time. I didn't know about  
18 scuba diving, I scuba dive now. I kicked my butt because I didn't do some scuba diving  
19 there, that would have been neat, something that I would never be able to do again. I  
20 knew there was some kind of swimming and diving there, I just didn't know what. Sight  
21 seeing, the Okinawans have an interesting way of burial. They have interesting tombs and  
22 I took pictures of that but I mean I didn't do a whole lot of sight seeing and I think there  
23 was a whole lot more to life than that. Again, if I have regrets about Okinawa, those are  
24 probably the regrets; I should have done more. If there was anything about active about  
25 worrying about Vietnam, it was one, what the hell do I need to take money with me for,  
26 because we had no concept of Vietnam. Most people thought Vietnam, if you've never  
27 been there before, you were going to be in a fox hole all your life except when you're  
28 walking your dog and you're going to be shooting at the enemy as soon as you get off the  
29 plane and your going to be shooting at the enemy until you get on the plane. I'm sure that  
30 tv news probably did stories on what life was in Vietnam. I didn't see them and I had no  
31 concept about it and I suspect that a lot of the guys I was with had no concept of what to

1 expect in Vietnam. Matter of fact, I know I had guys joke about it. They thought they  
2 were going to be given a M-16 as soon as they got off the plane, you know, "Here, grab  
3 this, and hit the dirt now," that type of thing. That didn't happen. When we left Okinawa  
4 we were pretty somber, it was late at night. I remember we were flying late at night, we  
5 flew out, and we were tired. There wasn't much energy in it and we were not looking  
6 forward to it because we knew now that we were going to do what everybody had told  
7 and trained us and all the war stories we had heard about, we were going to experience  
8 them now. The flight was a Flying Tiger, God I want to say it was a prop plane. I think it  
9 was. Just right after the pilot announced that we had just crossed into Vietnam, the  
10 shoreline.

11 RV: Air space?

12 GS: Well it wasn't air space but he said, "We've just crossed the coast line of  
13 Vietnam." I think that is how he put it. We hit an air pocket, hell I hadn't flown that  
14 much, I had no idea what an air pocket was but I do know that that plane started to go  
15 down and that scared the hell out of me. I thought we'd been hit by a rocket or something  
16 because it happened right after the pilot said we were crossing into Vietnam at that point.  
17 That was a scary moment.

18 RV: Welcome to the war.

19 GS: Yeah. So that kind of reinforced the fact. I'm thinking oh shit, what did I get  
20 myself into but we got into that. We landed in Tan Son Nhut uneventful. They trucked us  
21 out to Long Binh and nobody handed us a gun, nobody told us the widows were  
22 uncovered on the bus. They did tell us if we got hit with things by attack or anything  
23 what to do and I can't remember what it was. I think it was duck. (Laughter) We had no  
24 body armor, no helmet, nothing. We were just plain old GI's in plain old uniforms with  
25 nothing between us other than probably a couple of gun jeeps at each end of the bus  
26 convoy.

27 RV: Now were you with your dogs then or now?

28 GS: No. Vietnam had a problem with, and I can't remember what the disease was  
29 but it was a blood disease and they were trying to keep it from getting back to the States  
30 and so what dogs were in Vietnam were going to stay in Vietnam. Our normal tour of  
31 duty was one year, dogs could live their life, working life, was about eight years. Being

1    eight years old, so you take two years from that. The dog was really good for about six  
2    years of duty. So there was a dog sitting in Vietnam waiting on a handler when I went in.  
3    We got to Long Binh and I discovered hey they got snack bars, they got EM club. Didn't  
4    have flushing toilets but you know they had barracks; there was no foxholes. We didn't  
5    have guard duty. Again we had KP. There were things there; well I had already spent all  
6    my money. I was probably out of smokes by then and I wanted a coke. I was finding all  
7    kinds of these pennies all over the ground and couldn't understand that. Now my wife  
8    and I we pick up pennies all the time when we're out walking but I was picking up  
9    pennies and I found about, I think a soda costs about 25 cents or a dime or something like  
10   that. I went in the snack bar and got myself a soda. Whenever the cashier, I handed her a  
11   handful of pennies for it and she says, "I can't take these. We don't take these, pennies  
12   are no good." I'm finding out why all the pennies are laying on the ground.

13            RV: Did you get your coke?

14            GS: She gave it to me. That was the first local I ever had any encounter with and  
15   it was kind of funny. I got myself a free soda and a handful pennies and I think I probably  
16   tossed the pennies out somewhere.

17            RV: Waiting for someone else to try again. Gary, do you want to take a break for  
18   a moment.

19            GS: No, I can keep going.

20            RV: Gary, let me ask you, what were your very first impressions of Vietnam  
21   when you landed and got off the plane?

22            GS: What a strange place, hot.

23            RV: Was it still dark?

24            GS: No, it was light. It was daylight, probably about mid morning. It was a  
25   civilian airport, there was civilians walking around. There was numerous Orientals  
26   walking around, well you're in Vietnam, that's all that lives in Vietnam is Orientals.  
27   After being on a military base and thinking you're going to land in a military base, that  
28   was kind of a shocker. You kind of relieved, overwhelmed, didn't get thrown your rifle;  
29   you didn't get given a flak vest and a helmet right away. Kind of overwhelmed that  
30   things weren't happening that you expected them to happen. At the same time relieved

1 that, wait a minute maybe this is not so bad a place after all. Maybe what they've been  
2 talking about isn't true. There was no evidence of war where we were at.

3 RV: That surprised you.

4 GS: Yeah, surprised me very much.

5 RV: How about the rest of the men with you, were they having similar thoughts?

6 Do you remember discussing how everybody...

7 GS: I don't remember discussing that. I'm sure we did but I just don't recall.

8 RV: How did you find morale in your unit and around in general?

9 GS: Pretty much the same as it was in all the other units I was in. Didn't want to  
10 be there, but we are so we're going to make the best of it type thing. We're going to get  
11 through this and get home type of thing. You always kept looking forward. From the day  
12 you get there, your counting days. I listened to the inmates, because I worked in a jail,  
13 counting days and I laugh about it because it seems like all my military career. I learned  
14 how to count days by just counting. I knew how many days were in each month, you  
15 would be surprised how many times the inmates come up and say, "Hey how many days  
16 are in December or January? I knew that by heart. Hell I got down to counting hours and  
17 seconds.

18 RV: So you started counting immediately?

19 GS: I probably did, I don't recall for sure but I probably did because everything  
20 was based on the time. You knew you were going to be there a year. You were a newbie  
21 when you got into country for your first 90 days. You were a newbie, that was a new guy,  
22 and then after that, I don't know, you didn't really get to be considered an old guy until  
23 you were probably about 90 days away from going back to the States. So there was a  
24 ritual there that you passed through on stages based on time. We had one guy, his name  
25 was Evans, and he was considered a newbie until the day he left because of the dumb  
26 stunts that he did while he was there. They just thought he was newbie regardless. The  
27 rituals, of passing the rituals, were based on time. When you first got there you had to do  
28 a week in Long Binh before you find out where you were going. So I was in Long Binh  
29 for a week, I mean, that was a long damn week because no money, they said you weren't  
30 going to get paid until you got to your unit. I was really in anticipation of getting to the  
31 unit, I mean great, I'll get paid, I can go get cigarettes and get me a soda because I wasn't

1 a coffee drinker and I don't think the Mess Halls had sodas at that time. I think they were  
2 strictly juices and milk and that type of thing. So anticipation was to get out of Long  
3 Binh, to get out of the repo depot and move onto wherever your unit was. Again, you still  
4 hadn't got issued a rifle; you hadn't been given any kind of equipment. All you were  
5 doing was detail work; police call, KP. I think that they had Vietnamese that were, and I  
6 don't want to sound gross but this is a true term, burning shit. We had to burn our solid  
7 waste, had to get rid of your solid waste somehow and the way to do it was pour, you had  
8 about a quarter length of a 55 gallon barrel underneath a toilet seat. A typical outdoor  
9 john and you would pull those barrels each day and fill them about half full of diesel fuel  
10 and then light it and you had to stir them as the diesel was burning to burn the waste. It  
11 burned it down to a sizeable solid stuff and then you would bury that. Never had to do  
12 that in Vietnam. I did it over in Somalia as a Master Sergeant, I don't know why I did  
13 that but my troops were doing it so I felt that I was obliged to help them. We had locals  
14 doing that. We had locals that did KP, I think. The locals were doing a lot of things so  
15 there wasn't a whole lot of details to do, but there was a few. Then we went to, oh I don't  
16 know what airport was out of there but 'Nam, we went to a military airport and flew out  
17 and went to Cam Ranh Bay and landed in Cam Ranh Bay. Now, I had an eye-opener at  
18 Cam Ranh Bay.

19 RV: What happened?

20 GS: At the airport we're waiting around for somebody to pick us up from our unit  
21 and...

22 RV: Are your dogs at your unit waiting for you?

23 GS: Yeah.

24 RV: We're sitting at the airport, I mean, just sitting there and got to go to the  
25 restroom, you got to go, and I went into the restroom. It was a nice big restroom; I mean,  
26 the Air Force knows how to live. This had flushing toilets, flushing urinals, went into the  
27 restroom and there's women in there cleaning. Well I'm a gentleman and I realize when  
28 there is women in something like that, I probably don't need to be in there doing  
29 anything. So I go back out, and I've slugged down some water or something and I really  
30 have to go so I go back in there to see if they're cleaning and they're still in there cleaning.  
31 I'm walking out and then I notice there are guys going in and coming out that are going

1 to the restroom while they are in there. Then I realized no body cares. You went in, you  
2 did your business while women were in there. Later on in my tour there I ended up taking  
3 showers while the women were in the shower on one end of the shower doing our laundry  
4 while I was on the other end of the shower room completely naked and shower and that  
5 was just normal way of doing things. That was an eye opener for me in Vietnam, I mean  
6 I'm looking at that and I'm going ok, well I can get over my intimacy and it kind of was  
7 funny because you didn't close doors or you didn't have locks on doors the way we think  
8 about it, you didn't close doors when you were just reliving yourself. Obviously, you had  
9 doors on the toilets where when you sat down. I went to the bathroom on my return trip  
10 home, didn't think anything about it, there are hundreds of guys on the plane, and didn't  
11 lock the door. Well Stewardess opened the door while I'm standing there relieving myself  
12 and it's kind of funny. I'm going oh shoot, that's right I'm supposed to be locking the  
13 door. For seven months I didn't do that. You got to remember you got to revert back to  
14 the civilization. At Cam Ranh Bay, the airport, we got picked up and taken to our unit  
15 and it was nothing but sand, and sand, and sand.

16 RV: Now were you near Cam Ranh or were you at Cam Ranh?

17 GS: We were at Cam Ranh Bay. We were on the Army side, not far from the bay  
18 itself but all you had was wooden World War II style barracks, no windows, everything  
19 was screened for the openings, tin roofs painted OD green, brown sand, and that was  
20 about it.

21 RV: Brown sand inside the barrack?

22 GS: No, we had wooden floors. Wooden or maybe the concrete and the second  
23 floor was wooden, but we had stable floors.

24 RV: About how many men were inside the hooch with you?

25 GS: Oh, in a barrack of that size at Cam Ranh Bay it probably have, probably two  
26 platoons so it would probably hold, no it would probably hold 50, probably a platoon  
27 size.

28 RV: What else to you remember about those barracks? Was it hot inside?

29 GS: Yeah, because we had fans. There wasn't much wind circulating through it; I  
30 don't remember the wind blowing that much in Vietnam. The beds were the old World  
31 War II style cots that probably the mattress was an inch thick and the springs were not

1 comfortable at all. We were all stuffed in one area of the barracks because we were the  
2 new guys waiting to be, I was going to be further sent out to Tuy Hoa. Didn't get paid  
3 there because we were not to our assigned unit yet which I was being reassigned to a  
4 platoon and that platoon was serviced by another finance company so the finance  
5 company in Cam Ranh Bay were not paying us because we had to wait till we go to Tuy  
6 Hoa. We spent one and, I think, two weeks in Cam Ranh Bay and all we did, I take it  
7 back, we must of got a quick 50. Maybe they gave us a quick 50 dollars. Any rate, we  
8 had some money because I remember we were filling sand bags. They put us on sand bag  
9 detail to build a bunker and we would get a break. We would start about eight o'clock in  
10 the morning, get a break about ten o'clock. We would go to the club, drink a few drinks,  
11 and I'm talking hard liquor drinks and I would get drunk. Go back fill more sand bags,  
12 break for lunch, go eat, go to the club, drink a few more drinks, get drunk again, go fill  
13 sand bags again till about 2: 30, three o'clock. We would go to the club again, drink, and  
14 then go fill sand bags and get off, clean up, go to the Mess Hall, eat, and then probably go  
15 to the club for evening entertainment. They had some pretty good bands coming in;  
16 Philippine bands come in. I can remember getting drunk three or four times in one day  
17 while we were doing that. I don't know if I did it every day, I can't believe I did but it  
18 seems to me that that was the ritual and the funny thing was the drinks were... A soda  
19 was something like a dime, for fifteen cents more you got a hard drink. A rum and coke  
20 was my drink of choice. I think beer was something like fifteen cents. Looking back  
21 that's real cheap and I think even back then it was real cheap. We did the sand bags, got  
22 the bunker built. One incident happened while we were there; this is kind of humorous.  
23 Everything we've been told was, if we get a rocket attack, grab your flak vest and helmet  
24 and head for the bunker, don't worry about anything else, just get your flak vest and  
25 helmet and put them on and get to the bunker.

26 RV: Is this the bunker that you all were building?

27 GS: Well the one we were building was closer to the Company Headquarters  
28 Area. The bunker that we would have ended up going to in this particular incident when  
29 it happened was a different bunker and it wasn't as well built, put it that way. It was a lot  
30 older. Any rate, so one night, and they said if a rocket attack happens it will happen at  
31 night. I was sound asleep in my bunk and I heard an explosion and then I heard a few

1 guys talking, and I laid in bed, I was tired. You just don't get up out of bed. Laid there for  
2 a little while longer and I heard another explosion and it's way off in the distance, I mean  
3 it's just so far away. You figured, nope, it's not around here so we're ok. Then we heard  
4 one explosion and it rocked the barracks, it rocked my bed, and that was it. It was time to  
5 go to the bunker. So I grabbed my flak vest and helmet and I ran to the bunker and I must  
6 have ran by a few people who were standing outside but it didn't occur to me that they  
7 weren't running too. I took it for granted; everybody is running for the bunker. One other  
8 guy, McKinnia came into the bunker and it was just him and I and he's dragging his  
9 duffle bag. I'm going, "McKinnia, why are you dragging your duffle bag?" He says, "My  
10 flak vest and helmet is in there and I can't find the keys to unlock it." (Laughter) So  
11 we're in the bunker, he's trying to wrestle with the duffle bag and then it dawned on us  
12 there is nobody else in here. What the hell is going on here? We can hear the explosions,  
13 they sound distant again so we peak out and there is people standing outside the barracks  
14 looking out. So we go up to the barracks and they're watching the fireworks from there.  
15 What happened was some sappers had gotten into the Air Force Ammo Dump which was  
16 some distance away and had set satchel charges and started blowing up the Ammo Dump  
17 and they were guarded by Sentry Dogs too, Air Force Sentry Dogs. That was humorous  
18 and what really worried me, and in my life I had heard, well in training, mushroom cloud  
19 means anatomic bomb. I saw a mushroom cloud that night, and I 'm going, oh shit, no  
20 body said they had that stuff over here. Started worrying about, for a few seconds,  
21 worried about fall out, you know, radiation and things like that. Somebody said, "No, it's  
22 napalm that just went. That's a cloud from the napalm bomb. So, ok, I'm safe. The  
23 kennels were closer to the Ammo Dumps because our kennels were really out by the  
24 field, several miles away from us, which was really close to the POL Dump and the  
25 Ammo Dump that we parked. The dogs really got jittery out of that. We didn't get out  
26 there to see the dogs yet. We hadn't even been assigned a dog yet.

27 RV: This is at Cam Ranh. Your dogs were held at Cam Ranh for you?

28 GS: Mmm hmm.

29 RV: Ok.

30 GS: So I hadn't even gone and seen my dog yet but I heard it was several days  
31 before the dogs finally settled down after that.

1 RV: Gary, you want to stop for today?

2 GS: Yeah, why don't we?

3 RV: Ok.

The Vietnam Archive  
Oral History Project  
Interview with Gary Smith  
Conducted by Richard Burks Verrone, Ph.D.  
December 5, 2003  
Transcribed by Brooke Tomlin

1           Richard Verrone: This Dr. Richard Verrone. I'm continuing my oral history  
2 interview with Mr. Gary Smith. Today is December 5, 2003. It's approximately 9:35 a.m.  
3 Central Standard Time. I'm again in Lubbock, Texas and Gary you are in Shawnee,  
4 Kansas. Why don't we pick up where we left off yesterday? We had gotten you to Cam  
5 Ranh Bay and you were getting ready to ship out to your unit, I believe. So why don't we  
6 pick up there?

7           Gary Smith: After we had been in Cam Ranh Bay for a few weeks and did  
8 nothing but detail, we were put on, excuse me just one moment. We were placed on duce  
9 in half's with our dogs and the dogs were in crates and we were sent on up to Tuy Hoa  
10 which is in the central highlands. It's about; I'm just guessing that probably about half  
11 way between Qui Nhon and Cam Ranh Bay.

12          RV: Now, you were with Rolf, your dog to be?

13          GS: Right.

14          RV: When did you actually meet him?

15          GS: I met him at Cam Ranh Bay probably towards the end of my stay at Cam  
16 Ranh Bay.

17          RV: Can you tell me what that first meeting was like, and what you went through?

18          GS: I went on Rolf, again, I had described any time you go into a dog the first  
19 time, you're nervous, your apprehensive, you're really not sure how he's going to react.  
20 Rolf was eager to get out, he was eager to have a handler and ready to go. He was not an  
21 overly aggressive dog. He was just genuinely happy that somebody was going to put a  
22 chain on him and take him out and get him out of that cage.

23          RV: How long had he been at Vietnam?

24          GS: I have no idea.

25          RV: What were your first impressions of him? You said he was not overly  
26 aggressive. What about as far as size compared to you?

