

Wisconsin Veterans Museum
Research Center

Transcript of an
Oral History Interview with
TERRY L. MASSEY
Long Range Reconnaissance Patrol, Army, Vietnam War.

2003

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Massey, Terry L., (1949-). Oral History Interview, 2003.

User Copy: 1 sound cassette (ca. 58 min.), analog, 1 7/8 ips, mono.

Master Copy: 1 sound cassette (ca. 58 min.), analog, 1 7/8 ips, mono.

Transcript: 0.1 linear ft. (1 folder).

Abstract:

Terry Massey, a Sparta, Wisconsin native, discusses his Vietnam War service with Company K of the 75th Ranger Regiment. Massey talks about basic training at Fort Campbell (Kentucky) and being lead by Vietnam veterans who blamed high casualty rates on a lack of physical fitness amongst the troops. He addresses having remedial training to improve physical condition and the sergeant's beating people up for infractions in the "motivation room." Massey comments on assignment to Camp Polk (Louisiana) as an 11 Bravo (infantry rifleman) for survival and jungle training. After a furlough at home, he speaks of arriving in Vietnam and being sent to Pleiku as a replacement for the 4th Infantry Division, where he volunteered for LRRP (Long Range Reconnaissance Patrol) training. He relates aspects of LRRP organization, assignment to Company K, 75th Rangers, and additional training, including rappelling from helicopters. Massey describes his first mission patrolling near An Khe with other inexperienced trainees. Assigned to a regular team, he characterizes his team leader, Tom Haruben. Massey portrays the equipment and rations the Rangers carried, seeing an artillery strike fall on the enemy, scouting for NVA activity, and duty during radio relay missions. He details the scariest mission he had, when a unit of North Vietnamese soldiers were moving towards his location at night. Massey mentions the bounty the North Vietnamese put on LRRP patches, suffering temporary hearing loss while stationed next to a machine gun, and reassignment to dispatch with the 4th Administrative Motor Pool for the 4th Infantry Division. He talks about the unfair lack of opportunity for promotions in the field and recalls having in-country rest and relaxation at Da Nang Air Force Base. Massey states he extended his tour rather than finishing with barracks duty in the United States. He describes living conditions in and sapper attacks on An Khe Basecamp. He reflects on his discharge, homecoming, and the standoffish reception he received in his hometown. Massey touches upon contacting veterans from his Ranger unit through the Internet and joining the Middleton Post of the Veterans of Foreign Wars.

Biographical Sketch:

Massey (b.1949) served with the Army from 1969 until 1970. Born in Walhalla (South Carolina), he grew up in Sparta (Wisconsin). He was working as an aide at Mendota Mental Health Institute in Madison (Wisconsin) when he was drafted into service. After the war, Massey settled in Madison.

Interviewed by James Kurtz, 2003

Draft transcription by court reporter Becky Berhow, 11/20/2006

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Transcribed Interview:

- Jim: Jim Kurtz, and I'm going to be interviewing Terry Massey about his experiences as a Vietnam veteran. Terry, where were you born and when?
- Massey: I was born in 1949 in Walhalla, South Carolina.
- Jim: How do you spell Walhalla, if you could, please?
- Massey: W-A-L-H-A-L-L-A, I believe it is.
- Jim: Okay. How did you end up in the Dane County, Madison area then?
- Massey: Well, I moved back up here; my mom moved up here in, I believe it was '56. When I was back up here I was in first grade and I lived in Sparta, Wisconsin, then I moved to Madison right after high school, started working here in Madison.
- Jim: You went to high school in Sparta?
- Massey: Yes.
- Jim: And what year did you graduate from high school?
- Massey: 1967.
- Jim: 1967. What were your plans when you graduated from high school?
- Massey: Nothing concrete. I moved up here to work at Mendota Mental Health Institute. I had a friend that I went to high school with that was working there and he seemed to enjoy it and he liked Madison, so I thought I'd come up here to work.
- Jim: Okay. And what did you do at Mendota?
- Massey: I was an aide.
- Jim: Okay.
- Massey: Psychiatric aide.
- Jim: And how long did you work at Mendota?
- Massey: I started there in '68 and got my draft notice in March of '69, and then I went into the service for about a year and a half and then came back and went back to work at Mendota.

Jim: Okay. When you got drafted, were you drafted by the Dane County Draft Board or where Sparta is? That's--

Massey: Monroe County.

Jim: Monroe County. Okay. You were drafted in Monroe County?

Massey: Yes.

Jim: And do you know what the quota number per month was or anything like that?

Massey: No. I had no idea what that was.

Jim: Did you go in with any friends of yours from the Monroe County area?

Massey: No.

Jim: Okay. When you were drafted in March of '69, when did you report for active duty and where?

Massey: March 29th was when I was to report, and I reported to the induction office or the draft office in Sparta.

Jim: Okay.

Massey: From there we went down to Milwaukee for our physicals.

Jim: Okay. And then after your physical what happened?

Massey: I passed it and sent on to Fort Campbell, Kentucky for basic training.

Jim: And when did you get to Fort Campbell? Was that right after March 29th?

Massey: Yeah, probably a day later.

Jim: Okay. How did you get down to Fort--

Massey: Bus.

Jim: Okay. How many people were in your basic training company?

Massey: Company was probably two hundred. I think each platoon had like twenty-five people in it and there's four platoons.

Jim: Did you know anybody in your basic training company?

- Massey: I knew a couple of people. Nobody really close or--you know, I just knew them. They were from other towns close by and I knew them from, you know, like going to football games. They were into sports and stuff like that.
- Jim: Okay. But no neighbors or anything?
- Massey: No.
- Jim: Nothing?
- Massey: No friends or anything else like that.
- Jim: Okay. Did you meet any unusual people when you were in basic training?
- Massey: Several of the drill sergeants.
- Jim: Okay. Can you describe what--
- Massey: They were--all of them, except for one, the senior drill sergeant, and three of the platoon drill sergeants just came back from Vietnam, and they made the comment right away that they saw too many of their friends and comrades killed over there because they were not in physical shape to be over there to begin with. And that that wasn't gonna happen to anybody in this company; that we were all gonna be physically fit when we ended our eight weeks of basic training, and they were serious about it.
- Jim: Okay. What did they do to increase your physical--
- Massey: Well, when I went in, I was really in poor shape physically. I hadn't done anything physically as far as exercises, running or anything else. I think I was-- when I went in I was like 215 pounds. And the first PT test that we did, out of a possible five hundred I think I scored like one hundred seventy-eight.
- Jim: Okay.
- Massey: The mile run it took me 11 minutes and 59 seconds to run.
- Jim: What were you at the end of basic training?
- Massey: I was probably around four hundred fifty something. Because I did so poorly at the beginning, they put me in--there's like seven or eight of us that they put in remedial PT, which meant that they--after the day of training, after chow, we would go back out and run a couple more miles, do some low crawls and stuff like that, to get us in shape. And then plus we were also restricted to the company area, which meant I didn't have any post privileges or anything and pulled a lot of KP. My regular and then every weekend I'd be going down to pull KP.

