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**The Vietnam Archive
Oral History Project
Interview with Yvonne Guidroz (et al)
Conducted by Dr. Richard B. Verrone
Date 12 November 2005
Transcribed by Mark Steven Varela**

The transcription of this interview was paid for by a generous grant from the National Endowment for the Humanities.

NOTE: Any 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 [Editor's Note: This interview also has two other participants.]

2 Dr. Richard Verrone: This is Dr. Richard Verrone, I am doing a video oral history
3 interview, it is November 12th, 2005. We are in Washington D.C., at the Crystal City
4 Hilton. We are here commemorating the 40th anniversary of the battle of the Ia Drang
5 Valley, Pleiku, LZ (Landing Zone) Falcon, LZ X-Ray, and LZ Albany. So if you all
6 please introduce yourselves and tell me why you're here and who you want to talk about
7 today.

8 Yvonne Guidroz: My name is Yvonne Guidroz and my uncle was Sergeant
9 Ronnie T. Mathis and he was killed at LZ Albany on November 17th, 1965.

10 Glenda Sammons: And I am Sergeant Mathis' sister, Glenda Sammons. We—I
11 guess that's all I need to say, you said everything else. (Chuckles)

12 Robert "Bob" Konrardy: I am Bob Konrardy, I was a platoon leader and Ronnie
13 was my RTO (Radio Telephone Operator). This is with A Company, 1st of the 5th.

14 RV: Tell me about Ronnie, what was he like? What was his personality like? I
15 know you all can probably comment from different angles.

16 YG: He was like a brother to me. Very playful, he was my best friend actually.
17 When my mother and father divorced, we moved in back with my grandparents and
18 Ronnie. He was about thirteen years older than me. So I've known him since I was an
19 infant. I grew up with him in my life, so he was a major part of my life. My grandfather

1 left when I was about six years old and he was the man in my life. Very important person
2 in my life.

3 GS: Well, we were very close growing up. I had an older sister, but it seemed that
4 he and I were the closest. We had a wonderful relationship he and I. We spent a lot of
5 time together. He was very easy going, pleasant, wonderful personality.

6 RV: Do you know his thoughts about his service to the country and what he
7 thought about going to Vietnam?

8 GS: Very dedicated. As a matter of fact, he had the opportunity to—when he first
9 went into the army, he was drafted. He spent his two years, but then when time came for
10 him to get out, his decision was to reenlist, and his plan was to make a career out of the
11 army.

12 RV: Sergeant, would you like to talk about what you knew of Ronnie?

13 BK: Well, like I said Ronnie was my radio operator. But for me and to me he was
14 more of a mother hen. I think he was two years older than I was, but he acted like he was
15 thirty. I can give you some examples.

16 RV: Please.

17 BK: One night we had some hot dogs and mashed potatoes flown in because we
18 were supplied every night with choppers and out of the whole platoon, were out in the
19 middle of nowhere, I got deathly sick. I was throwing up and everything, and we always
20 take turns, one guy sleeps, one guy watches. So I crawled back into the perimeter and I
21 go to take our watch. Ronnie and I share the same foxhole because if I needed the radio,
22 he was there. So he says, “You take first watch, I’ll wake you up when it’s your turn.” He
23 never woke me up. I get up in the morning, I said, “Why didn’t you wake me?” He said,
24 “You were sick, you needed your sleep.” There was another time just before we went into
25 Ia Drang, we heard the firefight from where we were, so all of us stayed up all night,
26 none of us went to sleep that night. So we’re all deadly tired already.

27 RV: This was what? Sunday night the 14th?

28 BK: This is the day before we flew into X-Ray.

29 RV: Before you guys went to X-Ray?

30 BK: Yeah. The day before X-Ray, we were supposed to go back to base camp. So
31 we took all of our ammunition, extra ammunition and buried it. Filled in our foxholes and

1 waited for the choppers to come to pick us up and take us back to our base camp. So we
2 had three days off. The choppers never came. So late in the afternoon they called us up
3 and said “We can’t pick you up you up. Dig all of your ammunition out and dig your
4 foxholes, you’re spending the night there. So the next morning was when we went into
5 X-Ray and the noise we were was the 7th Cav getting hit. So everybody stayed awake that
6 night. So in the morning we were waiting for the choppers again to take us out and they
7 told Ronnie it would probably be two or three hours, so he grabbed six or seven guys and
8 found a little thicket off to the side. He said, “Lieutenant, you need some sleep. You want
9 to go over there?” “I can’t do that.” He says “You need to get some sleep in case you
10 have to lead us out of here. One of us has to be able to think.” And that’s how he was like
11 for me all the time.