1 GS: Size was medium, probably about 70 pounds. He was all black, same as  
2 Frisky was which was kind of strange that I would get two black dogs like that because  
3 that is not a common trait. He had a good-looking smile and face I guess. (Laughter) All  
4 his traits were good, I mean he had good pointed ears, and everything, he was just a very  
5 good dog. German Shepherd, his brand number was 72X6 and this, I don't know if this is  
6 important, but the Army assigned Preston, they called it the Preston brand number. It was  
7 based on a four, five digit number sequence with one letter in it. Per letter, I think, if I  
8 remember correctly they could brand approximately ten thousand dogs so there was no  
9 chance of running out of sequences on that. Rolf's brand number was 72X6, even to this  
10 day I remember that. That's just something like I remember my old serial number  
11 because I didn't have a social security number when I first came in the Army. They had  
12 assigned me because I didn't get my social security card. I had a social security number  
13 but I just didn't have the card with me when I got enlisted and they assigned me a number  
14 of #####. So I got Rolf and we played, worked through the physical training  
15 program which was an obstacle course. We did that a little bit, the kennels were so far  
16 away that we really couldn't spend that much time with them.

17 RV: That was at Cam Ranh?

18 GS: That was a Cam Ranh Bay. Now once we put the dogs in the crates and  
19 convoyed up to Tuy Hoa. My convoyed experience on the convoy to Tuy Hoa was  
20 uneventful other than first time I've seen water buffalo and I had heard about water  
21 buffalo through passing, I don't know, maybe in history, or geography or something and I  
22 found that just kind of neat to see. One of the instructions we were given was don't shoot  
23 people with black pajamas, all Vietnamese wear black pajamas, not just the VC. We're  
24 starting to realize now that, hey things are a little bit more serious.

25 RV: Who gave you that instruction?

26 GS: Probably one of the Sergeants. Probably my platoon sergeant, Sergeant  
27 Bridges, somebody like that. Whoever came down to get us I really don't remember.

28 RV: Had you been issued your weapon yet?

29 GS: You know what, we must have had guns with us or weapons with us at that  
30 time because I remember them saying, don't shoot because not everybody is a VC.  
31 Another thing I remember on that convoy was seeing houses built out of cardboard. Coca

1 Cola cardboard boxes and things for the siding, I don't know how else. More was to the  
2 structure but the siding was cardboard boxes from Coca Cola cartons. Which up to that  
3 point I thought this is really deplorable I mean how could people live like that but that  
4 was not very often but it was a few. It wasn't until I went to Somalia that I really saw the  
5 worst that I've ever seen. The towns were always crowded that we went through. There  
6 was umbrellas, there were little like three-wheeled scooter with a back, it was like a small  
7 pick-up truck but only three wheels. I remember seeing them and thinking how  
8 remarkable it was how many people can get in the back end of one of those and I think  
9 they even carried some pigs or something on them. Saw one building out in the middle of  
10 nowhere that was shot up and I don't know if that was from some kind of a battle or if  
11 that was just people when they drive by, putting rounds in an empty building type of  
12 thing because it was out in the middle of nowhere. We got to Tuy Hoa in the afternoon,  
13 unloaded our dogs, got assigned our barracks, and I think we went to sleep that night and  
14 the next day I would have had to gone to work.

15 RV: Now is Tuy Hoa, where you were going to be stationed for your tour?

16 GS: It was, however, I got a chance in December to go up to An Son, which was a  
17 more preferred place to go. I was assigned to the 981<sup>st</sup> MP Company Sentry Dog, which  
18 company headquarters, was in Cam Ranh Bay. The platoon headquarters was in Tuy Hoa  
19 and it had three squads there and then one squad was up at An Son so I was there from  
20 first of September to probably about the end of December, I think.

21 RV: What were your quarters like their Gary?

22 GS: They were old Air Force barracks, which was a whole lot better than  
23 anything I had seen in Vietnam up to that point they were on concrete slabs. The sides of  
24 the building were metal, just like you would see in any kind of metal building. The  
25 bathroom, the latrines were enclosed in metal too, flushing toilets, showers that drained,  
26 just like State side combinations, basically. The buildings were wide open; there was no  
27 privacy. We did have wall lockers and if you asked the hooch maids to go buy you some  
28 curtains they would go buy you silk curtains and you would hag them up and that would  
29 divide off your little area. We had two man cubicles. I was teamed up with my buddy,  
30 Tex. I'd been with Tex all the way from AIT up to this point.

31 RV: Now was that by coincidence?

1 GS: Yeah, that was by coincidence, no design on it. Up to that time we really  
2 didn't know each other that well, probably knew each other in passing. Matter of fact,  
3 Tex was in my platoon in AIT, but it wasn't until we got assigned as bunk mates in Tuy  
4 Hoa that the friendship started. He taught me things. I didn't probably mention this but  
5 my first time to ever encounter a taco I was back at Cam Ranh Bay and we were still  
6 doing details and had a guy who was going to go to Tuy Hoa with us, but he wasn't a  
7 Dog Handler, he was a Company Clerk and he was going to be our Platoon Clerk and his  
8 name was Gonzales. He was from LA and one day we were just milling around and he  
9 said, "Well let's go over to the service club and get a taco." I go, "What's a taco?" He  
10 said, "Come on, I'll take you over, it's Mexican food." Went over and I enjoyed it, been  
11 eating Mexican food ever since. Went up to Tuy Hoa and that was where Tex introduced  
12 me to more Mexican food

13 RV: In Vietnam?

14 GS: In Vietnam. Tex would go to the Commissary. We had a little Commissary  
15 on the base there and he would buy tamales and if we were lucky, they hadn't spoiled yet.  
16 We got a hold of a couple of bad ones and the cans were bloated by the time we got back.  
17 He would make tacos, pinto beans. I remember he was always big on fixing up pinto  
18 beans and tamales when we had a chance to have them. I've got pictures of us sitting  
19 around in the cubicle, several of us, and just eating a Mexican meal. The other things we  
20 did in Vietnam we would buy a refrigerator, we would buy electric skillet, and things like  
21 that so we could fix meals and stuff. We had Hooch Maids that did our laundry.

22 RV: Tell me about them and who they were?

23 GS: Well I can't give you names anymore but they were Vietnamese local  
24 women. They were usually fairly young, I would say probably in their 20's. They would  
25 come in the morning, do your laundry, pick up your dirty clothes, and generally we were  
26 typical Americans, throw the clothes on the floor and they would pick them up and take  
27 them in. They would hand wash them.

28 RV: And you paid them, right?

29 GS: Yes we did. We paid and it was a very minimal amount, I can't even  
30 remember what it was, but this was very little money compared to what we were getting,  
31 probably two or three dollars a month. They would polish our boots. In Vietnam why

1 would we need pressed uniforms, but they were pressing our uniforms. They were  
2 ironing them and then hang them up on hangers. When the monsoon season came it  
3 rained for a month and after the second day I didn't have dry boots and after the fourth  
4 day you didn't have dry uniforms. The only way you dried anything was air dry and  
5 when it wasn't monsoon everything dried out really quick. They polished your boots and  
6 I mean put a good spit shine on them. They washed our clothes in the shower area and I  
7 think I mentioned that this is where I encountered, you know, I'm taking a shower stark  
8 naked and they're over there on the other side, several of them, are washing the clothes. I  
9 mean it was just a normal everyday thing.

10 RV: Would you converse with them?

11 GS: You know, I think we did and I think they use to giggle and laugh at, you  
12 know, it wasn't so much that we were naked, maybe they thought we were a little  
13 intimidated, I don't know. There was always jokes, innuendo's about being a butterfly.  
14 Butterfly over there was messing around with more than one woman or something like  
15 that. Or if you had a girlfriend in the States and you're messing around with somebody  
16 else, which Tuy Hoa was a closed post, there was no chance to get off post and do  
17 anything. The toilets were closed off, you did have privacy, you had a door that you  
18 could lock when you sat down on the toilet seat. It was just a real; the accommodations  
19 were really good.

20 RV: What kind of relationship did you form with these housemates, these  
21 women?

22 GS: The Hooch Maids, you know, relationship, none. I mean we conversed once  
23 in a while. I insulted them after about the second or third day I'd been there. I didn't  
24 realize I was insulting anyone and it's easy. We're very particular about our lifestyle and  
25 they were too. They were cooking some food and it smelled terrible and I think I  
26 probably walked in and said something, "God, what in the heck is that awful smell?" If I  
27 remember correctly my boots didn't get shined for a couple of days.

28 RV: Oh really.

29 GS: And my uniforms didn't really get pressed all that much for a couple of day  
30 either. They didn't talk to me at all and I didn't understand. What it was, is they had some  
31 kind of, it's a spice; I don't know how to describe it. I was married to a Vietnamese at

1 one time, I didn't meet her over there, and its called nukmaum and it will smell up an  
2 entire area. I think it's worse than kimchi, the Korean kimshi, but they are very particular  
3 about their food and they were insulted and I know your asking about relationships. I  
4 know I asked the Hooch Maids to get us the silk curtains, relied on them to get us  
5 cigarettes. The PX would get a delivery of cigarettes and run out. I remember when I got  
6 paid, finally got some money from the Army. PX was out, and so I asked her. Asked one  
7 of the Hooch Maids to do down and pick me up a carton of cigarettes when she comes  
8 back on base the next day. Illegal I imagine because it was dealing in the black market  
9 but I got cigarettes that will last me until the shipment came in and I think I did that two  
10 or three times. Guys would get Vietnamese beer, things like that; I can't remember what  
11 else was brought in. We relied on them to get us from the local economy at times.

12 RV: What was the security like and this is ironic asking someone who provided  
13 security for that base, but what was the security like as far as their entrance and exit from  
14 the base each day? Do you remember?

15 GS: Pretty dog gone stiff. I made a mistake, actually I was tricked into this and  
16 I'm sure that, you know, I was a naive 19 year old or 20 year old soldier that believed in  
17 everything and believed everybody's word. I had a Hooch Maid come to me and she says  
18 I was given this perfume as a present and I need to get it off base. Well why in the hell  
19 whoever gave it to her didn't go down and try to take it out? It's because he knew that he  
20 couldn't do that but they got a 19 naive GI to go down and pass it to her and I got caught  
21 passing it to her right at the gate. I got pulled off the side, "What the hell are you doing?"  
22 I explained and he says, "You're not allowed to do that." They confiscated the perfume  
23 and sent her on her way. I don't think she got into any trouble. I got an ass chewing for  
24 trying to do it, for doing it at the gate. So security was tight going out, I would assume  
25 security was tight coming in, make sure they didn't have weapons. As Dog Handlers we  
26 didn't work during the day. We weren't at the checkpoints; we were on the perimeter. So  
27 we wouldn't really know what the security was like down at the gates, matter of fact, I  
28 don't think I ever saw the gate but that one time until, well twice maybe, because I went  
29 to Qui Nhon to process in and then come back. I'm kind of backpedaling here but once  
30 we got to Tuy Hoa it was probably the next day we had to go to Qui Nhon which was  
31 further north and process in and we went on convoy there and we took a few people up to

1 An Son because An Son was right outside Qui Nhon. The battalion headquarters that  
2 handled our pay and personnel records was up at Qui Nhon. Going to Qui Nhon, we went  
3 through what is called Qui Nhon pass, somewhere along the convoy, I'm looking at the  
4 scenery and anything else and wasn't really watching. The threat just didn't seem like  
5 there was much of a threat there. I was told after we got to Qui Nhon that we've been  
6 shot at and I say, "What?" They said, "Didn't you hear the bullet fly by?" I go, "No."  
7 They swore, the other guy swore that we had been fired on. It probably was a sniper of  
8 some sort, lousy shot, but that was the only time I've ever been fired on until I went to  
9 Somalia. Coming back from Qui Nhon it was uneventful, easygoing convoy, no big deal.  
10 Back to Tuy Hoa I was talking about Hooch Maids and everything. We had a Mess Hall;  
11 we went to the central Mess Hall for the entire installation. Every Saturday night was  
12 steak night. Got steaks, the food was pretty good. We had a movie theater that was  
13 enclosed whereas in Cam Ranh Bay it was an outdoor theatre. We had, I don't remember,  
14 being at a gym, I don't remember going to a gym. The PX was a large open area but it  
15 was a pretty good-sized PX, I remember. Had a service club, had a couple American  
16 women that worked there, I never really got to meet them. They were called Doughnut  
17 Dollies. It was an old air base so there was a lot of helicopter traffic going in and out.  
18 There was an old civilian terminal near the checkpoint with an old aircraft, looked like  
19 some kind of prop airliner that was pretty well destroyed; I don't know what happened to  
20 it, nobody ever explained that one. I mean that pretty well describes Tuy Hoa. It was right  
21 along the China Sea; part of our perimeter was along China Sea. The dog kennels were  
22 right along the beach too and took Rolf out several times to go play in the surf and just to  
23 walk the beach and get a little bit of sun. I probably didn't take him out as much as I  
24 should have but we did go out and do things like that.

25 RV: You mentioned the movie theatre. What else was there for entertainment  
26 purposes?

27 GS: Service Club. EM Club. EM Club is where you drink, Service Club is where  
28 you kind of, you know, you play games, they're going to have books and things like that,  
29 magazines. I spent most of my time at the EM Club. Entertainment was bands. They  
30 would have bands come in, Filipino bands came in, danced. Scantly clad Filipino girls,

1 they would play songs. The interesting thing about any band that came in... *Good*  
2 *Morning Vietnam*, the disc jockey there...

3 RV: Adrian Cronauer.

4 GS: It's mentioned in this movie, and I've only seen it one time, I detest watching  
5 Vietnam movies except maybe John Wayne some, *Green Beret*. There is nothing, I don't  
6 think movies can tell what I've seen of Vietnam. They probably tell other people's stories  
7 but they just don't capture what I remember.

8 RV: Have you seen any good Vietnam movies?

9 GS: The only one I enjoy is John Wayne and that's because I enjoy John Wayne. I  
10 work in a county jail and they TV on for the prisoners and one night, I think it was  
11 *Platoon* or something; it was not Martin Sheen, the other.

12 RV: Charlie Sheen.

13 GS: Charlie Sheen was on and he was having to burn shit and I'm thinking, well  
14 that's pretty typified. That captured the truth of what I remember.

15 RV: Do you try to avoid the movies?

16 GS: I do now and I have since I got back. The movies to me do not portray what I  
17 remember and what I want to remember of Vietnam. I mean I didn't see a lot of blood  
18 and guts. I didn't see death every day. I look at the movies, almost like cop movies. Cop  
19 movies portray every waking hour, every waking minute you're in the middle of a chase  
20 or pursuing, or fighting, and your breaking up robberies and things which is bs because  
21 most of the time you're sitting in a Cruiser and you're just patrolling or you're going to  
22 take a report somewhere. It's mundane, boring work. That's what it was in Vietnam. It  
23 was work, eat, maybe go to the EM Club and then back to work, sleep, and then eat. I  
24 don't think any movie could ever portray that. If it did, it wouldn't make any money. So I  
25 stay away from them.

26 RV: Tell me about the EM Club and what you all would do there. You mentioned  
27 the bands, would they come there?

28 GS: Yeah, the bands would perform. We usually drank and truthfully we were  
29 drinking before duty and that was not supposed to be done, but nobody ever checked. I  
30 mean we had guard mounts every night. The Sergeant that formed the guard mount knew.  
31 If he didn't know that everybody was half lit when they went out. All his nose had to be

1 clogged up. We would sit there and drink. We had two shifts on work and we would have  
2 an early shift that went out at, I think something like, nine o'clock and work until three.  
3 Or no, that wouldn't be right. Probably going out at till seven and working till midnight  
4 and then midnight to something like 5. The bands were the interesting thing to me  
5 because I had a little incident that happened to me in Saudi Arabia, during Desert Storm.  
6 There were certain music, certain songs you were not allowed to have played in Vietnam.  
7 Doesn't mean that you didn't have recordings of them in the barracks on your tape decks  
8 and things but you were not allowed to hear the anti-war, they were never played on the  
9 radio and the bands were never allowed to play them. One of them was, *We Got To Get*  
10 *Out of This Place*, Eric Burdon and the Animals. Obviously the one from Woodstock,  
11 *Country Joan Fish* and I never heard a band play that one, but we knew it was around  
12 because we use to sing it ourselves on the way out to post. I think I use to lead the, give  
13 me an F.

14 RV: Right, that was what I was just thinking of.

15 GS: You know this 19 year old, 20 year old guy trying to enlighten themselves a  
16 little bit.

17 RV: What other music do you hear today that takes you back to Vietnam?

18 GS: Well, that was what I was going to remark. We were not allowed to hear  
19 those certain songs. Once in a while the bands would slip into it and if the Club Manager  
20 was quick or if he really was paying attention, he would stop it. I'm sure that was his job,  
21 he was to defend himself, but one of the songs that I remember that they play, which it  
22 didn't make much sense why it was tabooed, other than they put different words to it,  
23 Bobby Bear's song, *Detroit City*. Every band did this, instead of I want to go home, it  
24 was I want to get laid and it was just comical and even now when I hear Bobby Bear  
25 doing *Detroit City*, the words are I want to get laid. So what happened in, and you asked  
26 about what songs remind me. I was in Desert Storm, Desert Shield. Right at the  
27 beginning we had an AFN station playing. All kinds of music and they were playing the  
28 anti war music which was kind of ironic but it was a different atmosphere. He had a  
29 better quality soldiers; we had all volunteer military. This was a short stint, things hadn't  
30 drugged out to where people were worn down, and thinking about ending war. *Platoon*  
31 had come out and it was real popular, the music to platoon was popular, god I don't know

1 what all the movies were. These songs were popular if the *Armed Forces Radio* was  
2 playing them. The Japanese provided us with bombs and vehicles, so we had a radio that  
3 worked and one of the guys, young troops, said "Hey Top, doesn't this bring old  
4 memories back?" I'm looking at him and I'm going, "What are you talking about?" I'm  
5 thinking he's talking about scenery or something. He says, "The music." He says, "The  
6 music, Vietnam". I looked at him and I said, "We weren't allowed to hear that." He goes,  
7 "What?" I said, "We were not allowed to hear that type of music over in Vietnam," and  
8 he just could not believe that there was any kind of censorship. He says, "No, they  
9 couldn't censor you like that." I said, "Yeah, they could and they did." So I think, you  
10 know, we've got memories of some of the things like that the younger soldiers would not  
11 know or even understand to this day. It was kind of funny, that music, how we've  
12 changed in the military from Vietnam to Desert Storm, Desert Shield. We've gone from  
13 worried about the soldiers doing probably, maybe the leadership was worried that that  
14 type of music would demoralize it to the point they realized that music is probably going  
15 to pump us up.

16 RV: Is that the incidence in Saudi Arabia that you spoke about?

17 GS: Yeah.

18 RV: What about drug abuse, Gary, did you see that?

19 GS: Yeah. There was an old saying, you was either an alkie or a druggie. I fit in  
20 the alkie. There was drug use. We had guys that got caught on urine tests and sent off to  
21 6CC which is a drug treatment center down by Cam Ranh Bay.

22 RV: Were these Sentry Dog Handlers or just everybody?

23 GS: Well the Sentry Dog Handlers that I knew about. Everybody goes to 6<sup>th</sup>CC  
24 for treatment though. I had an occasion I think twice of being offered drugs.

