

Wisconsin Veterans Museum
Research Center

Transcript of an
Oral History Interview with
GARY A. DOWE
Machine Gunner, Marine Corps, Vietnam War.

2003

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Dowe, Gary A., (1949-). Oral History Interview, 2003.

Master Copy: 1 sound cassette (ca. 45 min.), analog, 1 7/8 ips, mono.

User Copy: 1 sound cassette (ca. 45 min.), analog, 1 7/8 ips, mono.

Transcript: 0.1 linear ft. (1 folder).

Abstract:

Gary A. Dowe, a Cedarburg, Wisconsin native, discusses his Vietnam War service as a machine gunner with the weapons platoon of Delta Company, 1st Marines, 5th Marine Division. He talks about enlisting at age 17, the shock of being greeted at boot camp in San Diego by yelling drill instructors, volunteering for Vietnam duty, and the results of physical training. Dowe evaluates the M60 machine gun and touches on progressing from new guy to team leader. Stationed at Hill 63 in the Que Son Valley, he describes patrols and night attacks, including an incident where he was wounded while crossing a rice paddy. His detailed account of this event includes lying wounded on the field for four hours, seeing a medical corpsman get shot by a sniper, fighting while moving with other wounded soldiers to an evacuation site, and leaving by helicopter the next day. After three weeks of recovery from his wound and dysentery at Chu Lai, Dowe was sent back to his unit. He touches upon life in a combat situation including lack of sleep, trading soda for beer, and saving his beer rations until he had enough for a buzz. About two weeks after returning to the field, Dowe discusses a mission where his company was under guerrilla attacks and he was hit by a grenade. He touches upon waking up in a hospital in Okinawa, recovering from shrapnel wounds, exemption from further Vietnam service because of his two injuries, and guarding nuclear weapons on Okinawa. Dowe talks about receiving care packages of food and “spit and shine” guard duty in the Philippines. He speaks of eating local fare, hanging around Treasure Island (California) for three months, and doing a Caribbean cruise. Dowe discusses attending jungle training school in Panama with other Vietnam veterans. After his discharge, he mentions working for Briggs and Stratton and joining the Cedarburg American Legion and the Disabled American Veterans.

Biographical Sketch:

Dowe (b.1949?) served in the Marine Corps from 1966 to 1969, including a tour in Vietnam in 1967. Wounded twice while in Vietnam, he received two Purple Heart medals. He settled in Grafton (Wisconsin).

Interviewed by Laurie Arendt, 2003

Transcribed by Jennifer Kalaidis, 2010, and Michael Kerins, 2011

Checked and corrected by Joan Bruggink, 2012

Abstract written by Susan Krueger, 2012

Interview Transcript:

Laurie: This is an interview with Gary Dowe, who served with the Marines?

Dowe: Mm-hmm.

Laurie: During what years?

Dowe: From '66 to '69.

Laurie: Alright. And the interview's being conducted at his home at the following address, which is?

Dowe: 2046B Pine Ridge Court, Grafton, Wisconsin.

Laurie: And today is July 28th. I am the interviewer, Laurie Arendt, for the Ozaukee Veterans Book Project. And the first question is just to kind of establish where you were in your life. Were you drafted or did you enlist?

Dowe: No. No, I enlisted.

Laurie: Why did you enlist?

Dowe: Well, that's a good story. I went to Cedarburg and I was going into my second year of high school, and my parents moved to Shorewood, so that didn't work out well out for me.

Laurie: No, I could see that. [Dowe laughs] That's a bit of a shock.

Dowe: And I was sixteen my freshman year, so when we saw that that wasn't gonna work out down there, I quit school and went to work and kind of bummed around, stayed in a couple of interesting places. I lived in a chicken coop for three weeks.

Laurie: Oh my!

Dowe: And then a car for another week. [both laugh] And then I lived above Alston's for awhile. And then I moved in with my grandparents for a little while.

Laurie: In Cedarburg?

Dowe: Yeah, they were just over the line. And that wasn't really going much of any place, so I decided, "Well, I might as well go in the Service." But I didn't decide to go right into the Marine Corps. My dad was in the Navy, so I thought, "Well, I'll go in the Navy." Well, there was a nine month waiting period to get into the Navy back then, plus being a high school dropout.

Laurie: Yeah, you didn't have a whole lot of—

Dowe: No. So then I thought, “Well, maybe the Coast Guard.” Well that was the same situation, the same with the Air Force. [laughs] It all came down to the Army or the Marine Corps. And I thought to myself, “Well, anybody can go in the Army. I'm a tough guy. I'll go into the Marine Corps.” [laughs]

Laurie: Okay, good. [laughs] Alright. Wow, I commend you. Did you know a lot about the Marine Corps at that time?

