

The Vietnam Archive Oral History Project
Interview with US Army Specialist Four James 'Jim' Fox
who served as a helicopter maintenance specialist in Vietnam
from July 1971 until July 1972
Conducted by Mike Law of the VHPA and 7/17th Cavalry
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Transcribed by Brian Obuya of Master Transcription

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- Mike: This is Thursday 19 September 2024 at the Ruthless Rider Reunion in Charleston SC. My name is Mike Law. I am talking with James 'Jim' Fox who served with C Troop. When did you get to Vietnam?
- Jim: I got to Vietnam in July of '71 and I stayed until July of '72.
- Mike: So, you were right out of AIT?
- Jim: Yes.
- Mike: And your MOS was?
- Jim: 67N. I was a Huey repairman, utility.
- Mike: Did anybody else from your class come in with you, or just you?
- Jim: No, just me.
- Mike: Okay. And so you walk in the door and the first sergeant says?
- Jim: He says, "Hello, you're going to work..."
- Mike: When you joined C Troop, where were they?
- Jim: They were at An Son, at Lane. Now, when I first got to Vietnam, I was in 158th Aviation at Camp Evans with 101st. And they went home in December or late December of '71. And I didn't have enough time in-country to go home, so they reassigned me.
- Mike: Okay, fine. So you were with 101st for how long?
- Jim: Almost six months. July to December.
- Mike: Okay. And what were your duties there?
- Jim: I was 67 November repairman working maintenance.
- Mike: But you didn't crew on a specific ship?
- Jim: No. I was in maintenance and somehow, I ended up working in the Prop & Rotor shop. That's where I got my basic skills in Prop & Rotor, which when I got to Charlie Troop, they put me into their Prop & Rotor shop.
- Mike: Now, let me ask you a question. When you come out of school, were you happy with the skills the Army had trained you?
- Jim: I was happy. However, my first assignment was -- they were doing a Periodic Inspection on a Huey. I was supposed to pull out and clean and reinstall the internal filter in the transmission. And although we'd done this task in school, it took me about 45 minutes to remember how to find it. I was digging through books and everything. I got scared, but after that, my confidence built up, and I felt like I was pretty good at it. School taught us well.
- Mike: Now, tools. When you get to your first duty station, did they give you a bag of tools?
- Jim: They gave us a large toolbox.

Mike: Really?

Jim: Yes.

Mike: Did it have anything in it?

Jim: It was about half complete compared to what it should have been.

Mike: All right. But, I mean, it wasn't zero.

Jim: No, it wasn't zero.

Mike: Okay, fine. Did they give you a mentor?

Jim: No. They pulled out a PM [Preventive Maintenance] sheet, and they said do this.

Mike: Really?

Jim: And they walked away, and there I was.

Mike: So, they really didn't put their arms around you, per se.

Jim: No!

Mike: Okay. So, you do some work. Eventually somebody has got to sign you off, whether it's a TI or whatever. And this may be the first time you'd met this man?

Jim: There are certain tasks that have to be signed off. And then when I was in the 101st, the TI had to be over your shoulder watching you. He would actually look at the torque wrench when you set the torque, and he looked to make sure it's set correctly. He'd watch. He'd listen for the click, and then he would sign off that you had done something correctly.

Mike: Wow. Pretty hands on.

Jim: Yeah. But there were certain tasks that you had to have the guy behind you to do it. Other times they just come around behind you and look at it and see if it looked all right.

Mike: Did you find offense to that, or did you feel like you could have used more supervision or?

Jim: No. Actually, I thought that was the procedure.

Mike: And you just had to learn to do it properly?

Jim: Right.

Mike: And you were not offended or?

Jim: No.

Mike: You were mildly scared that you might do something wrong because you didn't want to do anything wrong or?

Jim: No, I didn't want to do anything wrong, that's for sure. I just thought it was the process. You do something that was really critical, you had to have somebody watch it. I don't remember really being offended. No.

Mike: So, who was your first friend?

Jim: Well, there was a guy named Wallace that I seemed to work with quite a bit, and I don't even know what happened to him. When the units stood down, we went different ways.

Mike: But you're going to be in Vietnam six months. That's a long time. And how many guys were in your hooch?

Jim: When I was in 101st, we had probably 25 or 30 of us in the hooch.

Mike: One great big dorm?

Jim: No, We had partitioned off little cubicles and most of them were open. Just had walls in between the bunks.

