Wisconsin Veterans Museum
Research Center

Transcript of an

Oral History Interview with

DENNIS L. BOYER

Intelligence Officer, Combined Intelligence Unit/MACV

1994, 1995

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Boyer, Dennis L., (1949-). Oral History Interview, 1994-1995.
User Copy: 3 sound cassettes (ca. 233 min.), analog, 1 7/8 ips, mono.
Maser Copy: 2 sound cassettes (ca. 233 min.), analog, 1 7/8 ips, mono.

Abstract

Dennis L. Boyer, a Dodgeville, Wis. resident, discusses his duties in the Air Force during the Vietnam War as a member of the Combined Intelligence Center/MACV, anti-war activities with the American Serviceman's Union (ASU), and post-war involvement with the Vietnam Veterans Against the War (VVAW). Boyer tells of basic training at Lackland (Texas) speaking to economic class differences and physical abuse; he also mentions meteorology training at Chanute Air Force Base (Illinois). Stationed in Washington D. C., Boyer relates his impressions of the Tet Offensive and GI resistance movements. He describes his participation in civil rights demonstrations and involvement in ASU. While in Vietnam, he mentions planning for anticipated operations with the Combined Intelligence Center, trips to Cambodia and the evidence of American bombing there, and living with a Vietnamese family. Boyer provides detailed discussions about drug use, fragging, racial tension, class differences, and soldier morale. He talks about his involvement with the ASU in Vietnam including meetings, organizational structure, anti-war actions, and connection between the ASU in Vietnam and in the United States. Boyer comments on his return home, fears of reentering civilian life, and decision to join VVAW. Boyer discusses VVAW at length providing an analysis of both the groups successes and failures and the reasons for its decline. As a member of the Lehigh Valley (Pennsylvania) chapter of VVAW, Boyer talks about participating in Memorial Day and Veterans' Day parades, interacting with the American Legion and Veterans of Foreign Wars, and coordinating several eastern states VVAW chapters. He mentions John Kerry's role and subsequent dismissal, FBI infiltration, occupation of national sites, the Gainesville Seven, and the Winter Soldier Organization. Boyer comments on the effect that his participation in the VVAW had on his life, including his politics, work with labor unions, and becoming a Mennonite.

Biographical Sketch

Boyer (b. July 13, 1949) served as an intelligence officer during the Vietnam War. During his service in the Air Force and after his discharge he was active in anti-war groups such as the American Serviceman's Union and Vietnam Veterans Against the War.

Interviewed by Mark Van Ells.
Transcribed by WDVA staff, 1997.
Transcription edited by Abigail Miller, 2002.

Interview Transcript

Mark: Today's date is November 3, 1994. This is Mark Van Ells, Archivist, Wisconsin Veterans Museum doing an oral history interview this afternoon with Mr. Dennis Boyer, a veteran of the Vietnam Conflict. Good afternoon, Mr. Boyer. How are you doing?

Boyer: Hi, Mark. How are you doing?

Mark: Okay. Well, let's just go with this questionnaire here. Let's start from the top. Basically, could you tell me where you were born, when you were born, a little bit about your upbringing. For example, was it a levi town, suburban type place or--

Boyer: I grew up in a rural area but in the East rural areas had a little bit higher density. I was born in Pennsylvania in the area between Allentown and Redding. I was born in 1949. Grew up in a place called Huff's Church. It's the name of an hamlet, not an incorporated place. It was a place with a pretty uniform or homogeneous culture; that of the Pennsylvania Germans, or as they're called back there, Pennsylvania Dutch. So I grew up in households that were predominately non-English speaking among people who had some peculiarities. But one thing, despite their ethnic difference, and it ran back for some time; that they had been in that area for 200-250 years despite the retaining of all the customs, the language and everything like that, military service was a very common thing. Where as some other ethnic areas, particularly German-Americans, were questioning their loyalties periodically these folks had a long track record of involvement in military conflicts from the French and Indian War on. In fact, in our family there was an oral history that my grandfather actually told me stories that were passed down, of the French and Indian War, Revolutionary War, Civil War, and so forth. I think in total I had nine uncles in World War II. So there was a fair amount of talk throughout in the military and from the kind of rebellious enlisted men's perspective, while there was a willingness to serve, there was also the standard stuff that goes on about veterans, about how screwed up things were and how the officers were a bunch of dolts and that sort of thing. Almost part of male, blue collar culture. Those types of stories.

Mark: I see. You finished high school in what year?

Boyer: 1967.

Mark: You enlisted right after that?

Boyer: Immediately, yes.

Mark: Did your family background, the background in military service, did that weigh heavily on your decision or was is --.

Boyer: To be frank about it, it was partly a thing of not being sure what to do. No one in our family had ever finished high school, never gone to college. As a result, the idea of what I would be doing in the future was fairly unclear to me. I was undergoing some of the chaffing under parental authority. So my decision to enlist had almost nothing to do with factors of patriotism. It was kind of my clumsy way of running away from home. [laughter]

Mark: One thing I was wondering is there were many people who volunteered during the Vietnam Era, volunteered because they thought they were going to get drafted and was conscription a concern of yours? Was it an issue?

Boyer: In a minor way. It was sort of like it probably would happen and then my choices would be minimized because I had a very--I had no idea about how to go about getting an education and I thought this might be one possible way and as a result I placed a high premium on having some choices in areas that would put me in a position to pick and choose among things. And I was weighted heavily at that time were the kinds of technical or scientific, in fact it was that stage in my life if you had asked me what I wanted to be when I grew up it would have been something on the order of a fish and game biologist or forester or something along those lines. That's what I wanted to do. I had a background that I wouldn't have had the first idea how to fill out a college application or even what an SAT was or any of those things. TAPE BLANKED OUT you do your basic there?

Mark: Sure did.

Boyer: They probably closed down the other places. When I was in they were training in a number of places.

Mark: Oh really? There was only one place when I was in. Well, back to Vietnam here for a second. You volunteered in 1967. The war had been going on, the American involvement in the war had been going on and I can't imagine you weren't aware of this.

Boyer: Yes, I was. Clearly aware of it. We had, the school I went to was called—Upper Perhiomon High School. We lost our first KIA to Vietnam in about 1962 and I can remember a high school memorial assembly to that effect. So it was in my consciousness but it was, I guess at that point of time, by '67, it was changing complexion, too. I have to admit, it didn't loom in my thinking about the military. And I had probably a naive view about that as I did with other things. I still knew plenty of contemporaries or people just a few years older than me who were going into the military, spending two years in Spain, two years in Greece, three years in Germany, things like that, and especially people who were going into technical things. I tended to know a lot of people who were radar operators or radio intercept people or things like that. It seemed obscure and vague; it was far off some place.

Mark: Why the Air Force? Why not any of the other services?

Boyer: I think predominately because of my technical interest. It seemed that, as I recall, I think that I talked to the recruiters of all five branches and took various--you know they had the roosts back then. The recruiters came in under the guise of giving all sorts of educational assistance and testing and things.

Mark: At the schools, you mean.

Boyer: Yeah, at the high schools. And I took all those types of things and I came away persuaded this was probably were I could get closest to what I wanted to do. That proved dellusionary, too, in the end. [laughs] But at that time, it seemed like the thing to do.

Mark: So, you enlisted without any job guarantees or anything?

Boyer: No, although unlike the Army where apparently they did give you a lot in the way of guarantees, the recruiter convinced me with the scores I had had in their testing system that there was a great likelihood, mainly because, you know, they were building up to a million person Air Force at that time, that I would get something in my--if I picked out five or so top things, I was very likely to get one of them. And he was right about that.

Mark: Okay. So, describe to me going to basic training and starting your indoctrination into the military.

Boyer: It, I don't think it was anything really remarkable. It was different than I suspected because I guess I had the idea that the Air Force was somehow not really the military, that it was more or less like going to work for IBM or something like that--

Mark: That's what a lot of these vets tell me around here to this day.

Boyer: I was surprised that there people in your face and yelling at you and you're running around doing ridiculous, repetitive stuff. All those things I found rather both offensive and intimidating. I was someone who had not traveled a great deal. I had very little contact outside of my own little community group and just to be thrown in the mix with a lot of different people all in the somewhat frenzied and aggressive forms of behavior was a form of culture shock for me. It wasn't the other things. My father always kept our hair cut close, there was barely any hair to cut when I want to basic training. I was accustomed helping on farm work and helping wood cutting, I was always getting up early, doing heavy, physical stuff.

So that part of it wasn't a problem for me. It was the idea that there were people who weren't nice. [laughs] That was a big change for me.

Mark: Yeah. You mentioned culture shock. Now, most of the vets I've interviewed so far were World War II vets and the military was segregated. What I'm getting at is, were you sort of, tensions between people of different regions or different races or those kinds of things.

Boyer: There was a little of that, although in my basic training unit, it tended to be kind of regionally grouped. There were mostly Pennsylvania and New Jersey, Maryland, Delaware, West Virginia, Kentucky people. So you might say kind of the mid-Atlantic, Appalachians slice were there weren't huge differences. You could tell who the Pennsylvania Dutch guys like me were by the way they spoke. And you could tell who the hillbillies were. But there weren't that astounding differences. The differences almost had to do more with, I don't want to sound too Marxist on it, but they were more class based. There was a rift between those of us who only managed to get through high school and those who had gone to college. We had quite a few people with two and three years and even degrees under their belts who were now enlisted. They were probably the ones most likely, actively fleeing the draft.

Mark: Yeah. That was my next question, actually. I was going to ask, did you get a sense of why people were joining the Air Force?

Boyer: What I found was the more likely, it was more likely if they were poor whites or minorities, and we didn't have many in my training unit, there weren't many. But those people, you could really see it was kind of economic opportunity motivation whereas for people who came from better off circumstances it was to stay out of the infantry and out of harms way.

Mark: I see. You went to Lackland?

Boyer: Yes.

Mark: What did your training entail? When I went through Air Force basic training, we sat in a classroom and marched around and got yelled at. Was that pretty much, well there's supposed to be a war going on.

Boyer: Yeah, they did have, I was given to understand that things did change around that time. And I'm told that they changed even more after I left or after Tet of '68. That was kind of a watershed for Air Force training for awhile. I believe that they kind of went back to where they were before. But in '67 they were, I guess they had lost enough airmen in a variety of things, sniper attacks on bases and stuff like that. It was starting to get a little more sense of urgency. In fact, they were getting more and more DIs, I guess who would then, the team B in the Marines and Army. They were getting drill instructors over from other services. Not on loan, but guys who had maybe ten years in the Army and then did a re-up in the Air Force as a DI. And, as a result, you were getting, we had one in my training unit, they had a much more aggressive stance on things. They were really in your face kind of humbling you, throwing people around bodily and stuff like that. All in the guise that you've got to listen to save your life. That was the psychology and I think that I wasn't the only one who was kind of surprised to hear that in a setting where we thought we'd be sitting in classrooms.

Mark: Was there physical abuse?

Boyer: Well, I don't recall any beatings to a pulp but contact was fairly common. Pushing and shoving, a lot of grabbing by the head. Even knocking people down. I did see things like that. And, of course, while I was at Lackland I didn't see and hear it. You'd have to be careful because there was always these rumors circulating. But then I believe it was true because at least that night I heard the ambulance. Apparently there was a suicide, a guy jumping off of some building or something there. So there was that kind of climate. And there were a lot of washouts. It would seem in my training unit and the ones that were near us, there were, oh I'm trying to remember how those flights and groups were organized. I think there were like 40 guys in the barracks.

Mark: I don't remember either.

Boyer: But it seemed like there were always about three or four per those that were being washed out, sent back, stuff like that over disciplinary problems. In the Air Force, too, we had a lot of guys in basic training who had physical problems, who couldn't run, a lot of over weight guys and stuff like that.

Mark: And this training lasted how long?

Boyer: It was six weeks at the time. And the components that they were just starting to get into, I was told by, I had a lot of friends who had gone this route before me. The school I went to we must have had about like 75% of our graduating class ended up in the military so I knew lots of people who had gone through Lackland and Amarillo, the other place they were training in '67. And they apparently in like '66 they do familiarization, sometimes not enough firing with an old M1 carbine and they had just switched over to the M16. They were getting active, they got three days of firing, which was a new thing apparently at Lackland. And then we got the twice run through the obstacle course, you know, the wire, the explosions and all that silly stuff. But they, it wasn't, I wasn't surprised that we did those things but I was surprised at the climate they tried to create of kind of fear and intimidation round. That was a survival thing. I don't think a lot of those guys bought it that they were going to be in this situation. I found it unbelievable.

Even for the ones that subsequently did find themselves in that kind of a situation, they felt it unbelievable.

Mark: And so then after basic training, you went to technical school somewhere.

Boyer: Yes. The first one I went to was at Chanute Air Force Base in Illinois.

Mark: What was your AFSC?

Boyer: The number? Let me look. I was in meteorology. That was my--

Mark: Meteorology Technician. You went to Chanute Air Force Base. What kind of training did you undergo there?

Boyer: Oh, I learned how to operate weather radar. I learned how to plot weather maps. I learned how to send up Rawinsondt, which was a weather tracking device on a balloon. Learned how to operate and read all the variety of instruments and calibrate the barometers, the psychrometers, those types of things--anonometer, the wind gauge, I'm trying to remember, the rain gauge we had--a variety of stuff like that.

Mark: This training lasted how long?

Boyer: I wrote these things down--that was 16 weeks.

Mark: Now, when I was in tech. school, this was the first time we'd got to meet the women.

Boyer: Uh hum.

Mark: Now, was it a training base for female airmen as well. Was there much of that sort of thing?

Boyer: No at that time, although in that occupation subsequently they did the smart thing and they used a lot of women, but at the time they weren't. In fact, there were none coming through the school when I was there but just within like a year or two after that they were coming through in droves ostensibly to free up men to be put into other things.

Mark: Now, at the time they were in separate auxiliary from the Air Force if I'm not mistaken. WAFs or something.

Boyer: WAFs, yeah. W-A-F. At Lackland at a distance we could see some detachments of them. We weren't locked in but at basic things were pretty controlled. At Chanute there weren't any female training units at all. There were females, military personnel on the base but they were usually way up in the hierarchy and trainees had very little contact.

Mark: And so this training at Chanute and then you were ready to go to your first duty station.

Boyer: No, I went to additional training first. I went to a two week course, because of where I was going to be next, out of Chanute I was assigned to a place called the Environmental Technical Applications Center.

Mark: Where was that?

Boyer: That was in Washington, D.C. It was an arm of the National Security Agency. Because it was a joint service operation located at the Washington Naval Yard. It was commanded by an Air Force Colonel but was in the Washington Naval Yard and it had other military personnel from other branches of services. We were sent to kind of, they had like an orientation there for people to how those things worked. It was at Fort Holabird where you got to learn--this was a quasi-intelligence function at this place. It was mostly application of environmental methods to war. Everything from targeting nuclear weapons to causing rain on places, weather modification. We went to Fort Holabird for two weeks.

Mark: That Virginia or Maryland?

Boyer: Maryland. Then I underwent a apprenticeship in my basic craft at Andrews Air Force Base simultaneously with being assigned to my new post. They still wanted me to keep up my skill level in meteorology so I was assigned to Andrews Air Force Base to finish out. They have--well if you were in the Air Force you know you go through those segments of you come out a one level, a three level, a five --

Mark: Yeah. One, three, five. I never got past five.

Boyer: I got my five. I had to go out to Andrews Air Force Base and work on that part of it 'cause actually the job I was assigned to had so little to do with my training that it was remarkable.

Mark: So, it sounds like the Air Force invested a lot of money on you, on your training.

Boyer: It did.

Mark: And you assumed your first duty station there in the naval yard, was it still '67 or was it 68.

Boyer: It was ‘68. There was an ironic subtext to that ‘cause I actually arrived in Washington, D.C., I can’t give you the date but I can tell you what was going on because I arrived by train. I had come down from Pennsylvania, had left the train in Philadelphia, come to Washington, D.C. I guess this almost exhibits an incredible lack of awareness on my part but I came into Washington while it was burning. The train pulls into Union Station, it was just after the King assassination and there were armored personnel carriers and jeeps running by with M16 machine guns on them. I was, I guess, surprised. I hadn’t read a paper for a couple of days or something. [laughter]

Mark: That’s what I was going to ask. Now, this is early ‘68. The Tet Offensive had started, had occurred by this time. And I was interested in the reaction among the military personnel to this particular event. And then more generally, at your duty station. Did people talk about the war and what--

Boyer: They started to. My observation from about Tet later, Tet came to play a very seminal role in my military experience through people I was exposed to. But, while I think many of us had a generalized idea from covers on Life and Newsweek and things like that, what really happened and what it meant to morale and for the prognosis of the war itself was not something that suddenly there was a dawning realization of what it took was the guys who actually experienced it coming back, rotating through. And in large numbers, finally year after year kind of reinforcing that. I’d say that, for military enlisted personnel to get the full message at Tet, took anywhere from 18 months to 2 years before it kind of sank in. Because for one a lot of those guys who went through that went directly to separation. So people in the military weren’t exposed to them initially. You had to depend on running into people one at a time who had been there through that. So it, by that time, by that stage of ‘68, while I knew what had occurred it didn’t mean that much to me. In fact, it was, early I was caught up more in the civil rights context and that’s where I first met people in the GI Resistance. It was subsequent to King’s death a few months later when Abernathy led the poor people’s march. They had formed an ad hoc kind of military support group to the Resurrection City that was built there. The poor people’s march, they camped on the mall and that’s where I first met other people in the military who had alternative views.

Mark: This was something you weren’t exposed to in high school or back in Pennsylvania?

Boyer: No. I had an openness to some of those ideas because my family had always kind of been labor activists. But on the other hand, they weren’t, on this issue of war and stuff like that, they weren’t really too active in those kind of things. So they hadn’t been peace movement people, although I had relatives who were pacifists, were Mennonites. That was an apolitical, totally spiritual orientation. The idea of active resistance was a different thing altogether.

Mark: So, the civil rights group you were telling me about here, was it mostly white? Was it black? Was it mixed?

Boyer: It was mixed. It was fairly evenly mixed on a racial basis. Although I'd say that the types of people from the different races, I think this isn't any sort of odd projection or identification, but I think I tended to be more like the black GIs who were involved because the white ones tended to be people who'd come off campuses, had been exposed to a lot of stuff. They were the ones who were always spouting off Marcso, things that I heard of at that point. Whereas blacks just thought there were people getting a raw deal. That's sort of how it seemed to me.

Mark: I see.

Boyer: So I was pretty unsophisticated about it.

Mark: Now, was this the kind of group that you joined or did you just show up at--

Boyer: Yeah, I just showed up. What happened was there were, initially there was, as Resurrection City was being built, there was a like a committee of people who I guess where either ROTC or National Guard out of the University of Maryland set up kind of a booth there. In the Washington area there are a lot of military service people and I went by there and they were handing out a thing that there was going to be a meeting to help with this. At this point, I thought about this event in a totally civil rights context and my family had always raised me to be sympathetic to civil rights issues, as a lot of labor movement people were. So when I showed up I didn't have any integrated view that there was this war and there was injustice connected to it and was reflected in these race problems which would yet inter, I didn't have any multi-national theories or anything like that. So I showed up at this thing which wasn't really a meeting. It consisted of a bunch of us driving fence posts to put up the fence around Resurrection City. And there was a lot of talk and now that I'm a lot more aware about the psychology of organizing, I can tell there were people kind of planted among us to talk certain things up and things of that type. As it turned out, there were, at University of Maryland, there was a kind of GI wing of SDS of people who had got reserve status and things like that who were pretty much committed to gumming the works up.