Dowe: Only what—I think I had talked to some other friends, and what you'd see on TV, but I knew it was, you know, a first rate outfit and everything, but I wasn't sure exactly how much I was gonna get out of that. I knew I was in great shape; I could do a hundred push-ups and a hundred sit-ups and I could do all kinds of pull-ups and stuff, so—

Laurie: Oh, that's good.

Dowe: Yeah, so I figured, “Well now, I'll be okay with that.” But I was only five foot two and weighed a hundred—yeah, 5' 2” and weighed a hundred twenty-two pounds when I went in. But I had a little attitude, so—

Laurie: Okay.

Dowe: But when I stepped off that plane and heard that screaming and yelling going on, I'm going, “Now what did I do?” [laughs]

Laurie: One of the veterans in the first book wrote his autobiography; I think he wrote in the same year. And he could have got a deferment, he was from a family of lawyers and, you know, he could've had his—he enlisted in the Marines, and he said, “You know, I was expecting after the long bus ride to California that, you know, we'd get a night off. Wrong!” [laughs]

Dowe: Yeah. I stood at attention from midnight 'til four o'clock in the morning waitin' to get your hair cut and get your clothes together and everything.

Laurie: Okay. Did you go to California?

Dowe: Yeah, San Diego.

Laurie: How did your family feel about you enlisting in the Marines? Did they have any opinions?

Dowe: No, they were happy to see me go. [both laugh] They figured that'd make a man of me and whatever else, ya know, needed to be done.

- Laurie: Okay. When you enlisted, did you go in right away or was there a week or two?
- Dowe: I knew probably a couple months before I went in. In fact, I didn't even take my physical 'til the day I left.
- Laurie: Oh, really?
- Dowe: Yeah. I swore in and took my physical on the day I left. I put it off. I knew which day I was going, but I kept just puttin' off the other stuff. And finally the recruiter said, "Well, we can do that all on the same day." 'Cause they needed bodies, so they were pretty, you know, free as far as what they could do.
- Laurie: Sure, flexible. Now in 1966, what did you know about what was going on in Vietnam?
- Dowe: Oh, I followed it pretty—history I love quite a bit, so I followed it quite a bit. I knew what was goin' on there.
- Laurie: Did you expect that you would be sent over there?
- Dowe: Well, the thing is, when I went into the Marine Corps, I was seventeen years old. So after boot camp, which I tried like heck to get steered towards motor pool or something, and after rifle training, then they sent me to machine gun school.
- Laurie: Wow.
- Dowe: Yeah. So when I got out of machine gun school, I wasn't eighteen—you had to be eighteen to go to Vietnam—so they sent me to Camp Lejeune, North Carolina.
- Laurie: And it was waiting time, waiting period there?
- Dowe: Well, no, they were going to go on a Caribbean cruise; they go on a Mediterranean/Caribbean cruises out of there. And we were gettin' ready—they were settin' up to do that. You have inspections and all kinds of stuff you have to go through before you go on these cruises. Well, this was one not much to my liking, and I kept volunteering to go to Vietnam and they kept tellin' me, "You're not eighteen." Well, in January I turned eighteen and they says, "Okay."
- Laurie: You got your wish.

- Dowe: Yeah, so then I was back home again and then out to California for some more training and then away we went.
- Laurie: What did you think of training?
- Dowe: Uh, you know, you adapted to everything. At first I thought, “Well, this is gonna be harder than I figured.” But no, it wasn’t. If you didn’t fight the system, you flowed with it.
- Laurie: Good. When you went in, did you end up with anybody from home? Or Wisconsin, I mean?
- Dowe: No. I bumped into people at Camp Lejeune. Further down the line I’ll tell you a story about a guy I ran into, but other than that, no. People from Wisconsin, but not people I really knew.
- Laurie: Okay, good. You came home when you turned eighteen; did you have leave?
- Dowe: Um-hmm.
- Laurie: Did your family notice any difference in you? Did they mention anything?
- Dowe: Maybe, I don’t know. See, I put on inches and weight, you know, so—
- Laurie: You hit puberty in the Marines.
- Dowe: [laughs] Right, yes. I had the puberty part of it. I went from 5’2” to 5’7” and from a hundred twenty-two up to a hundred fifty-two, and I pretty much maintained that all the way through.
- Laurie: But I imagine despite the big growth spurt you were pretty lean and muscular, you know, because of the training.
- Dowe: Oh, yeah, I was—in fact, boot camp more wore me down than built me up as far as what I could do. Like I said, I could knock off a hundred push-ups and a hundred sit-ups and everything, but you’re goin’ day and night, you’re always goin’. You’re out there runnin’ and you’re doin’, and somebody messes up and then you’re doing more physical stuff with full gear and in sand and hot and everything. What it does, it doesn’t—strengthwise, sure it does temper some of your muscles, but it builds your stamina. You can take a lot more.
- Laurie: My husband was in the Army, and when he came home from basic training, he had matured a lot, but he had developed a gambling problem. [laughs]
- Dowe: Well, you gotta have money to gamble, and that wasn’t a deal for us. We made ninety-six dollars a month when I went in.