Mike: So, there was some privacy?

Jim: Yeah. Well, when I was at Camp Evans, we had a typhoon come through. I was about the lightest weight guy in the hooch, so I got up on the roof. Guys were throwing sandbags up to me. I dropped sandbags all over the roof to keep the roof on during the typhoon and it actually worked.

Mike: And you probably got seriously drenched.

Jim: Oh yeah. I had my wetsuit on, but still it didn't matter. It was raining sideways. It was fun.

Mike: So, you didn't make any bosom buddies in the 101st, or did you?

Jim: Not so much in the 101st. When I got to the Cav, Red Gilpin and I worked pretty close together. Red Gilpin was -- we remained pretty good friends.

Mike: And he was an E-4?

Jim: He was E-4. He was a Cobra crew chief. And we worked pretty much together for about three or four months. We did Dailies [multiple Daily Inspections on a list of aircraft] together. Worked on the aircraft, went to the club, got up the next day and did it again.

Mike: All right.

Jim: When we came back, we both ended up at Fort Stewart for a while. Then he ETSed and I just DEROSed. That's before I went to Bragg. They sent us to Fort Stewart, but the Cobra transition had closed at that time.

Mike: They'd moved it back to Rucker by that time?

Jim: Yeah. And they still assigned me there, so I ended up in a transportation unit driving a truck, which was terrible.

Mike: So, you were an E-4 when you got to the Cav?

Jim: I was an E-4 the whole time in the Cav.

Mike: When you get to C Troop, they look at your clothes and say, "Well, you've been here a while." Then, they put you in Prop & Rotor?

Jim: Right.

Mike: And so who was the guy that was running that shop, do you remember?

Jim: I was the only one in the Prop & Rotor shop.

Mike: The only one!?!

Jim: Yeah.

Mike: You're supposed to have five guys, right?

Jim: I think there were several guys that should have been in there. And the maintenance sergeant was SFC Hammerich, I think that was his name? There was E-6, SSG Polachowski. He was in charge of the Allied shops as a whole, but Hammerich was in charge of the maintenance as far as the NCOs go. But when an aircraft came in and needed something, I'd work on it. I ended up taking Huey heads apart, changing O-rings because they had been leaking oil. I had pulled a Cobra head apart and found all the Teflon bearings were failing. We had to replace them. It was a fun job. I

got to do stuff I never knew. Just pull the book out, do it by the steps. I mean, it was good.

[Mike Law's notes: In the Vietnam War years, the term 'Allied shops' includes: "Prop & Rotor"; "Electrical", "Engine", "Sheet Metal" and "Armament" Shops. These shops had talented machinists, electricians, and welders who could fabricate or repair almost anything. In addition to the Allied Shops there were sections that interacted with the shops to make the whole thing work. These were the Production Control, Tech Supply, Quality Control, Aircraft Maintenance teams, Unit Supply, and Avionics.]

Mike: Did they have good TIs too?

Jim: They had good TIs.

Mike: Do you remember any of them?

Jim: I don't. You know something? I don't remember any. I looked at the picture books last time we had an Reunion, and I looked at it last night. I saw the TIs. I recognized their faces, but I don't remember their names.

Mike: No, I understand. At the same time, I have met crew chiefs. They will give you an estimated date for their child's birth, but they will know exactly the three helicopters that they crewed! I mean, by all eight digits! You know there are people who live this stuff. They really do because it was important to them, and not that your child is not important to you. It's just that that's the way it goes.

Jim: I understand that and I think I did for a long time. I think right now I remember 627. That was the last numbers of the Cobra I worked on often.

Mike: When do you DEROS?

Jim: I DEROS July 13 of '72.

Mike: 1972. That was pretty far down the line [The Troop would leave Vietnam in 1973] then. Now, they changed names?

Jim: Yeah. We were H Troop, 10th Cav at that time.

Mike: I'm sorry. What date do you get into C Troop?

Jim: December 26 of '71. I remember that day because we were flying the day after Christmas. It should have been a cease fire day. We were flying from Tuy Hoa to Quy Nhon, and we took about three hits!! We were about 2,000 feet. I don't understand how they did that.

Mike: You know, if you shoot enough, eventually something's going to hit it.

Jim: Right.

Mike: Let me ask you another question here. Did you write home very often?

Jim: I wrote home.

Mike: Were you married?

Jim: No. I wrote to my mom. My girlfriend quit writing me about three months after I was in Vietnam and same old story.

