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**The Vietnam Archive
Oral History Project
Interview with Earl Hayes
Conducted by Dennis Berger
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Transcribed by Dennis Berger**

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 Dennis Berger: This is Dennis Berger conducting an oral history interview with
2 Mr. Earl Hayes for the Vietnam Archive at Texas Tech University. Today's date is 4
3 August 2008. I am in Lubbock, Texas, and Mr. Hayes is in Karber's Ridge, Illinois. Mr.
4 (Hayes), welcome.

5 Earl Hayes: Thank you.

6 DB: Some questions here. Number one, when and where were you born?

7 EH: I was born in Harrisburg, Illinois, February 5, 1948.

8 DB: Okay, and what was your family background?

9 EH: Uh, I'm not really sure of the question.

10 DB: You know, what occupation was your father in? Did you guys live in town,
11 or out of town? That sort of thing.

12 EH: My father was a diamond driller, and exploration for minerals for mining
13 companies and such. Mom was a housewife, part-time waitress.

14 DB: So mining runs in your family?

15 EH: Pretty much, yeah.

16 DB: Okay. Could you describe for me, briefly, what your childhood was like?

17 EH: Well, with Dad moving around all the time, we moved a various amount of
18 times 'til my older brothers and sisters got into high school. Then we quit moving around.
19 Dad, I'd say, had a normal job.

20 DB: Okay. And along those lines, did you have any particular interests while in
21 high school?

1 EH: Any particular interests in what?

2 DB: While you were attending high school, anything in particular that you did or
3 enjoyed?

4 EH: No, not really—just a typical high school kid.

5 DB: Okay. Okay, where did you attend basic training?

6 EH: Fort Bliss, Texas.

7 DB: Okay. And when was that exactly?

8 EH: Where?

9 DB: When.

10 EH: I got drafted on the 24th, 25th day of September, 1967.

11 DB: And did you report right away, or—

12 EH: Yeah. Well, yeah. We went to Saint Louis and they distributed us from there.
13 Generally, people from here went down to Fort Leonard Wood, Missouri, but, all their
14 facilities were full, so that's how come I ended up in Texas.

15 DB: Okay. In those days how long was Army basic training?

16 EH: Eight weeks.

17 DB: Eight weeks. Okay. What were your memories of basic training?

18 EH: The biggest problem I had with basic training in Texas in September was that
19 it was ungodly hot. Fort Bliss is in El Paso, Texas, in West Texas, right on the New
20 Mexico border and it's nothing but desert down there.

21 DB: But other than that no other striking memories of anything, besides the heat?

22 EH: Other than the large numbers of us that were scattered around, about, around
23 the base.

24 DB: So it was a pretty busy time at Fort Bliss in those days?

25 EH: Pardon me.

26 DB: Was it a pretty busy time for Fort Bliss?

27 EH: Oh, yeah. Yeah, they were. Fort Bliss was, is the training center for, Patriot
28 missiles and such, and they just made a place for basic training, actually was what they
29 did.

30 DB: Okay. What was your, what was gonna be your job in the Army?

1 EH: After we got out of basic they sent me down to Fort Polk, Louisiana, to their
2 jungle warfare school. Basically, I was trained as a rifleman for the infantry.

3 DB: Okay. Do you feel that, both or neither basic training or advanced school
4 adequately prepared you for what you experienced in Vietnam?

5 EH: The mechanics, yes. I don't suppose anything or any amount of training will
6 prepare you for the psychological part.

7 DB: Okay. Do you feel that all your instructors were professional or as
8 professional as could be in that time period?

9 EH: About ninety percent, ninety-five percent of our instructors, drill instructors
10 and people that were teaching the classes were Vietnam returnees and they were sincere
11 in trying to teach us what they knew we had to have to stay alive.

12 DB: Okay. Okay, after you left advanced school, what units were you assigned
13 to?

14 EH: Initially I was assigned to the 4th Infantry Division. It was where my orders
15 were for, but by the time we got to Vietnam the 101st Airborne Division needed
16 replacements and that's where I ended up.

