

Wisconsin Veterans Museum
Research Center

Transcript of an
Oral History Interview with
TED BOQUIST
1st Cavalry Division, Army, Vietnam War (1965-1967)

2011

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Boquist, Ted, (1944-). Oral History Interview, 2011.

Master Copy: 1 audio cassette (ca. 60 min.); analog, 1 7/8 ips, mono.

Abstract:

In this interview, Ted Boquist, born 1944, discusses his experiences serving in the Army's 1st Cavalry Division for the Vietnam War from 1965-1967. Boquist details his friendships, sleeping conditions, and dining while in Basic Training in Fort Knox, Kentucky. He briefly touches upon Advanced Infantry Training at Fort Campbell, Kentucky, and then his experience moving on to attend Jump School twice at Fort Benning, Georgia. The narrator talks about how he expected to go into Special Forces but instead was ordered into the Headquarters and Headquarters Company, 1st Brigade, 1st Cavalry Division of the Vietnam War. Boquist reflects on knowing about Vietnam, but not understanding what it meant to go over there, why we were there, or where they were going. After given his assignment, Boquist discusses going on leave to see his friends and family back home in Wisconsin. He then traveled by boat to Vietnam from Savannah, Georgia. Boquist speaks to his experiences on the boat, docking at particular places along the way. In the War, he was assigned to be the driver and caretaker of a Jeep. He also helped the 1st Cavalry Division build a base in An Khê. He discusses living conditions in An Khê, the food, mosquitoes and malaria, entertainment, guard duty, and his first mission near Happy Valley. He also talks about his R&R time with a group of men in Hong Kong. Boquist flew home into the Travis Air Force Base on a Freedom Flight and then on to Milwaukee in 1966. He explains how he bought a car, and was shipped down to Fort Bragg, North Carolina shortly afterwards. He discusses how he sent to Special Forces, earning his beret, but was then discharged in 1967. After being discharged, Boquist lived on unemployment for a year before finding work. He retired after 35 years at Oshkosh Truck. As a retiree, Boquist is the Quarter Master for the Mainland-Woodruff VFW and expressed interest in meeting other veterans. Boquist touches on his feelings of frustration towards the organization of the war effort, though overall he enjoyed the experience.

Biographical Sketch:

Ted Boquist was born in Redgranite, Wisconsin on November 30, 1944. He played many sports in high school and got a job in construction right out of high school, but then enlisted soon afterward in 1965. He became a member of the Army's 1st Cavalry Division. He participated in the Vietnam War from 1965-1966, mainly in the An Khê region. He flew home in 1966, went through school for Special Forces, and attempted to earn his stripe. Boquist was discharged in 1967 and then made a living working for Oshkosh Truck. He retired after 35 years and remains active in the Mainland-Woodruff VFW.

Interviewed by Rick Berry, 2011.

Transcribed by Joshua Goldstein, 2014.

Edited and Abstracted by Dana Gerber, 2014.

Interview Transcript:

Berry: With Ted Boquist who served with the 1st Calvary Division during the Vietnam War. This interview is being conducted at the Wisconsin Veteran's Museum at the following address: 30 West Mifflin Street, Madison, Wisconsin on the following date September 10, 2011. The interviewer is Rick Berry. Okay, Ted, could you tell us a little bit about your background and life circumstances before you entered military service?

Boquist: Well, I was born in 1944 on Thanksgiving Day, November thirtieth. I'll let you guys figure that out yourself: on the thirtieth. I spent most of my life growing up in Redgranite, Wisconsin. Went to my high school, played basketball, football, most of the sports they had available at the time. Education is basically four years in high school and then that was about it, then go find a job.

Berry: How about your family situation?

Boquist: I had three brothers: one is deceased now, one lives in Henderson, Nevada. The other one lives in Wyocena. He's retired also. Mom and dad are passed away.

Berry: Okay, could you describe to us your entry into military service. Were you drafted or did you enlist?

Boquist: I enlisted. Being from a small town, I didn't want to be here anymore, I wanted to be gone by doing something. So I worked the summer after school, graduation, I worked in Milwaukee for a while. And then the boss that I worked for quit at the end of the season of construction so I come home. And I decided I would join and I had a buddy that was going to go with me had a physical with me but he kind of chickened out and decided not to go. Which is no big deal. I went down there I failed the first physical, now that I think about it. For ear wax build up, they wouldn't let me jump. I wanted to go to Jump School; I wanted to go to Special Forces. And that was my reason for joining but when we went down there for physicals the second time, I passed, no problem, because the Doctor told me what to do.

Berry: Where did you actually take the physical?

Boquist: Down in Milwaukee, stayed in the Randolph Hotel; that is not a good place to stay. [laughs] I got closets bigger than that room was. Then from there I talked to my buddy and he changed his mind about going. So I said, "Well can you give me a lift down back by Milwaukee? I gotta leave to pick up a train." So brought me down to Milwaukee and we trained all the way to--Fort Knox, Kentucky for Basic Training. You had the Wisconsin people and the Illinois people together so really good they were together, with the conflict and that stuff that goes on. Let's see, from there I went to--Georgia, Fort Hamil.

Berry: This is after Basic Training?

Boquist: I went to AIT--

Berry: Let's talk a little bit more about Basic Training. Could you describe the camp and so forth, where you took the train, Fort Knox?

Boquist: Well it was kinda interesting to see. One day it snowed, it don't usually snow down there and everybody's all twitterpated. But basically, you get up, get something to eat. We were K [??] and not KP. Do your exercise in the morning with the ladder; you had to go up and down that twice, then go eat. Come down whatever it was on the agenda as far as the schooling was, how to walk, how to talk. Basically they taught you how to do most everything, rifle, how to take it apart, put it back together. And then we'd go home, _____ [??]. It was cold, at the beginning they take you back and gotcha all fitted for clothes. They say "How big are you? What size shoes are ya?" They whip stuff out at ya. [inaudible; mumbling]

Berry: What sort of weapon did you qualify on in Basic Training? M-14?