Jim: So that was some incentive to improve?

Massey: Yeah. It was an incentive, but we had no choice.

Jim: Right. What kind of weapons training did you receive when you were in basic training?

Massey: It was, I believe, the M14, the M16 and I think it was the M60 machine gun.

Jim: What about the M79 grenade launcher?

Massey: I don't remember training on that.

Jim: Okay. So I assume you got out of basic training in eight weeks, and that puts it roughly into May of '69?

Massey: Yeah.

Jim: Then what happened to you?

Massey: Got orders for 11 Bravo. I remember all through basic training, they kept saying if you think this is going to be rough, wait until you 11 Bravos get to Fort Polk. That's where you're really gonna have realities, where it's really gonna be rough. Also in our basic training we had--the drill sergeants had the motivation room, where if anybody screwed up or didn't do well, the drill sergeants would take 'em in this room and they'd tell the guy they'd have five minutes to fight their way out, and they would literally beat people up in there. They encouraged our platoon leaders and platoon squad leaders to do the same thing.

Jim: For the record, what was an 11 Bravo?

Massey: Infantry.

Jim: Infantry. So that means that you were an Infantry Rifleman?

Massey: Yeah.

Jim: Out of the two hundred or so in people in your basic training company, how many got 11 Bravos MOS's?

Massey: Probably I would say at least fifty, sixty percent. Out of the whole company that I was in, when we got to Fort Polk there was like eight or nine of us that were in the same company.

Jim: Okay. That were from Fort Campbell?

Massey: Yeah.

Jim: What did the people who weren't 11 Bravos, what kind of military occupational specialties did they get?

Massey: Clerk typist, truck drivers, medics, things like that.

Jim: Okay. So was there any basis for this selection in your mind?

Massey: No. I think the ones that were drafted were probably pretty much 11 Bravos. We had some people that enlisted, and those are the ones that got what they--you know, they wanted to be mechanics or medics or something like that and they were picked for that.

Jim: So you went to Fort Polk, Louisiana. When was that?

Massey: That would have been--I was there in May, June, July; August was when the cycle was up. So it was during the summer.

Jim: Fort Polk, advanced infantry. What were your experiences there?

Massey: It was a cake walk. It was real easy. We got down there, we were bussed down there and we got down there like about 10:00 o'clock at night and they said at the reception station, they said, "Your drill sergeants will be coming over here shortly. When they get you back to the company area they'll have milk and cookies probably waiting for you." And the guys in my company looked at each other and said, "Yeah, sure, right." And when we got to our company area they had sandwiches and juice, which really surprised us, and then they told us they'd try and guarantee us eight hours of sleep a night, whereas in basic training we were up at 2:30 in the morning to clean the barracks, we were out by 3:30 running and coming back from the basic area by 5:00--we were heading out to the range by 5:00 o'clock in the morning, and the rest of the companies were getting up there and so it was--it was easy.

Jim: Okay. What kind of training did you get at Fort Polk; what did you do?

Massey: Survival, jungle.

Jim: Okay. What was the survival training like?

Massey: It was one of those where, you know, you were given a live chicken, you had to kill it, pluck it, cook it. Ah, then the end of that is when you had your night course where you had to maneuver through the swamp areas down there and avoid being captured and taken to a POW camp and stuff like that, and then more of the rifle training and—

Jim: What kind of weapons were you trained on down there?

Massey: The same thing.

Jim: Okay. The M79 at all at that time?

Massey: I don't remember anything about the M79 until I got into Vietnam.

Jim: Okay. Did you see any of the weapons that the North Vietnamese or Viet Cong used at Fort Polk?

Massey: Yeah. They mentioned the AK47 and that was about the only thing I recall ever hearing about, what the enemy used.

Jim: Okay. Did they--

Massey: And the distinct sound that it made so--

Jim: Did they tell you about the different colors of the tracers? I mean, you mentioned the sound.

Massey: No.

Jim: Okay. [clock chimes] Is there anything that stands out about your experience at Fort Polk?

Massey: No. Only that it was a lot easier than Fort Campbell, which was surprising to the guys that were in the company that we were in there together.

Jim: Did you meet any unique people at Fort Polk?

Massey: None that stand out, no.

Jim: Okay. What happened when you completed your AIT?

Massey: Well, a couple weeks before sergeants shake and bakes came around and wanted to know if anybody wanted to be Airborne, and bunch of us signed up for it, but then they lost our orders. And so at the end of the cycle, they said, "You can either stay here for the next three to four weeks and wait for orders to come down again or you can go home and then, you know, you got your orders for Vietnam; go home for your thirty day leave and go on over." And I thought, well, I didn't want to sit down there for another month pulling details and stuff, so I'll just go home and go on over.

Jim: So you never went to Airborne?

Massey: No.

Jim: Okay. So you went home, you had a thirty day leave and you had orders to Vietnam. What percentage of the people in your AIT cycle had orders to Vietnam?

Massey: I think probably ninety-nine percent, if not all.

Jim: Okay. So did anything unique happen during your leave? How were you treated by people back home?

Massey: I was treated alright. My--some of my buddies that I went through high school with were all either enlisted or drafted in the service by then, so when I went back home on my thirty day leave, there was just a couple people that were still around that I, you know, knew enough to run around with and--

Jim: Okay. So you left for Vietnam. What route did you take to get to Vietnam and where did you go through?

Massey: Well, when I left for Vietnam is when they started to cut troops back from going, and I went to Oakland, California.

Jim: How did you get to Oakland?

