

Wisconsin Veterans Museum
Research Center

Transcript of an
Oral History Interview with
PHILLIP J. GRIMM

Marine Dentist, United States Navy & USN Fleet Marine Force, Vietnam War
2002

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Grimm, Phillip J., (1939-). Oral History Interview, 2002.

Master Copy: 3 audio cassettes; analog, 1 7/8 ips, mono.

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Abstract:

Phillip J. Grimm, born in Chicago in 1939, narrates his experience of enlisting first in the United States Navy as a dental student and then the United States Marine Corps as a dental officer during the Vietnam War. Within this interview, the narrator outlines his experience as a dental officer in South Vietnam and more generally, his experience as an enlisted officer in the US Military. In 1961, Grimm joined the navy as a freshman in dental school in order to gain experience in the field, as many dental students did at the time, and gain four years in the Naval Reserves. By 1966, Grimm received orders to report at Camp Pendleton and shipped out for Vietnam with the USN Fleet Marine Force, lacking any combat training. Originally, Grimm was set to deploy with the First Dental Company, but he requested to ship out days later in order to be present for the birth of his son. Once attached to the USN Fleet Marine Force, Grimm performed dental duties, along with midshipman duties, for which he was never trained to perform. In Vietnam, Grimm participated in Operation JACKSTAY, which occurred in the Rung Sat Special Zone and later, he became permanently stationed in the village of Chu Lai. The narrator described his experience working in local South Vietnamese villages, in which he attempted to provide dental care. His work was a part of what Grimm described as the “people to people” program, in which US forces attempted to gain the support of local Vietnamese people by providing health care. Grimm reflects on his evolving feelings in relation to the United States’ involvement in the Vietnam War and the challenge he faced in identifying the enemy while stationed in Vietnam.

Biographical Sketch:

Phillip J. Grimm was born in Chicago, Illinois in 1939. After growing up near Milwaukee, Wisconsin, he enlisted in the United States Navy during dental school in 1961 but never saw action with the Navy. Instead, he deployed with the USN Fleet Marine Force and became a Marine dentist while serving in South Vietnam during the Vietnam War. He participated in Operation JACKSTAY and was eventually stationed permanently in the village of Chu Lai. While in Chu Lai, he transferred from the MASH unit into the 3rd Amtracks Marine Regiment. As a dental officer, Grimm provided dental care to enlisted Americans and to local Vietnamese people until 1967. After serving a year in Vietnam, Grimm returned to the United States and was stationed in Quantico, Virginia. In June of 1967, Grimm elected to be discharged from the Navy and returned to Wisconsin to settle in Madison and begin his career as a civilian dentist.

Interviewed by Deborah Thompson, 2002.

Transcribed by Kylee Sekosky, 2014.

Edited and Abstracted by Kylee Sekosky, 2014.

Interview Transcript:

Thompson: This is an interview with Phillip Grimm who served with the Fleet Marine Force during the Vietnam War era. This interview is being conducted at the Wisconsin Veterans Museum on August 16, 2002, and I, Deborah Thompson, am the interviewer. All right, Mr. Grimm, thank you for being here. This first question is sort of interesting. We'd like for you to just describe yourself.

Grimm: Describe myself.

Thompson: Yeah.

Grimm: Lord.

[Both laugh]

Grimm: You bushwhacked me with that one.

Thompson: I'm sorry. I shoulda alerted you to that one.

Grimm: Yeah, uh, you stump me right off the bat here.

Thompson: If you want, your age—

Grimm: I'm seventy-three. I'm a retired dentist that's been retired since nineteen—2007, and I'm married, have been married for forty-seven years. I have two sons and seven grandchildren and live in Madison and my son is a dentist who took over my dental practice, which would bring me up to do all the things that retirees dream about doing and here I am.

Thompson: Well tell me a little bit about your background and life before your military service, like when you were born, your home town—

Grimm: Okay.

Thompson: —about your parents and family.

Grimm: Okay. I was born in Chicago, 1939 and at Cook County Hospital. Excuse me, Evanston Hospital and my mom and dad were both from Iowa. My mom was born in Colorado to a man who worked for the Swift and Company and he traveled around quite a bit and finally settled in Clarinda, Iowa, and my dad was born in Sharpsburg, Iowa, population about two hundred and fifty. His dad was a farmer. My dad was one of seven children and he contracted polio when he was twelve and was not gonna be able to farm ever. Interesting side light, his older brother enlisted in the Canadian Army in World War One and fought in France and was killed eighteen days before the armistice and he left an insurance policy to my grandfather that said that my dad, since he couldn't farm, was to go to college and my dad was the first Grimm to ever get past eighth grade

'cause the school in Sharpsburg went to eighth grade and then they went to work at the farm. So, my dad got on the train every week, stayed in a boarding house in Clarinda, Iowa, where he went to high school and he graduated in high school, that's where he also met my mom and my dad then went to the University of Iowa, again the first Grimm to graduate from high school, went to University of Iowa, graduated Phi Beta Kappa from Iowa and went on to teach at economics at the University Chicago and he met my mom and they were secretly married in Iowa because my mother taught high school in Clearfield, Iowa and in those days if you were married you couldn't teach in Iowa. So once they discovered she was married, they had to let her go and she moved to Chicago 'cause my dad was a struggling person in Chicago, this was now just around 1929 depression and she was teacher of the year for every year she was at Clearfield, but because she got married, she no longer could teach. So they went to Chicago and my dad then couldn't make a lot of money teaching school, so he worked for an insurance company. He started out as a book keeper, made thirty-five dollars a week during the depression, supported two families. One family became president, the man became the president of Illinois Bank and Trust, the other one became Executive Vice President of Eli Lilly, but during the depression they relied on my dad's thirty-five dollars so that three families lived together. My dad had the only job and so that's kind of the household that I was raised in. Although, by the time I was born of 'course the depression was long over or concluding because of World War Two starting. Then they left Chicago, my dad got a job as a, I say job, he was a general agent of New England Mutual Life Insurance Company in Milwaukee and so we moved from Chicago to Milwaukee and that's where I was raised and went to high school in White Fish Bay and graduated from there in 1957. I had two older brothers. One just passed away in February. He was an entrepreneur, developed CAT scans, did a lot of marvelous things. My other brother was general electric and also very successful. So three of us had down very well their lives and all kinda doing part, I bring that up because of my uncle Seton who died in World War One and gave my dad this life insurance policy. Had he not done that, all of this probably wouldn't have happened and we woulda been maybe still farming in Iowa, hard to tell, but the good Lord moves in mysterious ways and that's how probably why I'm here speaking about my experiences because I probably, something else would have happened in my life. So it's an interesting thing that war caused my uncle to die, but war gave me the opportunity, as my two brother and my dad, and so it's kind of a twist, a little irony in that respect. So, I graduated, again, from White Fish Bay in 1957. I played sports at high school, the normal, football, baseball, track, and stuff. I had a normal childhood, lots of fun. It was a great time to be a kid. Kids could do things that kids can't do today, wish they could, but they can't, but we had a lot of freedom to have loads of fun, worked hard, and upon graduation from White Fish Bay, I went to Grinnell College in Iowa. My

dad really wanted me to go to Grinnell. I wanted to go to Wisconsin or Colorado, drink beer and have fun. My dad had the foresight to realize that one of my older brothers had taken that route and had not done so well and so I was subjugated to going to college at Iowa, Grinnell College, and I had no idea where it was. It was right smack in the middle of Iowa, a town of about nine thousand and when I arrived there, I found that every student was either in the top five percent of the class or valedictorian or salutatorian of the class, which I was not and so my first year at Grinnell was one of rapid growth and I thought about that many times—That's cause I have the allergies. I'm not that sentimental yet. I have tear in my eye but [both laugh]—So it's an interesting story because these are all things that lead to where we are today and one of them was that I was not doing well in school and a professor by the name of Charlie Cleaver kinda asked me to make a decision about growing up or faltering and I knew my dad had never faltered, nor my brothers and it just wasn't the Grimm way so I sucked it up and ended up getting a very good grade point at Grinnell. I was a history major, wanted to teach history in college. I did ask a history professor why they wore patches on their tweed sport coats. I thought it was really cool and he told me it was because they had holes in the elbow and I thought, "Well that's strange, how come?" He said, "Well, we can't afford new sport coats." So, he said being a history professor is a long arduous task and I thought maybe I was not cut out to do that and we had no dentists in our family. My only dental experience was as a dental patient, but I had taken all of the pre-dental courses because I like science and so my older brother, who was very astute in the business world, when I asked him about dentistry, he did some research on it and found out that dentist make a good living and they do something that's really important. They kind of are their own boss and he said he was his own boss. He did things his way all his life and he said it's really enjoyable running your own company whether you're running a large multi-million dollar corporation or a dental practice, you are your own boss so your success and failures are your own, and I thought, "You know, I kind of like that idea." So I went into dentistry not so much because I knew anything about taking care of patients, but because I really wanted to do it on my own, and so I went to the University of Iowa. Upon graduation from dental school and unlike kids today, I didn't have a break, didn't have an interim. I just went right on to school and fortunately, my father could help me. I worked every summer. Worked hard, I worked at school. I was determined to pay as much of my own way as I could, but my dad was always there to fill in the blanks. So, again thanks to my Uncle Seaton and my dad had the wherewithal to do this, it's a very, I always go back to that because it's a very important part of all the Grimms and where they ended up, just being killed in a slip trench in Cambrai, France just eighteen days before the armistice was a lousy thing for Uncle Seaton and a wonderful thing for all the Grimms. I worked my way through dental school and graduated in 1965 from dental school and one of the things you do in dental school,

because in those days there was no graduate programs in dentistry to speak of, is everybody joined a branch of the armed services. That was going to be your “internship” and in 1961, when I started dental school, the world was very quiet after Korea. Vietnam, unbeknownst to us, things were happening there with the advisors and things that President Kennedy had done in Vietnam but it wasn't very well, it wasn't talked about. It wasn't in the papers. So, Vietnam was slated to happen as early as 1960, for sure, but none of us knew about that. So, I didn't have to join the service, and probably could have ended up not going to Vietnam in the long run, but in sixty-one everybody joined the service because it was, and they kind of fought to get in because it was a two year window where you went out, saw lots of patients, a lot of military bases had rotating internships where you learn to do things with prosthetics, endodontics, and oral surgery, and the training was quite good and you saw thousands of kids and you got really competent at doing a lot of dentistry. So it was a good thing, plus you got paid. Most of us had never had that kind of money. So I joined the Navy, the old adage, "Join the Navy. See the World." You know, I thought, I've always loved water and I had—when I was raised in White Fish Bay on Lake Michigan and my parents did do some vacationing. They had two weeks a year, that's all people had in those days even though my dad was a general agent of a life insurance company, he had a two week vacation, but we always went to water. We went up to, Muskoka Lakes in Canada, so I loved the water and the navy was a natural thing for me to do. Couple interesting things in my dental training, one of the things I did between my junior and senior year is the U.S. Navy decided to teach us how to be officers and the way they would do that, historically, was at Newport, Rhode Island, but this one year, 1964, they decided to have it at Annapolis, at the Naval Academy. The only year they'd ever done it 'cause it was a consummate disaster, but they had a hundred and twenty eight medical and dental students come there and they gave us the rank of Ensign and the humor is that we had to go buy uniforms. Well no one even knew what an ensign's uniform was so a lotta guys went and bought, one guy showed up with a rear admiral's hat because he liked the little things on the brim, all the little lightning stripes, and he wanted to have stars on his shoulder boards, so these students showed up with all these crazy uniforms 'cause they had no clue what an ensign's rank was, you know, and they just bought the most colorful thing they could buy. Of course, here was all these midshipmen at a naval academy and suddenly there's a hundred and twenty eight officers of various rank running around. We didn't even know how to salute, and you know, here comes the rear admiral, you know, and of course the midshipmen, that's just like meeting God, you know, and so they would do things and here's rear admiral, doesn't know which hand to salute with, didn't know what to say. So, quickly the Naval Academy straightened that out, got us all into the right uniforms and we were there for a month taking various military course and military protocols and what not, and I would say by the time we graduated

from that little month activity, we were at least had an idea of what an officer's supposed to do, but it was a funny process and one of the things that helped us a lot is—I was thinking back on this—one of the dental students was an ex-marine. He was a gunny sergeant in Korea and he had gone back to dental school. So, he was quite a bit older than we were and he just couldn't stand the sloppiness of this, of the dental students. So, he took us out in close order drill after class every day. We went out and marched, and he marched us like we were recruits. Well the interesting thing was they came; NBC came to film the Army-Navy game and the class of midshipmen and guess who they filmed marching across the campus? It was all the dental students, 'cause they didn't know us from a hole in the ground and we got on the half time of the Army-Navy game as the midshipmen from Annapolis and here came all the dental students and we were good. We were right in step and this guy was callin' out the cadence and we came across the campus and they filmed us. Well that was kind of funny.