25 RV: Ok, Gary, we can continue.

26 GS: Ok. Well I was saying I was pulled off post night. For some reason they  
27 didn't want a Dog Handler out there. So I was an extra body and instead of being sent  
28 back to the barracks and get a good night's sleep I was told by the Sergeant, "Go ahead  
29 and just stay in the kennel area, kennel office. The guy that was operating the radio had  
30 some marijuana and offered me. I had never tried marijuana and never even wanted to  
31 and offered it, I tried it, and I got so sick. My head was spinning around. All I could do

1 was lay there and groan for the rest of the night. I never wanted to do that again. I think  
2 one other time some body offered and I said no, because I get sick enough with just  
3 foods. I didn't need to do something like that. The common phrase, the common thing, in  
4 Vietnam was you were either an alkie or a druggie. Back to Cam Ranh Bay, to show the  
5 drug use, and I can't remember, it was skag. We called it skag, which was heroine, must  
6 have been a real wide use and even in a MP area. What you would see is in the sand, I  
7 mean in the military, we policed everything, and we'd pick up everything. If it's not  
8 vegetation it needs to be picked up and thrown in the litter. The viles that were used to  
9 hold heroin in it were lying all over the sand. I mean you couldn't walk two feet without  
10 stepping on a capsule of what contained drugs. They were clear plastic viles, probably  
11 about the size of a quarter in diameter, probably I'm going to say half inch in depth. They  
12 were plastic, clear plastic. We were told when you're on police call, don't pick them up,  
13 if you get caught with one of those you'll be labeled as a druggie and you know have to  
14 go for treatment and probably get article 15. So they never got picked up. Maybe it was  
15 only one person using it but every vile of his was sitting out there in the sand. Tuy Hoa, I  
16 didn't see that. I didn't see the viles, I didn't see any of that but obviously drugs were  
17 getting in. I talked about security on Tuy Hoa; I never got off of Tuy Hoa until I went to  
18 Qui Nhon and then when I went to An Son. Well, I take it back and then I went to Long  
19 Binh, but what I'm saying is all military business. The Post was closed, we were not  
20 allowed to go anywhere at anytime. I know a couple of guys got off post one night. Either  
21 took the jeep or something, and these were not Dog Handlers, these were regular MP's.  
22 Went downtown and they either fired on or were fired on and then fired back on some  
23 cowboys and they got killed and it was because they snuck downtown to get whatever  
24 they were going to do. I am assuming probably to get laid. I remember we were formed  
25 up and giving us a talking to about that, not to do that.

26 RV: Not to go off base or not to go...

27 GS: Not to be doing stunts like getting jeeps and sneaking off and do something  
28 stupid like that. The cowboys wore black plaid, wore black somewhat like a cowboy hat,  
29 but not quite, but it was a full brimmed hat. You could see them in the town; they were  
30 carrying their guns. I don't know; they might have been a local militia or a local  
31 protection gang or something like that. I never knew the distinction other than the fact

1 that you didn't mess with them and that they would fire on GIs at different times without  
2 provocation so I don't know if they were associated with VC and just wasn't proven or  
3 what.

4 RV: Sorry. They would walk around in the open in the daylight?

5 GS: Oh yeah. Daylight, nighttime, I got pictures of them in the daylight down in  
6 the village. I don't remember the distinction as to what they exactly were but they  
7 weren't military. We never considered them enemy because then they would have been  
8 captured, so they had to be friendly but they weren't the friendliest that you wanted to  
9 mess around with.

10 RV: Where were they located? Would they stroll the streets of Tuy Hoa?

11 GS: I don't know about Tuy Hoa. I've got pictures of them and I can't remember  
12 what village I took the pictures of. As I understand it, they were in all villages. They were  
13 all black and wore the black hat and were always armed with bombs and rifles. Drove  
14 motorcycles, well what they call motorcycles, scooters. That's about all I remember of  
15 them.

16 RV: Did they seem more like gang members?

17 GS: I think it was more like a gang than anything else.

18 RV: You mentioned sneaking off to the town to get laid. What about that contact  
19 with women? How available was that?

20 GS: What for sex you mean?

21 RV: Yes.

22 GS: I don't know because the only time I ever heard of anybody sneaking off like  
23 that was... Well I take that back. The road MP's were sickos downtown at night and they  
24 did stunts like that because I knew a road MP that told he was going down to see some  
25 girl one night. Dog Handlers, as far as I know, we didn't do it and couldn't do it because  
26 Dog Handlers and Road MP's were not the best of friends. The derogatory remark for the  
27 Dog Handlers was we were puppy fuckers. They looked at us as less than an MP. [We  
28 composed a saying showing our pride. It went like this: "If you aren't K-9 you aren't  
29 shit and if you aren't shit, you aren't a puppy fucker."]

30 RV: Why did they do that?

1 GS: I think it's just common amongst cops everywhere. Even on my own  
2 department, the Sheriff's Office, they guys that are on the road think less of the people  
3 who are in the jail. Because it's not as glamorous and exciting job as what they are doing  
4 and I think the same thing with the Dog Handlers. Our job wasn't as glamorous in  
5 society. I mean you had the MP's that went out on convoys, you had the MP's who were  
6 patrolling and the people that patrolled downtown to make sure nobody was sneaking  
7 downtown. Our job wasn't as glamorous. Even though we made a distinction between the  
8 two the infantry couldn't ever get us straight. We got gassed several times, tear gassed,  
9 CS gas was tossed into our barrack because we lived right next door to the Road MP's.  
10 First time, I woke up something like nine o'clock at night and I was sound asleep and  
11 woke up to the smell of CS and that was a terrible smell. It happened two or three times  
12 we got gassed.

13 RV: They were trying to pick on the road MP's.

14 GS: They were trying to pick on the road MP's for sure because Dog Handlers  
15 had no complaints with them.

16 RV: What other kind of rivalries were there between the various MP groups?

17 GS: I don't think there was that much rivalry. Nobody liked MP's so that's why  
18 the infantry was the way they were. When we went out to walk the dog, generally,  
19 everybody was completely acceptable to us. You always had the tower guards that come  
20 yell down, "Hey, can I come down and pet your dog?" "Oh yeah, right." This thing will  
21 eat your arm off.

22 RV: They were serious?

23 GS: Oh they were serious. They didn't realize what the dog could do. I said,  
24 "No." Rolf was not aggressive even when they come down, I mean Rolf would want to  
25 chew them up from one end to the other and that chased them back up the tower. We also  
26 had to worry about the tower guard's lock and loading on us and firing on us.

27 RV: Especially at night.

28 GS: Yeah, your talking about drugs, well we always got the reports at Guard  
29 Mount of what towers had skag freaks in them, dopers, and we would steer clear of those  
30 particular towers. I've been locked and loaded on several times in Tuy Hoa and that is a  
31 scary feeling that they don't even yell "halt" first and I understand their point. Hell

1 they're wanting to protect themselves. Locked and Loaded, you know you got a full  
2 firearms aiming at you, you can't see anything and your yelling and password, counter  
3 sign. Several times I responded when somebody yelled the password, "You got to be  
4 shitting me, " or something like that. "Yeah ok, I know you're a GI." I know down in  
5 Cam Ranh Bay, this happened when I wasn't there, but it happened. One of the tower  
6 guards went nuts and fired on people coming out of the club or something like that. It was  
7 a real nervous time for us when we had to walk around the towers or get close to them.

8           RV: Let me ask you a question about, you said the road MP's. You all kind of had  
9 some bad blood between you. Does that continue today when you all are together at  
10 reunions, at larger MP reunions or do you see these guys at all?

11           GS: I have never been to a reunion other than Sentry Dogs. I would think as time  
12 goes on, no that wouldn't have been a problem. Even back then, we had a couple of road  
13 MP's that were good friends with Dog Handlers. I don't know what their relationships  
14 were, it was strange, it was a strange time. I mean I played poker with the Company  
15 Commander to the Road MP Unit and the First Sergeant. I was a PFC and I'm in middle.  
16 My own Company Commander was there, matter of fact, when we were in Cam Ranh  
17 Bay. We were playing poker and having a good time at it, matter of fact. It was just a  
18 different circumstance, I think. I don't know.

19           RV: How much contact did you have with home?

20           GS: Letters. I got Dear John when I first got to Tuy Hoa. My girlfriend sent me a  
21 Dear John letter.

22           RV: Did you see that coming?

23           GS: No, I didn't. I wasn't really the most faithful person either. They went into  
24 Okinawa; I partied. I deserved what I got. But I didn't see it coming; it really hurt me.  
25 She was several years younger than me. At that time I didn't take it so easy. I called her, I  
26 wrote her a nasty letter. I called her on MARS system, MARS being the military amateur  
27 radio system; I think it's what it stands for. It depends on ham radios going across the  
28 United States. Every time you got done talking you had to say over just like you would  
29 on a radio. I talked to her and she assured me there is no way in hell we would ever get  
30 back together and that pretty well ended it. I stayed in contact with my sister and brother  
31 and wrote letters. John turned me on to a State Trooper, I wrote letters to him a couple of

1 times, he didn't understand. I think I wrote a letter questioning whether about Vietnam,  
2 about what we were doing and stuff and that kind of soured the rest of the  
3 correspondence with the State Trooper so I didn't write him anymore. My sister was  
4 involved in a traffic accident in August and there was a long time before I ever got a  
5 letter from her. I had written my brother, both my brothers, asking them what is going  
6 on. I got real concerned and it wasn't till after everything was over with and they were  
7 sure that everybody was going to be ok before I got any mail from her. Then they told  
8 me, "Well we were just trying to spare you so you wouldn't worry about us," type of  
9 thing, "so you would be safe." I don't know.

10 RV: Was that State Trooper a Veteran, do you know?

11 GS: I don't know because of my feelings of wanting to be a cop, John had  
12 suggested I write this guy and I did a couple of times. It's just...I don't know why. I've  
13 looked at my letters, my sister saved my letters and my wife has got them now and I was  
14 reading a few of them and I'm thinking I was a stupid 19 year old kid then. Can I ask a  
15 favor?

16 RV: Absolutely Gary.

17 GS: Can we break for a few minutes?

18 RV: Ok Gary, go ahead.

19 GS: I had just found out my sister was injured in an accident and her kids. I even  
20 tried to involve the Red Cross to get to go home. I was looking for a way to get out of  
21 Vietnam too; go home. The Red Cross said no, the danger was over; she was ok so there  
22 was no reason to try to send me home. That's pretty much the letters I wrote.

23 RV: Did you make any other MARS phone calls besides the one to your ex  
24 girlfriend?

25 GS: No, I don't think so. It was difficult to do. You had to have the timing had to  
26 be right. Obviously the price was right, they were free on our end. Now if the MARS  
27 station was calling from one place and calling some place else in the states it was more  
28 expensive.

29 RV: Were you able to keep up with news from the United States?

30 GS: You know what, we read the *Stars and Stripes* which was; I felt, pretty good  
31 newspaper. It reported a lot on Vietnam and what was going on. It would report the local

1 news, what I would consider the local news, the hometown type of things, what was  
2 going on. I didn't watch tv. I remember we had tv. I remember watching *Hee Haw* and  
3 that was about it, once in a while. The news, the radio news, I don't remember too much  
4 about listening to the radio. I do remember when we closed down Tuy Hoa, this is a little  
5 bit further ahead, but when we closed down Tuy Hoa, we got down to Cam Ranh Bay  
6 and they said, "Well we've been waiting on you." We're going, "How? We only got the  
7 word this morning that we were going to shut it down and to come down here." We've  
8 been waiting around for days on end but they finally gave us the word to go. The First  
9 Sergeant said, "We heard it on Paul Harvey today." I was just astonished that, "Gosh here  
10 is a radio personality that knew what we were doing, and cared what we were doing."  
11 That was probably the only in the way of the radio and TV stuff that I can even  
12 remember. A lot of guys had their own stereos and they would have their big reel-to-reel  
13 players and big speakers. We would listen to music that way. I had a little boom box, we  
14 didn't call them boom boxes then, but a little cassette am/fm radio that I would listen to  
15 tapes on I think.

16 RV: What kind of music did you listen to?

17 GS: At that time, I liked the oldies and I was starting to get into country because  
18 Tex liked country and he predominately played the music. Matter of fact, I am almost  
19 certain it was mostly country because he was the predominate force in that. He had the  
20 music and I was a captive audience.

21 RV: Did you have access to religious facilities: churches or ceremonies?

22 GS: There was a chapel there, and again I think the only time I went there was  
23 when I was worried about my sister and I really didn't have much exposure to it.

24 RV: Did your spiritual beliefs change at all or were they altered at all by your  
25 experience in Vietnam?

26 GS: No, not at all. I am more religious then I was back then, now. I didn't have  
27 that much. I believe I'm a Christian, I believe in Christianity and the teachings of Jesus. I  
28 knew it then but I didn't practice it or, I don't know, partake of it, you know by going to  
29 church and worshipping as much as I do now. Before I went to Vietnam I didn't go to  
30 worship services. After my mother died and my father couldn't take care of us, I don't  
31 think I ever went to church after that. I did go to church one time in Basic Training and

1 that was one of those things where the Drill Sergeant was stamping his foot saying, "We  
2 strongly encourage this and the ones that don't go are going to be pulling KP." I went,  
3 but that was a one-time thing. As far as religion, didn't have involvement with a  
4 Chaplain; never saw a Chaplain. I don't remember a Chaplain coming around and even  
5 visiting. I do remember a Recruiter coming, not a Recruiter but a re-enlistment NCO  
6 coming by one time and saying, "You guys want to reenlist?"

7           RV: How did you react to him?

8           GS: Oh we told him, "You got to be joking." He said, "Yeah, that's pretty much  
9 what I get from everybody." That wasn't pursued. As far as the Chaplain goes... Later on  
10 I was a First Sergeant in Germany and we had a Chaplain who constantly would come by  
11 and he says... It was explain to me when I first got there that we were his adoptive  
12 Company or he was our adoptive Chaplain, somewhat like that, Catholic Chaplain. In no  
13 other unit did I ever see anything where a Chaplain was fully involved coming by and  
14 getting involved with the unit.

15           RV: Gary, why don't we walk through your typical day as far as what you did,  
16 actually with your dog and what your duties were, what your mission was.

17           GS: Typically, we started out in the morning. You never missed a meal. We ate  
18 breakfast, went back to the barracks, laid down for a few hours, got up, went to the  
19 Dining Hall, Mess Hall, for lunch, then went to the theatre if there was a good movie or if  
20 there was any movie, if we hadn't seen it before, that was the basic thing. Saw a movie,  
21 went back to the barracks, probably messed around in the barracks a while until it was  
22 supper time, ate supper, went back to the barracks, set around, maybe read or something,  
23 I don't know. Then went to the EM Club, had a few drinks. If there was a band, watched  
24 the band and then get ready for work. We were already dressed. I had a pair of cut off  
25 Levi shorts, white shorts, and I wore an OD green t-shirt and that was my civilian attire  
26 and shower shoes. All the rest of the time I was dressed in uniform.

27           RV: What was your uniform like when you would go out with the dog?

28           GS: Uniform was strictly, the OD uniform, now you could buy cammies from the  
29 Hooch Maid's, I forgot to mention that. You could get cammies from the Hooch Maid.  
30 The OD uniform, you wore a ball camp. Flack vest and helmet were supposed to be worn  
31 but they usually got thrown in your waterproof bag because they were just a hassle to

1 even carry. You had a waterproof bag that you carried one, for your duty you would be  
2 issued one C-ration, a bandolier of ammunition, M-16, you had your dog gear. You had  
3 your muzzle, choke chain, leash and collar, let me see, I don't think there was anything  
4 else that we carried, oh poncho. Had to have a poncho and a poncho liner.

5 RV: Did you have a side arm?

6 GS: No. M-16 was all we carried.

7 RV: Rolf was muzzled?

8 GS: Rolf would be. When we get him out of the cage and give him a break before  
9 we had guard mount and loaded up, I wouldn't have a muzzle on him. Once we started  
10 forming up, you muzzled him. Then guard mount would take place and basically guard  
11 mount was nothing more than telling me what post I was going to be walking that night.

12 RV: Did you have a preferred area that you wanted to walk more than others?

13 GS: I think I would have preferred the beach. It was just more tranquil and things  
14 like that. When the monsoon came there was just no way, no preferred place. The  
15 Officers Club, the post out in front of the Officers Club was preferred by some because I  
16 think some of the guys were able. Oh I remember, the waiters or the cooks inside would  
17 once in a while pass something onto the Dog Handlers if they were still in there cleaning  
18 up after the club had closed. That was about the only preferred post I can think of.

19 RV: When you would actually go out, how far would you be away from each  
20 other and how did that set up go?

21 GS: This is stuff I'm going to be admitting to that is just. This is one of the things  
22 I mentioned in my bio, hand written bio that I regret. We weren't as diligent in patrolling  
23 and walking our perimeters, as we should have been. Numerous times you set down in  
24 the middle of the perimeter or in the middle of your post, or you set down at the end of  
25 one post and one Handler was on one post and you were on the other and you set there.  
26 Didn't walk your post but once maybe a great while. I know when I was taking out the  
27 first time; it was spaced with two Handlers. They laid their ponchos out and watched the  
28 ocean. We were on the beach and watched the moon coming up. We were close together  
29 at An Son post and the entire perimeter was not patrolled by Dog Handlers. There were  
30 some areas that were really swampy. Just wouldn't walk. There was always a Handler

1 near by. The only time there wasn't is when I was actually walking my entire post, I  
2 don't know if that explains that or not.

3 RV: It does, it does. Can you explain then, to follow up, exactly what you all were  
4 doing? What was your mission? What were you supposed to be watching for or listening  
5 for? What was Rolf doing?

6 GS: Rolf was supposed to be doing all the work. All I'm supposed to be doing is  
7 reading the signs. Dogs have a better sense of smell, hearing, and seeing. Your post  
8 would be, I can't even remember the length of the post, but they weren't that long,  
9 probably 100 meters long, maybe a football field, maybe a little bit longer. You used the  
10 dog to watch for any intruders coming in. We were usually way behind the tower line,  
11 especially by the ammo dump in Tuy Hoa. We were way behind the tower line.

12 RV: You mean the tower line was out first, it was the first defense and then there  
13 was you?

14 GS: And the tower line was in back of the perimeter fence, which was all lit up  
15 and the perimeter fence was constantina wire strung together, probably about six feet  
16 high and I'm not sure how many perimeter fences there were. The perimeter was always  
17 lit and we would be walking behind them in total darkness. You had no light; you didn't  
18 use a flashlight. We did have a two-way radio. We had hand held radios, basically a  
19 walkie-talkie, a commercial type, for the military, that we can converse with other  
20 Handlers and the SOG.