Boquist: M-14, expert, I don't know if it had to do with my background of deer hunting, stuff like that. I see a lot of younger, they are my age now, other city kids would kind of overkill the whole system as far as Basic Training. They get all twitterpated or something, just go with the flow.

Berry: What year did you take your Basic Training?

Boquist: '65.

Berry: '65 okay. Did you make any lasting friendships while you were in Basic?

Boquist: I met a stray [??] in Basic Training which surprised me. He kind of looked like my uncle. Big weather had turned to, I don't know how many weeks, about six weeks I think they are, most of them were not around. We did a lot of stuff indoors, exercise and stuff like that. He actually made a game of it to do it. And then you did your--you'd crawl under the barbed wire with live fire going over your head. And you also went in to do your gas mask work. But the rifle training was done in succession a lot of it not in one day or anything. And you were shooting at 400 meters and they all had electronic gates knocked down if you hit it so I did pretty good.

Berry: Pop up targets when you were qualified?

Boquist: Mm-hm. I had no problem, they told you like I said at the beginning, they told you what to prepare for when you were out in the field. Put extra sock, and your coat, and your shirt and keeping warm, it could get cold. If you got sweaty you

could change but then you'd be _____[??] for it. But other than that a lot of marching. I liked it because it was that kind of weather. It wasn't like the middle of summer; so I went in like January into basic training. That's why I enjoyed it. Kentucky can get awfully hot but not like North Carolina where it does get a little bit warmer.

Berry: What about the food? Have enough of it?

Boquist: Always plenty of food. It wasn't the greatest tasting stuff but plenty of food.

Berry: And you guys slept in a barracks?

Boquist: The old wooden barracks. Most are falling down, like McCoy, wooden barracks all close together. These were all--coal fire and they were starting to convert over to gas. And we had one fella did not agree with the whole system, he would have to deal with ___[??] and one Captain. He spent the rest of his basic training breaking up these concrete slabs all 24/7. By the time you took a shower and got something to eat it was back to work. So it kind of cured him of that; never saw him again.

Berry: Anything else you'd like to say about basic training?

Boquist: I think after we got to know everybody-- they kind of kept us in barracks as far as Wisconsin or Illinois but we did inter-mingle a little as you went on. You kind of crossed the bridge a little[??] to understand what you were doing. That's about all I can remember off the top of my head.

Berry: Okay and how about your training after Basic, your individual training, what sort of training was that?

Boquist: AIT. That was in Georgia.

Berry: That's Advanced Infantry Training?

Boquist: That's right. Training on all weapon, how to take them about and put them back together. Steal a part and see if you can put it back together, figure you forgot something, it ain't workin'. [laughs] Um, M60 machine guns, M79s, sixteen round Carbine, and M1 Garand we were working with, and M-13.

Berry: How long did that last?

Boquist: I'd be lying, I'm not sure, I know it was three or four weeks.

Berry: You said that was at Fort Campbell?

Boquist: Fort Campbell, Kentucky, I believe it was.

Berry: You have any memorable experiences from that period?

Boquist: Well there was a fella that really didn't like it--he joined just for one reason, he wanted to be in the Army Band. He didn't want nothin' to do with rifles, he wanted nothin' to do with marching, or nothin'. He just wanted to play in the band and he was very good at it too. I don't know if he got to make it or not but they shipped him out in that direction. But like I said before, cold barracks and a cold bed. And there was one fella at AIT that is all he did. He went to all the barracks; coal fed 'em--he swept underneath there--that's how the water was heated also to take our showers. That is where he spent three weeks. He was a colored fella but he never looked clean to begin with. His uniforms was always dark. We enjoyed what we do.

Berry: What did you do for recreation? I would expect you had more free time in AIT than in Basic?

Boquist: I think we went to Columbus once when they had the golf thing going. That's the only thing that sticks to my mind because my ma mentioned it to me when I got home. That I looked for you on TV and there were some Army people there in the audience. I didn't know anything about golf back then. The only thing I can think of other than civilians overcharging us for--weren't giving us the correct change back. That's about it. I never really fit in to too many places never felt quite comfortable being where I was at.

Berry: How about lasting friendships in AIT, I assume it was a different group of guys you were with than in Basic?

Boquist: Definitely, but from AIT it got more heavy on keeping everything squared away, everything gotta be just so, clean, neat, tidy. Toothbrush here, toothbrush paste and all your things in the footlocker. Back then I had dentures, 'cause I had problems with my teeth and I left that toothbrush out and that was not a good idea. [laughs] They kind of hid that one and use the one they used in the head[?]. But everything was spit shinned. Your pipe had to be cleaned every day, polish it up. And the DI for there, he lived off post but he had a room in our barracks and when he would change to put his civilian clothes on to go home he'd put his khakis underneath his bed on a board with the mattress laying on it. You could cut yourself on the side of this bar if you had to. Other than that, then I don't know how it came about--'cause I was promised by my recruiter and this is why I signed up and this is what I promised from him to me I would get that, to go to Special Forces. Well, during AIT we had a skills test. I don't know what they called it then. We had to take some tests on your knowledge of different things. The one that sticks in my mind is a photograph. They show you a May photograph and then they give you a book, and on the book they want to know where this picture is taken from. And you had to go through _____ [?]. I did the thing at a hundred percent. I guess I got

qualified to get in there. That was Jump School; it was time for Jump School so that is where I went to after AIT.

Berry: So you went to Jump School after AIT? How did that go? Where was that?

Boquist: That was Fort Benning. It's the only Jump School I know. That's where the 101st Airborne Division is at, "Screaming Eagles."

Berry: How long was Jump School?