17 DB: Okay. What part of the 101st were you assigned to?

18 EH: I was assigned to D Company, 1st Battalion, 501st Infantry.

19 DB: Okay. When you first got to Vietnam, what were your impressions of the
20 country and of our mission there?

21 EH: I didn't much think about our mission at all. I had orders to go and I went and
22 I, (coughing) excuse me, I knew I was going to do what I was ordered to do. That's the
23 way it's always been in our family—when our nation called we went. That's just part of
24 our tradition.

25 DB: Was there a certain amount of regret or fear on the home front from your
26 family when you got your orders?

27 EH: I'd say probably fear, yeah. I had an uncle that was killed in World War II
28 and my grandparents and my, mother, my daddy had passed away and my mother was
29 pretty apprehensive about letting me go. But there wasn't, you know, wasn't anything we
30 could do.

1 DB: Right. Okay, going back in-country, when you first arrived there, did you
2 arrive at Tan Son Nhut, or how did you get in-country?

3 EH: We landed at Cam Ranh Bay.

4 DB: Cam Ranh Bay. And what was your impression when you got off the
5 airplane, with the smell and the heat and everything?

6 EH: Well, one of the first things I noticed was the smell and, naturally, the heat as
7 soon as they opened the plane door. Cam Ranh Bay was a vast base. It was probably one
8 of the largest bases in Vietnam for American forces and you really didn't notice or pay
9 any attention other than in the back of your mind that you were in a war zone because
10 everything was hectic.

11 DB: Okay.

12 EH: Like being in a large city.

13 DB: Large city. Try to describe it for me, because I've seen photographs of it, but
14 never, you know, not being there—

15 EH: It was a deep-water port. A lot of materials came in to Cam Ranh Bay on the
16 ships and was offloaded. It was like being in the city.

17 DB: Were all four services stationed out of there or was it anyone in particular
18 that owned it—

19 EH: All four were there.

20 DB: Okay.

21 EH: And one of the largest area, largest busy air, busier, busiest airports in
22 Vietnam at the time. There was a jet taking off, I think they said, every minute and thirty
23 seconds.

24 DB: Okay.

25 EH: It was twenty-four hours, seven days a week.

26 DB: Oh, wow. Did they give you a lot of time to, when you first got there, give
27 you a lot of time to get used to being in-country, or did you—

28 EH: No. No, we didn't have a whole lot of time. I was there an extra three or four
29 days. That's where they reassigned me. Evidently the 4th Infantry Division didn't need
30 me and we were held over, a group of us, I don't remember how many, maybe a hundred

1 were held three extra days, or maybe four, so they could cut our new orders, arrange
2 transportation for us to go north.

3 DB: Okay. In the time you were at Cam Ranh did you notice, did you notice any
4 kind of animosity between people who were going to be in forward areas versus those
5 who were rear echelon?

6 EH: No, not really.

7 DB: Not really. Okay.

8 EH: We were a replacement battalion or company and we weren't, you know,
9 once they disbursed everybody, we were all wearing the same green.

10 DB: Right. Okay. Once you got to your unit, how would you rate the capability of
11 your leaders, from the squad level up?

12 EH: Repeat the question.

13 DB: Once you got into your unit, to D Company, how would you rate the leaders
14 in that company, you know from the squad, you know, leader all the way up to the
15 company commander and higher?

16 EH: The leadership at the time that I got with the 101st Airborne Division was top
17 notch. It was, I couldn't have asked for better. At the time I didn't realize it, but all of our
18 platoon leaders were West Point graduates. Our company commander, I think, he had,
19 this was probably his second or third tour. And everybody was professional. They treated
20 you as a professional also, after you got a little time under your belt.

21 DB: Did a lot of that 101 mystique or reputation—

22 EH: The esprit-de-corps was there, yes. They were there and they intended to, to
23 uphold their name and their reputation, and we did.

24 DB: Good. Okay, now let's look at the enemy, both Viet Cong and the PAVN
25 (Peoples Army of Vietnam). How would you rate their capabilities?

