

Wisconsin Veterans Museum
Research Center

Transcript of an
Oral History Interview with
HAROLD A. FRITZ
Tank Platoon Leader, Army, Vietnam War.
Army, Career

2000

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Fritz, Harold A., (1944-). Oral History Interview, 2000.

Master Copy: 1 videorecording (ca. 100 min.); ½ inch, color.

Security Copy: 1 sound cassette (ca. 100 min.), analog, 1 7/8 ips, mono.

User Copy: 2 sound cassettes (ca. 100 min.), analog, 1 7/8 ips, mono.

User Copy: 2 sound discs (ca. 100 min.); digital, 4 3/4 in.

Transcript: 0.1 linear ft. (1 folder).

Military Papers: 0.1 linear ft. (1 folder).

Abstract:

Harold Fritz, a Lake Geneva, Wisconsin native, discusses his career with the Army and his Vietnam War service, including the action for which he won a Congressional Medal of Honor. Fritz talks about his decision to enlist after receiving his draft notice, training and attending officer candidate school at Fort Knox (Kentucky), assignment to the 6th Armored Cavalry Regiment at Fort Meade (Maryland), and riot control duty in Washington, D.C. in 1967. Sent to Vietnam as a replacement, he was assigned as a tank platoon leader in Company D, 1st Squadron, 11th Armored Cavalry Regiment. He describes the capabilities of the M48A2C tank, problems carrying enough gasoline to refuel a tank, the organization of the regiment, driving through the terrain in Vietnam, and the ability to surprise the enemy due to the sound-masking effects of thick jungle vegetation. Fritz contrasts diesel and gasoline powered tanks. He comments on the three combat scenarios for his unit in support of infantry: acting as a reactionary force to support units under attack, sweeping a pre-set area to scout for enemy activity, and switching from one unit to reinforce a unit under attack. Fritz talks about the tanks' firepower, rangefinders, and escape hatches. He addresses the problem of enemy forces in villages using friendly civilians as cover, examines the most dangerous enemy weapons, and portrays destroying damaged tanks to keep them out of enemy hands. He relates a tank driver falling asleep on the march and discusses the danger of heat exhaustion and dehydration. Transferred to the reconnaissance troop, Fritz speaks of supporting supply convoys along Highway 13 in M113 Armored Personnel Carriers and their vulnerability to land mines. He details the attack for which he was awarded the Medal of Honor: volunteering for the reconnaissance run even though he was scheduled to leave the troop, his twenty-eight-man team getting ambushed by a North Vietnamese Army (NVA) company of over 200, moving the wounded, trying to contact support and stop the convoy despite damaged radios, and organizing a defense. When the combat started, Fritz states, "It was as if I was a viewer but not a participant. Everything was moving in slow motion." Leaving the tank, he talks about leading forces armed with only a pistol, seeing reinforcements arrive, having difficulty determining which troops were NVA or American because both were covered in red dust, and being wounded by friendly tank fire due to his close proximity to an NVA unit. While being evacuated, he remembers a sergeant joking that they'd had the enemy beat without support. Fritz tells an anecdote about seeing a conscientious-objector medic shoot NVA soldiers to protect his patients. Fritz details the efforts of Samuel Dorsey, an African-American mess

officer, to make two transport runs through enemy fire so that the troops could have a real Thanksgiving Day dinner. Fritz recounts some close calls: friendly machine gun fire at the mess tent and having his equipment shot by an enemy soldier. He highlights the valor of the soldiers he served with, and he talks about attending unit reunions and working with artist Jim Dietz to create a print of the ambush firefight from memory. When receiving his Medal of Honor, Fritz mentions meeting General William Westmoreland and President Nixon, and he characterizes John Finn, another Medal of Honor recipient. Fritz comments on highlights of his post-war duties, including a tour in Grafenwöhr (Germany) with the 11th Cavalry, training troops to replicate Soviet tactics with the Opposing Forces Division of Fort Leavenworth, duty as chief of the Communications Counter Measures attachment in Korea, and jungle survival training in Panama. He touches on his position as deputy director of the Illinois Department of Veterans Affairs and as a civilian aide to the Secretary of the Army for Illinois. Fritz discusses the Army's current efforts to increase enlistment through an employment program with major corporations and emphasizes the role of the military against modern threats. During the war, he talks about giving gifts to a Vietnamese village at Christmas and being led to a stash of enemy mortar rounds by a young Vietnamese boy.

Biographical Sketch:

Fritz (b.1944) served in the Army from 1966 to 1993, including in Vietnam with the 11th Armored Cavalry Regiment from 1968 to 1969.

Interviewed by James McIntosh, 2000
Transcribed by Liliana Gundy, 2011
Checked and corrected by Joan Bruggink, 2011
Abstract written by Susan Krueger, 2012

Interview Transcript:

- James: Okay, here we go. You were raised in Lake Geneva, right?
- Fritz: Lake Geneva, Wisconsin, right.
- James: And you would have finished high school there and so forth?
- Fritz: Well, we originally were in Chicago and my parents moved up to Lake Geneva from Chicago in 1949, so from 1949 until I went into the service in 1966 I was raised in Lake Geneva, went to school there, grade school, high school, and really grew up in Lake Geneva, around the lake.
- James: Sure, I understand. And how did you get into the military? How did that go about?
- Fritz: Well, [laughs] initially I received a draft notice and Mary and I, high school sweetheart, had married and we were living in an apartment, and she was pregnant, and I was going to school in Milwaukee, Wisconsin, and working at the same time, but I cut my hours in school down to twelve hours as opposed to a full school load and one day, so I could get more time, put more time in at the factory, and I came home and I had a notice that I was being drafted in the Army. But I turned around enlisted as opposed to going in as a draftee because it afforded me a little bit more of an opportunity to decide when I wanted to go in.
- James: I see. So you finally entered when?
- Fritz: Well, I got in, in April of '66.
- James: Where did they send you?
- Fritz: I went from Wisconsin down to Fortress Knox, Kentucky, home of Armor and Armored Cavalry.
- James: That's right. I know about that. I've run into several who have been to Fort Knox. And then basic training there?
- Fritz: I went to basic training and AIT [Advanced Individual Training], then I was sent over to the Reception Battalion to work as Cadre and while I was over at the Reception Battalion, that's when I decided to look at OCS [Officer Candidate School] as a possible alternative to give me some opportunities in terms of a career.
- James: You had the background for the OCS?

- Fritz: Well, I tested for it and they, and all of the preliminaries showed that I was qualified as a good candidate for Officer Candidate School at Fort Knox, and so I had to take the physical training test and some of the battery aptitude test and passed those, and was selected subsequently to go to OCS, and then graduated in March of '67.
- James: OCS was there?
- Fritz: Fort Knox, Kentucky.
- James: I see. So many people went to Fort Benning, that I just—
- Fritz: Well, at the time—and Benning now still is really the only OCS program that the Regular Army has, but at the time Knox had an OCS program, Benning had an OCS program, Fort Sill had an OCS program for—in the case of Sill it was artillery officers, Benning infantry officers, and Fort Knox armor officers. So I went to Fort Knox and I was selected to go through that OCS program, based on the fact that my enlisted skills were armor related, and so that's why I was chosen to go to that OCS as opposed to Benning or Sill.
- James: Armor, does that mean tanks?
- Fritz: Tanks and APCs [Armored Personnel Carriers] and cavalry, scout reconnaissance vehicles.
- James: Right. Cavalry is a loose term now, now that we don't have horses, right?
- Fritz: Well, that—
- James: Because I noticed that the Airborne used this term, "cavalry" referring to their helicopters and the Army refers to cavalry using their tanks, so it's usually used loosely.
- Fritz: Well, you have Air Cavalry and you have Armored Cavalry and the relationship really is in the missions, primarily in that they're light forces, their primary role is scouting forces, not sustainment forces.
- James: Right. Motion, I think, is a common term. Right.
- Fritz: Absolutely.
- James: Right.
- Fritz: Mobility, flexibility. [Laughs]

- James: Right. On time arrival, right?
- Fritz: That's it.
- James: Okay. So you've got this skill; now what are we doing with it here?
- Fritz: Well, after I got commissioned as a second lieutenant, then I was sent to the 6th Armored Cavalry Regiment at Fort Meade, Maryland. And that was my first assignment as a commissioned officer. And the 6th Cav at Fort Meade, Maryland was in a rotational role at the time. Their job was to pre-position themselves and train up to rotate and replace then the 11th Armored Cavalry Regiment in Vietnam. And the 11th Cav would come back then and take the place of the 6th Cav, the 6th Cav would go through a rotation and the 11th would rotate as a unit back over to Vietnam. The units that were stationed in the States in a rotational posture, such as the 6th, were really a replacement station for those returning from the Cav units in Vietnam. But since they had—at that time in 1967-68, they had the D.C. riots, the Washington D.C. riots, and the 6th Cav was called upon to go in and assist in terms of riot control, and because of that the mission was changed so that, that Meade-based cavalry unit and the 6th Cav was no longer a rotational unit, it was a stabilized unit whose additional mission was to be available for any riot control duty in Washington, D.C. So anybody leaving the 6th Cav then went as individual replacements to Vietnam.
- James: Ah.
- Fritz: So that's how I went over; I didn't rotate with the 6th Cav, I rotated as an individual to Vietnam.
- James: You went over solely by yourself, you mean, alone?
- Fritz: Yes, uh-huh.
- James: And you replaced—
- Fritz: Well, what I did, they had a—in the case of a one-on-one replacement, you'd go to Vietnam, and unlike a unit rotation where the unit would go and you'd maintain that unit integrity, the individual could go to a cavalry unit or could go wherever an armor officer was needed within the forces, US forces in Vietnam. I was selected, once I got to the 90th Repple Depot in Long Binh, to go to the 11th Cav. So I went from the 6th Cav to Vietnam to the replacement depot for attachment and then to the 11th Cav.
- James: Was that difficult to get into a totally foreign unit? I mean, you didn't know anybody in there, or did you have some acquaintances?

- Fritz: Well, the tactics though, even though the individuals were different, the training and the tactics and the vehicles of the organization I was going to were the same ones I was familiar with based on the training and the unit I came from.
- James: Right. So what was your first assignment in 'Nam?
- Fritz: I went over and I was initially assigned as a tank platoon leader with Delta Company, the 1st Squadron, the 11th Armored Cavalry regiment. So I was tank platoon leader.
- James: And now tank platoon consists of how many tanks?
- Fritz: Five tanks. And at this time we had the M48A2C tanks which were 90-millimeter main gun, .50 caliber commander's weapon, .30 caliber co-axial machine gun and a twelve-cylinder gasoline engine, with seven hundred gallons of gas, three hundred and fifty on each saddle tank.
- James: Which would move you at what speed?
- Fritz: Oh, they were fast; because they were gas we could probably crank out at about forty-two miles an hour.
- James: Oh, really? That's pretty good.
- Fritz: But you also had a lot of gasoline you were carrying with you, too.
[Laughs]
- James: I was going to say, you had to carry extra gas.
- Fritz: Well, we figure we got about—
- James: Two miles a gallon?
- Fritz: Well, we actually got about seven gallons to the mile. [Laughs]
- James: [Laughs] You had to carry—oh boy.
- Fritz: That was it. So they weren't especially fuel efficient. [Laughs]
- James: Not especially.
- Fritz: You're talking about moving, you're moving about forty-eight to fifty tons.