Thompson: Well, I have a question, a clarification.

Grimm: Sure.

Thompson: You said you graduated from dental school in sixty-five and joined the navy, but it sounds like you had a connection to the navy before you graduated?

Grimm: Okay. The only connection was in 1961 as a freshman, you could join a branch of the service any time in dental school and if you joined in 1961, I got four years of credit toward the Navy Reserves. So, technically if I wanted to retiree as a naval officer, I'd already have four years of duty even though at dental school I never saw a uniform or a naval officer, anything, but I would have gotten four years of credit. So, I joined in sixty-one and in 1965 right in conjunction with my graduation, I also was commissioned a lieutenant in the navy, captain in the Marine Corps, and so I had my commissioning then.

Thompson: And did you get any money from the navy for college?

Grimm: No.

Thompson: Okay.

Grimm: No, nothing. Nope. So we could talk about that. So when I did—After the Naval Academy at least I knew how to do all that stuff, okay. So, and it was very, it was humorous. I learned how to sail and did a lot of things at the Naval Academy. Okay, sixty-five I graduated and got commissioned, but prior to that, about March of sixty-five, Gulf of Tonkin was in November of sixty-four, and so I knew the Vietnam War was on, but I thought I was in the Navy. About March, I got my orders and it said Camp—and I asked for California 'cause I had never been west of Iowa.

You just don't do those things you know; I never had the luxury of travel. I just went to school and worked locally. So, I wanted to see some of the world, so I thought, "Well, I'll go to California." So, I requested, and I knew they had San Diego and lotta naval bases out there. So, I got my orders. It said, "Camp Pendleton, California, FMF." It meant nothing to me. I thought, "Camp Pendleton though?" I thought, you know, I knew enough about Camp Pendleton. I said, "I think that's a marine base." Wasn't quite sure of all that, and it took me about three or four days at dental school to realize, talking to dental professors, I finally found a guy who was a retired naval officer, Dr. McClaren, who was an oral surgeon, who said, "Congratulations, you're a marine." I said, "No, no, no. I'm in the navy." He said, "Not FMF, nope, you're far removed from the navy. You're not gonna see a ship and where you going?" I said, "Camp Pendleton." He said, "That's the home of the First Marine Division." I said, "First Marine Division, wow. You know that's kind of like Guadalcanal and all that. What is this all about?" So then I started digging into this thing and I thought, "Holy mackerel." Found out that the marines had no medical personnel, they were all naval personnel, and that was what I was going to be. I thought, "Well that's kind of little twist on things." So, I knew when I graduated, and I had to buy a set of navy whites and the only time— I wore them twice. I wore them at graduation, and I wore 'em when I got, later on, after Vietnam, I went to Quantico, Virginia for three months. That's where I was mustered out, and I had to wear 'em to some event at some admiral's house. The only two times I ever had these whites on and when I had to buy them in dental school, they were a fortune. I think they were a hundred and fifty dollars for these things and I didn't have a hundred and fifty dollars, and I never put the things on. All I wore was Khaki and then later on camouflage stuff in Vietnam so, but—Okay, so how we doing so far?

Thompson: Doing great.

Grimm: Alright.

Thompson: You're on your way to Camp Pendleton.

Grimm: Alright, so my senior year in dental school, I met the love of my life, met her at a cuspidor, met my wife, Dale. She was a dental hygienist, and we got engaged about the time I got my orders, and I still wasn't clear what these orders meant. We set a June wedding. I had to be at Camp Pendleton July fifth. I got married on the twenty-seventh of June, day before my birthday in Arlington Heights, Virginia or Arlington Heights, Illinois and left the next day. I had bought a new red convertible my senior year in dental school. I cashed in all my life insurance and took out a student loan [laughs]. I had driven cars that barely had wheels on them, so I thought I'm going have a nice car. So I had a red convertible and a new wife, and we packed up everything on my birthday, the twenty-eighth of June and we headed west to a new life at Camp Pendleton. I don't know how much you

want me to—there are some interesting events on this thing. So, my wife had done a dollar a dance thing at the wedding and we had put two hundred and fifty dollars in the glove box from this dollar dance [laughs] and we had a little money. We had no credit cards, nothing for gasoline. Those days you, what we had in our pocket was what we had, and I had to make due all the way to Camp Pendleton, and so we stayed in little places all the way out. My dad booked us a cabin at Yellowstone and so we drove two lane roads. There were no interstates, two lane roads that—the four lane ended at Madison and from Madison to California it was two lane roads all the way and we went to—our goal was to go to Yellowstone and then Salt Lake City. I wanted to see Boulder Dam, and then on to Camp Pendleton, and so it was kind of a honey moon on the way out. I have to tell this one sidelight 'cause it's really interesting. We were in Wyoming, and we were driving toward Salt Lake City and I had driven over a pass in Wyoming and there was a rock slide on the road and I drove. I couldn't miss it. I couldn't stop. I drove over it. I got to the other side and all the oil in the car was running on the road and so I jumped back in my new convertible. I got it up to about eighty miles per hour, turned the key off, and went over a little rise. We hadn't seen a house in two miles, and I coasted down this hill. At the bottom of the hill was this little cluster of buildings, and I coasted in. There was a gas station. I gotta tell this story. So, I coasted into the gas station. All the oil was out of the car, and I actually got a little jack. I jacked the front of the car up myself, but they were really busy. I could see a big hole in the oil pan and I thought, "Oh my—" and I had to be in Camp Pendleton probably two, I can't remember, a day or two. I was runnin' outta time and I had my car, was totally disabled, and I thought, "What am I gonna do?" So, this man came over and he said, "The problem?" I told him about the rock slide. He said, "Oh it happens all the time. Last guy, he was here three weeks before we got the car fixed and he finally sold the car and got on the train." I said, "Well I can't do that. I've gotta be at Camp Pendleton in two days." So the guy, he said, "I'll be back in a second." So he came back a few minutes later and he had a—at that time I called it an Indian—Native American, big tall guy, and he said, "We'll take care of your car." I said, "How you gonna do that?" He said, "You see that airplane hangar over there? Well, I build airplanes. If I build airplanes, I can fix your oil pan and this gentlemen here is going to take care of your car and don't worry about him. He's not very well educated and he's a little retarded but he's a good mechanic." I said, "So what should we do?" He said, "See that motel across the street? I own that too. You and your wife get your bathing suits, go over there and have a swim. I'll let you know when your car is ready." So I thought, "What other option do we have?" So we got our bathing suits on, went across the street, swam. The drinks were on him. I'm thinking, "This is just a set up. I'mma come back and my car'll be gone," and the Indian pushed the car around behind the building and it disappeared. I thought, "Oh my God." So, about, I don't know, two hours later, I was getting frantic now. I

thought maybe they've stolen all of what little clothes we had. This man came across the road on a motor scooter and he walked up and he looked like something out a Zane Grey novel. He was steely grey eyed and quite a guy, and he introduced himself and his name was Dallas Klinger. I thought, "Oh my God, figures." He said, "So you're going in the Marine Corps," and I said, "I am." He shook my hand and he said, "Well, maybe you know about me," and I said, "No sir, I really don't." He said, "Well, I was one of the Flying Tigers and if you've ever read the book *God is My Co-pilot*," and I said, "I have read the book." He said, "Well, I'm in there. I was one of Chennault's aces in World War Two. Tried to get my sons to go in the army and the worthless kids wouldn't do it. I'm really glad you're going in the marines. Your car will be ready in a few minutes. Why don't you get dressed?" So we went back across the street, there sat my car. He says, "Full of oil, full of gas, it's all taken care of. It should be just fine." So I thought, "Okay, here comes the big question, what do I owe ya?" He said, "My honeymoon present to you guys. Enjoy your trip." So, I got in the car, I drove it for six months before I thought, better get it looked at, and I took it to an old mill dealer and I put our new oil pan on it and the guy said, "I don't know who fixed this car, but you coulda driven this car forever." So Dallas Klinger, a lot of funny things happen in your life and this was one of the nicer things. I got to Camp Pendleton on time and due to an ex-Flying Tiger ace. So, I arrived at Camp Pendleton and we stayed in a motel and the next day I drove into the base, presented my papers, and there was a sergeant behind the desk and he said, "Well, Dr. Grimm, nice to meet you. You're one of the new dentists going to Vietnam." That was the first words out of his mouth and I said, "What?" [Both laugh] He said, "Yeah, our company is gonna be pullin' outta here reasonably soon," and I said, I didn't know what to say. I mean, my heart just kinda went through my throat and I thought gosh I'm, you know, I've been married five days and I'm going to Vietnam. So, we got settled into Camp Pendleton and we rented a house in San Clemente, right across from President Nixon's estate. He wasn't present at it then, but were he stayed would be and rented all our furniture. We didn't know anything and I started to, I was the dentist at, they had bases all over Camp Pendleton and I was the dentist at one of these bases where I just took care of recruits and I went to field medical school, and this was in July and they expected to be out of there by November and so we were in field medical school where we ran up and down carapel nets. It was essentially basic training. I crawled under barbed wire. I had a live 50 caliber ammunition shot over the top of me, all this, threw hand grenades, fired hundreds of rounds through my 45. Most of the dentists and the physicians couldn't even hit the target, let alone—you know, I figured I'd throw it at somebody if I had to. I'm a pretty good shot actually, I hunted a lot when I was, before I got in the service, so I could handle guns pretty well, but we saw hundreds and hundreds of kids and they were scared to death. They were in the real basic training, ours was tough, but not like they had it. Terrified, and their

teeth were just awful. It was funny 'cause when I was in the service they would say things to you, like, "You will do sixteen fillings today." Well I was doing, like, fifty a day, and so we got mad at that a couple times. We cut back to sixteen and they came out and said, "What are you doing?" And I said, "I'm just doing sixteen fillings a day." So the service is always interesting. I tell that story 'cause sixteen fillings a day, lots of kids woulda left without dental care. We learned all kinds of dental tricks to get kids done as fast as we could and did a great job. Most of the young dentists worked extremely hard. We worked, you know, ten, twelve hour days and it was an endless procession of young kids who had been drafted. I think drafted. I think the draft was on by then, and so it was tough. In the mean time I had this cloud over my head that I was gonna have to leave. So, course as things would happen, my wife got pregnant and that got—things started to get complicated, and I had my bags packed on three occasions and all three times they called it off. So, I was with what they called the 1st Dental Company. Finally about December, my wife was now post six months being pregnant. The 1st Dental Company was going to leave for Okinawa, not to Vietnam to Okinawa, where they were gonna stage. So, I actually went and saw a one star general and told him that I did not want to go, and of course that's an interesting thing to say to a one star general, and it was kinda like something like Hawkeye Pierce might say in MASH, you know, says, "What are ya gonna do? Court Marshal me or send me home?" You know, I said, "My wife is expecting a child soon and I want to stay until she delivers and I will stay under any circumstances you choose, but I want to stay right here." Believe it or not he acquiesced, the 1st Dental Company went to Okinawa, but when you're in the service you have to be attached to somebody. So, they attached me to a mortar battery of the Battalion Landing Force 1-5. So, I was—my CO [Commanding Officer] was the head of this mortar battery and he—I out ranked him, but he was my CO and it didn't mean anything other than I was just attached to this battalion landing force and I thought nothing of that. December rolled by and January rolled by and then about close to the first of February, they said that the Battalion Landing Force was leaving, now I had to go, and I thought, and my wife had not delivered. So, early in February they were scheduled to leave and I had talked to an obstetrician in Camp Pendleton, and I said, "What can we do?" and he said, "Well, we can try to induce you wife to see if she can deliver before you leave." So I talked it over with Dale and decided to try it, and she went through thirty-six hours of labor with this induction, and I was now just about out of my mind and she was just suffering horribly, and I said, "You gotta do something. Either stop this thing or make it happen," and he gave her another injection of Pitocin, I think it was. Anyway, she delivered a nice healthy boy and she stayed in the hospital the next day, and the next day, I don't know what the normal time in the hospital would be, probably a week at that time or five days. The second day—well, let me back up. About the time she's going through this delivery, the entire