Boquist: Two times it was, not my fault. They always said, you know, keep in line, march, you are always marching in Jump School. Getting in shape is what it amounts to. They say if your bootlace becomes untied, fall out and get in the back of the line. I didn't like that. One came loose, tied it and got back in there. They hauled me away just about half way through basic training. It had been hot [??] then.

Berry: This is half way through Jump School?

Boquist: Yeah, on the run, just running around all over the place and screaming and yelling at each other. And they got ready to jump going into an old barn. Go up into the rafters and you'd be hooked up and you'd jump out and perfect your PLF, your landing. Land with both feet and then tumble. Everything was going great until an old man pulled out and said I had to take it over again because I got out of line which bothered me.

Berry: You were essentially recycled into another Jump School class.

Boquist: So I took that one again. They didn't say what else they wanted me to do. But from there I was supposed to go to Special Forces, and wound up 1st Cav. As a personal was, I had nobody to scream at anybody, didn't know what I did. And I had no idea what this Vietnam thing was, no clue. So I wound up there.

Berry: So the 1st Cavalry Division at that time was still in the United States. Where did you join the 1st Cavalry?

Boquist: Fort Benning, Georgia. I busted out of the barracks and like everybody else who got shipped back there. Like I said to complain wasn't the right place, sign on the dotted line saying go there. Maybe in the long run it was quite better I didn't know because you never know what might happen in Special Forces when you get in the hot and heavy. So I followed orders and did what I was supposed to do. Start packing things the day we got there and they never said nothing about why how come or what for, um, but then they sent us home.

Berry: What unit in the 1st Cavalry Division did you join?

Boquist: I didn't join, they put me there. [both laugh]

Berry: Okay.

Boquist: It's Headquarters and Headquarters Company. I didn't know that at the time and I had to look at my records to remember what it was. And it basically the higher command to tell the lower command what to do. [inaudible; mumbling]

Berry: So this was just at division headquarters?

Boquist: Yes, then I think we come back. We still didn't know what we were doing. We went home for two weeks or so, and then we came back. Then they let us know what we were going to do but it still didn't mean anything to me; I didn't know what they were talking about. There was never any program set up and a teaching aid to say, "Hey where going here, this is what is going on, this is why we're going there and these are things we may have to train for." We didn't do a whole lot of training. I was going to be First Sergeant D Crew, driving convoys and that is what I did over there for a while.

Berry: Let's go over your leaves. You became a member of the 1st Calvary Division then you went home on leave?

Boquist: I think it was that, or it could have been right out of Jump School, and then came back.

Berry: And how did that go?

Boquist: Going home?

Berry: Mm-hm.

Boquist: About the same, go find a few old high school buddies; drank some beers because back then it was still eighteen to drink.

Berry: How did your family feel about you enlisting in the Army? Did they support that?

Boquist: My mother did, yeah, my dad had passed away back in '62. So he never made high school graduation or anything--never made football games, stuff like that. He had cancer. [knocks on the table two times] I don't. My brother don't; but my other brother passed away in 2001. He worked for the place that don't exist in Nevada--Area 51. [inaudible; mumbling and clock chiming] But, uh, he had a heart attack out there on base back in Henderson, Nevada. Three weeks later he died--my sister all blames the nuclear stuff out there. I don't know.

Berry: Okay you returned back to the 1st Calvary Division and you were assigned as a driver for Headquarters Company.

Boquist: I was assigned a Jeep. It was mine to take care of period. Keep it clean; keep it painted, and whatever else. I'm thinkin' it could have been a month I was there when they decided to tell us we were going to 'Nam. Where is that? Nobody knows what it was. As far as I was concerned you'd never know. Then they didn't give you no training as to what it was. They did check your feet to see how your feet were, if you had jungle rot or whatever, have it bad, athlete's foot.

Berry: So the entire Division went to Vietnam then?

Boquist: By boat.

Berry: By boat. Where did you board the vessel?

Boquist: We left--our post went to Savannah, Georgia. Meanwhile these boats have all been loaded for the whole month but we didn't know. I mean there were helicopters, there was Jeeps, our bags if we packed it all. All thrown in there and down the hole.

Berry: How long did the trip take from Savannah to?

Boquist: Thirty days.

Berry: Thirty days. Did you enjoy that experience?

Boquist: Oh, it was great, and it counted towards my time in.

Berry: It counted towards your year in Vietnam.

Boquist: Now I can say it was good but then I didn't know, oh my goodness jeez. The slide presentation I gave Gayle has us on the boat in different segments going over there, we were escorted by submarine, we didn't know that. And they had mail call a couple of times, we got to wait [??] the ship to catch up, screaming [??] across one guy's got to go get the mail. We could target practice on the boat shooting at something we were dragging something, like milk bottles or something, on the back of the ship. What was it? The USS--*Patch* we came over on.

Berry: P-A-T-C-H?

Boquist: I think that's what it is.

Berry: And where did you arrive in Vietnam?

Boquist: We were still on boat; we had to go to Panama first. So we went through the Panama Canal and it was time to get some more food and exchange linens or what for the ship in Long Beach. We were pulling in in the evening. Captain comes

over the intercom and says, "We are pulling into Long Beach, there will be no cameras while off deck, if someone is carrying a camera we will remove it from you," and hung up. We get on top and there is the USS *Enterprise*. You talk about a ship, my God it is huge. Four guys [??] on top, standing. From there we took off--

Berry: The *Enterprise* is an aircraft carrier?

Boquist: Yeah, it's an aircraft carrier, one of the big ones. Five thousand men on it, I think it is? Unreal.

Berry: Did you get a chance for leave in Long Beach?