- James: Right.
- Fritz: And, uh, it was—yeah, they weren't very fuel efficient. Then when you worked with an infantry unit because they weren't used to that large amount of fuel consumption, one of the infantry units that we were operationally under the control of, or OPCONed to, asked about refueling and asked how many five gallon cans of gas we'd need, and I had five tanks and each one of these burning at the rate of about seven or eight gallons per mile, needing seven hundred gallons to top off. You can see the amount of fuel that was needed; five gallon cans weren't gonna do it. So when you talked about delivering five hundred gallon rubber livits[], which were colossal fuel tanks, as a means of refueling the tanks, the first look you'd get was really an expression of, "Gee, that much?" because there was no concept in an infantry unit of how much a tank would use.
- James: Incredible. You didn't carry another carrier with gasoline in it?
- Fritz: No, we normally would refuel, either pre-position the fuel and get to that organization that had it and refuel, or we'd have it flown to our location, refuel, and then they would take out the empty fuel bladders.
- James: You wouldn't want to carry the amount—
- Fritz: No. The problem with carrying that much with you, if you had it outside the vehicle itself, is the danger of an enemy round hitting it and you know—
- James: That's all it'd take.
- Fritz: —they'd go up pretty fast.
- James: I'm sure, I'm sure. That was just ordinary gas; I mean, regular automobile gas?
- Fritz: That's correct.
- James: Not a high special octane or anything like that?
- Fritz: No, no, it wasn't aviation fuel, it was just standard gasoline.
- James: Was that better than the diesel-operated tank?
- Fritz: Well, the reason we had 'em, and it's rather interesting, before I got there they had the diesel-powered tanks. But the diesel-powered tanks, because of the maintenance required and the overhaul time, were rotated back for overhaul, the engines were, and they were replaced by the gas burners. So

they originally started, the 11th Cav started with the diesel tanks, then went to the gas tanks when I came in, and the gas tanks, after I get ready to rotate out, were replaced again by diesel tanks. So this was a replacement for the diesels while they were repairing the ones that the 11th Cav had.

James: Was the operation of the diesel tank different perceptibly than the gas tank?

Fritz: Well, they were safer to operate because you didn't have the explosive volatility of the fuel, first of all, you had better fuel to mileage ratio with the diesel tank, and they didn't quite have the starting problems that the gassers had. The gassers, if you flooded 'em, sometimes they would just be a hellacious thing to get started, because the engine would be flooded.

James: You couldn't blow it out or—

Fritz: No, and you couldn't push start 'em too easily either. [Laughs]

James: [Laughs] No matter how many guys you had, it just didn't cut it.

Fritz: But they were quicker, the gas tanks were quicker in acceleration and top end than the diesels were, so there were trade-offs. If you talked to most of the guys that were in Armored or Armored Cav, they'd probably tell you that they would prefer to have the diesels because they felt safer in the diesels in case they took a turret or a hull-penetrating round because of the fuel, but we never—in my thirteen months over there, we had one vehicle that was hit through the hull into the fuel cell and it wasn't just an instantaneous explosion, it started small and it got bigger and we got the crew out and eventually the vehicle was consumed in flames and the rounds started going off and we lost the entire vehicle, but we didn't lose any soldiers nor were any soldiers injured.

James: Lucky. Did you have radio control, you know, connection with your four other tanks? The four you were not in?

Fritz: Yes, we were able to communicate via radio communication between the vehicles and then each of the—two of the five tanks had two sets of radios, so that one we could use to communicate within the platoon and the other set, one was with the platoon leader, one was with the platoon sergeant, so you get the next higher headquarters, in our case the company or the unit that we were attached to.

James: So you generally operated with it by yourself?

Fritz: Yes.

- James: This unit, you were in the 10th, didn't have a larger—
- Fritz: No, the 11th Armored Cavalry regiment had most of its subordinate elements right down to platoon OPCONed out for the most part because of the firepower that they had and that firepower was being distributed to the infantry units and the MECH [mechanized] Infantry units to give them the additional support that they needed.
- James: So you were assigned to an infantry unit, an infantry unit was assigned to you or *visé versa* and it was your job to be with them and keep them out of trouble?
- Fritz: Correct. To give them the additional fire support that they would require as they go on their operations.
- James: Did someone direct you from the infantry about where they wanted you or would this come elsewhere?
- Fritz: Well, we would work—in our operational briefings, we'd look at the concept of the operations for the upcoming operations to determine how to best utilize the tanks and where to employ 'em, and how we would use them if there was a flank action or in fact one of the elements of the infantry unit was hit. And so we had preplanned operational guidance that was given out to both the people with the tanks and the infantry, so we knew where we were going to be and where they were going to be.
- James: How much separation was there generally between tanks?
- Fritz: It depended on the operation and the terrain.
- James: I suppose the terrain made a big difference. A lot of that country was hilly; didn't that make a difference for you?
- Fritz: Well, you'd hear people say that Vietnam really wasn't tank country. In the rainy season you were restricted as to where you could go, but even then we were able to go many places people, including the North Vietnamese, didn't think we could go: through thick jungles and over, through the rice paddies.
- James: How did you deal with thick jungle?
- Fritz: Very slowly. [Laughs]
- James: I mean, did you have somebody out there with two machetes whaling away?

Fritz: Well, no. We would, in the case where we thought we would be running into, where there was a high probability of enemy contact, we might send a recon element out first on foot, but we didn't wanna get the recon element in front of the main gun tubes because we had canisters, so if we thought we were getting into an area where there was a possibility of contact and we weren't concerned about disclosing our position because of the noise we were making—

James: You can hardly hide with a tank.

Fritz: No, you just take the canister and fire a couple rounds and its got like a 90-millimeter shotgun with a canister going out and then we'd just continue to push through. But amazingly enough, as much noise as those tanks made, in the jungle because of the very thick foliage it's often very difficult to tell exactly what direction that noise is coming from.

James: Really?

Fritz: And you may find that surprising, but it really is true. You get out there and you hear the noise and you know it's close and you hear it coming closer, but in very, very thick vegetation if you can't get a visual—a motion of the trees or any motion at all or smoke from the vehicles—it's hard to tell—

James: You're not absolutely sure?

Fritz: That's correct. And so sometimes you have the element of surprise when you really think you don't.

James: These missions were generally preplanned and you had an area that you were going to go into, or were you waiting for some activity to draw you into this particular area?

Fritz: Well, we actually had three scenarios, one in which we would be set aside in a position to act as the reactionary force, so if a unit that was within our sphere of operations was in fact engaged with the enemy and needed the extra support, they would then contact us and we would react to that, we would be the reactionary force. Secondly, if in fact we were in an operation where we were gonna move with the unit, then in fact we would move in pre-positioned paths with the organization to sweep an area so that we could clear the area or try to determine if there is any enemy activity. And then thirdly, if we had to shift because one unit was hit over the other one we had to be prepared to do that, but for the most part we planned it, but in the reactionary force role it's hard to do any planning because you don't know who's gonna get hit even though you have good intelligence or just the entire size of the enemy force, so you have to kind

of play that by ear when you come on the scene. But see in Cu-Chi, which was a pretty flat area, if you're in a reactionary role, most of the time you wouldn't have to use a compass or get directions, you'd just look out into the horizon, you see the smoke from the battle and all you do is head toward the smoke and the battle, and that's the unit engaged. And you'd just find out what direction they were oriented towards so that you could get behind them, or cut across the front of them so you wouldn't be—

- James: Coming up behind an infantry platoon or two or three, wasn't that a problem for them to stay out of your way?
- Fritz: We normally would work very well with them, and then of course the tanks had the external phones on the back, so we would have one of the platoon leaders—
- James: An external phone?
- Fritz: An external phone in a box that was hooked right to our radio system.
- James: Oh, that's handy.
- Fritz: And the infantry units knew where that was, that we worked with, and we drilled on that so they knew how to get into the radio, pick it up, and they could actually talk to the tank crew in the tank, or talk to the platoon leader in one of the other tanks.
- James: And point this big gun in that direction.
- Fritz: Correct. To point out some of the targets that we couldn't see.
- James: Now, the big gun generally fired what type of a missile? Was this a simple exploding missile or something more complicated?
- Fritz: We had 90-millimeters, and the types of rounds we had, we had a heat, which was an anti-tank round, we had a high explosive round, which was an HE round, and we had high explosive plastic, which was an anti-tank type round or bunker round, and then we had a canister round, it was like a big shotgun round, and then we had a white phosphorous round that was normally used for marking targets. So that was the array of main gun rounds that we carried with the 90-millimeter, M-48A2 tanks.
- James: I know about white phosphorous, because when I was in Korea I took care of a lot of guys that were burned by white phosphorous.
- Fritz: Um-hmm. Nasty stuff.

- James: Nasty stuff is right. Deep burns, really had trouble healing those. No napalm out the gun, none of that?
- Fritz: No, we didn't, we didn't—
- James: Didn't do any of that?
- Fritz: We did not have a flamethrower tank with us. They did have flamethrower APC-113s with the units that we worked with, but none of the tanks, we didn't have any grenade launchers on the—these were the old M-48s, so they had the basic coincidence rangefinders where you brought the two images together, but the target—
- James: What was the M-48 called?
- Fritz: That was the old Patton tank. Yeah. And with a coincidence range finder, you brought the two images together 'til they were one and that gave you the range. And in Vietnam the ranges were often so close that what we'd use to gauge whether or not the main gun was on the target is take the coaxial machine gun and fire a short burst with the tracers, and where the tracers went, that's where the main gun round would go, and then we'd go hit the main gun switch and the main gun round would go where the tracers went, generally, because we were so close.
- James: That was a big surprise; there are a couple little bullets coming and the next thing you know big brother is coming in.
- Fritz: That's right, that's right.
- James: Geez, that's a devastating round, a 90-millimeter that close, wow.
- Fritz: Yeah, it definitely will do some damage. [Laughs]
- James: You have any trouble with the villages now? Your friend Kenny complained that the villages had the Viet Cong in and it was tough to deal with.
- Fritz: Well, that's, that's another environment, because when you get into that you don't want to engage the friendlies, and often times the enemy would use the friendlies as cover.
- James: Right, that was the problem.
- Fritz: And it just—when you have something as lethal in a major weapons system, such as a tank, one could say, “Well, if you've got the enemy located in the hut you could just run through it with the tank.” Well, that's

fine, but if it's all enemy in there you don't have a problem with it, but you don't know that the enemy's in there, and they took full advantage of that, of using, using friendlies as shields or hiding in villages.