Landing Force boarded ships in Long Beach and were sailing to Hawaii, maybe even before that, I can't remember the exact time, but they had left, and I was still there, and I got a medical leave to stay a little longer and Dale delivered Russell, my oldest son, and two days after she delivered, she and I and Russell drove up to El Torro Air Base. I got on a DC3 and said goodbye to my wife and my two day old son. My wife was twenty one years old and had a baby, no friends, living in California and I was leaving for Vietnam. Got on the airplane, said goodbyes, you know all the crying and hugging and kissing and then the damn airplane wouldn't run. So, I had to get off the airplane and they had to get another airplane. I had to go through it a second time. How I, how either one of us got through this thing, I have no idea, but it was awful. I flew up to San Francisco. I stayed in the bachelor's officers' quarters with a guy who I never knew existed. He was a black beret, and he wanted to go out on the town that night, when we would leave the next day for Hawaii. We joined this B.L.T. and I got tangled up in this black beret and all he wanted to do was go in bars and kill people, fight people. I finally got rid of him and snuck back to the B.O.Q. [Bachelor Officers' Quarters]. I thought this is just—it was the strangest little period of my life you could ever imagine. I got on the airplane the next day [??] at Travis Air Force Base. I'm sitting in an airplane, thinking I'm gonna fly to Hawaii. I said to the guy next to me, "Well, so what are you gonna do in Hawaii?" He said, "Well, I'm not gonna do anything in Hawaii. I'm goin' to Tokyo." I said, "Well, I'm going to Hawaii." He said, "Only if you can jump. This plane's non-stop to Tokyo." They had me on the wrong airplane. Had to stop the airplane, get me off the airplane, find my bag, you know that diddy bag, and drag me back in the airport. Finally got on the right plane to Kano'i Bay, Hawaii where BLT was gonna show up and in the meantime, I had to travel in a class A uniform, which was navy blue, which I didn't own, couldn't afford 'em. So, I bought this chaplain's outfit in a used store and my wife had sown on the acorns of the dental outfit, and I don't think this guy had bathed a day in his life, and so I'm going through all these hot airports, hot planes, Hawaii, and I just smelled somthin' awful and I got to Hawaii. I got a ride out to Kano'i Bay, which is on the other side of Oahu, and I hadn't shaved in probably, it didn't have electric razors so I had a very heavy beard in those days so I just, I looked like a bum, and I report into this, I'd never met this guy. Lieutenant Colonel Kaufman, I still remember him, crisp, a marine's marine, sitting behind his desk, I had to present my orders. I walked in with this smelly outfit on, unshaven, gave my orders. He looked at the orders, looked at me and he said, "What the hell are we gonna do with you," and I said—you know by this time, I didn't have much humor left in me and I didn't care whether he was the general or what he was—and I said, "Frankly, sir, I don't give a damn. I'm here. What do you wanna do with me?" He said, "Son, watch your mouth," and I said, "Okay. Sorry, sir." He said, "We don't warrant a dentist." I said, "Whatdya mean, you don't warrant a dentist?" "We're a Battalion Landing Force. We

don't have a dentist." I said, "Well, you do now." He said, "Son—" I said, "Oh yes, sir [laughs]." So anyway, I got attached to a Battalion Landing Force of fifteen hundred marines who were going to Vietnam in an amphibious ship, and I was their dentist, only they didn't want me as their dentist. I thought, you know this thing's getting weirder by the moment and it, my whole dental career's weird in this respect. So, they were gonna go over on the USS *Princeton*, LPH 5, and I got bib wacked that night and the next day I went to my ship and we were gonna leave the day after, and I went to the ship and they had a dental suite, and one of the dental officers was my classmate from Iowa, which is really weird. I mean I didn't even know he was on the ship. So, that helped, but here they had two dental suites, one was fully equipped. They had two dentists, they took turns, the other suite didn't have a thing in it that was mine. I had no dental chair, I had nothing. So I said, "I've got fifteen hundred marines to take care of." "Well, normally we take care of 'em but we can't. We've never done this before. We barely take care of our ship's company," and I said, "Well, I don't have any—I'd ask for a bigger room." I said, "What am I gonna do?" and they said, "I don't know." So, I thought about it awhile and you know after a while you either cash it in or you get angry. Well I was getting pretty hot now. I went in, I had a dental tech assigned to me, the dental tech knew some guys at the naval base and I can't remember which naval base it was. I should [laughs]. So, we stole a big truck, a six-bye they call it, it has a lot of wheels on it, and we went into a naval base at night. Went to the dental clinic and we stole an entire dental operatory: chairs, drills, everything I needed. We just, we hauled it all and put it in this truck. It's unbelievable. This is grand larceny, grand theft. I said, "I'm gonna have a dental clinic." The ship was leaving the next day, and I got a guy, who could hook all the stuff up. Fortunately, all of the equipment was kind of the same; the mounts and everything were there, the plumbing. We spent all night, we hooked all the stuff up, and we got everything put away. Nobody on the ship cared. We were hauling stuff up an elevator and oh it was crazy, and all night long we worked on this thing and by the next morning, I had a dental outfit. Now, somebody in this dental clinic was missing a whole dental operatory and I thought, "Well, ships leaving, they're gonna have a hard time catching us." So, anyway I left for Vietnam with a stolen dental outfit, and in the process of taking this dental outfit, found out that the commander of this base, and this is something, this is a little subjective, I found out later it was true, he was scheduled to be in my place and his captain had gone into the system and pulled my name out to go in his place with this outfit. So there was a—and later on, I'll get to that. It's a long time from now, but I found out it was true. So, I found that out too, and there was nothing I could do about that. I'm on my way to Vietnam. So, I'm now with fifteen hundred marines who don't warrant a dentist with a stolen dental outfit on a ship and I got, my roommate was Larry Lighter. He was the BLT's physician, nice guy. He was from Omaha, and so we had a little birth up front of the aircraft

carrier. It was an aircraft carrier, and we were sailing now for Vietnam, okay?

Thompson: I have a question, clarification. You mentioned early when the ship you were on, you said LPHI.

Grimm: Landing Platform Helicopter.

Thompson: Awe. Okay.

Grimm: It was in a—The *Princeton*, it had part of the slide things here. We're getting close to that. *Princeton* was the first aircraft carrier to launch jet aircraft in the Korean War. It was a *Princeton* Class. I believe it was, big aircraft, hundred and somethin' feet long, and it was built after World War Two, prior to the Korean War. It got, it was obsolete by the time the Korean War started, but they did launch jet aircraft from it, and then they converted it over to a helicopter ship and its function was to take a battalion landing force and give them amphibious capability through the air. So, it had lots of helicopters on board, and it was a really packed ship. They had fifteen hundred marines and the ships company, I think, was about twelve hundred. There were a lot of people, and they had to re-configure the ship to house all these marines. It was a tight deal, and I'm so thankful I got that dental equipment, 'cause all I did was all these kids I told you about, that I couldn't take care of like at Camp Pendleton, well I finished 'em on the ship, and they all needed all kinds of work. We had, I had kids show up with no teeth. They had extracted 'em all and never made 'em a denture, for instance, and the poor kids, not kids, a lot of 'em were older marines, they had no dentures. They said, "You'll get 'em at your next duty station." Well, I was the next duty station and had I not got all that equipment that night I wouldn'ta had any capability to do anything, 'cause the other chairs were full of these dentists taking care of the ship's company. So it was a good thing I did.

Thompson: So did the equipment episode ever raise its head again?

Grimm: Never heard a peep out of anybody. In fact, I'm getting a little ahead of myself, but when I got to Vietnam, finally, at Chu Lai, I removed it all from the ship [laughs] that which I could and I flew it into Chu Lai and I had the only dental chair in Vietnam, the only dental chair. They had metal chairs from World War Two, and I had a complete dental chair, and they couldn't believe it, and I practiced in a tent in Chu Lai, that's how we started. I had a green naugahyde dental chair that went up and down and stuff. It was great. The rest of the dentists, I have some pictures here of what they had to work with. I had a picture of my dental chair [laughs]. Okay. So, where are we?

Thompson: On the ship.

Grimm: On the ship. Well—

Thompson: —your bunkmate's from Omaha.

Grimm: Yeah, yeah and we sailed from Kanoi Bay, and we went to Subic Bay, that's where we landed and I think the marines probably did some training there. I just tried to, recreative in Subic Bay and what not. Subic Bay is not the greatest port in the world. It was kind of a—there's a lot a stories I'm not gonna tell, but they all relate to stuff in Subic Bay. I had strange duties with this Battalion Landing Force and I won't—well, duties that weren't dentally orientated, but they were medically orientated. So, and then we went—our first operation was Operation Jackstay down in the, they call the Rung Sat Zone, south of Saigon, and we were gonna go down there and a lot of the supplies to, then the Vietcong, what not, were coming up the waterways and we had to secure that area down there. So that was our first operation. Well, some interesting things happened en-route. It finally dawned on me that I wasn't gonna be a dentist in these operations. I kinda became an advanced corpsman, which was not to my liking because the corpsmen were highly trained, very sophisticated people in terms of what they could do and I had had triage and some things at field medical school at Camp Pendleton but my gift of taking care of wounded people was so limited, and the colonel, we used to have these briefings, and he'd always ask everybody at the table, artillery, this and that, you know for reports and he calls me, "Alright, does the dentist have anything to say?" [Laughs] You know, I just, I would try to talk about my dental procedures and he could care less about that, you know. So I always got passed over, and it came down, kinda through the grapevine, that I was gonna go in as a corpsman, and so I thought, I'm gonna be in people's way, is all I'm gonna be. So, we developed a triage system, and I said to the physician, "You know what, I'm pretty good at oral anatomy, head and neck, and kids are gonna get shot there," and I said, "I probably can take care of arms and legs, 'cause you know a wound's a wound. I can do that. So, why don't we assign me to head and neck injuries and arms and legs?" Terrified at the thought of some kid coming in with a gunshot wound to the head, I thought I've never done anything like that in my life. Probably knew more about the anatomy there than the physician did. So, he went to the colonel, and I got "re-assigned," if you will. I made up my own billet. I had to, I mean to go in as a corpsman was just, I'd of been worthless. So, then I said, "So," to Larry Lighter, the physician, I said, "Where are we gonna take care of all these wounded people?" He said, "In sick bay." I said, "Well there's only two beds down there. We're going to have casualties coming in," and he said, "You're right." So, what we did was, I used to be pretty good at carpentry, we made up a whole bunch of saw horses and put stretchers on 'em and got lighting for 'em and we built a hospital room in one of the hanger bays where we had about a dozen beds that were stretchers on saw horses for the wounded, and so I finally got kind of niche in this thing. The CO or the colonel saw that, said, "Who's idea was that?" and Lighter said, "It was Grimm's idea," and he looked at me finally with a "maybe this guy has some purpose," and we did have casualties and

we took care of them and fortunately we didn't have, I think we only had six or seven guys were killed on the first thing. We had quite a few wounded people. Some kids got involved with, they had some wells booby trapped and stuff like that and things blew up and one of my jobs also was to identify bodies by their dental records in body bags, and you know, I'm twenty-six years old, God, I'd never seen anything like that in my life, you know, and I unzipped that first bag and it is, there's a lot of growing up to do and some physicians and some dentists fell apart. They just couldn't do it, and I was always proud of myself, but I sure didn't like it. I didn't like what I saw, but it was something that had to be done. You had to get these kids, their dog tags were gone and the only hope was dental records, it's what was left of 'em. So, I did that and took care of arms and legs and head and neck. The first, my first patient was a first sergeant, who had been shot in the thigh, and we had about, probably, twenty kids lying on stretchers and it was a leg, so I got the leg, and I had never done one. I knew what to do, but I'd never done one, and the most astounding thing was there was twenty kids in there of various injuries, some pretty severe, and there was no noise, and some little kid cried out. This old first sergeant said, "Hold it down, son. We'll get to ya," and I can remember all these kids laying there and not a peep out of them, and I thought, my God, you know. That was very emotional. So, I got to this old first sergeant—no he wasn't a first sergeant, no he wasn't a first sergeant, yeah, mighta been, can't remember right, but he was an old timer, and he kept saying, "No, doc." He didn't know I was a dentist, and thank God, and he said, "There are kids worse off than I am, go treat them," you know. Well, I couldn't because I had arms and legs, head and neck. I said, "No sarge, they're in good hands. I'll take care of you," and so I had to take care of his wound in his leg, which I did, don't need to go through the treatment but I got that taken care of, bandaged up. He thanked me, and I went looking for other—fortunately, there were a couple other minor arms and legs injuries. Fortunately, no head injuries, thank God, that came later. So, that was our first operation and that took place over a few days and then we made another one. We'd go back to Subic Bay and we'd regroup, then we come back to Vietnam and we did this amphibious stuff. Around Vung Tau, 'round Saigon, mostly in the southern, not up in I-Corps where I was up by Chu Lai, but down south, and we had times in Saigon. I never got to Saigon; I had times in Vung Tau and other areas. We had little R and R, and it was a strange war because it was very isolated, very small little pockets of activity, not many marines over, no army to speak of, and so it was not a full scale war by any means. It was very localized and we could—I could just keep going or we could do the pictures? I don't care whichever you wanna do. The pictures kinda chronologically go through this thing so, if you want, can we stop this thing here or is it? I'll get that set up.