Boquist: No, the ones who got leave had to have family there and you can prove it. I don't know how that came about. No, we didn't get out, we just stayed in. And then uh, one morning _____ [??] and headed out. Next thing we saw other than the fish and the dolphins and the flying fish, _____ [??], we had the hull in the front, believe me I did [??] nothing, which is surprising from my experience. Just keep the hull clean, and you're good to go. So we did. The mess hall was always overkill [??] so. There wasn't one bad day on that ship. And that's all gone for nothing, portholes and all, see the water come out and go down, see stuff sliding down because they got rails all the way around everything there to protect the stuff you had on the floor. That's about the highlight of that. And the first thing I saw was all Guam, big clump of land in the middle of the ocean. The coastline but you could see it as an island. Like this one lady would throw her bra over and exposing all by itself.

Berry: So you could see Guam but the ship didn't stop there.

Boquist: That is where all the B-52s were, I found out. They flew in from out there. The next is coming into 'Nam, the time factor; you don't have that in your head at the time I'm thinking. So we pull in there and the guys are like, "How are we getting off this thing?" We are pulling into a small country, we either go down the rope ladder or how we getting off this thing?

Berry: When was this? Was it like summer of '65?

Boquist: Yeah summer of '65, late summer because over there it is summer 24/7, 365 too. Anyway, to this day I think we walked off somewhere being the ship it was. We walked off a regular railing system on the outside.

Berry: Do you know where in Vietnam you--?

Boquist: Da Nang.

Berry: Da Nang.

Boquist: I'll have to look at a map to verify that. From there we trucked up along the cape.

Berry: Might have been Quảng Ngãi rather than.

Boquist: It might have--now that I think about it you're right. We got off and as I said we got trucked up to the area we were going, I don't know how [??], just one lane roads anyway out there. And we got off and they said grab a trench tool and dig yourself a hole, take your rifle. Finally, the rifles showed up. We didn't take them off ourselves, they were taken off _____ [??].

Berry: So your personal weapon did not stay with you at that time?

Boquist: At that time, because I don't think they had--to be truthful I don't think the M16 was built until after we were up there. So whatever weapons were there were the M14s. But they were aniconic; they would lock up and crack.

Berry: So you were actually assigned an individual weapon after you arrived at An Khê?

Boquist: Right.

Berry: Okay.

Boquist: We got to the area we were going to be. We had our basic tools, the poncho and all that stuff on our back. They said it was necessary to dig yourself a fox hole and spend the night. Some Colonel came up to me and wanted me to dig him a hole. I call being that naive, I told him I ain't got time, I gotta dig my own. And surprisingly he walked away. He didn't bother me one bit which I was surprised about. I had hung myself to dry not digging his hole first. Then we just started building the place. Hauling dirt, filling sandbags, digging holes, cutting trees down. We worked on the perimeter of An Khê. It's a hill with a logo in it and we built perimeters all the way around.

Berry: The logo was a 1st Cav patch?

Boquist: Up in the hill [??]. We cut down all the trees but we couldn't cut them down well enough, but some of those tanks couldn't make it over. It was like going over rubber bands and back up the tunnels. The presentation shows a lot of the logs that we cut down. A lot of them, the Vietnamese, were hired to help. We were there to watch them at the same time because they were known to do a dumb thing. In fact, they'd leave some fire [??] out where our hooch was. They would clean that all out. They would leave their sticks pointing in a certain direction telling somebody where to go or something and stop working then after that. That's all I know about that.

Berry: How about your personal quarters; did you stay in a tent?

Boquist: We stayed with two ponchos, two tents. Everybody got one; you slept together on an air mattress. You don't blow it up all the way, leave it in the sun, more than one blew up, you'd have white powder go all over. To bring it back--remember coming off the top of my head--then you hooked them all together and you created a tent of your own. You kept it high though. You could let the air flow through.

Berry: This is still a two-person tent?

Boquist: Right but you couldn't get it down tight on the ground because of how hot it was, you'd just suffocate inside there. There were basically two man [??], a good month or more. The rest of supplies never got up. Finally we got our own barracks type tent, stinky green ones, then you had your own cubicle.

Berry: Did you get to know your tent mate well during that month or no?

Boquist: No, not really, knew them by their name which was on their tag and to this day I only can remember four people by name because every now and then, I look at my photographs, the names--they're on the ship, and they're all sitting there, and the names are still there. The names are still there a little bit, my memory. There was one fella that his job was to run generators. He had his own tent and a hammock where these generators were. He had to maintain them all the time. But I can't remember his name, a nice fella, super nice fella. But as far as entertainment or anything we built a mess hall. We built a church. And the movie house that we created was a cargo parachute hung from trees and a Comet [?] container that housed the projector. The person who packed that projector forgot to put in the low beam. It was quite an ugly looking picture but it was something to listen to and have a conversation. A few beers were drank--Falstaff, a lot of beer, truck loads. [laughs] Not the greatest beer in the world but--

Berry: And the brand you were issued, or drank, was Falstaff?

Boquist: Pretty much that's what you got and if you were smoking Salems were sent over, boatloads. I was not a menthol smoker but I became one. The price is right, what you going to do? Eventually--that was toward the latter part of me being there. Supplies were coming in.

Berry: So what you guys were essentially doing was building the base camp for the 1st Calvary Division--

Boquist: --The whole Division was built together with my camp.

Berry: Did you spend anytime actually driving, your assignment?

Boquist: The first assignment we ever had was going down to Happy Valley and set up down there and then something hit the fan while we were down there. You could see white phosphorous all along the trail and then Command comes through and said, "Pack it up; we're gettin' get out of here, we gotta go." Wherever it was, can't remember. And they are bringing in Chinooks for us and he said, "You know how to guide one in?" I said "Yeah." "Get out there and guide one from off the road."

Berry: Happy Valley is close to An Khê or--?

Boquist: No, it's south.

Berry: Out on the coast or--?

Boquist: Down by Quy Nhon down that way; it's a big flat area. With that slides I got you can see the gunships coming in--they are moving air so much you can see the movement of the air in the photographs that I got.

Berry: These would be helicopters gunships?

Boquist: Right, huge.