- James: Women and children as shields.
- Fritz: Correct. And it was very difficult; you can't just mow down everybody because there's a guy that's there.
- James: Right.
- Fritz: So they made full advantage of that. The villages were very difficult to deal with.
- James: Kenny has great guilt over shooting a priest. We talked about that at great length; he really felt badly about that. And obviously it's weighed on him, even today, because he kept referring to that. It's really a problem for him.
- Fritz: Well, I think what happens, you have to, you have to look at the situation you're in, and when we're dealing with other, other soldiers, enemy soldiers—I mean, they believed what they were doing was right for the most part. And so it's one soldier against another soldier and there are gonna be times when you have innocent bystanders that are killed, it's just—you try to avoid it, but it does happen, and you just can't let that, you can't let get you down, because it, while you're there, because if you do it's going to cause you to perhaps hesitate in a moment where you shouldn't hesitate and give the other guy the upper hand, the enemy soldier. And then he will be the victor and you will be the vanquished.
- James: What was the biggest weapon that you faced that was a problem for you?
- Fritz: Oh, let's see. We had—in fact it was, it was captured US weapons, 90-millimeter recoilless rifles.
- James: [Laughs] Made—
- Fritz: Made in the United States—
- James: Made in New York or Detroit.
- Fritz: Made in the United States. And they were very good at taking US weapons that they either bought from countries or they got from the Americans and turning them around and using them on the Americans.
- James: Could they get enough ammo, too, for them?

Fritz: Yeah, they could. And they had the RPG-7, that was a very lethal—

James: What was that?

Fritz: Anti-tank weapon system that was very lethal, shoulder fired.

James: That would penetrate your back tank?

Fritz: Yes, that'd go right through it.

James: Been reading a lot about those nuclear grade deterrent—what is that term? Degraded nuclear weapon material.

Fritz: Oh, depleted uranium.

James: Depleted, that's the word I'm looking for.

Fritz: We didn't have any of those.

James: No, that's fairly new now.

Fritz: It is.

James: But the description of how that operates is frightening.

Fritz: Well, it's—the weapons systems today are certainly every bit as lethal as what we had, and more so in some cases, but the way I look at it, it doesn't matter whether the guy had a bolt action rifle or you're using depleted uranium; dead is dead.

James: Right, you can't be any deader.

Fritz: No, you can't be any deader than dead.

James: Right. Does a tank have a game plan when the tank is hit? How to get out, and do you have an order to get out or does everyone just fight for the hatch and see what happens?

Fritz: No, you [laughs]—depending on where you're hit you usually have an evacuation plan, and you have a plan for the other tanks that are with you, or the infantry, if you're geographically disbursed farther than normal, to protect the exiting crew if you're exiting the vehicle. The other thing you want to prevent is exiting a vehicle, leaving it there for the enemy to get a hold of. If it's not—you have to ascertain what the damage is, and sometimes if the tank is hit, like the one that was hit in the gas cell in Cu-Chi, we got the crew out, we actually had to pull some of the infantry back

because the vehicle was on fire, and in doing so we didn't want to leave the tank in the position it was in, with any possibility that the enemy might get inside and get some of the armament. So we actually destroyed that tank with our own tank guns so that the enemy couldn't get it. And we observed it throughout the night, we pulled back and it burned literally to the point where the next morning when we went in to get it, the breech block, the main breech block that would open up to allow the round to be inserted into the main gun was melted because of the heat and the secondary explosion.

James: At least it solved that problem. But there's only one way out.

Fritz: Well, in a tank you get several; you get the driver's hatch, he can get out there, and then there's an escape—

James: Oh, that's front, right?

Fritz: That's right. There's an escape hatch below the driver—

James: I drove a tank in Korea, briefly.

Fritz: —then there's a loader's hatch and then you've got the commander's hatch, so you actually have three ways of getting out.

James: That gets three out for sure.

Fritz: Now the disadvantage of a tank is that the only way you can stop a tank, if the driver is hit, is from the driver's position. The tank commander can't stop the tank, nor can the loader stop the tank, nor can the gunner stop the tank. The controls for making the tank go in motion, stop, is in the hands of the driver, and that's one disadvantage if your driver is hit and you're moving into the attack, you're literally at the mercy of this vehicle. Hopefully the driver would slump off the gas and we had, we were in a night road march where I had a driver fall asleep in the tank that I was on and we noticed—we'd been on the road for—it was a forced road march, probably a good eight to ten hours, and it was hot, and it was into the evening and we'd been in contact earlier that day with the enemy, and suddenly my tank just started veering, we were on a road system, it started veering a little bit to the left and then jerked over to the right. So I called the driver and I didn't get any response, and suddenly we veered to the left again and we started goin' off the road. So I said to my loader, I said, "Go get him." And he jumped off the turret, because you can't get into it, you can't get to the driver unless the turret from the inside, unless the turret's faced to the reverse—

James: Oh, my goodness.

Fritz: —because that's just opening in the basket, turret basket sits in the hull and that allows you to get into the driver's compartment to haul him out if he's wounded. But again, you would say if you're in combat and the driver's wounded and you put your gun tube to the back, doesn't that reduce your fire power, and it does. The other way you get to the driver is through the driver's hatch, and so my loader jumped down and grabbed this guy literally by his ears and woke him up. He had his helmet sitting next to him and he'd fallen asleep driving, and luckily we didn't get into any difficulties with that, we were able to wake the driver up and he stopped the tank, and we could get back on the road. But it just—you know, lesson learned there. If your driver is hit, you're in, you probably could be in some very serious straits in a hurry.

James: Boy, I can see that. I didn't realize it was so hard to get at him.

Fritz: [Laughs]

James: You might have a little cattle prod so that you can reach down and poke him.

Fritz: Normally he's got his radio on and you can talk to him and it works out fine, but if that—like I say, if he gets hit, normally if we're in contact, you would have the hatch closed, so he wouldn't be, and he'd have vision blocks like a periscope that stick out there. But in Vietnam, oftentimes because of the heat, even in contact you'd drive with the hatch open. And there was—

James: It must have been unbearably hot inside of those things.

Fritz: Oh yeah, and you really had to watch, you had to watch heat exhaustion over there, stoke over there, because even though the turret temperatures were cooler than the outside, I mean—in the morning the hulls and the steel of the tank was cool to the touch, but by noon it was so hot that you couldn't—with your bare hands you'd burn your fingers almost on the steel because it was just, the sun was so hot on it.

James: So you must have carried a good deal of water.

Fritz: Oh, we did, we did. To make sure everybody—that and salt tablets.

James: That was going to be one, I bet, one of your jobs to make sure they took the salt tablets—

Fritz: Absolutely.

- James: —and drank their water and kept after them about that?
- Fritz: Between the platoon leader and the platoon sergeant you really had to watch that, because the soldiers oftentimes wouldn't feel the results of the dehydration and so you'd have to regiment them into drinking so much water a day—
- James: Just on schedule.
- Fritz: —and taking the salt tables, and taking their boots off, and checking their weapons.
- James: Boots, too?
- Fritz: Boots, too, because otherwise you get into, because of the moisture if you're on the ground, you'd get into trench foot and you'd have foot problems, and then you'd lose the effectiveness, you'd have to medevac the soldier.
- James: Right. I'd forgotten about it. I always think of trench foot with cold, not associated with the heat, but I can see that was a problem. Okay, tell me about the troubles you got into when people were shooting at you and wounding you, and, you know, things like that. How did that happen?
- Fritz: Well, we had—several things led—we got into several major battles, and I was with the tank company and then I was transferred over to the recon troop. I was the XO [executive officer] of Alpha Troop, which was in the same squadron, but it was a different element. And the one-one-three [M113 Armored Personnel Carrier], about thirteen tons, is a good vehicle, and it's a very reliable vehicle, diesel powered, but thirteen tons of aluminum doesn't withstand a mine as well as fifty-two tons of homogenous steel. And I had hit several mines with the tank, one of which flipped it over on its turret, and we got out of that basically unscathed, but I had one-one-threes that had been hit and one case we were in a mine field and it literally just tore it apart and they were killed.
- James: This is the recon troop vehicle [unintelligible] reconnaissance.
- Fritz: And when you run into that type of situation you're more vulnerable, especially to land mines. And so you really gotta be, you gotta have an extra set of eyes and ears out there for that type of thing, whereas in the tank platoon, if you hit a mine you blow a track, or worst case you flip it over.
- James: But everybody is okay.

- Fritz: But usually everybody is okay. In a one-one-three it wasn't the same. In a one-one-three you had, you normally had casualties, and oftentimes you'd have, you'd have people killed, because the thickness of the one-one-three was no comparison to the tank and you'd have the penetration.
- James: The blast upward would be sufficient.
- Fritz: And I saw one one-one-three that was probably thrown about thirty feet in the air, came down and was just literally was split in half, and we went in and pulled the crew out. One was the platoon leader, he'd lost his leg. The driver, we went back to get him and the vehicle was starting to go through its secondary explosion sequence, and the driver was nothing but a torso, the driver had a flack jacket.
- James: Secondary explosion sequence? What is that?
- Fritz: The ammunition in the vehicle had started—
- James: Oh, the heat had risen enough to set it off.
- Fritz: That's right, it started going, it started cooking off the .50 calibers and the hand grenades, and the rest of the things in there.
- James: Boy, and you never know what direction that's going.
- Fritz: No, no, not in a case like that. And so that's, it's really devastating when you see those things, you know, but—so I transferred from the tank company to the recon troop and the first time they got into a contact the thought that goes through your mind is now you're in a very light vehicle instead of this heavy one, and you're maneuvering around, so you're looking at the terrain around you wondering if, if you're gonna run over one of these mines, it's just gonna blow you right off this thing.
- James: Yeah, but how can you tell?
- Fritz: Well, sometimes you can't, you're just riding around with your fingers crossed. [Laughs]
- James: Right. Why didn't you take the lowest rated—
- Fritz: [Laughs] You're going like this.
- James: [Laughs] Why didn't you take the lowest rated man and shove him out, and wander ahead?
- Fritz: Well, you just can't; [laughs] it doesn't work that way.