Mark: That was interesting. I'd never heard that.

Boyer: I don't know that it ever took a very concrete form but that was my only encounter with it, but a lot of them kind of spun off into a ASU, American Servicemen's Union, later on, at least the Washington area chapter of ASU was heavily influenced by guys who had gone to college at least for a few years and had contact with SDS.

Mark: Just in this Resurrection City activity, about how many people were involved in this--Military personnel?

Boyer: Well, it took place over a series of days. In fact, the work involved in it was almost a week long. I think I was able to get away for one full day and parts of two others. Each time I was there, there were anywhere from 20 to 40 people there and mostly different people. I hardly, except for a few people out of the University of Maryland, I never really saw the same people twice at that event.

Mark: And how did the Air Force feel about this?

Boyer: Well, they didn't know immediately but I think there was something, the wheels of those things grind fairly slow too and how it turned out whether or, there was some reference made by someone else that I came to know in the American Servicemen Union that my picture had been in some left wing rag but I did not hear anything from the military for about maybe six months when I was called in by the commander of the unit I was with for an interview. He told me that things like that could jeopardize my security clearance.

Mark: Do you remember your reaction to that?

Boyer: I was surprised because I had asked him, you know, if I had done anything wrong from his perspective 'cause I thought I hadn't broken any laws. See in my naive view I was upholding the law.

Mark: Civil rights sound like a good cause.

Boyer: Fool that I was. [laughter]

Mark: I see. So this, were there many of these other kinds of groups that you were aware of within the military. You mentioned that there were other groups like this that sort of evolved into the American Servicemen's Union.

Boyer: Yeah. By '67 I think they were embryonic but they were starting to be at a lot of places. Especially where a base was near a metropolitan area or a campus or some other form of counterculture. I think that critically true in Germany where there were GIs living close to Hamburg or other kind of wide open city and things like that where there were still remnants of kind of '50s bohemian stuff and coffeehouse culture and stuff like that. It started to spin off around that time. Now, I don't want to over-exaggerate the size of these things but by '67 I'd say most major places had some little committee just in the cooking. In '69-70 things really started to gel and started to see in papers. I'm convinced in my kind of post-war beer chats with other people of similar backgrounds, that by that point there must have been hundreds of these committees and even hundreds of publications. Some of them only came out with 3 issues and disappeared because the editor was sent to Iceland.

Mark: Or something like that.

Boyer: Put on a coal, fuel tender in the South Pacific somewhere.

Mark: But there wasn't much interconnection between these different groups. There might be one that would spring up--

Boyer: Well, the connections I have to confess, and I'm not saying this as some sort of international communist conspiracy or anything, connections tend to be provided by other structures in the left that, quite frankly in retrospect, I think tried to manipulate these things to their ends. And the ASU, is my observation, even though I was active in its support of many things it did, it was really a strategic decision on the part of the entity called the Workers World Party, to create. That's my analysis of how it came into being. It was simply they had people in the field who saw their really little things around here and that there was an opportunity, a good propaganda opportunity, to show a different anti-war face. There were actually people in uniform who didn't like what was going on.

Mark: That gets to me next question involves anti-war activity among GIs at this time. You mentioned you started working in the civil rights area. Were there other, was there a nascent anti-war--

Boyer: You'd hear people talk about it but it wasn't that explicit. I think what it took was almost that same gestational period that Tet took. It took, it went, I think maybe it was in the back of people's minds, they didn't have, weren't sufficiently bold. Then there were a couple of things. You started to hear the first indication of a couple of isolated cases of people refusing the order to go to Vietnam. The thing at Fort Dix, a couple of others here and there where you started to, you know, these left wing groups that we're in contact with started to put this stuff into our hands. Here's three guys who are in the stockade at Fort Dix because they refused to go. And all of a sudden that's kind of in the back of your mind, well, yeah, maybe nobody should go. But I think what it took even more than that was finally running into people that came back just saying it's a total crock, a total waste. People go there, they get killed and it's just for nothing. That puts a different seed into you altogether because that it's, like I don't think anybody likes to die for nothing. You raised that specter. But I thought about this when I looked at these questions. For it to feel where these things interconnect, the interface on this stuff, it can't be separate from the broader culture because by this stage now you're getting counter-culture people drafted. So you're having people come in who are already against it. So that's different. It wasn't like me who kind of evolved into it, who might have been suspicious and ambivalent. But there were actually people who were full bore against it and were nonetheless drafted, put in uniform. And there were also people by then being drafted who really had a kind of counter-culture, anti-authoritarian streak irrespective of the military. See, I was always a good person in the military except insofar as I questioned the policy. But in any other respect, I was exemplary. 'Cause I didn't have any trouble with the actual entity itself at that time in my life. So, yeah, you're getting people who are disciplinary problems, you get in the drug stuff, you're getting, and a certain level of criminality, too. I don't know now if this is taking anecdotal stuff too far, but it seemed in my experience from about late '68 on that military ranks and since I because of both my assignments and my of duty activities, I was in contact with a lot of other branches, it seemed like there were a lot of people coming in who were coming in on the basis of judges saying you could pick between prison and going into the military. So there was, I guess, kind of an element of sociopathology thrown into it as well.

Mark: I see. Now, on the event Tet and how that played within the military. Do you recall any specific people you ran into who were there in Vietnam and do you remember them telling you what their experiences were and what your reaction was to it?

Boyer: Yeah. The first guy I ran into was where I was assigned, that a made a difference for me, was an Air Force guy who had done similar work and he came back to the Environmental Technical Applications Center and was assigned there. He was kind of clearly a burnout but I got to know him over a few beers and it was through probing him, I could really see it had changed him at a fundamental level. Led to probably what was akin to clinical depression. He had seen people killed and which I don't think he had any expectation that as somebody involved in meteorology that that was a high risk type thing. He was at a place that I think for the bulk of the war had been safe but just was kind of partially overrun during Tet. I think what it did for him, as it did for many of us later on. I wasn't at this stage at this point myself but I think he was at the stage I later came to and that was that the fact that he had been exposed to that situation made him call into question almost everything he had been told by almost all institutions. I think he felt like, that he had been suckered, that he'd been lied to. 'Cause that was the attitude he developed. I wasn't as far gone as he was at that point in time but I think I got there later on. But that, I think he had the biggest influence on me, a fella from Connecticut. In fact, we stay in touch to this day. He, like some guys, he sprung out of it. I don't think he was scarred for life, as many people were 'cause what he had seen and the context of what went on there wasn't that bad but it was bad in the context of what somebody in an ER or who works on an ambulance might see and since he wasn't expecting it, I think it did surprise the hell out of him.

Mark: You went to Vietnam in 1970?

Boyer: Yes. Yeah, it was really coming apart at the seams by then. It had an anarchistic wild west flavor. It was definitely on the way down.

Mark: I'm interested in American Servicemen's Union. I'm not that familiar with that group. When did this start, when did this group start to take off and what were its main tenets? Was it before you went to Vietnam, were you aware?

Boyer: Yes. They were in existence at least in an embryonic form, at least their name was appearing on the bottom of leaflets at that stage. They hadn't at that point, projected themselves much into the consciousness of the broader culture. I'm not sure that they ever did really. Although they did such things that they were the main support base, support committee for the Fort McCoy people later on. You probably know about that transaction.

Mark: Yeah.

Boyer: But they had those all over the country. I think they even, they got grudging respect even from their sectarian adversaries on the left for taking that job on and doing it. But what I see at the time, like by 1968-69 I thought of them as kind of a free floating kind of yippie-style thing that wasn't really structured. And that's because none of us, none of the people like me, were aware that there was a structure and there were people voting strings. We just weren't seeing it. I think the main reason for its existence was to have a component of anti-war GIs. We were, you might say, kind of counter-cannon fodder.

Mark: I see.

Boyer: That's what I think it was.

Mark: Now, these sort of groups, how did they circulate their message around the Military. You mentioned passing out leaflets. I can't imagine someone standing at the gate of the base.

Boyer: That happened from time to time. It was dealt with rather swiftly. [laughter] In fact, a lot of the fence cases were around, a lot of the transfers to Iceland, things like that, too. Typically, it was done around alternative social gathering places. Now, you know, around every base there's places where people go off duty, off base, off post, whatever. Around that, I think historically, all those were places were pretty similar but by the late '60s they developed different tracks because there'd be a place to go, you might call it the southern redneck place, would be the country-western music bar and stuff like that. And then it developed as kind of coffee house, wine place with Joan Baez music, you know, the girl with long hair and all that. So people of different types, inclinations, gravitated to certain places and I think it was in those places, those alternative places, where this stuff started to be posters on the wall, people leafleting at the door or sometimes even guys moving table to table talking to people.

Mark: I see.

Boyer: It was fairly low key. I don't know that it was any, you know, hard sell type stuff.

Mark: And so for you, you stayed in Washington up until the time you went to Vietnam, is that right?

Boyer: I did some TDYs elsewhere, little things that I was involved in here that were most of the technical--yeah.

Mark: I suppose it's about time to move on to your actually going over to Vietnam. I want to ask this question first, you sometimes mention, it was at this stage or that stage. On the eve of your going to southeast Asia, what stage do you think you were at in terms of civil rights and anti-war sentiment?

Boyer: By the time I was actually ordered to go to Vietnam, I was convinced the war was a horrible folly. But I was also, I guess, in a way duped that it was going to end fairly shortly and that I'd probably be the--you know, while I was there that it would probably come to some sort of conclusion. But it didn't. It was four years of bombing and other things left. So while I was going there I thought, I viewed it, oddly, as kind of an opportunity because I was actually getting more and more committed to a political message among GIs and I thought here was a way to get to talk to some people.

Mark: Yeah. Or experience it for yourself.

Boyer: Yeah.

Mark: Did your superiors have any inkling of your political sentiment at the time? It seems to me --

Boyer: Well, yes and no.

Mark: --that you were in kind of sensitive area.

Boyer: It was and yet it was an odd psychology to it. There was, institutionally, I knew almost everything as you can see with the Aims case with the CIA. There's a great desire to not see things you don't want to see. And that's true of every bureaucracy I've ever dealt with. So that unless you're really kind of in their face, there's somewhat of a "I don't want to hear it," "I don't want to see it," you know, "Don't tell me."

Mark: Schultz mentality.

Boyer: Yeah, there's some of that. And plus we had a second command in this unit, an Air Force lieutenant colonel who remarkably that within a few years made Brigadier General. Name was Daniel Lufkin. He as a remarkable officer who had taken his Ph.D. I think in atmospheric physics at the University of Oslo in Sweden and did his dissertation in Swedish. A remarkable intellect and he repeatedly was writing letters to the New York Times, signing them--at his rank--that the war was a crock. So there was some of that at that level, and I don't know how it was that he survived he even kind of flourished in that ravine, except that with the Air Force especially, there's technical, scientific things, there was a little bit of tolerance for the nutty professor type stuff. That might have been part of it. But that kind gave some of us the green light. You know, his opposition was probably on a very kind of ether plane [laughter] human beings could barely comprehend what he wrote usually.

Mark: I see. So you, to get a couple of facts straight here, you had orders to go to Vietnam when in 1970. Early, mid, late?

Boyer: I think I got the actual orders around January or February and I wasn't slated to depart until, it must be on here, as long as I can look at the dates--I don't see it on here. It should have been right around the beginning of July. No, end of July, excuse me. End of July.

Mark: What, did you remember your initial reaction. You're sitting at your desk some day and the little printout says, little printout comes and says you're going to Vietnam. Do you remember your reaction?

Boyer: Yeah, it surprised the shit out of me because I, you know, I was getting fairly close to having my time being up and I don't think it would have surprised me or shocked my a year or two before had that come but the fact that I was getting so close and that they were, you know, they had invested a lot in me. And it was a very arcane type of work we did there. I didn't think I was irreplaceable but it seemed odd that they would want to throw another body in there where is what I first thought they were going to send me to over and then Nam was a fairly commonplace, thought that would have been easier for them to fill. As it turned out, that was not the case either. There was another kind of surprise for me. But, you know, so then there was this specter I guess in my mind had this been manipulated because of things I had said and done. And there were things insinuated to me by people who were at that unit that said, yeah, that's the case, your message, but nobody, it was never put in writing. Whereas some of those other things that were punitive that I described, the typical one, the kind of, I mean I knew of a guy in the Navy where the shore patrol came and drug him out of the barracks in the middle of the night, stuffed a sea bag and put him on a plane to Iceland. That didn't happen to me.

Mark: Fortunately. For anecdotal sake, I'm interested in your travel to Vietnam. I would assume it was on an airline--

Boyer: Yeah. It was a chartered flight like a lot of them were by that stage. I can't recall. It was Flying Tiger or Seaborg World, it was one of those that was their main carriers. I guess I was surprised about the democracy of that in the sense that my next seat companion for the full trip was an Army colonel. So there was no kind of attempt to segregate people by rank.

Mark: No first class?

Boyer: Yeah.

Mark: Business class, whatever they call it. Where'd you leave from?

Boyer: Travis Air Force Base in California. Which I returned to, too. As long as we're getting into transit things, I did remember from an earlier question on the training. I wanted to mention something I think I was told. Here again this is kind of urban legend stuff, but we went from San Antonio at the end of basic training to Chanute in what was said to be one of the last troop trains ever. In fact, they hadn't used troop trains since the Korean War but the Air Force had got such a glut of people it was sending from Texas to Illinois they started using trains and they broke out these old like Pullman cars. And, as a train buff, I thought I'd throw that in. In fact, I still have my ticket.

Mark: Oh. How long did it take, I'm kind of curious about that actually?

Boyer: It was, I'd say, close to about 30 hours and it didn't make many stops. I think the only place the train actually came to a total stop was in St. Louis. Nobody got of it, nobody got on it. I don't know why they stopped, but they did.

Mark: Were you given a berth or you supposed to sleep-

Boyer: No, they had berths. But there were an awful lot of all-night card games and people, some ingenious individuals had managed to smuggle liquor aboard and stuff like that. For people just out of basic training it was kind of a wild time. And no authority. It was sort of like people, you know the kind of ersatz authority of basic training units where somebody's made the squad leader. I forget what they are. They usually, somebody you usually don't like. One of your peers is put over you. That's how it was in these cars. Somebody who was really supposed to maintain authority. What a joke! It was just bedlam the whole time.

Mark: So you took how long to get to Vietnam?

Boyer: As I recall, it was around 24 hours. But, we flew the "great circle" and I'm trying to remember. I think we landed in Alaska and in Japan on the way there. Coming back, it's funny, coming back I don't think that was the case. I'm sure we didn't go through Alaska. I'm not sure how we went though.

Mark: You landed in Tan Son Nhut?

Boyer: Yes.

Mark: Which is where you were stationed, were based?

Boyer: Well, there was a confusing thing about, when I was assigned there I was assigned to a detachment, a weather unit that didn't exist. I couldn't figure this out. I had asked everyone in the whole Air Force structure around Washington, D.C. Think I could get an answer 'cause they had the units enumerated and there was a detachment at Tan Son Nhut that wasn't that number. And I asked whey, you know, where this one was and I was told it was not on the list.

End Tape 1 Side A

Boyer: When I got there I got off the plane, came down the ramp, went through the terminal and there was this grungy kind of guy who looked like he had the same uniform on for about a year, hadn't shaved in several weeks and he's looking people over as they're coming out and he's calling my last name. He said, "Come over here" and he's a guy in an Air Force uniform and he's got an Army 3/4 ton jeep that looks beat to hell, mud from top to bottom and he said to throw my stuff on there and away we went. We went to a place called the Combined Intelligence Center which was a subdivision of MACV. It was basically staffed by the Army's 45th Military Intelligence Company but it had, it was a very unusual unit in that it had a Marine full bird as a commander, which usually you wouldn't have in something that's just barely over company size; at about 10 of us from the Air Force and a bunch from the Navy and fair number of ordnance, mostly South Vietnamese Army but they had some of their Navy and some of their Air Force personnel then as well. That was my big surprise when I got there.

Mark: This was how far away from Tan Son Nhut?

Boyer: Oh, only a few miles. It was in a odd location, it was in a, it was out kind of in an area where we had a soccer field on one side and a cemetery for North Vietnamese refugees on the other. So it was kind of off on its own down a little dirt road with no sign at the end of it or anything else. It was just--

Mark: Out in the jungle or rice paddy or something like that?

Boyer: No, it was out in the open. I mean, you could see it. It was just kind of a white building back there and there's a cemetery on one side and a soccer field on the other.

Mark: What were some of your initial reactions to South Vietnam? Some vets I -- for example, describe the smells.

Boyer: That's it. Coming down the ramp of the plane, the smell just hit me. It was almost like pushing me back.

Mark: I've heard it described variously. How would you describe it?

Boyer: A kind of sickly, sweet, rotten, of high decomposition. No particular fragrance to it. I can't label it in a spectrum of it smelled like this or it smelled like this. Just Overpoweringly, sickeningly sweet and rotten, must, a must component to it.

Mark: Now, this wasn't rainy season yet was it?

Boyer: Yeah, it was. It was just coming. The rain was just starting to come on again when I arrived there. In fact, it rained every one of the first I think 47 days I was there if I recall. It just rained all the time; it was never dry. It seemed like it was, I think it was partly they were having fun with the new guy because they were always sending me on errands and these things came at certain times of the day I wasn't aware of yet. So I was always out somewhere to get wet so that I could sit there for the rest of the day in wet clothes and wet boots and wet socks.

Mark: So, what was your--what were your duties supposed to be?

Boyer: I was attached to a thing called a Train Section. We did a type of work called a Tactical Scale Study for Operations. Both in Vietnam and in adjacent countries we did the planning for anticipated operations. That involved a kind of top to bottom review of a precise piece of real estate; of what was in it, so that the unit was divided into a number of segments. Because I had the kind of physical sciences background, mine was in terrain, and that had everything; meteorologist, hydrologist, oceanographers. What else did we have? Well, we had map surveyors, cartographers, stuff like that. Then there was the order of battle section. They did more stuff of tracking enemy units of which NVA units were where, what strength they were in, had they been resupplied recently, and things like that. There was a fair amount of interchange between these components. 'Cause we had to kind of be on the same page then. There was a group that handled agents; that had people that were engaged in espionage. Then there was counter-espionage unit. Then there were people to analyze documents. There were people who created documents; we had a kind of forgery section. Those people were neat. They could whip you up passports for any nationality things like that.

Mark: Would they actually do that? – Weekend pass--

Boyer: Oh yeah. I came back with an, I came home with an Australian passport. I used it a couple of times. I never not in trouble fortunately. But they had things there that I wasn't real involved in that was like they were hooked into dummy companies 'cause they would, they would actually send people into places like Cambodia in the guise of being businessmen for some entity who were going to buy real estate and you know, pump the Cambodians all full of bullshit about wanting to build hotels in places when in reality all they were doing was scouting, you know, photographing their air fields and stuff like that.