26 EH: The capabilities—I got there after the main part of the Tet offensive in, in
27 February of 1968. I got there on the sixth day, well not to the company, but I got there in
28 March. The Viet Cong weren't really all that active. What, the 101st Airborne Division
29 and the people in northern I Corps, was dealing with was the remainders of the invasion
30 force, the North Vietnamese regular army. They were very professional and they intended
31 to kill you.

1 DB: Okay. Of the two, which one would you have rather faced? Or was there no
2 choice?

3 EH: Personally, you know I mean, heh, the North Vietnamese army was as
4 professional as we were. If I had to make a choice I'd rather go up against the guerilla.
5 He's not as, as well trained and as well equipped as the North Vietnamese army was.

6 DB: All, right. Okay, let's talk about some of the things you might have been
7 involved with. Did you participate in Operation Nevada Eagle?

8 EH: Yep.

9 DB: Okay. What was the purpose behind that operation?

10 EH: To be honest with you I don't really remember other than search and destroy
11 and keep our area of operations clear of the enemy.

12 DB: What part of the country was that located in?

13 EH: I was stationed outside of Hue and Phu Bai in northern I Corps.

14 DB: Okay, okay. And it basically consisted of just a lot of patrolling?

15 EH: Yeah. We walked around every day looking for a fight.

16 DB: Were you trying to deny the enemy any logistics, food stuffs—

17 EH: Oh, yeah. Any time we found large, large amounts of rice, food stuff,
18 medical supplies they were always loaded up and sent, I'm assuming, to the South
19 Vietnamese government and their army.

20 DB: Okay, was that a successful operation?

21 EH: Very successful. They had weapons caches and food caches all over our area
22 of operation and it was just a matter of finding them.

23 DB: Okay. Did you serve in the A Shau?

24 EH: Uh, no. I never, I never went into A Shau. We were just across the mountain
25 range from it, but our area of operation didn't include it.

26 DB: Okay. So, in addition to Nevada Eagle in the I Corps area, what else were
27 you involved with during your time in-country?

28 EH: Oh, there were five major campaigns—Nevada Eagle, Caratan One, Caratan
29 Two—can't remember the other, the others now.

30 DB: Okay, can you describe those for me, their purpose—

1 EH: They, basically everything we had was, was doing at the time I was there was
2 a counteroffensive campaign. We were on the, were on the offensive. We were trying to
3 hunt down the remainders of the North Vietnamese army and to kill or capture 'em.
4 That's all there was to it, and we intended to clear out our area of operations, and we did.
5 By the time I left there our area of operation was really quiet.

6 DB: So there wasn't this recurring enemy action after you left an area, them
7 coming back in and back filling it, like you hear a lot about?

8 EH: Repeat that.

9 DB: There wasn't a lot of that same problem where most times you go about
10 clearing an area and then you move on and they come back in behind you, that wasn't a
11 problem—

12 EH: Not a whole lot, no. Once in a while you'd run into your little local VC
13 operative when you went back through part of your area of operations. We patrolled it
14 like a city policeman on a foot patrol. We went from point A to point B. We, you know,
15 basically walked a beat.

16 DB: If you patrol an area several times do you become familiar with the locals?
17 Do you kind of pick out who the VC were, whatever—

18 EH: The locals, well, they wanted what we would give 'em, but they weren't
19 overly friendly.

20 DB: Okay. Okay. Would you describe for me, generally, what a patrol would be
21 like? Duration, that sort of thing?

22 EH: If we were already in the bush, depended on whose, whose turn it was to be
23 on point that particular day— moved out in order of the day. You know, the point
24 platoon, point squad—and followed, I'm assuming the company commander's plan and
25 basically walked around looking for the enemy.

26 DB: Okay. On an average, how many times a month do you think you went on
27 patrol?

28 EH: Oh, Lord, I couldn't even begin to imagine that. We were, we'd be in the
29 bush for weeks at a time.

30 DB: Okay. For, for me, did you have a base camp and then a rear echelon
31 headquarters—

1 EH: We had, well, the rear echelon headquarters was in the southern part of the
2 country, it was outside of Bien Hoa. We just, we had forward base camps, LZ Sally,
3 Eagle, Camp Eagle, and places like that, where we had, where we were out for so long
4 then they'd pull us back to the rear for clean clothes, a shower, and basically kind of rest
5 a little.