- James: Do it like the Chinese did. The Chinese solved that mine problem, you know; they just ran a platoon through and then they followed in. That cleared out any problems.
- Fritz: You couldn't operate like that, but it was—[End of Tape 1, Side A]—it was a challenge, I can tell you that, it was just very interesting. And so I had, so that's where I finished my tour was with the recon troop, that's where I got into my MOH [Medal of Honor] fire fight, was with the recon troop on Highway 13.
- James: That's where I need to have in detail here.
- Fritz: Well, it was, ah, it was kind of interesting. The circumstances that surrounded that are somewhat odd. I was due to leave the recon troop that day to go up to the squadron headquarters to work as a squadron S-2 or intelligence officer, but prior to that day, the platoon leader for that platoon that I took out had been injured and he had been sent back to the base camp because of an eye injury. The night before the platoon sergeant for that platoon had been injured; he'd basically had his leg ripped on an M-60 machine gun front sight and we had to medevac him. So that particular platoon didn't have its original seasoned platoon leader, nor its seasoned platoon sergeant, and in a case of that particular element, we were on Highway 13 and the mission of that troop was to escort the supply convoys from, that basically came up from Saigon to Long Binh up Highway Thirteen to Lai Kai, up along Highway Thirteen up to An Loc and then turned around, if they didn't go to Loc Ninh, and turn around and come back after they've resupplied. It was a ground re-supply convoy that normally was anywhere from about sixty to a hundred and twenty-five trucks loaded with everything from gasoline, to food, to bullets, to clothing, that type of supply. And they would come to Lai Kai, and from Lai Kai forward to An Loc was what they considered to be an unsecured area of Highway 13, which was a dirt road. And I had the Cav troop at what they call Thunder Three. It was a position, a semi-permanent position, and we'd take one platoon and send it south to join up with the element at Lai Kai, the other platoon would go north and sweep the road, go to Xuan Loc, and at Xuan Loc they would refuel if they needed to, and then come down and sit somewhere between Xuan Loc and our position to act as a reactionary force so if the platoon coming up with the truck convoy got into trouble, they got ambushed, then this platoon would go and be the reactionary force. And then inside our fire support base we had a one-five-five towed battery and fire support. So that was the mission that we ran on about a weekly, every other week basis, and that morning I was supposed to leave but we had a new troop commander, he had just come on board, oh, a couple weeks before, and so instead of leaving, I told him I'd take the platoon up north and take that swing, which would have been

the road sweep and then the reactionary force, and after the supply convoy had gotten safely up to An Loc and were en route back, I would come back with them and then get on a helicopter and go back to the squadron headquarters and leave the troop. But of course we never, that didn't occur. We made the sweep and got up to An Loc, radioed the trucks and the other platoon that everything appeared to be well and they could start their forward movement north, and they did, and we started south and we reached the point that had been an area that I had looked at before and thought it would be a good position for an ambush, and we had—we had a sniper—well, I don't know if you'd call him a sniper, we had an enemy soldier that occasionally would shoot around at the passing trucks and it was January so I told the troops I thought it was probably an NVA [North Vietnamese Army] that got a new AK-47 rifle for Christmas and he was trying it out and he wasn't very good with it yet. So what we decided is that I'd stop at this position and maybe we could capture this little guy and get some intelligence.

James: Um-hmm. Go ahead.

Fritz: And when I looked out on the on the map to see if we were in the location that I thought was the position, that's when we got ambushed. We got hit by the NVA force that had moved in between the time we swept up and stopped and came back down, they had moved into an ambush position for the truck convoy and they didn't think we would come that far down the road to set up our position and they figured they'd be able to hit that truck.

James: They came up behind them then.

Fritz: They'd figure they'd hit that truck convoy and then move back into Cambodia, because we were only about two Ks from Cambodia, or 3 Ks, kilometers from Cambodia.

James: That's all?

Fritz: The NVA had no choice; it was a good ambush, but we were right on top of them and if they didn't spring the ambush on us and have the, and maintain the element of surprise and hopefully immediate fire superiority in the first thirty seconds, we were gonna expose their position and we'd engage 'em, and so they decided to hit us and that's what it was. Initially I thought it was a mine; it blew me off the vehicle, and I got up and saw the fire and the tracers and the exploding vehicles and I knew it was an ambush. So there we were right in the midst of this thing.

James: How many in the vehicle?

Fritz: We had, in my vehicle I had the driver, I had a vehicle commander, two side gunners and myself. Now normally in that scenario, on those vehicles, the platoon leader would ride on the back of the vehicle, the back lid of the vehicle, so that the vehicle commander then would control the fifty and the platoon leader then could exercise his control over the platoon. But that day instead of riding in the back, I rode right behind the commander, behind the cupola. I wanted a better position and was trying to take a look at the road and that's where I rode the whole mission, but had I been on the back lid, or deck, as I normally would have ridden, then I would have been killed, because both gunners got killed by anti-tank rockets that were on that vehicle, that came in from both flanks. So that would have, would have hit me right in the middle of them. So for some reason I chose to ride up where I did, and it was just, just a, just a guess at the time; I wanted better control, I wanted to be there. We had a crew that—I had a driver, the driver was one of my sergeants that was supposed to leave the troop that morning, but decided that he'd go on the mission with me, and the sergeant in the lead vehicle, he also was supposed to leave the troop, but he said he'd go with me that morning, so we had the experience with the platoon. And so I had people that weren't supposed to be there and I was in a position that I normally I wouldn't be in, but I would have been killed if I would have been where I normally rode. And so it was just, it was just a set of circumstances that started welling up that were unusual, but they were very fortunate for me and very fortunate for some of the other people. We got both my gunners that were killed instantly, on the side guns, and the vehicle was on fire, the radios were out, we didn't know whether, because our communications were disrupted terribly, whether we were able to get anything out to our headquarters or the other element to let 'em know we were hit. And we had the NVA that had us in a very effective crossfire, because on one side of the road they were level with us, firing at us, and across the road there was a ditch that we didn't know about and they were firing up at us, so they had us in an effective crossfire without getting themselves caught in the middle of it. And they were, you know, they were very close.

James: How did you get out of this?

Fritz: [Laughs] Well—

James: You painted the picture as if you can't get out of it.

Fritz: I thought about that at the time. You know, you hear about people saying that they see their life flash before them, and it actually happens. I'd actually seen, you know, I saw my childhood and my adulthood right there, just in a flash.

James: You're kidding.

- Fritz: And it was just—I mean, it was just amazing, and I could see, I could see the tracer rounds, but it was almost as if when you see a movie and they have a slow motion scene. You know what’s going on, but you’re a viewer, you’re not a participant. And there I was; I could see these rounds and I saw the rounds fly past my head and strike the vehicle, and I could see the tracers, but it was just for a few seconds, it was if I was a viewer but not a participant. Everything was movin’ in slow motion, the people, the voices were subdued, and every time I see one of those scenes in a movie I think of that because it was exactly like that. It was just the strangest, the eeriest feeling. And then right after that [snapping sound] it snapped back to reality and I was right in the middle of it again. And we tried to gather up the best we could, the wounded, we had many of ‘em wounded, we had twenty-eight people.
- James: I was going to say there must be vehicles behind you.
- Fritz: We had a total of seven vehicles.
- James: Seven vehicles.
- Fritz: And I was the second vehicle. One of the vehicles, the third vehicle we had, was a Vulcan; it mounted a 20-millimeter mini-gun.
- James: I don’t know that vehicle.
- Fritz: And that was there as an experiment, we had two of them. And we took one with us that day, it was from somewhere from the United States to do a ground test of its effectiveness and it was a stateside crew on this vehicle—
- James: What was the vehicle?
- Fritz: It’s a one-one-three with a 20-millimeter mini-gun mounted on it. And they were firing at suspected targets, and the roar of this thing is just awesome to hear it. The 20-millimeter mini-gun is just, when your head is right next to it, it’s just, it’s scary. And so the NVA didn’t know we had it, and that was one of the things that threw ‘em off a little bit and it gave some time, it bought us time. So we were able to bring in the wounded together on the road near the front of the column and with the number of people that were wounded, we didn’t have a lot of people that were able to stand up and fight. And we tried to patch a radio together. Now you’d think in seven vehicles that we would have at least a decent radio that would work, but again, the ambush was well prepared and they hit both the command vehicles first, platoon leaders, platoon sergeants, take the radios out, take those two sets of radios out, that’s key. And then they

worked down the rest of the column and knocked the other ones out. So we were really in pieces as far as radios. We did get one together, we got a call out to let 'em know we were hit, started to bring some artillery in, lost communication with the artillery units, so they had to stop. We were trying to ring, put a ring of artillery around us and the enemy, so that we were both trapped.

James: Yeah, the one-five-five was back there.

Fritz: The one-five-five, and so we were both trapped—

James: That's a big gun.

Fritz: —so were trying to set up that ring and we started doing that, but then we lost radio communication. And again, we were hoping that we got the information down to the other elements so that they would stop this column because what we didn't want to have happen was have this truck convoy roll right into us, and there they were.

James: Right, march right into it.

Fritz: Because we were smack dab in the middle of the road and there was no way—I mean, they would have hit that, they would have had 'em right in a, in a, in a real vise then, literally. So we didn't know at the time that the word did get out and as this thing evolved, this battle started, it started to gather in intensity. They had several ground assaults they tried on us that failed, we pushed 'em back. We went after 'em; we did a ground assault after 'em.

James: Bombarded with small arms?

Fritz: That's right, rifles—

James: That's all?

Fritz: —and pistols and anything we could grab. They tried to run over the top of us; we repulsed 'em again but, as—in terms of distances, we're not looking at, you know, a hundred meters or two hundred meters, or three hundred meters, we looking at, we're looking at three meters, we're looking at four meters. I mean, they're right next to us, and so you're not, you really don't have to sight; you bring the gun down and there's the enemy and he's doin' the same thing. And so it's just this passage of bullets and people and—

James: Did you get your .45 out for this?

- Fritz: Oh, absolutely.
- James: You were finally within range of something to fire your .45, right?
- Fritz: Oh, absolutely. And I—that was a good weapon; it certainly saved me that day. But as we went through the battle and things increased, there wasn't very much that we could do to get out of that situation because we were literally surrounded. My only hope was to create enough of a, of a signal in smoke and noise that if the word didn't go out, somebody would see us. There was a helicopter that passed over, somebody would realize if they were calling us that there was no resp—and there was no response that there was a problem and they would bring a helicopter and find out that we were in trouble and stop the convoy. The first thing was stop the convoy and then protect the soldiers they had. And we got to the point where things were getting down to the wire, we were getting pretty low on ammunition and, uh—
- James: You were down to sixteen men or so?
- Fritz: Oh, we were down to, we had twenty-eight and we had, uh, five of us that were really doin' most of the fighting.
- James: Did George Custer come into your mind?
- Fritz: Just about, just about, just about. Because when we talked to the soldiers that were there—and it's hard to imagine this, but in the din of all this you're still able to communicate with the people, because you're eyeball to eyeball, you're that close to your guys—and I had one of 'em call me several months ago that I hadn't talked to since that battle and I recognized his voice as soon as he called. It was just like it was yesterday and he couldn't believe it, a guy in Texas. But I told the sergeant there, I says, "You know, we could try to get you out of here but I don't think you're gonna make it because they're just too—"
- James: The kids wanted to leave?
- Fritz: No, we were trying to, looking at the options for the wounded people. I said, "I just don't think you're gonna make it, you know. We can't leave you here and we're not gonna be able to make it ourselves, so, you know, we're just gonna have to stick it out." And a guy had a grenade and he said, "We'll do what we think is necessary," and the message there was, you know, if they come over the top of you, we'll pull the pin, they're not gonna take any prisoners.
- James: Take both of us, right.

Fritz: They're not gonna take any prisoners. And then as that decision was made and we were getting ready for what appeared to be one or two of the last charges, uh, then I looked down the road and there was this big cloud of dust, it was the dry season, and believe it or not, sticking through that dust was an antenna and on the top of that antenna was a red and white cavalry guidon.

James: A sight to behold.