Mark: What was security like at this point?

Boyer: Well, the ostensibly, really rigorous. I mean you had to go through multiple check, you had to, there was a gate outside the building. Then at the door, another screening you had to go through. And then to go into your individual sections to be screened again. But the way it was done it was a kind of corresponding thing. You had not only your standard ID, you had a photo badge as well. They always made the verification to match them up. That made it sound like wow, they're really on the ball here, but the reality is the place must have been a sieve because we found out later on there was almost nothing we did that wasn't compromised. I bet there were laundry women in Saigon who knew what we were doing before I did.

Mark: How do you think they found out? I mean, I know you can't answer the question, but I just--

Boyer: Some of us had gotten together afterwards to talk about it and I'm pretty sure that we had somebody on the inside passing information.

Mark: American?

Boyer: I think American. We had a lot of stuff from the enemies. We didn't trust them though. They, for sure, will infiltrate it. [Laughter]

Mark: It's kind of an aside, but the bombing of Cambodia went on secretly since 1970 and I'm just curious in a place like that were you aware, I mean I'm not sure when the public found out about it. My chronology is kind of --

Boyer: I'll back up a little bit. Before I left because it was between the time I received my orders when I thought, yeah, this is going to be over anyway and the time I actually embarked was the Cambodian invasion. In fact, as you might suspect, that even added to my ambivalence. But nevertheless, at least I thought when I went over there, that's over anyway. As I say, they not because what happened one of my very first assignments was on a survey team that went into Cambodia. So even after the alleged pullout there were people there. The bombing was really in evidence. You could, any casual fly over of Cambodia really revealed it as these pictures will 'cause it was moonscaped in many places. Even--I don't--reporters in Saigon must have had to stay drunk 24 hours a day not to know the bombing because from Saigon and Tan Son Nhut at night-- on a clear night when there weren't any storms the bombing in Cambodia was visible. It was like the western horizon was just flashing continually. You had to figure out well that's somewhere over there. Something bad is happening.

Mark: That's interesting.

Boyer: From Saigon to the Parrots Beak is only like 35 miles.

Mark: So, you were, daily duties at Tan Son Nhut there included, well you mentioned that you had gone out in the field.

Boyer: Um, periodically I guess. It was a lot compared to what I thought it was going to be. I had been a desk jockey predominately and I thought that's what this would be. What entered into this 'cause I don't feel personally victimized with it. It wasn't like somebody was throwing me in the maelstrom. What they went through as they stood down, because they wanted to have this allusion of troop reductions, they kept trying to do the same things with fewer and fewer bodies. As a result, they were supposed to have people say who couriered back captured documents because of what was often valuable to us if they had, infantry unit had an engagement with an NV unit and they captured their maps which were updated you know about places where bridges had been washed out or blown out or where they had done surveys that we hadn't. One problem, this was before you could map by satellite, the maps that were used for that war were surveyed by the French in the 1880s. There was stuff on them--they didn't have elevations properly and as a result you'd have, you know, you'd send flights of helicopters or what else into the fog and clouds and they'd fly into mountainsides that weren't supposed to be that high. They'd say capture documents somewhere, hop a Huey somewhere and ask for Sergeant so and so and pick up a map case and bring it back and it was incidental that little jaunts like that were kind of my version of war tourism that I saw a lot of what was going on. And actually that affected me a great deal. To it—

Mark: It's quite interesting actually. I want to verify this a little more. You got up from behind the desk and out in the field about how often? Once a month? Something like that?

Boyer: It really varied. In the first month I was there it only happened once. Later on it kind of accelerated. The longer I was there the more it happened for a couple of reasons. There were fewer people. The unit I served with started with about maybe close to 200 people initially and by the time my tour was gone it was down to about 80 but were doing all the same things. Then partly I kind of was curious about things and I often would volunteer and sometimes, I was going to get into this later, sometimes I'd go unauthorized to places I wasn't asked to go. It really amazed me after a couple months there I found out, hell, you could travel anywhere you want. There were aircraft and convoys going places constantly and all you had to do was ask to get on a truck or ask to get on a helicopter and you could go. I went into Cambodia probably a dozen times. I'd go visit temples and stuff like that. I had friends who were monks and it was kind of interesting. I liked a lot of people there. But it was, you think about the military being so authoritarian and in a way I could never have standed being in the military at some post like Fort Dix and pick up cigarette butts and paint rocks and crap like that. But over there it was breaking down. Officers were scared to go into the field. With fraggings and stuff like that people were loath to challenge folks. Fewer and fewer questions were being asked and people were kind of doing what they wanted to do.

Mark: This brings up the question, what did you see when you went out into the field to the various Army units. Because this is a period when the Army started to disintegrate essentially. The fragging is just one thing. Drugs, race problems, etc. I'm interested in your perspective on the disintegrating Army.

Boyer: Yeah, all these things came as a surprise to me. I guess I expected other people who were disgruntled to be like me. Be kind of neat and tidy about it. But it didn't turn out to be that way at all. I had only been there--did I make a note on that-- I think maybe just a few weeks when I found a guy in a latrine, dead of an overdose. A black guy. It never occurred to me, you know, about drugs. Drugs to me were somebody smoked a joint.

Mark: Was this heroine?

Boyer: Yeah. He was sitting there with a needle and the stuff still around him. What was even more surprising than his death, was that people kind of viewed it derisively or almost humorously that there were, I was the one who reported the death and in the meantime people would go in and kind of decorate the body like it's a Christmas tree. You know, that was a bizarre culture in my view coming into that. By the end I was kind of like that myself too I think.

Mark: I see. Let's tackle these topics one at a time. Now we've already touched on drugs. How much drug use was there really? As I mentioned I had some students in here last week and I read to them, I elaborated to them some Army estimate from 1969, 30% of troops had smoked marijuana. How accurate was that? Was it a lot more? Was it less?

Boyer: What year was this?

Mark: About 30, in '69, 30% had smoked marijuana.

Boyer: I can't really question that. I would think it was somewhat higher in '70 and '71. But there again, I can't claim to have a universal experience. But I'd say anywhere from 1/2 to 75% of the people I encountered smoked pot. In fact, one of my kind of informal assignments in the unit that I was in was to procure it for the officers. Even the junior officers smoked pot in my unit. This was in the intelligence unit. But they didn't want to be seen on the street dealing with cab drivers or whores buying it so I was sent on that job.

Mark: Was it easy to get?

Boyer: Oh yeah, it was everywhere. In fact, I did a funny thing. I was asked to speak to a high school class shortly after I came back, and to show you my frame of mind, a kid got up in this assembly in high school and asked if drugs were a problem. I thought for a minute and I said, "No, you could get them everywhere." I didn't say it as a joke at the time. [laughter]

Mark: Although that's probably not what he wanted to hear.

Boyer: Yeah.

Mark: You mentioned where you'd get it from. You'd get from prostitutes, perhaps?

Boyer: Cab drivers, yeah, almost everywhere. There were odd things there. There were odd entrepreneurial forms in Vietnam. The most infamous one, the one I was first introduced to, was Rosie's Car Wash. At Rosie's Car Wash you could get a massage and beyond, get drugs, get your booze, any other form of contraband. Illegal weapons; AK 47s, an enemy Tiger jeep would be washed. [laughter]

Mark: -- much for full-service to me.

Boyer: Yeah, it was.

Mark: Did you observe problems with heroin? Now being out in the course, I'm interested in that question. Harder drugs. How common were those?

Boyer: Well, there was a stratification on those. In my unit, in the intelligence unit, I don't know of a single hard drug case. But in auxiliary support units around us there were some and that's in the case where I found this guy, he was a supply guy who was dead in the latrine. And then I visited a lot, since I was out visiting the units in the field and everything from artillery, battery too, Army aviation units, I didn't see much heroin use out there although I'd see things like OJs, opium joints, where there was a combination of drugs. But I didn't see the needle stuff much except what you would call rear support units where there were high levels of boredom. It really seemed to be, to me, a big function of people with a lot of time on their hands.

Mark: I was going to ask, we can just cover this now. What do you think brought about this problem?

Boyer: Well, for some of them I think, here again I have to keep it straight in my own mind what I thought at the time and what I've kind of surmised since then and that's hard to do.

Mark: That's one of the inherent problems with oral histories.

Boyer: At the time I guess I would have thought it was a partly a cultural and race thing because most, quite frankly, most of the people I had seen, that I observed using heroin or obviously on heroin were urban black. Not rural Southern black but, although there's almost no such thing today, but back then there was. It seemed to be kind of inner-city people. What I've concluded since then there was probably a fair number of people who came over there already on. That may have been part of it. That never occurred to me back then. In relation to show McCoy's conclusion and things like that, there was even at my low level there was an obvious, the connection between the US infrastructure and the heroin trade was quite obvious 'cause we got involved, or the commander of our unit, the Marine Colonel, was really kind of a, he was a drug-a-phobic and I have to admit because I had counter-culture sympathies at the time, I was kind of libertarian in some ways. I didn't share them entirely. I probably would now. He really pursued things zealously. When he came across tips of US complicity he really tried to ferret them out. He was probably thwarted and stymied in a lot of things but the one thing he did he did blow the cover on a ring of US servicemen who were smuggling heroin back to the US in bodies of GIs. They were using the military mortuary there as a method of smuggling. Actually putting it in body cavities and stuff like that. Pretty macabre.

Mark: From your observations I suppose the very typical, again it's the--as you say, every story then put together makes some history -- you did observe some of these connections between US apparatus?

Boyer: Yeah, well, you could go into bars and talk, have conversations with Air America pilots where were flying it out there. Some of them frustrated by saying, you know, had to go up into Laos today, and brought a bunch of Hmongs down and we discovered half the load was heroin. You know, this was talked about. It might have not been talked about like, you know, if you're out at Fire Base pace with a battery of the first Air Cav. and all you see is the same people maybe it didn't get out of that level. But in that kind of, it's almost like if you're going to talk politics you talk in a watering hole around the square here, you're going to hear stuff about Tommy Thompson or--

Mark: We do.

Boyer: And Doug LaFollette and stuff like that. It was that kind of milieu.

Mark: I see. What about race relations? What was your observation on this topic?

Boyer: Well, that was the eye opener for me because I had been sympathetic to civil rights. This was my first place in the military where I ran into blacks who were hostile to me irrespective of what -- not interested in what my views were or where I was coming from.

Mark: And this wasn't the situation in Washington when you were there?

Boyer: No. There were lots of integrated forums in a place like Washington. But over in Vietnam when I started to run into more people from like Detroit, Cleveland, Los Angeles, a lot of kind of urban hard edge folks that aggravated through substance abuse. Just as often alcohol as drugs.

Mark: I mentioned, asked about alcohol actually.

Boyer: I know we're hopping around. It's hard to follow this. [laughter] But, yeah, I saw plenty of episodes of friction and was even in a few myself. I had one bizarre one. I didn't typically sleep on base. I had another arrangement that we'll get into later. But one night I got back from someplace where I couldn't get out the gate after curfew so I did have a bunk in the base actually. I hardly stayed there but I did. And there's this one black guy in the barracks, he was a supply guy for another unit there. It was a shared billet. He said odd things to me over time but I didn't know really what his problem was. He had a snoot full and about 2:00 or 3:00 in the morning he woke me up by sticking the flash suppresser of his weapon up my nostril like this. And had his finger on the trigger and was asking me a long line of questions that were really nonsequitors of that almost sounded, you know, like he was on the verge of psychosis or something. It was a very scary moment for me. Other people eventually wrestled him to the ground. But that could have been the end for me, the death of me. It was an odd thing because for somebody who had really, I guess in a way I felt, you know, I had been trying to do the right thing as Spike Lee might say.

Mark: Did this change your attitudes or commitment to the issue of civil rights? That you had--

Boyer: No, it didn't. But it really made me aware that, see I guess I had this thing, I had grown up around such dependable, upstanding people, decent people out there that the idea of evil had been fairly remote from me. My whole time in the military was kind of growing process to realize there were a lot of troubled people, there were a lot of sick people, and that I couldn't approach things as if everybody had grown up with me in Huff's Church Pennsylvania. That was just part of the process.

Mark: Is it true that camps were sometimes segregated between black zones and white zones?

Boyer: Well, I've never seen it. I've heard that in some places. Those places, some people alleged that in some of the last of the marine bases up in the first corps had more. And some people said that about Army facilities around DaNang. But that wasn't my observation. What I saw was mostly segregated recreation where, like off post if there were brothels, bars and things like that, those were fairly segregated. There were exceptions in Saigon because they, in Saigon we had most of your, say people like me were doing the things I would do, working at MACV and stuff like that, those were integrated. Admittedly, not with that many minorities but for those who were there there weren't those frictions. There from my friends who were like in 11 Bravos and infantry companies, they didn't seem to have that problem either. It seemed like the only all that arose were a large number of people sitting on their ass waiting, thinking they might get killed but never really being sent anywhere. It was sort of the juxtaposition of boredom and terror of something immanently it happened. It keeps getting moved further and further back. In the mean time people were going kind of nuts.

Mark: You also mentioned fragging. I'm interested in the general question of officer/enlisted relationships and morale in the military in general. Did you see, personally, any, did you know of any examples of --

Boyer: I didn't actually see a fragging in progress. I didn't see that but I saw the moments after it being in progress things like that. I was at a place called Long Thonh which was a, well the other name for it was Bearcat. It was an Army air field, an LZ, it was actually the headquarters to the Aviation Brigade. It was midway between Saigon and Vung Tau and there I was out to visit a friend and there was a fragging one night. It was a latrine fragging of a higher EM. I don't know if he was an E-7, E-8, something like that. I don't know the total circumstances other than there was a generalized consensus that he was a pretty unpopular guy. No one was real surprised.

Mark: What made him so unpopular?

Boyer: He had a kind of zeal for, he apparently had some role to do with security and things like that. He used to run guys out on active patrols in the surrounding rubber plantation which they felt exposed them to unnecessary danger. Because this was something that connects back to morale and dissident GIs but this was something I found in my travels that on an informal basis often through wide avenues, sometimes simply a matter of respect for talking to a laundry lady or the girl who sold Cokes, there would be understandings filtered back between people at a small outpost like this and the locals that were not really looking for trouble and how about if you get word to other people that if they leave us alone, we'll leave them alone. There were places, especially by the end of '71, scattered all over the place there were these kind of informal cease fires that weren't blessed by the government. There was an awful lot of that.

Mark: Or were and a lieutenant or senior NCO could perhaps break that cease fire. So was that the most common incident or was it the only reason people were fragged?

Boyer: No, there were, endangering life was one. But a lot of it, this is hard to put in categories. I'll just enumerate the categories rather than try to establish percentages because I just don't know. I think one of the letters I gave you actually talked about numbers that I was aware of back at that time in a particular area of operation. I think for like one unit in about a six month time there were 40-some fraggings, one division. I don't know if you can extrapolate that on a broader basis but the thing is there was a lot of lying around it because as far as I know all of those casualties were attributed to being killed in action. All those names are on the "wall," not with an asterisk like Roger Maris. But anyway, back to the types, there was you put us in danger. That was a kind of prospect of the thing, that you might get us hurt. Then there was you DID get us hurt and I lost my friend. Then there was, that one might have been the biggest category, actual revenge for an action that was taken and resulted in a casualty. But then there were things maybe you could say were petty or maybe not. There were the cultural ones. There was the black on white and the white on black. Then there were the cultural ones. There were some particularly like Southern NCOs that just really did everything they could to invoke discipline, court martials, Article 15s on those who used pot. And so there were kind of wars, we used to call them wars between the heads and the juicers. That went on. And there were fraggings both ways. And those type of things. But there were then even pettier stuff to settle little scores, you screwed my woman you're dead.

Mark: The basic --

Boyer: You beat me at cards. Yeah, in an armed environment --

Mark: Those kinds of things are unique to the military. Although, you're right. In an armed environment--

Boyer: Yeah. It's just the thing is here everybody has easy access to weapons and explosives on a post and such. Now fragging is a misnomer because I think it implies that all these things occurred by the use of a fragmentation, grenade, and that's not always the case. There were other, it could have been a bayonet, it could have been a machete. A lot of times it was shooting, particularly the ones my friends tell me about that occurred in the field, in combat operations were typically shootings. And sometimes done quite adroitly, covered up by actually using a captured weapon from the other side to do the shooting so that all the holes, shell casings, and everything else conformed to the MO of the other side so then it could be easily attributed that way.

Mark: I see. I want to discuss relations with the Vietnamese, did you get much contact with the Vietnamese, these culture--

Boyer: Yes, I did. In fact, my 12 months in Vietnam, 11 of them I lived with a whole Vietnamese family.

Mark: A family?

Boyer: Yes. A whole extended family. It was multigenerational. Always three generations in the household, sometimes four. I went to, upon my arrival there, one of my activities that I was delegated to do at night for six weeks was a defense language institute course in Vietnamese. I didn't gain fluency. Yeah, I want through the language school. I can't say, I'd never be able to discuss the, you know, the Vieg religious works in Vietnamese.

Mark: But you could talk about the weather, for example.

Boyer: Yeah, and I could get food. And find, get directions and things like that. It was funny because the Vietnamese really appreciated the effort. Actually, it's not a difficult language to learn from a vocabulary or grammar standpoint. The real trick is in replicating the tonal quality.

Mark: It's a tonal language.

Boyer: Yeah, replicating them and then detecting them coming back at you. There's eight diacritical marks on vowels so it's quite tricky. But I got by and it helped me with Vietnamese people. It was, their faces would just light up even with the rudest form of trying to converse with them in Vietnamese.

Mark: So, how did you get hooked up in this sort of arrangement?

Boyer: This family? Well, it was a I guess in a way, you could say a sort of romantic arrangement. The older NCO that I worked with at the Intelligence Center, he had a Vietnamese girlfriend and he had me over at his house and his friend had a friend who I was introduced to and it sort of took off from there.

Mark: I see. And so, what was the, I'm trying to get at what sort of perspective from your perspective, was the Vietnamese family's perspective -- boy is that convoluted -- about the war?

Boyer: It was all over the map. There were, in this family, there were people in both armies. This woman I knew had brothers who were ARVN soldiers. She had brothers in the Vietcong. She had lost a sister who was a nurse with the Vietcong in the Tet offensive. But they were all over the map on everything. They were kind of mixed. Buddhists, Catholics. They kept, I think it was kind of standard almost like satirical thing, you read about Italians in World War II about trying to keep a hand in everything because not being sure which things, which way things are going to turn out. Probably the prudent thing to do under the circumstances.

Mark: At least you mentioned the different generations were living in a whole household.

Boyer: Yeah, she was a widow. Her husband had been an ARVN and killed in the war. She had children. She had her, in fact, she had a sister, it--her sister--was an older sister there who had already had children and grandchildren. And her mother who was there part of the time. So between like, yeah, it ran from the grandmother to at least one great-grandchild. And an uncle who was there periodically, too, who was a cab driver organizer. But because he periodically, he was a civilian with no connection to the government but periodically I'd find him hefting bags of revolvers and automatic pistols I suspect he had some underworld role in Saigon of some type. And there was a considerable amount of that. In that environment, there were a lot of people who weren't on any side but were still dangerous.