Berry: The Happy Valley you may be referring was off the Bong Son Plain out near the Coast.

Boquist: It is possible, I heard routine names but that is the only one I remember because that was the first one. We had like ten choppers come in and grab everyone and get the hell out. And we had to go someplace else. And I don't remember where at.

Berry: You were stationed primarily at An Khê while you were in Vietnam?

Boquist: We were thirty days in and your thirty days out. That's the way it went. One thirty day trip was to a Special Forces base in Cambodia. That I know for sure because I got a new book and I'm looking through it. It is a Vietnam book that we just got, postman got. We were supposed to read it all over. I got it when he was done but I paged through it. And in there were some photographs and I know ____ [?] through that. So I went through my photographs and sure enough my photograph looks the same as that. So I know I was there--before that I didn't know where I was at, but I know I was with Special Forces camp. It was in Cambodia. We had a tank, a craft, the engine it had worked but it couldn't go anywhere. So they buried it but left the turret open so we can use the turret.

Berry: Okay. What sort of food did you have in An Khê?

Boquist: We started out with C-Rations from 1945. And every time we went out we ate C-Rations but towards the end we started to Mess Hall it. But I can remember one place we were at, the Agent Orange had been there and just a red dirt everywhere. Choppers would come in; just a big red screen of dust would come up. It got on your clothes, you couldn't get it off. And the punji stakes take the men out there. Had to pull off patrol one night, and went to a down to village, a monument [??] village, up on stilts because to get in had to walk up steps. Nothing was there, nobody was there and no sign that people had been there either. We made a turn and come back out, the squad left and a tank comes to replace for the time being just to cover the flank. And the only thing I can remember of that evening guard duty in that particular place as far as gun fire being with the company I was with. They were given the password as normal, and they gave it out and I mean darn it gets dark. And then whatever it was didn't return the counter sign and all hell began. Two twenty-one round clips, they said, "Everybody just stay where you're at, where you're going, unless something comes up." So we waited, waited, wait for day break. Here comes the guy from the hole as his spot fell out and a deer had been shot. It was all riddled in pieces, looked like a small dog but it was a deer, a wild deer but it had horns so I know it wasn't a dog.

Berry: Okay, what was the food like?

Boquist: All dehydrated for the first six months for sure.

Berry: Okay, this is after the C-Rations they opened.

[break in recording][00:31:37]

Berry: Okay, Ted, we were talking about your guard duty experience there. Would you like to say anything more about that?

Boquist: Did we get that on? -- Not really but some more equipment started to come in. And we started to get jungle hammocks.

Berry: This is still at An Khê now?

Boquist: This is out in the field we got 'em.

Berry: Okay.

Boquist: Hooked them up, set them up. They were really nice; Mosquitoes were no problem, it was a help. I got--can't think of it—for mosquito bites—I can't give blood now.

Berry: Malaria maybe?

Boquist: Malaria, it lasted about three weeks. You're either on the toilet or you're just shivering. One of our people that were in there had got it and he was sitting at a 104 and they just couldn't bring him down so they stripped him down, slapped him on a chopper on the outriggers. Took him up to a thousand feet and sat there and hovered for whatever it took--dropped him down, it saved his life.

Berry: Were you issued Malaria pills?

Boquist: No, I don't remember them--getting--I think that was part of the problem. As far as--that is the only time I got sick. And you ain't eating because nothing is sticking in with ya. You are hot, sweaty; you just want to stay in the sack.

Berry: When you were working as a driver were you assigned to a particular Officer or a motor pool?

Boquist: I had either the First Sergeant, or the First Lieutenant--Second Lieutenant if they wanted to go somewhere. Those are the only two that I took. I didn't take no photographs anywhere. Like I said we ran counter wide. The First Sergeant kind of runs with me in my convoy. I would usually be in the front convoy or the rear with a Sixty.

Berry: So a lot of the movement from An Khê out into the field was in a truck convoy as opposed to going by helicopter?

Boquist: More by helicopter . I rode a Caribou a couple of times. We had to take bladders of water but that was part of going off with that Special Forces with me all the time like in camp. We took ladders out there, I think they were all water, we dropped them off. I have photographs of leaving the airport and all the way up into the cloud. Dropping those off and we stayed there overnight, or two nights. Then we'd come back from there. There was only a select few, we didn't take everybody. The whole squad didn't go on Caribou, just a select few. Plus the Chief went with me. Anytime I had to go anywhere out far he had to go with me.

Berry: How did you and your buddies entertain yourself when you were in An Khê or out in the field? You mentioned movies; did you do anything else besides movies?

Boquist: Well, there was beer available, we drank that. As far as entertainment there really wasn't. Bob Hope came in one time that I can remember going into. I remember seeing Westmoreland with his broken arm and he kind of got in everybody's craw because he broke it playing tennis. There was not a happy person throughout the group. They were not thrilled about that but Bob Hope, I was glad I got to see him. I always saw the Christmas show he'd put on as a Civilian but to see him live was--

Berry: You saw Bob Hope where, An Khê or--?

Boquist: Right there in An Khê, he came there _____ [??]--they referred to [??] what do they call it now--the crane helicopter?

Berry: Flying Crane?

Boquist: Going over and he says, "What in the hell is that?"

Berry: This would have been Christmas 1965?

Boquist: Yeah. He says, "What in the hell is that?" The blades start turning around that it gets nice and warm. We had to move them around about every night, we parked them. Most of the helicopters were parked in the same place because there are going to be incoming mortars to take them out. They'd watch where sitting on another head or whatever but they mixed them up. Our gunships and then roll them down.

Berry: How often did--were there mortar attacks on An Khê?