Fritz: And because the Cav troops used to do, we'd set red and white, these guidons on our antennas, and it was the platoon that had been with the convoy. They locked the convoy in a security area, with a security force, and they were comin' up to react to us, as opposed to us reacting to them, and so they rolled on the scene at the same time—

James: The cavalry is coming to rescue.

Fritz: —at the same time before them was a tank platoon that was in our NDP, or night defensive position, and that was the first element together with the Cav element that came into view, and all of a sudden you see this guidon then you see this main gun tank, too, and then you see the rest of this force coming, and then if you switch your hats for a moment, because I was just happy to see them, they stopped. And they stopped short of where we were, and what the platoon leader of the tank platoon was trying to ascertain was where the good guys were in relation to the enemy. Because in the dry season, because we had been in such close contact with the enemy, all the uniforms were the same color from their distance. We had red dust on the Americans, red dust on the NVA, and the NVA were in amongst us and we were—

James: Hard to tell the good guys from the bad.

Fritz: —so they didn't know, they were trying to figure out who was who when they saw the vehicles on fire down there. So they were trying to ascertain how to best maneuver into that, and I didn't know this. And so what I told my NCO there was, figuring that they were perhaps somewhat confused or there was some other problem, I ran down the road towards them, to direct them into positions. And as I approached, the enemy was firing at me as I was running down the road, the lead tank turned its gun on me. [Several seconds of silence on tape]—the actual shock of the weapon going off threw me back into the bush, and what I found out was that as the tank commander saw me coming up the road, he wasn't sure whether I was a good guy or bad guy, but then behind me was a NVA team with a shoulder-fired anti-tank weapon.

James: Oh, that's what he was firing at.

Fritz: And they were aiming at the tank, and so they saw him, they saw them and me, and they had no choice, they had to engage those guys. So they were actually engaging the team behind me. And so I crawled back up and my ears were ringing and I was—

James: And you were yelling, “What are you doing?”

Fritz: —I was a, I was a real mess. So I got up to the tank and I was about ready to shoot ‘em.

James: Right. [Laughs] What the hell you guys doing, right?

Fritz: And so we redirected. I said, “Okay, we’re over here, those are bad guys.” So they started to deploy. I moved back to the troop element, and that pretty much turned the table on them.

James: Your boys were still alive?

Fritz: Yeah, they were, and we got them in, and one of my sergeants, I saw him, I saw him at the convention several years back, and I’ll never forget what he said. After we got everybody in, we got the wounded evacuated and things and I was getting ready to be evacuated and he looked at me and he said something to the effect, I can’t give the exact, but he said, as the other forces came in, “What are they doing here? We got these guys beat.”

James: [Laughs]

Fritz: Now this is a, this is an NVA-reinforced company, so you’re talking about two hundred, two hundred and ten soldiers, and we had twenty-eight in our force, and this guy is so confident he said, “We had ‘em beat.” And this is the same—I’ve got a painting of the battle in there, and this was the same soldier that was in front, and he was just firing that .50 caliber until it got so hot that the barrel was warped and the rounds were comin’ out in a spiral from that .50 and he just kept crankin’ it, crankin’ it, crankin’ it. Finally it literally blew up on him, and he just did a great job. And so we—as the battle ended and they took a count and they were doing the battlefield police, that was about ten-thirty in the morning, and that afternoon, later in the afternoon they were completing the battlefield police, US casualties were—we had two killed, both my gunners were the two that were killed, but we had many more people involved in it throughout the day, and the NVA lost a lot of, lot of soldiers, captured a lot, and lost that one. But it was an interesting situation.

James: That was close.

- Fritz: That was a close one; I don't like to be that close.
- James: No.
- Fritz: But the soldiers just did a magnificent job. You could never ask for any more valor or dedication than they displayed that day.
- James: These are kids, too, aren't they?
- Fritz: Yeah, you're talking—I tell people, I say, they look at you and they say, "Well you're, you know, what?" I said, "I'm fifty-six now. But you go back there, and most of those men that were there were between seventeen and nineteen years old."
- James: Just children.
- Fritz: Seventeen and nineteen years old. I was the oldest one over there at about twenty-four. And so when you look at those decisions that you have to make and you look at what they're facing and then they have to come back from that to a hostile America, you know, it's difficult for 'em, but they just did a magnificent job. And I didn't have—I had one conscientious objector that was a medic and during one of the firefights, uh, he—I saw him take an M-16 and he shot, shot two NVA. And I said, "Wait a minute, come here Ish," afterwards. I said—
- James: What about this?
- Fritz: I said, "What about this? I saw you do that." And he says, "Sir, what you saw me doing," he says, "my first duty is to my patients and the NVA were trying to shoot my patients and the bullets were bouncing around us, and I had the means to protect my patients and that's what I did; I protected my patients." And I said, "Good job, good job, medic."
- James: It works for you right? [Laughs]
- Fritz: Yes, and it worked for him. But—
- James: That's a cute story.
- Fritz: Again, it was just—when you talk about some of the humor that occurred, I had a mess sergeant, E7, Samuel Dorsey. And Sam Dorsey was black, E-7, and Sam said—he was a mess sergeant for Alpha troop—he said, "We're gonna serve,"—that was before the [unintelligible], it was Thanksgiving of '68—he said, "We're gonna serve whole turkey, whole turkey to the troops. Not this canned stuff, not this—I want to serve whole turkey." He said, "I can get a deal up in An Loc but I need some help. I

can go to the officer's mess and I can make a deal there." So I said, "Okay, Sam." And so what I did was I gave Sam a temporary commission to 1st Lieutenant and disguised him as a lieutenant and we went up, and I said, "Now remember, don't you salute these warrant officers because you're a 1st Lieutenant now, you know." And we went up there and he made a deal and he got a truckload of real Thanksgiving treats. He had the cranberries, he had the pumpkins for the pies, he had the whole turkeys, and when he was coming back with one of my platoons, they got hit. And he called—the platoon called me on the radio and said, "Mess Daddy's coming down, I don't think he's got his breaks on, I don't know if he's hit or not." And I looked up down the road, and here comes this truck, two-and-a-half ton truck, and the canvas was a flappin', you could see smoke rollin' out of back of it, holes down the side of it. And he hits the wire, jumps over the wire with the truck, hits the sandbags, about rolls it, stops. Throws the door open and he jumps out and he says, "I'm really pissed." And I said, "What happened?"

James: [Laughs]

Fritz: He says, "Let me show you something, Captain." And I go back there and he pulled open the back and all these supplies he had, had holes in them; the NVA had shot 'em up. And he was smokin', and he said, "There's all these turkeys." And I said, "Well, I guess we'll just have to settle for, you know, what we can get." And I says, "Good thing you're okay, you know, you're not hit." He says, "No, I'm going back to get some more turkeys." And I said, "Wait a minute. You're gonna go back up that road? You want me to send another element up with you after you've been hit?" And he said, "I'm gonna get some turkeys for the troops." And so we gave him a two platoon escort, I gave him an M-16 machinegun and a case of M-79 grenades, and a M-79 grenade launcher, two M-16 rifles, a .45, a case of hand grenades—

James: Just keep shooting all the way up the road.

Fritz: And literally coming back down, he got a new load of turkey, you could hear these explosions and these rounds going off and I called the platoon leader and I said, "What is that?" He said, "Well, that's the Mess Daddy reconing by fire; he's not getting—"

James: [Laughs] I was going to say—

Fritz: And I've got pictures of that dinner, and he actually brought it back and at Thanksgiving he served turkey, whole turkey, we've got pictures of whole turkey, cranberries, and pumpkin pies. So in the midst of all this, this death and destruction, here we have a Thanksgiving dinner served and an individual that was a soldier that was really interested in other soldiers that

he risked his life twice to get these turkeys and to bring the real Thanksgiving meal to the soldiers in Vietnam. So I thought it was good.

James: Great story, great story. Super. Where is he now?

Fritz: I don't know where Sam—I haven't caught up with Sam Dorsey. We left Vietnam and we corresponded once and I really, I don't know where Sam is; I think he's probably out of the Army by now, but, ah—

James: He was a regular?

Fritz: He was Regular Army. And then we had—well Sam had, we had another interesting experience with Sam Dorsey. We had the Vulcan there and when they test the Vulcan gun system, it rotates on a pivot and it's eight barrels, 20-millimeter and they've gotta turn it over the back deck of the PC—

James: It's a Gatling gun with eight barrels?

Fritz: Yes, um-hmm. And we have, we've got, ah, the perimeter set up, and we've got two of these things on there, and so I told them if they have to test them, not only de-link the ammunition but back the vehicle out, turn the rear of the vehicle out of the perimeter, so when the gun is over it, if it happens to misfire or happens to actually go off, you know, it'd go off outside the perimeter. Well, the guy who was with him didn't listen to me and I was in the five-seven-seven and I heard this [imitation of the sound of the gun going off] it was this Gatling gun that rapped off about a hundred rounds. And when I went outside all I could see was the dust because it was aimed in the direction of the mess tent, and we were messing at the time, fifty percent on, fifty percent off, and I expected to just see nothing but bodies and gore out there. And as the smoke cleared, out of a hundred rounds fired by this thing and a line of troops, you're taking maybe forty-five troops standing in line for chow and those serving, nobody was hit.

James: Went over the tops?

Fritz: There was a server standing there with a handle of a spoon and he had the head of the spoon literally shot off right in his hand. He was still standing there with just an ashen look on his face. A fella was sittin' down on a bunk, had the bunk leg shot off, so it wasn't over their heads, but it missed every one of 'em.

James: Incredible.

Fritz: Every one of them. And that just—I can't believe that even happened.

- James: You set that up, you probably couldn't do it.
- Fritz: You couldn't, you couldn't, you could not do that. And it just—it was just, ah—you know, a lot of things happen. When I was with the tank platoon and an enemy soldier got up, and apparently he was juiced up on something, because he tried to shoot the tank and the crew with an AK-47 and that was the last thing he ever tried, but—and as he did and he shot at me, at the tank commander, he hit the—I had a, I had a belt on and whip[?] off and on and epaulets on my flack jacket and he shot the .45 off my right side and he hit the epaulets up here, and he hit my helmet here and he come down this side and got this epaulet and then he got my ammunition pouch down here and it all fell off but it never touched me, it just went “brrrrp.” It never touched. I've got pictures of the helmet and the equipment that was hit and I just—any direction difference, down or to the left or right, I would have been killed.
- James: But you did get wounded?
- Fritz: I got wounded twice.
- James: Your *curriculum vitae* said you were wounded twice.
- Fritz: During the MOH fire fight I was hit and earlier when I was—
- James: With rifle fire?
- Fritz: It was, uh, a combination of shrapnel from the RPG and small arms and then in Cu-Chi when I was in another assault, we got hit there and I was with the tank platoon then.
- James: When kind of a wound did you suffer?
- Fritz: Oh, back and back of the head and arms and legs.
- James: Superficial stuff?
- Fritz: Well, most of it. I still carry a few pieces with me, but nothing that caused any permanent disabilities such as the loss of sight or that.
- James: That was fortunate.
- Fritz: Yeah, it was. It was a good tour with a good group of troops and the unique thing about it, I think, was the valor of the soldiers was very important. I get back to the States and years later George Patton was the commander of the 11th Cav, the son of the World War II Patton—

James: Son, yeah.