Thompson: Actually, let's just, that's okay, just go ahead and set it up. Yeah.

Grimm: I don't want—

Thompson: —Do you need help?

Grimm: Well, see I shoulda had it turned on right.

Thompson: Let's hope it comes on.

Grimm: Yeah, I, it's [laughs]. So, this'll take us through the, what I did and it'll kinda bring back most of the chronology, and they're fun to look at. So how we doing so far? All right?

Thompson: Oh we're doing good, almost an hour so—

Grimm: —oh my God, I haven't even gotten there yet.

Thompson: Ah, that's okay. [Grimm laughs] You're an excellent story teller.

Grimm: I like stories.

Thompson: Yeah, you're very good, very good narrator.

Grimm: Yeah, [laughs] well I like stories. I was gonna be a doscine up there at the [inaudible] Yeah, well they gotta, apparently they have all the help they need, so—

Thompson: —well, maybe they have a waiting list or something?

Grimm: Yeah.

Thompson: By the way, for the transcriber, we're having a little break here. We'll get back to you in just a minute.

Grimm: [Laughs] Yeah, beer break. Okay.

[Break in interview]

Thompson: So we are now resuming the narration.

Grimm: So I was lucky enough to have a camera and these are some of the pictures that I took back in nineteen—I guess we never did identify the date, but this would be probably January, February, and starting in March of sixty-six, when I was with the Battalion Landing Force 1-5, that's 5th Marines, 1st Marine Division. So the first picture we're looking at is the *Princeton* and that's the LPH [Landing Platform Helicopter]. You can see all the helicopters which were H34s and—these are just some shots. I'm gonna zip through these. This is a picture—we were always—it's a supply ship bringing cargo to us while we were being resupplied, and we wouldn't re-intern supply the destroyer that was with us. We would supply it with fuel oil. That's my dental unit that I confiscated from Hawaii and it actually was—simple but it worked. I had all my little chairs not in there. Well,

there's my chair right there. Yeah. This is a picture of the—of that bay on the carrier where I took and by the way, I'll make sure you have a copy of these if the transcriber or anybody that wants to look at them with this record. So it's kind of nice. I'll talk about 'em and somebody can watch this stuff, but that's the stretcher system we set up with the lighting in the hanger bay and—

Thompson: This is on the ship?

Grimm: —This is on the *Princeton*.

Thompson: Okay.

Grimm: On the—Yep. It worked out very well, and here's Operation JACKSTAY. The marines are actually going ashore and these H34 Sikorsky helicopters. This was our very first operation. We also had these Chinooks, interesting story about this Chinook. It was developed for Vietnam and it was developed in cool weather and when they got to Vietnam, it was so hot. It could only carry half the people it was supposed to carry. So, the OH34 was a better helicopter. These are the kids waiting to go ashore. This is there first time and you see all the Jerry cans and the guys got M80 grenade launchers and what not all of the accoutrements, but that's the Battalion Landing Force. This is after they secured this area around the Rung Sat Zone. This is the area where the battle actually occurred. You can see the results of the battle, and we went in—I was with the dental team and a medical team and one of our big jobs after we took care of the marines was to try to do what they call "people the people," and the idea was to go in and give assistance to the local population in terms of medical and dental needs, and this is where we landed. This was actually our little CP and we went out into the village and this had never been done before and we went out to give care to the Vietnamese, and one of the interesting things was that the Vietnamese did not have a word in their language for "dentist." So, I went along and they had no clue what I was to do, none. They knew what the physician was and basically they knew if they got a shot of something it was gonna make 'em better. They were used to the thought of an antibiotic or something, and in terms of dental needs, they had no clue. So, went to work for the first time and we're down now south of Saigon in the Rung Sat Zone and this is a strategic hamlet, and a strategic hamlet was set up actually back in the Diem period, the sixties, and their idea was based on an old Mao, Mao Tse-tung theory is that you treat the enemy by isolating the people from the enemy, then the ones that aren't isolated are the bad guys. So, they brought all the people from all these villages—can't see that can you—into a barbwire compound, called a strategic hamlet. So, all these people were inside the wire, so everybody outside the wire was probably a bad guy and there was actually fighting going on while we were at this hamlet and this is where we took care of the people, here. The strategic hamlet theory didn't last long 'cause it was,

you couldn't support it. This guy up here is an ARVN troop. The ARVN proved to be very unsatisfactory.

Thompson: Why don't you explain what ARVN is?

Grimm: It's the South Vietnamese Army and they were supposedly to watch over these things, run the guard posts and what not and they proved to be just not very reliable and so most of the strategic hamlets got over run very quickly. They were indefensible, but the original theory was to clean the landscape up 'cause they couldn't tell good guys from bad guys as you'll see in these pictures, I'll keep chugging along here, but this is what they looked like. They made a lot of the buildings, a lot of the buildings were made out of just grass and thatch and it really was a very cruel thing to do to the Vietnamese people 'cause it took them away from their normal home and put them in a situation. It's a relocation camp; most of 'em don't work very well. This was a marine advisor and the Vietnamese would not let me take their pictures till we gave 'em cigars, and so we gave 'em cigars. They would pose for us, so at least I got a picture of 'em but that's what these hamlets looked like, and these are not for protection. These are to keep their animals in and so here I am in this village and this is an interpreter and that's the village chief and I'm gonna give him the helmet.

Thompson: Now which one is you and which one is the chief.

Grimm: That's the chief sitting in the chair.

Thompson: Oh, okay.

Grimm: He had a terrible abscess. So I'm gonna take his tooth out. So I gave him an anesthetic.

Thompson: I'm sorry, is that you?

Grimm: Yeah.

Thompson: Okay.

Grimm: Yeah it is.

Thompson: Go ahead.

Grimm: And as, I was twenty-six there, I think, and so I gave him an anesthetic, and his toothache went away and he got up out of the chair and left, and these people all lined up for their shots. So, this guy's trying to explain to them that, "No, no, now we need to take the tooth. The tooth is the bad guy. The shot isn't—" but I had, after I wasn't gonna give anybody a shot, they all left. [Laughs] So, I had nothing to do again. Well, we went back the next day; there's the chief again, same tooth ache. So I gave 'em an anesthetic and got his tooth taken out, and then everybody understood what was going on and that day I set a record. It's probably never been

matched, took out four hundred and some teeth and [laughs] I had, you can just kinda, he's the—that's the guy from Texas, that's the doctor and that's a South Vietnamese guy who's trying to interpret the best he can but he was just swamped with boils and I'll show you all that stuff, but here I am. I'm zipping these teeth out. I had their head against the post, sitting on a stump and I had a sergeant up here so I'd go down the line and I had a grease pencil and I put 'X's. I'd numb 'em all up and I'd put 'X's on the teeth that he could take out, the easy ones, and we had a big boiling thing of water over a fire and we'd use the same instruments. We'd wipe 'em off and throw them in the boiling water, best we could trying to keep, but I had people, I couldn't see the end of the line and these were kind of the, this is the picture of some of the dental issues. It's hard, I should be careful of what I'm saying here 'cause I know you can't understand me because you can't see the pictures [laughs]. So, this is a typical dental situation. The people obviously had never practiced hygiene ever. They lived on the coastal areas. They ate a lot of sugar cane, and it just rotted their teeth out and then to appease the pain they would chew betel nut and so you'll see signs of that later on. In this village, this is the village itself, not all were secured as a strategic hamlet. Very interesting 'cause this is a whole wall of Schlitz beer cases, 1966. I have no idea how they got there, but you can see how a village would look prior to the war, pretty much untouched. This is where they leave food out for the dead to come back and the villages were very clean. This is another town. I don't want to get into all these little towns down there. Most of 'em I can't remember the name of. This is the actual downtown, and one of the things we used to do in these downtown areas, we used to do in these clinics, is we'd pass out tooth brushes, and we'd show them how to brush their teeth and the next day we'd go downtown and all the tooth brushes would be for sale. So, we learned how to get them out of the wrappers and make sure they scrubbed their teeth with 'em so they were used, 'cause if you didn't they'd sell 'em. So, there's that same house with the Schlitz beer cases, and that's just more pictures of me. This is—I'm sorry transcriber—but these are pictures of some of the dentistry, interesting dentistry. They were brass alloyed crowns and the way the dentists would put them on the teeth would be a local dentist, would be he'd cleave off the sides of the teeth and then just pound these things in place. So they would expand and some people had all their teeth capped in that manner and if you were to touch any of those teeth, they'd kill you, 'cause she's very high in the pecking order. She had all her teeth fixed. Unlike movie stars today with white teeth, you had gold colored teeth then you were really in and then afterwards, we went to a little village and we drank what was called Biere Larue, which came from Saigon and it was hot and for some silly reason, I asked if they had ice and this women procured ice and put it in these drinks and we drank the beer. I found out the ice was buried in back underneath the ground in the pig sty and I contracted dysentery and when I went to Vietnam, I weight two hundred and twenty-eight pounds and by the time I got done with my

dysentery, I weighed a hundred and seventy. I had it for almost a month, but once I got over the dysentery, I could eat and drink anything over there. So I had never been that fit, but this was the thing that took me down the tube right there. This is Vang Tau and when we were trying—

Thompson: Can you spell Vang Tau?

Grimm: V-A-N-G-T-A-U. This is how the French left it prior to the Vietnam War. Vang Tau was their area where they had all their villas on the ocean and it was a summer home from Saigon and it was a summer vacation area. It was beautiful, and still as you can see, untouched by the war. It was uh—everyone's going about their business. You could get a Pacific Hotel. I could get a gin and tonic for fifteen cents and I walked on the beaches. I have no pictures of the beaches but the beautiful French villas and at that point in sixty-six nothing had happened. They were later all destroyed, but our LPH was anchored in the bay there and we flew into this town by helicopter, which is an interesting story 'cause we got on this helicopter on the LPH and the way it worked was if you—I was a captain. So if another captain got on board, a lieutenant had to get off and if there weren't any more lieutenants then the captains had to get off. Well this helicopter got full of captains and I had been already going in and out of the country in helicopters, so I knew their capacity and we had seven more people in the helicopter. It was scary and we went down the runway of the helicopter and the pilot somehow got this thing in the air and I thought we were all going in the drink, and a little side story. This is on the aircraft carrier, that's General Westmoreland. He came to visit us and he broke his arm playing tennis in Saigon, which I thought was interesting. Okay, so we had, this is the first picture of Chu Lai. So, I'll stop here and—

Thompson: Can you spell that also, Chu Lai?