6 DB: Hmm. Okay.

7 EH: Even though we were supposed to be an airborne outfit, I wasn't jump
8 qualified to begin with. I'd never jumped out of an airplane, but they, they never jumped.
9 We operated just like any, any non-airborne infantry outfit in the country. We lived off
10 what we had on our back, anywhere from forty to seventy-five pounds in a rucksack.

11 DB: Okay, so your main mode of transportation was either foot or truck, never a
12 helicopter?

13 EH: Feet or helicopter.

14 DB: Yeah, okay. Could we talk a little about people in, in the Army while you
15 were in? How would you describe race relations in your unit?

16 EH: Didn't have any problems with race relations when I was there.

17 DB: Even though this was '68 and—

18 EH: Yeah.

19 DB: With everything happening back home?

20 EH: The, uh, you have to understand the majority of the people that was in the
21 101st Airborne Division by the time I got there was, were volunteers. They had
22 volunteered to jump out of an airplane. So when the division, the majority of the division,
23 went to Vietnam in December of '67 they were volunteers and they were with 'em. And
24 there was a large black community within the 101st Airborne Division, but we never had
25 racial problems at all. My first squad leader was a black man and a fine fellow. Couldn't
26 ask for better squad leader.

27 DB: Is that pretty much the same way that your whole tour, or did it change
28 toward the end of the tour?

29 EH: I never experienced any racial problems at all until I got back to the States.

30 DB: No problems at all. And what was that?

1 EH: Well, there was a lot of animosity. I did six months in Fort Carson, Colorado,
2 with the 5th Mechanized Infantry and it was the blacks stayed off to themselves and, you
3 know, if you had a black buddy he was a good buddy and, you know, you just didn't go
4 off to yourself much.

5 DB: Okay.

6 EH: Always wanted to make sure there was somebody around.

7 DB: So there was a lot of racial tension back stateside?

8 EH: Yeah. Yeah, a lot of racial tension stateside. I was glad to get out—get away
9 from it.

10 DB: Okay, what about the issue of drugs and alcohol? We hear so much about
11 that—

12 EH: I didn't see too much of hard drugs. Marijuana was plentiful— alcohol you
13 know, we were issued one beer and one soda a day when we got resupplied when we
14 were in the field. There was no drug use in our outfit while we were in the field. That
15 would get you hurt. Catch somebody smoking marijuana while he was supposed to be on,
16 taking his turn on guard at night in a night defensive perimeter you thumped his head.

17 DB: Right. So in the field everybody pretty much—

18 EH: Pardon me.

19 DB: In the field everybody pretty much stayed straight and didn't—

20 EH: Yep.

21 DB: Okay.

22 EH: You do what you want to do when you get in the rear as long as you're not
23 gonna endanger our life we don't care, but if you're gonna endanger our life we're gonna
24 take drastic measures to stop it.

25 DB: Was that a, informal policy by leadership or was that just in the, in the
26 platoons?

27 EH: Just in different companies and in different people.

28 DB: Okay.

29 EH: I couldn't, I don't know about the rest of the outfits. We operated on such a
30 strenuous schedule that we very seldom ever got to visit with any of our sister companies
31 or battalions, or anything. I mean, when we went to the rear we were there for four or five

1 days and we had security to take care of on the bunker line and make sure everything was
2 secure, but we still got to sleep on a cot and under a roof.

3 DB: Which was a whole lot better than being up in base camp, wasn't it?

4 EH: Yeah.

5 DB: Okay. Within limits do you think that command did everything it could for
6 the morale of the troops in the field?

7 EH: That's a tough question.

8 DB: I mean you see so many things like USO tours. I've heard folks say that was
9 demeaning to them and—

10 EH: Well USO tours, we were so far up north that most of the USO tours we got
11 couldn't speak English very well. Whatever, what's the native language of the
12 Philippines? Most of our USO shows were Filipino. There's a lot of things that could
13 have been done probably a little better for us up north, like, for instance, when a Bob
14 Hope show came at Christmas time you were allowed, like, four people out of the
15 battalion. There was four rifle companies in the battalion, you got one man from each
16 company that got to go down to see the Bob Hope show, that wasn't really too cool in my
17 estimate—the way I think.