Fritz: —and asked me if I would consider doing a project, the proceeds from which would go to the scholarship fund for the daughters and sons of the soldiers killed in Vietnam, and he wanted to do a print, a limited edition print, of the fire fight, and so I worked with an artist in Washington State, Jim Dietz, for about a year, going back and forth on the telephone. He'd send me sketches and I'd look at the sketches, and I didn't have a lot of photographs to go back to look at people that I had, I just didn't do a lot of that, and we did it pretty much from memory. And when my wife and I were at a reunion in Colorado Springs, one of the soldiers brought a print to me, one of those prints, and asked me if I'd autograph it for him. And we had some of the members of the platoon that had been in that fire fight with me I hadn't seen since Vietnam, and were gonna meet with us up in the room that we had. I was a guest speaker for the lecture. I said, "How would you like to have members of the platoon that were actually there also autograph that for you? Guys that were actually there?" And he said, "Super." So for some of them it was the first time they'd seen this print and so it was in a tube and we rolled it out, set books on it and the members of the platoon that were there were actually able to point themselves out in the print without any duplication, without one duplication.

James: Very—

Fritz: And they asked me what photographs I used and I said, "I didn't use any." And so the lesson in that is, you know, some of those things that happened stay with you to the infinite details of what occurred, what the people looked like and what they sounded like.

James: Well, you were so close—

Fritz: And it just, uh, it was just one of those strange things that occur. So that was—I'm glad I did them justice on that and, like I say, the proceeds from that went to a good cause and I was really happy to see that and so were the other soldiers.

James: And they all got copies of the print so—

Fritz: They get those.

James: Everybody got everybody's signature is what I'm saying.

Fritz: Yes.

- James: Do you keep in contact with these?
- Fritz: We usually have, one of the fellas—
- James: A sub-meeting when the group gets together or the division gets together?
- Fritz: One of the guys, Caldwell, he keeps in touch. About the 11th of January every year he'll get on the phone and start talking to people, talk about what happened and it's kind of, that's kind of a reunion we do.
- James: Sure.
- Fritz: And it's unique, Jim's a great guy. He got—Jim got pretty badly burned during that. His vehicle was hit and it caught on fire and he's lucky to be alive. But he really does well and, uh, they've done a lot of reconstructive work on Jim and he's super, and he thinks that, that I was able to save his life, but it was really the work of all of the soldiers there. It was a team effort that made the difference, it wasn't just one person, and I'm glad I was there to be the platoon leader for that element. I was really the XO at the time, the acting platoon leader, but we, all together, everybody reached down and grabbed whatever we needed to inside to gain the strength to come out victorious, survive really that day.
- James: It certainly brought you together.
- Fritz: And that's, you know, that's the thing. When I go around, whether it's as a Medal of Honor recipient or I go out for the Department of Veterans Affairs, the people ask me about that. I remind them that, really, when I go out as a Medal of Honor recipient and I wear my medal it's for all the people that served in Vietnam and for those that didn't come back and for those that are gonna have to face something like that again. My son's a captain of the 101st Airborne, you know, so he's—
- James: Right now?
- Fritz: He is.
- James: I'm reading Clancy's book about the Airborne; it just came out. Excellent book.
- Fritz: My son was, he had a Patriot missile battery, and then he took a Stinger battery over, but he was a Patriot missile officer and then a Stinger battery and now he's going, he's been selected for a tour with the Canadian Artillery schools, an exchange officer.
- James: Oh, I didn't know they were doing that.

- Fritz: And they're expecting their first child. We have three grandchildren now. We've got one son that works, one son that's in the Army, he's expecting the first. Got the next—oh, the youngest son is a sophomore at Bradley, the next one is a captain, that's Mike, then we got Jaffe, he's a captain in the United States Army, then Chris is an engineer with Caterpillar here in Peoria and he's got three sons, those are three grandchildren, and then my daughter Kim works for Motorola as Regional Representative here in Illinois. So three of the four are here in Illinois.
- James: Boy, you're lucky. You're lucky to have them so close.
- Fritz: [Laughs] Yeah, it makes it nice.
- James: Yeah, I only have one son that's close. The girls are away, and Gail's got a daughter and she's in Ohio so we do a lot of telephoning.
- Fritz: Oh, yeah, that makes it nice.
- James: So now tell me more; I got off track here. Your group, you meet as Medal of Honor winners, that group meets regularly, the other two fellas that—
- Fritz: Yeah, the recipients get together on a—they were meeting every other year, but now they're meeting every year, and the reason they changed that meeting schedule is because we're losing recipients. Down, I think, to a hundred and forty-eight now. Uh, they do an annual—
- James: That are still alive?
- Fritz: That are still alive.
- James: From all conflicts?
- Fritz: All periods,— **[End of Tape 1, Side B]**—right. In fact, I think if you're interested, I've got a breakdown sheet of how many from each conflict we have.
- James: I've got a list, got a list right there.
- Fritz: So they want to give the recipients every opportunity to get together, and so they're meeting on an annual basis. This year they're gonna meet in September in Pueblo, Colorado.
- James: Tell me about getting your medal and how that went down. You know, start at the beginning, you suddenly found—when did you find this out?

- Fritz: Well, we were at Fort Lewis, Washington, and I was with the 3rd Armored Cavalry Regiment up there.
- James: And this is how much later?
- Fritz: 1970.
- James: So that was two years later?
- Fritz: The action happened in '69, January of '69, and in 1970 I finished a tour with the 3rd Armored Cavalry Regiment in Fort Lewis and we were getting ready to go to Fort Benning to a permanent change of station, PCS to Fort Benning, and I had been reassigned prior to that PCS as the Regimental Enlistment Officer for Unit of Choice Enlistment Program under Westmoreland; 3rd Cav was one of the units. My replacement had come in and I'd briefed him and we had, had the movers at our quarters and they'd packed up all our goods and everything was ready to go and we were getting ready to go to the guest house and I stopped by the office and my clerk, former clerk, told me there was a telephone call for me. And I said, "Well, give it to George Christensen, Captain Christensen." He said, "No, they asked for you specifically." I said, "Aw, give me that phone. Goddamn it, I'm trying to get ready to leave." And I picked it up and it was this colonel in Washington and he said he wanted me to have his telephone number and to call him back for verification, but he was notifying me that the recommendation had been, for the Medal of Honor had been approved by President, President Nixon, and that they were going to have a ceremony and he wanted to give me implementing instructions and coordinating instructions, but he wanted me to verify it. So I hung the phone up, thought about that. Clerk says, "Who was that?" "Oh, some colonel up in Washington. I don't think he's got his screws, his screws aren't all tight or something."
- James: What was your rank?
- Fritz: I was captain. So I called the number back and it was the office that they gave me and verified the fact that we're going to Washington, and so I called my wife and I said, "We can't leave just yet, we've got to go to Washington, dear." [Laughs]
- James: A little diversion there.
- Fritz: And she says, "What about the furniture?" Well, they'd locked everything in place; they'd kept the moving truck there and everything, and flew Mary and myself to Washington and my parents from Lake Geneva to Washington and we had the opportunity to meet the President. That was the first ceremony—there were seven recipients there—that was first

ceremony that was open to the press, because of the unpopularity of the Vietnam War, and we had a great time there. It was very interesting, of course, to meet the President, to meet Westmoreland. And as a side note, interestingly enough, we talked to—we were talking to Westmoreland, he was very, very impressive, and he turned around—I'm a captain in the Army—and this guy turns and says, "Hey, Captain Fritz." And you turn around and all you see are these medals, you know, they go—

James: [Laughs] From his umbilicus up to his shoulder.

Fritz: They go from his knee to his shoulder. And he told me who he was and I told him I was the Unit of Choice Enlistment Officer for the 3rd ACR, 3rd Cav, and I said, "You know, I think we've got the best program going of the seven units that you named. You ought to stop down there and take a look at that." And he said, "I will." And I went back to the organization after we left Washington to get ready to move, and I told Colonel Howden[?], who was the regimental XO, that I'd talked to Westmoreland and Westmoreland was gonna come down and visit in about two weeks, maybe three weeks. And he went to the Regimental Commander, Kenneth Cook, and they checked Westmoreland's scheduler and there was no schedule, so they said, "Yeah, right, he's not going to come." Well, it was an unscheduled trip and lo and behold, three weeks later, my replacement called me and said he was in Cook's office. And Westmoreland landed at the airfield—

James: And everybody went to the bathroom, right?

Fritz: And the next thing they know, here comes this general walking in the colonel's office—

James: Unscheduled.

Fritz: Walking in the colonel's office, and said, "Hi, my name's Westmoreland. Colonel, tell me about your Unit of Choice."

James: This guy passed out cold. [Laughs]

Fritz: I said, "How'd the colonel do?" "Oh, pretty good." [Laughs]

James: "What's my name? I don't know."

Fritz: "Pretty good." So that was really kind of humorous. That was, I tell ya, that was—but that was a great experience, it was an awesome experience, you know, you go in there, a chance to be in the White House and a chance to talk to the President and it was, it was just overwhelming.

- James: Did they give you some money?
- Fritz: [Laughs] Well, I wish they would, but—
- James: Einar Ingman said they gave him a check for a thousand dollars.
- Fritz: Oh, when he went to Washington? Well, here's what happened; they changed by the time I get it; it always changes when I get there. What happened, they assign an escort officer to Mary and I. And the escort officer had chits, and he followed us around. We'd go to a restaurant and he'd write out this chit that was good for the money that we'd spent on the meal. So I got to ask him about that, because I'd heard about that, too. I said, "Some of the recipients said you come here you give them money." And he says, "Well, a few years back," he said, "we had one of the recipients come here and he brought about twenty of his relatives and it cost us so damn much money we don't do that anymore." [Laughs]
- James: [Laughs]
- Fritz: I said, "I can understand that." But it was, it was really neat because that's how they did that, and at one time they did give out money but then they changed it and then, of course, I went there in '71, and so they changed their procedure, and I can understand that. But we had a grand time and we had a chance to go to restaurants and we had one of the soldiers that was assigned to take the pictures as we went around, my wife and myself and family. We were in a hotel and there was this staircase going up and he wanted to take a picture of us coming up the stairs, and he was going up, backing up, and the camera opened up and this whole roll of film went, "Rrrrrr" exposed, right down the stairs. And I said—well, Mary and I, we didn't think it was any big deal; I mean, take more pictures, right? But to him it was death. He says, "Oh, no, you don't understand, you know. This means I'm done, I'm going out to the Bering Sea in a life raft from now on. You don't make these kind of mistakes." And so we talked to his boss and he assured us that this young soldier was—because we weren't that concerned about it, they would try to save as many pictures as they could for us and if we didn't mind, they didn't mind, and so we, I think, interceded, rightfully so, to help this young man out. Because those things happen. I mean, God Almighty, we're just regular people, you know?
- James: Right.
- Fritz: So that was kind of interesting.
- James: So they don't send—Einar Ingman and Ken get five hundred dollars a month.