Mike: Same old story, yeah. I got to find some guy that's around here. You're a long way away.

Jim: Exactly. But I wrote my mom.

Mike: So were you drafted?

Jim: No. I was going to be drafted, but I enlisted.

Mike: Were there any draftees in your AIT class, in your 67N?

Jim: Yeah, I'm sure there were but I...

Mike: How many people would you guess were in that class?

Jim: I think about 10.

Mike: Really that small?

Jim: Eight or 10. Yeah.

Mike: Oh, I thought the number would be much higher.

Jim: They ran them about weekly, so it was...

Mike: Weekly? Okay, fine. And it lasted about how many months?

Jim: Three weeks was basic mechanics course. They called it the 67A10 door gunner school. And then the Huey training was eight weeks. So, 11 weeks total at Fort Rucker.

Mike: Okay. And then you went right over after taking some leave?

Jim: Yeah.

Mike: How do you spell that guy's name that you were friendly with?

Jim: Gilpin?

Mike: Yeah.

Jim: G-I-L-P-I-N. They called him Red guy.

Mike: He had a real name but...

Jim: I know he did, but Red is all everybody ever knew. Everybody knew him as Red.

Mike: We got a couple of them here, same story, second verse. I mean, their real name is Richard, but he's Red.

Jim: Yeah.

Mike: So, what was the best, most fun or enjoyable, not stressful, time in Vietnam for you? What was the best day you had there? Like Thanksgiving dinner? I'm making this up.

Jim: I don't think it was Thanksgiving dinner. I remember shrimp and rice one time and fried liver one time. That was the difference. But I think I really enjoyed the days that when you worked everything went GOOD. I don't know how to explain it. That's about all we did. There was work most of the time I was in Vietnam. Off base was off limits. So, you lived your life on the base. Every now and then you had a USO show or something that came through, some Philippine band or something like that. That was a reason to sit in the club. But outside of that, nothing significant. I did R&R in Taipei. I enjoyed that.

Mike: Oh, I bet. I was gonna ask you about that. And so you did just one R&R?

Jim: Just one R&R.

Mike: That was after you in the Cav or when you were in the 101st?

Jim: It was after I was in the Cav. The 101st standing down kind of messed me up because I'd put in - I wanted to go to Australia, and they cut it out. And actually, they cut out Taipei, Taiwan about a week or two after I went. So, I was one of the last people to tour there. I think Taiwan got kicked out of the Security Council or the UN or something at that time and there was some kind of political thing that we quit going R&R there.

Mike: But did you go on R&R with a couple of your friends or just by yourself?

Jim: No. I was the only one from the unit. We had a whole airplane full of people flying there, but I was the only one from the unit there.

Mike: Boy, you did kind of a solo tour?

Jim: Well, I don't know. I think they let two or three people from the same... They could, I guess.

Mike: Oh no, they did that routinely.

Jim: Really?

Mike: In fact, people would request it. They'd go to the first sergeant and say, "Hey, you know, can you make this happen?" Well, there were some SP-5s running this thing [scheduling R&Rs and getting the Orders cut] and all the 1st Sergeants needed to do was say, "Okay, make this happen," and he would, you know. Oh, did you play with Cobras up in the 101st?

Jim: No, we didn't have Cobras. We were a total slick unit up there.

Mike: What company were you with up there?

Jim: Alpha Company, 158th Aviation.

Mike: So, you come down to the Cav. They put you in Prop & Rotor for a while, but there was nobody in there, but you. So, if you got more to do than you could do, would they send other people in or?

Jim: If I needed somebody to help me lift something or move something, I was able to get help. But as far as just the tasks that had to get done, that was just me. And it was a pretty busy job. We were working close to 8 - 12-hour days.

Mike: Was your hooch back up near the chapel [the stone chapel building was (still is) a well-known landmark at Lane] or near the flight line?

Jim: It was closer to the chapel. In fact, our hooches were on a line right next to that hill they used to shoot at every night.

Mike: Yeah. I've got an overhead picture of Lane. If I can find it, maybe you could show me where it is. There was some maintenance hangar down lower where they stored the airplanes. But did anybody live down there?

Jim: Not that I know of.

Mike: Everybody else lived up more into the higher ground.

Jim: When I first got there, our hangar was kind of down, and we shared a hangar with, I guess, the 129th. And then they moved us to another hangar, kind of over hill on the other side of the clubs. And that was right next to the flight line over there. They moved us over there later on.

