

Wisconsin Veterans Museum  
Research Center

Transcript of an  
Oral History Interview with  
TIMOTHY M. MCCUE  
Airborne Ranger, Army, Vietnam War.

2000

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**McCue, Timothy M.**, (1950- ). Oral History Interview, 2000.

User Copy: 2 sound cassettes (ca. 90 min.), analog, 1 7/8 ips, mono.

Master Copy: 1 sound cassette (ca. 90 min.), analog, 1 7/8 ips, mono.

Video Recording: 1 videorecording (ca. 90 min.); ½ inch, color.

Transcript: 0.1 linear ft. (1 folder).

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

**Abstract:**

Timothy M. McCue, a Madison, Wisconsin native, discusses his Vietnam War service as an airborne ranger with the 11th Light Infantry of the 23rd Division, including leading small patrols of American soldiers who called in air strikes. McCue states he enlisted and had basic training at Fort Campbell (Kentucky). He talks about pre-jump school at Fort Gordon (Georgia), airborne infantry training and officer candidate school at Fort Benning (Georgia), assignment to Alpha Company in the 75<sup>th</sup> Airborne Rangers, ranger school at Fort Benning and Eglin Air Force Base (Florida), and jungle warfare school in Panama. McCue evaluates the effectiveness and high difficulty of ranger training, stating that it saved his life in Vietnam. Sent to Vietnam, he was assigned as a platoon leader to Delta Company, 11<sup>th</sup> Light Infantry Brigade, 4<sup>th</sup> Battalion, 3<sup>rd</sup> Infantry Regiment, 23<sup>rd</sup> Infantry Division. Stationed near the Laotian border at Firebase San Juan Hill, he details recruiting and training volunteers to rebuild a reconnaissance platoon that had been completely destroyed during the Tet Offensive. He talks about leading patrols along Highway 9, fighting with a group of replacements to retake Khe Sanh, and preparations for the invasion of Laos. McCue describes the South Vietnamese Army, characterizing it as "corrupt," with excellent soldiers but poor leadership. He explains why not allowing Americans to fight in Laos was a disastrous mistake. McCue also voices criticism of General Creighton Abrams for dismantling the special forces troops and General Westmoreland for failing to change tactics in a jungle war and halting the Marine Corps' Civil Action Program. McCue states that jealousy towards airborne officers caused unnecessary rivalry, and he reflects on the downside of the military's officer promotion requirements. He praises General Weyand for his tactics during the Tet Offensive. McCue describes training his men with the M16, a typical patrol on "hardball trails," ambushing enemy camps, calling in air strikes on Vietnamese positions, and using guerilla tactics. He reflects on the intense training of the North Vietnamese Army for specific missions and his feelings that Americans were better soldiers because their training was not mission specific. McCue mentions the effect of the anti-war movement on the United State's withdrawal from Vietnam and being treated like a pariah by his former classmates. He analyzes the causes of the war and why, though "tactically and strategically we won the war," the United States pulled out of Vietnam. He compares the corruption in South Vietnam politics to the corruption of the Central and South American militaries. McCue describes the food and equipment his teams used in the field, the necessity of sometimes leaving behind wounded or dead, and the logistics of cigarette breaks while on patrol. He touches on being wounded by shrapnel and his R&R in Hong

Kong. McCue mentions using the GI Bill to attend the University of Wisconsin-Madison.

**Biographical Sketch:**

McCue (b.1950) served in the later years of the Vietnam War with the 23rd Infantry Division. He returned to Wisconsin after the war, eventually settling in Middleton.

Interviewed by James McIntosh, 2000  
Transcribed by Elisabeth Bownik, 2010  
Corrected by Channing Welch, 2010  
Corrections typed in by Noah Brooks-Motl, 2010  
Abstract written by Susan Krueger, 2011

**Transcribed Interview:**

Jim: All right, there we go. Talking to Tim McCue, and the date is 19 July, year 2000. What were—what year were you born, Tim?

Tim: I was born in 1950. January 4<sup>th</sup>, 1950.

Jim: One, '50. In Madison?

Tim: Yeah.

Jim: And you entered military service when?

Tim: Ah, I think July of 1968.

Jim: You volunteer or drafted, what?

Tim: I volunteered.

Jim: For the US Army?

Tim: Um-hmm.

Jim: U-S-A. And where did they send you?

Tim: First I went to Fort Campbell, Kentucky, for basic training.

Jim: And—and what unit was that?

Tim: Oh, I don't know. It was just a training battalion—

Jim: Just a—

Tim: Basic battalion

Jim: Right, for basic.

Tim: Yeah.

Jim: And then?

Tim: Let's see. Then I went to Fort Gordon, Georgia.

Jim: For?

Tim: For airborne infantry training.

Jim: Thought that was in—in Fort Benning.

Tim: No, it was—this was pre-jump school.

Jim: Oh, pre. Pre-jump.

Tim: This was—yeah, this was infantry training for airborne troopers, and then if you made it through that then you went to jump school.

Jim: Oh, I see. All right, then what—you were there—how long were you there?

Tim: About—I don't know—ten weeks. Something like that.

Jim: Ten weeks. And then Fort Benning?

Tim: Yeah, then I went to Fort Benning.

Jim: And—

Tim: That was for airborne.

Jim: Airborne. How long was that training?

Tim: Oh, I don't know. I think it was probably four weeks.

Jim: Four weeks.

Tim: Yeah.

Jim: That's all.

Tim: Yeah.

Jim: In four weeks how many jumps would you have to make before they accepted you?

Tim: I think you had to make five or six jumps. Yeah. Pretty-- at least five, maybe six jumps.

Jim: And then you joined what unit? The 101<sup>st</sup> or the 82<sup>nd</sup>, or—

Tim: No, from there I went to Officer Candidate School at Fort Benning.

Jim: Oh. And—OCS same place. Same base. And that training was how long?

Tim: That was six months.

Jim: Okay. Now you're really ready to produce for the Air Force, and then the airborne. Had all this training.

Tim: No, I wasn't done training yet.

Jim: Oh, you weren't. Oh, there's more. [Laughs.]

Tim: I got assigned to Alpha Company 75<sup>th</sup> Airborne Rangers.

Jim: Alpha Company. Fifth what?

Tim: 75<sup>th</sup>. Airborne. Rangers.

Jim: Oh, then you're really into the high—high-tech training.

Tim: Well, then I got assigned there, and then from there I went to Ranger School.

Jim: [Laughs.] How long were you in the Airborne Rangers?

Tim: Well I—I got assigned to the unit.

Jim: Oh, I see

Tim: I was only there a couple of weeks waiting to go to Ranger School.

Jim: Then Ranger School.

Tim: Then, I went to Ranger School.

Jim: Where was that?

Tim: It had three phases. The first—I think it was six months long—the first, maybe, two months were at Fort Benning. And then the next two months were up in the Blue Ridge Mountains up in Dahlonega, Georgia. And then the last phase was down at—in Florida at Eglin Air Force base up in the panhandle. And then from there I went back to the—to Alpha Company 75<sup>th</sup> Airborne Rangers. And then from there I volunteered to go to jungle warfare expert school in Panama.

Jim: [Laughs.] You were a trained for Jungle Warfare School?

Tim: Yeah. Jungle Warfare School in Panama. Jungle warfare expert school—

Jim: [Laughs.]

Tim: Was the full title, I think.

Jim: Geez, what training. I never had anybody had so much schooling and training as you. How long does that last?

Tim: I think that was about a month.

Jim: In Florida?

Tim: No, that was in Panama.

Jim: Panama. Alright.

Tim: And then I came home on leave, and then I went to Vietnam. And when I went to Vietnam I was assigned to the Americal Division. That's—

Jim: Vietnam, do you remember when you went to there?

Tim: Let's see. It would've been in, I think, June of 1970.

Jim: '70. Americal. C-a-l?

Tim: Yeah.

Jim: And there's an E on the end, or not?

Tim: No. No, just c-a-l.

Jim: Americal Division?

Tim: Yeah. That's the—that was the name of the division, but it was the 23<sup>rd</sup> Infantry Division.

Jim: Okay. And what were your specific duties, now?

Tim: I got assigned to the 11<sup>th</sup> Light Infantry Brigade. And I was in the 4<sup>th</sup> Battalion, 3<sup>rd</sup> Infantry. We worked way out in the mountains, along the Laotian border. And I was assigned to Delta Company as a platoon leader. Delta Company—I think the full strength of an infantry company at that time was 178 men. They had typically around ninety to one hundred men because of casualties. I spent about three weeks as a platoon leader, and then the battalion commander called me in to a fire—the firebase—firebase San Juan Hill out in the mountains.

Jim: In—in Laos or in Vietnam?

Tim: It's in Vietnam, but near the Laotian border. And his reconnaissance platoon had been wiped out in the previous Tet Offensive in 1970 in February, and he wanted to rebuild the reconnaissance platoon. So I took over the reconnaissance platoon, and I built it up from scratch. I had all volunteers. I had a number of brand new sergeants from the non-commissioned officers school who had volunteered to go to that school, and they came out as an E-5, as a buck sergeant, and then went to Vietnam. And I trained them as team leaders. I had anywhere from—I had six-man teams, but my team I had seven men, because I needed two radios. I needed one radio to talk on my internal net to my teams and then one—

Jim: Back to your base.

Tim: Yeah, well—yeah, or forward air controllers who were flying over. I had typically three teams. We operated out in that area.

Jim: Of six men each.

Tim: Six men each. But I would have casualties. Men's tours would end, and they would go back, and I would get more volunteers. I was constantly asking for volunteers. And then we went up—probably in the beginning of January—went up along the demilitarized zone for the invasion of Laos, so they put out a big call for volunteers for my unit, and I had—what did I have—I had about—they wanted me to go up to forty-four men, but I would weed out the volunteers. So typically I would take about half of the volunteers. You know, some people, you interview them, you know that they're lying and they're cowards, you know, or they have a big head. I only made one mistake the whole time.

Jim: Very good.

Tim: Yeah. Only one guy who I thought was going to be real good—we all thought he was going to be real tough.