Mark: So, I assume the household had the shrine and, the whole--'cause you mention they were sort of mixed between Buddhist and Catholic traditions. Did you get any perspective on village life at all? How was, the Vietnamese villages were known to be close-knit and interdependent.

Boyer: This was evidence of a lot of displacement. It was only through talking with Net, that was her name, N-E-T, that was her name, she told me what it was like. She had grown up in the Mekong Delta and then moved closer to Saigon when she married and then she became a teacher. She talked about that stuff in a nostalgic form and told me a lot of things that were really born out later when I read things like "Fire in the Lake," "They were that Bad," "When Heaven and Earth Changed Places." A lot of traditional, were a kind of Confucianist. Family oriented, values oriented stuff. And it really helped me in a modest way get an understanding of what was going on around me. But it was fractured. I mean, people had lost lots of relatives, they had moved lots of times. People were reduced to things that were humiliating for them because it was a service sector that catered to Americans that was really raking in the dough. Everybody else even despite their professional credentials were all grinding in poverty. This woman had studied in

France and she couldn't make it hardly, you know, teaching. Whereas somebody like a cab driver was making more than like he minister of health of the country. [Laughter] As long as you got American tips you were doing okay.

Mark: The wild west as you said. Did you get indications of the wartime atrocities, it seems to me Calley was on trial at this time.

Boyer: Yes, it was. I don't know if the trial had started but it certainly, the knowledge was out there about it being pursued. And there were still ongoing investigations. There were still people crawling around in some of those places 'cause as it turned out there were others. They ran the gamut. The worst ones from what I was told and the information, 'cause where I worked actually these things often came through there. Guys would show them around. And then there were ones that were just harder to pin on anybody in particular. The other side did some. So it was a very ambiguous moral climate in that sense. But that was demoralizing too 'cause I think as I came out, I don't think anybody, even the most ardent hawks over there, really wanted to see themselves in those terms. It gave you pause. I saw that affect a lot of officers, carrier officers, deeply. It had turned into a mob and the mob was no longer under control. I think for people who made the military their life it was a painful experience to see that. At least that's what some of them would tell me -- that it was not what they had devoted their lives to.

Mark: I see. Well, I'm interested in two topics military-wise. One is, your excursions into Cambodia. Where did you go? You weren't supposed to be there, obviously.

Boyer: Well, one time, I shouldn't say just one time, several times I was supposed to be there. But other times I just hitched rides there. Mostly this Mayrang area, which is the central city, provincial capitol of the area, called the Parrots Beak.

Mark; Parrots Beak?

Boyer: Yeah. The border areas closest to Saigon, they had all those odd names, the Parrots Beak, the Elephants Ear, what was the other one? The Dogs Leg--forget--I think. Yeah, I think that was it. The odd configurations on the map. So Mayrang was the biggest city in that part of Cambodia and I'd go there periodically. It was sort of funny because you'd get the Stars and Stripes or copies of publications from back home that say US troops, Nixon says for the tenth time, there are no Americans in Cambodia. You're walking the streets, you'd see them by the hundreds. In fact I had a picture, I can't find it, I have a picture of me with a paper, I can't remember if it is New York Times or what it is, that says where, you know, Nixon, it was a quote from Nixon -- Americans out of Cambodia -- and I'm sitting near an old French road sign and it says Phnom Pen so many kilometers or something like that. Obviously I'd have to be in Cambodia to have the picture.

Mark: Was there evidence of the bombing did you say?

Boyer: Yes. Yes. It was quite extensive in places. In some areas it was so dense, B-52 bombing, it was rare to find craters that weren't contiguous to one another. In other words, the bombs dropped so close together, dropped so many times, that it was no longer flat, interrupted by a crater, it was just undulating craters.

Mark: And you'd see these all along the roadside or something?

Boyer: Mostly from the air. It was easier to see them from the air. That's when you could see them. Some places, literally stretching from horizon to horizon, of paths. Because the B-52s in these sweeps, I'm trying to remember if it was like a mile wide -- I think they'd do a thing like one mile wide, five miles long in a carpet. Then they'd do another section. And when they'd done all the sections they'd come back and start over again.

Mark: What were the targets?

Boyer: Ostensibly, they were to be, this was supposed, in the Cambodian operation, it was supposed to be the terminus of the Ho Chi Minh Trail. The area, you may recall from Nixon's war, when he invaded Cambodia, it was supposed to be the secret headquarters --

Mark: The Casbah

Boyer: Yeah, and although no one ever really established to anyone's satisfaction that they even ever existed. If it existed, it probably existed under the 25th Infantry's headquarters in Chu Chi, underground. But, yes, they thought they were bombing something over there and bombing the trails. You probably know this from your studying, it wasn't really just one trail. It was networks of trails. But it was another exercise in American self-deception, an euphemism because we did this even where I worked -- you'd get these reports and then we'd get stuff ready for MACV which I assume they in turn gave to the press and stuff like that. The thing would start out where, say you had to cross some river or down in the Mekong, maybe two dozen sampans were carrying bags of rice across and there was an F105 up in the air or a Cobra gunship and and FO spots this thing and they don't have anything better to drop it on that day so they go waste these little boats with the rice on them. And by the time that filters up the chain it becomes supply barges. And then, like where there is a, where somebody cut down a big, what would it be, mahogany tree or something like that across a mountain stream so they could have a foot patch across it, they'd bomb that and major bridge taken out. This was the type of lie. That's why I think it was frustrated because one could wonder how could this area be bombed so often? It was because mainly things they were bombing were so replaceable and of so little consequence. Bombing bicycles and you know.

Mark: Did you see any comparable sites in South Vietnam when you were—

Boyer: Bombing?

Mark: --of the devastation?

Boyer: Yeah, in the Mekong Delta particularly. Heavy, heavy bombing there. I think in the Mekong Delta the reason it was so obvious is because the ecology is so sensitive, it's a wetland, and the craters stay there a long time 'cause they fill in with water. In fact, I have photos of that somewhere in here where it's just, it looks like somebody's made dozens and dozens of ponds across this little piece of acreage. It's not ponds at all. It's just shell holes.

Mark: They stopped making Agent Orange in '71.

Boyer: I don't know the precise date. Supposedly, we were in a place in the Run Sat Special Zone one time where it did get sprayed. We were on the ground and this most came filtering down. Somebody said that's what it was. I don't know. In adjacent areas it was really heavily defoliated. I have some of those photos here too.

Mark: You want to crack those open?

Boyer: I'll get into this.

Mark: They other operational thing I wanted to cover was the Lam Sun Operation.

Boyer: Lam Sun 719.

Mark: This took place in 1971.

Boyer: Yes.

Mark: Now, when you first got to Vietnam, was the planning underway for this? Did you know it was--

Boyer: Not that come, when I got there I didn't know about it. But things that happened while I was there led me to suspect it was in the planning stages. Probably in conjunction with the Cambodian invasion. They were probably thought of as two things at the time. Why they were separated in time, if that was a conscience decision or if it was politics that forced them to move it back. But my role in it, the active planning of the final stages of it, didn't become apparent until probably about October of '70. It became apparent 'cause that's when we started seeing the requests coming across our desks where people wanted stuff updated about particular areas. It was a big telegraph to us because when they started to ask about -- well, if 500 trucks went up this road on a rainy day, will it still be passable for armor to come -- you know, that's these hypothetical get posed.

Mark: I see. What were the goals of this operation?

Boyer: It was like Cambodia in a sense it was to go in and interject NVA units, destroy their base camps, and hamper their ability to wage war in Vietnam. But, like with the Cambodia, they proved elusive in some respects and unlike Cambodia though the US never committed enough ground strength itself and as a result the South Vietnamese really got hammered in a bad way.

Mark: Yeah, it's my understanding that it was largely a South Vietnamese operation.

Boyer: Yeah. There were Americans there but they weren't, they didn't commit any full divisions. There was a--there were barely any Marines left in Vietnam at this stage but for some odd reason they did commit a battalion of Marines in this invasion. That's almost ludicrous to think that one battalion could turn the course in an area where there were umpteen divisions of NVA. I don't know why that was done. There were lots of Special Forces units employed in there. I knew Rangers who had gone in and things like that. They had--they moved the 5th Mechanized right up to the border. They had on loan a number of helicopter assault units from the 1st Cav. up there. But all those units did was pound across the border and artillery—

End Tape 1 Side B

Boyer: ---in with the 1st Cav. ferry people in and out. Then the NVA set up kind of diversionary stuff trying to sweep around side, come down through the DMV and stuff like that. But they on the other hand were never able to pull off another Khe Sanh or Dien Bien Phu in that area. So it was kind of a big standoff.

Mark: I see. And you, personally, went up to the battle area? I'm interested in what you saw and your perspective from behind the lines.

Boyer: Well, a lot of chaos. It was among the 5th Mech. in particular, there was, they had severe discipline problems by this time. You probably know that in units like the 1st Cav., 1st Infantry, 25th Infantry, there had been a kind of mutinous type tyings. That had not occurred in the 5th Mech. up until this time and then in this operation stuff like that did start to crop up.

Mark: Things like what? Fragging? [unintelligible] problems?

Boyer: Fraggings and sit-downs. Widespread insubordination, unwillingness to do things. I came upon a scene near the rock pile where there was some small scale NVA unit on a hill sniping, and things like that, and officers were, this one company commander was urging his men up -- apparently some had gone up and got shot. We happened upon this place right in the middle of this thing and they finally got to the stage where they kind of took this guy over in a shell crater and just beat the shit out of him. I don't, we left then so I don't know if it went even further later on or what. But they had just had a belly full of it. It was, did you ever see, you've probably seen *Apocalypse Now*?

Mark: Yeah, I've seen that.

Boyer: There's that scene in there where they're going up the river to that place where the bridge is. This operation was that bridge. Arrived there and Martin Sheen is asking if there's anybody in charge and nobody's in charge. It's just kind of random screaming and shooting in the night. That's what it was like in that forward area at that time. Not very impressive from a military standpoint.

Mark: Certainly not the impression you get from a World War II movie.

Boyer: No.

Mark: Okay. I want to move on, unless you have anything you want to add, I'm going to move on to the GI activism and anti-war sentiment among the troops in Vietnam.

Boyer: Sure, we better. It's getting late in the day.

Mark: If you want to split this up. Do you want to do this some other time, that's fine with me. I've done that.

Boyer: Yeah, maybe we should. I guess I wasn't sure how long -- did we set a time?

Mark: No. I tell people --

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Mark: Okay. Today's date is, geeze what is it? January the 24th, 1995 and we're continuing the oral history interview with Mr. Dennis Boyer of Dodgeville, Wisconsin. A veteran of the Vietnam War. Good afternoon, once again. Welcome back. Happy New Year.

Boyer: Good afternoon, Mark.

Mark: I decided to start out today's session with catching up on some business from the first portion of the interview which had slipped both of our minds at the time. And Dennis went ahead and made some notes on some topics and so we can just cover those right now.

Boyer: Okay. The thing that I think we failed to get into the last time, one of the items anyway, was about just how people occupied their free time. In the places I was at and how I might have done that. I think that's connected, partly, to the substance abuse problems and alcohol problems. There was a fair amount of concentration on, if you were in units that got to spend some time in the rear, on bar life. Both club on-post and stuff off-post as well. Although there was a fair amount of restrictions on that. A fair amount of trouble with off-limits areas. Things like that. But it was widely unobserved by GIs anyway so that it revolved around bars, brothels, things like that. On the upside --

Mark: These were ignored among the GIs?

Boyer: Yes.

Mark: Were the officers aware of this--did they participate in this sort of thing?

Boyer: Well, it was a mixed picture. There were some who didn't care, there were some who cared a great deal. But, I think in the period we're talking about '70, '71, authority had broken down sufficiently it was very difficult for them to do things about this type of activity. And to the point where, especially with junior grade officers, they were so much, you know, they were a product of campuses often through ROTC, very loose attitudes, so it wasn't uncommon for them to go on forays. It wasn't uncommon for enlisted men to loan them fatigue shirts with enlisted men insignia on them so that they wouldn't be standing out in a crowd in some of the places we went to.

Mark: I see. Did you run across any old-timers there who, perhaps, would have noticed the deterioration in morale and the increase in sorts of activities. Did you get a sense of that when you were there?

Boyer: Yeah.

Mark: It's my understanding that that sort of problems got much worse as time went on.

Boyer: There was a guy I wanted to mention when we get into the part of actually talking about individual personalities, people you dealt with. There was one senior NCO who had been in Vietnam at that point in time he had 17 years in the service and had spent almost 10 of them in Vietnam. So he had an opportunity to see an evolution over time and as far as he could tell me he had seen, up to that point, had seen actually about 3 or 4 distinct periods on how this type of thing was viewed or how the whole matter of discipline and order in the military was viewed and he thought we were really into the kind of collapse stage by '71.

Mark: I see.

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Boyer: --moving papers in and out and I was kind of sitting back from my notes and I could see them.

Mark: Don't be conscious of the microphone. Okay. I have a question on my mind that kind of escaped me.

Boyer: We were back on the matter of how senior people or people with experience would have viewed the evolution of things over time. He really saw a lot of changes in that. I always had the perception that at least there were three categories. There were the early advisor stage, that was one type of war. Then there was the pre-Tet of '68 war and the post-Tet war '68 war. The minimum, some people might say there were four or five different ways it could have been sliced. But you could really see that the outlook of enlisted men really changed after '68. They were just more inclined to view things from on top cynically.

Mark: As for drug use. Did you get a sense of who did it and who didn't?

Boyer: Well, it was --

Mark: Was there a sharp delineation there?

Boyer: Well, drug use was fairly pervasive. I would, I hate to, I'd have to rely on generalizations. But just so people would understand that these things are generalizations. It seemed that the substance of choice was defined by groups. And as a result you found people who came from more ore less white, middle-class backgrounds, perhaps some college, marijuana was fairly prevalent there. And then you kind of found you got into some people more minority, inner-city backgrounds, some of the other things were more acceptable there. The harder stuff. Mostly in the form of opiates. Then you had the kind of, in the military there's a kind of huge rural Southern white culture, and alcohol was the clear drug of choice and they seemed more juiced up than anybody else practically.

Mark: That's what I was going to ask. It's my understanding that there's a distinction between the juicers and the --

Boyer: Heads, they're often referred to.

Mark: --heads. That's the term.

Boyer: Yes. That really was there. And somewhat even reflected among officers. I don't think it was widespread drug use among officers, but a fair amount of casual marijuana use. In fact, they often used it and asked the men to procure it because they didn't want to be seen on the street in the actual transaction, which was fairly open when you got down in a place like Saigon or Vung Tau or DaNang. Drugs were sold openly on the street in bags. It wasn't a very covert atmosphere at all.

Mark: Substance abuse is just one measure of the decline in morale and discipline. What about incidents of fragging or less serious infringements on military courtesy and these kinds of things. Did that seem to get worse to you when you were there?

Boyer: It seemed to. And I hear, in this area I'm not proceeding on the basis of actually been a party to any type of thing like that, but even where I worked we actually collected data on that and, while I don't have the memory of precise numbers, I do recall that there was some sense of alarm that it was accelerating. Especially into the year '71 when the ground war really had wound down considerably, there was still quite a few senior NCOs and officers in the field who were getting hurt and the suspicion was it wasn't through hostile circumstances. And yet, as far as investigation, a lot of times there wasn't much follow-up and there wasn't any way to really dispute it. So I have a feeling that among the casualties say of senior NCOs and officers in the latter parts of that war, while their families may have been told it was due to hostile action, I think that there could be a case made that wasn't the case in at least a significant number of cases. The one unit that we worked the most closely with, the 1st Air Cavalry, they seemed to have quite a few of these things where it was significant. I mean double digits, like over a period of months, they might have had a dozen, couple dozen fragging type things. Of course, I'm not separating out the ones, the attempts, the woundings, and the actual killings. I don't have the recall for just how that broke down. But it was significant. There were some people who were saying that it was, that there might have been totally, in all the units, it might have run over into the hundreds.

Mark: We've hinted at this before, but I'm interested in your direct comments on what attributed to these sorts of discipline problems.

Boyer: The ones that I know the most about evolved around operational things where there was a feeling, a kind of grass roots feeling, that poor decisions had been made and people were being put at risk, or had already been put at risk and incurred casualties and yet they were being sent back in one more brainless attempt. And that often would precipitate it. Sometimes, I think it can be broken down to a couple categories. Some of it was precipitated right in the operational context. Those are probably the ones most covered up. Then there were others that was more back in the rear where vengeance was taken. That was often sometimes taken by buddies of those who had been killed. Here again, I'm proceeding mostly on, this is anecdotal type of stuff, kind of in the EM club talk about what had happened. Some of the circumstances aren't really known. In the rear, it took a couple of forms. It was usually, it really was fragging is a big generic area. Fragging in the rear usually was a fragging in the sense it was a grenade, usually under a bunk, you were in a latrine, or in some other confined space environment. In the field, fragging was any hostile action that could have taken. In fact, in the field it was more often a shooting than an actual grenade.

Mark: Race problems. Race was a problem?

Boyer: Yes it was. Especially in some units. And I'm not sure, I never satisfied for myself what was the distinction that underlied why it occurred in one place and not another. I have my suspicions it may have had a lot to do with senior NCOs, given that a large number of them were from the rural South. I had some guesses into that, what might have inspired some of it. But we had a unit, for example, that had very little in the way of race friction but on the other hand we didn't have a very large minority representation. And those that we did tended to come, not from poor backgrounds. In fact, they tended to be from like the black middle-class, essentially. So that I think might have been part of it. But there were other units that were combat units that seemed very cohesive and very little problems. And others, on the other hand, where it was virtual warfare right within the unit. And there I think it was just a lot of different sociological patterns that probably gave rise to it.

Mark: What sort of behaviors would indicate this sort of war-like situation. As you described that?

Boyer: There were places, particularly -- do I make reference to that, I can't remember. There were places, particularly around DaNang, where it was fairly widely known from I think from '69 onward that place around DaNang really got pulverized and there were times when it turned into actual shooting and there had to be intervention through Military Police and sometimes even Special Forces units to keep people apart. That happened periodically. But on -- that was kind of exceptional. But on the lower level, it was mostly in the bars and in the brothels and over a period of time I think what happened was almost a Jim Crow situation in those places. It got to the point, from both what I observed and then with those who had the longer perspective were essentially they became black bars and white bars; black brothels and white brothels. And so there was a delineation in that. In a way I guess you could say it helped diffuse things, too, by keeping people apart and less opportunity for friction. Especially, when they're under the influence the opportunity ran pretty high. But then in an interpersonal sense, things were very, very touchy. People could perceive on both sides, perceive slights or insults and in a context where everyone was armed, that's a fairly volatile situation. There was a, I had a barracks episode myself although I was rarely in the barracks. I had a place there but didn't prefer to be there and usually avoided it. One evening the, we had a black supply guy with our unit and he woke me up by sticking the flash suppresser of his M16 up my nostril. And there was --

Mark: What prompted this?