Massey: I flew down to Oakland and then I left a couple of days early because I wanted to see what San Francisco was like. So I flew, I was there by myself, and I think I had to report to Oakland like September 3rd or something like that and I left August 31st or something like that from home.

Jim: Okay. Anything impress you about San Francisco?

Massey: Not much, no.

Jim: Okay. So when you went to Oakland you went to Travis Air Force Base, I believe--is that correct?

Massey: I can't--probably, yeah.

Jim: All right. Did you go over on military transport or civilian?

Massey: To?

Jim: Vietnam.

Massey: Civilian.

Jim: Okay. So it was like a regular airliner?

Massey: Yeah. Movies and everything.

Jim: Movies and everything. Did they give you any equipment to take with you, or just your personal stuff?

Massey: Just the personal--or yeah, what we brought with us from basic training or from the--what we were issued, uniforms.

Jim: What were you told to bring with you in the way of personal stuff?

Massey: Very little. You know, that we could get what we needed when we--wherever we were going to.

Jim: Okay.

Massey: We'd have time to get stuff.

Jim: Where did you land when you crossed the Pacific for refueling?

Massey: Guam.

Jim: Guam. So Guam, and then where did you land in Vietnam?

Massey: Bien Hoa outside of Saigon.

Jim: Okay. And was it the 90th Replacement Detachment that you went with?

Massey: I think that was it.

Jim: Okay. And how long were you at the replacement detachment?

Massey: From what I remember, a couple of days.

Jim: Okay.

Massey: Yeah, we had --

Jim: And who were you given orders to?

Massey: The 4th Infantry Division.

Jim: Okay.

Massey: In the central highlands.

Jim: Okay. And then how were you then taken from Bien Hoa to the central highlands?

Massey: Geeze, I think we flew.

Jim: Okay. Do you remember where you flew to?

Massey: Pleiku.

Jim: Pleiku. Okay. And what kind of a plane were you taken in?

Massey: It was military, like a 130 or something like that.

Jim: Okay. Four engine?

Massey: Yeah.

Jim: Okay. It was a C130 then. When you got to Pleiku, what happened to you?

Massey: Went to the reception station, was there for a couple of days, and then I had the orientation, and at the orientation we had these guys come in and talk about the LRRPs. [Long range reconnaissance patrols, pronounced "lurps"]

Jim: Okay.

Massey: And they said that they had their share of injuries, but no fatalities in the last I-don't-know-how-many months, and then they said you'd be going--you'd be volunteered, you know, it's an all volunteer unit, and if you're accepted you'd be going out with--they usually operated in four to five man teams and you'd be going out with three, four other guys who knew--had their stuff together. And you'd go out for four or five days, come back in for four or five days or longer, you know, clean sheets, hot meals, and then go back out again, and I thought that sounded a lot better than being in a line unit where half the guys didn't care whether they even made it back in or not after a while and stuff, and so I volunteered and was accepted into the unit.

Jim: What kind of people were recruiting you? Were they sergeants, captains, lieutenants?

Massey: They were sergeants and Spec 4s.

Jim: Spec 4s?

Massey: Yeah.

IM: And they had--

Massey: Guys that were actually on teams and going out.

Jim: So they had been in the country for a while?

Massey: Yeah.

Jim: And any of them that you know of that were second tours at that point?

Massey: Not that I was aware of.

Jim: Okay. Did any of the people that you went to AIT with end up in the 4th Division with you?

Massey: Not when I went over there, no.

Jim: So you didn't know anybody that you went to Vietnam with?

Massey: No.

Jim: And Bien Hoa and--

Massey: No.

Jim: Okay. So describe how you were trained then when you went into the LRRPs? That's a--LRRPs is what?

Massey: They still referred to 'em as people that were in the unit even--it's long range reconnaissance patrols, but in '69 , January of '69, LRRP units were deactivated and they were reactivated as Ranger units and assigned letter companies.

Jim: Okay.

Massey: And so it really surprised me because when they recruited us and they were talking, they kept saying LRRPs, they never mentioned Rangers, but then when we were accepted and they gave us our mailing address it was Company K, 75th Rangers, and I thought, "God, what did I get myself into?" I didn't know I was getting into a Ranger unit.

Jim: Okay. The 75th Rangers is a regiment, is that right?

Massey: Yeah, right.

Jim: Did each division have a Ranger company that was over in Vietnam, is that the way it went?

- Massey: Yeah, each one was assigned, you know, a unit.
- Jim: How many people were in the 4th, or the 4th Division of Company K of the 75th Rangers?
- Massey: There was four platoons and probably--so it was probably one hundred, one hundred-fifty probably actually going in, depending on how many teams are in each--
- Jim: In the platoon, was that led by a captain or a lieutenant or a sergeant or--?
- Massey: Usually platoon leaders were lieutenants.
- Jim: Okay.
- Massey: And then the CO was usually a captain.
- Jim: Okay. And how many NCOs in a platoon?
- Massey: When I was over there most of us were PFCs, Spec 4s and then some sergeants.
- Jim: How did your training compare with the people that were in your platoon?
- Massey: For--?
- Jim: Military training. Were there Airborne people there, were there Ranger-trained people there?
- Massey: There were very few Rangers. You know, I remember one coming in shortly after I got there that was Ranger qualified stateside. I think some of the platoon sergeants were Ranger qualified when I got over there. But like I said--and then some of the people, I think the stateside and the ones that were really trained stateside and stuff were leaving and going home and it was the volunteers that didn't have their Ranger training stateside there were coming in, and the only training they had was three weeks of training after they volunteered, and that was map reading, weapons and that's where the 79 was introduced [unintelligible].
- Jim: So your first assignment in Vietnam was with the Rangers, is that correct?
- Massey: Yeah. I was going into a line unit with 4th Infantry Division, but then I volunteered for--so then they recut the orders.
- Jim: Okay. So they recut the orders. Now, did you receive any additional training after you'd got ranger orders?

Massey: Yeah. They had three weeks of in-country training: physical,--you know, you had to pass map reading, artillery, calling in fire power, _____[?], rappelling. A lot of it was physical.

Jim: Rappelling out of a helicopter or down a hill or--?

Massey: Out of a helicopter and then off a tower.

Jim: Okay. Could you explain what rappelling down a helicopter means?