Jim: And he couldn't hack it?

Tim: When we—the first time that he got into heavy combat, he just laid on the ground with his pack and refused to come up and help. So--and then I kicked him out soon as we got back in. We operated up there for the invasion of Laos. We operated at—first we—when we first got up there we did some patrolling around Con Thien which was an old Marine firebase along the demilitarized zone, while they were building up the troops. And then basically the invasion of Laos was—all the premiere South Vietnamese units were used to invade Laos, but the American Army cleared the way all the way out to the Laotian border. Highway 9 is the old, dirt French road that went all the way out to Khe Sanh and then across the Laotian border. We began to operate on both sides of the road, basically clearing operations. The South Vietnamese government and the South Vietnamese Army were incredibly corrupt. So we all knew that the North



Vietnamese would know that we were coming. It seemed like everybody in North Vietnam who could carry a gun came down through the DMZ. Our mission was basically to clear both sides of the road to keep the road open for convoys. We would leapfrog by helicopter and get dropped off on a ridge and then patrol down the ridge until we would get into contact and then call in fast movers, you know, jets or gunships, or if we were around artillery, we would call in artillery. I probably spent over 50 percent of my time operating beyond the artillery fan. So we were always way, way out there where we could not call in artillery. And that was my whole tour, you know, was operating along the mountains, well over 50 percent of the time outside of the artillery fan.

Jim: You were there a year?

Tim: Yeah. We operated all the way out to Khe Sauh. We retook Khe Sauh. Then we moved out toward Lang Vei which was an old special forces camp that was even closer to the Laotian border. Cleared that area, and then the South Vietnamese army moved through us and invaded Laos. And I don't know if you know the story of that, but it's incredibly sad. Their officer corps were not highly trained. You became an officer if your family was rich and they could purchase a commission for you. And they took their best units like their marine division, their first army division, their airborne divisions, their airborne ranger units, and basically—and their first—I think it was the first mechanized infantry division—sent them into Laos, but President Nixon had made a real big mistake—one of his many mistakes. He decreed that no Americans could go across the border for the invasion of Laos. He wanted—he wanted the operation as a showpiece for his Vietnamization program. Unfortunately, American advisors basically ran the South Vietnamese army units. They—they had some excellent soldiers. You know the old adage that it's not the soldiers, it's the training and the leadership that wins wars, and it's never the soldiers' fault? That was the problem with the South Vietnamese army.

Jim: Very poor leadership.

Tim: Very poor leadership. They got in there and very many of them were wiped out to a man. It was an ignominious retreat on their part through no fault of the soldiers. It was because they had no American advisors to lead them. There are stories about how South Vietnamese captains and colonels, generals didn't even know how to call in air strikes. Didn't know how to operate their units without the Americans there, the American advisors. And it was sad. I mean, we could see them coming out in choppers—hanging on—on Huey choppers, hanging on to the struts, you know, trying to evacuate. They were beaten horribly. I mean, we kicked butt. The Americans stood all the way out to the border. If the Americans had gone in, it would've been, you know—

Jim: The purpose of going to Laos was—

Tim: The purpose of going to Laos—

Jim: Interdict the supply—

Tim: Ho Chi Minh trail, supposedly, but it was—I mean, I read a lot. I'm a military history nut. I've got my basement room—I've got two walls, floor to ceiling, of bookcases I made full of military history books. I read a lot, not just on the war in Vietnam, but everything I've read on the war in Vietnam—it's so sad because they went to cut the Ho Chi Minh trail—there was a town called Tchepone, T-c-h-e-p-o-n-e, that Highway 9 went into in Laos—the town had been totally destroyed. Bombing, you know, years before. No one lived there. But that was the main objective, supposedly, was to reach the town of Tchepone because it was a road junction. And they actually made it to Tchepone, but there was nothing there. And then the South Vietnamese generals didn't know what to do so they left their troops there. The North Vietnamese brought in their tanks. There were tank battles. It was really hard for helicopters to fly, and for the fast movers—for the jets—to fly in support because the North Vietnamese had so many anti-aircraft weapons that they already had along the Ho Chi Minh trail, but they brought in an awful lot of them because they knew that we were coming. They had a lot of 37mm radar-controlled anti-aircraft weapons. And I believe the statistic was that we lost 350 Hueys in the operation. You know, Huey helicopters, those ships that were mostly flown by Americans. Nixon had decreed no ground troops, but, you know, the air support whether it was helicopters or B52s or jets—jet bombers—fighter bombers—were all flown by Americans. And we lost 350, I believe, choppers in the operation because we let the—basically, we let the South Vietnamese army operate beyond the border, and their officer corps was incapable of handling it. So-- and that I'm positive led to the downfall of the corrupt regime in South Vietnam after we pulled out. I think it was in '73 there was a major offensive—'72, '73.

Jim: That was the last, right?

Tim: No, that wasn't the last one. This was one where they invaded from North Vietnam into South Vietnam, and it was only American airpower that stopped that invasion because they had lost their—the vast majority of their premier units in South Vietnam because of the failed operation into Laos.

Jim: North Vietnam—North Vietnamese soldiers were pretty good.

Tim: Umm—

Jim: Or not.

Tim: You have to—you have to look at the big picture. They—we got drafted for one year, or I mean our tours were one year. If you got drafted at 18 years old in 1966

and came down the Ho Chi Minh trail, you were there for the duration. So if you could survive all the way until the final invasion—

Jim: That's pretty good after five or six years.

Tim: Well, you know, it's like World War II—quite frankly, all this Stephen Ambrose stuff—I mean, I've read a lot about WWII—the Germans laughed at the American soldier after the Normandy breakout because the American soldier had no combat experience.

Jim: Right.

Tim: But by the time we got to the Westwall [German name for the Siegfried Line in WW II] and were ready to invade Germany we were kicking their butts, but that only comes from combat experience. We had a lot of problems in the beginning of WWII—

Jim: Well, they had a real problem over there in Africa. They were really green there.

Tim: Really green. Kasserine Pass.

Jim: Yeah, see that was—

Tim: Yeah, that was— but that was also bad leadership. The commanding general—

Jim: I was gonna say that really wasn't the soldiers that time.

Tim: Yeah.

Jim: Yeah, a lot of guys got sent back to United States at a high level—command level.

Tim: I can't remember the commanding general's name, but he put—

Jim: Well, he went home.

Tim: Yeah, he—on the back side of a mountain range he had them dig a tunnel where his headquarters was, where his radios couldn't talk to anyone. But he was safe, you know. But that's always been a problem—not to—not to say that the American officer corps was perfect in Vietnam, not by any means. We had a lot of problems. I thought I had a career and in fact, I wrote my parents a letter before I went to Vietnam and said, "I've got a career." I thought, you know, here I had gone to all these schools, I—you know—I was third in my Ranger class. Ranger School is a very, very difficult school to make it through. I believe my class started with 360 or 365 students, and I lost thirty-five pounds. You're constantly patrolling. You get between zero and three hours of sleep a night.

You get by on one meal a day, C-rations, in Ranger School, and the Ranger training cadre were really mad when we graduated because it was the first class in like five or six years where they had graduated over a hundred students, and I think we had about 108 in our class. They were mumbling that it was a failure that they hadn't made more people flunk.

Jim: What was the purpose of starving you? Just get used to not eating, or what?

Tim: Ranger School is what kept me alive. It taught me how to—how far I could push myself beyond the limits. When people say, “Oh, I only got three or four hours sleep last night. I'm so tired,” I never say anything to them, but I always think to myself, “That's nothing.” You know, you need three hours of sleep to go into REM so anything beyond three hours is fine. If you only get one or two, then you actually didn't really get any sleep. The purpose in Ranger School was to graduate just a very, very elite few. One of the problems with the—well, there's a whole bunch of problems with the American officer corps. I'm sure they still exist today. There's always been a bad feeling with all the other officers against the paratrooper officers. First of all, because so many people drop out of paratrooper school because they're afraid. A statistic that I've heard a lot is that after the first jump—you know, the guys who've made it for the first jump—that usually, you know, between 40 and 50 percent will quit after the first jump.

Jim: That's enough?

Tim: Yeah, they're afraid to do it anymore. A classic officer who's considered a hero, who I really don't care for, is Creighton Abrams. Creighton Abrams was the--

Jim: Named a tank after him.

Tim: Yeah. Yeah, they did. But they named Fort Bragg after Braxton Bragg who was probably one of the worst officers in the history of the American military. Creighton Abrams was commander of the 37<sup>th</sup> Tank Battalion in WWII. His tank unit was the first unit to go into Bastogne to relieve the paratroopers there. The paratroopers don't have any tanks. They—the Ardennes Offensive by the Germans had the cream of their military equipment. It had all the Tiger and Panther tanks. The airborne troopers were very brave, stopped them, held Bastogne. Creighton Abrams hated airborne people after that because they got all the press, and he thought that he should've had it because he was the first unit in to relieve them. Consequently, when he went to Vietnam and took over after Westmoreland, one of the first things he did was dismantle Special Forces and get rid of them. They were probably one of the greatest things we had there. They had—they were small in number, but they had indigenous troops that they had trained, mercenaries who were Hmongs or Montagnards.

Jim: Yeah, a whole bunch of them.

Tim: Yeah. They had trained those people and led them.

Jim: Right. Now they live in Wausau.

Tim: Yeah. [Laughs.] Yeah, and San Francisco and all over.

Jim: Right.

Tim: But—which I think that we should've taken them because, you know—

Jim: Well, they wouldn't give them any payment. I thought that was terrible.