Boquist: Oh yes, quite a few. I would say after the six months we were there it was on again. From then on it could be every other night or every night. We did have one entertainment, if I recall. It was a--I couldn't remember till now--I remember a Fourth of July or something it might of been. Imagine a lot of money went into it [??] except it was from Europe, it was a race between a Buick and a Chinook, who's gonna win. I'm going to run with the gunship you know. These Chinooks would just fly by but it left from the hill, they'd all go [??] straight across the canyon, you can hear them real high [??], because it really knew how to pick up the air, they'd bang away [?]. That's one entertainment but that's about the only I can think of other than the movies. Nobody really came to inside the squad camp. Bob Hope is the only one I can remember.

Berry: How about R&R, did you have a chance to go on R&R?

Boquist: I went to Hong Kong for R&R.

Berry: Did you choose Hong Kong or it was offered?

Boquist: Depends on where you're going. I went with, uh, I think it was a group of six of us.

Berry: From your unit?

Boquist: No, no this was scheduled to go; couple of them had to go for a thing _____ [?]. This was uh, I can't remember his name, but I got a picture of him. He got sent on R&R and he tells me this story. He was out on patrol and the lead man got captured. So they went looking for him and then they started hearing screaming.

And then they finally found him, hung him to a tree, tried to peel him. So he took out his .45 and shot him. They knew he was not going to make it. Tried to peel him like a banana, he was a colored fellow. One other fella who was also colored and they sent him on R&R _____ [??] it's quite obvious though. I imagine he sure had a little psychiatric work done after that too as they happen to do that [??] because he knew it was not going to work. He was doing a favor but I don't think the government thought he was. The names I don't know why just don't stick in my head. Did some shopping there, nothing major. They put you up in a hotel. I don't remember that either but I called my mom though. I forgot about time zones, it was three o'clock in the morning. I got hold of her but she wasn't too happy about it but she was after she heard my voice. Other things-- _____ [??] monkey. We went to a restaurant, the group did. Down by the fishing markets there was a boat. A lot of actresses have been there. The pictures are all on the wall of all the entertainers that were there at one time. Super group, you eat as a group, big plate of rice, big plate of ribs--something good.

Berry: So while on R&R the six of you pretty much hung out together.

Boquist: We all got together because we all had to be together to be accountable for ourselves to my knowledge. And we all had to be back at a certain time. Hong Kong didn't know but they built that airport on the ocean, on garbage. When you landed you were landing on basic concrete with garbage underneath but that's how they built it because no other place to put it so they put it out in the ocean.

Berry: Okay, after R&R you returned to An Khê and did more of the same--thirty days in An Khê, thirty days out in the field?

Boquist: I think we were on R&R for maybe two weeks. I can't remember the time after I was there but, yeah, went back and started to do what we were doing before. One guy didn't come back, not our group, but after my group, never came back.

Berry: Mean he didn't come back from Hong Kong?

Boquist: Right, he was sent out with a different group than ours but he never come back. They finally found him, they were looking for him. He was taking off. So he spent the rest of the time with the guy in the coal pit filling the bunker. He and another fellow; that is all they did, filling sandbags and building a big bunker in the night in the dark.

Berry: Is there anything else you'd like to say about your Vietnam experience?

Boquist: In general?

Berry: Did you enjoy the experience in general?

Boquist: In general, I enjoyed it but the one point I don't like now after being back and not hearing all those stories but my mind relating back to it of how unorganized it was. I'm not saying about the little guy; it is the upper echelon was not organized to do anything. Coming all the way back to Washington. They didn't know what the hell they were doing. They'd tell the Air Force you can go here, you can't go over here, you have to stay within, don't touch the bombs or nothing. Meanwhile they have sand stuck up their butt. If they left the politics out and let the government--the services do what they are supposed to do it would have been all right. I think we could have taken care of the problem. Where you got China and Russia feeding the top end and we are just beating ourselves. The numbers don't work out. Then you're being shipped back.

Berry: How did you return to the States?

Boquist: By C5A Galaxy [?]; also sounds like "C5VA Alpha". We didn't have big planes that we came over with when we were still--we started in '66 somewhere in that area, give or take a couple of weeks. As far as New Year's and Christmas, that really didn't exist.

Berry: You mean, while you were in Vietnam you really didn't know what day or week?

Boquist: My twenty-first birthday was KP, on my twenty-first birthday. Them did not exist basically in our mind. We had a few more beers on that night but it didn't exist as a holiday. Fourth of July had [?] floats around the airplane. We had some helicopter races, that is about it and we had some decent meals. The experience like I said, it was an experience. But like I said I flew out with 395 guys and two crappers DC-5. This aircraft is not capable of going over water and just dry land. We boarded there, meanwhile this thing is coming in and taking off from Manila Airport. The choppers are all circling--

Berry: So this aircraft landed at An Khê?

Boquist: No, I can't remember to be truthful. [?]

Berry: Okay.

Boquist: It might have been another better airport, not airport, another air landing strip. It could, I'm thinking. It might have been we had been there once before with my thirty days out. Refurbish somethin', fixing somethin', the air force is sitting pretty good; they got their own crappers with paper or otherwise we'd have to burn it. And when we leave there, it continued, never shut any of its engines down, kept rolling and then left. Choppers were still going around disappearing, then they'd come back and landed. They were all shootin' at this thing. Then we flew over and from there we went all the way up and over towards home [?] and back down to Travis Airport.

Berry: So you landed at Travis?

Boquist: [inaudible]. Kind of different.

Berry: And did you feel good about leaving Vietnam on a freedom flight? Any special remembrance of that?

Boquist: No. Anything memorabilia you weren't allowed to take, that's for sure. Down the years I heard you could bring things home if you got permission. They shipped it for you or you pay for shipping. I had a couple of items I was going to bring back. One did get back with me. It's an AK-47 bayonet, it's at home.

Berry: You just put that in your duffel bag on your way back?

Boquist: No, that went in my boot. There were no metal detectors back then, especially on government plane. [laughs]

Berry: So you landed at Travis and did you have leave then?