12 RV: Wow. So you all were going to be positioned at Falcon is that correct?

13 BK: No, we were—we went into X-Ray.

14 GS: You were like backup, weren’t you?

15 RV: The reserve.

16 BK: 7th Cav—I got hit the first day. We went into the second day as
17 reinforcements.

18 RV: What was it like? What did you see? What was that battlefield like when you
19 arrived on the 15th?

20 BK: Well, there was Viet Cong bodies everywhere. There was Americans still not
21 picked up yet because we got in fairly early. The smell already was bad, there was flies.
22 We went to our perimeter and we took one section of it and we had to pull back so that
23 the platoon that was still there could take their dead out of the foxholes, so we could take
24 them over. We walk into a perimeter that had already been hit hard before. So that was a
25 strange feeling. Just wondering, what did they do wrong? Could have they done
26 something different? Can we do something different?

27 RV: What was Ronnie like? What was his attitude there once you guys got on the
28 ground in the middle of that fight?

29 BK: He always was on my right-hand sight so if needed a radio, it’d be like this.
30 And his attitude was he’s getting me home. We didn’t get personal often, even though we
31 lived together for—24/7, but he did show me a picture of his wife and his little girl one

1 night. This was just before X-Ray. You kind of get afraid to talk about personal things.
2 You don't want to get too attached, but yet since he had to be with me all the time, in
3 case I needed the radio, we accidentally too attached.

4 RV: (Chuckles) Accidentally. When you go through something like the X-Ray
5 campaign and what happened there, those three days I can only imagine that you get
6 tighter because you're still relying on each other. Tell me about what your platoon did.
7 You get there on the 15th and you're there through the night, I assume, to the 16th.

8 BK: Yes.

9 RV: What happened on the 16th?

10 BK: The morning of the 16th, we had to go out and check some of the bodies to
11 see if we could find any identification papers, anything pertinent.

12 RV: The enemy bodies?

13 BK: The enemy bodies, yeah. So we did that and we started to move out to
14 Albany. Our platoon, A Company was the last company in the column. Our platoon was
15 the last platoon. So we were way in the tail end.

16 RV: Yes, with Captain Forrest.

17 BK: With Captain Forrest. So late, late morning the column stopped. So right
18 away we put out our security and Captain Forrest went up front. Couple of minutes later,
19 we started getting mortared. We thought that our own people were doing that because
20 they didn't realize we were spread out so far. So Ronnie calls up to find out and tell them
21 to stop the friendly fire and we found out that it wasn't ours. Right after he had said that,
22 then everything exploded all around us. I ended up getting hit with the mortars. I couldn't
23 walk, I got hit in the back and in the side. Mentally, I was gone and physically, I could
24 barely move. So Ronnie puts me on a poncho and he should've been protecting himself,
25 but he put me in a poncho and called three other guys over. The four guys would pick up
26 the poncho and carry me and drag me into the next safe area, while they would fight the
27 enemy, they picked me up and dragged me again. I fell out of the poncho about four, five,
28 six times because it was so bloody. I kind of laughed, but they were dead serious. I had
29 no sense of reality. I'm guessing this went on for hours, at least hour and a half. I lost
30 track of time. But if those four people hadn't picked me up and carried me all that while

1 until we established a landing zone, I wouldn't have made it. Then Ronnie went back to
2 our platoon after he knew I was safe, and Ronnie did not make it.

3 RV: Did you know what happened to him? This is after the fact.

4 BK: Everybody was detached because when they hit us, they just spread us all
5 over. Since we were the last element, we were completely detached. So what had
6 happened when we went out to help the rest of the platoon, they got cut off and never
7 made it back.

8 RV: What do you all know about what happened with Ronnie that day?

9 GS: Well, we located a real good friend of my brothers as a matter of fact,
10 through an article that was written in a Columbus, Georgia newspaper. We contacted him
11 and he gave us a better description of what had happened and evidently from his
12 information that Ronnie became wounded and he was away from his group. During the
13 night, they said the Vietnamese soldiers were going through the brush finding Americans
14 that were still alive and killing them and massacring them. That's what happened to him.

15 RV: What did you hear about this?

16 YG: Same story, same story.

17 RV: Lieutenant, when you got out of there and you were recovering from your
18 wounds, when did you find out about what happened to Alpha.