Tim: Yeah, that was—that was terrible. But, the thing is that Creighton Abrams dismantled them. He dismantled a force of over 100,000 troops that quite frankly we didn't care if they died, because they didn't count against us in the media for body count. But yeah, Creighton Abrams to me typified the anti-airborne—the anti-elite troop—flavor of the American officer corps, and I—in my dealings with officers—you know, I was a 2<sup>nd</sup> lieutenant and then a 1<sup>st</sup> lieutenant. In my dealings with officers I began to realize that airborne officers were people that I could count on and would treat me with respect, but that straight leg infantry or armor officers or helicopter officers were jealous. And they all had the opportunity to become airborne or even to go to Ranger School, but they didn't do it. And [laughs] you know, I mean I don't want to look at the camera and say, “So, were they cowards? I don't know. They had the chance to do it, and then they were jealous—” It's like being jealous of the football star—

Jim: Yeah, but that's—but that's rejection, you see. That's a—that's a very common trait of people. They—you project against something that—

Tim: That you can't do or haven't done.

Jim: Right.

Tim: Yeah. But the officer corps—the biggest problem with the officer corps in Vietnam was that—that they had these sibling rivalries, if you will. Plus the fact that in order to be promoted past captain you had to have what was called “your ticket punched,” meaning that you had to have command time with a combat unit in Vietnam, and then you had to have staff time in a combat unit in Vietnam. So typically an American officer, whether he was a lieutenant or a captain or a major or a colonel or a brigadier general or whatever, would go to Vietnam, and they would do a certain amount of time as a staff officer and a certain amount of time as a combat officer or vice versa. And then if you made a mistake in either situation you had what were called—or they still have today—“OERs,” Officer Efficiency Reports, and they're based on a 100 percentile, but if you don't get over about—I think it was a 94 or 95 percentile—once you want to make it past captain you go before the officer boards three times. If you don't get promoted to

the next grade then you have to retire. And that was a real problem in Vietnam that all these officers wanted their tickets punched. They had no concept of what combat was like because most of the time they were back in a firebase or flying in a helicopter. They had no idea what life was like on the ground for their troops, and they would make outrageous demands that cost a lot of casualties. Not to be down on the Marine Corps, but the Marine Corps had an even higher casualty ratio, but in my studies of military history the Marine Corps' attitude has always been "Damn the casualties. We're going to take the hill."

Jim: Straight ahead.

Tim: Yeah. And that was a problem in the Army, also. I don't—though I don't think to quite, you know, a higher degree. And trust me, I have nothing but the highest respect for the Marine Corps in Vietnam. They had one of the toughest jobs. We were working up in I Corps [one of four corps tactical zones in the Republic of Vietnam]. They fought some incredibly difficult battles, but I think it was poor officer leadership on their part at the higher—mid- and higher-levels—just like it was at the Army's levels. They got men killed. When I study the Civil War, and I—or the Revolutionary War—and I read about men getting on line, like at Gettysburg and charging across open fields and up hills, you know—ugh! I would never do that. I would never want to order my men to do that. That's insanity. You know, and then with the advent of the machine gun around the turn of the century it should've been obvious in World War I that the machine gun changed the whole ballgame just like heavy artillery did.

Jim: Defense won the World War I.

Tim: Mm-hmm. And the problem was that you would have, you know, like Passchendaele [one of the major battles of WWI] and the Battle of the Somme and Verdun. Think it was in Passchendaele where they—

Jim: 60,000 deaths.

Tim: Yeah, they called it the loss of the flower of a generation of England in one day. I mean, and that was just insanity, but it was on these officers' parts, who had no concept of what combat was like.

Jim: Right, they were—you know, and all wars seem to be fought with the equipment from the war—or the tactics of the previous war. And with the improvement in weapons, you see, the previous tactics are suicide now.

Tim: See, here's a—here's something for you. At the beginning of WWII, or actually in the '30s, there was a General McNair in the American Army—

Jim: He got killed.

Tim: Well, he—his—

Jim: In [Unintelligible] pocket.

Tim: Yeah.

Jim: By us.

Tim: Yeah. But, you know what? General McNair was in charge of tank and anti-tank development prior to the war, and he came up and embraced the 37mm anti-tank gun which was way too small to stop a tank, and then he had this attitude and this idea that tanks would never fight tanks.

Jim: Right.

Tim: And so that's why we ended up with the worst medium tank—the M4 Sherman—it was absolutely the worst medium tank. And we used that as our heavy tank, even though it was a medium tank. The rule of thumb in Europe was that the Americans needed to have between ten and twelve Sherman tanks to surround one Tiger tank to take it out—

Jim: Yeah, they had to shoot them from the side.

Tim: Yeah.

Jim: That's the only way they could disable the Tigers.

Tim: Yeah. And McNair was in charge of this, the tank development. He never got it, and I'm sure that we lost an incredible amount of people because of that. I mean, and it's like in WWII—in Europe—the Americans, whenever they would capture any German equipment they always wanted the Panzerfausts, which was their version of a bazooka, because it was ten times better than our bazooka. Our bazooka was—

Jim: Yeah, heavier.

Tim: Yeah, too small. But that—that carried over into Vietnam, that the total disregard for the welfare of the troops by the vast majority of the mid-level and senior officers—company commanders with incredible amounts of pressure on them to produce. I know—I've read a lot about the Battle of Khe Sauh, and I know that there was a captain in the 26<sup>th</sup> Marine Regiment, which were the guys who were at Khe Sauh for the battle—guys there, can't remember—his name eludes me—but he said that he reached a point that all these brand new 17 and 18 year old Marines showing up, that he could not look them in the face after a couple of months. He could not look them in the face because he knew that they were going to die or be maimed, you know, because of this—Westmoreland's idea that

we would hold this combat base way out in the middle of nowhere. Westmoreland I have no respect for. His plan was to fight a conventional war against a guerilla army. His plan was to fight what's called "the decisive battle," you know, to bring your enemy's army to a decisive battle where you can defeat them.

Jim: But guerillas don't fight that way.

Tim: No. And, in fact, the—I have nothing but the highest respect for the way that the North Vietnamese fought. They had four phases. They had—let's see if I can get these right. The first phase was to go in, set up, develop rapport with the people, like Mao's fish in the sea. Get your bases set up, train your cadre—your troops. The second phase was to start a limited guerilla war. The third phase was the major combat phase, I believe, which was what the Tet Offensive and all the offensives after that were. And then the fourth phase was basically mopping up. Unfortunately for them and fortunately for us—and I have to say this—we destroyed them in the Tet Offensive in 1968. The press gave us a very unfair—gave us a very unfair and distorted picture of what happened during the Tet Offensive, but during the Tet Offensive General Weyand, for example, down in—outside of Saigon—he knew it was coming. Westmoreland didn't. He tried to tell Westmoreland. Westmoreland was not the brightest light. **[End of Tape One, Side A]** But Westmoreland was tall and handsome and always got his ticket punched properly. And, anyway, General Weyand was the one basically who moved troops and protected Saigon. Westmoreland sent the 173<sup>rd</sup> Airborne Brigade out to Dak To and had them operate out there. This was prior to the Tet of '68. These were guys who had only operated along the coast, and there were two types of zones in Vietnam. There were free-fire zones where you could kill anyone you saw, and where there were theoretically no villages, no farms, no towns. And then there were the controlled-fire zones, which were along the coast. But well over 90 percent of the South Vietnamese population lived along the coast. Anyway, he sent these guys out with no combat experience in free-fire zones in the mountains. I think they lost in one battle 400 or 500 men. It was comparable to Hamburger Hill that the 101<sup>st</sup> went through. In both cases they were doing it to take objectives that didn't count because they would take the hilltops—

Jim: And then leave them.

Tim: Abandon them a day or two later. The Marine Corps, their theory of battle in Vietnam was to fight a mobile war just as the French had fought against the Viet Minh. But—

Jim: Well, except when they went to that—

Tim: Dien Bien Phu—



Jim: Right, then there's--

Tim: Was another Khe Sauh.

Jim: That's right, they made a mistake again.

Tim: Yeah.

Jim: They made—they gave the enemy all the advantages.

Tim: Yeah. They had the French—

Jim: The hill and the—

Tim: Yeah, Khe Sauh. I mean, I was there. It's down in a valley. I know.

Jim: That's right.

Tim: I did a—I did a real tour around Khe Sauh as we moved up to—moved out to Khe Sauh, we went from Con Thien to Camp Carroll to the Rock Pile. Then we moved to Khe Sauh, and then from Khe Sauh we moved out to Long Bay. You know, I mean, we were on the cutting edge. We were getting in combat almost every day. Sometimes several times a day.

Jim: What was your purpose? Just to destroy the Vietnamese?

Tim: Yeah, exactly.

Jim: Just essentially—

Tim: Exactly.

Jim: Basically—

Tim: Exactly. That was—yeah.

Jim: To engage them and so you could hold them still so you could shoot them.

Tim: Yeah.

Jim: And how did you get men to volunteer to do this sort of thing? What was the incentive for them? They couldn't get home any sooner.

Tim: They couldn't get home any sooner, but there were a lot of—as I said before, or I started to tell you—when I joined 4<sup>th</sup> Battalion 3<sup>rd</sup> Infantry and went to a line company, to Delta Company, there was only one officer out in the field. That was

the company commander. He was just tickled pink that he had a new officer. You had a lot of untrained people leading units, and that's where that mentality of "Let's just hide out, let's give false coordinates for where we are, let's tell them we're setting up an ambush but we're not on ambush. We're hiding out," that type of stuff. Well that's the type of stuff that eventually will get you killed, and keeping officers—I mean, the old thing of WWII, that 2<sup>nd</sup> lieutenants had the highest death rate in WWII, it's the same thing for 2<sup>nd</sup> and 1<sup>st</sup> lieutenants in Vietnam. Plus, even lieutenants and captains only had a six-month tour of duty in combat zone. I volunteered to stay in the whole time, because by the time I had been there six months I was so fed up with the officer corps and the way that they were running the war. The whole concept of the North Vietnamese Army being excellent fighters—incredible fighters—first of all, I'd say the vast majority of them were terrible shots. Second of all, their gun, the AK-47, is not a bad gun, but when you put it on "rock-n-roll," when you put it on fully automatic and pull the trigger, it lifts up just like a Thompson submachine gun—

Jim: You can't hold it?

Tim: No. What you need to do is to train your troops to fire in little touch-the-trigger, two- or three-round bursts. The beauty of the M16 is that it has a big spring plunger in the stock that absorbs the recoil. So whenever we'd come back to a firebase after a mission I was constantly having my men shoot. We—would dig a trench, run—

Jim: Practice.