Boyer: That was the real kind of situation there because he made some wild claim that I found totally unintelligible, kind of stringing together of nonsequitors that I was never able to make sense of. I sort of think it was either drugs or that, literally, he mistook me for somebody else. And I was around so rarely, that's why it seemed so odd to me. But it was a very scary episode, nevertheless. [laugh]

Mark: Were these problems worse in certain branches of the service? For example, did the Army have more problems than the Air Force? Was this problem pretty much all of the service?

Boyer: I think the Army had the biggest problem. Although I'm told the Marines had it in some places. The Army, it was very visible. I think all the branches had some of it. And the Army was more visible and I think, from what I could tell, it was attributable to the sociology of conscription and recruitment. I think especially as the war wound on, they were having trouble filling those quotas and they dip further and further into the tank in a way, to the point where, at least this is what I was told by people in infantry units, they were getting a lot of people for whom the Army was a mode of alternative sentencing for the criminal justice system. And that's a prescription for problems, too.

Mark: Some conservatives would argue that the anti-war movement injured morale significantly. Was that your sense when you were over there?

Boyer: No. I could allow for how that might have been possible at some stage in the war, perhaps pre-Tet. But it's my perception that by the time I was there almost everyone with the potential to become disaffected was disaffected almost upon arrival. [laugh] I do recall one Major who was close to 40 years old expressing a view that the war protesters were hurting the effort but other than that I didn't hear that from anybody else. In fact, maybe it was atypical but I knew a fair number of people who had been war protesters before their arrival and intended to be war protesters upon their return to the United States. So that, yeah, it's hard for me to get the perspective of time to really know if what I saw and who I dealt with, just how representative that was because I was in a unit where there was a fair amount of disaffection and then return to anti, essentially an anti-war veterans group. I tend to know--I tended to know people while I was in and after I was out who didn't like what was going on.

Mark: I see.

Boyer: Some of them weren't necessarily anti-military, but were nevertheless thought the whole thing was just one big screw up.

Mark: I see. Did you know any sort of pro-war sentiment at all? You know, we've got to stop the Communists and all this kind of thing?

Boyer: When I first went in the military I heard some of that. By the time I got to Vietnam I wasn't hearing that except in some rare circumstances. I had, there was no one in the unit I served with who was like that. From the Colonel on down, you could tell the officers didn't believe in what we were doing. But we did occasionally in an operational context, run into people who were like that. Those were often prime candidates for fraggings and they were often regarded almost as sociopathic characters because, while they use that kind of veneer of a kind of patriotism, political objectives, things like that, there was a fair amount of suspicion that they just got off on what was going on. That wasn't viewed as healthy because they were often seen as risk takers and likely to put other people at risk as well. So by the latter stages of the war I think when somebody like that became obvious it was kind like almost a red flag.

Mark: At the time you were the U.S. was gradually withdrawing troops.

Boyer: Yes.

Mark: And I'm interested in your --

[Problem with the tape, can not make out Mark's question]

Boyer: We were talking about the withdrawals.

Mark: This is going up much more now. That seems to be my problem. Okay.

Boyer: Yeah, on the matter of withdrawals as an element of morale. The, I think the thing there was very personally focused in terms of, at least I heard it articulated by individuals repeatedly, and that was the fear of being among the last people there. There was an assumption that as things wound down things would turn out to be kind of apocalyptic. Actually, what ran through most imaginations of most people and I would admit myself too, that there would be a conclusion far more convulsive than it actually turned out to be. 'Cause it was kind of more like a whimper than a bang as it turned out. But I think there was the assumption it would get down to a division or two with a bunch of support people and they'd literally have to shoot their way out. And with the unit I worked with, there were actually contingencies for that. There were contingencies from everything, scenarios of the South Vietnamese Army turning on us and us having to shoot our way out from them to the coast. That what was in the back of a lot of minds that it would get down to the point where we there but so few it wasn't really defensible and people would get overrun.

Mark: I see.

Boyer: So that was a real moral -- it was often said no one wants to be the last person to die here. You heard that almost weekly during the time I was there.

Mark: There were other things you wanted to touch on?

Boyer: Yeah, see, it said describe some of the men in your unit and how I would characterize them. We had a wide variety of people from technical backgrounds and, since this was a thing that dealt with intelligence mostly of a scientific nature we had everything from geologists to hydrologists, things like that. So among our officers they tended to be products of physical science graduate schools but the enlisted men were kind of atypical, too. I think that might put some of my other remarks in context. We had a lot of Army Spec 4s attached to the unit that were Ph.D.s, a lot of philosophy Ph.D.s in our unit who were enlisted men. They had a Spec 5 who was--with a doctorate in art, a landscape architecture.

Mark: How did these guys wind up as enlisted men in the Army?

Boyer: I think mostly because their attitudes about the military precluded them rising to the commissioned ranks.

Mark: Were they draftees or volunteers?

Boyer: They were either draftees or volunteers under pressure, conscription. That was typical mode for them. Most of them weren't malcontents that were threatened with Article 15s constantly. They were just people who didn't want to be where they were at but let everybody know it and where just kind of doing their time. Not outright rebellion but constant grumbling. I was actually, it was funny given what I've done both back there and since, that I was more of a model soldier than most of them. [laughter] 'Cause I actually made some effort to do what I was told even though I might register a protest against it. And we had MBAs, enlisted men, things like that. I don't know, it's funny when you kind of consider the Dan Quale scenario, I don't know how these people failed to have themselves protected so I can't say that the middle-class was totally successful in evading the war.

Mark: Yeah. I was going to ask where they originated from. Get a sense of their class background.

Boyer: Most of these people tended to be middle-class, even some upper-middle-class. I've heard some things about how there might have been a father who could have had influence to get him out and declined to do so because of this brand of politics. He might have been some muckety-muck in the Republican Party or some of that sort of thing. Some of whom whose fathers thought it would be a character building experience and other stuff like that. But by and large the people I served with in that particular unit I think were—much--better off than most average Americans.

Mark: They certainly seemed to be much better educated.

Boyer: Yeah, I think that was the case. Of course one could make the case that the public institutions of higher learning were in better shape and more accessible in those days than they are now. That could definitely be part of, too.

Mark: Were there regional distinctions? Were there many Southerners? Or a lot of East Coast--

Boyer: It's my perception in the military as a whole there were a lot of Southerners. And the units we worked with we saw a lot of Southerners. But in our particular unit, there were very few. We had one First Lieutenant, geologist, from Arkansas, and that was, I believe the sole Southerner in our unit. It tended to be East and West coast people by and large. We didn't even have many Midwesterns. We had one Lieutenant from LaCrosse, a fellow whose last name was Johnson, as I recall. He was, his background was in soil mechanics, I believe. He did studies for trafficability for armored, thing like that.

Mark: Do you thing that was a function of class? For example, the South is known as the poorest--its, generally, it's considered the poorest part of the country, or certainly was at the time. Do you think that was simply a matter of class?

Boyer: Well, I think that was an element. But I think that's also some regional patterns, politically and how people perceive the military and how they perceive other opportunities. I think for a lot of Southerners, the military was an opportunity. On the other hand in the South, it was far greater level of support for the military as an institution. And when you connect it with what happened through years and years of the congressional seniority system, the very fact that the installations were basically down there, too. It was probably an inter-related phenomena with a lot of aspects.

Mark: You mentioned before that there was one African American in your unit. That was it?

Boyer: Yes. One in our unit and one Latino man as well. The Latino man was in a different situation, too. He was like an assistant cartographer and he had, his background was very poor, Barrio, Los Angeles-type upbringing. There were a lot of cultural hurdles for him and he was often the brunt of a lot of harassment and discipline. Not from other enlisted men. It wasn't racist reaction to him. It was a lot of--he kind of had a Cheech Martin approach to things with officers and as a result he was really kind of almost blowing marijuana smoke in their face half the time, and he was in and out of Article 15s and other types of infractions periodically. He was a nice guy.

Mark: And everyone pretty much got along in the work place, otherwise?

Boyer: Yeah, we did. We had some friction with one officer when I was there. In the first three months we had a lieutenant, a captain there in our one section, the train section, who really was kind of a hard ass but not from a military perspective. It was more kind of a, most people thought it was kind of a character disorder. It was sort of like he was just a hostile person with lots of agendas. It didn't really have anything to do with the war, that he would have been a jerk anywhere you had met him.

Mark: You do run across those sometimes.

Boyer: Yeah, you do.

Mark: Now, in a unit such as yours, I would have expected many more gung-ho types I guess. It doesn't seem to have been the case at all.

Boyer: No. We had very little of that. Though I could tell-- you could actually tell from files and other kinds of artifacts that at one time it would have been so. In the evolutionary sense because frequently I'd have to go back to a case file or study that had been done and in between the lines you had that sense that there was actually a fair amount of enthusiasm for what was being done say mid-'60s or so.

Mark: And that wasn't the case when you were there?

Boyer: No. It really was kind of the mood of the last one out turn off the light. Although the unit did go on for I think about another year and a half after I left when they finally folded it down.

Mark: Something else?

Boyer: I don't know how much to get in about these other personalities. I think maybe I'll skip over that part of it. The other thing, question we didn't hit before was about the "describe departure and return overseas." That's probably a more significant question for people from other wars.

Mark: As I recall we hadn't left yet anyway.

Boyer: That's true. That's the next topic I would get into. So if you have any other stuff—

Mark: No. I'm interested in the GI anti-war activism in Vietnam.

Boyer: In Vietnam. There were out of Long Binh, there was a small group of people I got to know in Washington, D.C. that were associated with the American Servicemen's Union. And we'd have periodic get-togethers in Saigon and sometimes elsewhere we could arrange like in country R&Rs at Vung Tau or Cam Rahn Bay Bay. That was one of the things that kind of fueled it, too. I don't think many people are aware of the amount of the kind of travel or touring that was possible in Vietnam. It was a kind of open season in a way. It took me a number of months to find out that if I weren't on duty on a particular day I could go out to the helipad at Tan Son Nhut or up at Bien Hoa or Long Binh and just wait for flights going anywhere. I went into Cambodia like, I don't know, maybe a half dozen or more time unauthorized. I just went there with people who happened to be going there. I did that all over. So I was kind of a tourist in that sense. That's where a lot of my pictures came from. But that was used to advantage by people who were doing GI work. There was one thing that I did want to mention about that that I think was significant after I thought about it. It's funny because I didn't think about this until after we started talking, but I can really, looking back, I can see there was a deep cleft in that type of those people who were interested in those things because, I guess there was a group of people who were really doing it out of a broader political perspective and looking back now I can see there were other people who were more aptly just anti-authoritarian. That it was just, it was sort of like this is, it was almost like a continuation of rebellion against parental authority. And so it was that going on and when I started to think about who said what and what would be decided to be done, I can see that's what it really came down to.

Mark: Do you have any personal guesstimate as to the composition, like how many, what percentage of people were politically dedicated? How many --

Boyer: I guess my rough perception it was almost equally divided. And that's probably the reason it didn't really conclusively get resolved. That it was an inability to achieve consensus. But almost everything of that era, anti-war was marked by those same phenomena as lots of arguments over process and decision making. And the tension between nonviolent protest and education versus disruptions, sabotage, and thing of that nature. That was a real fine line because even some of our hot heads recognized that if it turned into overt acts of violence that it wouldn't take long for people to get rounded up and thrown in the stockades. But nevertheless those things occurred. And almost like in the environmental movement, it was kind of, it had to be done by individuals in a fairly covert matter.

Mark: What sort of things occurred in country?

Boyer: Oh, everything from letting the supplies vulnerable to the elements and deterioration. We had people right in our unit that I know performed improper data entry. This was in the days when intelligence was done by punch card entry. And I know there were people who sat a keyboards and just typed random characters into things to screw them up. Instead of what was supposed to be a long technical analyses, say like barometric pressures over target sites or anything like that. It would just be random numbers.

Mark: And the logic behind these sorts of actions was to disrupt the war effort in some way?

Boyer: I think that was part of the justification. But a lot of it was kind of a getting back too. It had a fair amount of rebellion. It was sort of like sticking it in their ear, that sort of thing. Telling me to do this and I don't believe in what they're doing, the hell with it. There was more serious stuff, too. Some of the guys I got to know through the GI movement and later on through the anti-war veterans movement, made me aware of actually more thought out, massive acts of sabotage. I'm pretty sure that between two and three aircraft carriers were prevented from sailing to the Tonkin Gulf by things that were done to them mechanically. The Constellation, for example, out of the West coast, someone injured the main gear and when they finally uncovered that there was some really humongous four foot monkey wrenches down in the drive shaft. I'm sure they didn't just drop down there.

[Laughter]

Mark: They don't appear out of thin air.

Boyer: Yeah, they kept that one, I think that held that one up four months for an overhaul.

Mark: Now, these are individual acts?

Boyer: Yes.

Mark: On the organizational level, say the American Servicemen's Union, what sort of plans or policies did the group have, if any? What was its anti-war position and policy? How-- did it have a plan to carry these out?

Boyer: Well, they did a couple of things. And it wasn't a well thought out and it wasn't widely observed because first of all, just to be in Vietnam went against the policy of the American Servicemen's Union because their chief strategy was to refuse movement. That's what they really concentrated on in the U. S. Getting people to refuse reassignment. So if you were there to begin with, obviously you had not observed step one. But there was a wide undercurrent of people who thought that that was the wrong attitude. They saw some futility in that of having people visibly refuse to go and as their trials proceeded it attracted attention that there were soldiers who, that weren't about to do that. At the same time there was a fairly large school of thought, I think maybe even a majority who thought that as far as, that the military was kind of cracking under the weight of noncooperation and just outright doofus behavior and that actually if you went there, fucked it up some, that it would be even more effective than protesting it.

Mark: I see.

Boyer: One kind of advocate of it, we had kind of a godfather for this philosophy in the form of a World War II veteran by the name of Fred Halstad. He actually got to tour Vietnam and influenced Vietnam veterans as he, in the guise of the vice-presidential candidate of the Socialist Worker's Party, he actually took the Pentagon to court to give him the same tour status as candidates of major parties. And he went around actually enunciating this: Come to Vietnam, make a mess of it. He came out of the Soldiers and Sailors movements after World War II of the, to bring our boys home effort. That was a chapter, until I got to know him, I had no knowledge of, that that had gone on in late '45-'46 that were major protests. Mostly in Asia, in ports, I heard even Shanghai and Taiwan and places like that. And he was involved in those. He was the guy who early on 'cause he was involved in the anti-war movement from probably '61 on, he was the one who tried to persuade the rest of the anti-war movement. Yeah set up a soldiers group, Yeah set up a veterans group, and ultimately he prevailed. His thinking I think influenced those things.

Mark: You met him after the war, I assume?

Boyer: Yeah, but I knew people when I was in who had actually heard him in place. It was almost kind of a folklore quality to it in the GI movement that he had come through and talked to people. He was an interesting guy. Actually, quite a nice guy considering he came from a kind of sectarian, rigid ideologue background. In the end, I think they booted him out probably because he wasn't rigid enough or something.

Mark: You mentioned the American Servicemen's Union would have meetings. What sort of business transpired at the meetings?

Boyer: Anything, it would be anywhere from like three or four to maybe at the most two dozen and it was the type of thing that you'd almost observe in campus politics because of the one thing, the way the military worked out assignments really worked against serious organizing. And I could see where serious organizing might have been possible in some prior wars where whole units made movements, you knew everybody. But it was a coming and going. So it was a lot of that. Then coupled with a fair amount of kind of punitive transfers precisely because of these activities and sometimes confinements to the post and other disciplinary actions. That kind of ate into the attendance. But so it could be, I don't think I ever saw anything with more than about two dozen people in it. Even though at any given time, say in the complex of Benwa, Longbin, Tan Son Nhut, roughly--you might say an area of about 20 by 20 miles where there were large concentrations of Americans there might probably about one-fifth of U.S. forces in Vietnam were in that small area because of the amount of support facilities there, that we might have known of maybe around 100 people that were inclined our way openly at any given point in time. It was, because of a lot of reasons, it was never possible to get everybody in one place.

Mark: I see. One of the questions I wanted to ask was, despite the large scale disgruntlement with service, groups such as the ASU seemed fairly small.

Boyer: Yeah. Well, it depends how you define that. I think the --

Mark: Organizationally.

Boyer: --Organizationally. I think that's a characteristic of a specific impoverishment of all American culture. I've noticed that in almost everything I've done in my life that it's, even if you go back to study the Revolutionary War, how few Americans were actually involved in it. I think that's kind of astounding to me too given the grievances that were going on. I think that's an unfortunate quality of life that there's always only a few who go to meetings and the few that come there that's who runs the direction things go. And that's one of the other kind of paradoxes of the politics we end up with.

Mark: --kind of like Congress.

Boyer: Yeah.

Mark: Was there much fear of being involved in such a thing? I'm interested in how the military perceived it, of how much they knew about it, and what their policies were. Did that, perhaps, keep people away?

Boyer: I think there was some of that. But at the same time, I think it was lessening as time went on. I think, as I read some of the things later on by say the Colonel Herberts and others who wrote for the war college journals and stuff like that, there was a concern by thinking people that if the war went on long enough that it would institutionalize this kind of dissatisfaction and I'm sure they kept an eye on it. After my Vietnam Veterans Against the War experience, now with the benefit of that hindsight, I bet that there was several people functioning for like the military police or OSI or other branches of internal security, they were probably right in those meetings from time to time. It wouldn't surprise me at all. Yeah, some people were kept away. On the other hand, there was an increasing phenomena of an attitude that what are they going to do to me? Send me to Vietnam? It was sort of like, the worst had already happened; there wasn't that much more that could be done to one if you were there, so there was that. I think if, I get back to that point, if people didn't come in large enough numbers, it was because Americans aren't joiners. Some didn't have the benefit of belonging to activist type things in their civilian life. They didn't -- political parties are weak in our culture -- it's just a wide, you know, and then the fact that people on their off-duty time preferred to go get laid.

Mark: Better things to do I suppose.

Boyer: That was a large part of it.

Mark: I'm still interested in the organizational dynamics. If you could describe a typical meeting. How does it start, what went on.

Boyer: Well, that was often a problem. There was, no thing that I ever attended in Vietnam was there any easy or instant agreement on what was going to be, how a meeting was going to be conducted or what the agenda would be. It was, there was often wrangling, sometimes to the point where that totally consumed the whole amount of time allotted for the meeting so that nothing of substances was reached. I'm sad to report that. That happened from time to time. And it was a kind of, usually it was, because these were all young people with very little experience, often with high hormone levels, it became a shouting matches often about tactics. And then the motivations of those espousing tactics. It often would start off somebody would say well, we ought to do, you know, blow up such and such. Somebody would say something like some colonel so and so ought to get blown away. Then there'd be the response to that. People would say holy shit, want us to go to Leavenworth for the rest of our life? And that would sometimes go on for a lengthy period of time. What worked best because there was no one with, there was hardly anyone there with any prior experience in chairing a meeting or any parliamentary procedure--

Mark: I assume there were no minutes taken or anything.