Massey: Well, it's when they--you attach yourself with a D-ring to a rope and you get out on the skid or on a tower against the wall and then you lower yourself down to the ground and you can control it by controlling the rope, how fast you ascend and stuff. I never had to rappel once I was in a unit; we were always able to sit down.

Jim: Where was this Ranger training?

Massey: It was in Pleiku.

Jim: Okay. Now, did you actually take some patrols and stuff like that as part of this training outside the--?

Massey: We had one. After the last two nights or the last--actually I think it's just, you know, it was in a fairly secured area close to a mountain area village and then if you passed everything--and then I remember at the end of the training, they divided the company up in halves, and half of the people stayed in Pleiku and then the group I was with they said, "We'll get in that deuce and a half, you're going on to An Khe," because the company was split in half. Two platoons were in Pleiku, one platoon was in An Khe.

Jim: So your first assignment was in An Khe?

Massey: Yeah. Happy Valley.

Jim: And that's A-N-K-E-E?

Massey: K-H-E.

Jim: K-H-E. Happy Valley.

Massey: Yeah. And then I remember when we were sittin' in the deuce and a half, the sergeant come out and he pointed to five of us. He said, "You, you, you, you, and you will be a team when you get to An Khe and you'll be going straight to Happy Valley." We all looked at each other and said, "What happened to this going out with several guys who had their stuff together?" You know, here we were, nobody had been out in the field before and they were going to go in and pull a

mission in a place we'd never heard of or--we didn't know what was going on. We were lucky. Our first mission we saw *all* kinds of villagers and everything out there and it was supposed to be a VC-controlled area. First night we set up our location and the villagers came right in between us with their cows coming in from the fields and stuff and we'd--like I said, we were out there, supposed to be a four day mission and we were out there for eight days because of the rain and we saw people every day. And they'd wave at us, we'd wave at them, no problem. Finally when they sent a team out to replace us, it was an experienced team, and the next morning they were ambushed. And the only thing I could figure out was that we presented no threat. We didn't know what we were doing out there and they weren't going to mess with us, and you get a line unit in there to move in through the area and stuff, but then when the other team came out that looked like they knew what they were looking for they decided they'd better get them out of the area. And then that was the only time we pulled that team, you know, operated; after that we were broken up and then put on regular teams.

Jim: What do you think the motive was, that this is training or--?

Massey: No. I think it was they needed a team in the area and we had training, and they felt we were qualified to go out to the area.

Jim: So were most of the people that were in this like you that hadn't had any training, or there have been people that were in line units that later volunteered for it?

Massey: Yeah. Uh-hum. There was a lot of them that volunteered. After several months in a line unit they decided they wanted to get out. And then we had people that were in Germany that re-upped for a year and volunteered for Vietnam to get out of Germany.

Jim: Why was that?

Massey: Because they couldn't stand the spit and polish of being in Germany. They, you know, would rather be somewhere else where it was more relaxed militarily, I guess. We had several of those.

Jim: What were your days like on this first mission; what did you do?

Massey: We walked around the area. We knew the area of operation that we had to be in and we would patrol. They said just look to see if anything's out of the ordinary. We didn't know what was out of the ordinary or anything, but they said, you know, it was supposed to be a four day mission. We had to walk into the area because the helicopters couldn't fly because it was raining and then we couldn't walk out--or we couldn't fly out because it was raining. It rained the whole--and on the eighth day they kept saying, "Well, we can't get any birds out there yet," and finally we told our team leader, who was a sergeant, E5. He said, "Okay," and then he says, "We gotta stay out a day." And the rest of us, the four of us, said,

“We're not. We're out of food, we're out of water. We walked in, we can walk out, and you tell them that and you tell them that now.” And he told them, and they said, “Okay, start coming out; we'll send in a team to replace you.” And we met the team in this village, the same village that we walked through at the beginning. They came out--

Jim: How far from An Khe were you?

Massey: We were probably about fifteen, twenty miles. We operated out of a fire base that was there.

Jim: On a fire base?

Massey: Yeah.

Jim: So what is a fire base?

Massey: It's a forward small base camp that has artillery, you know, M105s and M155s, and they're used to get farther out to support line units that are in the area.

Jim: Okay. So when you left on this patrol what was the load of equipment and food that you had?

Massey: The food was we had LRRPs, LRRP rations, which was dehydrated, so they were real light and everything else. We probably had about a--I probably took about a six days' supply with me.

Jim: So is it kind of like the mountaineering food and stuff that people have?

Massey: Yeah. You just add hot water to it or water to it and it soaks it up and then you--

Jim: How much water did you carry with you?

Massey: Probably six canteens.

Jim: So you had six canteens on you?

Massey: Yeah.

Jim: Did you have any other sources of water when you were out in the field?

Massey: We had tablets that we could use for, you know, if we--you know come to a stream or something we could put water in the canteen and put a tablet in to try to kill the bacteria [clock chiming].

Jim: How did that taste?

Massey: It didn't taste that--you know, it's usually colder than what we had, because after a while it was hot water that you were drinking anyway.

Jim: And how much ammunition did you carry with you?

Massey: Oh, I always carried a lot.

Jim: What is a lot?

Massey: Probably -- I probably had twenty something magazines and an M16. Then after I was over there for a little while I was issued the--I can't think of the nomenclature, but it was the old—what we called the over and under. It was the M16 with the M79 right attached to it, and so I carried rounds for that, too.

Jim: And in this first mission did you have to fire your weapon?

Massey: No.

Jim: Okay. What happened then after your first mission when you went back? Did they let you stand down for five days?

Massey: Yeah. Yeah. And then they--when I got back, then they sent us up to Pleiku and then I was assigned to a team.

Jim: So you went back to Pleiku?

Massey: Yeah.

Jim: Okay. Then what happened?

Massey: Then I was assigned to a team that--you know, the team leader I was really impressed with. He was cool and collected out in the field. He was very good at calling in artillery; he was an expert at it.

Jim: Was he a sergeant then?

Massey: Yeah. He was an E5.

Jim: And what was his experience as far as you could tell?

Massey: He had been in the country about eight, eight or nine--well, probably more, probably ten months, because I was only with him for about two months, I believe, and he was well trained, I think. He had a lot of experience out in the field and I was comfortable going out with him.

Jim: Do you remember his name?

Massey: Yeah. Tom Haruben from Boston.

Jim: Tom Ruben?

Massey: Ha-ruben.