Tim: Practice. Dig a trench, run a rope underground with—we'd take the 105 howitzer wooden crates that had—would have two shelles in them—always plenty of empty crates—pop a hole in each end, bury them, run a rope through, then take the C-ration cartons so a guy could walk with his M16 at port arms on fully automatic. We would follow behind and jerk on that rope and a—

Jim: Just a pop up?

Tim: A cardboard cutout from a C-ration case would pop up, and they could pull the trigger. Each pull of the trigger was a three-round burst, and with the M16 there's no recoil. You could shoot an M16, tuck it under, and pull the trigger on fully automatic, and actually, I mean, in the old days, that metal trashcan over there? I'd have no trouble just squeezing the trigger and putting three-round bursts in there until the magazine was empty, but the magazine only held twenty rounds. So—and with such a high cyclic rate you could burn out the ammo real quick. So, I didn't have—

Jim: Not the gun?

Tim: No, no. The ammo—or the gun wouldn't. The gun—

Jim: The gun would hold?

Tim: Yeah.

Jim: You could keep jamming more—more rounds into it?

Tim: Yeah, there was a problem in the beginning of the war when the—with jamming. And don't know if you know what caused that?

Jim: Yeah, I've seen it on TV—the History Channel. I've seen it twice about the gun. This little thing that got clogged up with dirt.

Tim: Yeah, what happened was the Air Force originally tested the M16 and said, “This is the best gun ever in the history of the world.”

Jim: [Laughs.] Right.

Tim: But they—when they tested it, it was a fantastic gun, and it was cycled at 1,200 rounds a minute which was incredibly fast. And it had this really fantastic powder in the shells that burned really clean. This really makes me sick. These guys should be shot. It was either two or three colonels from the Department of Defense who were involved in acquisitions, signed a no-bid contract with the DuPont Corporation to purchase an inferior powder which burned dirtier. And because of that the bolt with the firing pin would build up a lot of carbon.

Jim: That was it.

Tim: Yeah, and that—where the shell would go in the breech—

Jim: And then it wouldn't slide in the—wouldn't fit then.

Tim: Yeah. So, by the time I got over there they had—and both of these colonels, right after they signed the contracts, then they retired, and they both went to work for DuPont.

Jim: For DuPont. [Said simultaneously with Tim.]

Tim: They both should be—I'd be happy to handle the firing squad on that—

Jim: That's criminal.

Tim: It's very criminal. But what the Army did then was they—who knows what the bribes were paid—they decided to keep the powder from DuPont and let them have the contract for making the bullets, but to cycle the M16 down to, I think it's 600 rounds per minute. Still a fantastic gun. The gun operated really well. It

performed really well. My M16 had a noise suppressor on it which is a silencer. It was about ten inches long and about that big around—

Jim: [Laughs.] Jesus, that's—you had a long pin to carry around.

Tim: Ah, it wasn't that heavy, but it was great for us working in six-man teams because we only pretty much operated on trails. The trails were what we called "hardball trails." They were manmade, and they were wide enough, you know, that you could walk down and not touch any vegetation. The trees in the jungle were to 100 to 150 feet high, you know, 8-foot-in-diameter trees. You couldn't see more than about twenty feet if you were lucky in the jungle. But the way we operated was we'd have a point man, and then the slack man covering him. I very seldom did I ever have any booby traps because I worked so far out. Booby traps were mainly out along the coast. I very—I don't ever remember—

Jim: Oh. In the—in the jungle you didn't see many booby traps?

Tim: No, if they knew you were coming they would set them up. You know, if you were around a base camp, or if they wanted to stop you, but we very seldom had any booby traps, and they would be incredibly easy for us to spot because the trail was packed dirt. Real hard.

Jim: About how wide? The average trail—

Tim: Oh, maybe four to six feet wide.

Jim: But your point man, now, how did he look for, maybe, an ambush? How did you prevent that?

Tim: You—first of all, we never talked out loud from the time we got off the choppers until we got back on them unless we were in a firefight. We never walked through open areas. We avoided—

Jim: But you're on a trail. That's somewhat open, isn't it?

Tim: Yeah, but you know, the trails don't typically go straight. It isn't like they're a half mile straight and you can see that distance. It would—because it was all mountainous pretty much the trails would pretty much contour along the sides of the mountain or be on the ridge tops. Then they'd have, you knowm just debris that, they'd have to go around. So you might have a thirty meter section that would be kind of straight where you could see to the end of it.

Jim: How far ahead would he be from the rest of the squad?

Tim: Well, we did—I hope you don't mind me saying this—there was a thing that we'd always say to everybody about "Don't be in a cluster fuck." That was more—

Jim: Sure.

Tim: More than two people together in a group. But typically, he would be six, eight feet, maybe ten feet in front of the point—or the slack man, and the slack man was covering him, because he would be looking down at the ground as he'd be moving along—

Jim: The point man would be—had his head down.

Tim: Well, not always. I mean, he would be walking along, but he could scan ahead, but it was so open that you could tell if they had put a booby trap, put a trip wire out. And what he would do is he would walk along—the slack man would walk, and he would carry his M16 typically on full automatic with his finger over the trigger guard. The slack man would walk with his M16 on full automatic, you know, his finger over the trigger guard. I would always go third. Sometimes I'd walk slack, sometimes I'd walk point, depending on the situation.

Jim: So, if he suddenly spotted something, then what? Hand signal back?

Tim: Depend on what he saw. If—typically what would happen is we'd bump into them, and—

Jim: Coming down the trail at you? [Laughs.]

Tim: Yeah. Yeah, and they would—

Jim: Oh, my!

Tim: They would typically have their AK-47 slung over their shoulders because they wouldn't know we were there because we were way out in—well, you know, some people would call it “Injun Country.” So, we would typically bump into them. They wouldn't know we were coming.

Jim: Then what would we do? What would be the scene then?

Tim: The point man would spray on—

Jim: Oh, he'd shoot right away?

Tim: Yeah. On full automatic, yeah. He had full automatic, his gun would be on, he would—

Jim: Oh, he wouldn't wait for you to catch up or anything.

- Tim: Oh, no, no, no. I wouldn't be that far away. I might—I might be twenty feet behind him.
- Jim: So the first time you knew there was trouble was when his gun went off.
- Tim: Unless I could see in front of him if it was in a straight section. But typically it wouldn't be. But he would go—he would either hose down with a full magazine or do the three-round bursts. Then he would fall to the side of the trail and put in another magazine. Then the slack man would do three-round bursts of suppressive fire—
- Jim: By that time there was no one to shoot. The first guy had probably been downed and you couldn't see the rest of the Vietnamese then.
- Tim: It would depend. I mean, we might come to a bend in the trail, and as he would come around the bend in the trail there could be ten of them walking toward us.
- Jim: Oh, so there's still plenty to shoot at.
- Tim: Yeah, it would depend. But see, they would go down right away also.
- Jim: But you—I was gonna say your second man would be receiving fire then.
- Tim: Not necessarily 'cause the first guy, you could—
- Jim: Oh, that's right. They had their rifles un-slung.
- Tim: Yeah, or slung. You know, typically.
- Jim: Or slung.
- Tim: You wouldn't believe how fast you can shoot off a magazine when, you know, the pucker factor is there.
- Jim: [Laughs.]
- Tim: But then the slack man would shoot. Then I would be ready—okay?—to give some more suppressive fire while the slack man would fall to the side, and he would be putting in another magazine.
- Jim: So, one of—you had two men on each side of the trail.
- Tim: Yeah. Well, depends. If we're contouring you always fall to the up-side of the trail. Grenades would be made ready to throw grenades. And immediately we'd throw grenades. Grenade's an excellent weapon. Then I'd have to make a

decision as to was this a three-man patrol, was this a ten-man patrol, was this a twenty-man platoon, was this a 150-man company—

Jim: So, if they had you outnumbered greatly then we'd get the hell out of there?

Tim: Yeah, it's called an immediate action drill. This is where my—my training came in, and I trained my men to do this. Then what you do, you know, if I—if I start yelling, "Pull back, pull back," then the point man, the slack man would throw grenades. You know—they would—the point man would stand up and do the three-round bursts or fire off a whole magazine. Then he'd turn around and run back to the rear of the team. Then the slack man would do the same thing and turn around and run around to the back. Then I would do the same thing and turn around, run to the back, and then we would get out of there. Meanwhile, my RTOs, my radio operators, the one radio operator I had who would—could talk to the higher echelons, if you will. He would be calling for gunships, or trying to get a hold of a FAC, a forward air controller for fast movers, for jets, to come in. And then my other RTO would be calling the other teams—

Jim: And let them know what's going on.

Tim: Let them know where we were, and, you know, what was going on. And the problem was that for an extraction it was always very difficult to get a helicopter in, because you had to have a landing zone, and landing zones were few and far between down the [unintelligible].

Jim: In the jungle there weren't—there weren't many of those.

Tim: Yeah. There were times where we would be, you know, playing cat-and-mouse with them in an area for, like, three or four days where they would—

Jim: Oh, you'd go back for awhile, and then—

Tim: Well, they'd be chasing us because they had a larger unit, you know.

Jim: Oh, yeah. I see.

Tim: And I'd be coordinating my other teams whether I had two or three or four, you know, or even five—

Jim: So, theoretically you could --

[Approx. 5 sec pause in tape.]

Tim: You got a larger unit, it's a real problem for you to have to deal with them. See, surprise is the name of the game. If they surprise you, and they outnumber you,

you've got a real problem. But if you can be quiet enough, and you can surprise them, you have a definite advantage.

Jim: Even though you're fewer in number.

Tim: Mm-hmm. There were times that we did—on these trails we called them way stations, and for some reason I could always smell them long before we'd get to them. Reason I could smell them is because they cooked over wood fires, and I could smell the—

Jim: Wood.