- Laurie: Wow. Okay, good. So when were you actually sent to Vietnam? '67?
- Dowe: Yeah, '67.
- Laurie: Okay. Did you anticipate anything about Vietnam?
- Dowe: Well, actually, ya know, I figured all the girls will think this is pretty cool and everything. I thought, I had talked to guys at Camp Lejuene that'd been there for a full tour and they hardly saw any action at all, and it wasn't any big thing as far as—yeah, I realized there were people gettin' killed, but not that big. And these guys were there like in '65, around there, and I talked to 'em, and they told me “Keep my head down” and everything, but it didn't seem like it was gonna be a real big problem.
- Laurie: Anything about the heat or—
- Dowe: Oh, it was a hundred-ten in the daytime, it was terrible hot, yeah. I had a surprise coming to me once I got there, because it almost started immediately.
- Laurie: Can you describe to me your first couple of days in Vietnam? Where were you, what were you doing?
- Dowe: I was at a camp, I was—well, first we landed in Da Nang and then we went from Da Nang to Chu Lai, and then we went out to a hill called Hill 63 in Tam Kỳ and that was in the Que Son Valley.
- Laurie: Okay, good. Did everything kind of happen in quick succession for you at that point?
- Dowe: Oh, yeah, it was—you're supposed to have four guys to a team, a machine gun team, and I was, when you first get there, low man on the pole. Well, we only had three guys. The Marine Corps was short of equipment and short of people, so, um, I was a—as we called it an “ammo humper” for about two weeks and then all of a sudden I was a machine gunner because of losing people; that's the way progression went. So I became the machine gunner, and then it wasn't long and I was a machine gunner and a team leader.
- Laurie: So tell me a little bit about being a machine gunner. Tell me about the gun, or was it hard to use?
- Dowe: Well, it was an M60 machine gun, which is these guns that I'm holding here. [points to picture]
- Laurie: Look at you! You look so young!

- Dowe: Yeah, I was! [both laugh] I don't have many pictures from my time in the Service.
- Laurie: This is a good picture though, this is a perfect one. This one too.
- Dowe: Just about every picture I have is other people had taken and—I mean, I didn't carry a camera or anything like that, you know, just lived for the moment and never thought much about it. So, um, yeah, machine gun—
- Laurie: Did it jam at all?
- Dowe: The M60 was a really good gun. It weighed—it was twenty-three pounds, but it was lighter than World War II, they used .30 cal's [calibers] and stuff like that and they were a lot heavier. Here the thing is you had to carry twenty-three pounds plus four hundred-fifty rounds of ammunition, plus a sixty pound pack plus a .45 side arm and your canteen and all your other stuff.
- Laurie: Forty-five pound side arm?
- Dowe: No, .45 calibers, sorry.
- Laurie: Oh, that's it; I was going to say, "Wow, that's really heavy."
- Dowe: Yeah. [laughs] Real slow on the draw! And then you're in weapons platoon, which is mortars, machine guns, all that—3.5 rocket launchers and stuff—and generally when you're traveling in a platoon or in a squad or anything you're traveling in, the weapons stay to the back—
- Laurie: Okay, is that in case you're ambushed?
- Dowe: Yeah. They'll call, "Guns up," and then you come running from the back to the front of the platoon and you're supposed to lay down cover for the rest of 'em, 'cause that put out the same as six automatic rifles did.
- Laurie: Prior to going into the Marines, had you been a hunter or anything?
- Dowe: Oh, yeah.
- Laurie: So you were pretty comfortable around guns?
- Dowe: Oh yeah, I had guns since I was six, eight—I mean, excuse me, eight, ten years old, where I fired .22s and stuff, and by the time I was twelve I was deer hunting. You had to be twelve then, and I think you still do.
- Laurie: It's funny, because a lot of the guys that I interviewed were hunters growing up. They grew up, and so they were like, "Oh, yeah, ya know, piece of cake!"

Dowe: Yeah, yeah.

Laurie: Okay, good. So you ended up at the Que Son Valley, correct?

Dowe: Que Son. We were on Hill 63. We'd run our operations out of Hill 63, our patrols and everything.

Laurie: So you went out on patrols?

Dowe: Yeah, I think I was there about three weeks now, two or three weeks, and we were out on a patrol—well, we had been under attack many times, but this day we were gettin' attacked a little bit here and there, but then all of a sudden we came into a wooded area and we were attacked on all three sides. They came up outta the ground and everything.

Laurie: So you walked into a trap?