21 RV: Were you in shouting distance of each other?

22 GS: No, not if we were walking and that would be something that we would never  
23 do, was shout at each other. Didn't want anybody to know where you were at. I wouldn't  
24 want the Tower Guards to know where I was at because I would be afraid that they would  
25 probably shoot us.

26 RV: How far away were the towers from your walking post?

27 GS: Well if you were on the beach, you were right on the tower line, I mean there  
28 was no distance between the road and to the tower line and we were in between the road  
29 and the tower line, behind the towers. You had to walk right next to the towers when you  
30 were walking your post because several times I remember... That's where I remember  
31 the Tower Guards wanting to come down and pet the dog because they hadn't seen a dog

1 for so long and things like that. Out on the other side of the perimeter we were, I want to  
2 say, maybe 200 yards away from the tower line. We were way off the beaten path and we  
3 walked the length, you know, like I said I think we screwed off more than we did work  
4 too. Feeling guilty about that now. I don't know what else I can tell you on that.

5 RV: On the beach were you all the only people out there on the beach?

6 GS: Yes, other than the Tower Guards.

7 RV: What was that like? I mean was it relaxing or was it anxiousness?

8 GS: Yeah, it was relaxing there because you didn't really worry about... You  
9 could see, you know, the perimeter lights were lighting up out in front of you. You could  
10 see, I mean I don't care how much trust you put in your dog, it still is more comforting  
11 when you know you're seeing out there. Now, obviously, my sight was not as good as  
12 Rolf's sight and his hearing and everything but you had a little bit more degree of  
13 comfort there, a comfort level was a little bit higher. When you're walking in the grass on  
14 the other perimeters, you had no idea what you were walking into. You had no idea if  
15 some kind of trap or snare was set for you. You had no idea what kind of snakes were out  
16 there. You know we always kept hearing about the two stepper or bunji sticks, or punji  
17 sticks I guess they were. Those types of things didn't dwell on your mind all the time but  
18 at the same time it kept you wondering what you were getting into.

19 RV: How much trust did you have in Rolf?

20 GS: Immense trust, a whole lot. There is only a couple of times we had alerts  
21 while I was there and I trusted him to lead me into whatever it was, never did find out  
22 what they were.

23 RV: What do you mean by alerts?

24 GS: Well that is the whole thing. We call it alert when he senses something, he'll  
25 either start pulling. With Rolf it was pulling, he wanted to go find whatever it is he  
26 smelled, hear or saw. Some dogs would just perk up their ears and tilt their heads up like  
27 they were trying to get a better smell, but that was called alert. Then you had to follow it  
28 and find out what it was that he was that he was sensing.

29 RV: Would you have to call in and tell the others hey we're on alert right now,  
30 I'm going check it out?

1 GS: Right. The whole time I was at Tuy Hoa we had a few alerts but never  
2 anything, nothing ever came out of them.

3 RV: So there were no incidents in Tuy Hoa?

4 GS: Right.

5 RV: Were there any larger base incidents in Tuy Hoa?

6 GS: Larger what?

7 RV: Like base incidents. Were you ever mortared?

8 GS: No, not the whole I was there. Now we did have an incident. They used to put  
9 gun trucks out on the perimeter in different strategic locations where they thought maybe  
10 sappers might try to come in that night or something like that. Gun trucks were five-ton  
11 utility trucks with a Quad 50. 4-50 caliber machine guns hooked together so they fire  
12 simultaneously together, a hell of a lot of firepower. They would set out on the perimeter  
13 at times and when they did, we had to give them a wide berth because all they were going  
14 to do is screw up the dogs senses and everything anyway. They also would call for mortar  
15 flares and I mean when you talk about somebody's ticket getting punched and you know  
16 it was his time. This is what happened, you have to attribute it; it was just his time. A guy  
17 was setting on a gun truck. The mortar flares, when they fire them, there is a casing in  
18 that it chases it when it goes up in the air and pops when the chute and flare pop out this  
19 casing drops off. The casing dropped off on a flare and landed on this gun truck and  
20 killed one of the people that was sitting on the truck, it hit him in the back of the head,  
21 took half of his head off. That is when you start saying if your time is up, your time's up.  
22 Not real philosophical but you know, you realize hey you don't have any control over  
23 anything.

24 RV: You realized that while you were there or is that hindsight looking at it now?

25 GS: I think we saw it there, especially after that incident.

26 The guys that went out and got themselves killed out in the village, they had control of  
27 that. There was no need for them being out there and firing on the cowboys and starting a  
28 fire fight and getting themselves killed. This guy had got killed on the gun truck, I mean  
29 if the gun truck had been 2 meters one way or the other he wouldn't have gotten killed, or  
30 if the mortar had been elevated one notch up or down it wouldn't have hit him. I won't

1 say it was an act of God because I don't God does it that way. There is just sometimes  
2 you don't have control over anything and it's just freak accidents that happen.

3 RV: How did you deal with that chance that you were taking every time you  
4 walked out there on the perimeter? What were you thinking and feeling during those  
5 night shifts?

6 GS: A lot of loneliness, even walking the dog, it's boredom. You're sitting there.  
7 We didn't get into philosophical topics or anything, there just wasn't. All I remember is  
8 either we were sitting or walking the dog. Did a lot of talking to Rolf, I mean he was a  
9 good listener.

10 RV: What would you say to him?

11 GS: Oh, I don't know, I'm just talking things about home, talking to myself  
12 basically. Spent time opening C-rations and feeding Rolf the main course, it was a  
13 wonder he didn't balloon up because I sure wasn't going to eat the main course. I ate the  
14 fruit and the candy bars and saved the cigarettes in case I needed cigarettes sometime but  
15 he usually got the beef stew, or whatever the main course was. I always carried two  
16 canteens because one canteen with two canteen cups, one was for Rolf and one was for  
17 me, I forgot about that. Out on the post, especially when you were walking, you didn't do  
18 anything but listen and watch a dog. That's about it on that.

19 RV: Did you smoke while you walked?

20 GS: No, maybe when I was sitting down and I thought that I was low enough to  
21 where I didn't present a target, I would smoke, but no not while walking.

22 RV: What was the worst experience you ever had while you were walking the  
23 dog?

24 GS: Let me see. The worst experiences is when the Tower Guards would lock and  
25 load on you before they even said anything. I mean there is a split second there after you  
26 hear a round chamber before anything else was said and before you could say anything.  
27 You don't know if that guy is high on drugs and what he is going to do, you're at his  
28 mercy. You're hoping that you can yell out Dog Handler or he'll yell out halt or  
29 something before he shoots. I think that is the worst experience. Most terrifying  
30 experience while walking the dog I ever had.

31 RV: That happened more at Tuy Hoa or at both places?

1 GS: It happened at Tuy Hoa. It never happened, I don't remember it happening  
2 at Cam Ranh Bay, I don't remember it happening at An Son. Tuy Hoa was just the  
3 scariest one, I mean you know you had the drug freaks and we called them skag freaks.  
4 You knew you had skag freaks and you knew that things could happen, even though they  
5 never did. I don't remember hearing before hand about any Dog Handler being shot by a  
6 Tower Guard but you know it was just that eerie feeling that it could happen. That's  
7 about it.

8 RV: Were the men in the towers regular Army or were they MP's?

9 GS: Oh no, they were Infantry or whatever other branch that was based at Tuy  
10 Hoa. In Vietnam, as I understand it, you would send your Infantry out on patrols while  
11 they would have down time when they were still back at the home base and that's what  
12 they did when they were at the home base, on their down time they would have full guard  
13 duty and other details.

14 RV: Can you describe a general, the differences between the daytime in Vietnam  
15 and the nighttime in Vietnam?

16 GS: Daytime was hot, humid, sunshine; very seldom did you see a cloud in the  
17 sky if I remember right. Just oppressively hot. At nighttime it would cool down, I mean it  
18 was acceptable. It was easier to move around during the nighttime. I remember you had  
19 lights at nighttime on the streets. You weren't in pitch dark at Tuy Hoa. When I was  
20 stationed over in Somalia, that was one of the things I keyed on when I landed in  
21 Somalia, there were no lights. We landed at night. If there was any light anywhere, you  
22 knew it was military. The populists had decimated their infrastructure so much that there  
23 was nothing there. I could see lights if I was on the right side of the perimeter I was able  
24 to see lights out in the village. That's what I remember at nighttime. Walking the dog, I  
25 mean, I was never comfortable just being out there on my own. It's kind of like being a  
26 cop; they tell you've got three phases that you go through. You're in green when you're  
27 relaxed, there is not a worry or anything and when you're on duty you should be, in  
28 amber or yellow and when something really happens it is red. Well in my case I always  
29 in, when I was walking the dog, I was in yellow most of the time. I just felt, you always  
30 felt the uneasiness that something could happen.

31 RV: I imagine that was emotionally stressful and physically stressful.

1 GS: You know, I don't remember being emotionally stressed out and physically...  
2 I should have been, should have been stressed, physically should have been stressed out  
3 and I don't remember being stressed out that much. It was just something that probably  
4 when we first got there, yeah it was, but after a while you just got used to the routine. That  
5 was what the whole Vietnam thing was, was a routine force. For me, get up in the  
6 morning, go to the work, or get up in the morning, go eat, then do this, do that, go to  
7 work at night and then after you got done working if you got off at five o'clock in the  
8 morning you went and ate breakfast then you went to sleep. If you go off at midnight  
9 you've gone to bed and then you get up in the morning and get breakfast. Never missed a  
10 meal that was the main thing.

11 RV: Gary did your Vietnam experience meet or not meet your expectations? I'm  
12 not sure if...

13 GS: I didn't have any expectations. I had expectations about Vietnam that  
14 somebody was going, that it was going to be constant fighting. It was going to be hand to  
15 hand, maybe not hand to hand but I had expectations that there was going to be a lot of  
16 fighting, ground fighting. So that didn't occur and I'm grateful that it didn't. I don't think  
17 I had real expectations of anything other than that and I just, again, I think it goes back to  
18 how much reading I had done about Vietnam, I didn't. I really didn't know that much  
19 about Vietnam.

20 RV: How aware did you become about the bigger picture while you were there  
21 and the understanding of what the United States is doing there in Vietnam and Southeast  
22 Asia in general?

23 GS: I don't think I really realized the big picture until after I got back from  
24 Vietnam and I was in my unit in New Mexico. When we were signing the peace  
25 agreement and we were going to start to make a more aggressive withdrawal, started  
26 wondering what are we doing? Then when Vietnam fell, that's when I was wondering  
27 why, what did we do, you know, why did we give up?

28 RV: Tell me about An Son. What was different up there and what were your  
29 duties up there and what was it like there?

30 GS: An Son was totally different, non-military environment for Dog Handlers. It  
31 was a squad-sized element. The Sergeant, the Squad Sergeant, Squad Leader was Ed

1 Hooligan and we used to refer to him as Ed the Head. He had a big mustache and longer  
2 than normal hair for a Sergeant. He was young. Did he do drugs? I don't know. I don't  
3 know where Ed the Head came from but we use to call him that and still being a young  
4 private I didn't understand until he said, "Don't call me that in front of the Company  
5 Commander or the Platoon Leader and Platoon Sergeant when they come here." I should  
6 have known that right off the bat. An Son was laid back. We worked; I think we worked  
7 two shifts on that also. I think there was an early shift and a late shift.

8 RV: Both at night?

9 GS: Yeah, both at night, all night. Dog Handlers, I never knew a Sentry Dog  
10 Handler that worked anything but nights. We walked the perimeter. An Son was Lane Air  
11 Field, is the proper military name and it was a heliport. Basically our ritual there, I don't  
12 think we had a theatre, so it was eating, barracks, eating and work. We were a closer-knit  
13 group of people because we only had one barrack that everybody was in. It was a World  
14 War II style barracks. We had out door John and our John and showers were down at the  
15 kennels. We could use the central, another shower that was close to our barracks that  
16 everybody used. The perimeter on one side was taken care of by the ROK's, which was  
17 the Republic Korean Marines. The rest of the portions of perimeter was open, surround  
18 by either village, or whatever. I remember the mountainside, on one side; it was a pretty  
19 spectacular view. You would watch the helicopters work out with their 20-milimeter guns  
20 and I want to say 50's but they shouldn't have 50's on the helicopters. But they were  
21 loaches and I can't remember, but I think it was loaches that they call the attack  
22 helicopter and watched them work out on the hill side and again I don't know if there was  
23 something up there that they were attack or what but that was pretty spectacular. When  
24 the lights went out, we had lights. One night I remember lights went out and they started  
25 putting, it wasn't mortars, it was field artillery firing flares up and that was kind of an eye  
26 opener because all of a sudden lights gone and then you hear explosions going off in the  
27 distance and you're going oh crap, this is it and it turned out it was nothing. I don't know  
28 why the lights went out. We were set for an attack as soon as that happened, that was  
29 scary.

30 RV: Was that the only incident up there at An Son that you remember?

1 GS: Yeah, I think so. Now we had been told, I told you once I was taken care of  
2 by the ROK's and they ROK's are a very aggressive military and it was told to me, the  
3 story was one Lieutenant walked up on a tower one night and caught two ROK's  
4 sleeping. He didn't bother waking them up, he just put a bullet in each of their heads and  
5 called the SOG and told them to get two replacements up there and get the bodies pulled  
6 down. Kind of makes you wonder, boy it's a good thing didn't have that. In An Son we  
7 were allowed, not allowed, we got away with having women in the barracks, local  
8 women and a lot of guys did. The agreement was for us to be Dog Handlers up there,  
9 there was an agreement that the post could not search our barracks without a two hour  
10 warning or something and guys had grenades, they had knives, they had crap that nobody  
11 should of ever had but they had it. They had the firepower type stuff. The worst  
12 experience I ever had was in An Son, it is not haunting me but it bothers me even when I  
13 think about this now and this is just minor stuff. We had to take care of stray dogs up  
14 there and the post would catch them and then they would bring them to our Vet Tech to  
15 kill them, put them to sleep. Our Vet Tech either wasn't very good at hitting the right  
16 spot or the drugs just weren't that good, I don't know, and there are several times the  
17 dogs would yelp and cry and everything while they were dying and that just. Being a Dog  
18 Handler and watching a dog die and holding him while he is doing it is not my idea of  
19 fun.

20 RV: How often did that occur?

21 GS: I remember one time. I wouldn't have done it again.

22 RV: I assume Rolf traveled up there with you?

23 GS: Yes, he did. We had an exercise area up there and Rolf and I were a team up  
24 there. We had, you know, I told you that we did have women; there was crazy things that  
25 got done. We had a guy that came into country the same time we did, he was in my AIT  
26 unit in Evans. He was referred to as Newbie all this time and it was because he did stunts,  
27 crazy things. He did, two incidents, one was he wanted a parachute from a flare and it  
28 was outside the perimeter and he tied up his dog or he took his dog with him, I can't  
29 remember which but went out and got the flare. He went through a minefield to get this  
30 damn flare and came back. Wonder he didn't get himself blown up. He was down at the  
31 gate one night and the Sergeant come by and he walked into the gate and says, "Evans,

1      Newbie, where is your dog?" "Oh, he's tied up out there." It was, "Newbie, you don't tie  
2      up your dog, you don't do this." He was just, he was a really good guy but he was always  
3      going to be Newbie. An Son was a real treat. I was only there for about a month and then  
4      I had to ship back to Tuy Hoa because President Nixon was doing the draw down and  
5      they figured I was getting short and that I would be shipping, getting an early out at  
6      Vietnam, so they sent us back to Tuy Hoa. I did about a month there and then we closed  
7      down Tuy Hoa.

8              RV: So just the squad of you went up there?

9              GS: Uh huh. Now, they replaced us. They kept Dog Handlers up there even when  
10     they pulled us back from An Son.

11              RV: So they just kind of rotated you in and out.

12              GS: Yeah.

13              RV: Did you volunteer for that or were you chosen for it?

14              GS: Oh I volunteered for it, I asked for it. Tex went up there first and we had  
15     always heard the rumors and talk about how good a place it was and I asked to go up  
16     there and like I said I think I was only up there a month. Tex had been up there a couple  
17     of months I think and Newbie had gone up there originally when we first got into Tuy  
18     Hoa and I think one other guy, Baker went up there. It was a place that you wanted to go.  
19     You had women; you had opportunity to women; that was the main selling point I think  
20     everybody talked about.

21              RV: Did you ever witness any abuse of the Sentry Dogs?

22              GS: No, no. I can't imagine any Dog Handler would ever abuse a dog. I was not  
23     the only one that was really upset when we had to kill the stray dogs and I mean Dog  
24     Handlers that would be the last. There is just no way in hell a Dog Handler would have  
25     put up with somebody abusing another animal. I can't imagine a Dog Handler ever doing  
26     that.

27              RV: Did you feel that way before you became a Dog Handler?

28              GS: Oh yeah. I felt that way about dogs all along. I can't imagine anybody  
29     abusing any kind of animal and wouldn't have tolerated it. Now we did stupid things with  
30     the dogs, I mean it's not abuse. Had a guy who had a black dog, like me in Tuy Hoa. He  
31     would train his dog to do tricks like, "What would you rather be?" First of all we had

1 certain commands that we had to train, I mean it's like any drill and ceremony in the  
2 military. Sit, stay, down, and you did it by hand signals and you did it also by voice  
3 command, heel, things like that. Well you also taught your dogs, well this guy taught his  
4 dog a couple of extra tricks. He taught them, "What would you rather be, a dead dog or a  
5 lifer". He taught them how to do a dead dog and a lifer was somebody in the military that  
6 was just a leech that was just hanging on and off, was not a very nice thing to be called in  
7 the military, even if you were a career soldier. He taught his dog how to be a dead dog. It  
8 would lie on its side and just lie there and not move. As soon as you said, "What would  
9 you rather be, a dead dog or a lifer?" This dog would lie down and be a dead dog and I  
10 think I copied that. I think I taught Rolf how to do that too. Then he taught his dog, you  
11 got to remember this is all male. There is no female and there is not a real big thing about  
12 women in the military at that time and he taught his dog how to lay on its back with it's  
13 four legs up and move around in a gyration that looks like a female having sex, type of  
14 thing. He would say, whatever his dog's name is, "Show me how a WAC makes rank,"  
15 and this dog would roll over on his back with all four legs up and just start moving. That  
16 was just the funniest thing when you're all male and you're doing stunts like this. I later  
17 on told my wife about it, she is a WAC and 20 years later, it was not funny. She did not  
18 care for that at all. I can understand why now but at the time it was interesting. This guy  
19 taught his dog had to do the dep. We had two black dogs, I mean back then the blacks  
20 soldiers, any time they saw each other they would spend minutes slapping hands together,  
21 closed fists together, but slapping each other's hands in different ways, different  
22 directions and all. For a white guy it was quite discerning. Why are you doing this, you  
23 know, there was a lot of racial strife that went unsaid.