Jim: How do you--

Massey: H-A-R-U-B-E-N, I believe is what it was.

Jim: Okay. Have you had any contact with him since?

Massey: No.

Jim: Okay. What were your experiences at two months with Tom Haruben then?

Massey: We--like I said, he was good at calling on experience, calling in artillery. I remember the first mission I went out on with him. We pulled in our night location, pulled in, you know, everybody got under in a thicket and then we were sittin' there, you know, pulling the guards and stuff, and then all of a sudden we seen a light down the trail and he says, "Now, you know," and he pointed it out to us, he says, "You know, only one light," he said, "but there's anywhere from three to five probably, you know, we refer to as gooks, for that light." He said, "Now watch this," and he called in artillery support. He said he had live targets and then he adjusted it and he said, "Now watch what happens here," and as he adjusted it and got it closer to those--that light, the light that at first was just walking casually down the trail, and then all of a sudden it was moving faster and as the artillery moved in on him you could see, you know, they were actually running. And then all of a sudden he said, "Okay, drop it twenty-five meters," or whatever it was, "and fire for effect." And when we fired for effect, all of a sudden the light went flying through the air.

Jim: How many shells were fired in this incident?

Massey: Probably about eight or nine.

Jim: Okay. Could you describe that night ambush position you were in. Was it an ambush position or a defensive position?

Massey: No. Defensive. We were--the unit I was in, Company K, usually went out on reconnaissance and our job was not to initiate contact but to observe the area and if we saw enemy to watch 'em, but the only time we'd initiate contact was when, you know, we had no choice or if it was an opportune position, where they were coming right up on us and stuff.

Jim: Okay. I'm going to turn the tape over.

Massey: Okay.

[After a pause, this conversation continues on Tape 1, Side A]

Jim: What were you told to look for during this two month period of time?

Massey: Trails. Any sign of the VC or NVA being in the area. Base camps, bunkers, anything that was in the area. And we always went out, usually far enough out to where there was no friendlies in the area at all, and usually no villages in the area. So we were told that if we saw anything we could consider it as enemy.

Jim: Okay. So this was in what was called a free fire zone?

Massey: Right.

Jim: Did you see many VC, or were they mostly North Vietnamese at this point in time?

Massey: What I saw visually were probably a majority of North Vietnamese.

Jim: Okay. What other experiences did you have in this timeframe with this Sergeant Haruben?

Massey: One of them was a mission that—well, one mission they told us in the briefing that we should make sure we write our relatives because it was—the area we were going into, what was supposed to be in there, our chances of coming back out were pretty slim. We were going to be going in, this was in November, and we were going outside of Pleiku and we were to be looking for a 105 Howitzer that the NVA supposedly moved into the area and buried. And the intelligence said there was supposed to be a base camp in the area and at least a battalion size NVA. And that the team I was on would be going into the valley and we would be going right by where the base camp was. And they'd be sending in another team that would be going up on the ridgeline opposite the river that would be our reactionary force if we ran into trouble. And they were saying there is a high, you know, big river, and that the plan was that we'd be taking air mattresses and putting our stuff on an air mattress and floating down the river at night, just past the base camp. And luckily for us, you know, the river ended up being just a little stream because when they flew over it was like a week or two earlier and that was just after a heavy rain, and that's why they thought it was a big river. Luckily, like I say, because my air mattress ended up having a big hole in it, so I wouldn't have been able to blow it up anyway. And the base camp was deserted. We found it and we looked around in it and nothing was in it and like our second or third night out, we didn't see anything at all, but then the team that was supposed to be our reactionary force got hit up on the ridge above us, so we were—

- Jim: Do you know what North Vietnamese Army units you were dealing with?
- Massey: Ah, no. I can't remember; I think it was maybe like the 5th Regiment or—
- Jim: Was it ever explained to you in larger picture what you were doing, or were you just given small missions to go out on?
- Massey: Small missions. Yeah, you could gather it if you knew other teams enough and what they were doing and the missions they were on; you could put things together as to what was happening.
- Jim: When you went out on these missions, did they then follow with regular infantry behind you later?
- Massey: No. No, it's, um—when we went out—like I said, I was fortunate, the teams I went on nobody was shot. We ran into some close situations where we thought we were gonna run into it. We initiated several contacts and stuff but we always made it out okay. But it was far enough out if we'd go out and gather information and bring it back in and if a higher up thought that it warranted a line unit going in to investigate further, they would send a line unit in to check out the information more.
- Jim: Now, did some of your missions ever get followed up with air strikes from fixed wing aircraft?
- Massey: Yeah, several of them did. I remember one of the missions that we didn't think we were going to come back on, they just told us it was gonna be easy. We were west of An Khe—or, east of An Khe on three hilltops and our mission was--no friendlies in the area, we were to listen and observe, and if we heard anything, call in our Taylor gatling or do whatever we wanted to do. There was no friendlies in the area at all, so if anybody was moving through there they were enemy. And the first three days it was, you know—we were settin' on top of a mountain basically and we'd hear chickens or something and we'd call in artillery on the chickens because they said if you hear anything, chickens are a food source, or a lot of times the NVA would use chickens to walk ahead of 'em and if they heard or saw anything they'd start cackling and then the NVA would know there's somethin' ahead of 'em. And we were out there and we were just doin' that and the last morning we were supposed to be taken out at 1:00 o'clock in the afternoon. About 11:00 o'clock we were practicing artillery and we were going to blow up a tree out in front of us; we were on a hilltop.
- Jim: Practicing by adjusting—
- Massey: Yeah, for practice. As we were doing that, all of a sudden—we were on a steep cliff, and all of a sudden we looked down and here's a platoon of NVA walkin'