Grimm: —C-H-U-L-A-I. Okay, we're gonna stop here a second because what happened now, this is in probably, I left the BLT in February and this was probably now April, I would guess and I really don't have the exact dates. I've kind of forgotten 'em, but somewhere in that vicinity where the BLT had done what it was set out to do and it now was gonna come ashore and be a stationary force. Something the marines hated. They'd much rather be amphibious, but hey were told to come in and secure Chu Lai and so the BLT 1-5 lands at Chu Lai and I come ashore as the dentist and this was like a MASH unit. So, it was bigger than BLT 1-5. Other people had already been there for sure and they were taking care of all of, a lot of the marines from De Nang and what not. This was a hospital base and the BLT then went inland and I didn't see them again. They didn't stay here. This was basically a third Amtrak, a marine airbase, and a MASH unit and since BLT didn't warrant a dentist, they dumped me here. So, I got attached to the dental folks at Chu Lai and this picture is what Chu Lai looked like in sixty-six. We slept in tents. They had wood floors. This is our shower. It's a fifty-five gallon drum. These things called a water

buffalo. You'd dump the water in the top and run underneath and take you shower. We had all latrines and, basically, our food for the first three months I was there at night I had spam and lima beans and bread and the bread was really good. They baked it there and I always wondered why they made sesame bread. I found out with all the maggots in the flour they baked, that gave it the crunch. I didn't know that for a long time [laughs] and so I had full scale dysentery by this time and I was just getting thinner and thinner and thinner and I came ashore here at Chu Lai. It was probably a hundred and ten degrees and the humidity was a hundred and the first day in Chu Lai I just passed out cold. I didn't even take my salt pills. I made it to about two o'clock and I just passed out on my bunk. That's where they found me and [laughs] I learned to drink water and take my salt tablets because it was hot and probably a good thing I lost all that weight. Later on, we went into a little town, which I have a picture of and we've got local produce and since we had steam autoclaves, we could cook fish. So we had lobster two or three times a week from the town and put 'em in the autoclaves and steamed 'em and we made our own rice and in town you could buy vegetables and stuff and once you got your system used to eating this, you're great. So we cooked a lot of our own meals in our tent and we got little burners and pans and made our own food and we'd fly med evacs down to Quang Ngai and you know how you spell that right?

Thompson: [inaudible]

Grimm: No N-G-I-, I have to look that up.

Thompson: Okay.

Grimm: Quang Ngai and we get Algerian red wine and bring it back. So, we'd have red wine and lobster and rice. It was good. I'd never put any weight back on. I stayed skinny. So that's what Vietnam, Chu Lai looked like. It was, I had a bunk and—before I left here I had my centennial. I'd killed my hundredth rat in my tent and you couldn't shot 'em 'cause you'd create havoc and I got traps but they ran off with them and my biggest rat I killed was twenty-four inches and I got so I could throw a knife and stick 'em. So we killed rats all the time and then a lot of guys went out into the villages and they bought these gigantic red lizards, iguanas, a size of a small dog and they kept them as pets and the lizards would kill the rats. So they'd keep the lizards in their tents and we'd walk 'em to dinner, our lizards, 'cause as you walked to dinner there were so many rats on the ground, they would kinda part and they'd come around behind ya, which if you had your lizard, they wouldn't come after ya. There were a lot of rats. They ate a lot of— Vietnam was full of rats. I hated 'em. I had 'em on me at night. I'd wake up and they'd be crawling on me. It was not, not good.

Thompson: How did the populace there handle the rats? Were they a food source?

Grimm:

I don't know. I know the rice was the big problem. They got into the rice stores all the time. I don't know how the locals dealt with it. I know how we dealt with 'em. I know how I'd like to have dealt with 'em but I couldn't shot. So, this is—it rained. I can't even describe the rainfall but this was a little later on in Chu Lai. We're starting to build, they call 'em "hooches," we're starting to build wood hooches and they had tarps over the top. They were gonna put metal roofs on 'em, but boy when it rained, as we used to say in Iowa, it was kinda raining like a cow peeing on a flat rock, you know it was just awful, but we were all in sand so the water just soaked in. We had very little in the way of mosquitos, believe it or not, lots of interesting bugs. The bugs themselves were things like walking sticks, and they were the size of a, you know like two pencils long. They were just, but they didn't do anything, but they'd surprise you. We had a lot of snakes and some of the snakes were okay and some were called "three pacers" which meant if they bit you had about three steps and you were gone, neurotoxin. There were really bad snakes but not many in camp, most of 'em were out in the country. So, that was my home for three months till I got my house bill and, basically, it just kept the rain off ya. They had a wood floor and you had cots and that's where you slept and we shared that with physicians and it was officers only, at least that's the way they serviced does it. The corpsmen and the dental techs were great people and I thought the NCO was—they ran the whole outfit. They were the smartest people, nice guys, but you know we kept things, that's the way the service does it, but that's what we slept in. You got used to it. The interesting thing about sleeping in Vietnam was in the winter time, when I got there it was the start of the spring or summer. In the winter time, it got down to maybe seventy-five at night and I slept under three wool blankets, froze to death. I just froze to death. I was so cold. The day time would be probably eight-five degrees. It was cold. I got used to a hundred degrees. It's hard to believe. That's our officer's club, it's called the recovery room and we had a refrigerator and occasionally we got beer, not very often. I don't recall having a lot of hard liquor. We just had beer every once in a while in there but a place to hang out. That was the chapel, we had a Catholic priest, nice guy and the Vietnamese built a chapel there and when we had winds, all these little windows would flop open and this thing never blew down. All the tents would blow down, everything would blow down and this thing never budged. They knew how to build buildings so they would withstand all that, lots of little Buddhist shrines. That's the beach at Chu Lai. We used to swim. I'll get to the dental stuff here soon, but later on that's how it got to look. That was our mess hall just about the time I'm ready to leave and the food was better. We had you know variances in food. The spam and lima beans was gone, you know you'd clean your dishes and boil 'em in the water in your mess kit and take it back to your tent. We built a racket ball court, played racket ball. We only had enough ply wood for one wall. We got really good at it. This is an interesting story. This is why I have these slides. This guy's name is Jack York and

Jack was our psychiatrist, okay? And he was also the barber and as you can see the haircuts he gave were basically one kind. You'd just cut your hair off 'cause it was so damn hot, you didn't need the hair. While he was cutting your hair, he would interview you and the interview was such that he would give you a number and the number related in this way: If you were a zero, you were perfectly normal, but if you were a zero and perfectly normal in Vietnam, you were nuts. If you were a ten, you were nuts, but if you were a ten you were so nuts that you were really nuts, okay? So, what you needed to be was a stable eight, which meant that you were almost nuts, therefore you were normal, and he would post all the scores and of course what book did I read one night while I was sitting in Vietnam? I read *Catch 22*, and I thought, "God this is *Catch 22*. This is what it's all about. I never really understood *Catch 22*, but the catch is like major major major said, yeah know, 'if you're normal, you're nuts, if you're nuts, you're really nuts but if you're almost nuts you're normal,' and that's exactly what he did, and he'd post the scores. So, when guys would ship out, you were short. You know what that means? You got a little stick, a little short stick and you carried it around. That meant to everybody that you're, I think maybe three week left and no one was to do anything to you. No one was to send you anywhere. No one was to bother you. You were "short," which meant you were almost a ten, because you were ready to go home and you were scared to death somethin' was gonna happen, and so you'd carry this little short stick around. No matter where you went, you carried your stick, and everybody kinda was treated you with kid gloves 'cause they knew if something bad happened, you could flip, very interesting, and there were incidents where I had a guy pull out a gun in a mess hall line and just killed the guy right in front of me, just shot him right in the head. The guy cut in line and he just pulled out a gun and shot him, BAM, and all he said was, "He shouldn't have done that." He was short and he was nuts. He just cracked and he shot this guy and, you know, I was never—you know being in the Dental Corp, the Medical Corp, your life was dedicated to treating patients. So, it wasn't dedicated to shooting people. It was dedicated to saving people up in these villages and it added so much to your wellbeing. You know, you're doing constructive things every day. I can't imagine being in the ground forces and having to kill people. I sure understood it. I had no problem with it, but those poor Vietnam veterans that came back and really had a problem, I can sympathize with 'em. I just feel so bad for 'em. They needed to be fixed and they didn't get fixed there and they sure didn't get fixed when they got home.

Thompson: Where you required to carry a gun in camp—

Grimm: Oh sure.

Thompson: —Yeah, all the time?

Grimm: Yeah, I got rid of my gun, my side arm, my 45, early on. I carried a Thompson submachine gun and I'll show you some pictures of that. So, that's Jack York, and this is a beach on the Song Tra Bong River, S-O-N-G is "river" in Vietnamese. Song T-R-A-B-O-N-G, Song Tra Bong River and these are these little basket boats that the Vietnamese could paddle and sail and I tried and tried and tried. I couldn't get three feet in one without tipping it over and these are all anchovies. They caught anchovies by the gazillions. So, we had anchovies on a lot of stuff you know, interesting. Archie Moore came and I cleaned his teeth and we had a lot of celebrities at Chu Lai but nothing big, you know, no Bob Hopes. Martha Raye came once and they were—the soldiers were terrible to her, just terrible. She was old and she didn't sing anything popular. I loved her and she tried her heart out and they were so rude to her, and I and some others got up on stage and I just, I really let these kids have it. I thought, you know we're better than this, and they felt bad. They wanted to hear some hot chick and she wasn't. She's a marvelous lady that was a sad day. Okay, there's the infamous dental chair that had traveled all the way from Kanoi Bay to Vietnam and that was my dental outfit after they built the—after the tents went away, they built us a wood structure, and it was, we did quite a bit of dentistry there. I was able to do all the regular fillings and of course the oral surgery and I did a lot of root canals and tried to save teeth, and I even had figured out a way to make gold crowns and that was a big mistake because while I had all this, when I unpacked my dental unit it said "Marine Corps Unit 1942" and I thought, "Oh my God." Of course it had the old pedal, it had a pedal drill and you can't see it here but I actually had what they call an air turban. The first couple weeks, all I had was the pedal drill which was absolutely worthless, then they sent us an air compressor, drive up normal drill like you have today and they worked really quite well, but in this kit was, I must of had a pound of gold. I thought, "What am I gonna do with that?" Well, I learned how to make gold crowns. The problem in Vietnam was so hot, if you made an impression of somebody, the material would set up before I'd get it in the mouth and so one day I was, I got a call in my tent and the dental tech came up and said, "There's a guy from an LST"—we weren't far from a naval base down at a little village of Sa Huynh, they could bring in LSTs and this was the lieutenant from the LST and he had a toothache, horrible toothache. The whole jaw was swollen up, and in those days, I wasn't obliged to treat anybody outside of the base but of course I was going to treat this guy but you also said, "Well, what's it worth to ya?" That's part of the standard deal you know. I had guys coming in at all times from the outside and they always had something that I needed and it's called Con Shaw, you always swap services. So he said, "How 'bout a crate of oranges?" I said, "Nah, I can get those here." Well he went through a whole list of things. He said, "How 'bout a twenty thousand BTU air conditioner?" I said, "You're on!" So, I took care of his abscess and he delivered a twenty thousand BTU air conditioner. Well, here I sat in

Vietnam with this twenty thousand BTU air conditioner, thinking, "You know, all these impressions that set up in the heat? I could make a room where I could do crowns and I could cool it and the stuff wouldn't set up. So in the middle of this tent I built a ten by ten plywood room and stuck in a twenty thousand BTU air conditioner. I could freeze water on the desk, and I had to hook it into the generator so, I had to pay off all the engineers to hook it in, but I got it operating and so I started this little side business of making gold crowns for servicemen and it worked great. I made really wonderful crowns and because some of the teeth needed to be crowned, but I couldn't do anything else but a gold crown. So, does anybody want a front tooth with a gold crown? Well, in Vietnam it got to be a rage. I became the prostadontist, the gold crown guy for the whole area and guys were coming in wanting gold crowns on perfectly good teeth, which I wouldn't do, but then they started, they wanted to get, they'd go into the villages and they'd get precious gems and they wanted precious gems set in their gold crowns. So, I got so I could put diamonds and rubies and sapphires into the gold crowns and their front teeth—well I had a business you wouldn't believe. I had this little book on the side and I did it kinda you know on regular hours and I was making gold crowns right and left and center. So it was kinda fun, you know, and there were teeth that were really badly broken. So, I wouldn't take a good tooth. A lotta guys wanted their front teeth capped no matter what. I said, "No, I won't do that." Well, one day I'm in there working and I got a one star general popped in on a surprise visit, and I wasn't there and he found me in this air conditioned room and he took my air conditioner for his own personal quarters, and he came back to me about a month later with tooth ache and he sat in the chair and he said, "Now doc, I wanna have one thing clear. I took that air conditioner 'cause I really needed it." He said, "Are you gonna—what kinda care are you gonna give me?" And I said, "Probably as rough as I can." And he said, "Are you really? [Laughs]" I took care of him. All right. So, that's a side story, but there's—lots of fun things happen over there. That's that church again. Isn't that a nice church?

Thompson: Mm-hm.