Dowe: Well, yeah, and before that too, I have to tell you, I had amoebic dysentery from drinking the water, and I was supposed to go in the hospital that day that we got attacked that time, but because we were under attack, we couldn't. And I was in a wooded area and I had my machine gun, and on the back of the machine gun is your butt plate and—or rather, the plate is your butt—and there's a plate that holds that in there and if that pulls out, well then the spring that holds the piston and everything else falls out the back. Well, it got hooked up—I had it open, I was puttin' my ammo in and it got hooked on, and that started comin' apart, there's bullets flyin' all over the place, I'm tryin' to put this back together, and I'm sick as a dog. So I just got it all together, and I went flying out into a rice paddy, and I got shot in the leg.

Laurie: Wow.

Dowe: Did a flip, and I thought, "Well, I better lay right here 'cause I'm in a wide open area." And I had one guy behind me, and he had been shot in the stomach and there was nothing I could do for him, so I laid there in the hot sun from noon until four o'clock in the afternoon, and while I laid there, the jets would come over and drop bombs. Because I could see out of the corner of my eye, I could see the enemy walking on the dykes and stuff and they threw a hand grenade over by—there was three of us now—and it hit my helmet and it rolled away, and I started saying my prayers. I figured, "Well, this is it." Well, their homemade stuff wasn't all that good and never went off. So at four o'clock, I'm thirsty, it's hot, I can feel the blood running down my leg—it never really hurt—and I decided, "Okay, next time the bombers come in, I'm gonna run back to where there's some cover." Well there I sat. Where's the bombers? Finally, they did start droppin', and I got up and I ran, and I got back to where my platoon was, the rest of 'em. And there were several of 'em

wounded there, and the corpsman came over and he wrapped my leg, and then he was goin' over and working on another guy and while I'm sittin' there watching him work on the other guy, his helmet just went up a little bit like this and he slumped over the other guy. They shot him right between the eyes and just grazed the helmet and raised the rim. So he was dead. So we were still—then we started movin' around and stuff, and all I had was a knife and a couple hand grenades.

Laurie: So then I have a couple questions. You were shot lower leg or upper leg?

Dowe: Thigh.

Laurie: But you were still able to run?

Dowe: Yeah, oh yeah.

Laurie: So did it go through?

Dowe: The bullet hit my machine gun and then it broke into like six pieces and hit me. It was, you know, it's stiff and everything, but you know you're so scared that's the last thing—you're not even thinkin' about that.

Laurie: Yup, okay. So when you were in the rice paddy, were you laying motionless that whole time?

Dowe: I was laying, yeah. And I was kind of laying on my side and just lookin' this way, but I was laying mostly, because they had snipers up there, and I didn't want to get shot through the head, so I just, you know, laid.

Laurie: Oh, god. Okay, let's see. And you said that there were three of you together. And the other two died?

Dowe: Yeah, they both got killed.

Laurie: Okay. How far away was your platoon?

Dowe: Oh, they were just maybe a hundred yards away.

Laurie: Like in some trees?

Dowe: Yep, yep. In the meantime, others were comin' in, and we were fightin'—we were tryin' to get across that same paddy and get over to another tree line where we'd be better protected. We did manage to do that. The guy in front of me had been shot twice through his chest, but it wasn't through his heart, it was—in fact, it was this side, and every time his heart would beat, though, the

blood would squirt out the front and out the back, but he was still up and runnin' too.

Laurie: Wow. He probably didn't feel anything either.

Dowe: No. He was a tough old Mexican. He was a big guy.

Laurie: Okay. [laughs] Now, how many times had you gone on patrol before this happened, roughly? This wasn't your first patrol?

Dowe: Oh, no, no, no. We had been out just about every other day since I'd been in country. We had come under some pretty fierce attacks before, but it was nothin' like this.

Laurie: Do you remember the first time you were shot at?

Dowe: Uh, yeah. We were out just approaching a village and we just got some sporadic gunfire.

Laurie: Was it surreal to you?

Dowe: It was—yeah, you just, “Well, what was that?” Ya know?

Laurie: So you ended up with your platoon and you moved to that other tree line, and then what happened?

Dowe: Well, they could see the enemy runnin' through the trees, and so we were throwin' hand grenades and stuff, and then we got back to—we got to an area where we could have more people all surrounded, and they decided that we would get all the wounded to a hill that wasn't far away to get medevaced out. So the first couple times it went pretty good, and then the dark started comin', and they were gettin' nervous about it, and there were guys worse wounded than I was, even though I'm still crappin' blood in my pants, and this is turnin' black, but—so I had to lay there all night long, and that was almost worse than what I'd gone through during the day already.

Laurie: Did the fighting continue on into evening?

Dowe: No, then it had stopped.

Laurie: It had stopped. Was that typical for it to end like that?

Dowe: Well, once they bring in stuff like a Puff [AC-47 gunship] and stuff like that, it clears it out pretty good. And we had more reinforcements come in.

Laurie: Okay. So at that time had you felt any pain at all?