19 BK: Last summer. Last summer.

20 RV: Really?

21 BK: It was an accident.

22 YG: It's an amazing story.

23 BK: When the movie came out, my family bugged me that they wanted to go to
24 the movie. Because I had gotten the book a few years earlier. Read it once and put it on a
25 shelf and blocked out everything completed. So I thought, "Well, I better check the
26 movie and see what's it like." And I like Mel Gibson. They had a 1st Cav guest page as
27 part of their website. So I signed it because this was the middle of the night and I wasn't
28 thinking too well. So I sign my name, my unit and everything. Then a few days later, I
29 get an email note from a Freddy Owens. He said, "I was with you in X-Ray and Albany.
30 We got a reunion coming up in Washington this year, would you join us?" And this was
31 two years ago. So I wrote him back and said, "I can't make it." That's it. I didn't erase his

1 name out of my address book, but I was going to. A week after Washington, after that
2 reunion here, I got curious, so I just wanted to write to Freddy. So I wrote and said,
3 “What happened in Washington D.C.?” What I did accidentally was send it to everybody
4 on the email note, I hit reply all. So everybody got it that was at the reunion, including
5 her. So I get an email note from a strange lady saying, “We had a wonderful time—”

6 YG: “My uncle was—”

7 BK: “Found some information about my uncle, Ronnie T. Mathis. Did you know
8 him?” And a few other little things. So I did not respond.

9 YG: No.

10 BK: No way. A week later I got another one.

11 RV: But you didn’t know what happened to Mathis?

12 BK: No. No, I didn’t. A week later I got another one from her. She didn’t give up.

13 YG: No, I didn’t give up.

14 BK: She said, “I found out you were my Uncle Ronnie’s platoon leader. Would
15 you please write back to me?” How can you say no to that?

16 RV: Right.

17 BK: That started it. Last summer, we got together. Our families met down in
18 Columbus, Georgia and one of my squad leaders is Paul Welch, who had found Ronnie—
19 also was there at our reunion and that’s where we got to know each other. We’ve been
20 corresponding ever since.

21 GS: And the information that I was giving you came from Paul Welch. He was
22 my brother’s best friend. The reason—how we found it, my daughter by accident typed in
23 on the internet my brother’s name and this article from the *Columbus Inquirer* came up
24 and he talks of my brother in that article. He said that he had never had the opportunity to
25 meet his family. So the very next day we got in touch with him and within three weeks
26 we were in Columbus.

27 BK: Wow. What was it like to tie this—get all these facts together?

28 GS: Well, you know it’s really strange how you don’t know in the beginning what
29 happens. Of course, you grieve and through the years you just sort of—it’s just always
30 there, but in the back of your mind. We had always wondered, but we didn’t know what

1 to do or how to do it to get the information. It was just amazing after it came to be thirty-
2 eight years after it happened that we got the information.

3 RV: How is it being together now and on this 40th anniversary of that action?

4 GS: I think it's wonderful.

5 YG: It is.

6 GS: We have all become wonderful friends. It's more family, more like family
7 than just friends.

8 BK: I wouldn't be here if they weren't here. I would not have gone to the wall
9 yesterday if they had not been able to be available.

10 RV: Did you find Ronnie's name?

11 GS: Oh yes, oh yes.

12 BK: Yes.

13 RV: What was that like?

14 GS: Well, it wasn't our first time.

15 YG: No.

16 RV: Was it your first time together?

17 YG: Right. Very emotional.

18 RV: Well, what would you want people listening to this interview generations
19 from now, what would you want to know about that day? And about Ronnie?

20 GS: I think he was instrumental in getting us together. Just so much—things that
21 happened. He just sort of guided us together, I think. I know he knows we're together.

22 BK: One of the things that the Cav is really is strong is we leave no one behind.
23 But in the middle of combat when everything is just flying all around, it's total chaos. I
24 mean, you can't hear—nothing. You're reacting as you've been trained. Theoretically,
25 Ronnie definitely risked his life, but even rolling me over and putting me on a poncho.
26 They should've left me and continued to defend themselves. Ronnie saved my life.

27 RV: Then he went back.

28 BK: Then he went back to help the rest of the platoon. He was the radio operator,
29 he thought that they might need the radio.

30 RV: That says a lot. Well, in interest in time, we'll have to stop the interview, but
31 this is a great tribute to him and his service, I thank you all for doing this.

1 YG: Thank you for letting us.

2 GS: Yeah, it's an honor.

3 [Editor's note: Interviewer asks for correct spelling of participants names.]

4 BK: When I was coming out of anesthesia, I was in the main room, my whole
5 family was there. I was still incoherent. They said that I kind of looked up and asked for
6 Ronnie and asked what he was doing there. Now I remember seeing Ronnie come in his
7 dress green, walk around the area and walk over to my side of the bed and said,
8 "Everything is okay, we're okay." So I talked to the vet counselor about that and she says
9 she feels like he was in dress greens, he was safe. Because that's what we wore when we
10 were safe back in base camp. He looked young, he had his full uniform on and she said,
11 "I feel he was letting me know he was okay."

12 RV: Wow.

13 (End of interview)