Tim: Burning wood smell, and also they—they cooked meat over them. You could smell charcoal, you know, like hickory smoked wood type flavor, whatever. I could—I could smell that stuff, and nobody else could, and guys would go, you know, the first couple of times guys were like, "I don't smell anything." And then half an hour later, we'd come to a way station. What we would—and these were just—way stations were where they could be moving coming from Laos, heading into the coast to do something, and they would stop and stay overnight there. What we would do is we would sneak up on them, drop our packs, leave one of the RTOs with the packs to secure them, and then we would sneak up on the—the way station, circle around, see who was there, then attack it. Sometimes we'd go beyond the way station in the afternoon, and then we'd set up an ambush, figuring that they—you know, it's like the old crusader castles. The old crusader castles were always a half day apart so you could always sleep in a crusader castle, take an afternoon siesta, and then sleep there that night. So, typically they were within a half to two-thirds of a day apart. Sometimes they'd be like a mini base camp where there'd be three or four hooches that would be set up. We—what we'd do is we'd sneak around, see who was there, then figure out what we were gonna do, and maybe I'd call the forward air controller and call the fast movers. We'd back up, have them come in and drop bombs on them or have gunships come in and shoot rockets and use mini guns, and then we'd sweep in. Sometimes we'd pull a raid on it where we'd—we'd go—we'd call them and have them on station or inbound, and then we'd go in and attack. You know, inflict as many casualties and as much damage as possible even though the enemy was larger, then pull back, and then get—head back to where we knew there was an extraction site on the landing zone. Meanwhile calling in the airstrikes or the gunships to attack and to cover our retreat, so to speak.

Jim: Would that generally work good?

Tim: Yeah.

Jim: Calling (??) the air con—your air contact was reliable and—

Tim: Yeah. Yeah, I was always very, very impressed with the—



Jim: They could pick out the spot you ask for.

Tim: Well, you throw a smoke grenade and give them a direction on the compass, maybe 120 degrees from the—you'd have them identify the smoke. You—

Jim: They could put it within fifty yards of that smoke?

Tim: Yeah. They could bring it generally right on target. And you could always direct them from there, and then you'd have them lay down suppressive fire if you were pulling back. There were times that we pulled raids on base camps that were—the enemy was numerically superior, but we caught them at total surprise. So we'd sweep in, put out a whole bunch of rounds, throw a bunch of grenades, use the grenade launchers, inflict a bunch of casualties.

Jim: And skedaddle.

Tim: Yeah. Try and get documents or whatever, and then skedaddle, and then get out of there, and then as we're running away me telling the fast movers on the radio that—throw smoke out, "There's the smoke. You can go ahead." We used to call it "Bring in the world."

Jim: What is the difference between Ranger training and just regular—I mean, what does the Ranger training offer you? How to live in a jungle?

Tim: It shows you how to operate for long periods of time at—in combat situations, where it's very intense for a long period of time or behind enemy lines. kind of what I was saying earlier about the advent of the machine gun should've told everybody not to attack on line. I'll never forget this: in my airborne infantry training we spent one afternoon getting on line and walking across an open field, squeezing triggers, shooting blanks at an imaginary bunker where there was supposed to be a machine gun set up. We would've all been killed. But Ranger training—I mean, Rangers are the elite combat force that we have in the American Army. Special Forces are—are great—

Jim: Seals?

Tim: Yeah, but see, those are really tiny units. We—for—and I have nothing but respect for Seals or Marine Force Recon. They're all—

Jim: Essentially the same, right?

Tim: Well, they're all—they're all combat—definitely combat-trained elite troops, but they—they have kind of different missions. We have, today—in those days we had the 75<sup>th</sup> Airborne Ranger Regiment, but they weren't regiments. They were Ranger companies—

Jim: Companies, right.

Tim: In Vietnam. Today we have Ranger regiments which are light infantry that are kind of akin to the—and they can do small-unit patrolling, aggressive patrolling, be dropped behind enemy lines and exist behind enemy lines.

Jim: This seems to be, from what I read and watch on television, that these kind of units are designed so they can be alone and deal with whatever problem is that they don't have to have outside help for the moment to—

Tim: They don't have the big supply lines that—

Jim: Right. They're used to not having—they're used to being independent and making decisions on the spot—

Tim: Yeah.

Jim: And that sort of thing for whatever they may encounter.

Tim: See, one advantage that we had against the North Vietnamese was that the actual way the North Vietnamese and the hardcore Viet Cong battalions operated was they only wanted to do combat three, maybe four times at the most, a year. They would train and train with sand mockups and mockups in the jungle of what their objective was, and they'd be in a base camp along the Laotian border, and then the unit would infiltrate all the way to the coast, do that one attack, capture the firebase or whatever, I mean—or try to—I mean, they didn't actually have much success against us. We typically—I think we killed 3,500,000 of them, and they killed 58,000 of us, so there's a great statistic. Who won the war? [Laughs.] But anyway, that's what they were looking for was to operate like that. So in a situation where we could—we would be out there in their territory looking for them. If they didn't know we were there we had a definite leg up. We had a super advantage. A problem with the American Army was taking an entire battalion and helicoptering them in to a big landing zone in the jungle, and then having them move and operate where people in the front of the column were shouting back to people in the rear of the column, and they were getting two hot meals a day flown in, and resupply choppers all the time, and senior officers flying in and getting off and talking for two minutes and going, "It's hot. Let's go back to our air-conditioned trailer back in Saigon," and all that. That cost us a lot of casualties because we weren't operating quietly. We—my units operated quietly, but the standard American infantry was—

Jim: Well, you were fighting the war the way you're supposed to fight a guerilla war with guerillas.

Tim: Right.

Jim: That's the way you defeat a guerilla army is more guerillas. You don't feed them—[laughs]—defeat them with a standard army because the guerillas have all the advantages. They're in their own element.

Tim: Element, exactly. When they would train to do, like, LZ Mary Ann, a firebase that was overrun when I was in Vietnam—was kind of out in the mountains, but they had—the NVA had trained for months on taking it. They—unfortunately, the artillery battery that was there—the 105 Howitzer Battery, was operated by South Vietnamese, and they were infiltrated by the Viet Cong. Well when these guys attacked, you had all these Americans who hadn't had any problems around that firebase for like six months. Guys were asleep on guard duty. They pretty much killed most of the Americans that were there, and the Viet Cong that had infiltrated the South Vietnamese Army turned the 105 howitzers on the Americans that were there on the firebase, that were, you know, shooting at them. But my experience on firebases were that I was always way out there in the mountains. They were always like LZ Professional or LZ San Juan Hill, for example. These were firebases that were on mountaintops. They were sandbag forts with bunkers, and we'd always have three to five 105 howitzers there. These particular forts were, you know—people knew that we—it was a dangerous situation, so you didn't have 80 percent of the people on guard sleeping all night in a bunker or something like that. I mean, you know, there was better control, but it—and there, again, it's the fault of the commanding officer and the other officers and the lifer sergeants—the senior career sergeants—for not going around all the time and making sure that everybody was awake, and everybody—you know, it's like you have to make sure, with the regular infantry that their guns are clean. You have to make sure that they take their malaria pills. You have to—you have to make sure that you—I don't know if you've ever seen pictures of everybody laying on their back holding their feet up in the air with their boots and socks laying there? You have to check their feet to make sure they don't have blisters, you know?

Jim: No kidding. I don't understand is that these—this is nothing new.

Tim: Right.

Jim: They learned this lesson in WWI.

Tim: Yeah.

Jim: They learned it in WWII. What happens to people? Why don't they, you know—this is their business. Why doesn't the Army—

Tim: Yeah, you'd think that a career officer who's—

Jim: Would never lose that.

Tim: Yeah. You'd think a career officer who was worried about the career would make sure—and a lot of them—there were a lot of officers who did, but—don't get me wrong when I'm denigrating the officer corps. But too many of the officer corps would wait until something would go wrong and then have a fit. They were more worried about getting their ticket punched—

Jim: Career.

Tim: And their career than actually accomplishing anything.

Jim: Is this because the war didn't seem to have much purpose?

Tim: Um—I think—

Jim: Was it to just to stop and then kill the Vietnamese?

Tim: I think that the purpose of the war was totally misunderstood by Westmoreland with his conventional warfare tactics, and I think that when Creighton Abrams took it over he felt like he was going to be the architect of the dismantling of the American military presence there. And, like I said, he wanted to get paratrooper units out of there. He wanted to get Special Forces out, but that was a personal vendetta, and everybody knows it. I don't think he was that good of a general. I think he was—he had a better understanding of guerrilla warfare than Westmoreland had, but ultimately I think that the Marine Corps' concept of—Marine Corps had a dual concept: winning the hearts and the minds of the people. That was where the Marine Corps had their civic action patrols where they'd take a platoon of Marines and put them in a village. They'd live with the people. They'd go out—half of them would go out on a patrol every night—

Jim: Just like the North Vietnam.

Tim: Yeah. Yeah. Exactly.

Jim: Same thing.

Tim: Yeah, and the Marine Corps wanted to do that, and Westmoreland told them no, that they had to go out, and—like, to Khe Sauh, or—and they operated up along the demilitarized zone closer to the coast where it was more open and kind of—not hilly or anything—kinda grassland. But they—the Marine Corps had a better concept of it, and Westmoreland wouldn't let them do it. He ordered them to stop doing that 'cause he wanted to fight the decisive battle so that he could be in the annals of great commanders and be on the History Channel. Well, you know, I—anything on Westmoreland that's on the History Channel has to show him as being a loser. He was a bad general, and I think the war—by the time we had figured out how to operate it was 1970, and by then we were starting to pull out. I

said earlier that we killed like 3,500,000 of them, and they killed 58,000 of us. We actually won the war militarily. Tactically and strategically we won the war, but there were certain problems. One problem was, of course, that there was an anti-war movement that got a lot of press, okay? And I—in my graduating high school class from Memorial High School I was the only one to go to Vietnam.

Jim: Oh, really?

Tim: Yeah. Everybody else in my class in Vietnam—or, I mean, in Memorial High School—everybody else in my class went to a university or a college. So, that kinda has made me a pariah. I don't go to my reunions.