- Dowe: My leg got really stiff, and I was just scared.
- Laurie: Okay. Probably thinking that Shorewood was a pretty nice place at that point.
[laughs]
- Dowe: [laughs] I thought Cedarburg'd be a better place!
- Laurie: Okay, and then the next morning?
- Dowe: The next morning I got medevaced out, just me, the crew, and ten dead bodies on a Chinook 47. And they took me to Da Nang, and, uh—wait a minute, no they did not. They took me to Chu Lai, the hospital at Chu Lai, and there they gave me my pills for that.
- Laurie: You finally got your dysentery treated?
- Dowe: Yeah, boy that took a while though. But, yeah. Then the general came in and gave me my Purple Heart and stuff.
- Laurie: So were you eighteen at that point?
- Dowe: Well, I was eighteen when I went to 'Nam.
- Laurie: But eighteen, eighteen and a half, closer to nineteen?
- Dowe: Well, I'd only been in 'Nam about a month now, so—
- Laurie: So you were a few months over eighteen?
- Dowe: January's my birthday, and this is June now.
- Laurie: Oh, wow, okay.
- Dowe: So that went all pretty good.
- Laurie: And your leg?
- Dowe: I healed good and everything, and the lieutenant came by and asked me how it was going and this was about three weeks later and stuff, and I says, "Yeah, good." He says, "Good. We've got a new machine gun ready for ya." And I go, "Okay, let's get back at it!" Yeah, well, I'm talkin' stupid, but [laughs]—so I went back to the bush again.
- Laurie: Now when you went back, were you put back with your same unit?

- Dowe: Uh-huh, same unit. I was with the First Marines, 5th Marine Division, Delta Company, Weapons Platoon.
- Laurie: I always try and put that in in case somehow your book would get to somebody who served with you, so they can go, “Oh my god!” ya know?
- Dowe: That would be something. The only this is—well, I’m gettin’ ahead of myself, but after I had left, just about my whole company got wiped out. So there wasn’t too much left. But I always look in the back of the—I get the *DAV* [*Disabled American Veterans* magazine] and I get the *Legion* [*The American Legion* magazine] and everything, and I always look in the back for any reunions and mine never shows up there, so, you know. Not for the year that I served or anything like that.
- Laurie: Or maybe like a wife or a child or, ya know, an adult child now? Okay. How long did you stay out?
- Dowe: About three weeks.
- Laurie: Three weeks. Were there rotations? Did you get rotated in at all?
- Dowe: Then I went right back into the bush, and we were in the back area, you know, in Chu Lai, and that was nice, yeah. Eat chicken and drink beer, you know, but then I was back, and went back to the bush.
- Laurie: And how long where you there?
- Dowe: Before I got wounded the second time?
- Laurie: Oh, you got wounded again? [Dowe laughs] Okay, yeah. How long were you there?
- Dowe: About another—let’s see, I went out there about a week. Oh, I got a little anecdote to that too. You know every day when you’re out in the bush they bring you a soda and a beer. Now the beer was either Falstaff or Ballantine Ale, both really bad beers in a hundred and ten degree weather, but I used to trade my soda for other people’s beer, and then I would stockpile my beer, and then I would have like three warm beers, and boy, if that wasn’t a buzz! [both laugh] And I’d only sleep about three hours in a twenty-four period, because I was just too afraid to trust my life to anybody else, I’d seen too many crazy things.
- Laurie: So was that just a matter of you falling asleep out of exhaustion, or were you—

Dowe: Yeah, you know, you'd sit back, and you had your weapon cleaned and everything and you just might doze off for an hour or so, and then you'd be awake and any little sound would wake you up.

Laurie: Did you have to pull guard duty at all?

Dowe: Oh, sure, sure. Yeah. We always, ya know, had to rotate on. That's why you didn't go on patrols every day. So I was back in the bush about, oh, I don't know, a week, week and a half. Maybe it was two weeks. Must have been about two or three weeks, because when we went out on another patrol, we had a big—we had, I think it was a battalion patrol, so it was a big patrol. It was what they call a regular movement, you know, where we were checking, looking for insurgents and stuff. And we had come out of a riverbed, and I set the machine gun up on the bank, on the top of the riverbed, and kind of just sat down below it against the bank like this, and a machine gun opened right down the middle of us, and I couldn't reach my machine gun 'cause it's up here and I'm down here, and there's a machine gun shootin' at us, and our lieutenant got wounded there. And then we all started firing and everything, and they were gone again. And that happened all day long; they would hit us and then go, hit us and then go, and everybody would kind of get, you know, some wounded here, some wounded there. Well then came the nighttime, and we were kind of dug in. We set up a perimeter, and I had myself a little ditch that I was laying in, and they did scary things at night. They'd blow whistles and call out "Joe" and, ya know, stuff like that.

Laurie: Some American words, English words?