24 RV: Can you give me some examples?

25 GS: An example was the dep, and they called it the dep.

26 RV: Is that d-e-p?

27 GS: I think so; I've never seen it spelled. All I can say is, it was pronounced dep.  
28 I'm 52 years old and I'm looking back now and it's hard to understand feelings but then I  
29 do understand the feelings. I mean there is mistrust. When you were out on patrol you  
30 trusted anybody that was wearing green, we were all green. The blacks hung around with

1 the blacks, the whites hung around with the whites and you didn't see two white guys  
2 doing the dep. You didn't see a white guy and a black doing the dep.

3 RV: The dep was the extensive handshake in directions?

4 GS: Right, yeah. It was just; there was a separation there. Thank goodness we  
5 have progressed a lot further than that.

6 RV: Anything else happen that you saw besides just separation?

7 GS: Well I got accused. Up at An Son I got, An Son wasn't real well lit and I was  
8 coming back from the club one night and as any drunken soldier can testify, you know  
9 there is a time when somebody says something. I had a black soldier who accused me of  
10 something. He was angry at me, probably angry at any white person. It was directed at  
11 me. It was dark out, I couldn't see even who he was. He had a friend with him. He says,  
12 "Listen, you've got to excuse him, he's..." It was another black soldier, says, "You've got  
13 to excuse him, he's drunk." He drug him on and I was in no mood to fight. I'm more of a  
14 passive than I am aggressive. I said, "Ok, alright." I think I did try to question him, why  
15 are you angry at me type of thing. It just infuriated him more. That was the only racial  
16 thing I saw out of my whole time there. I mean the tension was there. You just, whites  
17 didn't understand why you had to spend so much time doing a handshake like that and I  
18 don't think I ever asked anybody why. I'm sure it was just something for them, you  
19 know, identity.

20 RV: What about the relationships you formed with the men in your unit?

21 GS: Well Tex was my closest buddy. Gonzales, the clerk that showed me tacos  
22 was my next closest buddy. We hung around together. Other relationships, no there  
23 wasn't a whole lot of other relationships. You talked, you laughed, and told jokes and  
24 things like but Tex was the one I went to the theatre with, the movies with. Gonzales was  
25 the one I went to the club with. Tex was the one I went to the club with too. Tex was  
26 usually the one I was on patrol with as a partner at times.

27 RV: So you walked in pairs?

28 GS: Well, not pairs but like I said, if you had two perimeters, two posts adjoining.  
29 You usually ended up meeting one and hanging out where the two posts met.

30 RV: Gary, let me ask you real quick. Were there, you mentioned Gonzales, was  
31 there any racial tension between whites and Hispanics or blacks and Hispanics?

1 GS: None that I know of. Quite honestly I didn't know Gonzales was Hispanic; I  
2 didn't know there was a distinction. I think I probably realized he was Mexican and back  
3 then that was probably the term that was used. Politically correct now, it's Hispanic but  
4 he was not Mexican. He was just a friend. One of these days I hope I could find him. Just  
5 a super nice guy, had a wife, a family back at home and all he wanted to do was do his  
6 time, get out, and go back to LA. Mexican food, he could tell me about and I don't think  
7 we talked that much about LA. I wouldn't have known, even thought of him about being  
8 different than me.

9 RV: Gary, what was your opinion of the enemy? Of the Vietcong and the NVA?

10 GS: That they were the enemy. I didn't see them as superhuman or subhuman.  
11 Now we had a lot of people that referred to and even me, I think. When I first go to  
12 Okinawa we referred to, when we got talking about Charlie, which was the VC or the  
13 NVA, we would refer to them as Gooks. We had a Sergeant there that overheard that he  
14 says, "I am married to a Vietnamese and I'll have you know that it not the polite thing to  
15 do." In other words, don't use the word Gook. I didn't realize that it was derogatory yet I  
16 probably should have known, I probably did know it was derogatory. One of those things  
17 that you use until somebody calls you on it and then you realize oh, maybe I better not.  
18 My opinion of the enemy was that they were the enemy. You really didn't know who  
19 your enemy was. I mean we got haircuts from the barbers who could have been  
20 somebody that was going to be attacking even though we never did get attacked. The  
21 Kennel Man, the guy that took care of our kennels in Tuy Hoa, he was very slender, mild  
22 mannered, to the point of being timid, if I remember right. I never thought that he could  
23 possible be the enemy and as far as I know, he wasn't. On generality you didn't, we  
24 didn't know who Charlie was and we didn't know who the NVA was.

25 RV: So you were conscious of that unknowing while you were there?

26 GS: Right.

27 RV: And walking around and doing your everyday things.

28 GS: Oh yeah. You didn't know, in the villages, when you went on convoy who  
29 was the enemy and who was the friendlies.

30 RV: What was your impression of the Vietnamese civilian population as you  
31 spent your year there?

1 GS: Here again, I didn't really know that much about the Vietnamese population  
2 except for the few ladies that I met. In polite terms, I didn't get to know them. There was  
3 more overpowering desires there then get to know about their life and all.

4 RV: One lady that I knew up in An Son, didn't really get to know her that well, I  
5 knew that she had a sister who was our Hooch Maid down in the kennels. She would  
6 bring in Korean C-rations to me. First ever I ever had Kimchi was over in Vietnam and I  
7 decided when I went to Korea that I would never have to try Kimchi. To get to know  
8 them, I didn't know that much about their life or what was going on. We didn't discuss  
9 the war. The girls, they obviously would say, "Oh yeah, the VC is number 10, they're  
10 bad," things like that. Any further than that we would be stretching it, I don't know.

11 RV: Were you given any cultural training about Vietnam before you went there or  
12 while you were there?

13 GS: No, when we first go in country to Cam Ranh Bay, we got a movie and I  
14 remember LBJ, President Johnson, they showed a scene of him saying, "Why Vietnam?"  
15 He gave an explanation of why Vietnam. I don't even remember what he said. I'm sure it  
16 was something with God, honor, country and stop Communists, something like that.  
17 When we walked out of there I remember a lot of guys thinking, no I remember a couple  
18 of guys saying, "Well I didn't know why we were here before but now I do." I don't  
19 remember exactly what President Johnson said other than, I'm certain it was in the nature  
20 of we need to stop the Communists now.

21 RV: Did you develop a sense of why you were there, while you were there?

22 GS: No. I mean, the big picture didn't develop until after because I was only  
23 concerned about Gary Smith and about surviving and getting home. That was the extent  
24 of everybody, I think, that I encountered was do your time, get out of there and don't look  
25 back.

26 RV: Let me ask a couple questions about your unit. Did you all have any pets  
27 besides your relationships with the dogs?

28 GS: We had one dog that was retired that was down in Cam Ranh Bay and you  
29 know you mentioned dogs being mistreated, this dog, poor dog. He was a mascot but he  
30 sure wasn't, it would long times before he was actually taken care of. I know he had ticks  
31 on him at one time, somebody told me. He was neglected, forgotten about. He would lay

1 in a kennel, I don't know if somebody ever took him out and walked him, I didn't spend  
2 that much time in Cam Ranh Bay. I know his kennel was right there in the barracks area  
3 and nobody ever took him out that I saw, mascots, other dogs, or animals; no. The  
4 Vietnamese were deathly scared of animals. I think that is the reason why you didn't see  
5 that many. They ate dogs. That was one of their cuisines. They were deathly scared of  
6 dogs because if they got bit by a dog Buddha said that they would not go to heaven. Now  
7 that is what we were told. Dogs were not real prevalent around there.

8 RV: Did you ever have any encounters with wild animals? You mentioned the  
9 snakes, you were thinking about.

10 GS: No, never did. I've heard tales, guys tell stories about monkeys. There was a  
11 type of monkey that used to when it made its noise sounded like, and again, I'm sorry I  
12 have to use these words but 'fuck you' and I remember hearing about that but that was  
13 way up north up by Da Nang that they talked about those kinds of things. Never had any  
14 encounters with any animals or anything. The biggest thing I ever had encounters was  
15 with mosquitoes. They would eat you alive. They were bad, especially in Tuy Hoa when I  
16 first got there. We got down in some of the swampy areas when we went to walk and I  
17 mean you would just be covered in mosquitoes. It could be hot and you would have your  
18 sleeves down and shirt buttoned up. I don't use mosquito spray very much and I even  
19 used it then.

20 RV: You did use it then?

21 GS: Yeah.

22 RV: Ok. How about any cases of Malaria that you were aware of?

23 GS: Never heard of anybody getting malaria. A lot of guys didn't take the Malaria  
24 pills either. Guys would complain about how they would get constipated or diarrhea if  
25 they took the Malaria pills. It was Malaria pills were either handed out or they were  
26 available and you had to take them once a week. I can't remember, but no body watched  
27 you to make sure you took them. I took them and then there's time when I didn't take  
28 them. I don't remember ever getting constipated or diarrhea out of it but I remember guys  
29 complaining about it.

30 RV: You mentioned you had some exposure to the ROK troops; did you ever  
31 work with troops from any other countries?

1 GS: No, the only experience, the only time I met a ROK was we had a ROK  
2 Marine come up, a Sergeant, and he was trying to get one of the soldiers up in An Son to  
3 buy him a refrigerator so he could ship it home, which was technically black market and I  
4 don't know if that ever happened or not but that was the only time I ever saw it, except  
5 when we were going through Qui Nhon Pass. It was guarded by the ROK's but that was  
6 the only time I ever saw any encounters with Vietnamese soldiers or with ROK's.

7 RV: So you didn't work with South Vietnamese troops or having...

8 GS: No, none what so ever.

9 RV: Now did you know the exact date you were leaving? Were you aware of  
10 exactly when you would be taken out of country?

11 GS: No. Well I knew a DEROS date would be one year after I went in. Now  
12 because we went to Okinawa for dog school, our tour started in Okinawa, which was  
13 June 16<sup>th</sup>, I think, something like that. No, end of June, June 26, somewhere around there.  
14 It would have been one year after that. They moved up my DEROS date for 90 days, I got  
15 out in March, but the sad thing about it was you didn't get credit for combat. You get a  
16 hash mark that is called an overseas mark, oversea stripe, I think, for every six months  
17 that you're in a combat zone. Well when I left Vietnam I only had one on my sleeve. That  
18 really looks stupid because normal tour is twelve months and you get two. There is  
19 always somebody saying, "Well why did you only get one?" Well I was only there seven  
20 and a half months. "Well why is that?" Then you explain dog school and everything else.  
21 "Oh, you got over." Well, yeah I did, unfortunately, or fortunately. One thing I did want,  
22 it has crossed my mind a couple times.

23 RV: Sure.

24 GS: One of the things I remember seeing and a lot of people didn't understand.  
25 We would see fire fights going on out in the distance in Tuy Hoa and you would see red  
26 tracers going out or going one direction and from the opposite direction you would see  
27 green tracers going the other way and cris-crossing. Well red is American and green was  
28 the Communist forces and then occasionally you would see red coming from the same  
29 direction that the green came from. They were using our ammunition and I thought when  
30 I saw that I'm thinking, well obviously I was also thinking people are dying out there.

1 That kind of captures the whole thing. You never know, you never know where your  
2 friend is or where your enemy is, even by tracers you don't know what's going on.

3 RV: So you all would kind of, while you were walking the perimeter you would  
4 be watching these fire fights?

5 GS: Well I only remember it one time, for sure one time and that was Tuy Hoa  
6 and it was something to watch, something to see and not knowing if it was coming  
7 towards or, you know, and I'm sure it wasn't but you just didn't know.

8 RV: What was the most humorous incident that you remember from your time  
9 there Gary?

10 GS: I had a Dog Handler and I can't remember his name, black guy. His dog got  
11 loose from him. This is Tuy Hoa and we had a regular septic system, I don't want to say  
12 septic tank. It was a water purification, sanitation facility. There was a shack that you  
13 went in and the shack covered a giant hole where I guess was the cess pool for the dog  
14 waste to go into and this guy's dog got loose and went into that building and they guy had  
15 never been in there I guess, I had never been in there. I didn't know what it was. Never  
16 had an occasion to go in there and he went in there and he fell into the hole. So he was  
17 covered with dog waste and that ended his night real quick. That was probably the most  
18 humorous thing I can think of.

19 RV: How about, particularly brave action. Do you remember anything?

20 GS: No, none what so ever. I mean, exceptionally, we didn't have any actions,  
21 anything that occurred, while in my presence, that I would say, you know, somebody's  
22 act of bravery or anything like that.

23 RV: As you were getting close to leaving, what were your feelings towards  
24 leaving Rolf?

25 GS: We spent a long time, as Dog Handlers talking about what were we going to  
26 do about our dogs. We felt that we were going to be the last American Handlers of these  
27 dogs. There was talk that the dogs were going to be turned over to the ARVN and we  
28 knew that Vietnamese don't like dogs; they like to eat them. It was talk, I don't know of  
29 any Handlers ever doing it, there was talk that, "Hey on my last night of patrol I'll say  
30 that the dog turned on me and I'll kill him and that will prevent him from getting eaten.  
31 Like I said, I don't know if it ever happened. There was a lot of sorrow when you have to

1 say goodbye. A lot of joy; you're getting out of Vietnam, you're going and I think that  
2 overcome a lot of any sorrow I really felt that time. You also, when you quit walking dog,  
3 you're done working, you got a couple days before you actually get out of country so  
4 you're spending time with friends and counting the hours until you actually get sent back  
5 to Long Bien. You know you tend to, I want to say sorrow but more of it is joy. I didn't  
6 realize how much attached I was to Rolf until afterwards.

7 RV: After you left country?

8 GS: Yeah. I mean I still remember brand number, still think sometimes about  
9 things.

10 RV: How did you say goodbye to him?

11 GS: I don't know, I don't remember. I don't remember. I don't know. I'm sure  
12 there's probably some teary eyes and things like that but I don't know.

13 RV: Do you know what happened to Rolf?

14 GS: No, never encounter any Handler that ever had dealings with Rolf after that.  
15 Like I said I probably was the last Handler, American Handler. We were always so sure,  
16 "Oh the ARVN's men train on how to use Sentry Dogs. Maybe they were and maybe they  
17 weren't, I don't know.

18 RV: When did you find out about the fate of the dogs in general, the Sentry Dogs  
19 and Scout Dogs? Were you ever able to find out the fate in general?

20 GS: No, never have. Even at reunions there is nobody that really knows.

21 RV: Well tell me about leaving Vietnam. Where did you leave from?

22 GS: They shipped us down on a C-130 to, out of Cam Ranh Bay we went to Long  
23 Binh and sat around Long Binh, I think for two days. This time I had money and then  
24 loaded us on a plane and I can't even remember the airline now. I always swore I would  
25 always remember this airline. Put us on a plane and we stopped in Tokyo, landed in  
26 Travis. We were dressed in Khakis, which is a short sleeved uniform, no coats or  
27 anything and it was March and it was 32 or something like that in Travis and we froze  
28 our butts off when we got off the plane. Then they us took from Travis over to Oakland.  
29 Re-issued us dressed green uniforms. I think I paid for my plane ticket earlier in country  
30 because you got it cheaper that way and so I had an open end ticket that flied back to

1 Indianapolis where I was from. The biggest event was the Stewardess walking in on me  
2 while I was relieving myself. [Airline was Braniff]

3 RV: Do you remember much about that flight back?

4 GS: The joy. Boy everybody stood up and cheered when the pilot announced we  
5 were crossing into the United States. You didn't really think, you know you asked about  
6 physical and mental stress, I don't think we really realized that until right when we  
7 crossed into the United States and we knew.

8 RV: Was there a sense of relief?

9 GS: Oh yeah, big time. We always referred to the planes going back to the States  
10 as Freedom Birds. You always saw the Freedom Birds taking off, especially in Cam Ranh  
11 Bay because there was a repo depot there too. Everything was released then, when we got  
12 told that we were crossing into the United States.

13 RV: Now you continued your military career for some time and you flew back  
14 and forth in and out of the United States many times, was that, coming back from  
15 Vietnam was that a very distinct one time only experience like that?

16 GS: Oh I can't remember anybody ever, any of the other combat tours I returned  
17 from announcing that we were back, crossing the United States. I had a homecoming in  
18 Panama that it was the best homecoming I ever had and it was the first one after Vietnam,  
19 that type of environment. That is the other thing, in Vietnam, we kind of was, you know,  
20 Vietnam you never had that parade, you never had that welcome home type of thing. You  
21 just got off the plane and it was up to you to find your ride to home.

22 RV: Did you have any problems at the airports?

23 GS: No, I didn't. I felt uneasy, I felt like this was San Francisco, the bed of  
24 liberalism but I didn't know it was liberalism then. You always heard how the people in  
25 California and San Francisco referred to anybody that was a Vet as a baby killer. I had  
26 uneasiness in San Francisco Airport thinking people were looking at me thinking I am a  
27 baby killer but nobody ever said anything to me or talked to me or said anything. You  
28 know, you're kind of left alone type of thing.

29 RV: When you got back home, what was the reception like for you?

30 GS: Real good. I got off the plane about ten o'clock at night, I got a picture of it,  
31 it shows the clock in the background and my sister, my brother, and my sister's family

1 was there and it was really neat. I'm sure there were some tears shared and hugging but it  
2 was just a real good feeling. I was relieved; again, I felt another relief. It was a good time.

3 RV: How much did people ask you about your experience or did you talk about  
4 it?

5 GS: When I got back I don't think anybody really talked to me about it. I was  
6 never asked how many people you killed or did you kill anybody, did you shoot anybody  
7 until I was at my next unit and I think one person, in all my life, I think only one person  
8 has ever asked at. It just wasn't talked about. The funny thing about homecoming, I think  
9 not that night but the next night, my little brother and I went out to have a drink and it  
10 was a good drink, rum and coke and I didn't even want to finish it. We were sitting in a  
11 bar. I said lets go home or whatever ever else we were going to do but drinking was not  
12 my interest. I was really amazed because I had spent numerous days and hours with  
13 nothing but consuming alcohol and getting up. I come home and it was just like I don't  
14 need this. After that I don't think I drank anything the whole time I was on leave. I never  
15 was a beer drinker and the hard liquor just didn't sound good. Now once I got to my new  
16 unit and got around with some other soldiers I went back to drinking again but it wasn't  
17 the predominant thing, it was just a casual thing.

18 RV: Why do you think you had that experience with your brother in the bar like  
19 that?

20 GS: One: I felt like an outsider, shorter hair then they had. I just didn't feel like I  
21 fit in, it just didn't feel comfortable there. I don't know, I think that is the only reason.