Jim: Oh, really?

Tim: No, I don't go to my reunions. I was, in fact—I got a Purple Heart up—one time, one of my Purple Hearts I got up at—for the invasion of Laos. And I was sent back to a hospital in Qui Nhon to recuperate, and CBS News came in and interviewed me. And everybody back here in Madison saw it or got word of it—all the people that I grew up with—and that just increased my pariah status. But I have to say that the war was wrong, not only because of the way we fought it, [Approx. 5 sec. break in recording. Tape resumes with Mr. McCue saying “class went to” from previous exchange.] but because of the government that we supported there which was incredibly corrupt. I mean, Nguyen Van Thieu, one of the last presidents there—I remember reading about an election where he got 98.6 percent of the vote. That's absurd. But we supported these people, and they were—we had a saying that if you saw a fat Vietnamese it meant they were corrupt. If you saw a fat Vietnamese he was either dressed in like a suit or really nice clothes or dressed as a senior officer. Or if you saw a fat Vietnamese woman she was dressed in a really expensive outfit and being followed by servants. People were—the Vietnamese government and military were incredibly corrupt. So we made it—

Jim: Well, why did we have to be there at all? Our sense of—

Tim: Well, it goes back to the Dulles brothers.

Jim: I mean, the Vietnamese were—fought the Chinese for centuries trying to be independent. What would happen if we just did nothing and let them settle that by themselves?

Tim: Well, see, I believe that the domino theory was correct, that if—what happened was at the end of WWII the OSS had said, “Ho Chi Minh is a populist. Sure he's a Communist, but—”

Jim: Yeah.

Tim: “But he’s the best chance we have to bring in to a multi-party system government with a parliament. Let’s use him.” But the anti-Communist people back in the State Department—you know, the government—said, “No, no, no, no.” So what they ended up doing was bringing in the Emperor, Bao Dai, and reinstalling him. The Dulles brothers: one was Secretary of State, and one was the chief of the CIA. Two old-school, Princeton, super-rightwing, old money, Republican, anti-union, anti-liberal, all this stuff—they were the ones who, basically—

Jim: Sent (??) policy.

Tim: They—yeah, but they fooled Eisenhower. And if you remember, Eisenhower’s last speech was a warning against the military industrial complex, ‘because he had finally woke up to the fact that he was a figurehead commander in WWII, and then he was a basically a figurehead president for—but the Dulles brothers were the guys who got this goofy peace with the Geneva Conference in—what was it, ’56 after the French pulled out—started to pull out in like ’54—and they divided the country which was a bad move, and—

Jim: Yeah, we kowtowed to the French after WWII and let them back in there.

Tim: Yeah, we [**End of Tape One, Side B**] should have never let them back in there.

Jim: That’s right. That was a deal made—

Tim: Yeah. Yeah, it was—it was definitely a deal.

Jim: That was the first major mistake.

Tim: Yeah, but then they—what did the Dulles brothers do? They installed this guy named Diem, D-i-e-m, and he was a Catholic from a very wealthy Catholic family. Well, unfortunately, the Catholics were less than ten percent of the population. The vast majority were Buddhist. So nobody liked him, and then he had his brother as chief of the secret police. He had all kinds of relatives and other corrupt people who were in charge of the military, and we continued to support them all the way through the ‘50s and into the ‘60s. And unfortunately, I guess for the anti-war movement I want to say they were right. The war was wrong. But they were right for the wrong reasons, because they had no concept other than it was—you know—was kind of a neat thing to wear your hair long, which I did after I got back, and I had a beard. But it was kind of a neat thing to be against the war and against the government, you know. It’s like—

Jim: That was the ‘60s.

Tim: Yeah, it was the ‘60s and into the—the early ‘70s, you know. The war was—the—I can’t remember what the general’s name was who was Commander-in-Chief in Vietnam prior to Westmoreland, but he was a total—I want to say

Harkin? Harkins? Or Harkness, or something like that—he was a total loser in the fact that the South Vietnamese military were using—anytime any—there would be a village where there were supposed to be Viet Cong they would just have airstrikes on it, or they would, you know, shoot artillery into the village killing innocent civilians which would turn everybody in the village against the government and make them pro-Viet Cong. And that kind of led up to the fact—and you remember the four phases I told you of the Communist insurgency—they were starting in the mid—by the mid-‘60s they were starting to get in—they were in the second phase, and they wanted to gear up for the third phase.

Unfortunately for America, we—we didn’t understand what was going on, and they—the officers who were in MACV, the Military Assistance Command in Vietnam, senior officers, they were all these old WWII guys who—or Korean War guys who were getting close to retirement age. They were stuck in a place where, you know, they had servants, they had air conditioning, you know, they had—they had their—

Jim: They didn’t get out to see what was happening.

Tim: Yeah, their champagne and their chardonnay and their shrimp cocktails and all that, and they just were taking the money from the American govern—the American government was giving the money to the South Vietnamese. They were blowing it all. The South Vietnamese Army, you know, was not—their military was not performing at all, but this was something that we had this whole McCarthyism, anti-Communism, that was ingrained from the late ‘40s and then the ‘50s, carried over into the ‘60s, so it was—you know, it’s like throwing good money after bad. It’s like now they want to do this stuff in Colombia. That’s a total waste. I was in Colombia mountain climbing in the ‘70s, and I’ve always been a big mountain climber. I’ve climbed all over in the Andes. And I always call the State Department before I would go to a country and tell them where we were going to go, and I called the State Department and asked for the Colombia desk, and they said, “Well, first of all, the army is totally separate from the government.” And I went, “Really?” And they said, “Yeah.” You know, it’s the old Central and South American thing, where a hundred families control the country, you know. It’s like Mexico. You can only buy Coca-Cola there. If you wanted to open a Pepsi distributorship they’d just kill you, and no one would prosecute anybody ‘cause there’s a hundred families that control the country. It’s like that in virtually every one of those countries. Well, Colombia, the army is totally separate from the government. They do what they want. You’ve got—you’ve got the government which is corrupt. The previous president was—they had all this evidence. They proved that he was—he had taken like, 6,000,000 dollars worth of bribes from the narco traffickers. The government never bothered to prosecute him. You know, and now here our federal government, our military, Barry McCaffrey, former general in the Gulf War, and ticket punching officer during the war in Vietnam, real aggressive officer, supposedly. He’s in charge of the—he’s the drug czar—he wants to dump all this money, I think it’s 1.3 billion dollars there. It’s gonna be used for corrupt purposes. The narco

traffickers, the cartels, and then you've got the guerilla movements, and the guerilla movements control wide swaths of the country where they're into growing cocaine and using it, and they're getting rich themselves. They've been co-opted from their leftist, Maoist roots. I mean, it's just sad. And here we're going to start throwing a bunch of money in there. It's—it's like El Salvador. Their best during the war in El Salvador—that was a pathetic war. And we had American advisors there, and it's sad. Their Atlacatl Battalion, their best battalion, was trained and led by Special Forces. They had the highest rate of massacres of innocent civilians, you know, and Reagan kept saying, "No, that's not happening." There was a bunch of peasant Indians went to San Salvador to protest for the way the military was treating them. Broad daylight in the town square, the capitol there, the big cathedral. The national police came and set up machine guns. It was on every network all around the world and every newspaper. They killed about 250 innocent men, women and children. They just machine gunned them because they had a protest against the military for being totally out of control. But their military down there was incredibly corrupt, and even today their military down there—

Jim: Still the same.

Tim: Yeah, they—the Army now—or the American military wants to set up an airbase now in El Salvador to use it to—not to interdict drug flights but to actually be able to monitor them, radar them and pass the information on, and the bad thing is that the military there—and everybody knows it, I read it all the time—the military in El Salvador is a major facilitator of transshipment of cocaine coming into the United States. They're using military planes. They're using military bases to do this stuff, you know. But we just, you know, we think it's fine to send all this money to Colombia. We wasted all this money and killed all these civilians in Guatemala, and—

Jim: Nobody's really willing to go down there and really do something, I think.

Tim: That's true. That's very true.

Jim: They—they turn their back on it.

Tim: Yeah, now, see, the Colombian military—once again, you buy a commission. The soldiers are not trained. They're given weapons. They never get to shoot them. You know, they're—they're not well trained. If they were well trained—if they were as well trained as the American Army was in 1971 in Vietnam—if we could take that army and move it over and dump it down in Colombia it might take three years, but we'd be able to get them. We'd be able to beat them. That's one thing that gets me about the war in Afghanistan with the Russians. There were no trees in Afghanistan. I couldn't figure out why the Russians couldn't beat them. Our biggest problem in wiping out the Viet Cong and the NVA was the fact that the jungle was so overgrown and so huge and so thick—



Jim: It's hard to get them.

Tim: But there's no trees in Afghanistan. It's basically desert and mountainous desert, you know.

Jim: Biggest problem, I think, with the Russians is the—the missile—missiles could be shot from the shoulder—could brought—bring down their helicopters.

Tim: Yeah. Yeah. They could, but by the same token—don't get me going on the Russian military. The Russian military—just briefly—is a worthless force, that's always been a total paper tiger even though it's really huge. The reason it's been—always been a paper tiger is their—you have an officer corps, a sergeant corps and an enlisted corps in an army, and an army is run by the sergeants. The sergeants are the guys—the lieutenant will tell the sergeant, "We've gotta take this hill. Get the men formed up, squads on line. First, second and third squad, fourth squad'll be the reserve. [Arouse (??)] ready reaction force, and get them ready. We're going up." In Russia sergeants have no authority in the Russian army. So being a sergeant is a joke. Another problem with the Russian army is I think you make about eight dollars a month.

Jim: Yeah.

Tim: You know, and then the stuff that happened in Chechnya. The Russian soldiers were begging food from the journalists—

Jim: [Laughs.]

Tim: Because they couldn't supply them, you know.

Jim: Sad.