- Fritz: Well, now it's up to six.
- James: It's up to six?
- Fritz: Six hundred dollars a month. See, that started out as—
- James: They got free license plates, do you get that? Illinois give you free license plates?
- Fritz: Absolutely, Illinois is a great state, let me tell ya. Wisconsin did; I used to have a Wisconsin plate and then I moved to Florida and I got a Florida plate, and then finally when I got out of the service I was gonna stay in Illinois. Illinois is, really, I think they're kind of funny about things, but they said, "If you decide to live in the state, you've got to become a resident." I said, "Okay, if that's the way it is, I will."
- James: Sure.
- Fritz: And they have a Medal of Honor license plate, so I've got one.
- James: They do, too, okay. I have to take a picture of that.
- Fritz: So Wisconsin, I've got the Wisconsin plate yet; it's a beautiful plate. Florida has a nice plate and Illinois' got one. Illinois' got seven recipients. They've got Allen Lynch in Gurnee, he's Vietnam; you got Dick Bush, Rich Bush, Marine Corps World War II, he's up in Waukegan. Then you got me in Peoria. We just lost Bobby Dunlap, he was in Monmouth; he was Marine Corps World War II. Then you've got Russell Dunham, World War II in Jerseyville. Clyde Choate, he's in Anna, Illinois, World War II, and Sammy Davis is Vietnam; he's in Flat Rock. Clyde was a member of the Illinois General Assembly for thirty-three years and nobody knew he was a recipient. Very few people knew he was a recipient until he retired and they announced it and it was—Clyde's quite a guy. Those are the six now in the state of Illinois. In the capital rotunda they've got a display honoring the six recipients of the Medal of Honor, state of Illinois.
- James: Now, the thing in Indianapolis with the Medal of Honor, have you seen that?
- Fritz: Oh, yes, we were there for the dedication.
- James: Did they give you a glass thing that—
- Fritz: Yes, uh-huh.

- James: We were impressed with that; it was beautiful.
- Fritz: Oh, it's gorgeous. They have really done a tremendous job. It was such a wonderful, wonderful opportunity to go and meet some great people out there. I mean, they were just so nice.
- James: At Indianapolis?
- Fritz: So hospitable, it was fantastic. And then they—John Finn, the oldest recipient, he's ninety-one, and we went to the racetrack and we were up at the suite—they had us in different suites to observe the race and the racetrack owner and they had—
- James: Indy race, Indianapolis auto.
- Fritz: Al Unser, Jr. was there and we were talking, we sat down and we were just chatting and he said, "Well, who's the oldest recipient?" I said, "Well, this guy by the name of John Finn; he's ninety-one. Would you like to meet him?" He said, "Oh, yeah, I'd love to." So I went outside the suite and there's the chairs that they had there when you were out watching the track and John had his earplugs in. I go, "John, John," and I said, "I'd like you to meet this racecar driver." And they got to talking and I found out that John Finn knew some of the old racecar drivers, never had—and it got into this conversation; it was just like he'd been living at the track for all of his life and he was tremendous. And the staff, they found that John Finn, even though he was ninety-one, he probably gave that crew over there the biggest run for their money out of any of the recipients. That guy just never ran out of energy, never. He said—I think he's from California, the California-Mexican border, and he said, "I don't come down from the hills too often; I might as well enjoy life while I can." He's ninety-one years old, riding back on the bus he was sitting with my son, the driver said, "Anybody want something to drink?" John says, "You got any cold beer up there?" He is really a character; he is the oldest recipient and he is just full of life.
- James: After you got out of the war in Vietnam, you stayed in the service and had other experiences?
- Fritz: Yes.
- James: Where was, what were the highlights of those?
- Fritz: Oh, I just, it's hard, it's—twenty-seven years, twenty-seven and a half years I stayed in the service. The last tour I had was at Fort Sheridan, I

was the Base Closure Officer up there. And we just had, we've traveled to Germany—

James: What did you do in Germany, for instance?

Fritz: Well, I was with the 11th Cav again, back to the Cav! [Laughs]

James: They just repeated exercises and—

Fritz: Well, we went to Grafenwöhr, we had tank gunnery, and of course, since I'd been with the 11th Cav in Vietnam, I wore my 11th Cav patch on my right sleeve with combat patch and when I was with them in Germany, you wear the unit patch with assignment on your left sleeve. So they call you a "sandwich" a "black corps sandwich" then because you got one of these—

James: The 11th on both shoulders?

Fritz: That's right.

James: Oh, that's unusual.

Fritz: So that was a real interesting tour over there in Germany. We were in the field a lot and I was with—when I was at Fort Leavenworth, that was in the early eighties, I had a chance to work in the National Training Center. That's now very, very active, plays a very active role in training Army units. I had a chance to really in that—I was with what they call the Opposing Forces Division of Fort Leavenworth, a TRADOC, Training and Doctrine Command Element, and our job was to teach the two US battalions out there to ensure they understood and could replicate Soviet tactics, motorized rifle regiment tactics. And also to procure some of the vehicles that they had and some that we actually procured were from foreign sources, and we had Soviet, actually they were Polish built, MTLVs, which are Soviet artillery tractors for pulling artillery pieces. We just got into some real interesting situations with that, but working with the NTC was just great, absolutely super.

James: Were you ever in Korea?

Fritz: I was over at Korea. I was the Chief of the Communications Counter Measures attachment over there and we did a lot of work with surveillance and deception plans, and surveillance, that type of thing. And that was, uh—

James: Did you have a decent place to live there?

- Fritz: I was in a brick building, I had a single, but it was, it was one of those things.
- James: You didn't take Mary over there?
- Fritz: No, it was an unaccompanied tour, and it didn't help me get promoted to colonel. [Laughs]
- James: Everybody thought that was the price you were going to—
- Fritz: “You've gotta go to Korea if you want to get promoted.” So I went to Korea, and it was one of those jobs where the guy I replaced, he said, “You heard about those positions you get as a lieutenant colonel that would give you power beyond your belief?” and I says, “Okay, Gary,” and I got there and he was absolutely right. That position you just, you touch a button and you were in the, some of the intelligence programs that I can't get into a discussion of, but just—you had access, literally, to the world in terms of gathering intelligence over there in that position and that was just, it was super. So I had a real good chance to see what was going on strategically and operationally. Now I work as a Civilian Aide to the Secretary of the Army for Illinois. That's a non-paying job, but it gives you an opportunity to talk to—I'm going to a conference the first part of June, get a chance to talk to Eric Shinseki, Chief of Staff of the Army, Louis Caldera, Secretary of the Army. Get a chance to talk to the Army leaders, find out what the pulse of the Army is. And I find that just, that's real challenging, that's exciting there. Then I work as the Deputy Director for the Illinois Department of Veterans Affairs.
- James: So what about, we'd better get into recruiting pretty soon?
- Fritz: Well, hey—
- James: Every time I pick up the paper they say there's less and less and less enlistments.
- Fritz: Well, the Army has got a new program now, and I think it's just exciting and we're very, very enthused about it, where they will offer—it's called Partnership with America Corporate Enterprises, PACE, where they will offer a contract to an enlistee that promises them a job with corporations such as American Airlines, Ford Motor Company, or Caterpillar; Caterpillar's getting into it now. So that puts them on more of an even scale when they get out at the three year, eight year, ten year, twelve year.
- James: That's what I was going to say. How many years do they put in for this?

- Fritz: That they're going to do in increments, and we're talking about the plans that involve, you know, the 401K plans, the management positions. They're looking for veterans because they know veterans are used to mission-type orders, they're good workers, they're honest, they get the loyalty, and the Army is the leader in this, and I think you'll see the other services picking up on that.
- James: So you take a boy out of high school and put him on active duty for two years?
- Fritz: Three years, three year commitment.
- James: Three years, and he's guaranteed a job at the end of that?
- Fritz: With the corporations that are involved in the program, uh-huh.
- James: Is there school? Is there an alternative in a school, if you prefer school?
- Fritz: What the Army doesn't provide, the corporation will provide in terms of the technical training and the certification. So it's a real good opportunity and it will offer incentive to the people that are looking at their futures, and I think it's a good program, I really do. It's a solid program, it's a win-win program. See, we can get—and here's why I think it is. You'll have people, more wanting to go into service, because they know that there's light at the end of the tunnel, they can get a decent job.
- James: Right.
- Fritz: Number two, if you have an individual that wants to come back to Peoria, for instance, or Springfield, where there's no Fort Knox, there's no Fort Benning, so can't really associate yourself with a Federal job, but you like your own civilian community, you can get those jobs. Caterpillar's corporate headquarters is right here. So you can really then return to a Fort Peoria or Fort Springfield, or a Fort Madison.
- James: Right, Madison.
- Fritz: And Caterpillar, one of the fellas at Caterpillar said that if the Army could provide him the names of a thousand people right now that were qualified, technically, in the heavy equipment field, inspections, maintenance or operations, they could put 'em to work. They could put 'em to work. And so with those types of guarantees and extended hands, the partnership by the corporations, the Army can really help, you know, the people of this country and really can help the corporations.
- James: Right, it's a win-win.

- Fritz: It's a win-win deal.
- James: How about the other services? I mean the Air Force and the Navy, do they offer similar—
- Fritz: No, the Army is on the cutting edge of this baby, and I think what's gonna happen is—
- James: It's going to bring the other two in?
- Fritz: The other services are going to jump on it, too. I mean, why not? And the Army is not saying, "Well, we're going to jealously guard this." They want to have this thing spread like a very, like a very positive influence—
- James: Well, all of the services need—the Navy, my outfit, is really worried because some of these ships are down to, you know, one-third the normal complement they should have and it's a big issue.
- Fritz: Now, what we did was we as—in my position as Civilian Aide and USAREC, the United States Army Recruiting Command, and actually worked with the Saint Louis battalion commander, lieutenant colonel by the name of Griffin, worked to develop what they call a "Tour of Influence" where we'd take people out of the civilian communities and the General Assembly. We took members, Senators and House of Representatives members; we took people out of the civilian communities, the sheriff's department, Caterpillar, Ford Motor Company. And we put 'em on a plane, met down at Fort Knox, and took 'em through Fort Knox, to let them talk to soldiers from Illinois to see what the training was like. Technologically, the advances in the service are so tremendous, even from Desert Storm, there's so much dependence on computers today, computer literacy that you gotta see it to believe it. And they went down and saw this and it was just amazing. They were totally convinced that it's such a difference that we ought to really reach out and grab these assets when we do the transition back from the service to the civilian community.
- James: For the kid that's gone through this in the Army, he's a perfect employee.
- Fritz: Exactly.
- James: He's got some talent to offer.
- Fritz: Exactly. And I think it's just, it's a wonderful opportunity, and the Army is starting to, as people would term, "think out of the box." Let's get out of, away from the traditional role of thinking and let's think about what we can do, because the young man or woman today is looking for something

different than they were ten years ago, fifteen years ago. If you try to sell the service just on the fact that it's your patriotic duty, it's not going to work.