Boquist: I don't know what we had. We could just go if I'm thinking correctly. It is not embedded in my head.

Berry: Did you have another assignment in the Army after Vietnam?

Boquist: Yeah we had another assignment but I can't remember, with the paperwork I got when I left, or when I was supposed to go down, but we had another month off, that I remember. When we flew into Travis, the taxi guy was super--"We got a plane leaving here in another fifteen minutes, where you guys headed?" I gotta go to Chicago first.

Berry: And you were heading home is that correct?

Boquist: Heading home, most of us were all goin'—we had to go to Chicago anyhow; to get the connecting flights where you had to go but we were all Wisconsin people there. He said I'll let you off at the basement level, that's where you get your ticket as I was going standby. It was fifty bucks. I don't even remember getting paid but I sent my money home. We got down there, the lady gave us our tickets, going upstairs and ready to go. It was an open flight, had enough room. I think it was four of us sitting on one side, maybe two. The stewards come around with little sandwiches on a tray and that. "Would you like something, I'll get you something to drink? Something else, go ahead keep the whole tray, I'll be back." The spitting stuff I never ever ran across that in my uniform; never did. And I went to Washington D.C. in Class As and never had a problem. So I believe the guys that are saying it, I believe it, but that was after I left though, for that particular situation to come up.

Berry: So, are you saying you were welcomed home then?

Boquist: To a certain extent, like my relatives and stuff like that. There was no band out there playing when I got home.

Berry: So you returned home for your thirty day leave after returning from Vietnam, how did your family feel about you returning home?

Boquist: Mother was glad to see me, the others were glad to see me. They were all still in the grand [??]. We did a little party, stuff like that. Anywhile, I had to go buy a car to get around. But I went to my bank, told them what I wanted, that I found the car I wanted, told them what I needed. Meanwhile, _____ [??] he was sitting there, it was a Friday, wanted to take out a loan to buy the car. Even better idea, I said, "I will take that money and I'll borrow it without touching my savings." They ain't gonna tie me up. _____ [??]. Didn't do it, that burned. It ain't his money, it's my money so write the check out, I'm leaving. "You didn't have to be that way." "You didn't have to be the way you were." You can put up with so much after that you get tired of it. Then we shipped back out, going to check all the way back. I went and bought the car myself, paid cash for it. And I drove back to Fort Bragg, North Carolina. They sent me, I did have orders. "I wanted to give you a choice where you wanted to go, name two of them." Or name one. I thought Fort Sheridan, Illinois, it was close to home but they sent me to North Carolina. [laughs] Okay, whatever, so I drove down there, finally found the place, twenty-four hour drive. Sent me to 82nd Airborne there, that is where most of the people came back were sent back to, 82nd Airborne Division. They weren't over there at the time, we were, just the 101st was there. From there we just sat around the barracks, they had enough bodies they didn't know what to do with it. They gave you a choice: stay in the 82nd Airborne, what you were already doing and there were two other openings. The second one I should have taken it, it was to go to Hawaii to test out parachutes. They did some record checking and said, "Hey you belong in Special Forces." "Yeah that was my unit." "So you want to go back?" "Yeah I'll go." I said I'd join the Air Force, went down there, which was just down the street from the 82nd Airborne Division. Went down there, checked in and went through school and got my beret. Then they got their orders to go to Fort Bolling for a stripe.

Berry: What rank were you at this time?

Boquist: E4.

Berry: E4, specialist four?

Boquist: Yeah.

Berry: Okay.

Boquist: Go in for hard five [??], that's what I wanted, had to go before a board. They didn't know what they were doing. Found my records right in front of them, when I get out, think it was like December of when I get out, which is only a couple of months away. They asked me all these stupid questions, they didn't know Vietnam. [??] The First Sergeant of my company in that staging area went along with the board. I never have gotten leave. [??] Officer sitting on one side and a big dude sitting on the other asking me stupid questions. And they re-enlisted; I was just there in front of the board for getting striped. "Oh. Well you got another year to go." "No I don't." "No, you got till end of this year." [??] "Oh." The First Sergeant said, "Just give me the information that you want and let it go, because I know what you want to do. Keep it simple as possible and get out of here." So we did and got that stripe. They wouldn't let me go any farther in school then which I liked to have gone, so I went to Ketner[?]. I actually spent so much time in the mess hall, I says, "Hell, put on the right uniform and I'll stay here." I'm in control, not you people anymore. That is how they did it. Huge mess hall; two sides to it, two hundred and fifty per meal. I did meet a friend in there. That is the only one I can remember that much of. It was Johnny Petraglia, professional bowler, ranked tenth in the nation at the time. And he says—we got to be pretty good friends. "You don't believe me do you?" "I don't know that much about bowling, I set pins when I was a kid." "Come on, we are going downtown." So we go downtown, had my own car, he liked that one. We went to a bookstore, they have all the books out in case you were a veteran[??] A three hundred game Fort Arkansas, something like that, perfect game down there, a ring a choice, he goes diving in, three hundred across the top. [??] And then the one weekend we were both off, he says, "Hey, want to go to New York?" I says, "Not really." "I'll pay for the gas." "Okay, let's go." He said we can stay with my folks. From there--they don't have cars in New York. They are all subway, cab or stuff like that. If you did have a car, you got to find a place to put this in. At his mom and dad's place, it's a-- I don't know, an apartment building. And the whole family lives in there, grandma, grandpa in the basement. _____ [??] all the way up.

Berry: So his family was from New York?

Boquist: Yup, he was the President of PBA then; one time was President of the bowling association. He married a girl out of Fayetteville [??], North Carolina, where we both were, this bag girl. He showed me his trophy room. He says he gives it a ring [??] every year, a medal involved in it. Super nice guy, went to see him in Milwaukee once but he had already left. Showed me around all of New York; I wouldn't want to live there that's for sure. [inaudible]

Berry: When were you actually discharged then?