Tim: I mean, it's—there's another classic example of an army that started out as a poor military force when the Operation Barbarossa started in WWII. They invaded with 3,500,000 men—the Germans did—but the Russians pulled back, built up the military. They didn't care how many men they lost, but by the time they got to Poland they pushed all the way into Berlin, but by the time they got to Poland they were a hellacious fighting force. But they didn't do much after that, and then the war in Afghanistan comes along, and you've got the Russian army is top-heavy with senior officers who don't—

Jim: Same problems.

Tim: Yeah. Don't know what they're doing, and you had all these young guys who weren't motivated. They weren't getting paid. They couldn't figure out why they were there. But yeah, that—the war in Afghanistan was horribly mismanaged.

But like I see—say, there weren't any trees. I don't know [laughs] how they couldn't beat them.

Jim: [Laughs.]

Tim: So—

Jim: Tell me about—what medals did you win?

Tim: ah—and I'm sorry 'cause I had this root canal yesterday. I was going to grab a bunch of stuff out of the folder and bring it. I got Air Medals. Several Air Medals, like three or four Air Medals. Those are for helicopter combat assaults. Quite a few Bronze Stars for valor.

Jim: Quite a few.

Tim: Yeah. I—see, I got—when I got back then I started receiving stuff in the mail. Like the Purple Heart would come in the mail, you know, with orders. You only actually get one medal. Like, say, for Purple Heart, you get one Purple Heart medal with a certificate, and then every one after that you just get a certificate. Bronze Stars for valor, I have several of those. I have Army Commendation Medals for valor. Those are all valorous awards. I've got Vietnamese Cross of Gallantry.

Jim: Oh, that's nice.

Tim: Yeah, which was their—the Vietnamese—South Vietnamese version of the Silver Star. Purple Hearts. Campaign ribbons, for trying to think—let's see, Air Medals, Good Conduct [laughs] Medal. I have, I think, five rows—four rows with one on top of stuff.

Jim: Oh, that's great.

Tim: I can't think of what they all are—of what they all are. But, I got a problem. I—I received this stuff, and I didn't get married until I was thirty-five—1985—and my mom—I had—I had a trunk. I lived at my grandfather's house on Chadbourne Avenue for awhile, off and on. I went to University of Wisconsin off and on, and then I was basically—

Jim: On the G.I. Bill?

Tim: Yeah. Yeah. Which was a good deal, I think, a very good thing.

Jim: Always is.

Tim: Yeah.

Jim: Greatest piece of social legislation this country's ever had.

Tim: Yeah.

Jim: Made the middle class of this country.

Tim: It did. It educated everybody. But I—I had—I was basically hanging out for my next expedition, and I could live there rent-free, and I could go to school, and then I'd work part-time, and I'd save up money. We'd go off on a climbing expedition in Yukon or British Columbia or the Wind Rivers in Wyoming—

Jim: Prolonging your childhood.

Tim: Yeah. Yeah, exactly.

Jim: [Laughs.]

Tim: Exactly. But see, I'm a risk junkie. I'm a—I've—I love to parachute. I love to mountain climb. I love to whitewater canoe. But I—basically, I had a trunk, and I had—

Jim: I bet he threw it out?

Tim: Yeah. My mom threw it out. It had about 350 photos and slides that I had taken.

Jim: Oh.

Tim: And it—

Jim: How could she do that?

Tim: It had a whole bunch of my military awards—my orders—

Jim: Yeah.

Tim: For stuff.

Jim: The museum would love to see that stuff.

Tim: Yeah. I've only got a few of them, unfortunately. But, she—what happened was a guy I had been adventuring with in Honduras and Rhodesia had drifted down to California, and he sold a screenplay for a movie. [Laughs.] And he called me, and I had just come back from climbing in the Andes, and he said, "Come on out to Southern California." He said, "I've got a place. Walk off the beach, and I've got a bunch of money. You can live here free." And he said, "Things are

happening, you know, in my life, and we're good buds, good friend." He said, "C'mon, you can come along." So I moved out there, and my grandfather died, and my parents sold the house, and my mother cleaned out, and she—she's a cleaning fanatic—and she—she's always denied that she ever threw that stuff away, but she's told other people who have told me that she did. She thought that I didn't want to think about the war.

Jim: She decided.

Tim: So she threw it away.

Jim: Aw, that's too bad.

Tim: So, yeah. And it's—it's sad, because, I mean, I had a lot of good photos.

Jim: Yeah. I would love to have seen them.

Tim: Yeah. But I would like to say, just briefly, about the North Vietnamese soldiers again—

Jim: Oh.

Tim: I really had nothing but respect for them, just like I had for the American G.I., but—like I had said before—when they got drafted they came down, and they were there for the duration. But unless it was a mission that they had trained and trained and trained for, they were not good fighters.

Jim: No. They don't have that American knack of adjusting—

Tim: American soldiers are the best shots in the world. It's because a lot of us grow up hunting. And American soldiers are the best shots in the world, and for a lot of American soldiers—I saw this a number of times, especially for us being way out, you know, in "Injun country" without any support really around—that when the chips were down, we would know, you know, this is it. There was no place to retreat to. I was on firebases that were attacked, and—

Jim: Well, you learn to improvise, you see.

Tim: Yeah, you learn to improvise, but, see, for us there was no place to retreat to. They could run off into the jungle, and it was basically their territory. They could get on a trail and keep going until they could come—

Jim: So what did you eat when you were in these situations?

Tim: For us, we ate basically freeze-dried meals. We ate two of those a day. We didn't ever take C-rations because they were too heavy.

Jim: Too [unintelligible], I was gonna say.

Tim: We went heavy—you might—here, I'll—I'll do this. I was thinking about this when I was laying in bed at three this morning with my thing [root canal]. I only wore socks in the dry season. I only wore socks in the dry season or I mean in the rainy season. During the dry season I just wore jungle boots with no socks. It toughened up my feet. We had camouflage fatigues. We only had a poncho and a poncho liner which is a little fiber-filled thing about that big that's camouflaged that ties on the eyelets of a regular Army poncho. During the rainy season, we would take hammocks or air mattresses which you could only wrap up in the poncho. The Army didn't supply us with very good equipment. We never had mosquito netting. We never had sleeping bags. It wouldn't have done us any good anyway 'cause they'd just get, you know—they were too hot. We had bug dope which was really good stuff, but—

Jim: The chloric wouldn't have prevented malaria.

Tim: Yeah. We had two—we had two types of pills, a daily pill and then a weekly pill that the medics would give out. We wore our web belts. Typically my guys would carry 1,000 rounds. That was always my SOP, my standard operating procedure, to take about 1,000 rounds of ammo because we couldn't get a resupply of fire fight. Everybody would have to take four or six grenades. Everybody would have—each person would have to take two smoke grenades. We had—

Jim: No white phosphorus?

Tim: Grenades? No. No. We had—myself and each one of my team leaders would carry parachute flares and star clusters, you know, so we could signal at night if we were in dire straits, you know, they could maybe bring in some—a gunship at night or something like that. Radio batteries. The radio technology was just classic of the military. The radio technology was real old so it was big and heavy. The radio batteries were about like this and real heavy.

Jim: Heavy.

Tim: Yeah. So the RTO was carrying about—my radio operators were carrying about twenty-five pounds, and they'd have to carry extra batteries so usually everybody in the team would carry an extra battery except for the medic who would carry a medic bag, and he would have a large medic bag.

Jim: Now, you didn't have a medic for each squad?

Tim: Just about. I had a medic—just about—

Jim: One of those six guys was a medic.

Tim: Yeah. But what I'd—what I'd have is I'd have a point man, a slack man, a team leader, a radio operator, a medic and a drag man.

Jim: Drag man.

Tim: He was the last guy to keep looking behind you because if—

Jim: He didn't have any special duties other than that?

Tim: Well, he—you know, we all—we all—

Jim: Rotated?

Tim: Yeah. Well, usually, the guy—'cause I'd have all volunteers I'd have guys who would volunteer to be point or slack men. Typically a drag man would be the newest guy on the team or a guy who was getting close to leaving, and so you'd be worried they'd be afraid—

Jim: You had to learn to walk backwards?

Tim: Well, you keep looking behind you, because—

Jim: Right.

Tim: If they know that you're there they would try and sneak up behind you, you know, and if they were—if they can sneak up to ten or twenty feet behind you and fire off a burst of thirty rounds—when I'd have somebody get wounded -- unless they could walk—you know, that's a sad situation. I mean, what do you—are you all going to stay and let them—stay with them—

Jim: What do—what did you do?

Tim: Well, you try and get them out of there, but you really can't if somebody's wounded and—if somebody's shot through the chest, if they've got a sucking chest wound, what do you do?

Jim: So long? So long, pal, that's it?

Tim: Well, you call for help, but if it's a larger enemy force that's trying to maneuver, they had to—if it was a larger force they'd always try and maneuver around us. And that's—you know—I mean, that's the sad thing. I mean, it wasn't—

Jim: Well, he's a goner then.

Tim: Basically he's a goner. You can't, you know, this whole thing about Americans never leave their wounded—never leave their dead?

Jim: That's not so.

Tim: That's not so. It's a nice thought. Would be nice if it could operate like that—

Jim: So if you were gut shot or shot in the chest—

Tim: Or shot in the leg. You know, if we were outnumbered, what do you do? See, small teams like that, what do you do? You have to leave them. You know, otherwise you're all going to die. Are you going to make a last stand? That's, you know—that's poignant but pointless.

Jim: Uh-huh.

Tim: You know, so it's sad. But yeah, that's why I say that we never talked out loud from the time we got off the choppers until the time we got back on. We never walked in open areas. We did not want to give away our position. We didn't take a gum wrapper and throw it on the trail. We'd take the LRP [Long Range Patrol] rations, the frozen freeze-dried meals, and put all of our trash in those, and then take a piece of tape that the medic would have, close that up real good, and then give it a toss so it'd be off the trails so they couldn't see it. You don't shit next to the trail or on the trail. They'll smell it. You have to dig a hole and bury it. Same thing with your toilet paper. Peeing on a trail or next to a trail.

Jim: Urinating is also—

Tim: They can smell it.

Jim: Should be done off the trail.