James: Not anymore.

Fritz: It will not work anymore.

James: That's old hat.

Fritz: And so you've got to find a way of capturing those people that have those interests, but also have other interests and feelings. Because it's, you know, you've got the X Generation, the Y Generation, the Z Generation and so that's what some of this is all about. And if you're looking at it as a parent, and you say, "Well, okay, what's the service offering my son or daughter?" And you look at that program and you ask the hard question: "Okay, if the guarantee is going to be there today, is it going to be there three years from now? Is it going to be there eight years from now? Show me that it will be." And those questions can be answered and those guarantees can be made and that's what's gonna sell it. And when you have your first group of people coming through there and actually experience the programs that we've instituted to do that, in terms of a positive experience, that's going to sell it.

James: Yeah, I would think, I'm always, always a wish that we could have some type of military training for all these boys when they graduate, just automatic. They grow up and become responsible, you know, and they behave like adults quickly. And they make better adults after they've—

Fritz: Oh, I think so.

James: —been in there, there's nothing like that training.

Fritz: When you run into, as you travel across the country and you talk to various people, uh, you sometimes, especially if you talk to people that haven't had the experience of the military, either themselves or having someone in the family in, you sense there really is a loss of understanding of why we got all of what we have.

James: Right, they don't appreciate it.

Fritz: It's almost as if it's always been here.

James: Right.

- Fritz: It's always been here and I'm gonna go out there and grab the gusto, materialistic gain is what I want, the bigger house, the newer car, da, da, da, da, da, da, da. And they have to understand that we didn't get this automatically and there's a lot of people out there that can still take this away from us.
- James: That will never change.
- Fritz: If we in this country ever face the situation, and they painted a scenario for the cast[?] when we were in Washington. So let's just back up prior to Y2K and this is the scenario that was painted: we know we're coming into Y2K, we don't know how that's going to affect us in terms of how electronically we do business, and we're working towards getting that fixed. Now what if at the same time we think about those power outages they had out in California, where you had these massive grids of power that went out, and we couple with that the bombing like we had at Oklahoma City, and you add to that the aspect of biological warfare, where you can take a bio-agent and release it in a place like O'Hare airport, and have all this hit simultaneously. It would just devastate this country.
- James: Yes.
- Fritz: They couldn't, they couldn't handle it, they couldn't handle it. Because they're not ready for it, because we've become so complacent and we just don't think about the military until we need the military, we don't think about those things because we haven't had it happen here. Now we've had a quake out in California and had a power outage, but you take a biological agent as deadly as anthrax and put it in a vial that's no bigger than half the size of that pen and release it on a timer in an aerosol fashion in an airport like O'Hare.
- James: Right.
- Fritz: And the people would then pick it up and carry it, in some cases wouldn't get sick immediately, but would spread it to wherever they were going, and pretty soon we've got this mass influx and then they have the bombings going on. What if instead of bombing Oklahoma, they bombed the hospitals, major hospitals?
- James: Right.
- Fritz: Medical centers. State capitals.
- James: From the other side you can see how it would really be possible.

- Fritz: Oh, sure. And it would show the ability to reach out there and extend the sphere of power as a terrorist. So I—you know, I'm not paranoid about it, but when they painted that and you looked at that, the sky would just be—how would the American people react to that? Very poorly.
- James: They sure would. Okay, you run out of gas?
- Fritz: [Laughs] I never run out of gas.
- James: [Laughs] I've run out of questions.
- Fritz: Okay.
- Unknown: Did you ask about Panama?
- James: Oh, Panama.
- Fritz: That was an interesting experience.
- James: Come on now, we don't want to miss that.
- Fritz: Fort DeRussy, the Jungle School, uh, jungle training, the barracudas, eating snakes, uh—
- James: Oh, the jungle training, you had to learn how to carve up the snakes?
- Fritz: Oh, yeah, they put you in, you had this—down there you had to gain confidence, so they had this cage about the size of this deck and it was filled with these old tree limbs and all full of snakes. And so as a student you had to go in there, down there, and they said, "Okay, you're gonna learn how to eat a snake, so go pick one out." You know, pick a snake out.
- James: Come on!
- Fritz: And they're all in here; now these are the nonpoisonous varies that they have in here and so you have to go in and pick one. And you look for one that's about the right size, not too big. [Laughs]
- James: [Laughs]
- Fritz: And you get your own snake; you want a green one, a blue one, a red one. And on the Chagres River, they tell you when you're going across the Chagres River don't make a lot of noise or a lot of splashes, because it's full of barracuda. And the barracuda, you know you get them excited, they might go after you.

- James: They go in groups, too.
- Fritz: So you have to worry about the barracuda, and then when we're going through there, they have the black palm needles and the black palms are just like needles, the spines on these trees, and if you're working night navigation then you can't grab these things because otherwise you're gonna end up as a medical evacuee, so you got the black palms that you're worried about, and in our case, I took one patrol through, and you're supposed to link up with a partisan. And there was no partisan; we get to the partisan point and what happened, the group before had mugged him, tied him up, threw him in the bushes, and stole his wallet. [Laughs]
- James: [Laughs] They had sort of made their own rules?
- Fritz: Oh, yeah, they made their own rules as they went along; this was a US guy.
- James: And I bet they laughed, and laughed, and laughed at you.
- Fritz: Yeah, Jesus. And so that was really a difference experience over there. And—
- James: What was the point of dragging one of these snakes out? Just to get into the habit of dragging the snakes or learning how to cut them up?
- Fritz: Learning how to survive in the jungle.
- James: What did they tell you to do with the snake? If you're in the jungle and you need to, how are you supposed to deal with a snake?
- Fritz: Well first you want to get one—
- James: Other than cut his head off?
- Fritz: Yeah, you want to cut his head off and then—
- James: I knew about that.
- Fritz: And then you slit 'em and you skin 'em and then you eat the meat, you cook the meat right, you can barbeque it, or put it over a spit or if you can't use a fire, then you can eat it right off—once you skin, take the skin off, you can eat it right off the skeletal system, fresh.
- James: Fresh. Did we do that?
- Fritz: Oh, we ate a snake, oh sure.

James: Fresh?

Fritz: Oh, yeah we had fresh snake.

James: How did that go?

Fritz: Oh, that was good.

James: Was it really or are you just being—

Fritz: We tried it all. [Laughs]

James: Everybody says snake meat tastes like chicken.

Fritz: Well, it depends on the snake. [Laughs]

James: Is that one the blue one or the yellow one? [Laughs]

Fritz: [Laughs] Yeah, it depends on the color of the snake as far as I'm concerned. I'd rather have a hamburger myself. But it's a—they put you through the training there. It was a good school, it was a good experience. You know, some of the things—I tell you, some of the things that I learned to do and that helped me survive over there were really things that I learned when I was in Boy Scouts. That far back.

James: Just—

Fritz: In terms of orientation and in terms of—

James: It's a little bit more of the same thing.

Fritz: You just build on that. In the Army you're—Boy Scouts, you're obviously not concerned about killing the enemy soldier, but you are concerned about survival, and how to live in nature and how to live in harmony with nature, and so it's really an extension of that. And we went out there and when we had the opportunity in Vietnam, I mean we didn't just burn everything we had to, or go, if we had an opportunity, shoot everything that was moving. Because it was—you know, Vietnam is really a beautiful county; it was so war torn, though. It was just, it was—you try to put yourself in the sandals of the Vietnamese over there, and it was almost as if you kind of say, "Well, what would happen if Peoria."—you know, you were in the middle of Vietnam and you had the NVA going through one time threatening your family, trying to burn your house down, next time you got the French coming through, then you got the US soldiers coming through. And so you have to, you have to learn to be compassionate, you

have to learn, I think, to honor, you know, the rights of the other people that live on this planet. We had a Christmas in Vietnam where most of the guys got a lot of things from home that we got over there, apples and oranges, and other candies and that we could get access to. We had a village that we were near that was half-Catholic and half-Buddhist; now don't ask me how it came up with that split, but that's what it was. And I got together with the village chiefs and told them that it was traditionally, it was a tradition for Americans to give at Christmas time, what we'd like to do is bring some gifts over and food and that, items that they could use and present them to the villagers, but it had to be equally shared with the Buddhists and the Catholics. So I went around with a trailer, we picked up everything that the guys had and we set up security around the village and went into the village. I had a jeep and the trailer, my driver, I was standing next to the jeep, and all of the villagers started coming towards—it was a friendly village, up to this point it had been. And there was a little girl—and this is out in the middle of nowhere, I mean we're in the toolies now, and this little girl had this dress on, and I'll never forget it, her dad must have spent a fortune on this dress, and she was coming towards us, the crowd pushed in, she tripped and she fell down on the ground, and she got her dress soiled. So I went through the crowd, she was about from here to the door over there, and I went over and picked her up and put her on the hood of the jeep and gave her a banana and apples and some other things. And her dad was so thankful that I was able to do that, it was just like I, I gave that little girl a brand new bicycle and I gave the father a brand new car. It was just, you know, it was just—

James: Seemed like nothing to you, but to them—

Fritz: Two people from different worlds coming together on a common holiday like that, just showing that we could share. And we had another little, another incident where there was a little boy. We're goin' down the road and all of a sudden he holds up this mortar round, on the side of the road.

James: Jesus.

Fritz: And of course the APC stopped immediately and they turned their guns on him.

James: Right.

Fritz: But what he was doing, they didn't shoot him, we stopped and he led us to a supply of mortar rounds that were hidden in a rice paddy and he was trying to say he found these things and he wanted to turn 'em over to the Americans.

James: That was risky.

Fritz: And he could have been killed right there.

James: Well, of course they didn't know if he was going to throw it.

Fritz: And so he in fact was trying to show the Americans that he appreciated what we were doing and he was trying to help us out. So we ran into a lot of, we were in a lot of situations, it was really a night and day situation sometimes. You run into that on one hand, and then you'd see some of the Americans that you found the bodies of that had been brutally tortured. Captured and tortured, pilots—

James: Pilots especially as I understand it.

Fritz: Yeah, and it's, it was—we had a F-4 that flew for us quite often out of Bien Hoa and the guy got shot, he was making one pass, he came over the trees a couple of times and they took him right out of the sky. The plane went down, and we got there and he was, he was dead. But those guys would just, just do some things that were amazing. The same guy, before he was killed, in fact the picture is at the armor school, and they show this huge explosion and these vehicles are back there and I looked at that picture, and I've got a copy of it, so that's the air strike, that's the plane that I called in. What happened was we had a rice paddy and a set of trees and there were just two VC in there and they were shooting a RPG [rocket-propelled grenade], just shooting, they weren't hitting the vehicles but they were shooting at us, and we were in a line formation and this guy was there and he says, "You got any targets down there?" And I says, "Yeah, we got a couple of guys over here with an RPG, if you take 'em out for us—[Tape Ends Abruptly]"

[End of Interview]