Grimm: And that's my dental clinic after, the first one was a tent, now it's a wood structure and it had side curtains so we could keep the dust out. I'll tell another story here. I'm glad I have these slides. This is First Dental Company. When I got ashore from the BLT 1-5, I was just in this outfit here and I can tell you about that too, but uh it was the First Medical Battalion, that's what I was attached too, and when the First Dental Company showed up about June, I was there for about a month, and I was gonna get Court Martialed because they couldn't find me. 'Cause going way back to Camp Pendleton, when I got attached to the Mortar Battery and the First Dental Company went to Okinawa and then back to Vietnam,

they couldn't find me. So, all the time I was with BLT 1-5 making these landings and doing all this corpsman work and all this other stuff, they didn't know where I was and so when they got to Chu Lai, here I am. This guy's name was Captain Condolase [??]and he said, "You've been AOL since January." I said, "No I haven't, I've been right—" Well of course I wasn't but I was for them and he said, "I don't know whether to Court Martial you or give you a medal for all the stuff you've done and then I didn't get either one. So, I got re-attached to my old dental company. So that's why it says First Dental Company. That's a little aside. Another one is a crazy story. See I was never supposed to be with this outfit. That goes back to that thing in Hawaii where that guy got—he got bumped out, I got put in his place 'cause I was a Maverick. I left the First Dental Company. I was kinda floating around out there and somebody found my name and just stuck me in there and this guy didn't have to go with 'em, long story. So, that's inside of our place and that's after the—that's probably before I built that thing. Okay. This guy, this Dr. Connelly, John Connelly, and this is a South Korean dentist. We had various others like UN guys come through and we would make our own food, as you can see, and it was quite good. He's playing the gut bucket. You know what that is? A broom with a string down to a tub Bm-Bm-Bm-Bm, and here's a guy playing the guitar. We'd have our own music at night and so, there was a lotta kinda bright spots in this thing and this guy, and he's making tea. John Connelly was my buddy because I did all these head and neck surgeries and I had absolutely—I didn't know what I was doing. I knew the anatomy, but I'd never seen a bullet wound. He was a general surgeon, but he didn't know the anatomy. So, we did all our cases together, and he knew all the surgical procedures and I could tell him where the structures were and the two of us did the darndest head and neck surgeries you've ever seen in your life and then we'd stabilize these kids. Kids had their jaws shot away, and a lot of really serious stuff, and they were on the verge of dying and he and I—I'm not saying that 'cause I'm pattin' myself on the back but this man said, "You know we can take care of these kids. You know your part." He didn't even know where to give 'em an injection to get em' numb. I knew all that. I knew all that and he knew how to be a surgeon and together we did some really neat things and then we'd medevac them to the hospital ship, but they were stable, and it was really cool, and he in turn let me do all his appendectomies. So I did a lot of those and he would stand right with me, you know, and I'd do the whole thing. I'd make all the incisions, take the appendix out and it's like everything else in this world, if you make the incision and there it is it's easy. It's when you make the incision, look down there and it's not there, you better know what you're doing. Well that's why he was with me. So I had some interesting surgical experiences, which when I became a dentist in Madison, surgery never bothered me. There wasn't any—you know people came in with all kinds of would-be insignificant wounds there,

problems. It was really easy for me to care for 'em. I was fearless 'cause I had done all this stuff.

Thompson: So, after you set up your dental clinic there at Chu Lai, were you still doing the—

Grimm: People to people?

Thompson: —The corpsmen work?

Grimm: Yep. Well, no, no, no. Once I left BLT 1-5 I was just a dentist—

Thompson: Okay.

Grimm: —But, I'm going to get into my Med CAP and Dent CAP.

Thompson: Okay.

Grimm: Unfortunately, we're about a tenth of the way here so stop me any time you want. That's the base of Chu Lai. You see it's an air strip and—Okay, so what we did is the dental team and the medical team went out to villages and this lady here, and I got her name somewhere, I forget what it is, but it's not important. She was the local nurse and we trained her in this village to handle emergency cases when we weren't there. I say "we." The physicians trained her. This is one of the corpsmen who helped work with her and she was terrific and they had a lotta boils and skin diseases and various medical problems that needed immediate attention and she just got to be—she was totally untrained and we got her to be just a fabulous nurse till the Viet Cong killed her because she was making friends in the village or the Marines and not for them. Those are some of the really sad things that happened, that people who befriended us to help their people were killed by the Vietcong and later the North Vietnamese, and it was a—we had to stop doing it because it wasn't safe for us to go out there later on and it sure wasn't safe for the people in the village to be friends with us. A real tragedy was initially, before the war got advanced, we made all kinds of intervals. We'd build clinics. People had care like they had never had it and they loved us. They loved us, and we didn't make any pretense about who we were. It was a doctor and a patient, and it worked perfect and later on, the army—not the army—the navy came in. Naval Intelligence and we started having people show up with their medical and dental teams and I thought they were interpreters and what they were were Navy Intelligence who were questioning the people about the whereabouts of the enemy, and it took us, us being the medical and dental, a month or so to figure that out and once we did, we just refused to go if they came and they stopped, but they did so much damage to—what would happened was they'd actually bring in destroyers and shell Vietcong positions that the people would tell them where they were and the Vietcong knew the only way they found out

was through us and it was just one of those dumb things. So she got killed and the day that happened, it was terrible. So, the way I go—this is an Amtrak, and I got a picture of this somewhere comin' up. This was a mine sweeper. It was not used a lot 'cause there weren't any mines at that time. The Vietcong didn't have mines. That's what threw the sand and blew up the mines before this thing got blown up and this is my second dental clinic. I'm out at third Amtrak now, where that Amtrak is, that's my dental clinic. The medical clinic is right over here and at one point I took care of a company called Morrison Canuson [??], you ever heard of them? They build air bases, big construction company, and these guys would come in and they built a gutter system all around my tent for fresh water. So, I had fresh water all the time. I built a big cistern and I could get water and we kept working on makin' the place more—my living quarters was in the back of the dental clinic, in fact there's my living quarters back there and we had some screening now and I don't think my awning system's up there yet. I lost my dental chair, I think. Maybe I have it still. I can't remember, but these are in metal chairs. When I got shipped out there, they kept my dental chair back at the other place, but you can see it's a pretty nice set up. We had good sterilization. That's a rubber dam, if you know a rubber dam, probably never had one put on but we put those over the teeth to keep them free of contamination when we did the fillings. We actually did really good dentistry. I was really proud of what we did. We did a lot of silver fillings 'cause that was—we did good fillings. He's my dental tech, but he's cleaning teeth and no one had ever clean teeth over there. I trained him how to clean teeth so he was my hygienist. So we actually had a hygiene program and we cleaned, you know you're kind of like a drop of water in a bucket. It's hard to get everybody done right but we tried to do it right. It was good, hot. Sometimes the fillings wouldn't set 'cause the reason you had to do these 'cause everything—well you perspire so badly and water's your bad thing. This is my shower. So you climb up the ladder, you throw a jerry can of water in the top and go down and it had a little pull thing and if you left the water in there—if you do the water in the morning, by the time you go out in the afternoon, it's nice warm shower, although most of the time the cold shower was good. These are just movies—I did a few med evacs. I quite doing those because I's gonna get myself killed. They shot at med evacs and I didn't like that. I volunteered, but I really couldn't do any dental work. I just went along to help and I have to admit, I was a chicken and they shot holes in the helicopters and I thought, "My God, these guys are a lot braver than I am." But this is on the way to some of those things. This is actually, I believe, is Cam Ranh Bay. It could be Da Nang and I've been trying to figure that out and look through that. I think it's Cam Ranh Bay, which was our big base. Okay, so people to people, they called it "Dent CAP." "Med CAP" was the big term, Medical Civilian Action Program, and then there was a subsidiary called Dent CAP. We just came under Med CAP and initially we went out into villages and the villagers built me this dental chair, and I

would see people like this every day and take care of their dental needs as best I could and I never knew who they were, I never questioned who they were, I just took care of 'em, and these are just some of the villages we went to. These are just pictures, you know. Is he a bad guy or a good guy, I don't know. If he had a dental problem, I didn't care and you can see their dental problems were the sugar cane had rotted all their teeth off. Every one of those teeth, that's the root canal you're lookin' at. It was staggering. That's what betel nut does to a tooth, it makes 'em glossy black and in actuality, there's no decay on those teeth, but all she had left were those teeth and I just couldn't bare to take 'em out but most of 'em are just abscessed, and so it was my little dental chair and that's my dental tech. These are all the people waiting to be seen. This little guy's up in the chair. He had some problem and I tried to help him and so our initial attempts were done in villages within a short drive of Chu Lai by that Amtrak, and I got a picture of that coming up here. That's me [laughs], that's Son Ha, the little village we were nearby and this is where I used to go down and get my vegetables. They had artesian water, kids. I'll just kind of whip through this. Beautiful pictures of what these villages looked like before the war. This was the big marketplace, the big drum where if you had a problem, they'd beat on the drum and that meant things were not right and you see all the food for sale. They had limes and vegetables and you could buy all kinds of stuff and this is the way Vietnam was for centuries before we got there and started this war. Fire wood, they were all chewing betel nut, but they all have these wonderful vegetables, red peppers. This is an interesting story. This is one of the little villages I went to and you see how these are all for mynah birds and see this little boy here? He's got worms, that little guy doesn't. His belly's all distended. Saw a lot of kids with worms, a lot of kids with cleft palates, and they all died. Cleft palate is a fatal injury if the palates split open. They can't swallow, and we had no cleft palates here in this country because they're all fixed. In Vietnam they weren't fixed and now with people to people, doctors without borders, they're all over there fixin' 'em all, and we saw 'em in little kids but we never saw them in teenagers because they already died and I couldn't do a cleft palate. I used to get my clothes done in the village and the guy would take my pants and he'd wash 'em, God knows where, and then he'd spit water over 'em and then he'd iron them and you kinda had to do that. We tried to maintain an economy with the village and we just all worked. The village was delighted to have the money. I wouldn't say our clothes were really clean, but they looked good. They were reasonably clean, I shouldn't say that, but that's how they did the laundry. This is a guy drilling holes in mahogany, cutting mahogany wood. This is Son Ha, the little village; these are all the fishing boats. I'm going to whip through this a little quicker. The boats would come in at night with their catches and anchor and then they'd go sell their produce. This is the north—uh South Vietnamese patrol boat. Now they're bringing in their food and this leopard grey, we'd have leopard grey steaks. We'd have lobsters. We'd

have snapper and flounder and we'd cook it up and we finally realized we could do the same. Okay we're back on this Med. CAP now. These are little kids waiting to be seen. You can see the sores all over 'em. I think I got a close up here. Yeah, they came in with boils. No hygiene, none. So we sat down hour after hour and taught mothers how to—gave 'em soap, taught 'em how to scrub their kids, bathe their kids, just treating foot injuries, I couldn't tell you what he had and the lady that was killed learned how to do all that stuff and these are local corpsmen from our base taking care of all of these people. Okay, that's round one. Now if I get out of here, how are we doing for time?

Thompson: Uh, we're good, we're about almost two hours.

Grimm: Really?

Thompson: Mm-hm. Are you doing okay?

Grimm: Oh yeah.

Thompson: All right.

Grimm: Yeah, I'm on a roll.

Thompson: So transcriber, we're in the process of changing—

Grimm: To the next group of slides.

Thompson: —to the next group of slides. Yeah.

Grimm: I think these slides are working out pretty good, don't you? Talking about 'em that way. Otherwise, I'd forget all this stuff.

Thompson: [Laughs] Yeah.

Grimm: Okay so here we are. These are the Amtraks, those big things I showed you, those big and we're going down the beach to these villages, that's how we got there. Why did we take Amtrak? Well, 'course A, they were amphibious and there's nothing but water around here and B, there were always the occasional VC who wanted to PING at yeah and—

Thompson: VC being?