22 RV: Gary, why don't we go ahead and stop for today?

23 GS: Ok.

The Vietnam Archive  
Oral History Project  
Interview with Gary Smith  
Conducted by Richard Burks Verrone, Ph.D.  
December 19, 2003  
Transcribed by Brooke Tomlin

1           Richard Verrone: This is Dr. Richard Verrone continuing my oral history  
2 interview with Mr. Gary Smith. Today is December 19, 2003. I am in Lubbock, Texas,  
3 again on the campus of Texas Tech University in the Special Collections Library  
4 Interview Room. It's about 9:30 a.m. Central Standard Time and Gary your in Shawnee,  
5 Kansas.

6           Gary Smith: That's correct.

7           RV: Before we move on with being back in the United States, you had mentioned  
8 to me off the record that you had a few things that you wanted to discuss about your  
9 Vietnam experience with me that we didn't cover. One of them was a couple of incidents  
10 at Tuy Hoa.

11           GS: Yeah, this is just a humorous incident. We were closing down Tuy Hoa and  
12 the first thing was when Tuy Hoa was active it was a numerous units there. I mean there  
13 was aviation, personal, finance, everybody. When they decided to close down Tuy Hoa  
14 they sent everybody out of Tuy Hoa probably a month, two months ahead of time. They  
15 brought a CAV unit in and I can't remember the CAV unit destination now, but it was  
16 just a CAV unit and then they left the dog Handlers. We were it. We kind of felt like we  
17 were the outsiders, we didn't feel comfortable going to their Mess Hall, didn't feel  
18 comfortable associating with them or anything like that. I don't ever remember anybody  
19 having any ill feeling towards or ever it being mentioned. As Dog Handlers you were still  
20 MP's and you just felt like the outsiders. One of the ways to get around this, obviously  
21 you had to eat sometime, our Vet Tech was also the Food Inspector for the Installation  
22 and he declared at least one can, and I'm not sure, maybe two cans of ham as spoiled or  
23 not spoiled but couldn't be used for human consumption. It was good ham but he  
24 declared it bad ham and confiscated it to dispose of it. Well his way of disposing of it was  
25 to take it back to the kennels and we had ham for I think it was about a month. Then we

1 had people go down to the village and pick up French Vietnamese Bread. The  
2 Vietnamese Rice Bread is a very hard bread even once you got through the crust. The  
3 bread itself was tough.

4 RV: I've eaten it. I know exactly what you're talking about.

5 GS: Ok. We ate ham sandwiches with Vietnamese Bread for about a month. Then  
6 we had C-rat's and I don't know. Well I know we went to the PX because I've got a  
7 picture of a pyramid of beer cans that is left over from that period of time. Guys were  
8 drinking a lot of Schlitz and it made one big, gigantic, pyramid of it. Speaking of which, I  
9 can remember after we closed down, convoys were getting hit and it seemed like the  
10 supplies that were coming in on the convoy's was on a daily...Whatever came in that day  
11 was going to get sold that day, especially beer. I can remember guys used to get upset  
12 because Charlie would hit the convoy and the beer supply was interrupted. So we went  
13 through that. One of the other incidences while we were closing down was the Kennel  
14 Master, the Platoon Sergeant said he wanted to have a Dog Handler and dog in the  
15 barracks to guard the barracks at night so we didn't have to worry about ARVN's coming  
16 in or any other riff raff coming in. I shouldn't say the ARVN's were riff raff, I don't mean  
17 I that way, but didn't want somebody else coming in and ripping off our stuff. Slicky  
18 Boys, we called them Slicky Boys.

19 RV: Who are Slicky Boys?

20 GS: Slicky Boys were guys that could come in and steal your radio and leave the  
21 music was the old saying. They would be half way down the street before you realized  
22 the music; your radio was gone because they kept playing the music a little bit louder as  
23 they were walking away or something. It was a myth I'm sure, mostly. Slicky Boys were  
24 Vietnamese that had gotten through the wire or whatever and gotten in and was able to  
25 steal whatever they could find. Any rate, I got tasked one night, which was decent I mean  
26 I was off. I didn't have to go out on a perimeter and I was tasked to sit in the...or go to  
27 sleep in the barracks and I could go to sleep and leave my dog hooked up to my wrist and  
28 he would watch the barracks and alert us if somebody tried to get in. My Platoon  
29 Sergeant, as usual with people who drink anything during the day, decided to get up in  
30 the middle of the night and he forgot my dog was there. My dog was all black, Rolf, and  
31 he almost stumbled into him and got nailed and immediately the next morning he says,

1    “That’s it, we’re not doing that anymore.” It was just comical the fact the way he reacted.  
2    He says, “There ain’t no way.” It scared the hell out of him when he almost got nailed. I  
3    mean you have 400 pounds per square inch coming down on a body part that would scare  
4    you. The last thing about closing Tuy Hoa, we did not know when we were closing Tuy  
5    Hoa. We had been informed day by day and each day we would get up in the morning  
6    and well is this the day and you wouldn’t know. Then one day they said this is it and so  
7    we loaded up our vehicle, got what we could on it. What we couldn’t had to be declared  
8    as war loss and we had the dogs and everybody loaded up and was ready to truck out.  
9    Here comes a Vietnamese ARVN down the street towards our drivers stump running  
10   towards Main Post with a broomstick over his shoulder and a toilet seat on the back of it,  
11   on the end of the stick, over his shoulder. It was just humorous seeing this, because you  
12   picture the Vietnamese not being very, I don’t know, civilized or what. You’re thinking  
13   that they don’t use toilets and things like that. I know in Korea they did but I have no idea  
14   what their outhouses was in Vietnam. It gave the picture of oh god, this is what they  
15   think, they’re going to be able to tear everything apart and just take whatever they think  
16   they need and they’re not going to use it as is. A touching moment was when we were  
17   leaving Tuy Hoa. All the kids, and again how everybody found out about this, kids were  
18   lined up outside the perimeter begging for candy and whatever other things that we would  
19   give them. We were throwing candy and C-rats and anything that we had that we didn’t  
20   mind parting with. So that’s how we closed down Tuy Hoa.

21            RV: Was it kind of bitter sweet?

22            GS: Yeah it was because we wanted to get out of there and it was an end of a...we  
23    saw the end of a post, end of a post there. I think I mentioned Paul Harvey had mentioned  
24    it in his radio commentary. We were dumbstruck when we got there and found out. We  
25    also got told don’t even get off the truck and get to the barbershop. The First Sergeant  
26    met us as we got there and he says, “You guys look terrible. Don’t even get off the truck,  
27    take them straight over to the barber shop, you guys get a hair cut before you come here.”  
28    We had been straggly and I don’t remember if there was a barbershop in Tuy Hoa and we  
29    just didn’t hit it or what, I don’t know.

30            RV: But you got cleaned up?

31            GS: Yeah, got cleaned up.

1 RV: You said you also wanted to mention something about Bob Hope.

2 GS: Bob Hope Show. I was selected to go to the Bob Hope Show because I was  
3 off that night. There were two of us selected. The other guy was because he had been  
4 there the longest and hadn't done anything, gone anywhere. We flew out, this is  
5 Christmas Day and I think I mentioned about the monsoons that they ended on Christmas  
6 Day, which I thought, at that time, was like a miracle. San Pans, the China Sea and things  
7 like that. Any rate, we got down to Long Bien, went into the stadium where the Bob  
8 Hope Show was. The stadium was down lower, it was like in a valley type of thing and  
9 seats were bleachers built all around in a semi circle around it. We were way up high and  
10 it was told to us the closer you got to Bob Hope, that was because you were Combat  
11 Arms. You're removed from the area because the Combat Arm guys deserved it. Which  
12 didn't bother us but I really couldn't make out Bob Hope either. I heard his voice and I  
13 knew what was being said. I couldn't make out who the females were or anything like  
14 that. Got a couple picture that demonstrate that but the thing that was really neat and I'll  
15 get tears in my eyes about this. They had gut wagons up in parking lot.

16 RV: What kind of wagons?

17 GS: Gut wagons. I think we called them maggot wagons, running chefs. What  
18 they were was basically your catering trucks that served food and drink and soft drinks  
19 and chips stuff. I bought, even back then I loved Coca Cola. You couldn't buy just a  
20 couple, single cokes or something. I think you had to buy a case. That was the only  
21 reason I can remember this. I bought a case of cokes and other guys bought chips for  
22 other soldiers, not even with my unit, and we were sitting up on the stage and this was  
23 probably an early form of tailgating because I was sharing the soda's, guys were sharing  
24 the chips and dips, or not dips, we didn't have dips back then. Sharing chips and  
25 whatever else they bought. I mean it was just a good time; it was just a very good time.

26 RV: Do you remember who you were with exactly?

27 GS: I can't remember the guys name now.

28 RV: Just the two of you?

29 GS: Yeah it was just us two Dog Handlers. I did run into a guy that I knew from  
30 Basic Training.

31 RV: Really?

1 GS: Yeah, a guy named White.

2 RV: In that huge crowd?

3 GS: In that huge crowd. Well I ran into him as we were flying back to Cam Ranh  
4 Bay and I met him at the airport. It was just a real good time sitting around with a bunch  
5 of guys and enjoying their entertainment.

6 RV: How many people do you think were at the Bob Hope Show?

7 GS: Oh god, probably 20, 000.

8 RV: Wow, and you said you couldn't really hear him very well?

9 GS: No, I heard him really well. The only thing could not see him well because  
10 the distance we were. Didn't have any binoculars or anything like that, you know it never  
11 occurred to us. He was a hero, he deserved everything the United States gave him and  
12 more. Got a chance, almost had a chance to see him in Saudi Arabia and that kind of blew  
13 up. Matter of fact I was a little PO'ed at one of my guys, who was an E-7 got picked to  
14 go see the Bob Hope Show. Somehow he was running late or something and missed the  
15 ride to get to the show and I was so pissed. I told him, I said, "I'll drive you there. You  
16 need to go and if you don't go, I'll go." I was just so perturbed with him and it ended up  
17 that he didn't go and I didn't get to take him, but I couldn't believe him. It was a different  
18 perspective. I was looking at it as here's a chance to do something I did back in Vietnam  
19 and here this guy was probably looking at it ok it's some entertainment. I had a chance  
20 and I missed it, no big deal.

21 RV: So the Bob Hope experience, just taking that time away, I take that it meant a  
22 lot to you at the time.

23 GS: It really did. When I first was chosen and told I was going which was only  
24 the day before, I didn't give it much thought. I mean I had seen Bob Hope Shows on TV  
25 before I went to Vietnam and didn't really mean a whole lot but once you got there and  
26 he explained everything.

27 RV: He explained everything?

28 GS: Yeah, he explained, "Listen, I'm making money but we're going to pan the  
29 stage, we're going to pan the audience and this is for the folks at home." He wasn't just  
30 there to entertain us; he was there to really give the people at home some hope too. That's  
31 about it.

1           RV: Do you want to know transition back to our discussions of when you were  
2 back in the United States?

3           GS: Yeah.

4           RV: Let me ask you Gary about a couple, just general things about United States  
5 Policy and Southeast Asia and Vietnam. You were there during kind of the  
6 Vietnamization Process such as the South Vietnamese were taking over the war and  
7 Americans were withdrawing slowly, what did you think of that policy? Did you think it  
8 was a good one? Did you think it was viable?

9           GS: Yeah because I thought it was viable because I didn't know what was going  
10 on outside my cantonment area. Like I said in Tuy Hoa we didn't go off post, we didn't  
11 experience the ground fighting. We didn't interact with the ARVN's. We didn't interact  
12 with anybody, and the same thing with An Son and Cam Ranh Bay, basically we were  
13 into our own little world of guard duty and off and that was it. You would read the *Stars*  
14 and *Stripes* and I don't remember the *Stars and Stripes* covering it that much. I'm sure  
15 they did, I just don't recall it. I didn't really take an interest, that's probably part of it too;  
16 I didn't take an interest. It's funny, I ran into a guy when I was leaving Vietnam and I  
17 knew him from Basic Training also, and he told me, he says, "Hey you probably saw my  
18 picture in the *Stars and Stripes* a while back." I said, "No, I don't think I did." He says,  
19 "Well I was in the *Stars and Stripes*." I said, "No kidding, where were you at?" He says,  
20 "Well I wasn't where they said I was." I said, "Ok." He says, "We were in Cambodia," he  
21 says, "but they said we were in West Vietnam or something." The story was that they  
22 were not; they were in Vietnam where they were supposed to be but he said that they  
23 weren't. I'm thinking, ok, I missed that. You don't get the *Stars and Stripes* everyday too.  
24 I didn't think about Vietnam until I got back and Vietnamization until, well the night I  
25 got back and I was told that Qui Nhon Pass fell. I'm going, no that can't be because the  
26 ROK's guard that; the ROK's have Qui Nhon Pass. Well it did, you know, I'm thinking  
27 damn something is wrong here. I went to White Sands Missile Range, New Mexico  
28 and...

29           RV: That was your next assignment, right?

30           GS: That was my follow along assignment and I ran into a couple of old country  
31 boys and they were really, they had never been to 'Nam but they were conservative, they

1 were interested in what was going on there. We watched the world news a lot. I had a  
2 combat vet for a Platoon Sergeant so you took an interest in it and started seeing things  
3 not going as well as it should have been. I remember the battles; losses were quite high.  
4 That's where I took notice of it.

5 RV: So you did make an effort to kind of keep up with what was happening?

6 GS: I don't know if it was an effort or if it was just there and with the people I  
7 was with. You know, we all were interested.

8 RV: Do you remember how you felt in April 1975 when Saigon fell and the  
9 whole thing ended?

10 GS: I felt like hell. That kind of made it, made me feel like it was worthless what  
11 we did. That we lost all those people for nothing. That you're a failure.

12 RV: We the United States?

13 GS: Yeah. I felt sorry for the Vietnamese. The ones that really wanted the  
14 freedom and we deserted them. Congress wouldn't appropriate the money, wouldn't let  
15 us go back in. We said we would be there and then we turned our back on them. I felt like  
16 we turned our back on the guys that got hurt, the guys that were killed, and the  
17 Vietnamese. I felt like total hell about it.

18 RV: How do you feel about it now?

19 GS: Well time heals all wounds. Vietnam would probably be better if we had  
20 stayed the course and did it the way we did Korea but I don't think we would have ever  
21 done that either. I think Vietnam's on the right road. I think eventually Vietnam going to  
22 be a free country again. Deaths that we experienced, I don't think it was a waste now.  
23 Somewhere along the line, they made an impact. They made a voice. If it hadn't been for  
24 Vietnam, Saudi Arabia, Desert Storm would have never happened the way it did.

25 RV: What do you mean by that?

26 GS: Well this is just insight from an old MP.

27 RV: Well your career spanned 24 years. So you saw the aftermath of Vietnam  
28 from the military standpoint.

29 GS: In Colin Powell and General Schwarzkopf's book really covered this. I hear  
30 politician's talking this now about Iraq. We kind of have an exit plan and things like that.  
31 General Powell had talked about it in his book that we didn't have an exit plan. We

1 weren't executing things right in Vietnam. Well bottom line was Politicians were pulling  
2 the strings in Vietnam. The military wasn't running the war. We weren't doing the right  
3 things. I mean in Vietnam we go out on convoy or on guard duty, we were told that you  
4 could not shoot until you got permission from higher headquarters, even if you were  
5 being shot at. You had to call in and request permission to fire back. Well now that's a  
6 bunch of crap, I mean you know your getting shot at, you don't have time to be calling in.  
7 Any rate, we had a better force when we went into Saudi. We had leaders who said we're  
8 running this; this is the way it's got to be run when we went into Saudi, we had exit  
9 tragedy, I mean it was just a whole lot better campaign. The politicians give you the  
10 strategic objective but you know it is up to the military to accomplish that and they  
11 accomplish it the way they have to.

12 RV: You think this is one of the great lessons of Vietnam for the United States?

13 GS: Yeah, I do. Because even now in Iraq I think it is happening. Despite what  
14 the Democrats are saying. I think President Bush is letting the military run the war and  
15 he's not trying to run it himself and I think that's an important thing from it.

16 RV: What other lessons do you think the United States learned from Vietnam? If  
17 any, or did they not learn lessons?

18 GS: The military, well you got to get the public behind you. The press was what  
19 defeated the military in Vietnam. It wasn't Charlie or the VC, well Charlie and VC same,  
20 NVA. It was the press. Even Tet of '68 was a total loss for the VC and NVA, I mean  
21 what they did was they exploited the American Press and the American Press labeled it as  
22 a great victory for North Vietnam but as far as everything that I read afterward, Tet was a  
23 total lost. We won it and still we were labeled as losers. You've got to get the press on  
24 your side. I think what happened in Iraq proves that. We had, I can't remember the word.

25 RV: Embedded Reporters?

26 GS: Yeah, Embedded Reporters. I think Saudi Arabia, when we went into Desert  
27 Storm and Desert Shield; I think that proves that too. I mean General Schwarzkopf was  
28 doing daily news briefings. Up to that time, hell I, and I still question that one. I think  
29 Generals have got better things to do. I mean the Supreme Commander has got better  
30 things to do than sit down and give a cop prêt. Dwight Eisenhower wouldn't have time to  
31 do that but you know that was probably one way of getting the press on your side so they

1      felt that they are getting the full scoop. We had a better quality soldier. One of the things  
2      I saw from Vietnam was that we had a good quality soldier during the Vietnam War. I  
3      mean I had no doubts about the quality of the guys that I was working with and I hope  
4      nobody had any doubts about me. We were a good fighting force. I think we were ham-  
5      strung with all the things going on; can't shoot unless you're shot at and politicians  
6      pulling the strings and things like that. After Vietnam we got rid of the draft and we were  
7      taking in just anybody that needed a job. I saw when I went into; let me see this would  
8      have been about my fourth assignment after Vietnam. I was over in Germany and I was a  
9      Platoon Sergeant in charge of a Physical Security Platoon, guarding nuks, storage and I  
10     had to worry about soldiers smoking dope on duty, sleeping on duty, they were in towers  
11     two hours at a time and I had to worry about them actually being up in the towers  
12     smoking dope. I had to worry about malingering. There was days when I couldn't make  
13     my commitment to get everybody out there and I had to borrow from other Platoon  
14     Sergeants. They had to do the same thing with me. Guard Duty is a very unrewarding job,  
15     I mean nobody wants to be a Guard; nobody wants to do anything like that. Sentry Dogs,  
16     notwithstanding, because you're working with a dog, you're walking with somebody  
17     wants you and likes you. In Germany I mean we had some of the most pathetic, I mean  
18     we lost the entire Platoon one time because of somebody. I don't want to nark or squeal,  
19     but somebody turned in the entire Platoon for smoking dope and in a matter of one day  
20     we lost the entire Platoon and had to pick up the slack with the other two Platoons. We  
21     were already working 12-hour shifts then.