18 DB: Okay. What about other types of morale at, issues, I guess, at base camp.
19 Clubs, recreation.

20 EH: We didn't—our base camp was so sparse that we had a little plywood hut
21 that had a cooler in it to keep our beer cool and that was about it. You know, I mean, we
22 didn't have any, like, Bien Hoa or Tan Son Nhut, any place like that. We didn't have any
23 big fancy clubs with music and everything. We pretty much lived by our boot straps.

24 DB: Okay.

25 EH: The only difference between us and, and the Marine Corps was the name. We
26 lived just like they did, they were just up the road a ways.

27 DB: Okay. Would you take a minute and describe for me what a typical base
28 camp would look like?

29 EH: Well most of our base camps were generally on a knoll, kind of gave you
30 command of the field of fire all way around you. With barbed wire, concertina wire all
31 the way round it and your bunker lines. We eventually got plywood huts, buildings with

1 tin roofs on them and got rid of the leaky tents. They were dry and dusty, when, during
2 the dry season. When it rained they were nothing but mud. You had your latrine, and
3 your shower with the water tank on top of it, your helipads where your helicopters come
4 in and picked up your resupply material, your motor pool, then you had your artillery
5 battery stationed around over base camp pointed in different directions.

6 DB: Hot chow?

7 EH: Yeah, we had a mess area. Generally they put on two hot meals and one, and
8 one cold meal a day. The noon meal being most of the time cold cuts or even C-rations as
9 far as that goes. Breakfast and evening meal were hot meals.

10 DB: Okay. Let me see here. After you left Vietnam, you said you went to the 4th
11 Mech.

12 EH: Went to the 5th Mechanized Infantry.

13 DB: Okay.

14 EH: Fort Carson, Colorado.

15 DB: Okay you left that and what did you do after you left the 4th Mechanized?

16 EH: Pardon, me?

17 DB: What did you do after you left Fort Carson?

18 EH: Came back home and went back to work.

19 DB: Walked right into the same job?

20 EH: Yeah, pretty much.

21 DB: Okay. In your time in the Army, from basic training until the time you
22 walked out the door at Fort Carson did you notice any changes in the professionalism of
23 NCO (non-commissioned officers) corps?

24 EH: There was quite a bit of change at Fort Carson. Fort Carson was a holding
25 outfit, holding division. They had one battalion in Vietnam. The others were for riot duty
26 and/or European service if we had to go. The NCOs, let me finish, I'm getting ahead of
27 myself. A lot of, the majority of the people in the infantry companies at Fort Carson
28 were people that had been in the Fitzsimmons General Hospital at Denver. They were
29 shot up pretty bad. Basically weren't physically able to do much, and that led, you know,
30 all they wanted was out of the Army. The ones that were still in good shape, you know,
31 tried to be as professional as we could, but it was really hard to do because of the, well,

1 they pulled some pretty silly stuff. You know, I mean here you got people that have,
2 really need to be walking with a cane because they've had a leg shot, excuse me, a leg
3 shot up pretty bad. It wasn't a pretty place, anyway, but they'd send you out with your
4 armored personnel carriers and your tanks up in the mountains on a field problem and
5 stuff like that with people that weren't physically able to do it. And there was a lot of
6 morale problems there. Everybody was short, due to get out of the Army within, some of
7 them, you know, days, weeks, and months.

8 DB: Do think that shortness led to a lot of discipline problems?

9 EH: Yes, it did. A lot of discipline problems.

10 DB: But nobody left because they were just that short, right?

11 EH: We had some with weeks to go that went AWOL (absent without leave) and
12 they'd bring 'em back. They couldn't. I know they were having problems coping with the
13 stateside Army.