through the rice paddy just below us, and so we called in the artillery. We told them to drop it and the NVA went into the wood line right after the rice paddies and we dropped artillery and there were probably about thirty, forty rounds of artillery, and then they sent in a reactionary force immediately to check out the damage and if there's--they couldn't find any enemy, but it was a major bunker complex, and so they decided to keep us in overnight to see what was gonna happen. And so we stayed in overnight one more night, and I was on guard, you know, alert, about 10:30, 11:00 o'clock at night, and all of a sudden, way off in the distance to the east of us, I see a light going along the ridgeline. It would light up then go out, move a little bit, light up, go out, move a little bit. So I woke up the team leader, Tom Haruben, and he watched it, and he says, "You know what that is, don't you?" I said, "No, what is it?" He says, "Well, that's like a jeep or a truck with a big spotlight on it, and what they do is use those to move mass troops. The truck'll be in front of the troops walking and they'll shine the light in the troops and it's like a rotor or real high speed trail, and the troops would go so far until they can't see any more and then they turn the light out, the truck would move ahead, turn the light on again and they'd move." So we'd watch it and all of a sudden they started moving toward us, down the hill, then up a hill and down and then we looked over on the other side of the hill and all—it was like lanterns comin' down the other side. By this time it was like 1:30, 2:00 o'clock in the morning, so we woke up everybody else on the team and we repositioned our Claymores because who thought they knew we were in the area and they were coming up to get us. So we repositioned all our Claymores and we were--on the edge of the cliff where we first saw the NVA there was like a ledge where we could drop down; it was probably three, four feet, enough where we could stand there and then get all Claymore—er, grenades and everything else, and we thought, well, if they're gonna overrun us, we'll stay as long as we can, but then we'd jump off, 'cause we weren't gonna be captured. When it looked like the light was coming up, they had us pinpointed, their artillery, exactly where we were, and so when it looked like they were coming up the hill for us, we told 'em okay, this is it; just start dropping, and for like two hours they dropped artillery all around. And then at first light the helicopters came and got us out of there. But that was the scariest one I've ever been on.

Jim: Did you fire your weapon this time?

Massey: No.

Jim: Was there any incoming firing at you?

Massey: No. They had the lights. The only—and after that, afterwards, after all these years I've spent thinking about it and that they didn't know where we were. They didn't know we were there. They didn't, you know—the squad that we saw across on the rice paddy didn't see us. And so they, you know—and I think they said that was a major bunker complex; you know, it was probably a base camp, and this was one group coming in from one area and they were moving in from

different areas, and I think they were gonna just form there anyway that night, meet up and then probably have an offensive against An Khe.

Jim: How far were you from An Khe?

Massey: We were probably fifteen, twenty miles. You could see—from where we were if you looked west it was flatland and then you could see way off in the distance the lights of An Khe.

Jim: Okay. Describe this terrain a little bit. You mentioned rice paddies. Are rice paddies dominant in this area?

Massey: No. No. Here it was—they would be intermixed and stuff, but like right here where these were there are three hills, big hills, and then right to the west of the hills were rice paddies. Not a big rice paddy field like you'd see in the deltas, but they had the dikes going between them and stuff. So they were small, so I think they were just there for the NVA for a food source.

Jim: Okay. What other vegetation was there? Was there jungle vegetations, teak trees, what?

Massey: Yeah. A lot of it was—when you got up toward--well a lot of the area in An Khe and stuff was mountainous. Not as much as Pleiku, but there was some of that you were going straight up and down. I remember one time—I didn't know they were teak trees until I read the books about "We Were Soldiers" and they had mentioned them and the big mountain, and I think this is where I was. In the book they mentioned something that it looked like the trees were growing upside down like there was a small bulb for the limbs and stuff, leaves up on the top, but the roots were just massive. And I remember having to keep from rolling down the hillside or the mountain, we slept next to the trunks of the trees so that we could have a place to support ourselves, anyway.

Jim: Two questions here. You've mentioned it was [clock chimes] raining a lot. What period of time did it rain? What months that were you there?

Massey: [unintelligible] but the monsoon seasons I think were in the fall: September, October, November—somewhere in there.

Jim: You said a concern about being captured. What was the reason for that? I mean, obviously you didn't want to be captured.

Massey: Yes. Well supposedly we heard rumors that there's a bounty on our head and anybody that caught a LRRP or a Ranger, you know, all they had to do was bring the patch in. Because we were used to being out alone and they weren't gonna take a chance, I think--our feeling was that they'd take whatever they could out of us and then kill us and then move on, that they weren't gonna try and take us to a

POW camp or anything like that, so it was either, you know, you pick the way you wanted to die, if it came to that, or the way they wanted you. And, you know, you'd want to pick the quickest way.

Jim: I think we're roughly to November of '69. Where should we go from there?

Massey: Well, at the end of I think it was May—I had twenty-one actual missions and five-four radio relays, so I had twenty-five missions altogether.

Jim: What is a radio relay?

Massey: It's when you went out on a fire support base and it's usually in a mountainous area or really an extended area from base camp where you don't have direct radio contact with the people at, like An Khe or Pleiku. So they put a team in on the hilltop, it wouldn't necessarily be a fire base, but a hilltop, and they put several teams in the area and the team on the hilltop would be radio relay. They would have direct communications with the teams and then they would transfer the information back to base camp.

Jim: Okay, and at _____[?] if that was needed.

Massey: Yeah.

Jim: Okay. Where do we go from here?

Massey: The last mission I was on was, I think, in April or May. It was one of those where we had contact and I had lost my hearing in the contact temporarily.

Jim: What happened there?

Massey: We were in overnight. We had moving around us all night, and then the next morning they were gonna pull us out, you know, because of so much movement in the area. They had other teams in the vicinity and they all had movement around them, so they figured it was—you know, the purpose of us going in in that area was to find out if the enemy was in there, and they were there. The next morning we were gettin' ready to leave and we had contact with the enemy and then the guy with the M60 machine gun was right next to me and he told me to duck because he thought he saw somebody off in the woods taking a bead at me, so I ducked, and as I ducked he opened up on the M60 and it was right next to my ear, so I had loss of hearing for a while.

Jim: Okay.

Massey: So when I came back in the base camp I had to go to Kunyan[?] to see a specialist and I was told I couldn't go out in the field any more because any sudden loud burst, I could permanently lose my hearing. So when I got back to the company

area, they cut orders on me because they didn't have any what we call "sham" jobs. And so it took about three weeks. They'd get orders down, but it would be for a line unit. One time the CO said, "Yeah, it's a line unit but you're gonna be the CO's driver." So I went over to the area first to check it out, and there was only one guy in the area. I told him who I was and he says, "Yeah, we're expecting you." And I said, "Yeah, I'm gonna be the CO's driver," and he said, "No, *he* was," and said that I'd be going out in the bush, and they were happy to have me because they knew LRRPs liked to walk point, they like to be out by themselves. So I got back to the company area and told them I was gonna refuse to do that, and then they finally got orders for me and I ended up going to the 4th Admin Motor Pool for the 4th Infantry Division, which was light duty. The CO said he'd make sure I was taken care of and they would—you know, if there was any chance of me getting shot at or anything else they were gonna turn down the orders. One of the orders was for perimeter duty daytime, and he said you still have a chance to get shot at there, so they refused that, and then the 4th Admin Motor Pool came down and he said, "That's right in the middle of base camp, so you'll be safe there for your final," so that's where I—

Jim: So this was May '70 you disabled out because of hearing. When did you—you said you extended your duty. When did you do that?