Boyer: No. In fact, there were suggestions to do that from time to time and that would be debated on infinitem and never be conclusively resolved either. Periodically, somebody would attempt to kind of summarize what had happened at a prior thing. But to tell you the truth, the only things that effectively worked were when the ASU provided some sort of material for, that people could crystallize around. Sometimes it would be something graphic like a little sticker. We'd get several thousand of those and it would often have some slogan of protest, like the symbol with the helmet, FTA, fuck the Army. And so everybody would get a big packet of those and were supposed to stick them everywhere they went and that type of, that was the kind of easy stuff to resolve. Or sometimes there would be like petition type things that would be circulated and that was kind of easy. To kind of go with the flow. But to tell you the truth, for those of us who were there, it was very difficult to come to agreement on what to do and usually people just kind of decided to go back and continue on what they were doing. For me that took the form, since there were several guys in my unit with like-minded views, we had our own kind of branch starting in '71, our own branch of the McGovern campaign in Vietnam. It actually proved somewhat useful, that ill-fated campaign as far as anything was useful for it. But we did assemble quite a committee of veterans on his behalf out of those people. I had a lot of fun, too. We had his bumper stickers all over Hueys and jeeps and deuce-and-a-half

[End Tape 2, Side A]

Boyer: --and stuff like that so--

Mark: I'm interested in the connections between the ASU in Vietnam and the movement back in the States. You mentioned they would perhaps supply you with materials or something?

Boyer: Uh hum.

Mark: Much connection between--

Boyer: Not in a formal way because the ASU, as I, I didn't know this at the time, but it didn't really have an organizational life of its own. It was subject to a lot of political manipulation. When it first got started it ostensibly was independent even though somebody from a left-wing party provided a lot of the inspiration. One of his rivals in another left-wing party, which would have been the Workers World Party, kind of early on I think more or less seized control of the entire apparatus. I don't thing that was something commonly known to rank and file GIs at that time but it was, with the benefit of hindsight, I see that that was probably the case. That by the time I was involved in it, it was probably a wholly owned subsidiary of the Workers World Party. As a result it wasn't--when you--I know that from my subsequent politic life, when you establish fronts you don't necessarily care about the organizational health of the front. It's there to be used and when you don't need it, throw it aside or discard it entirely. And so that would be lapses, there would be kind of fits and starts that we were supposed to do something or educate ourselves about something and then six months later some new information would come down in a totally different direction. So there was a lot of insistent stuff that was hard for, you know, like a 20-year old like me to even fathom what the hell was going on with it.

Mark: I see.

Boyer: But periodically we'd get stuff from them. But the really unifying thing was their paper. I'd say that was the most cohesive thing. 'Cause a large function of what the GI movement did wasn't planned action or concrete acts that it took. It was kind of a--I think the primary attribute level of it was kind of a fellowship. Kind of a way of letting people who felt that way know they weren't alone. The paper reached a lot of places, to guys in really isolated spots. Radar things in Iceland, out on ships at sea, and things like that.

Mark: Now in the American Servicemen's Union, was there any talk about strike or anything--

Boyer: Or collective bargaining or anything like that?

Mark: Yeah. How much of a labor union was it?

Boyer: I don't think it ever got to a point where that was seriously on the agenda. It was sometimes talked about in their materials and I think there were people who were attracted to it, for the possibilities of that kind of thing, but it, I'm not aware of any instance where they were the pivotal group in say raising a mass demand and forcing say a base commander to negotiate with them. I know of no such thing like that. Even though I did hear that something like that occurred ad hoc, totally unorganized basis. But what I think happened with their name, it flew out, it flowed out of a kind of a left background and as a result you had, you had a ton of people in the ASU that were out of places like New York, Pittsburgh, Cleveland, Detroit, working-class backgrounds, left-leaning. Some of them red diaper babies essentially who were in the military for one reason or another. I think they were attracted to it because, if nothing else, it gave them comfort of the same types of arcane arguments that took place in their living rooms with their parents who were in the garment trades or something like that. They could now argue about that in Vietnam. It was a weird subculture in a way.

Mark: If I'm not mistaken, you were over there during the Carl Armstrong bombing here on this campus. Do you recall--

Boyer: I recall stuff about that in the Stars and Stripes but I'm trying to fix in my -- could you tell me what the date of that was?

Mark: It was late August, if I'm not mistaken. It was just before the school year was going to start.

Boyer: In '70?

Mark: August of '70.

Boyer: Yes, I was there then. What I couldn't remember is if I remembered stuff of the actual time that it occurred or if I was reading about the subsequent stuff after that. 'cause it was, as I recall, it was in the Stars and Stripes more than once. I think through the pursuits and things like that not the trial 'cause I guess the trial was way later.

Mark: Yeah. They had to catch him first. The reason I bring it up is because when you read the historography on the anti-war groups here in the States this is often portrayed as a kind of watershed of time. Where the movement had reached the point of violence or no violence and a lot of people backed away at that time. And you mentioned the potential at least for some violence actions. I'm wondering if that had an effect on your activism in Vietnam? Apparently not really--

Boyer: I don't think so and I think there's a reason for that. In the context of Vietnam, the idea that one bomb went off in one building is kind of a piddly little thing. In Saigon that happened every couple hours, even under the best security. There was always a USO getting blown up, or some officers BOQ, having a bicycle bomb out in front of it or a cab blowing up. It was sort of like today Lebanon or Israel. So a bomb blows up an Army math lab. That would have been a shoulder shrug for most people.

Mark: That's an interesting reaction actually.

Boyer: Well, I think that happens to anybody who's in a culture of violence. I mean, I don't think people in Bosnia would be real impressed with the Army lab blowing up. I understand the impact on what it did but I also I guess since I got more deeply involved in the anti-war movement after the war I discovered how widespread acts of sabotage were and how much the FBI did to cover up what did go on.

Mark: In the U.S.?

Boyer: Oh, by the hundreds. Apparently, it was almost a daily phenomena. Very few of them as dramatic but other stuff nevertheless. That's stuff, a lot of stuff was apparently attributed to criminal motives rather than acts against the war. And that was kind of the way of smoothing people over about it. But since a lot of involved trains with military supplies or things of that nature, it probably, and with no apparent robbery motive, it must have been that way. When we get into the part, when we get into the anti-war movement, I think what we too were to run that course and finally come up against a lack of options with the pressure to go violent. And I can get into that when we get to that stage. It's funny that that didn't manifest itself in the GI movement as it did in the veterans movement.

Mark: I think we're about to that point. When did you finally leave Vietnam? It had to be in--

Boyer: 1971.

Mark: What time of year?

Boyer: It would have been in June, end of June.

Mark: Did you count your days? Did you know how short you were?

Boyer: Yes, yes I did. I didn't have a calendar like some people did but I had a pretty good running sense of it without writing it down. But I had a fair amount of regret. I was not doing cartwheels really about getting out. I had made some friends there, I got to know a lot of Vietnamese people, had close friends, lived with a family there. It was kind of a mixed bag for me. 'Cause in spite of what was going on I didn't consider it a totally negative experience.

Mark: Or enemy territory.

Boyer: Yeah.

Mark: Can you describe your trip back, just for anecdotal purposes?

Boyer: Yeah. It's a very short story 'cause it was just a flight out of Saigon back to the San Francisco area. At which time-- the flight was uneventful. We arrived there and that was kind of eventful because an odd form of treatment. They decided, I can't determine whether they thought we were too filthy or too dangerous. They kind of like quarantined one section of the plane where there were a lot of people from the field. I think from the 1st Cav., some guys who were left over from the 1st Infantry which had already stood down but they had been left behind and were replacements in other units. And they herded us off. I happened to be sitting in that section of plane. They herd us off into this little wire enclosure and had us strip down and took our clothes and disposed of them and made us clean up and then went over us and our bodies and our luggage with metal detectors. So I don't know if it was a fear of lice or the fear of grenades or whatever but it was an odd way, and that's when I got a new set of fatigues we went into the processing center and I was discharged so I was out of the military within six hours after being back in the United States.

Mark: In San Francisco.

Boyer: Yes.

Mark: Some of the stories you hear about some Vietnam veterans being spat upon or yelled any of that kind of thing. Did you have any experience with things like this at the airport? Did you travel home in your fatigues?

Boyer: No, I didn't. I went to--on Travis Air Force Base where I got discharged, I want to a base exchange and bought a pair of blue jeans and a tee-shirt and changed into them and went off in that fashion. The only thing that I ever encountered, I've heard that anecdote, that's almost like the child with a grenade anecdote that I used to hear in Vietnam, about being spit on or something like that. That never happened to me. The thing that came closest to that in a perverse way, when I left San Francisco I want up to Oregon, eastern Oregon, to see a friend. I hitchhiked up and while I was passing through Caldwell, Idaho on the way to eastern Oregon I went into a bar where a group of--this was a type of bar where people came in their Winchesters, and the people, 'cause I had been in the field, I did not have a really formal GI haircut even though it was shorter than it is presently, and I was accused of being one of those hippies. [laughter] People attributing to me that I was a likely draft dodger. That was, that's the flip-side of that story you've been hearing.

Mark: That is. How long was it before you got back to Pennsylvania, before you went home?

Boyer: It was maybe about 20 days.

Mark: You just traveled around up in the Northwest?

Boyer: What I did was kind of look up buddies who were in that section of the country. Went up to Vancouver from Oregon to meet with some guys, veterans, who were up there in resistance. Those were guys who were in exile, ones who had done one tour and had refused to do another. So essentially they were stuck up there for the duration until the later amnesties. Then I hopped some freights across the Midwest back to the East and stopped along the way in a couple of places to tie into people I knew from protest activities and look up people what I knew was developing into Vietnam Veterans Against the War. I was really interested in that. That was, as far as headlines to follow in the Stars and Stripes, the ones of the medals being thrown away on the Capitol steps, was the one I keyed into the most and I knew, with the earliest opportunity, I'd be paying them a visit.

Mark: I see. What prompted you to take this sort of circuitous route home?

Boyer: Kind of decompression desire. Kind of, well you know, not wanting to get back into things too quickly. I did have the feeling there was that re-entry into civilian society would not be easy and it wasn't—I wasn't real eager to throw myself right back into it.

Mark: Was this something you had thought about before you left Vietnam? Was it something the groups thought about?

Boyer: It was something, by the time I was there, it was something people were thinking about a great deal. It was being vocalized. That people were having problems, you know, 'cause by the time I went they had seen enough people coming back from there that were zoned out. In other units and we'd get guys who had time left, not like me who were getting discharged when they came back, they might be have another year, year and a half left in their time in the military. They didn't look like they were in too good a shape. There were people with a lot of apprehension.

Mark: I see. So, you got back to Pennsylvania and you went home. What were your priorities now in your civilian life? I know for a fact that you went to college. Was it something that you had planned, thought about?

Boyer: Yes. I had, in fact, back in Vietnam, my trajectory had been altered. It had been my intent, I came from a family where no one had ever gone to college. No one had ever finished high school. What I thought I wanted to do, I was kind of an outdoors person, I wanted to get into forestry or game management and that changed. When I was up in support of the invasion of Laos, Lon Song 719 I saw some things there that really deepened my politicization and I decided to do something about this culture, this society in a long-term basis so I changed my plans, my study plans, and went into pre-law. I prepared to get enrolled that fall and I did. I went to Penn State.

Mark: So you started the fall right after you got out of service at Penn State?

Boyer: Yes.

Mark: A state college?

Boyer: No. I went to one of the, I started at one of the branch campuses. They have a system there somewhat like Wisconsin does.

Mark: On that campus, where there a lot of other vets? Did you have trouble connecting with other vets?

Boyer: No. In fact, when I got back before the school year even got started a chapter of Vietnam Veterans Against the War got started in our area. Right in the area where I grew up. It was, the first configuration of it was called the Lehigh Valley Chapter of the Veterans Against the War, which turned out to be one of the, as the VVAW went on, it was one of the biggest chapters. We had, over the time of our existence of about four years, we had probably upwards of 300 different people who had joined us at one point or another. They weren't all active at the same time.

Mark: Yeah. And how did you all get together and active?

Boyer: We did visible--

Mark: Phone calls and all this kind of thing?

Boyer: The organizational life or the--

Mark: Yeah.

Boyer: Okay. Well, there were a lot of actions. This particular chapter was very active and visible. We did stuff through '71, '72 that was almost a weekly activity of some sort of vigil, some sort of protest. And it ran the gambit. We'd do things like we did an impromptu way we'd tag onto the end of say the Veterans Day parade or Memorial Day parade, even though we weren't registered and not wanted. And sometimes thrown out. Other types of mainstream veterans activities, we went to with the banners and with the signs. We did a lot of stuff with other groups. In that particular area, there were a lot of pacifist churches of a variety of denominations. Everything from the Schweinfelders to Morravians to Mennonites, Quakers, and when they did stuff, we did stuff. There was a fair amount of university life around there between Lehigh, Morravian, Mulenberg, of Penn State branch campuses and stuff like that. There was always campus stuff. We were always involved in that.

Mark: I see. So the protest movements were in the paper, were widely know. So you had no problem knowing where to go.

Boyer: No, not at all. It was, in fact, just within a few days after I got to Pennsylvania that I, there was a group proceeding through along the highway, they were converging on Harrisburg. I don't know if you recall Massachusetts legislature passed a bill making it illegal for anyone from Massachusetts to go to Vietnam?

Mark: No, I don't recall that.

Boyer: They did that. And there was a state senator from Allentown, Pennsylvania who decided that Pennsylvania should do the same thing. Those measures were subsequently ruled unconstitutional, invalid. But people thought that might be a good way to promote the issue. Such a bill, there was a bill out before the Pennsylvania legislature right when I came back and I read about it in the paper. And it turned out there were marches converging, a line would march from Philadelphia, one from Lehigh Valley, one from Pittsburgh, and one from Erie through state college where about 1,000, 1,200 veterans were going to camp out at Harrisburg until the bill was passed. And so I joined them on the road. That's how I got tied into it. I want to make it clear though that these were not all VVAW people. What it was was a lot of campus vets groups, admittedly a little bit of a party atmosphere.

Mark: You mentioned you sometimes participated in some of the mainstream veterans parades? I'm interested in the reaction of Vietnam veterans in general and Vietnam vets of your political view in particular were greeted by say the Legion or the VFW or those kinds of groups.

Boyer: I can't say it was universally bad, but overall it was quite negative. In fact, there were people in that stage, even though I know those same groups go around practically begging Vietnam veterans to join today. In those days they just about always showed you the door. They wouldn't show you the door if you were passive and just kept your mouth shut but if you said anything at all about what had occurred over there it was a good way to be disinvited. A lot of people felt kind of run out of those groups. In fact, the one post, Post 13 of the VFW in Allentown got to the point where we had enough people there to be a critical mass to get some people elected and when it appeared we were getting close to taking that post over, as evidenced by when we sent people to, we sent people to the national VFW convention in '72 and when Richard Nixon made his keynote address, we unfurled a banner "Stop the Bomber" and after that we found that our charter was not in order and that we probably would lose our liquor license and a bunch of other things. It seemed like the world came crumbling down on that post after that point. It was a big lesson in American civics. [laughter]

Mark: So if you tagged onto the end of a parade or went to the, I don't know, fish fry would be a Wisconsin thing, but some activity, what would be the personal reaction to you guys from the older Legionnaires?

Boyer: Well, it was funny. The more invested in the organization they were, usually the worst they were to us. Casual members, the guy--this was a context in which, cultural context, in which membership in VFWs and Legions in Pennsylvania, a state with strict liquor laws, was based mostly on the desire to have access to the late night club that was attached to it. So those guys were pretty good actually. They weren't too bad in dealing with us. But the people who were gung-ho so to speak, the people who would be post commanders, they let us know on no uncertain terms that we were rabble and not to be trusted. Disloyal citizens and all of that. They ascribed all sorts of improper motives to us. It was always, you know, if you don't like it, go to Russia. There wasn't anybody who was saying they wanted to live that way. It was kind of strange.

Mark: What about your relations with the community as a whole? Joe six-pack, how did he view your activities? What sort of allies and enemies did you have in the civic community?

Boyer: Well, that was pretty good in our area. Now, when I got out, when I got an organization role in VVAW and got to travel 'cause eventually I was coordinator for several states, this was not uniformly true through some of those areas. Like in Maryland, when I had to deal down there, there was some tough territory there to be protesting the war. But in that industrial belt of Pennsylvania, it wasn't bad because it was, just about everybody had a dad, an uncle, or a brother who was an auto worker or steal worker and by that time in the war a lot of those industrial unions were really questioning the policy of the war. The auto workers in particular. And public employees, too. So that helped 'caused there was then a kind of cultural context. And the war was getting fairly well discredited. I think it would have been a lot harder to do some of that stuff in 1965 than it was in 1971. So we were often well received, I'd say. We didn't get nearly the hostility that I expected. That was a big encouragement sort of to my whole political life that once you try to do something and try to explain it to people that you didn't have to be as worried as you thought you had to be to do it.

Mark: Now boos and jeers at parades--

Boyer: It happened sometimes. It was more likely to come from the other people in the parade though. [Laughter]

Mark: Now, this is something you mentioned before and I'd like to explore it a little bit more. Pennsylvania has an interesting religious history, shall we say. Quakers are known to be pacifist, at least in theory. The other sets of groups that you mentioned. Did you find a lot of allies in churches?

Boyer: Allies in some sense but also kind of a level of estrangement in another because while they welcomed anybody who echoed the anti-war message I think they had some recognition that not all of us were on the same page. Because I wouldn't characterize Veterans Against the War as a pacifist movement. We simply, in fact the only programmatic thing was, my wife and I were talking about this the other day 'cause she did a lot of support work years ago for the ASU and other things like that. Her background was fairly left-wing, too. And she asked me with the VVAW, what really was the agenda there at the end? And I said, you know, our whole programmatic mission and only single consensus could be expressed in one sentence, bring our brothers home. That was the only thing that was ever said. It never said the military is evil. It never said, you know, it didn't really adopt some Gandhian and Martin Luther King overview of social problems and violence. It was just, bring the guys back.

Mark: Okay. So we were talking about some of the --

Boyer: Religious groups? Yeah, they were glad to see anybody show up because those were the people in a way who have to get the credit. They bore the brunt of public hostility when it was really unpopular right from the early '60s on when they questioned that. A lot of them were linked into the anti-A-bomb movements and other broader social justice, peace issues. Some of them already, by the time we had arrived, some of them had been on the streets for a decade having stuff thrown at them. And when we arrived it, whether this was a real connection or not, they didn't get stuff thrown at them anymore. So I think they were glad to see us arrive in that sense. But also there was tension because most of these people were very nice people with such--at least the ones--I'm not saying everybody in a denomination was an angel, but by and large the people who were connected to this stuff were, had such peaceful aspects to their personality and outlook that the very idea that some of us had been in something else and participated, it was a startling thing to them.

Mark: I was wondering about that.

Boyer: It was quite traumatic for them. It was funny because they would often ask us if they were planning an event, they would often ask for us to speak about our experiences. What we had done, what we had seen. Then when guys would say it you could just about see they were about ready to break down. It was hard for them to listen to. When we'd run the winter soldier movies, things like that, or "Only the Beginning," another video we produced, not a video film. And they'd, it was horrifying, it was traumatic for a lot of them to go through that. It was far, for them, they couldn't even comprehend the level of horror.