Tim: Yeah. For us to smoke a cigarette, which everybody smoked—but to smoke a cigarette you would stop to take a break, you'd have to have your point and slack man go out about a hundred meters, you know, moving quietly and slowly. That would take enough time for—and then have your drag man move off, like, fifty meters, and that would be enough time for myself and the medic and the two RTOs to smoke a cigarette, and then these guys would walk out real slow and then walk back. We'd be done with our cigarettes, and these guys would come in and have theirs, we'd walk out. We'd walk back, and that would be basically the end of the break. You wouldn't want to be in a cluster—cluster fuck—six guys, seven guys in a little group all smoking and talking—

Jim: That's an opportunity. Right.

Tim: Yeah. Because then, you know, nobody's paying attention. Anytime we'd stop on a trail the two point and slack men would face down the trail or face out. It was standard patrol procedure: always have your gun at the ready, be prepared at all times. It was Scout's Motto: Be prepared. And now the slack man would always be facing to the rear, you know, that type of thing.

Jim: Right.

Tim: When we'd sleep at night, ideally you'd want to put the radio in the middle. You'd have to—and in the jungle near the equator you don't get the variation in the light cycle like we do up north here so typically around 7:00, 7:15 at night in the jungle—triple canopy jungle—boom [Tim snaps fingers], the lights would go out. You wouldn't be able to see your hand in front of your face until about 6:00, 6:30 in the morning.

Jim: Totally dark.

Tim: Totally dark. And you could use your flashlight with the—Army flashlight—with the red filter, you know, if you needed to read something or whatever, if you were in a bad situation, you were giving coordinates and you were calling. I'd -- a lot of times if things were bad I'd plan out called—what were called "Def Cons," defensive concentrations for artillery, and I'd plot them all out, so that if something would happen during the night I could call and say, "Fire for effect at this grid or this grid, coordinate, whatever."

Jim: If you smelled or heard the enemy come along the trail at night would they do that or no?

Tim: We—actually, we did not ambush that much because we were such a small unit, and like I was saying before you never know what size unit you're going to run into. But typically at night when they would be moving on a trail they would be moving with flashlights because it was their territory. And if they were moving at night it would be a large unit.

Jim: So at night you weren't overly concerned that they might be sneaking up on you because that's not the way they did things.

Tim: Yeah, at night—most of our ambushes were like at a way station or a small base camp that was not in use at the time. There were times when we were—I know one time we were watching a mini base camp of about six or seven hootches with a nice little stream going through it, and there were—just my team—seven of us there. Then about midnight about 500 NVA [North Vietnamese Army] —NVA Battalion showed up. And they moved into the hooches and set up and put up hammocks all over. They were within about thirty or forty meters of us.

Jim: Didn't know you were there.



Tim: Oh, we were crapping in our drawers.

Jim: [Laughs.]

Tim: [Laughs.] We were crapping in our drawers.

Jim: Right.

Tim: So, and we were all set at dawn, and at dawn we just moved off really slowly and quietly until we got about 200 meters away, and then we called for airstrikes there.

Jim: On that area.

Tim: Yeah. Yeah, and then we moved off, and I—you know, moved off in another direction and continued on patrolling in our mission, and I think about three days later we walked into some enemy on the trail, and we fired them up. It was, I think it was about three or four guys. But that was an extremely large unit, and I—we were very, very, very tense. Very scared.

Jim: So, how many men did you lose? In your—

Tim: Uhh—

Jim: Of your squads.

Tim: I lost—[pause]—three of us got wounded first six months I was there, and that was it. But that—

Jim: What kind of wounds? Superficial—

Tim: Yeah—

Jim: Most probably 'cause they didn't—they didn't leave you, so—

Tim: I had—one of my platoon sergeants got shot in the thigh. Then the rest were all—we all got like shrapnel wounds.

Jim: Oh.

Tim: But there were—I think there were two of them that were bad enough shrapnel wounds to have to be evacuated. Some of the rest of us would get shrapnel. I mean, I still got shrapnel in my body. I still got a piece in my hand. I got a piece here in my thigh. But that was the first six months, and it was because I trained my guys and instilled in them the idea that if you did things correctly you'd have

a leg up on the enemy. But then we started to get involved in some more larger enemy units moving in, and, you know, firebase—we were sent to beef up firebases. We would be used as a ready reaction force so if a platoon from a line company was in trouble they'd chopper us in and drop us off to make a sweep to relieve pressure on them or help them.

Jim: Did they give you any R&R during your year over there?

Tim: Oh, yeah. Yeah.

Jim: They'd pull you off the line and—

Tim: Yeah, it was on a—you—well, it was a rotational basis, but usually the guy who had been there the longest could apply for R&R. I mean if you'd only been there for a month, you know—

Jim: For your whole squad then.

Tim: No, no, no. One man at a time. See, that was a problem that—why I wouldn't always have as many teams as I—'cause I'd have guys in the hospital, I'd have guys who were going home, and I'd have guys on R&R.

Jim: So, when—tell me about your R&R. Where'd you go?

Tim: I went to Hong Kong.

Jim: You flew up there by—

Tim: Yeah. Yeah, we flew there.

Jim: Took a transport.

Tim: Yeah. It was—Hong Kong was just great. They had flush toilets, air conditioning, restaurants—

Jim: Things that you had forgotten.

Tim: Cold beer. [Laughs.] The only way we could get cold beer was to steal a fire extinguisher, and then open a case of beer and then use the whole fire extinguisher on it. [Laughs.] That would chill it all out.

Jim: Cool it down. [Laughs.]

Tim: But yeah—

Jim: You have any trouble getting cigarettes?

Tim: There would always be cigarettes in the LRP rations or the C-rations. And we'd come back to a firebase, and then someone would go into the rear, and so they would get cartons of cigarettes for people, bring them back out, or you could pay—

Jim: Beer?

Tim: Beer? Yeah, beer you could get—I think a case of beer was about a dollar seventy.

Jim: Yeah, but wouldn't take those on the trail [unintelligible]—

Tim: Oh, no, no, no, no. But we'd come back to a firebase, and we might have three days off so two guys went together—go together and pay a dollar seventy to a door gunner on a helicopter—supply helicopter—to, you know—they were always bringing stuff out and selling it to guys.

Jim: How long could a guy stay on the trail and keep his sanity, under those—that amount of tension?

Tim: It would depend on the person. And that was—

Jim: But I mean, you, as the squad leader, had to pay attention to see if these guys weren't losing it. How—could you tell when they were starting to get away from them too much?

Tim: I could always tell when somebody'd get short, meaning that their time was almost up. There were guys who would just—

Jim: Oh, they'd start to worry that they're gonna get killed before they got home.

Tim: Yeah. They thought they were gonna get whacked before they'd get a chance to go home so usually I'd make them drag man.

Jim: I was gonna say they weren't very—as effective in your squad then.

Tim: Well, it was just that they're more tense. I never saw anybody have a breakdown and run away, but the—that's because I—a number of reasons. Number one, I had all volunteers. Number two, these guys knew that there was no place to run to. In WWII they discovered that the maximum amount of time that they thought that an infantryman could be in combat was seven days, and that after seven days you literally had to pull them out because they would run the risk of--no matter how good a soldier they were--of having a breakdown. When we were up at Khe Sanh for the invasion of Laos, we were getting in contact two or three times a day and guys—my guys just stayed good. I mean, I know at a place called Nui Ba

Lao [Hao?] where we were in a big, big operation out there while the invasion of Laos was going on—that was the worst amount of casualties I ever had. That’s when I was beefed up. I had about thirty-five guys. And we had—had to go into this little mountaintop on the end of a ridge that the Marines had used as an outpost during ’68 when they were there and all the Marines had been wiped off. The top of it was flat and about thirty feet so you could just land one Huey, and we went in there to land, and my chopper was the first one in, and we were operating at high altitudes so they could only have four people on the chopper. Couldn’t have like six guys on the chopper. And we were supposed to be landing there at dawn, and we ended up going back twice back to Camp Carroll, and choppers were getting shot up. They just, you know, it’s like the NVA knew we were coming. Anyway, when we finally got in there about 11:00 o’clock we’d landed, and my chopper landed first. The choppers—high altitude—will lift up their tail rotor and then just kinda fall off the mountain to build up some thrust. Anyway, the pilot did that, and there was a bap-bap-bap-bap-bap-bap, and the chopper just was riddled, and the—I’ll never forget the—part of the rotor blades were flying off, and then it crashed right below us. So I called this major—this operations major, Major Frakes [?], and I said, “There’s a 51 caliber position right below us.” And he said—I said, “I need you to bring in gunships to take it out.” And he said, “That’s a negative.” And they had been hitting this place all night with artillery, and then they had been coming in with fast movers each time we’d go out there, and we couldn’t land ‘cause of ground-to-air fire so they pulled us back, and they kept just plastering it. Anyway, he said, “That’s a negative.” He said, “There’s three 51 cal positions that we can see now, and we’re not bring anybody else in until you guys take them out.” So the four of us had to take them out, which, you know, was a—we were laying on this little flat spot on the top, and we had grenades, and we basically used grenades to take them out, and then they brought everybody else in. Are we done? Okay.

Jim: This ran out of gas.

Tim: Okay. [Laughs.]

Jim: Good.

Tim: Yeah, that worked out all right.

Jim: Hey, that’s terrific. You’re about run out of gas, too, aren’t you?

Tim: Ah, no. I can tell war stories until midnight. [Laughs.]

Jim: Can you?

Tim: Yeah. Yeah, gimme a few beers. Ask my mountain climbing buddies. We’re stormbound in a tent. I’ll start talking about the war in Vietnam. You know, it’s like I’m—I’m going down to—every other summer my wife lets me go out to the

Rockies for two weeks to go climbing with my mates, and this year since I'm fifty and I'm gonna, you know, I can't keep doing this for much longer—my wife is going to let me go down to the Andes down in Venezuela, go climbing in a place for two weeks where I've been climbing back in the '70s.

Jim: Uh-huh.

Tim: And I'm going with my buddy, Randy, and he—he wasn't there with me when I was there before I—

**[End of Interview]**