Massey: That was after I got into the 4th Admin Motor Pool.

Jim: Okay. So what was your DEROS?

Massey: My original DEROS was in August, and I extended 'til the end of October.

Jim: So you had had assignment from May to August to being a 4th Admin?

Massey: Yeah. And I remember I checked in there, went into the orderly room, the clerk typist was doing the paperwork and he says, "Okay, what rank are you?" He says, "How long have you been in the country?" And I said, "I've been in the country about eight months." And he says, "What rank are you?" I said, "I'm a PFC." And he says, "PFC? How many court martials have you had since you've been here?" And I said, "I haven't had a one." Then he says, "Geeze, you must have a whole slew of Article 15s against you then." And I said, "Not a one." And he says, "You mean you've been in the country for eight months in a Ranger unit and you came in as a PFC and you're still a PFC?" And I said, "Yeah, nobody got promoted in my company." We were attached to the 4th Infantry Division, so our allocations for promotions came from the 4th and whatever ended up left over after they promoted all their own people—you know, it might be one, maybe two at the most in a month, so hardly anybody ever got—the only ones that got promoted went to sniper school or—

Jim: Okay.

Massey: Then he says—and I still remember the guy saying—“Well, next orders that come down we’ll make you a 4 and we’ll try and get you a 5 before you leave here. And that kind of irritated me, thinking here what we refer to as sham jobs, fairly secure, safe jobs, they were promoting themselves and then the people like us that were out there weren’t getting anything.

Jim: What was the difference in pay; do you remember?

Massey: Not much.

Jim: Okay.

Massey: I think I was probably getting’, with the combat pay and everything else, I was probably getting’ a hundred a month.

Jim: What did you do at the 4th Admin Motor Pool?

Massey: I was a dispatcher. They started me out as a mechanic and I didn’t know anything about mechanics, and then the guy who was a mechanic before I got there was moved into dispatch because a guy had left, and he couldn’t stand that, and I had some experience working out at Fort McCoy between my junior and senior year in a motor pool, with logbooks and stuff, so I told him I’d take that position.

Jim: Okay. So you extended when you got to the 4th. Were you encouraged to extend, or how were you—?

Massey: Well, I felt like I was in a safe area and I didn’t want to do stateside service when I got back, and I thought, well, sixty days over here would be a lot better than seven months stateside.

Jim: Okay. Did they encourage you to reenlist or anything like that?

Massey: The CO and a couple of ‘em wanted me to go to be a Warrant Officer for Supply. We had an IG inspection and they thought I did a really good job of getting the motor pool in condition and shape for the IG. The motor pool did well. They said that they were impressed and I should consider it and I said, “Naw, I just want to get out of the service.” They even brought up that if you’re a Warrant Officer it’s like being a civilian; you can quit any time you want. You don’t have to be in, sign up for three or four years. You sign up but you just give ‘em a notice when you want to get out and you can get out, but I still didn’t want anything to do with it.

Jim: So did anything unique happen to you while you were with the 4th Admin Motor Pool?

Massey: No.

- Jim: What were your living conditions like?
- Massey: At the 4th Admin? Nice. We had the barracks--
[End of Tape 1, Side A]
--they had the club close by where they had bands and movies and stuff like that. It was just like being on vacation
- Jim: How was the food?
- Massey: The food was good.
- Jim: Was it typical military food?
- Massey: Yeah.
- Jim: And you were at Pleiku when this happened, I mean --
- Massey: An Khe.
- Jim: An Khe. Was that base ever mortared or rocketed while you were there?
- Massey: Yeah. We had Sapper [Dac Cong] attacks and mortars and rockets coming in once in a while. You know, they didn't bother—I remember one time when I was working log books getting ready for the IG and heard the Sappers came into the finance area and I knew Sappers, they come in and out. They don't go running around base camp, you know; they have a specific target. They come in and they get out as quick as they can.
- Jim: What is a Sapper?
- Massey: It's one where they're highly trained and they're one of the more feared units in Vietnam, I think, as far as base camp and, you know, if you're in a base camp area you fear them more than rockets because you never know when they're gonna--they crawl through the wire, they're real--trained well, and they carry charges, satchel charges, and when they get into the area, like when I was in the LRRP unit, they came in and they blew up something like fourteen helicopters and nobody saw anything. They sneak through the wire and then supposedly they have tunnels all over the base camp areas anyway, so they'd know where the tunnel escapes are. So they come in and they run through where the helicopters were, throwing satchel charges in 'em, blowing them up as they go along. And then all of a sudden they disappear and you never see them.
- Jim: You mentioned tunnels. Did you see any tunnels when you were out in your position with the Rangers?

Massey: Some. Old tunnels that didn't look like they had been used for a long time. We never went down into them or something. We'd just note them and, you know, if a line unit went in and wanted to check them out--we'd look into 'em a little bit but we wouldn't go down. You know; we weren't tunnel rats or anything.

Jim: Okay. How big was the An Khe base camp?

Massey: It was--I think from what I remember the circumference of it, if you rode around the wire, perimeter wire, it was like twenty-six miles. And then there was what they called, I think it was Hong Kong Mountain--in the middle of it. And 101st Airborne, I think, was up on the top of that, you know, for communications and stuff. But supposedly they had all kinds of tunnels in there, and that was one of the areas that supposedly when they raided into Cambodia that they were gonna--we had reports that the NVA and VC were moving into that area and they wanted to take over Hong Kong Mountain, but they never had any problems or anything.

Jim: How many soldiers were stationed at An Khe when you were there?

Massey: I couldn't say for sure how many. There's a lot of coming in and going back out and stuff. It was a big base camp.

Jim: Were there a lot of people there in administrative capacities and stuff like that?