Boquist: Around Christmas time of 1967. You had to get out of your Class As, boots included.

Berry: Where were you discharged from?

Boquist: North Carolina.

Berry: North Carolina. So you are still at Fort Bragg?

Boquist: Fort Bragg and you had to provide all the paperwork which they're are supposed to have. I guess they are in no hurry to do what they do, that's my opinion. To get you discharged--they gotta pay your money [??] your back pay or whatever. When I left, most people were starting to get their leave for Christmas yet. Three, four guys I was with, one was in Joliet, Illinois and I dropped him off. A couple of spots, every now and then he'd go home on leave, take a little break, keep on driving, get gas, get a cup of coffee and keep going, nap quickly. Then we got home, the car was packed tight. Actually, the last driver coming into Lake Forrest Oasis, in the middle of the pass, restaurants on top. It was really icy and we pull off shoulder and stop here and the whole outfit was pure ice. We started sliding over. I says, "Keep it on the gravel, don't move!" he put his foot off the break, he slid back over. He high beamed the signs to go this way or that way, whole car's a wreck. They don't mess around up there they come and get the car immediately. Towed it away, here's your car here is where it is going to be. Come get it. So I called my brother in Milwaukee, he comes and picks me up. I tell him what happen and get in his car and go back and get a tow but I couldn't get the tow bar to work so _____ [??]. It was a '64 Chevelle [??], beautiful car, wish I had it today. And then I went home. As far as any medical problems, I had nothing of that. Again knock on wood I can still tell my story. I think of the people in New York when the Towers came down and they breathed plaster. They are dropping off from cancer and lung problems.

Berry: When you returned home from Vietnam, what did you do then? Did you go back to school? Start working?

Boquist: No. I couldn't believe it but I got unemployment. I could have it for a year so that's what I'm going to do.

Berry: This is after you left the Service?

Boquist: Full unemployment for the whole year and did nothing, basically I went and got a dog, a puppy.

Berry: You were staying in Milwaukee at this time?

Boquist: Yes with my mother, with her, she lived alone. And I stayed with her. She was working all day. I did nothing basically. There was really nothing to do because it was a small town. Not that I was looking for stuff to do. I just didn't do anything but I finally got bored enough that I decided, well I better find a job. I did. It was like the high school job I had, it was a pickle factory in my old job. I went back

over there just for something to do. A half hour maybe, I don't know, just to pay for gas and insurance. After that I think I went to K-Mart, they built one in Oshkosh. They had a training schedule going up to Appleton, trained to be a meat cutter. Then I went to K-Mart in Oshkosh and took a crap. Back to square one. I worked for 7-Up for a while. Then I ran--my brother-in-law said need some people on a truck--Oshkosh Truck. I went up there and spent the next thirty-five years and retired, forty years no complaints.

Berry: Did you join any Veteran's organizations after the service?

Boquist: I am the Mainland-Woodruff VFW, I'm the Quarter Master , just elected in July; don't know what I am doing. Nobody trained me yet, we have to go to Hurley next weekend to do a little schooling, so that's good, because the guy that was doing Quarter Master--threw some books and said bye. [??] All these forms you have to fill out; send your money here and there, why--got a letter saying you owe us twelve dollars. I want to know why. I don't know what checks out there he wrote. I'm accountable for it. That's what I am doing now. Fishing and hunting, they take care of the problem. A couple of people up there--a friend of mine from Illinois, I got his cabin so I keep on that for him. Just look it over, make sure they haven't burned down so on and so forth. Another fella has some business up there, and he has some property out there. I told him I'd be down in Madison this weekend doing this. He always has work for me.

Berry: Did you continue any friendships you made in the Service? You still interact with any of the buddies you had from forty-something years ago?

Boquist: That is kind of a question I'd like to throw upon you, how can I get someone?

Berry: We can talk about that later. How about injuries and disabilities, sounds like—none. Okay. Have you attended any reunions?

Boquist: No, that's another of the reasons looking for some information. I've looked but haven't found anything available. I get the magazine, I'm a life member of the VFW but there is no reunion. But I just picked up a magazine another fella has got. It is from DVA and there is no information in that particular paper; thought I might come up with stuff. I thought can go back in the archives of the paperwork asking somebody okay who was there, can I have a manifest? If I saw the name the light bulb would go on. But I know one fella is gone. He had a traffic accident from Corpus Christi, Texas. His name was Manuel, that's the story.

Berry: Okay, looking back on your military service is there any comment you'd like to make?

Boquist: As an adult now, then I was probably basically just a teenager--nineteen years old about then when I got in. It needs a little-- don't know what it is today but

probably looks a little better. Could use a little OJT work as far as body and teaching people things, not going to be as good as you.

Berry: Did you overall enjoy the experience?

Boquist: Oh yeah, I did, I had no problem. Like I said in basic training I picked up a strategy that I don't think anyone knows but I did and I was quite surprised. The only problem I had mental wise was with dog tags, come to find out that I am allergic to nickel and magnesium so I had to have a plastic shield and I didn't like having them along to begin with.

Berry: Okay, anything else you'd like to say Ted?

Boquist: Not right now but probably by the time I get out the door I'll think of something.
[both laugh]

Berry: Okay, well I'd like to thank you for your service.

Boquist: I appreciate it and I appreciate your service, most all of them I do. In this day and age I am getting more recognition than I did back then because of all the other stuff going on.

Berry: LC Greenbow [??] was fun wasn't it?

Boquist: Oh yeah, it was worth the time. I spent two days there. Then I found out that two of my high school buddies were in them also but I didn't know it at the time till I saw the photograph. Valhalla, that was a sight to see back in the day that was a sight to see when you drove in with my hunting cyclist. They were there, I didn't know, never saw them.

Berry: Okay. Let's end the interview if that is okay with you?

Boquist: Sure.

[END OF INTERVIEW]