Mike: The one they moved you over to, was that near where the Chinook unit was? Because there were just two primary large pads for aircraft.

Jim: I think we left the Chinook unit and moved to the other one, if I remember right.

Mike: Do you know that guy over there? His name is Roger Lone.

Jim: Yes, I know him.

Mike: Okay, fine. He was there, but I don't know too many other guys that were there. One of the guys that -- we called him Soup [Louis R. Goeltzenleuchter]. He was a maintenance warrant officer. You remember him?

Jim: Yeah.

Mike: How did you graduate or move on from Prop & Rotor to the Cobra line?

Jim: They got two guys that were school trained at Prop & Rotor. They came in and I had to get them started. We worked together for three or four weeks, and then they told me I could get a maintenance job. So, I left. I went to Cobra team.

Mike: So, when did you start playing with the Cobras?

Jim: That was probably the first of the real time playing with them. Was in April when I went to Pleiku, got into Cobra. A Cobra is just like a Huey.

Mike: Yeah, it is. But, you know, it's got some interesting things.

Jim: Yes ~ it is skinny and has weapons.

Mike: Yeah, you're right. Fundamentally, I mean, mechanic-wise, until you start talking about weapon systems and stuff like that, it's a Huey.

Jim: It wasn't hard to transition [working on Hueys and then Cobras].

Mike: Okay. So you said you went to Pleiku. Now, during those days, the troop kind of had a dual personality, both at Lane to support what was left of that whole stuff there on the Bong Son Plain and all that jazz. And then they probably had almost half the troop in Pleiku on and off.

Jim: I think for the most part, the operational part of the gun platoon was at Pleiku.

Mike: Because they were there, you guys were there.

Jim: Right.

Mike: Yeah, right. Because they had another troop there.

Jim: Yeah, Bravo Troop was there.

Mike: But I know that, like I said, there was more work for everybody to do than they had people to do it. So they had this dual personality. And even before that, they were down at Phan Rang and places like that.

Jim: There was a unit. Now, we had people working out of Cam Ranh. I didn't go down there. Well, when I came back from R&R, they had a Huey down there. They couldn't get the blades to track on it. They grabbed me and said, "No, you're not going back up to Lane right now. You're gonna stay here and track this helicopter." So, they put me to work there for a couple days, which was pretty nice. They were living in Navy barracks. They had air conditioners and flush toilets and everything. Cam Ranh, that was luxury compared to Lane.

Mike: Well, Lane was luxury compared to the sandy and muddy areas we lived in. I lived in tents. What was your opinion of your comrades, the guys that were your peers?

Jim: Most of the guys I worked with were really good people.

Mike: In other words, they were trying harder, the best they could?

Jim: Yeah.

Mike: Were you ever short anything, like couldn't get a part or you couldn't get a tool or?

Jim: I remember our aircraft didn't have eight-day clocks in them. I don't know what ever happened to those things. But there's always things that you needed. You had to go maybe another unit to get a certain size of torque wrench and borrow it and go do your job, then take it back to them. I don't remember parts problems so much.

Mike: So in other words, if you would order something like a bearing, like you said you took that head apart one time, if you would figure out what you needed, and again, the

book told you what you needed, so you fill out the paperwork to get the part, it would come in a couple of days?