Dowe: Yeah, yeah, yeah. And, uh, all of a sudden there was an explosion, and it was a hand grenade, and it went off near where my foot was, and my foot went numb and I thought, "Oh my god, I lost my feet." And then I guess there was another explosion, because then I was—next thing I woke up in the hospital, and the guy asked me how old I was, and I said—told him how old I was, and next thing I woke up I was in Okinawa.

Laurie: Wow.

Dowe: [pause] And I had gotten shrapnel in my feet, my hands, and through the top of the helmet.

Laurie: Really?

Dowe: Yeah. Just a— [pause] just a, ya know, a concussion.

Laurie: Was that confusing? To wake up? Were you aware that—

Dowe: I knew I wasn't in the bush any more because I woke up, I'm assuming in Da Nang, and when the male nurse asked me how old I was, I told him I was eighteen, and he says, "Well, we're gettin' you outta here." And then when I woke up next I was in Sukiran, in Okinawa in the hospital there.

Laurie: So how long were you in Okinawa?

Dowe: Well, I was there, oh, laid up for about three weeks or so, and then I got stationed there in Okinawa. When you go into a war zone, they give you a wish list of where you would like to go. **[End of Tape One, Side One]** But they went ahead and just stationed me in Okinawa.

Laurie: Why did you put those on your wish list?

Dowe: Well, I just—Philippines seemed neat, and Japan, well that sounded interesting. And Okinawa's just a third choice I just threw in there.

Laurie: So the fact that you had been wounded twice, did that take you out of Vietnam?

Dowe: Yeah. If you're wounded one time severely that takes you out of war, two times if you stay at least forty-eight hours in the hospital, or three times no matter how bad you're wounded, that automatically takes you out of Service.

Laurie: You said you were in the hospital for about three weeks, but did you have to do any physical therapy or rehabilitation, or was it just a matter of healing?

Dowe: Yeah, it was pretty much that. I'm pretty rambunctious, so, you know, you get up and around and everything.

Laurie: Do you still have the shrapnel in your hands, feet and legs?

Dowe: No, that's all okay. I still get in my thigh, my leg I do.

Laurie: Can you tell the weather by it or anything?

Dowe: It does humid—I mean, not humid days, but like rainy days it hurts, it hurts. Some days you're limping a little bit, but it's nothin' serious.

Laurie: Because I have back problems, and I can always tell when it's gonna rain before it rains, like if there's a cold front comin' in I can always tell. Good. So what did you do when you were in Okinawa? Once you recovered.

Dowe: Guarded nuclear weapons.

Laurie: Oh, god!

Dowe: [laughs] Well, we had top secret clearances, so we couldn't tell anybody we guarded nuclear weapons.

Laurie: Can I put that in, or are you gonna get in trouble?

Dowe: Sure. No, no, no. Believe me, they built a new place, wonder if I've got it here. [brief pause]

Laurie: Your condo looks remarkably like Mr. Riebe's.

Dowe: Yeah, oh except for one thing, he's got the smaller one.

Laurie: Yeah, yours does seem—

Dowe: See, ours is a little more open here, and we have a utility room. He doesn't have that. [they're looking through photos].

See that old building there? Well, we had a guard with a twelve gauge shotgun with double-aught buck and a forty-five on the inside, and the same on the outside. And we would guard that building, and that building, they had nuclear stuff inside that building at that time.

Laurie: Was there any knowledge of what was in there, outside of you?

Dowe: No, that's why we all had those top secret clearances. But I was there for six months and I received my second Purple Heart there. I was there for six months, and then they came to me, and says, "Oh, we looked at your wish list. You said you really wanted to go to the Philippines first." And I says, "Yeah." He says, "Well, you can." And I says, "Oh, really?" I says, "Do I get to go home first?" He says, "Sure." So I got to go home again and then come back to the Philippines.

Laurie: Wow. Did you stay in contact with your family at all? Did you write any letters?

Dowe: Oh yeah, I wrote, ya know, whenever I could. Friends and family.

Laurie: Oh, that's good that you stayed in touch.

Dowe: Letters. And my grandmother always sent me care packages: Polish summer sausages and vegetable soup and Campbell's and all that Franco-American spaghetti; I can still eat all that stuff cold out of a can today. [laughs]

Laurie: Oh, wow. My husband was in Desert Storm, and I think we talked twice while he was there, and he was complaining about the food, but not—like he wasn't

whining about it because he'd been in some—you know, he'd eaten MREs for days when he was—he was in regular Army, then he went in the National Guard, and that's when he got activated. But I sent him tuna, mayonnaise, and a loaf of Wonder Bread, and it got there and it wasn't moldy, and they made tuna salad sandwiches.