22            RV: Did you say that Guard Duty is very rewarding or not very rewarding?

23            GS: Not rewarding. Nobody wants to be a Guard, I'm basically a Guard in jail.  
24            I'm a Deputy Sheriff and everybody wants to get out on the street and be a cop,  
25            everybody wants to do the glamorous stuff and nobody wants to be in there working with  
26            the inmates. We do the direct supervision of the inmates. We don't sit up in towers.  
27            We're actually in the modules with them but again; nobody wants to do that. What I was  
28            trying to point out was I had poor quality soldiers over in Vietnam, or not over in  
29            Vietnam but in Germany. I mean; it was pathetic. Ronald Reagan got into office and I  
30            could see the turn around when I went to my next unit, which was working with a  
31            Reserve unit, and that's where I met my wife. I started seeing a better quality of soldiers,

1 I saw training being done. Then when I left there and went to back to Germany I was a  
2 First Sergeant at an MP Company. I mean it was just night and day. We had a better  
3 quality, a better-behaved soldier. Night and day is the best I can do but it was more than  
4 that. I had soldiers in Germany the first time that were accosting women, malingering.  
5 Three guys I had to kick out of the army, and literally I spent my day trying to handle  
6 them while I was waiting around for the army to finally chapter them out, then I was  
7 handling my Platoon.

8 RV: So do you think all this is a direct result of Vietnam or the legacy of  
9 Vietnam?

10 GS: I think so because we went from a no draft after 'Nam, and not being very  
11 selective who we were taking in. Jimmy Carter kind of sold us down the tubes too in the  
12 military. I was in Korea in '76, I think, yeah '76, '77 and Jimmy Carter made a comment.  
13 We were waiting for a pay raise and we were waiting for an Appropriations Bill to be  
14 signed so I was wanting to DEROs and go back to the states and mine was being delayed  
15 because the funds hadn't been appropriated yet. Jimmy Carter made a comment about he  
16 was going to veto the Appropriation's Bill if it had a raise in there for the military or too  
17 big a raise. He says, "The military doesn't need a raise, they're not in the military for  
18 money. I know, I was in the Navy; Naval Academy." I'm sorry but I do think military  
19 needs a raise. I think they need to be compensated for their sacrifices and things. That  
20 was the err of how things were back then. As soon as President Reagan got into office,  
21 like I said, you started seeing things change. I think it was just natural. Looking back  
22 now, I think it's natural. Vietnam left a bad taste in everybody's mouth. Nixon got  
23 wrongly blamed for Vietnam. Hell, he was trying to get us out of there under honorable  
24 terms and then Watergate really screwed things up. Then you got Ford; he wasn't in there  
25 long enough to do anything. Then President Carter comes in and I think he mostly came  
26 in based on what happened with the Republicans, not just Watergate, but Vietnam, and  
27 don't spend a whole lot on military, we don't need them. Just throw them in a hole and  
28 keep them there until we need them again, type of thing. When President Reagan came in  
29 he says, "We need a strong defense." So I think it's like a pendulum on a clock; it swung  
30 one way; it swung the other. I think it even went through that with President Clinton. It  
31 started with President Bush, the peace dividends, after the fall of the Berlin Wall and all.

1 We stood down and I think we're just starting to realize that we need a strong military  
2 and I think Vietnam was part of that.

3 RV: Gary, what did you think of the anti-war movement?

4 GS: I was not happy with it, obviously. I really did believe that we were there to  
5 stop Communism and if we didn't stop it there it was just going to progress on and on  
6 and on. I thought that anti-war was more harm than anything. Jane Fonda demoralized  
7 people and the more I hear about what happened to the PW's when she went to Hanoi.  
8 She's asked for forgiveness and I don't know if anybody can forgive her but I just  
9 basically won't forgive her. These people that were against the war, they the same time of  
10 people going against the Iraq right now. I mean I agree peace is a whole lot better than  
11 having war but I mean sometimes you just got to fight and I thought Vietnam was what  
12 we were fighting for was the right thing and I thought they were wrong.

13 RV: Let me ask you about your personal service. Today, looking back, how do  
14 you feel about your service in Vietnam?

15 GS: I am very proud of my service in Vietnam, but I am also, and I forget what I  
16 wrote on my thing. I used a word and I can't even remember what it was but I am...

17 RV: I'll look for it here while we talk.

18 GS: I'm proud but I'm not proud. I wish I had given more and been more  
19 aggressive in my duty performance in Vietnam. I felt that, looking back now, that I didn't  
20 do enough. I didn't work hard enough. I didn't spend enough time with Rolf. I didn't  
21 walk my perimeter as often as I should have. I didn't do things. Something just came to  
22 mind about Vietnam and I want to mention it. When I went to Vietnam and this is  
23 probably standard procedure anywhere you go. When you first process in any unit, they  
24 give you a bunch of papers. They pull them out of your 201 files and say, "You don't  
25 need these." Being the dumb Private I think I probably pitched mine and said yeah ok, I  
26 don't need them, throwing them away. Well one of them was my diploma from Dog  
27 School, which I never found. Never was able to get a copy. Two, was my drivers license.  
28 I was not allowed to drive in Vietnam, legally. When we were closing down Tuy Hoa, the  
29 occasion came, Sergeant says, "Do you know how to drive a jeep?" I said, "Yeah," I  
30 says, "but I don't have a license. My 348 got lost when I first got here." He says, "I'm not  
31 worried about that. That's mox nix and we're closing this place down, hop in and drive."

1 Again I wish I had been more aggressive instead of just following along with everybody  
2 else, what they were doing. At reunions I don't hear anybody else saying that and I don't  
3 know if it's in the back of their minds. At the reunions that I go to it's mostly Handlers  
4 from Cam Ranh Bay. When we moved back to Cam Ranh Bay I saw a higher  
5 professional soldier there then I saw up at Tuy Hoa.

6 RV: Why do you think that was?

7 GS: One, probably Sergeants that checked on their people. Whereas Tuy Hoa you  
8 didn't see a Sergeant except at Guard Mount. There was no emphasis on making sure the  
9 soldier was doing what he was supposed to be doing. It was lax in Tuy Hoa. An Son  
10 wasn't lax; it was lax but for some reason everybody wanted to do what they were  
11 supposed to be doing. I don't know, I just don't know why about Tuy Hoa, but Cam Ranh  
12 Bay it seemed like there was a greater check and balance on things there. Guys that I  
13 went to Dog School with that stayed in Cam Ranh Bay were ahead of me on wanting to  
14 do, going out and doing their job. Another funny event about Vietnam was next to my  
15 last night; I had never been in a rocket attack in my life, until my next to last night in  
16 Vietnam. I heard a swoosh and a thud and I was in a POL, I think it was POL Dump and I  
17 had to call on the radio and I says, "What was that?" Somebody come back and said,  
18 "That was a dud rocket." I had to make the remark, I says, "I'm too damn short for this  
19 shit." Tuy Hoa, nothing ever happened like that. In Cam Ranh Bay that was just ok, we'll  
20 continue on type of thing.

21 RV: Gary, what do you think was the most significant thing you learned while  
22 you were there?

23 GS: That I could put up with adverse conditions. One moment.

24 RV: Sure.

25 GS: I found that I could survive, that I wasn't just a wimp. I found that there was  
26 more strength in me than I had thought. Up to that time I figured I was just...really didn't  
27 think I would hold up under adverse conditions. I mean after going through the monsoon  
28 season without a dry uniform, freezing in your uniform. When you got off, you went to  
29 bed and you shook and shivered until you finally fell asleep. You were out in the  
30 elements at night. You couldn't stay dry. To me that was just the most unbearable thing I  
31 could imagine anybody having to go through, next to combat, shooting and firing. I'm

1 thinking I can do this and I've done it, I've made it through that, you know, I'll make it  
2 ok. I found something; that I was not as fragile as I thought I was going to be. I think that  
3 was it.

4 RV: How do you think the war has most affected your life, looking back?

5 GS: Probably made me stronger in being a conservative type of person,  
6 politically conservative, and just who I am. I can't describe too much more but I think  
7 that's made more impact on how I ended up where I'm at in things. I mean staying in the  
8 military was not just because of Vietnam, actually, it was a Platoon Sergeant I had in  
9 White Sands. I think I'm more conservative about things.

10 RV: Do you suffer any disabilities from your service, to include Post Traumatic  
11 Stress Disorder?

12 GS: No I don't, far as I know I don't suffer anything in the way PTSD. I do  
13 receive 10% disability from the military for my back. It's not from Vietnam, it's probably  
14 all the damn ruck sacks I carried when I was in training and other places. That's the only  
15 disability I see out of my military career was my back and I understand my hearing is not  
16 as good as it used to be.

17 RV: Gary, what are your thoughts about Rolf?

18 GS: Like I said I wish I would have spent more time with him. I wish I hadn't left  
19 him there. That's a real friend and I just didn't realize it until after I left.

20 RV: You don't know the fate of him?

21 GS: Huh?

22 RV: You don't know the fate of him?

23 GS: No, I don't. No. And I don't think I really want to. It's been a long time ago, I  
24 know he's dead and that's the end of that.

25 RV: Do you think about it at all?

26 GS: Oh yeah, I think about him quite a bit. I've got right now, I'm sitting here on  
27 the floor in my bedroom, we don't have an easy chair in the bedroom. I've got my two,  
28 well my wife's two dogs. They're Lhasa Apso's and then my daughter who moved from  
29 Houston to Washington DC. When she moved she didn't have a place picked out yet to  
30 hold her two dogs, which is another Lhasa Apso and then the Terrier mixed breed. So  
31 I've got four dogs in this house and right now until two of them got up and moved away I

1 had all four of them laying around here with me. So when you have dogs around it makes  
2 me think about Rolf. My wife is big on military pictures. We have pictures of myself in  
3 different military settings but she has a patriotic tree downstairs. She picked it up after  
4 last year, well after 9/11. It's almost like a Christmas tree but it's red, white, and blue and  
5 she has pictures of all our relatives in their military uniforms and Rolf is on there as well.

6 RV: That's nice.

7 GS: Oh yeah, so yeah I think about him quite a bit. If something comes up and is  
8 mentioned I'm always quick to say yeah I was in Vietnam and was a Dog Handler and  
9 you know I start describing the fact I was a Sentry Dog Handler type of thing. So yeah I  
10 do think about it.

11 RV: Would you ever want to go back to visit Vietnam?

12 GS: I don't know. I don't have an overpowering desire to go. If I had the  
13 opportunity then yeah I would, opportunity and money. My wife would love to go to  
14 Ireland and I think that's the first place that if we ever did any world traveling we would  
15 do. Yeah, if I had the opportunity to go to Vietnam I would and it would be to the places  
16 where I was at and look around. But I think I would probably be sadly disappointed. I'm  
17 sure Vietnam has changed quite a bit. I mentioned that I went back to Oakland on an  
18 extradition one time and I couldn't even see where the Oakland Army Base was. I saw  
19 places that looked like it should have been the Army Base but it's no longer there and I'm  
20 thinking Tuy Hoa is probably like that too and then An Son and Cam Ranh Bay. If I had  
21 the opportunity, yeah, and money I would opt to do it.

22 RV: Have you had any contact with Vietnamese here in the United States?

23 GS: Funny that you mention it, yeah. Last night I had a prisoner come in, an  
24 inmate come in, he's a Vietnamese. Just a kid, he doesn't go back to the war years. I've  
25 ran into several Vietnamese in the jail which I think it's kind of unusual because the  
26 Vietnamese that I've read about and not really got to know but the boat people really  
27 came over and it's taken over our educational, I mean excel in education. That's because  
28 the parents really put an emphasis on it. I think that is really good. So I'm always  
29 surprised when I see a Vietnamese in jail that's in trouble. My Dentist, one of my  
30 Dentists, is a Vietnamese. Her father was a Colonel and she said he was a Colonel in the  
31 Army, in the ARVN Army and he suffered under the Communists. She was a boat child.

1 She came over in one of the boats. She was so young I don't think she really remembers a  
2 whole lot, but she's done well for herself and her father has really done well. I see them  
3 occasionally. I was married to a Vietnamese when I was in, I've been married three times  
4 and I don't think it's a result of Vietnam or anything else, it's a result of military service  
5 that I got divorced from the first two. Chou I met her in Fort Knox, Kentucky. She was  
6 living there and I went to Germany, we were married, and instead of being sent right back  
7 to Fort Knox I was sent to Detroit, Michigan and she didn't want to leave Fort Knox. She  
8 had numerous friends there that were Vietnamese and she did not want to leave those  
9 friends and so we ended up getting divorced because of that. I've ran into Vietnamese  
10 quite a bit.

11 RV: Gary, if you had to go into a classroom today and talk to young people about  
12 the Vietnam War, what would you tell them?

13 GS: Probably pretty much a lot of the stuff I told you about. I mean I would talk  
14 about the humorous things because I remember, you know time heals all wounds type of  
15 thing. I don't remember too many bad things. I remember the monsoon. I don't know, I  
16 would probably talk about Rolf and the good things; the Bob Hope Shows, things like  
17 that. Obviously I couldn't talk about fighting, the combat and stuff. You know I had a  
18 guy, I ran into another guy I knew from Basic Training in Cam Ranh Bay. He was a  
19 Finance Clerk and he was really apologetic, I mean I'm just a Dog Handler; I'm locked  
20 on a base like he is. He was telling me "Yeah," he says, "I'm the Finance Clerk, you  
21 know, I'm not going out and fighting." In other words not going out and doing the  
22 glamorous thing of going out and killing and fighting and all that. I had to remark to him,  
23 I says, "We all have a job here. We're all in danger here." That's the one thing from  
24 Vietnam I would take and make sure anybody, when you're in combat zone; you're in  
25 danger regardless. The rockets don't necessarily go to the POL dump. There is always  
26 Sappers getting through the wire, even if you do have a bunch of Dog Handlers doing  
27 their job. The missile that Hussein sent down to, I can't remember the city down in Saudi  
28 Arabia, but...

29 RV: Riyadh?

30 GS: Yeah, Riyadh. It had barracks. I mean that was a stroke of luck. Those  
31 rockets were not accurate at all and he got lucky. Ended up we had one of our soldiers out

1 of our unit had been delayed coming over and he ended up coming over with a Reserve  
2 Unit. I don't think he was the First Sergeant but he was going to be one of their Sergeants  
3 and he got injured really bad. I mean that was a stroke of luck, this SCUD missile. I mean  
4 in Somalia, the second time I've ever been shot at was Somalia. I made it through  
5 Panama, well we ended, and we had mortar attacks there. We weren't in our housing; we  
6 were down at the TOC but the mortars impacted pretty damn close to where we were  
7 living at. Went to Saudi Arabia and you had to worry about the SCUD. When the air war  
8 started we had to spend every night for about the first three or four nights in bunkers  
9 underground. I mean we went underground for, I don't know, probably about nine hours  
10 underground sitting in a bunker while the air war was going on. We were way out in the  
11 middle of the desert, but Somalia was the second place I've ever been shot at and that  
12 was also friendly fire too.

13 RV: It was friendly fire?

14 GS: Well, it was both. It's kind of comical but I was in what use to be called the  
15 University City and that was on sides of the hill and we were the closest to the perimeter  
16 and the, I can't remember what their nationality was. They would receive small arms fire  
17 and they would start firing. I mean small arms fire was coming in and I don't remember it  
18 actually impacting anywhere near me. We were on the perimeter. They were old  
19 dormitory classrooms and we were the closest ones on the perimeter, but we had Medic's  
20 behind us, which were higher up than us, and they were firing through our breezeways  
21 while we were out on the breezeways firing out into the perimeter. This is comical, this is  
22 active duty guys, and they ended up taking the Medic's ammunition away from them so  
23 they wouldn't be able to fire back after a couple episodes of that. Many a night as soon as  
24 it got dark we would get small arms fire and it was a refuge camp outside and so you  
25 didn't dare fire out into the camp but that's where it was coming from.

26 RV: You served for quite a bit of time after Vietnam and I would like to just  
27 briefly touch on some of these major operations you took part in and you mentioned  
28 them. In *Operation Just Cause in Panama*, what was that like in general terms? What did  
29 you do?

30 GS: The comical thing about that, I mean I have to describe this. I just left  
31 Germany in '89 around Thanksgiving and I had just gotten my family to Fort Meade,

1 Maryland and I asked to go to an MP Battalion because I was hoping to be a First  
2 Sergeant again. I got to the MP Battalion and they says well you're not a First Sergeant.  
3 You're going to be our S2 NCO and that's an E-8 position, which I was an E-8. They  
4 says, "We're getting ready to deploy to Panama, matter of fact we're leaving here in next  
5 day or two. Get your family settled and you can follow along." The Sergeant Major made  
6 it clear, he says, "You're not in a hurry but we think something is going to happen while  
7 we're down there on this deployment so you might want to get down there as soon as you  
8 can." Well I, being the gun ho Sergeant I was, I got my family. The people at  
9 Government Quarters there getting into Quarters so I got them into Quarters pretty quick.  
10 Got my POV out of storage and I thought I had my family pretty well settled. Now my  
11 wife would disagree with that because it was coming up for Christmas, the whole  
12 household goods hadn't come in yet or anything. I says, "Well I'm ready to go." I got  
13 orders to go. The day that I flew out we had to stop off in Miami and wait to fly on down  
14 to Panama the next day. Well that night I'm in Miami, that's when the Marines were  
15 killed down in Panama, which started the whole thing for *Just Cause*. Flew down the next  
16 day and everybody is locked down and everything so I didn't see a whole lot of Panama  
17 before that, of knowing what Panama was like. Two days later we're in the middle of *Just*  
18 *Cause*. Everybody else calls it invasion; hell the MP's were already there. It was a good  
19 military operation. It was well thought out. Again, I think this was something that people;  
20 the military ran it and got it done. My part in it didn't do a whole lot other than sit in a  
21 Tactical Operation Center and watch the radio traffic coming in and watch assignments  
22 going out. There wasn't a whole lot of intel. As a matter of fact I think once I got down  
23 there I got switched to the S3 for short time. They felt they really didn't need me in the  
24 S2 at that time. Being the new kid on the block I really wasn't integrated into the  
25 Battalion so I really just didn't see a whole lot. After the conflict was over, that was my  
26 first time of smelling death. Do you remember back, they were talking about mass  
27 graves?

28 RV: Yes.

29 GS: Ok, there was one and I mean we were up front about it. It was there and it  
30 was near the PX and I remember being on the bus to go to the PX to get some things,  
31 food items or something and you could smell death.