- Jim: For the most part, we got them just in a few days. I remember there was a clevis. It had three bearings in it, and it came off a Huey and for whatever reason. We had a press in the Prop & Rotor shop, and I ended up having to press a lot of bearings. And they had ordered those special bearings. It took forever to come in. They got it in, and they got the bearings, and one of the mechanics brought it to me and asked me if I'd press the bearing for him, and I was pressing the bearing and it slipped. Sergeant Hammerich had a field day on my rear end because he had to order it again. At the time they were pulling, one aircraft come into maintenance, we 'd pull that part off and put it on the one going out.
- Mike: I mean, they had... That was life, and luckily, you had a lot of airplanes. But at the same time, there was always... Did you have any interaction with the armorers?
- Jim: No, not there. I don't remember any armorers in Vietnam, but I know there had to be some.
- Mike: Well, yeah. Somebody's got to... Just like you got to play with the Prop & Rotor, some other guy had to turn those miniguns and get them to work and all that.
- Jim: We did too. We had our guys that were on the flight line that would -- they just pulled them off, put them on. We helped them load them. Helped them load 20s [20mm cannon on the Cobra]. When I got back to the States, and we went to the Aerial Gunnery Ranges, I had to show everybody there how to get rockets out of the boxes.
- Mike: Really?
- Jim: You're right. So yeah, we did that over Vietnam too. That's where I learned that.
- Mike: Taking them out of the wooden crates and assembling the warheads.
- Jim: You pull them out. Then pull the rocket, and then you had to get the warhead.
- Mike: Yeah, right.
- Jim: We did have... I'm sure we did. He was in the Armory. When we were in Pleiku, they were unloading armorers off an aircraft to send it into maintenance. He was walking across the front of and somebody touched a minigun and it popped off a round and hit the guy on the leg.
- Mike: If you turn the barrel, it will fire!
- Jim: It should have been cleared when they finished firing. Of course, you know, things happen.
- Mike: Well, yeah, and I wish he was the only one that got hurt that way.
- Jim: Then after that, they got really crazy about bullet catchers. Soon as you hit the ground, you had to --
- Mike: Put a bullet catcher on.
- Jim: Yeah.
- Mike: So how long did you work on the Cobras, not in Prop & Rotor?
- Jim: From early part of April until July when I went home.
- Mike: So not all that long?
- Jim: No.
- Mike: But again, it was just a job and you did it.
- Jim: Exactly.

Mike: Yeah, right. So of all the people that you remember there during those days, this Red Gilpin, that was the only one you really remember.

Jim: I remember Roger Lone, and some of the pilots I remember, of course, a lot of them have passed now. Red is probably the one I knew the best. He's the only one that I ever really kept up with.

Mike: And how long did you keep up with him?

Jim: Through the internet and stuff like that. He passed about four or five years ago. It was just a couple years before he passed that we really kind of quit. Just maybe every now and then a comment to each other.

Mike: It's always sad when that kind of drifts away.

Jim: Exactly.

Mike: It happens all the time. And some of it is because I got scrambled eggs instead of brains and so I really can't carry on a conversation, and I know it. So therefore I really don't want to talk to you because I'm going to make an idiot out of myself. So what did you do when you got out of the Army?

Jim: I stayed in the Army for 20 years.

Mike: Oh, really!?!

Jim: Yeah. I stayed in aviation until '76. I ended up going to... Well, first they sent me to Stewart where I ended up in a truck unit for six months, and then they were forming a Cav unit at Fort Bragg and they sent me to Fort Bragg. I ended up with what had been B/7/17th. They became Alpha and then Delta, 1st Squadron, 17th Cav at Fort Bragg, and I ended up with them until '76. Couldn't get promoted. The Army had way too many aviation people. They had cut off way high. Actually, I got up and exceeded the cut off, and they raised it so I couldn't get promoted. So, I decided I'd get out.

Mike: So you were an E-6 by then or?

Jim: No, I was an E-5 trying to make 6.

Mike: For 20 years?

Jim: No, no, no. But when I was still in aviation at Fort Bragg, I got out of Army Aviation. I went into the electronics field and I worked electronics for 20 years. Not 20 but the rest of my time until I could retire.

Mike: You were still in the Army or you were DA civilian?

Jim: No, I was in the Army until '91 and I retired. After retiring, I fixed TVs for a couple years, and then I got a job in the post office as electronic technician, and I worked for them for 20 years.

Mike: I see. So, what rank did you retire with in the Army?

Jim: I made E-6.

Mike: Wow. You have a lot of patience.

Jim: I went into dead fields. There came a time in the Army where Vietnam veterans weren't really cared about a whole lot, and I had a command sergeant major that I think really would rather see me out, and he was in charge of my last three promotion boards at DA. And I've heard stories that --

Mike: You got sabotaged.

Jim: I got moved to the "not gonna make it, pal!" real fast.

Mike: That is so sad.

Jim: When you get that much time in, you gotta finish it.

Mike: Well, after a while, yeah, the retirement was quite enticing, but unfortunately, you got to pay your dues for that. Well, if you combine that time with your post office time, you probably did more well. I mean, well enough.

Jim: I had that option and made more money in military retirement than adding the 20-years to my postal retirement. But I still get the postal retirement.

Mike: So in essence, you got two?

Jim: Yeah.

Mike: All right. Fine. Well, that's good. Any super regrets?

Jim: No.

Mike: I mean, the country asked you to do this. You volunteered to do it. You did it, da, da, da, but...