Grimm: Vietcong and they'd shoot at yeah. We were fair game. We really didn't have much protection. These were basically, we'd have five or six marines with us and the rest were all corpsmen, dental techs, dentists and physicians. We weren't an armed force. We were on a mission and so it was a safer way to get places. And again these are some of the villages we visited, they're just pictures. We went to these villages, one of the interesting thing about the villages was there was no sanitation and I couldn't figure it out and they went and did all their business at low tide on

the beach and worked perfect. The tide would come in and the next day, the bathroom was clean again. I just thought of that, that's why I have these slides, 'cause I think of this stuff. So, they fished, there's all their nets and it's important to see this because this is what we started the war in, you know. These people were living a very solid life; they had all they wanted to eat. They had their sanitary conditions, they were comfortable and when I say "we," whoever the forces to be who got in this war destroyed all this and now probably all back again. Very industrious people, they had a system that worked. Those little basket boats, this guy's makin' nets, weaving nets. They carried water. Look at this kid, he has—can you imagine your grandson that size carrying ten gallons of water. Look at that little kid, can't weigh fifty pounds, water buffalo, just pictures of people. So this is still the Med CAP program and you know we'd see these people in the morning and now who are the bad guys in there. I have no idea and I never asked that question, you know, "Is that guy a bad guy?" Boy, he could be couldn't he, but they were all willing to sit in the chair and get their teeth fixed. So, as long as we didn't do anything—this is a picture of all the boils and things we saw routinely and soap and water and scrubbing, made these kids better. That was our little medical-dental facility inside. The guy's givin' me a little salute there. And at the end of the day, we had little bags of candy and we'd get all the kids outside and throw the candy to 'em. God they just went crazy about that, pretty little villages. This is a really fascinating story. So, after a while, I got tired of fixin' teeth, leaning against posts and chairs and I decided we needed to build a building, okay? We need to have permanent structures and the marines fought that. Marines don't like permanent things and we said we can't take care of these people without a facility, a roof. So, I went to this village and I was gonna build a clinic for both of us, and the chief of the clinic spoke no English and I'm sitting there, I didn't know what to do. This little guy walks up in a Cub Scout uniform and says in perfect English, "Can I help you?" And I said, "You can. I want to build a medical facility for your village." He said, "That's a good idea." Eight years old. So I said, "Could you tell the chief that?" He said, "Sure." So he went over to the chief and told the chief. Well, the chief said, "That's a good idea." And he came back and said, "Chief said that's a good idea." And I said, "Well, can you work with me with the chief on this thing?" And he said sure. So, this little guy and I and the chief built this medical facility, eight years old, and he was trained by the French nuns back in the early sixties to speak English and he spoke perfect English and what happened to this guy I don't know, but I suspect he didn't make it because he befriended the wrong guys again. We just didn't know that at the time. So that's what we built for them. Okay and looks like a nice solid structure, right? No one came. We sat there and no one came, and I said, "What's the deal?" And the deal was, we built it, and the little boy said, "People don't like it, it's not theirs, it's yours." And I said, "Okay." So, what we did is we gave them the materials and they built the next one and they all came, because

it was now their building. It wasn't our building. This was us, this was a United States building, it wasn't a local village building. They built that one, thatched roof, and everybody came. It's now their building, and they held meetings there and we trained the nurses there and they came by the drolls. Just interesting pictures, probably not seen much like that, huh? I like it because people need to understand, it always wasn't bad over—you got this picture of the little boy running down the street with a Napalm, wasn't always like that. At first it was good. Okay, so we taught 'em how to scrub, gave 'em soap, and the mothers, they were into it. It's all hygiene. That's betel nut, just—this is the little town and somebody who knows Vietnamese can tell me where I was [laughs]. Sometimes the name of the town on the sign and the name of the town weren't the same. We were throwing the candy at the kids. So, we go to villages this way. Sometimes ten miles and we get back into places and six marines and our dental team—Well, I'll show you here. We'd land and we had no idea where we were. We were miles from the base. We didn't know who was around. This walk here to this village was probably two and a half miles down this road, and it was interesting because the little kids used to come and say that we were great, we were number, I can't remember, number ten was good and number one was good, but it changed. All the sudden, we weren't great and they were being told by the Vietcong things that, I knew they were being told—I went back and said, "I'm not sure this is a smart idea anymore." And the numbers of people dropped off dramatically and we never got shot at, I never got in a fight, but I thought probably because I got smart enough to say, "We just gotta quick doin' this." It's a real shame, but we were clearly making more friends than they were. This is this walk-in, that's all tapioca and you walk by little grave sites. That's how beautiful the countryside was. This is that walk in to the village and that's where we got to and there's our little Red Cross thing where we took care of these people and eventually, no one came. So, these are just pictures of—this is a bus. Quang Ngai, there's Quang Ngai, Q-U-A-N-G-A-I. tp. Tam Ky, Chu Lai's right in the middle of the two, that's a dental outfit where they make those little caps you pound on the teeth. I went in there and said I wanted to have my teeth done and he thought it was really cool, like he could get an American to do this for him. I gave quarter—he gave me a price. I can't remember what it was, but I said, "No thanks." That's what they look like, see they just hammer 'em on. In Quang Ngai, we went into a local dentist's. This guy's a South Vietnamese Army dentist, army dentist. Those are his two kids and we worked at the hospital of Quang Ngai and we did that, probably, couple times a month, went down there and saw people in a beautiful facility, French, and they'd open the door at ten o'clock and there would be hundreds, if not thousands, of people and at two o'clock, they'd shut the doors. [Laughs] And I said, "Why don't we work till five?" "Nope, we work ten to two," and at two o'clock that dentist would go to his practice and work, that was his private practice, that's his office. So this is Quang Ngai, but you know, is there a

sign of war there? No. That's Laura Scudder's potato chips; I'm still intrigued by that, these little kids selling stuff. So, this is a Catholic church that Diem started to build. Remember, Diem was Catholic, and when he came to power, we put him there. He tried to convert the Taoists and the Buddhists and whatever to Catholicism and he started to build this—look at the size of that thing. In the middle of nowhere, just near Quang Ngai, and when he got assassinated in '63, it just ended. Here sits this huge, I don't know where it is today, probably torn down, but look at the size of that church. That's because we tried to make Diem—it's enormous. These are these little strategic hamlets, I'm flying over 'em. This particular one got attack routinely by the Vietcong and they blew up the bridges and they kept trying to isolate this little compound here of ARVIN troops. Quang Ngai, this is the local nurse we had, pretty people, Budweiser cans. So, okay, I'm just going through these kinds of quick. This is interesting. One day I—this is how I got my Thompson submachine gun. I was in this village and I still don't know who these people are, good guys or bad guys, I think they're ARVIN troops but I wasn't sure. One of them had a Thompson submachine gun and he wanted—a K-bar is a big knife you carry. I would carry that, he wanted to swap a K-bar for the submachine gun, and I said, "That's worth a lot more than my knife." He said, "I can get one tomorrow." So that's how I got my Thompson [laughs] from a South Vietnamese Army guy. I gave him my knife and I got a submachine gun, which I felt better carrying than that. You can see how little they are, see how skinny I am. These are Vietcong that were interned down there near Quang Ngai and I went to take their picture and the guy [laughs] opened the gate and walked out, no security. That's supposedly a bad guy. I mean, the war in '66 was really weird. We never saw the enemy. We hardly ever came in contact with 'em. This is kind of a relocation village again. I spent a couple nights on a swift boat. I got invited, again they had some dental issues, and my deal was, "Okay, how about a weekend on a swift boat," kind of a mistake, because we got involved in a lot of—these guys got shot at a lot and a lot of tough duty, but they cooked T-bone steaks. So, I got a ride on the swift boat and that's the crew. We stopped this group here, these turned out to be all bad guys and we stopped a lot of people like this, looking for contraband and things. You can see their mouths are already chewing betel nut. All their little jumps, that's there kitchen, this is their bathroom, very self-sufficient little units. These are fishermen; they turned out to be okay. We got a lot of fish; this guy went in and bartered for food, so we cooked it on the ship. These turned out to be bad guys and we towed 'em into Port where they turned 'em over to the South Vietnamese Army. They were Vietcong trying to escape up the coast and the job of the swift boat was to catch 'em. We actually had a few fire fights in our compound, but not a lot, beautiful sunsets, now these are pictures of Manila. My R and R wasn't there. I went to Hong Kong for my R and R. These are pictures that were taken from the time I was on the air craft carrier when we stayed in Subic Bay, I got the chance to travel

around to Manila and that's Subic Bay, very comfortable spot. So, I don't think there's much. So, maybe we can wrap this thing up? After the people to people thing that kind of deteriorated then we kinda stayed in Chu Lai and the involvement in the war increased in scope and the number of casualties that came in increased in scope and we had a lot more operations, COLORADO, and some of these big operations that they kept pushing further in land to try to secure more territory and as a result we got more and more casualties, you know. Three or four hundred at a time would come in. You'd have to take care of 'em.

Thompson: But what year did things start picking up?

Grimm: Oh, late sixty-six.

Thompson: Late sixty-six.

Grimm: Yeah, soon as like July, August, somewhere in there started picking up pretty quick, and our perimeter got tighter and tighter 'cause they got interested in Chu Lai and we had the air base there. So, we had a few fire fights and I had a couple incidents traveling to some of these villages where we got shot at a couple times and so we decided to discontinue going to these villages. The C.O. was Captain Condlese was getting lots of awards for activity but he never left the base and one day he decided that—I said "Captain, you really need to see what we do." So, we staged a terrible thing. We staged a fire fight and we were walking down the dike to this village that we had no intention of getting to and we had a bunch of marines hidden in the jungle and they started shooting at us and this guy never got his uniform dirty and we had to dive into some dirty rice patties and we staged this fake fight and he got just filthy and terrified and so that ended. He said, "Maybe we shouldn't do this anymore," and I said, "Good idea." That's how we did it. I forgot about that. That ended our—'cause it just wasn't safe anymore. So, it was too bad. A lot of village chiefs got killed and some of these nurses got killed and it turned out to be just not what we wanted it to be and so at the end we just stayed at the base and took care of the wounded, and I had a week in Hong Kong in December and some personal things, I remember I bought a tape recorder and I taped things to my wife and sent 'em to her. There was no communication until, probably, it was January or somewhere in there, December, January they got a Ham radio [Amateur Radio] operator that we could reach home and the wait was six weeks and when my time came I got connected with Dale and I talked to her for about a minute and we lost the connection, never got it back. I lost my turn. So, in mid-sentence it ended and she said it was probably the worst moment she ever had 'cause she finally heard my voice and then I was gone and she didn't know what had happened and of 'course she can't communicate. I immediately wrote her, sent her a letter. It took weeks. She would send me cookies and cakes, some arrived in good shape. She would break bread and put bottles of red wine in the bread and mail it to me and all kinds of things. Probably my worst moment I had

there was Christmas, I remember I went out into the country and found a little pine tree and cut it and Dale sent me all these decorations and I had this little Charlie Brown Christmas tree in my tent with all her ornaments and you know what I saved every one and shipped 'em home. They're still on our tree today, but that was kind of a lonely time. I was sitting there by my tree and yeah, I got lonely and then toward the end as I said, we got short and then I left and when I left it was really interesting—before I leave if I think of anything else I should, there's a lot of little incidents, but I don't know how much more stuff you wanna, you know just a lot of treatment of patients.

Thompson: Well, what are some of the most lasting memories or senses that you have from your time there in general, you know the beauty of the place or the loneliness or what do you think about when you think about that time?

Grimm: Well, I said, yeah, loneliness; you fight that all the time. It's a lot of comradery, a lot of nice guys, everybody was lonely, everybody's not happy, 'cause I said you're all stable aids which is really uncomfortable, everybody's kind of edgy, always trying to maintain space with people 'cause you never know what's gonna happen. I really was saddened when we couldn't go into the villages anymore. It went from a constructive phase to a destructive phase. I was no longer able to—I sure practiced my profession on the marines and personnel, but I felt that we had a much bigger mission that was being taken from us because the war was escalating and it's not conducive, not compatible with war. So it ended and so—

Thompson: So, when did you actually leave there?

Grimm: —Left in February of sixty-seven and flew to Okinawa. I 'member it flew from—You know what I should do one thing here. I told my son I was going to have lunch with him today.

Thompson: It's a quarter till twelve.

Grimm: Yeah, wonder if I could call him.

Thompson: Absolutely.

Grimm: I'm that close to ending though.

Thompson: Really close? Sure, give him a call. Do you have a phone?

Grimm: No.

Thompson: Here, I'll give you mine.

Grimm: I should. Yeah just put a—

[Break in the tape]

Thompson: All right, we're going again.