1 RV: What did it smell like?

2 GS: Terrible. I mean I just can't describe it. Decomposing bodies is the worse  
3 damn thing you could ever smell. I don't think there is anything else that is worse than  
4 that. I smelt it again when I was over in Somalia. After they excavated the site and  
5 removed the bodies after the war was over I mean it was a long time before it was gone. I  
6 think it was still there even when I left, the smell. Panama was such a depressed area; I  
7 didn't realize how bad it was. I didn't want to see the Panama Canal turn over to the  
8 Panamanians because I saw what they did to their railroad. Their railroad was virtually  
9 nothing but a rust bucket. When we first got there I noticed there is a railroad line that  
10 follows along the canal and the canals were operating perfectly good, the railroad is  
11 sitting there, nothing. Passenger's cars just sitting on the rails, freight cars that have torn,  
12 nothing. All the rails are rusted so you know nothing's ever moved up and down them for  
13 a long period of time. They explained to me that we turned the railroad over to the  
14 Panamanians and I'm thinking, hell why would we want to turn the Panama Canal over to  
15 them if this is going to happen. The country was really depressed. You get down town  
16 after the war; we had MP stations because we had to train the Panamanian Police into  
17 being Police Officers instead of torturers and oppressors. In some of the areas I mean  
18 they were ghettos, just squalor, utter squalor and depression.

19 RV: Can you compare that with what you saw in Mogadishu and Somalia?

20 GS: It was better than Mogadishu and Somalia because they actually had power.  
21 They had lights. They had water. Mogadishu and Somalia, I mean there was nothing. The  
22 Civil War took everything out of Somalia. When you go into a building and you see the  
23 conduits and all the copper wire has pulled out of it. You see all the electrical fixture that  
24 you know places where they should have been and there not. When you arrive in the  
25 country and there is no lights anywhere expect for maybe one little stray light somewhere  
26 in the middle of darkness, you realize there is nothing here. I mean, you know,  
27 civilization we could live with a lot less lights and a lot less luxuries but they had no  
28 power, they had no infrastructure in Somalia whereas Panama had an infrastructure. It  
29 was just a depressed area. Vietnam was much better than Panama. I never saw anything  
30 as bad as Panama in Vietnam. The villages, I mean, Korea was better. Korea was better

1 than Vietnam too. Those two places had to be the worst I've ever seen people living,  
2 what conditions they were living in.

3 RV: What was your job in Somalia? What was your duty?

4 GS: Again, I was an S2 NCO. Boy I never was able to get back into being a First  
5 Sergeant. I went to another MP Battalion after I left. The MP Battalion I was in for, let  
6 me see, for *Just Cause* and then *Desert Storm* and then I went to the Sergeant Major's  
7 Academy and then I went to another MP Battalion. Hopefully I was going to get a First  
8 Sergeant spot, didn't. I ended up in the S2 again. So my job was to collect Intel and help  
9 the Intelligence Officer collect Intel and disseminate it to the units. In Somalia there  
10 wasn't a whole lot of Intel being collected or disseminated. We were there, not as  
11 peacekeepers, but as humanitarians trying to get the food moved. Intel was things like,  
12 watch out for fishhooks, that's how they're stealing your sunglasses and watch out for  
13 them so you don't get your eye hooked with one. Coming up and finding out what they  
14 were using to pilfer our stuff off vehicles and things. Just be careful about things. There  
15 were deaths over there. Once in a while somebody was getting shot and killed but it  
16 wasn't to the extreme. When I left out of there in May we still hadn't had a real major  
17 conflict, nothing like *Black Hawk Down*. It was not laid back but it was we were there for  
18 humanitarian; we were not trying to do anything. We were not trying to be aggressors.

19 RV: Gary, let's pause just for a moment.

20 GS: Sure.

21 RV: Ok Gary, let me ask you about Somalia. Do you think the United States  
22 actually accomplished its mission there? When you were there did you see it as being  
23 successful?

24 GS: I think we were. When we first went in I was really kind of, I don't know,  
25 questionable about it. I thought President Bush got brow beated into it. He had just lost  
26 the election and he was only doing this because he wanted have a, I don't want to say  
27 legacy, that word seems like it's used a lot. I felt he got brow beated by the press into  
28 having to do something, do something good. Somalia came along and...when we went in  
29 there we were helping get humanitarian goods to the humanitarian agencies. Now after  
30 that the humanitarian agencies it was up to them to disperse that. I thought ok how long  
31 could the military do that? Not very long, military is purely for fighting and it's not a

1 peace keeping force, it's not humanitarian force. It never will be because you've got to  
2 train to do your mission. I stayed there until May and yeah we were getting the mission  
3 done as it was assigned. The mission got changed somewhere along the way because  
4 when they went after a Adid and they went after rightly so because a Adid was doing  
5 some...we even had Intel that he was doing some pretty shaky things. We knew he was  
6 importing kat, which was a drug and that decimated the country too. We can not fight,  
7 I've had this philosophy for a long time, we can not fight other people's wars, and we can  
8 not liberate other people unless they're willing to fight for themselves. Iraqi's have got to  
9 be totally involved in Iraq to save Iraq; we can not save it. Somalia would never be saved  
10 because the Somalias didn't care. The Somalians were not going to change because they  
11 didn't want to change. I don't want to say they were happy with getting donations and  
12 living off of hand-me-downs but in all fairness you didn't see anything in them moving to  
13 try to get the better of themselves. We were doing the right thing but we were just  
14 prolonging. If we hadn't gone in there, maybe the warlords would have, maybe the  
15 populists would have revolted against the warlords and maybe they got things going. I  
16 understand they're trying to get a government going, you know a National Government  
17 going in there now.

18 RV: The President now I think is actually a US Marine.

19 GS: Oh is he?

20 RV: The guy who took over. Yes.

21 GS: Oh well that might work out. I mean the warlords they were just nasty  
22 individuals. We had our chance to have, I think we got Adid one time or one of his  
23 seconds, I think it was one of the seconds, but he was in a Adid's vehicle and we had him  
24 at one time, but that was when we were doing humanitarian. We interviewed them and  
25 released them.

26 RV: What did you think of *Black Hawk* down and then of course the movie?

27 GS: Well this goes back to my thing about war movies. I don't go see war movies.  
28 There is too much, I just don't feel that movies are going to tell the truth. There is a guy;  
29 he just started working for our Sheriff's Office. He was in *Black Hawk Down*. He was  
30 one of the Black Hawk Pilot's and as a real Veteran he won't talk about it. He said a  
31 couple of things, actually he's in the movie itself and I didn't know that.

1 RV: He himself or his character?

2 GS: No, he himself. The moviemakers had some of the people play themselves in  
3 the movie. But he mentioned *Black Hawk Down* and he says, "That was one battle." He  
4 says, "There was about 160 some other battles going on too." I just don't go see the  
5 movies. I told you John Wayne is one thing because John Wayne's pro-military. John  
6 Wayne is John Wayne. World War II movies were pro-military and I love watching them  
7 but I just have a real hard time watching anything after that.

8 RV: So you have not see *Black Hawk Down*, the movie?

9 GS: No, I have not.

10 RV: And I take it you have not seen *We Were Soldiers*?

11 GS: No, I have not. I saw, when I'm stuck in a module we have movies on  
12 Saturday night, first run movies as a treat for the prisoners if they keep their areas clean  
13 during the week. It starts out with either with a movie that we put on the VCR. Next thing  
14 if they really keep clean is they get a bag of popcorn and if they're really clean during the  
15 week they get a glass of soda pop because they don't get soda in our facility. One night I  
16 was in a module and *We Were Soldiers* or whatever the name of it was, was on. I saw bits  
17 and pieces of it. I talked to my wife Sandy about it later and I mentioned boy that was a  
18 different type of movie then I kind of expected and she told me, she says, "Well that was  
19 the movie written by a Soldier that was the first combat of Vietnam that employed and all  
20 this." And I said, "Oh, ok." Again, I hadn't heard about it. I stay away from the movies. I  
21 stay away from the books and that type of thing. When *Black Hawk Down* occurred I was  
22 really pissed. One, dragging our soldiers bodies through the streets. Two, things started  
23 coming out in the press that, you know, the military asked for things before the operation  
24 and was turned down by administration, that even pissed me off more. It just reinforced  
25 my beliefs that if you start letting civilians run the operation then your not going to get  
26 the quality operation that you're supposed to have. I have no love for President Clinton. I  
27 thought him being a Draft Dodger during Vietnam and hell he didn't dodge draft but he  
28 damn sure got out of going and serving and he did it in a very disrespectful way and I  
29 don't care for him at all. When he didn't support the military when his administration  
30 wouldn't give the tools to the military that they asked for, that just reinforced more. Then  
31 the things leading up before 9/11 that happened where the USS Cole was bombed. When

1 I was in Somalia I just had gotten there and the Clinton Administration had just taken  
2 over. They had been in the news that a Civilian Administration, a military member,  
3 General, had walked up and said, "Good morning." The civilian person says, "I don't talk  
4 to the military" and walked off. It got in the press and at first it was played down, oh no,  
5 no that didn't happen and then they found the military member and the military member  
6 said, "Yeah, it did happen." I wrote a letter saying I can't believe you allow people in  
7 your Administration to continue to serve when they're treating military members like  
8 that. I wish I would have saved a copy of my letter, I didn't.

9 RV: You wrote it to the White House?

10 GS: I wrote to the White House. I wrote to the President because he was the  
11 Commander and Chief.

12 RV: Did you get a reply?

13 GS: I got a reply and I still got that. Sandy's got it put away somewhere but the  
14 reply was a standard letter, thank you very much for your, wasn't concern, your interest  
15 in this subject. We really appreciate hearing from you about this and please feel free to  
16 write us again if you care to, type of thing. It was a standard letter, it wasn't signed by the  
17 President or anything and I thought ok, that did a lot of good. So that just seemed barred  
18 feelings about it. But when the towers were bombed and when USS Cole was bombed  
19 and what else, the Embassy's in Kenya, I mean nothing was done. It wasn't until the  
20 World Trade Centers were actually brought down that we finally saw the light and  
21 decided to do something. Well we had a totally different Administration then too.  
22 President Clinton did not impress me and I think he's probably part of the cause for 9/11.

23 RV: Gary, can you tell me your feelings about the present day war in Iraq having  
24 already been there and served in *Desert Shield* and *Desert Storm*?

25 GS: When we went into Panama we called it Just Cause and I think there was a  
26 couple of reasons. One, we needed an operational name and I think it was the right name.  
27 I think Iraq could be called *Just Cause* too, just like it was for *Desert Shield*, *Desert*  
28 *Storm*. It's the right thing to do. I don't want to see military members put into harm's  
29 way. There was too much implications of weapons mass destruction. There was too much  
30 implications that he could divert those to terrorists and come on our shores and I thought  
31 for those reasons he needed to be stopped. We criticized, after World War II, all the

1 history books I read. I mean we beat ourselves up for not getting involved in World War  
2 II earlier by saving the Jews. All I ever heard how terrible we were for not saving the  
3 millions of Jews that were exterminated. Saddam Hussein was the same as Hitler; I mean  
4 he was exterminating people. So if we beat ourselves up for not doing what we did in  
5 World War II I think we were justified by just what we were hearing of what he did to his  
6 people. I heard the other day he had, oh what do you call it, chopping machine that...

7 RV: Guillotine?

8 GS: No, not a guillotine. You know what a mulching machine is right?

9 RV: Yes.

10 GS: They had mulching machines for human beings and throwing them in there  
11 alive. Now that's only one report I heard, I didn't actually see it in the news. I heard it on  
12 the radio. But if that's true, that's gone even beyond what Hitler had done. I mean, God.  
13 That's justified. That was just cause. Now, protecting the force. Things are going to  
14 happen. We're going to have losses, roadside bombings and things like that. It seems like  
15 it's happening way more than I would of thought our force would be doing. I would have  
16 thought our force would have been more, I don't know, hardening the targets, defending  
17 our targets, preventing. The other day somebody got a car bomb inside one of the  
18 compounds. I guess there was two car bombs and one made it almost in through the gates  
19 and everything. Well that's almost like reliving the Lebanon Barracks, the Marine  
20 Barracks in Lebanon. I don't know, it's just to me, I think the Military Commanders are  
21 not protecting the forces as well as they should, especially on convoys, but I'm not over  
22 there either. It's hard to say. You're going to have combat losses in any war and it just, I  
23 don't know, I'm wondering if Military Commanders are doing all they can. Knowing  
24 Military Commanders the way I do, there is no way in hell they wouldn't be doing  
25 everything they could to protect their force. I think the press is doing a hell of a job  
26 against the military. They're telling us all the bad things that are happening and forgetting  
27 about the good. I think we're doing the right thing in there.

28 RV: Gary, why did you choose to stay in the military for 24 years?

29 GS: I joke about three years at a time. Originally I stayed in the first three years,  
30 my second enlistment was because I had a Platoon Sergeant who I really respected and I  
31 don't think he ever knew it but I really respected him so much that I saw a careerist, a

1 professional, and I said “you know this might not be a bad thing to do”. So I stayed in  
2 three more years, and plus I got to reenlist and go where I wanted to and I was going to  
3 be a cop. I was going to go to Fort Knox, Kentucky and be a real MP. I did do that and  
4 that’s why I stayed the second enlistment. After that I enjoyed military life, I enjoyed the  
5 people I was working with, I enjoyed things and I was just reenlisting every three years. I  
6 always said if I ever get fed up with this, the worst I’ll have to do is stay three years.  
7 Until I got to 24 years and then I was forced out. I would have stayed until they forced  
8 me out and they did.

9 RV: How were you forced out?

10 GS: As an E-8 I never got picked for promotion to E-9 which was Sergeant Major  
11 and that’s the highest rank you can go and I just was never selected. As an E-8 you have  
12 to get out after 24 years.

13 RV: Gary, one more question about Vietnam. Have you been to the Memorial in  
14 Washington DC?

15 GS: I have.

16 RV: Can you tell me about your experiences there?

17 GS: Very moving. I really didn’t think much about it until I got there. I kind of  
18 broke down about it. I had Sandy with me and the kids and we were in Detroit, I think at  
19 the time when I finally made it to it.

20 RV: What year was this, do you remember?

21 GS: Oh God, no I don’t. I can’t even place it.

22 RV: Was it like in the last couple of years?

23 GS: Oh no this was probably a couple of years after it had been built.

24 RV: Ok.

25 GS: It was very moving. I’ve been stationed in Maryland since then and I went  
26 there a couple more times and it is just as moving then. I went there after they put the  
27 statues up of the different soldiers in the service members and that was moving as well. I  
28 had a good tour in Vietnam but even with a good tour you have sorrow about how things  
29 went. It was just moving. That’s only way I know how to describe it.

30 RV: Was there anything else that you would like to talk about that we did not  
31 cover?

1 GS: Yeah. Did I talk about homecomings?

2 RV: Back from Vietnam?

3 GS: From Vietnam versus Panama and all of them.

4 RV: We did not compare them. Why don't you go ahead.

5 GS: Yeah. When I came back from Vietnam, I think I mentioned this, I was in the  
6 San Francisco Airport and I felt like I was being looked at. I probably was paranoid  
7 because we had always been told oh yeah you're going to be called baby killers when you  
8 come back. Well I never had anybody approach me or tell me I was a baby killer or  
9 anything like that but I did feel like I was being starred at. I was in uniform. When I got  
10 home to Indianapolis my little brother and my sister and her family were there to  
11 welcome me home at the airport and that was a good feeling. I was very pleased. I was  
12 relieved. I remember lying in bed that night and couldn't sleep because that was the first  
13 night I've been in a bed and I felt safe, you know I felt that nothing could happen.

14 Coming back from *Just Cause*, we flew in at something like 12, we got in probably about  
15 12 o'clock [midnight]. We had to fly into Dover, which was kind of funny because we  
16 flew into Dover and we were so close to other military air bases at Fort Mead but we flew  
17 into Dover and then from Dover we were bussed in a long bus ride. Everybody had a  
18 chance to sit around and say what they were going to do. Guys were talking about, "Well  
19 I'm going to the Denny's; I'm going to get a decent cup of coffee and stay up past 11  
20 o'clock at night because everything shut down pretty much in Panama at night until right  
21 at the end. When we got there nobody knew what to expect, I mean when I got back from  
22 Vietnam there was nothing. When we got back there was a band playing and there was a  
23 lot of people there. It was really a good thing. My wife was there with I want to say my  
24 daughter or my son; I think my son that was there and one of my dogs. The funny thing  
25 was it was like the dog realized I was home.

26 RV: Really?

27 GS: Just jumping up and down and everything else. The band was playing, the  
28 military, Garrison Commander was there to welcome us back. I mean it was a big deal.  
29 Another movie I watched and only because I wasn't in the campaign is Clint Eastwood's  
30 *Heart Break Bridge*. At the end one of the Marines says, "Well this is old hat for you  
31 buddy. "He says, "To tell you the truth, this is the first time." Well that's the way it was

1 for me. It was like I said in the music they played in Saudi; it was a new experience.  
2 Coming back from *Desert Storm* it was the same thing only we were in an auditorium in  
3 a gymnasium. I mean the press was there, the Garrison Commander, again. A big to do,  
4 formation, the whole bit. I was seen on TV with tears rolling down my eyes, the whole  
5 thing. I was interviewed and the interview was never shown on TV but in one of the news  
6 clips I'm shown wearing my Boonie hat and in my desert cami's, tears rolling down my  
7 eyes. The news commentator says something like not only the spouse or the family  
8 members have tears in their eyes. I'm thinking oh great this is not a good picture of a  
9 tough Sergeant. Somebody who I didn't even know who knew that we were coming back  
10 and was a friend of the father of one of my daughter's friends taped everything that was  
11 being televised about that homecoming, so I got video of that and you guys will get all  
12 that too. When we got back from Somalia, which was a little bit different. I was asked to  
13 hold over into Somalia with the Battalion Commander, the Plans Officer, and I want to  
14 say there was four of us, three Officers and me. I was asked would I stay back with them  
15 when the Battalion moved back to Fort Hood and I said I would. When we got back, we  
16 had to fly back with our guns in our duffle bags; no I take it back. I guess we didn't come  
17 back with guns because we were borrowing guns from guys, weapons from the unit that  
18 we were supporting. So we had duffle bags and we had to travel in our BDU's. I am so  
19 happy for the guys from Iraq, getting cheered on the plane. I overheard that when their  
20 coming back for their R&R they're still in their BDU's and they're flying on civilian  
21 aircraft and people are standing up and cheering and that's good. Well we flew into all  
22 the airports, not a whole lot of taboom made about it, you know you felt kind out of place  
23 because we're in those cami's. We got to the airport at Killen and there was a small group  
24 there to welcome us home, and they were the guys that had preceded us, left Somalia  
25 before us. My wife was there and it was a nice homecoming. The first one, *Just Cause*,  
26 that had to be the best, most not expecting at all. It was just a real good, real good  
27 homecoming. So that's about it on the homecomings.

28 RV: Ok, all right. Is there anything else that you would like to discuss Gary?

29 GS: I don't think so. I think that pretty much hits it all.

30 RV: All right, well we'll go ahead and end the interview with Mr. Gary Smith.

31 Thank you so much for your time sir.

1

GS: Hey no problem Richard. Thank you.