Jim: When I joined the Army, I went into Army Aviation, and I knew that most likely I'd end up going to Vietnam. I knew if I got drafted, that they would put me into whatever they wanted and I'd most likely end up going to Vietnam. So, I went to school. I wanted to work on the aircraft. And my parents lived in Huntsville, Alabama and the Redstone Arsenal is there.

Mike: Yeah, big town.

Jim: They had a bunch of schools there that worked on missiles and rockets that don't go to Vietnam, and they knew that if I got in one of those MOSs, there'd be no chance of me going, and they didn't like it. But no, I have no regrets. I ended up... There's a lot of things in life I've done that I didn't like working that.

Mike: Sometimes you just got to strap on your big boy pants and get it done.

Jim: When you grew up at that time too, it was in the news every day, and you saw people going, and some way or another, it [Vietnam] was part of your life before it even happened.

Mike: I love that expression -- part of your life before it even happened. Thank you for saying that. That is going to make me think about that quite a little bit. I had my time slightly different than you did, but that you've said is right on. Anyway, so how many of these reunions have you been to?

Jim: This is my fourth, actually. Yeah. I went about 18, 20 years ago to Louisville. And then, for whatever reason, three years ago, I went to Gatlinburg.

Mike: I was at Gatlinburg.

Jim: Then I went to Williamsburg last year.

Mike: But you and I never talked?

Jim: No. I guess not.

Mike: Wow. That's my bad. You're a quiet man though, but that's fine.

Jim: I think two years ago, Roger Lone and Larry Richards were there. They were the only two people out of the unit I was in that came to that reunion. And Louisville, there wasn't anybody there from my unit. And then last year, my wife went with me because she wanted to go to Williamsburg. Had to take her out to Mount Vernon. She said she's been here a couple of times, so she wasn't coming here again.

Mike: Well, my wife is very kind. If I wanted her to come, she would, but she'd rather just stay home.

Jim: That's the same way with us.

Mike: She said, "All you do is talk for morning to night anyway." And she said, "I love you, but go talk." Any rate. So what is your street address?

Jim: 6492 Welannee. I have to spell that. W-E-L-A-N-N-E-E, Boulevard, Laurel Hill, Florida, 32567.

Mike: All right. Fine. And you have an email?

Jim: jimrfox@yahoo.com

Mike: Okay, fine. And a phone you answer?

Jim: 251-605-9501.

Mike: All right. Fine. I will get this transcribed and let you have a hack at it. Okay. What's the scariest time you did in Vietnam? The most fun thing you said is really when things worked out good. It was more of an accomplishment than anything else.

Jim: One of the scarier times, I guess, we were flying back from Lane to Pleiku, and it was soup; you couldn't see anything. And we were flying up over the Mang Yang Pass but you couldn't see a thing. I had thoughts we might fly into that mountain somewhere.

Mike: Yeah, you're right. Well, righteously so, because a lot of people did just that! So, you were very scared and nervous for the whole time.

Jim: That part of it was very bad. I can't think of too much else. Flying in a Chinook going to... When I first got to the Cav, we had a change of command ceremony in Pleiku. We had to send a platoon over there, and I guess being a new guy, I got stuck on that platoon, and we were flying in a Chinook going over there. I never liked flying in Chinooks. But there was a time when we suddenly dropped pretty fast. Remember you can look out the back end of the Chinook. I know it was further up, but it looked about 100 feet above us was a belly of a C-130 going the other way. There wasn't any reason for being scared after nothing happened.

Mike: But that was scary. Operative word "was" because 10 seconds earlier it was stark terror. Well, that was a big problem, and, boy, they had more than a few midair collisions in Vietnam, and that was just kind of a sad commentary on the times, but nonetheless, it was. So, when you got short... Let me ask you this question. It's kind of silly, but it's kind of important. Did you guys have short timer sticks by then?

Jim: We had calendars but I don't remember sticks so much. But we had calendars and things you had to mark down every day and --

Mike: Brag about it. Yeah, right. When you went home, did some other people go with you or did you just go by yourself?

Jim: Went and got on an airplane with a whole bunch of other people.

Mike: Where did you leave from?

Jim: We left from Long Binh?

Mike: No, no, I meant where were you based when you left?

Jim: I left from An Son.

Mike: Okay. And you flew to where?

Jim: About three or four hops, I hitchhiked down to Long Binh.

Mike: Really?