Grimm: Okay, okay, so the question was about you know lasting impressions, overall impressions of Vietnam and I was telling Debora about trying to maintain a sense of normalcy with your life there, despite all the distractions of being in Vietnam, being in a hostile area, you had your own sense of values and you had your professional sense of values and it's what really sustained you through this whole thing. You tried to always be doing constructive things with your life and fortunately, you know, unlike a combat soldier, whose life is based on destruction because that's what they're trained to do, and I always felt it'd be a terrible thing to be constantly pitting yourself against another human being in terms of taking one's life, where my job was as a dentist, I so much didn't save lives in a lot of cases, in some cases I did, but you were always putting people back together, which always gave you a positive feeling, which helped sustain you through the day and then you always had your—you never really got too close to people there, not that you were afraid they were gonna die, but it was a strange comradery you had, but since I've left Vietnam, I've never stayed in contact with anybody. I've never seen 'em again, never talked to 'em. I think about 'em a lot. I wonder where they are. One exception, a dentist who I met over there, I did manage to correspond with him a little bit. So, the impression I had in my era there was that the country was still a beautiful place. The only reason I didn't like it was because it took me from my family and I missed my, I'd never seen my son. He was two days old and never saw him again and my wife and I, our marriage was obviously under tremendous stress because from the moment we got to Camp Pendleton, I knew I was going to Vietnam and it's not how you want to start your marriage. So, we had no constructive part of our lives, everything was based on the fact that I was departing and so I was anxious to rebuild that when I got home. I really wanted to get back to a normal life. So, in February, I was to be shipped home and I remember going to the Chu Lai airport in Chu Lai and I got on a C130 with a bunch of people and we had to fly to De Nang and we had to take off in this thing and I was terrified that they were going to shoot the plane down. I was never so happy in my life to get to De Nang and when I got to De Nang the damndest thing happened. Well first off, they put me in a temporary BOQ, Bachelor Officers Quarters, at the end of the runway, so the whole night they had F41 Phantoms taking off from De Nang, I didn't sleep a wink. It was nothing but a thunderous roar all night long, but I didn't care. I knew the next day I was outta here. Next day, I got dressed and I went to get on my airplane and there sat a Boeing 707 continental jet, and I looked at that plane, and thought it can't be, and I walked up and they said, "That's your airplane," and I went up the gangway, was met by a stewardess, I sat down in a seat and she gave me an iced towel [laughs], still remember that. Thought I was gonna die, gone to heaven, so I whipped—You know you sweat the whole time you're, oh you just sweat and I got this iced towel on my face and I thought, "My God, I'm gonna make it," and they served me

a filet minion steak on the way back, I hadn't had one of those in a year, and I flew to Okinawa, which isn't very fair and one of the most amazing things is that you're in an airplane a couple hours and you're in another place. It's all gone, Vietnam's gone. In fact this year, we flew to Cambodia, my wife and I went to China and Cambodia, and I flew right over Chu Lai in this jet. We were supposed to land in Ho Chi Minh City and they diverted us to Phnom Penh and flew right over Chu Lai. I looked at that little strip of land and I thought, "My God, all this for that," and it took us almost no time to get from De Nang to get to Okinawa, just like something out of a time warp and I landed on the runway in Okinawa and I went to the officer's quarters and all I did for almost a full hour was flush the toilet. I couldn't get over this toilet flushed. I sat and watched that thing flush and I thought something this simple. I hadn't seen that in a year and water coming out of a spigot in the hot shower and I thought—and I went down to the bachelor's officer's quarters and had a dinner and I just thought, "The transition from Vietnam back to civilian life is way to abrupt," and I was in Okinawa for a day and I was supposed to fly to Hawaii to meet my wife, and my plane got halfway to Hawaii and had engine trouble and had to turn around and go back to Okinawa, and then it turned around back to Hawaii. I got to Hawaii. My wife had tried to get out of Chicago in the worst snow storm in Chicago's history and she couldn't communicate with me and I sat on a runway in Hawaii for two days waiting for her and every plane that showed up, she wasn't on it, and I had a friend of mine from Grinnell College, who was the dentist in Hawaii, and these poor folks had me on their hands for two days and only someone whose been in an area like Vietnam or wherever, understands how weird you are, and I must have been weirder than weird. You're wacky. I mean there's no other way to put it.

Thompson: How so?

Grimm: Well, you're just so wound up. You've been liberated from a year in a combat zone and now you're in Hawaii and you're just so hyper. I'm sure you talk a mile a minute. You don't make any sense. My wife was not getting off the airplane, and we kept going to places and I'd have a beer and I was getting half drunk, 'cause I had never had any beers before, but I didn't wanted to be inebriated with my wife on the airplane and I didn't sleep for two days, and these poor people were stuck with me, and it'd be like you were stuck with a wild man and finally, I sit at the end of the runway and all these people get off the airplane and there'd be no Dale, and I'd have all these leis, you know, and I'd throw them away and I'd wait for the next airplane and I'd buy some more and wait again, and I missed her coming off the airplane and I turned around and she grabbed me from behind. Well, Dick and Paula Copenger, that was the—Hendrickson, the people. We got in the back seat of the car and I'm sure it was a mugging. [Laughs] they must have thought, you that—they couldn't get us to wherever we were gonna stay fast enough [laughs] and we got—Oh, it

was just wild. We'd never really had a real honeymoon and now we did, and the fun part about the honeymoon was I had booked a place on Maui and Maui had one hotel when we got there, and we stayed at the Royal Conapoly Hotel, and when I got there, they'd never heard of me and I was I'm sure, a force to be reckoned with, I was just not quite normal. I don't know what I said to this clerk, but they put us into a two bedroom bungalow on the beach. We had a maid, and I didn't pay for that and they just gave it to me. So we had our reunion, our honeymoon on this beautiful beach, and I met a couple from Harrisburg, Pennsylvania who were staying there, and I called him King Kamehameha and he went out and—I'm embarrassed to say that every night, I had way too many Mai Tais, and Dale said I was just nuts. I did goofy things and I mean, not bad things but crazy. We stayed there for almost a week and when I left to pay my bill, this guy from Harrisburg, Pennsylvania had paid my entire bill and left me a rental car. Yeah, and we corresponded with him for a long time, so a lot of acts of kindness. Anyway, we went home to Chicago and I got to see my son.

Thompson: Where did you actually get discharged from? Did you go back to Camp Pendleton?

Grimm: Well, I haven't got there—

Thompson: Oh, you're not there yet! Sorry. Okay.

Grimm: —I'm still on active duty.

Thompson: I got'cha.

Grimm: So, I got to see my son, first thing I did was run his head into the top of the car, never forget that. All I did was cry, and I thought, "Oh God, big dad I am." Then she still had my red convertible and so my next duty station, I got my pick and I picked Quantico, Virginia 'cause I'd never been to that coast either and when I got to Quantico, Virginia at the military, at the marine base there, it was kind of weird. I was this weird celebrity 'cause most of the marines hadn't been to Vietnam. So here I was, this naval dentist, a Vietnam veteran, and I had all these seminars, everybody wanted to know what it was like in Vietnam, and I thought, "Isn't this strange." The combat soldiers wanted to know what it was like in Vietnam, and I was just this Navy dentist, but I ran into— my CO was this Navy Captain who had set up the deal in Hawaii to get me in the place of this Lieutenant Commander, and I knew his name and I walked into his—I'll never forget his name, and I walked into his office to report in and my God here's this Navy Captain, the guy, who was essentially got me to go with this Battalion Landing Force. So I told a little story, I wasn't pulling punches; I had already decided I wasn't going to stay in the service by then that was done. So, I told him the story and he got really white in the face and he thought, "Oh my God, can you believe this guy shows up at my desk," and

he says to me, "We're really pretty well staffed here. So, why don't you do this, why don't you work a couple days a week and then maybe the other five you and your wife can travel? How's that sound to yeah?" So I had three months there and I don't think I saw a handful of patients. We just travelled. I was an old history major, so I went to every Civil War battlefield on the east coast and we traveled up and down the coast. It was actually a nice tour and that's how I concluded my service, and one of the last things that happened was they asked me to re-up, you know, and I said, "No I don't think so," and a friend of mine was there. I got to know this other dentist, and he was from Jackson, Mississippi, Bob Black, and he was a Navy dentist and was gonna be shipped to Vietnam, and he and his wife Jane were just like Dale and I. He was devastated. So I went to this Navy Captain and I said, "I'll tell you what Captain," —they had offered me a post at a lighthouse in Puerto Rico for my next duty station, about the cushiest dental post in the navy. I said, "Captain, I'll tell you what, you know the little story we have between us, how about if I forget about that if you get Bob Black to go down there and take that post at Puerto Rico," and he said, "You have short term memory," and I said, "It can be very short, if Doctor Black gets that duty station down there instead of Vietnam," and he did, and Bob and Jane Black, my God, I couldn't wrong with them. So, he ended up his naval career in Puerto Rico instead of in Vietnam, and I thought, "That's a good move." So, then I got discharged from Quantico.

Thompson: When was that?

Grimm: That was in June of sixty-seven. So, I had a two year tour of duty and we loaded up our few belongings we had, and I had 'em flown to—I had to figure out what I was gonna do with the rest of my life, you know and I really had no—didn't know where I was gonna practice. I was licensed in Wisconsin and Iowa, and I was pretty sure I wanted to go back to Wisconsin, and I always kind of liked Madison. I had driven through it. I thought, "Nice town." I did a little research on it, and I said, "I think this is a good spot to practice." So we flew home to Chicago where my wife's parents were, and I took one of their cars up to Madison for a day. Made an appointment to find a place to practice, spent the whole day, and at four o'clock had nothing and had found—the person who was showing me around said there was a dentist in the west side of town who had a four-plex office, and one of the professional people in that office had left and maybe he'd rent it to me. So I went there and this doctor, Riley McCormick, one of the nice people in my life, made me a wonderful offer and took him up on it. So, I started from scratch with no patients, no nothing, rented this space and we came back in June and fixed it up, Dale made the drapes, I built some of my own equipment, I borrowed a little money from my dad and Dr. McCormick helped me out, and I started practicing there in I think about July of sixty-seven, didn't stay in the reserves. I did a lot of work with students, and I had a lot of Vietnam

memorabilia around my office, and a lot of students were very bitter about the war in sixty-seven, as you can imagine, fear of the draft and not understanding, and I tried to help them with the things that I did over there, and I think I made a difference in a lot of their lives, and I'll kind of conclude this by saying, one of the interesting things that happened to me recently is after you retire, you can become a senior auditor, and I took the course here at the university, and the Vietnam War is taught by Professor McCoy, and it was really the best closure I've had in the whole Vietnam experience, because he went through exactly how the war, every stage of how the war came to be, from before World War II, 'bout nineteen hundred on, and I finally had an understanding of exactly how the Vietnam Wars came to be, but never understood how in the world we ever got into this conflict. It didn't make sense to me. It made sense to me when I first went over, because I was doing what I thought to be a patriotic duty, that simple, and I wasn't bitter about going there. I thought it was important that we be there, and by the time I left Vietnam, I wasn't very sure, and by the time I got back in the civilian life and watched what happened in the late sixties, early seventies, I knew it was wrong. I knew it was a dead end, and I was really saddened by the last years of the war and how many kids died and how little we gained from that if anything and taking this course from Professor McCoy was really the final chapter, 'cause now I had a good understanding of the, I guess for lack of a better word, the idiocy of how we got into this thing, and the egos involved, and the bad decisions that a lot of people made at the expense of a lot of kids' lives. I'm still saddened by that, but it's over. So, that kind of concludes this whole thing. Do you have any other questions on this?

Thompson: Have you joined any of the veteran's organizations?

Grimm: No, I haven't. Not for any reason, I just have been pretty comfortable in my own skin, if you will, I like this organization a lot, but that's the museum. I've been to a lot of classes down here and I'm a member of this museum, because I think what they do here is terrific stuff, but I've not been to a lot of rallies and stuff like that. I'm very uncomfortable around a lot of Vietnam veterans, because I think they're, they had such a terrible time when they were there and a terrible time when they got home, I feel so sorry for 'em. They're just very troubled people, a lot of the vets, and our country, I'll say this, when I came back, it was only a matter of days and I was sitting, my dad and mom took me to the Milwaukee Athletic Club, and I was still in uniform, and I was having dinner with them and I can't remember the occasion, but it was in a big room of people, some event, wasn't for Vietnam I don't believe. The speaker acknowledged my presence, and there was this little round of applause, and I thought, "You folks have no idea, what's going on over there, none." I really felt saddened by that too. I felt like, boy this country is so divorced from reality in Vietnam, and they stayed that way clear to the end, and I was saddened by how we turned our back on some many people over there,

and as you can see from those pictures how the Vietnamese were pretty happy before we got there, and I think they're pretty happy now, but boy they went through a terrible period as did we.

Thompson: Well, thank you. You've told a wonderful story here, but on behalf of the museum and all of us, I wanna say thank you for your service.

Grimm: Yeah, well thanks.

Thompson: Being willing to share the experience. It's very powerful.

Grimm: It's easier now. It wasn't so easy. There are parts I left out, those parts don't need to be talked about, so I'll let you shut that off.

[END OF INTERVIEW]