Mark: And do you think that affected the way they dealt with you? Of--

Boyer: Yeah, I'm positive of that because I've become Mennonite, I deal with the legacy of that even today. I see that.

Mark: Blood on the hands?

Boyer: Yeah.

Mark: Interesting. What about other student groups -- SDS was pretty much down the tubes by this time I suppose.

Boyer: Yeah, it was pretty much out of the loop with the exception that some of their, there was some interplay between VVAW and some elements of the Weather people. And then they had, the Weather people had a support group known as Prairie Fire that there were people in the VVAW that played around with that. As time went on, the VVAW got really subsumed and a lot of those things every left-wing group in America tried to make sure it had its veteran faction in the VVAW wrestling for control of the organization. Students didn't become much of a factor roughly from I think maybe though '71 they were and after that through '72 they kind of disappeared off the radar scope. It was mostly left-wing organizations after that that we had our relations with. That and more conventional peace groups. But we ran the gambit and this is something I really, for historical purposes, people understand about the VVAW because the only thing we were unified on was bringing our brothers home. In our chapter, in the Lehigh Valley, we had people who were ardent supporters of George Wallace. We had people who were virtual John Birchers. Libertarians. All manner. People who just thought it was a waste and had gone on long enough. And that was the unifying factor. They were often our better members because those guys were preoccupied with all those sort of New York City inner-political in-fighting. They were so busy with that crap they couldn't do anything for the organization.

Mark: That's interesting, actually. I'd never heard such a thing.

Boyer: That's why we had, once we got started we got, developed quite a background, a network of chapters in Pennsylvania. When I first got back there was only Philadelphia and the Lehigh Valley one. By the end of '71 we had Rending, we had one at Scranton, Wilkes Barre, we had one at state college, we had one at Harrisburg, Pittsburgh, Erie. We branched off and asked for a jurisdiction in West Virginia. We went down and started one in Charleston, one in Wheeling. Then came back to Delaware and did that too. We were really getting down to the grass roots level and that was something that didn't happen at the VVAW in the rest of the country. It never, most of it, you know the rest of the country, it really was big in metropolitan areas. No other part of the country had chapters in places like Wilkes Barre.

Mark: You had no trouble drawing up recruits?

Boyer: No.

Mark: How would you explain that?

Boyer: Well, we, what happened was that through the guys in the UAW we got some serious advice on how to organize and it turned out, we had such bumblers running the national office and this later became the fodder for a great deal of inner-organizational strife. But there was, in 1971, there was a group of business executives in the advertising industry that did a national add campaign for the VVAW, free of charge. And persuaded things like The Nation, Playboy, stuff like that to run the adds. They did so and it generated a list, a mailing list of over 40,000 Vietnam veterans. Unfortunately, this was in the national office and no one was ever given the list or where any of these people lived. When we heard about it we had guys from Lehigh Valley who went up and burglarized the national office.

Mark: Threw in a little Watergate?

Boyer: Yeah, and took the list. And once we had the list for our area, we went about organizing it. Because we had some people who were in their 30s and 40s who told us how to put out a leaflet, how to hold a meeting, and things like that. And we got some support through the UAW and AFSCME put out mailings, they put out, you know, if there were 100 guys around Allentown, they'd--so that's how that stuff got started there. I think it, you know, fortunately we didn't have to do it longer because it was a text book case on organization. It had a specific mission and it really had no reason to outlive that mission. But it, had there been a need for it and the war continued there would have been some of us who had been devoted to using that model elsewhere and I have no reason to believe that it couldn't have been done elsewhere. I don't think our circumstances were that atypical. Its just that the energy wasn't being applied elsewhere.

Mark: I see. So you became involved in the national organization as well. Perhaps you could describe to me how that came about. Like a chapter chairman or something like that?

Boyer: Yeah, what happened is I started out in Lehigh Valley chapter and we decided to spin off, we got enough guys coming over from an area closer to where I lived around Redding, and so people thought we should start a new one over there. And we started a chapter there and I started to head that up. And once we had a critical mass of chapters around, a half dozen, we convened the statewide meetings and then I was asked to be the state representative to the national. I went to the Philadelphia meeting and at that point then after we decided to incorporate into the broader regions in West Virginia, Maryland, and Delaware.

Mark: So this is in '71? '72?

Boyer: '71. It so happened that all of these things happened in a space of about three months after the time I came back. So it was a quite dynamic and exciting thing. Pretty heady for somebody like myself who had barely done anything before.

Mark: And you were what 21 at the time?

Boyer: Yeah.

Mark: So your first involvement at the national level was the, what city did you say again. Philadelphia?

Boyer: Philadelphia was the first.

Mark: National convention.

Boyer: Well, they weren't called conventions then. Because of the gaps in organizational expertise, I'm trying to use the most kind euphemisms I can, it wasn't clear sometimes what standing any of these events had or entirely clear if they were convened upon any sort of authority.

Mark: I see.

Boyer: 'Cause we'd find out from time to time that the factional warfare in the national office in New York City was so rampant and ripe that occasionally meetings would be convened by one side or the other and be called the national meeting and you weren't sure if they were convened by the people actually delegated to do so. Whether they reflected some majority sentiment. Those kinds of things became quite confusing. It wasn't quite as bad as the ASU, but it wasn't much better. Initially. There was, a lot went on. It improved over time, but also as it improved unfortunately we faced some other challenges and evolution and character of the war that made our improvements kind of irrelevant. But in the beginning it was hard to tell. When I went to Philadelphia it was hard to tell what was happening there. And that led to us making an effort to kind of bypass the national and we started to have direct state to state relations. And that's how I got to know some of the people out here. Most notably John Lindquist in Milwaukee. He was one of the, from our point of view in Pennsylvania, he was one of the good guys. And that's what we did behind the national's back. We went about kind of installing the good guys in as many places as we could.

Mark: I see. Could you be more specific, perhaps, in what was wrong at the Philadelphia gathering? Just to complete disorganization? You don't know where to go. Who to talk to?

Boyer: Yeah--

Mark: No Robert's Rules of Order or anything like that?

Boyer: Yeah, there was none of that. It appeared that there was a group that came with an agenda that had very little to do with the consensus focus of the organization. There was some people, some of whom were barely known to anyone else, and that was a problem here because there weren't long-standing relationships in any case. You couldn't tell who was who. But a group of guys came in from New York claiming to represent the national office and here's the agenda and the problem, the focus they had, we got treated to a whole afternoon of lectures on the danger of Trotskyest infiltration and how the Workers World Party and the SWP and a long list of front groups were now our main enemy. And we'd better route out anyone who ever talked to them or had any connection to them. And along with that, there was a lot of mud thrown on John Kerry and the negative influence he was--and that--we'd better get rid of him.

Mark: Now, we discussed this before. Is this an opportune time to discuss John Kerry?

Boyer: We could get into that a little bit. He wasn't deposed at the Philadelphia meeting though. He was deposed at the Kansas City meeting.

Mark: This was a year later or something?

Boyer: No, it was only a few months later. And that one I didn't go to. I can kind of report on the guy I--who went--he said--like I can kind of tell you what he told me coming out of there.

Mark: Well, I'm interested in John Kerry's role generally and your perception of him.

Boyer: Well, now with the benefit of hindsight, I think his role was more positive than people allowed for. There was a lot, he was the victim of a couple of things. There was widespread anti-officer sentiment in this group. And he being a former officer, his high profile really rankled people. And then there was something put out kind of a coffee table picture book of photos from the medal throwing away ceremony at the Capitol which was actually entitled John Kerry and his Vietnam Veterans Against the War. That did not go over well with the troops. [laughter] So he had a public relations problem, as they say today.

Mark: Now, in some sort of technical sense, was he the national chairman or something like that?

Boyer: I don't believe so. He was, I think a duly authorized spokesperson at some stage. I think at some stage he reflected an organizational consensus. There's a lot of evidence that would point to the fact that he may have exceeded his portfolio at some point in time. But now looking back I can see he had so many enemies that were, you know, kind of throwing so much gas on the fire that it's hard to get a clear picture of whether he was grievously at fault or had simply made some errors like so many of us were making at that time.

Mark: Now he's, of course, gone on to be a U.S. Senator.

Boyer: Yup. Not the average fate of Vietnam Veterans Against the War person.

Mark: No. Do you think his activities in the group, do you think he had ulterior motives?

Boyer: I think he looked toward a political future. But I have to be honest, I think a lot of people in that did. Not universally. I'm not saying it was filled with aspiring politicians. But I think it was filled with a lot of people with agendas even if it was in tiny little ponds of little things they were doing with left-wing political parties or other stuff.

Mark: That's good to know.

Boyer: But he was not alone in that. I think he probably went further than most people ever thought he would. Maybe he went further than he thought he could. [laughter] I don't really fault him for that. I still see him as someone, generally on the good side. I don't see him as our salvation or anything. But, yeah, there were other people. I could go if I was, had the time, I could compile a list for you of city councilmen in little rust belt towns that are former VVAW members and stuff like that. Guys that are district directors for mine workers and stuff like that.

Mark: Or work at the Department of Veterans Affairs.

Boyer: Yeah.

Mark: So you mentioned that the national organization was so disorganized that your, was it state chapter?

Boyer: Yes.

Mark: Your local chapter decided to simply bypass?

Boyer: Yes. We started trying going around them.

Mark: And to coordinate between the different states. Did you get a sense of where the VVAW was best organized and least organized? Do you have any reasons as to why that may have been?

Boyer: Well, I think, I'm a regional chauvinist. I tend to believe Pennsylvania was one of the best organized places and mostly through the process I told you about. Because of some of the assistance we received.

INTERRUPTION

Mark: I'm sorry. Where did we leave off?

Boyer: Good question.

Mark: We were just starting to get into connection between the different states. Bypassing the national, the different states.

Boyer: Yeah. We developed a number of relationships -- I think actually the last thing you said was my evaluation of who was well organized and who wasn't.

Mark: Oh, yeah.

Boyer: In Pennsylvania we did, I think we went further in terms of grassroots stuff. But I won't claim that we had the most perceptive or most astutely organized thing. We simply had a broader base than most. By virtue of the fact that we had actually talked to the people who had signed up on this list that these business ad executives had accumulated. But probably one of the best chapters pound for pound was the one in Washington, D.C. It tended to be really tied in the kind of think tank people, grad students like the American U., Georgetown, stuff like that. So that was a good one of movers and shakers, especially in the planning sense when we're doing something. And they created a spin-off. For a time, they spun off a thing called the Organizing Committee for a Fifth Estate and put out a magazine called Counter Spy. It was a network of former military intelligence operatives. They did a lot of useful revelations of third world intelligence stuff that the U.S. was doing. A chief actor in that was a guy named Tim Butts, a guy I really respected, really bright fella. I think, I have no idea where he's gotten to over the years. I'd like to know. But they were funny. That's a kind of other social life of VVAW; how different areas developed little nicknames and the DC chapter was called the DCVC. And as a sociological footnote, over time they became noted somewhat in Vietnam Veterans Against the War as having a feature that other chapters didn't have visibly. Undoubtedly they did in some respects, but they had a kind of a gay caucus within that and that became known as the ACDCVC. [laughter]

Mark: A natural progression of things.

Boyer: Yeah it was -- But same thing happened in Minnesota. There was a group there; it was called the Minnesota First, First Minnesota Home Front Snipers and then the group in Missouri was the Missouri Natural Guard and there were all kinds of little nicknames like that.

Mark: I'm interested, were there many VVAW chapters in the South?

Boyer: Not many.

Mark: Or other parts of the Midwest?

Boyer: Not many. And over time we can get into that subject matter related to Gainesville and the conspiracy trial. They did exist in the South. They tended to be -- the pattern in the North was predominately metropolitan. In the South, it was predominately university things. Gainesville had one, Chapel Hill had one. It was kind of focused around some of the bigger, public universities in the South. But a lot of us became fairly cynical of the Southern chapters over time because it became apparent, even before Gainesville, that they were heavily infiltrated. We had lots of problems with chapters in the South having virtually no veterans in them. Being filled with lots of police agency people with various motivations. Everything from drug enforcement types and state police. We found out through the Freedom of Information Act in Florida for example, in Florida they did have more chapters than any other place in the South; maybe as many as the whole South combined. They might have about five. I think Tampa had one, Gainesville, Miami, a couple of other places. But it was none of them that didn't have a significant number of police agents in it. And in Tampa for example, it turned out in a, I think it was around, it was only a small chapter, like nine people -- there were no veterans in it. It was all police agents. And what was more funny, they didn't know each other were in it. [laughter]

Mark: Army intelligence, one was Air Force, one was local police.

Boyer: Yeah, like that. There was no veteran in that chapter.

Mark: Sounds like a Mash episode.

Boyer: Yeah, it was bizarre. That's what led, unfortunately, to the Gainesville occurrences when those guys got set up. I don't know how much you know about that historically.

Mark: I don't. I was going to ask you about it, too. Is this a good time to talk about it?

Boyer: Sure. Unless you want to get more on the organizational thing.

Mark: Yeah. Actually I've got a note here. Let's just keep going with the organizational things. Coordinating with the other state agencies, what were your aims and goals and how did the national organization react, if at all?

Boyer: Well, they got fairly hostile once they knew they were being backdoored. And it let to a lot of internal rivalry and a lot if improper things probably done on all sides. But the, our goals, essentially we wanted to be as effective as we could in organizing veterans against the war. Around that we were developing a consensus for some major national actions. Now, late in '71 -- excuse me, I'm losing track of my years -- late in '71 we pulled off some of the small ones by the occupation of the Statue of Liberty, the occupation of Betsy Ross House, Independence Hall, Lincoln Memorial. And the guys on the West coast did something in San Francisco, about a public building seizure. That was kind of test run for us. That was done over the objection of the national office. We had guys up in New York occupying the Statue of Liberty in defiance of the national office, even though we couldn't really get out of them what their plan was exactly. But that was, we were looking forward to a time where we were doing more or less the kind of Vietnam veterans general strike that we'd really create a systematic timetable of high profile, visible civil disobedience by veterans. We thought that was something the American public would have to look at. That that was something that would really grab, you know, 6 o'clock news on a nightly basis. We started doing just pounding and pounding on it that every day veterans would have to be pulled away by police from somewhere.

Mark: Now what sort of civil disobedience did you perceive, or did you conceive of? What I'm getting at is, you mentioned the VVAW wasn't necessarily non-violent. So were there different ideas of what the strike would entail?

Boyer: Yeah. There were people, I'd say the range of discourse extended pretty far from the traditional kind of Gandhi method of sit down somewhere and make them drag your body away up and including the destruction of governmental property. That was a discussed item. Nowhere, though did I ever hear--

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Boyer: --anything discussed about you know inflicting harm on people either by taking, you know, no hostage schemes or assaultive schemes or anything using firearms. That was often laid at our feet. That was kind of the whole basis of the Gainesville conspiracy charge -- that we were going to invade the Republican Convention with weapons and kill delegates. I'm not saying that nobody anywhere in 40,000 people on the mailing list didn't discuss that but it was never in any room that I was in. 'Cause we used to kind of, almost virtually, eject people from meeting rooms if they even started talking about weapons. 'Cause it was just too dangerous. We knew we were under too much scrutiny for that stuff.

Mark: And you were certainly outgunned.

Boyer: Now I will say, what happened later on, and it was very fortuitous that the war ended when it did, because one thing that was legitimate discourse in the organization as we became increasingly desperate -- I think a lot of us were under the perception that the Nixon strategy by effectively ending the ground war and in perpetuity carrying out an air war against Vietnam, it was something it was weighing very heavily on us. And there were people who were -- plans were getting pretty far in place that we would do something of a much more escalated nature over in Asia on an air installation. We had people who were looking at, in a very serious way, of getting their hair cut again and dusting off the uniforms and one by one reinfiltrating onto someplace in Thailand or something of that nature. That would, I think that's really a matter that we saved by the bell. Because if the war hadn't ended I think there would be a very ugly story to be told about something like that. In fact, probably wouldn't get, there probably wouldn't be any firsthand interviews about the people who had gone on that one. I don't think they would have come back from it.

Mark: Kind of brings up a note I wrote down. That involves changes in the war. The troops were, American troops were being pulled out continually. The air war was escalating. In '73 eventually we declared we were going to pull out completely then. How did these sorts of things affect the VVAW?

Boyer: It knocked the wind out of its sails in a mass sense. What had happened, those guys I described who weren't left-leaning with ideological agendas, fell by the wayside. Kind of--a lot of--our blue collar constituency, the guy who worked in the steel mill, the guy who was kind of George Wallace beer swiller. Those people we lost. So it came down to that. Those people who were jockeying for various ideological sectarian reasons and that's really in the end what did the organization in because without that stabilization that that mass base gave us it became pretty cannibalistic. It just ate itself up over time. Their were factions, revolutionary union leaders, later the revolutionary communist party, other groups and filled with recriminations and wild charges against each other. And in that environment it became increasingly irrelevant what the structure itself was doing for those who wanted to continue doing it, they almost had to do it on an ad hoc basis of veteran to veteran.

Mark: We're getting ahead of Gainesville. That was 1972, right?

Boyer: Yeah, that's when the initial indictments were handed down. The trial lasted, I guess really through about '74 'til it was all dismissed.

Mark: Now, I've only seen, you know, flyers passed around and that kind of thing, about Gainesville. I don't know about the entire issues. If you could just explain briefly what was at issue here?

Boyer: At issue was the government's allegations, the FBI through the Justice Department, maintained that it had uncovered a plot supposedly orchestrated exclusively by the Vietnam Veterans Against the War. No other more sinister influence was alleged. And that Vietnam Veterans Against the War had a -- people had crossed state lines and made other overt acts such as the purchase of ammunition and weapons that they were going to invade the 1972 Republican Convention in Miami to disrupt it with explosions and firearms and kill Republican delegates. They indicted I think in the first bill of indictment it identified nine individuals. One was soon after dismissed. And then later on a second one was dismissed. So at various times, you might hear the phrase Gainesville Nine, Gainesville Eight, Gainesville Seven, 'cause I thing it finally came down to seven at the end. And in the bill of indictment it said and other as of yet unnamed coconspirators. Because they used, the trial itself wasn't their sole tactic. It was a ruse by which to essential go on a fishing expedition through the whole breadth and width of the veterans movement. Right after the indictments almost every chapter experienced an FBI visit and almost everybody got called at home or their employers got interviewed or their school got interviewed. That was a good way of tying us up. It sucked up a lot of money in defense resources. It also took a lot of energy. Invoked a kind of climate in fear, too. That really kind of put the brakes on our growth, too, because people really weren't sure if they wanted to risk their job or risk their education over that type of thing.

Mark: How much legitimacy do you think there was to these charges? Any at all?