Jim: Yeah. I think I ended up in a C-123 for a little ways, and ended up in Beaver or something like that. I can't remember what it was. And flew down the coastline and we landed. It might have been in Vung Tau. And then I kind of hopped from there over to Long Binh.

Mike: And were you just carrying a duffel bag?

Jim: One duffel bag, and I'm sure another bag. I could carry it all at one time. I think I probably carried my house at one time. I was going home. I was ready to go.

Mike: Yeah, for sure. But those were kind of scary days because, man, there was nobody around anymore. I mean, everybody was, you know. I had heard stories about guys saying, well, if we needed to go south, we would call ahead to see if they had fuel. And if they didn't have fuel, we wouldn't go there. I thought, really? I never thought of anything like that. Once I get to Vietnam, I just... Unless you landed out in the boonies, they had fuel everywhere.

Jim: I don't know for the enlisted one. When I was at Camp Evans, if you're going to go somewhere, you hitchhiked.

Mike: Really?

Jim: You went up. There's a little tower in the middle of all the bases, and holler up and tell them, I need to go to Phu Bai. And they get on the radio, they find out who's flying to Phu Bai and say, we got a passenger here. They land, pick you up, and take you to Phu Bai.

Mike: So you just hitchhike?

Jim: You hitchhike.

Mike: So that was no big problem for you?

Jim: Right before I retired, I went to Desert Storm.

Mike: Oh, yeah?

Jim: And when Desert Storm got over, they, well, time that you retire, you need to go back to State. You know how to get back. I went to Bahrain. Told them I need to get back to the States. I had orders. They found a C-5, they put me on it. I flew to Madrid, found another one. I flew to Dover Air Force Base, found another one. I flew to Tinker. I mean, I hitchhiked back.

Mike: Have all your stuff with you and eat when you can.

Jim: That's pretty much it.

Mike: That's a treat. Well, like I said, I'll get this transcribed and then send it to you, and it'll be a hoot. This will also go in the Vietnam Archive at Texas Tech.

Jim: All right.

Mike: That's for VHPA's archive. It takes a minute or two to do that, but there's a couple of release forms I'll send you.

Jim: Okay, no problem.

Mike: Thanks for your candor. And if today or tomorrow or whatever, you think of something, say, "Oh, I wish I would have talked to Mike about this and that, because something is important to you, because really, this is your history. Actually, I appreciate people like you, I think, more than anything else because you were a good soldier. And I'm sorry, that was what the Army was supposed to be built on. Good soldiers, not good officers, not nothing, but good soldiers. So when you find somebody that was sincere and hardworking and honest, I'm sorry, those are the

guys you really -- you want to say good for you! So thank you. We only needed a million more like you, but we did have a few. We did have a good handful. For sure more maybe. And those guys, sadly, the history book will never have those in them because we don't know who they are, and it's sad because their contribution was huge. It really was. Especially, helicopters were complex enough that if you didn't have people to love them, they'd kill you.

Jim: Exactly.

Mike: And so you really do need people to love them.

Jim: I talk to people now. This ain't on that, but at Eglin, they have a ranger day every year. And I go down there and back from my grandkids who're little. I take them down there and let them -- they enjoyed it. Get to shoot blanks out there. But they always had a couple of Blackhawks that'd come in there. They'd have some guys jump out of them and they went... They got a big cord that they get down low, they hook on with D-rings. They pick up. They got a string of people, and they fly them, and they let them off and stuff. But I was talking to some of the pilots and stuff. One of them is a maintenance officer, and he was telling me stories about the horrors they have at maintenance today. Most everything is on the computer and everything. They don't get it like we did. But he told me twice about bits getting dropped into an intake. And I said, "Bits?" And he said, "Yeah, screwdriver bits and stuff." I can't imagine they allow people to get around a helicopter with a set of bits and a handle --

Mike: That could possibly drop into it.

Jim: Yeah. Bits are held on by magnet. And he said, "Yeah, they do it all the time." If I was in charge of maintenance there, they wouldn't do it at all!

Mike: Wow.

Jim: Just the little problems they have now. They're all different, but they're terrible problems. Anyway. I don't know what you said that brought that to my mind.

Mike: Well, good for you. Anyway, anything else for this tape recorder?

Jim: I don't think so. Not right now.

Mike: Anyway, thanks a million, Jim. You're a treat.

Jim: Okay.

Mike: Anyway, thanks so much. Take care.