Dowe: [laughs] Well, the outside of my casings were always moldy, but that's okay, we just washed 'em off and pulled the casing off. And see, most of the boys never, ever tasted summer sausage before. And I would get my piece right away, because I wasn't getting' any more. They loved the stuff. That and my grandmother's fruitcake. They ate that too. [both laugh]

Laurie: Oh, that's funny. So you went to the Philippines?

Dowe: Yes, I did.

Laurie: And what did you do there?

Dowe: There I was in a barracks, a Marine Corps barracks, which is guard duty. Marine Corps guards all naval bases and ships and everything and that's what I did there.

Laurie: Did you find—and this probably isn't the right word—but yeah, you were guarding nuclear weapons and you were guarding the barracks, but did you find it *boring* compared to what you had done in Vietnam, or did you not mind?

Dowe: No, because when I wasn't doing that I was out partying or something, so it—and the funny thing is, I was walking by the office one day and I saw a name on the C-Bag [US Marine duffle sea bag] that I recognized, and here was one of the guys from Camp Lejeune that'd told me keep my head down. He had gone back for a second tour of duty in Vietnam. He hadn't got wounded the first time, but he got wounded three times the second time he went back, so we were both stationed at the same place.

Laurie: Wow. But he survived?

Dowe: Yes.

Laurie: So how you said you were out partying, that kind of leads to—do you have any funny stories? Any PG-rated stories?

Dowe: Well, I'll tell you, I don't even know where you start on something like that. It was pretty much, you know, just go out to town. We had our certain hangouts and stuff like that.

Laurie: Did you get any tattoos?

Dowe: No, no. In fact, when I came out of boot camp I went—after about a week or so of rifle training, you got your first leave. I went down to San Diego and we were gonna get tattoos. I was gonna go down and get a, ya know, Marine Corps insignia or a USMC or something, and they went down there and the guy says, “Sure, no problem. Got your ID?” Because you had to be eighteen for that too. And I go, “Aww, I left it at a hotel, I’ll be right back.” And I never went back for a tattoo. [Laurie laughs] And my father said that I would smoke and drink coffee by the time I got out and I never did that either.

Laurie: Really?

Dowe: Yep. Hard-headed.

Laurie: You wanted to prove him wrong?

Dowe: Yeah. [laughs]

Laurie: Now you finally did get to the Philippines. Was it as interesting as you thought it would be?

Dowe: Well, it was fun. It wasn’t—this was more spit and shine duty than what I had been in Okinawa. In Okinawa we were guarding utilities and stuff. Here you had to be dressed—

Laurie: Presentable?

Dowe: Yeah, and you had to have your khakis or your dress greens, depending on the season, and you had to spit and shine.

Laurie: When you were over in the Far East, did you have an opportunity to sample the cuisine?

Dowe: Oh, yeah!

Laurie: Did you like it?

Dowe: Oh, yeah. I loved it! In fact, when I came back, I was looking for a dish that I had over there called Pancit Canton and what it turned out to be is Cantonese—like Chinese—if you go to Chinese places and order Cantonese, it’s pan fried noodles with the stuff on it. Only over there, it’s all the vegetables and it’s pork and it’s pan fried noodles. But any place I was, I just about tried—I had raw octopus, and they dipped that in a hot sauce in Okinawa in Japan; dried squid, that was like eating beef jerky, only saltier; seaweed; any dog meat—had that in the Philippines, quite good.

- Laurie: That's what my husband said, he was in Korea. Okay. Do you still have a taste for that type of food?
- Dowe: Oh, yeah. But I couldn't eat rice for a long time, and here I cooked it yet tonight, ya know. [his wife comes in and says he didn't like rice very well]
- Laurie: So now, you weren't dating, or you met him right after?
- Wife: Right after he came out, in '69.
- Dowe: Well, yeah. I came out in April and I met you in July.
- Laurie: Well that was convenient.
- Wife: Yes, it was. [unintelligible]
- Dowe: Actually, I met you in June; I met you in June. We dated first in July.
- Laurie: So when you were done—
- Dowe: Well, then I went back to the west coast to San Francisco—I'm trying to think of the name of the base.
- Wife: Treasure Island?
- Dowe: Treasure Island, thank you, dear. Treasure Island, yes. Treasure Island was a—it's a staging area, or an area that get orders, or transit area, which you would call it. Well it just so happens that two of the guys I was in the Philippines with, one was in charge of the orders and the other guy was just getting out, and he lived in Richmond, which is, like, over by Oakland, so the guy that's handing out the orders asked me, ya know, when do I wanna go and where do I wanna go. And I says, "Well, I'll hang around here for awhile," because my other friend had just gotten out, and he said I could hang by his place, so I stayed there for three months. [laughs] I was more or less a civilian, pretty much, more than I was in the Service. I'd come back and sleep at night and stuff, but I didn't have to report to anybody because this other friend of mine was taking care of me that way. So after about three months I decided, "Well, I better get back to my regular stuff. Now where do I wanna go? Hmm." So I says, "Okay, I'll make one of those Caribbean cruises, so I had him write me up orders—of course, stopping at home again—and then going back to Camp Lejeune to make the Caribbean cruise.
- Laurie: So that was your first one, correct?
- Dowe: Yes.