Boyer: Well, if the indictment had been that the leading coconspirator, Scott Camille, was a kind of erratic individual with hair brained ideas and given to a big mouth, if that was against the law, they could have won the case. But, in fact, 'cause he was kind of a baiter. He was kind of--loved to goad things on, but as far as I can tell, there was no basis to the allegation of a conspiracy to do violent acts at all. As a matter of fact, the records suggest that it was totally the concoction and kind of entrapment of a government agent involved in it. I can't remember his name now. It might have been in some of the materials I gave you before. It was a guy out of Arkansas who had moved to Florida and he---it was a vet with a drug problem and after having been in trouble with the law several times was encouraged to put his talents to use infiltrating the VVAW, which he did. He was the one who obtained the explosive, the only one who obtained explosive. He was the one who had the automatic weapons and he was the one who apparently in these meetings was always the one saying they should do something violent. If there had been anything done, it would have been the government's plan not our plan as far as I can tell. And that's apparently, the federal judge concluded the same thing. So, but it just--

Mark: The federal government apparently just targeted your group?

Boyer: Yes.

Mark: That is harassment.

Boyer: I think it was. I think they knew that -- I'm not trying to be boastful about this -- but I think they knew the moral force that an anti-war veterans' group had was being listened to. I think historically this was always a problem for governments. You look at what happened to Portugal and Angola and Mozambique. When soldiers and former soldiers get restive and acting against the sitting government, it's a destabilizing thing. And I think there's always a desire to keep that under control. I've looked a little bit at other veterans type involvement and disorder, everything from the Whiskey Rebellion on up, governments don't like that. It's threatening and it's confusing to the populous. So it's to be I think crushed in any way that it can be. And there was that climate 'cause COINTELPRO against the Black Panthers and others had already gone on. There was nothing they did to us that they hadn't already tested on other groups and already bashed them pretty good.

Mark: I see. And so the trial took place in Gainesville, Florida.

Boyer: I don't think the trial was in Gainesville or was it? It was in the U.S. District Court for the Northern District of Florida, wherever that was. The people were in Gainesville--the defendants were from Gainesville.

Mark: I see. And what eventually happened to them?

Boyer: It was dismissed. Nothing came of it.

Mark: For how long?

Boyer: About 18-20 months after about 3/4 of a million dollars in legal fees. That's what actually it sucked up from the time of the indictments until I think about the end of well probably into 1974. I spent more of my time dealing with fund raising and other stuff around that than I did with what I was supposed to be doing.

Mark: So how would you assess the impact of the Gainesville business on the VVAW?

Boyer: I wouldn't say it was the fatal blow to us. In the end I think the changing character of the war did more but it was certainly not a help. It really took away a lot of energy from us. There were trade offs, to be honest. At the same time it kept the issue in the media. 'Cause I think things like the Progressive, The Nation, routinely covered it and even the mainstream press, there was network TV on it and stuff like that. So the very fact that there veterans on this charge kept the issue alive. I have a feeling that most people weren't real inclined to believe that this was an actual plot. By then there had already, 'cause we had been helped out on the Harrisburg Trials, the Berrigans and, of course, there had been the Chicago Seven. So there had been, that cultural experience that the government was not on the up and up on some of this crap.

Mark: And what sort of activities did the Gainesville Trial force you into? You mentioned doing some fund raising and those sorts of things. What was, how did this impact on your activism?

Boyer: Well, I had to spend a lot more time with liberal angels. Smoozing them. It turned me into the cocktail party circuit at a very tender age.

Mark: Who were the liberal angels?

Boyer: These were people who might have been people over the years who gave money to Gene McCarthy or George McGovern. Tenured faculty with resources and things like that. People with families with old money where some of the kids were on the little more liberal side. Maybe had some foundations and stuff like that. So we, but thanks to that background we got from some of those union guys, we learned to play some of those tricks and pull those strings and go to those places. But it was a diversion. It wasn't the best thing we could have been doing at the time.

Mark: I'm interested in the Winter Soldier activities. Did you have any involvement in that sort of thing?

Boyer: Well, it depends what you mean by that. Because of the unclear organizational character, do you mean the hearings and the materials that were produced in testimony? Or do you mean the organization as it evolved when VVAW became slash The Winter Soldier Organization?

Mark: I'm confused as to what the relationship all is.

Boyer: Well, you have a right to be 'cause I don't -- I was pretty far up in the structure of things and I don't know exactly.

Mark: I'm aware of the hearings. But the organizational VVAW - WSO, I've never been able to understand exactly what that is.

Boyer: This is the best rendition I can give you. And admittedly it's only mine. This is not something I read somewhere. This is a conclusion with the benefit of time. At the time when the national office was finally moved from New York, which was viewed with a sigh of relief from almost everyone. We didn't know that the worst was yet to come. It went to Chicago. What we didn't know was the people who were really instrumental in that move, the rest of us were passively accepting of it 'cause of the bad history, great get it out of New York, but it turned out the people in the Revolutionary Union were deeply involved in manipulating that event. This is my perception and other people may have a different version. It's also my perception that as part and parcel of this, the RU had a kind of perspective of having equality for women -- that women were to be fighters in working class organizations as well -- and that significant others of veterans, not to mention women veterans, were to be more deeply involved in the organization. And plus they had the view that other -- in the beginning Vietnam Veterans Against the War was kind of a purist group. It was almost all in-country veterans. Some of these same folks wanted to broaden it to out-country veterans and veterans of other eras and so forth. And there was a mood because of the gender and inclusiveness thing, to evolve toward a more neutral type of name. I think they were already anticipating at some point in time there wouldn't be a big need for Vietnam Veterans Against the War but there might be a need for some sort of a veterans organization. And it's my perception that that all fed into it. There was I think, a motivation of a keep veterans in it if they could because at least I had conversations with RU people who convinced me that they thought the Vietnam Veterans Against the War was going to be the backbone of the armed insurrection against the United States of America. They really expected that. That we were going to lead them into the streets and take the place.

Mark: So after the office moved to Chicago do recall what year that was offhand?

Boyer: I think late '73 or early '74, somewhere in there. This is my guess.

Mark: The worst was yet to come.

Boyer: Then it became more overt, it really became apparent that the RU had just taken us over. That we lost our organization. That's what I described as the worst. But it was very emotional at the time and traumatic. You do things, you get invested in them. But in the end there wasn't that much need for it. And even today there's, you can find guys right in this town who were very dismayed by what happened. They are still involved in Kennedy's trademark or copyright name things 'cause there is that other group out there still. The group in Madison has kept faith with the old style thing but periodically they'll issue a press release that there's another group running around the country that's really connected with --

Mark: There is. In Seattle. I've run across them myself.

Boyer: Yeah.

Mark: What was the VVAWs interest in readjustment concerns? It's my understanding, later on in the 1980s what remained of the VVAW got involved in the Agent Orange issue. As I understand it, kind of revitalized the group.

Boyer: Especially in the Midwest. I think that's true.

Mark: At the time you were involved? I've come across memos and things like that describing Post Vietnam Syndrome and those kinds of things. Was it a major concern of the organization in your experience?

Boyer: Yeah. It became one. It was a balancing act because people felt that some -- we get too far into we'd be into distractions since we have kind of tried to keep a limited focused agenda. But it became apparent that we had to deal with some of it because we had a problem. But I've seen it in almost every left of center group in this country. That when once you become a focal point for protest you attract people who have a lot of grievances and a lot of problems. In a way you become kind of a magnet for a lot of pathology, too. I try not to be too ungenerous about it, but there were a lot of people who came around who were so heavily dealing with their own problems that they were getting in the way. And I think some people saw that and guys, there were some guys who early on did some stuff with Dr. Robert J. Lifton, you probably heard of him.

Mark: Yeah. I think this book's done by him.

Boyer: Which one is it? Violence in America or--

Mark: No *Home from the War*.

Boyer: Yeah.

Mark: --special Gulf War company maybe about 10 pages but anyway, I digress.

Boyer: Yeah. That became a model and kind of a spin-off in a lot of places in the East almost every chapter started to incorporate some sort of group therapy, AA 12-

step style type of thing into its practice of talking about. I don't mean to flippant about it either. I went to some of those things. We did an experiment where I was at in some novel modes. We started letting people script out some of their thoughts on stuff and started acting it out as videos. In fact I gave Jim Wachtendonk one of those that we did. It was on old inch tape format. I don't know where that ended up. It might be down at the State Historical Society.

Mark: I suspect it probably is.

Boyer: But, you know guys, who were predictably troubled we'd, in one case, the one I gave him, a guy who was involved in a prisoner execution. And so we kind of redid it. We restaged it as a way of dealing with the elements of it and then talking about. Then other groups used it for viewing. We did a number of those things The other elements though that came on were like Agent Orange. Out here though the real leader of that, the guy who got on it even faster than the '80s, right while the war was still going on, was John Lindquist. He was in the thick of that. We had a lot of contact with him. Out to see him. We had him a number of times. In fact, I had him all around everywhere get that into the people conscientiousness 'cause in the early '70s there really wasn't much know about that. He picked up on that real real early. Sometime I'll have to talk to him about just how he got started. I don't really know.

Mark: Maybe I should, too.

[Laughter]

Boyer: Yeah.

Mark: What else do I have left. World War II veterans, this is a personal interest of mine. Did you have much contact with World War II Veterans for Peace or anything like that?

Boyer: Only a few. There was a chapter in Bethlehem, Pennsylvania that was active and did some support on our behalf. They weren't very big. Might have been a dozen guys at most. They were friendly and supportive but at the same time not that, it wasn't sort of like they, they didn't invite us home for supper type thing. It wasn't quite that--

Mark: Generation gap to use the term at the time I suppose.

Boyer: I think it was some of that. And I think it might have been because they, there were class differences, too. We tended to be really blue collar. They tended to be by and large, faculty, assistant principals, clergy, and things like that. That I think could have been part of it, too. The VVAW in Lehigh Valley and Wilkes Barre and Redding and Harrisburg and those places was really kind of a down and gritty bunch.

Mark: So when did you meet Fred Halstad? Under what circumstances?

Boyer: I met him, actually I didn't finally get to talk to the man until I was working for the Milwaukee Road and he was doing labor union support work. By that time on some rail strike activity. And I got to talk over that whole history with him. In fact, he was--he came--he actually sat at my kitchen table when I lived in Morgantown, West Virginia and he was there with another guy. A guy named Ken Shildon, originally from Wisconsin, who was in the Socialist Workers Party also. Had come up through the UTU, the United Transportation Union on the Milwaukee Road and it turned out that, a few years later I found out that Ken had been a lifelong FBI informant on all, the whole left. I was rather discouraging of that.

Mark: What was -- kind of leads into where I was going anyway -- when did your involvement in the VVAW end and what sorts of activism did you get into after that? How did your VVAW experience influence that or not influence it?

Boyer: As far as an end, it's hard to put a precise date on. I can tell you when I became less active in some, I mean I still get stuff out of Chicago periodically. I still hear from the guys here locally. It's cooled a little because I, I'd like to state for the record, I committed a terrible faux pas with them. I was interviewed by a guy out in California. I can't remember his name. He came through Wisconsin and other places interviewing the VVAW people. Apparently he was going to do major work on anti-war veterans. In the course of interviewing me he asked me to make a sociologically observation why I thought it was the Vietnam veterans might have been having more problems than veterans from other wars. And I said well, it's hard to say overall. I'm not even sure if that's the right observation. But I said I think there may have been some things connected to the fact of who went -- the pool of who went. And what happened was I think he shared some proof manuscripts with people here and they concluded that I had said we were all from the bottom of the barrel.

Mark: Bad information will do that.

Boyer: So that was, while I don't want to portray it that way, I think there is something to that because when you don't have Kennedy's going and other people out of the upper strata of society, you get treated differently, there's a different perception of who the veterans are. And if you take exclusively from the lower ranks of the society, there going to have more problems. They've already come from broken homes, no jobs, go back to no jobs, crime, violence. It's a big surprise there are problems. That's all a I meant to say but some people viewed it as a real slam. I don't view myself as coming from any different background.

Mark: And so, you got into labor union politics--

Boyer: Well, that wasn't my first thing. I went to law school and I was active through a variety of political things. I dabbled in a lot of stuff. Everything from environmental, variety of social justice type things after the war. My formal involvement with the VVAW I think really by '74 you could say I was done. I mean I went to some things after that but I didn't hold any real capacity after that because it was hard to tell what there would have been to hold a capacity in. So my interests went elsewhere. Then I got involved in law school and that took up a lot of energy for the years I was there. Went to work for the West Virginia Department of Labor and was increasingly having a hard time there because I was viewed as, I was viewed by the Secretary of Labor as too much of a patsy for the unions and the employees. So after a time they told me it might be better if I found a different line of work. So there were some unions around that thought it would be a good thing, too. So that's how I kind of got realigned. But my family had a lot of inclination in that area as well. My dad had done some organizing work for the United Electrical Workers Union. My grandfather had been a miner, his father had been in the Knights of Labor. So we had many, many generations of that type of working class organizational structure. That hadn't made my life easy. In fact, it's made it difficult because the model of unions I was brought up with, the model of movement organizing that I came to understand through my efforts in VVAW and stuff that I read later on, it's not been easy to adapt to the kind of structured business unionism today. I heard, on my grandfather's knee, I heard stories about people like Gene Debs and instead it's a strange environment when today, at least it's my perception that what the members of union usually want is kind of like an insurance system. They pay a premium and we adjust claims.

Mark: As opposed to--

Boyer: Taking some responsibility. Yeah, there's some things I wish could be changed about the model of activism in this culture. That's why in many places, and what I've said, I worked in that and complained about -- at this particular part of my life had problems it's note like the other things have gone great or the society for that matter.

Mark: Do you think your VVAW experience kept you involved or did it challenge your involvement in these sorts of issues?

Boyer: No, I think it did keep me involved. Because as I said even back to Vietnam when I reached that point in time where I decided that I was going to devote some energy to politics not just in a kind of ad hoc protest mode but that I would really have to devote some long-term sustained energy to it I think VVAW gave me, it was a confidence building thing. That I could do it, that it wasn't a mystery. It all seemed so obtuse to me. 'Cause my dad and granddad, while they were interested in that, they were kind of blue collar natural leaders. They didn't hold organizational roles as such, and things like that. So it was always a mystery what happened to those guys who worked in those offices and pushed those papers around, and stuff like that. So it kept me out it really did change my life. If it hadn't been for that I might have gone back to being a forester or working in a natural resources department somewhere.

Mark: I'm also interested in your religious background. You mentioned that you were Mennonite.

Boyer: Yes, I am now. I wasn't brought up that way. My grandmother was and I would attend with her. There were many things related to war that occurred in that family that provided a lot of tension. She belonged to a very unusual congregation of Mennonites, in the Frankonia Conference in eastern Pennsylvania, and they had had 200 years of fights over whether or not to participate in war because they had a faction that was somewhat enamored of the "just war theory." And as a result hers was one of the few Mennonite families who had an abundance of veterans from the Revolutionary War, the Civil War, and even some of her sons in World War II who participated as unarmed medics. As a result there was some tension over that -- of what the proper role was. Was it always a bad thing? Or was there some justification on occasion.

Mark: So, when you were a 20-year old kid in Vietnam, did this weigh on you?

Boyer: It was all too complicated for me, frankly. [Laugh]

Mark: You didn't think that much about it.

Boyer: No. I thought, you know, to put it in the crudest euphemism I can, what the original appeal of the anti-war movement for me wasn't on a moral level, it was just things seemed fucked up. And I saw people under kind of emotional pain. That was the context in which I wanted to see it end. I didn't have any deeper philosophical or moral basis for it at all.

Mark: I see. Then in your later life then, your involvement in the church and these sorts of things, it's my impression that grew were independent of your war experiences and activist experiences, this was something that happened to Dennis and he was [intelligible] or whatever the case may be.

Boyer: Well, it evolved over time. I hope I thought it through enough to give an answer to it because it's something I ask myself. What trajectory I'm on and how did I get there exactly. It's a process in a way. When I got here in Wisconsin and I got involved in setting up something that, while it was a fiasco at one level, it was very rewarding for me. I was one of the founders of the Labor Farm Party. And in the course of that I did a lot of traveling around the state, ran for Attorney General, got involved in the anti-nuke movement at the local level, treaty rights, stuff like that. I was getting out and meeting a lot of back to the landers, a lot of tribal people, a lot of medicine men, lodge keepers, pipe carriers. And it kind of -- it touched a part of me in some way that I was intrigued with and I kind of reconnected with some of that stuff. I was starting to look at things in a more value based way. Trying to figure out, you know, what was--what were these cosmic things that needed to be looked at. I went through that evolution for a period of time but I didn't want to see myself just as an Indian want-to-be 'cause even though I am part Native American it's really remote and barely consequential. So it's not that I have some cultural thing to paw on me there. But I liked what they were doing. I saw, even in the veterans context, there's in most of the traditional spiritual Ojibwa I know, there's a way to bring a veteran back into the circle and reconcile, and cleanse him. Kind of a purification. We don't have that for people who have gone through war and I think it's very significant that culture recognize that need. And they do. So I was kind of investigating these kind of, I say kind of a folk wisdom that exists in a lot of cultures. Then finally it all kind of culminated for me when the Persian Gulf War came along. I had recently had a son and I wanted to, it was, my wife and I, we just had only been out on this farm in Dodgeville for a few years and we were thinking of ways to get back into the community and so we were visiting various churches around the area and along comes this war and right away it's kind of "rah rah" the troops and yellow ribbons everywhere right from the pulpit and I said to my wife this is--no this is not it. So we got to get some people who thought this through a little deeper and that's what brought me back to the Mennonite connection. Was that an answer or was it too around the horn?

Mark: Oh no. It was very interesting. Am I missing anything do you think?

Boyer: I can't -- no, I can't think of it. There might have been different ways to skin this cat. Oh, the only thing I might want to add, it's somewhat, you didn't ask any question that prompts this but I try to think of anything else I might have done that's kind of interesting, from a veteran's perspective. Through my work with the Labor Farm Party and because I kind of got greened by all those people out in the boonies, the Indians and others, I ended up on an exchange with the Green Party of the German State of North-Rhine Westphalia and I went back over there in '86. And to show how green my timing is, on the plane going over there Chernobyl blew up. Which was actually a great way to see the Green Party because instead of being in kind of a low level look at the posters just visiting the office, it was, I was there for six, five weeks. It was just one ass kicking, hell raising, over the barricades, water canons, tear gas day in day out. It was pretty exciting. But one of the things I got involved in there that I don't think bore that much fruit but it had an intriguing possibility and I tried to follow through on it, one of the Greens told me that one of the most frustrating things was dealing with American servicemen in Europe, especially those connected to nuclear weapons, the Pershing missiles, and the cruise missiles and stuff like that. And I talked about that with them extensively and we developed some materials, I helped them develop some English materials on it and then we started a kind of thing of once a month -- we did this for about a year and a half -- we'd have an, they put out a thing by an American veteran about the character of these weapons of mass destruction. I did the first one. But I had guest luminaries, people like Sam Day and other veterans who wrote things up for me and we sent it over there and they got it, you know, the Greens would be outside an installation handing these things out. That was kind of, that was you might say my last veterans activist shot.

Mark: As I was leaving Germany, too, actually.

Boyer: Were you?

Mark: Yeah. Okay, well if there's something else I'm missing, be sure to remind me. We can always start this up again. Otherwise, thanks for stopping in. I appreciate the vast amount of time you spent with me.

Boyer: No problem.