Massey: Yeah, uh-hum. Yeah, it was finance headquarters and, you know, that was where all the generals in the area and stuff and--

Jim: Did they have a hospital there?

Massey: Yup.

Jim: Okay. Is there anything else that you should tell us about the An Khe or your experience there at the end of your career?

Massey: No. I never went on R and R until the very end.

Jim: Okay. Go ahead. Where did you go on R and R?

Massey: Da Nang.

Jim: Da Nang?

Massey: Yeah, I--for some reason I always felt that if I left the country I probably wouldn't want to go back, and I never felt I needed a break and then, you know, you're allowed either one seven day out of country or two, three day in-country R and R's, and I think when I was down there like my last two weeks, three weeks, I went to Da Nang for the six days.

- Jim: Okay. Where did you go in Da Nang?
- Massey: I just--to the air base there and then just hung out on the beach. It was a vacation. The Air Force was treated well. They had their mess hall; the food was a lot better than the Army and everything else, so it was like getting away. And it was a very well secured and relaxed feeling.
- Jim: Were you in that area called China Beach?
- Massey: Yeah.
- Jim: Okay. So when did you leave Vietnam and from where?
- Massey: Left from Bien Hoa and flew to--it had to have been like, October 29th, I can't remember the exact date, and then we flew into Fort Lewis in Washington--Seattle area, I think it was.
- Jim: Okay. And where were you processed out of the Army?
- Massey: There at Fort Lewis, Washington.
- Jim: Okay.
- Massey: We were discharged,--I remember taking the oath on October the 29th --or March 29th of 1969 and they released us--that was at 7:30 in the morning, and they released us at like 5:32 on the 30th of October. I got home on the 31st.
- Jim: So you left Vietnam on the 29th of October?
- Massey: Something like that. 'Cause I think you lose a day
- Jim: You lose a day crossing the international date line—
- Massey: It might have been the 27th or something, because I was in Fort Lewis a day or at least two days processing out.
- Jim: Did they give you any briefings on anything when you were in Fort Lewis?
- Massey: Only that we were still in the military even though we were discharged basically at 5:30, we would still be under military jurisdiction, and if you got in any trouble or anything else, we would be brought back into the Army, so behave yourself going home.
- Jim: And you were in the military until you got back to Madison?

- Massey: Yes. But they were saying, you know, if you got in trouble on the way back--
- Jim: Did they give you any counseling about any experience or anything like that?
- Massey: No. It was the same going over as coming back: you went over alone and you came back alone.
- Jim: Okay. What was your experience when you came back to the Madison, Dane County area?
- Massey: I came back into Sparta and it was--it was strange. You know, people treated you differently. They knew--in a small town, they knew you were overseas. They knew you were in the Army and that you were in Vietnam for the last year, and they--they'd say, "Hi," but they would be standoffish you know; they wouldn't be friendly toward you, more or less. They didn't know what you were gonna do or what you'd been through and how you were going to react.
- Jim: How did you feel about that? [clock chimes]
- Massey: I was a little upset about it. I felt it was a bad way to ever run a war, for them to send people over there by themselves. Once you got over there, you didn't know anybody and you--most people when you got over there didn't take the time to get to know you, because they figured you might not be around tomorrow anyways, so why waste your time. And it was my feeling, too. I got to know--in the Ranger unit, I got to know maybe five or six people fairly well and that's all I wanted to know. Luckily, the people I knew all made it back. I didn't know whether they made it back or not until the last year or two, when I started making contact with them.
- Jim: So you've made contact with some of the people you were close to?
- Massey: Yeah, three of them.
- Jim: And have you met with them physically, or do you just talk to each other on the phone?
- Massey: E-mail.
- Jim: E-mail?
- Massey: Uh-hum.
- Jim: How did you go about finding these folks?
- Massey: On a website. I just happened to come across it. I started looking for 'em probably two and a half years ago, and then last summer or last spring I came across this

one 4th Infantry Division LRRPs. It was a guest book sign in, and I started going to see who had signed in, and people made comments on it, and when they were there and stuff. I went down, and all of a sudden I see this Dave Bristow. He was the one that was the stateside qualified Ranger--

Jim: Okay.

Massey: --that I knew over there. And then I went down a little bit farther and here was Bob White.

Jim: Where are these two fellows from?

Massey: Colorado and Minnesota.

Jim: Okay.

Massey: And then when I--when I signed the guest book I signed it that I had made a couple of contacts, but I was still looking for two people. And then I, through that message, made contact with the one I had--what I considered my best friend over there and found out where he was. You know, he's in Lake Charles, Illinois.

Jim: Who was that?

Massey: Doug Chillers.

Jim: Okay. Have you seen him?

Massey: No. We've e-mailed and I called him once.

Jim: Okay.

Massey: And left a message but he hasn't returned the call. He's e-mailed me several times and wants to get together, but it's one of those things; you want to do it but then you're hesitant to do it.

Jim: Sure.

Massey: Because you're not sure what's gonna happen, you know, when you see him and stuff, so--but yeah, I tried calling him and left him a message and he hasn't returned the call yet, so I'm gonna have to--

Jim: Did you join a veteran's organization when you came back from Vietnam?

Massey: No.

Jim: Have you joined one since?

Massey: Yes, I have, about three years ago.

Jim: Okay. And what was that?

Massey: It's the Middleton VFW post.

Jim: Okay. And were you recruited by somebody?

Massey: Yeah. Pete Lundell [?]. I work with Fed Ex and he also works for Fed Ex, and he approached me one time, one day about if I was a member and if I'd be interested in joining his post.

Jim: Have you got anything more to say about either your Vietnam experience or your experience since you've come back from Vietnam that's related to it?

Massey: No. I remember when I got back from Vietnam and came back here the Vietnam protests were at their height here in Madison, and I remember going down and watching those and I was--yeah, I was upset with the protest. But I was amazed at how well organized they were and the number of people that showed up for them and how, you know, they maneuvered around and how coordinated they were.

Jim: Did you ever think about protesting yourself?

Massey: No. No. I believe we had a purpose of going over there, and my belief was that I had--I owed my country some service and, you know, if I got drafted I'd go where I was told, I'd do what I was told to do and then I'd come home and I would be fulfilled.

Jim: Okay. Is there anything more you'd like to say, Terry?

Massey: No. I think that's probably it.

Jim: Okay. That's the end of our discussion.

[End of Interview]