- Laurie: Yeah, 'cause you just were there when they were staging—
- Dowe: I was just there and we weren't going. That's the thing, any opportunity I had where I could go somewhere else, I would. That way you avoided a lot of inspections and stuff, and you got to see more of the world, and that's what I was after anyhow. So you didn't make much rate that way.
- Laurie: Well, who cares?
- Dowe: No. Well, it would have been nicer to come out a corporal or a sergeant, but I came out a lance corporal.
- Laurie: Uh-huh. Well, you weren't planning on staying in, were you?
- Dowe: Well, I'll tell you, when I first went in I thought maybe after boot camp and everything I was likin' it, but after Vietnam, I go, "No, I don't think so." You know what, if I would have been in something other than machine guns, maybe.
- Laurie: Okay. So when you were discharged, did you have any idea of what you wanted to do? Were you coming home? Did you want to—
- Dowe: Oh, yeah. Well, I was—I went back to North Carolina, and there I was in a outfit that wasn't going to the Caribbean for about two months, and I go, "Here we go again, junk on the bunks and everything else." But then, as magical ways will have it, somebody said that over at 2-6 they—they were gonna go in a week, and they need guys to fill it out. Gary's hand's up again.
- Laurie: You volunteered?
- Dowe: You betcha! So, we did, and then you know where we went? We went to the Caribbean, but one of the places we went to was jungle training school in Panama, and I never went to jungle training school before I went to Vietnam. [both laugh] And the funny part is, out of my whole platoon, only two guys had never been to Vietnam; all the rest of us were veterans.
- Laurie: Did you learn anything?
- Dowe: Oh, it was a blast! We had a blast, oh! We'd get up on the—they had this big rope up to a tree, or a cable. And this tree's up on a great big hill—way up, big tree—and they had a way to climb up into that tree. Go a half mile across this big river, and there's another tree on the other end. Like this. [demonstrating] And they [have] this tire as a stopper, and you got in this harness with this, like, pulley there, and you got yourself going down that thing, going like crazy, and you come down to hit—just hold on when you get down there, cause it'll

fly you all over the place and guys would come flying out of the harness and stuff. And it was a blast; we wanted to all go back and do it again. Of course, they were just gonna do it once, so. But so anyhow, we went to jungle training school in Panama. I had my twentieth birthday there, and we'd do a lot of stuff that we ended up, that we did in Vietnam, but it was definitely backwards. Like I said, they needed bodies over there.

Laurie: Yeah. Well I'd rather be in jungle training school than in Vietnam, you know?

Dowe: Oh, yeah! Oh, we had a blast!

Laurie: Okay, so after the cruise, what happened?

Dowe: They said that they were gonna give some early outs, so my whole platoon, pretty much one by one, we got out of the Service, and I had a couple good friends from this cruise, and one today, we see once a year yet. He lives over in Michigan and our families are good friends, and our kids grew up together.

Laurie: Oh, terrific!

Dowe: Yeah, we still get together.

Laurie: Good. Okay. So you were discharged in—

Dowe: '69.

Laurie: You were in for four years?

Dowe: No.

Laurie: No?

Dowe: No. I had a three year hitch.

Laurie: Okay. And what did you do when you came home?

Dowe: Came home? I went to work at Briggs and Stratton three days after I got home. I was an expeditor.

Laurie: Are you glad you did what you did? Are you glad you went there?

Dowe: Oh, yeah. And I wish I would have done it smarter. I wish that—but my brother was gonna go in the Marine Corps too, and I says, “No, you're not. You're gonna go in the Navy or Air Force and get an education.” And he did, and it helped him. So there's not much call for a machine gunner. Mafia's not hiring.

Laurie: Nope. [laughs]

Dowe: It's kinda conspicuous carrying that M60 around.

Laurie: Okay. Good. And your brother ended up in the—

Dowe: Navy.

Laurie: Navy. Okay. Well, you said you look for reunions. Are you involved in any veterans' groups?

Dowe: I just belong to the Cedarburg Legion. And I'm a member of D.A.V. [Disabled American Veterans].

Laurie: Okay. Are you active in the Legion?

Dowe: Not really. We have a place up North, and we're up there just about every week.

Laurie: Oh yeah? Where up North?

Dowe: Crivitz area.

Laurie: Okay. Well, I was just going to say if you are active, you have to tell them that you had your interview done, because they're wondering why their interviews aren't being done.

Dowe: Oh! Well, it's just for lack of time at this point. Maybe when I retire then—I know those World War II guys are kinda getting towards the ends there and stuff like that. They carry most of the load, so.

[End of Interview]