14 DB: All right.

15 EH: Which was a whole lot different. The discipline was different. The military
16 courtesy was different. Vietnam you didn't salute an officer at all. That gets you in more
17 trouble than not saluting, cause the officers didn't want to be recognized.

18 DB: Okay.

19 EH: And then you'd come back to the stateside Army with, with reveille
20 formation, noon formation, and, and retreat formations in the evening and it was hard for
21 people to do that. They just weren't used to the discipline. They were used to a year of
22 carrying a rifle, you know, and looking for somebody to shoot at.

23 DB: Okay. Let me know this, how would you rate your Army experience? Was it
24 generally positive, or generally negative?

25 EH: I'd say my experiences were positive. In less than two years I was a, an E-5,
26 a buck sergeant. Had responsibilities. When I first got out of the service I wasn't proud of
27 my military service because the feeling pretty much, the feeling in this county when I got
28 home wasn't really good. Pretty much anti-military, anti-war. We drove through the
29 hecklers and the protestors when we left Oakland to come home, you know, and eggs
30 throwing at the taxis and stuff like that. And that wasn't very positive, but as I got closer

1 to home, and, well, you've, you've been to Marion, Illinois, that's where the closest
2 airport is.

3 DB: Uh-hmm.

4 EH: The closer we got to home the more patriotism you could feel. I mean
5 everybody in the little town I'm from, was raised in would shake your hand you know,
6 welcome home thing. So yeah, my military experience was positive.

7 DB: That's great. Okay, have you ever thought about going back to Vietnam?

8 EH: No.

9 DB: No. Okay. How do you, what are your feelings toward the Vietnamese
10 people?

11 EH: The Vietnamese people?

12 DB: The people.

13 EH: My attitude toward the people has changed a lot. When I first, the first fifteen
14 years I was home I had no use for them at all. I realize that the civilian populace didn't
15 have anything to do with the way that their military did or didn't handle the war situation.
16 I still have a little bit of a problem with associating with them, but that's something that I
17 have to deal with.

18 DB: Okay. I guess last question. In general, how did your Vietnam experience
19 influence you in later years?

20 EH: Well, that's a hard question. It gave me a whole lot more respect for the men
21 and women in our military today. Gave me whole more respect for the veterans that were
22 before me, the ones that are after me. I may not support what's going on in the world with
23 our military, but I will stand and support every man and women that's in uniform
24 regardless of branch of service they're in. Do anything and everything I could for 'em.
25 My Vietnam experience, I think, made me love my country a little more after I got home.

26 DB: Okay, that's great. Any last thoughts that you might have about the stuff
27 we've talked about that's come up, that you've thought about since we left that particular
28 question?

29 EH: Repeat that please.

30 DB: Do you have, anything you might remembered after we left a particular
31 question, something might have come up—

1 EH: No.

2 DB: —that you want to add to this?

3 EH: No.

4 DB: Okay. Well, I really appreciate your help.

5 EH: I wish I could have been more help. A lot of people have to look out for each
6 other. And you get to be really tight with them, and if something happens, one gets hurt
7 or killed you feel a loss and you feel it really bad. The new people would come in, just
8 like they did with me, and everybody wasn't really wanting to get acquainted with them
9 because the realization was there that they might not be there tomorrow. But, once you
10 got in your rifle squad you were, I'm sure you've heard the phrase in the movie *Band of*
11 *Brothers*.

12 DB: Uh-hmm.

13 EH: I don't know how the other branches of the service feel, but see the *Band of*
14 *Brothers* was a movie about the 101st Airborne Division, and they'll always be that band
15 of brothers amongst the people that serve with the 101st Airborne. Regardless where
16 they're at, where they're at in the world or how long they spend with them. There's a
17 certain amount of esprit de corps there and pride that goes along with the 101st Airborne
18 Division that you'll never be able to get rid of or, it'll never die.

19 DB: Great. Okay—

20 EH: I will make one, one broad statement. They are probably the best in the Army
21 itself.

22 DB: The 101?

23 EH: Yep.

24 DB: Okay. Well, Mister Hayes, I really appreciate you taking today to talk to me,
25 and in the future we will, in the near future we—