

**Wisconsin Veterans Museum  
Research Center**

Transcript of an  
Oral History Interview with  
DANIEL P. RYAN  
Records Clerk, U.S. Army, Vietnam War  
2012

OH  
1544

**OH  
1544**

**Ryan, Daniel P.**, Oral History Transcript, 2012.

Approximate length: 51 minutes

*Contact VWM Research Center for access to original recording.*

**Abstract:**

Daniel P. Ryan discusses his service as a records clerk with the 826 Ordinance Company Reserve Unit during the Vietnam War. Ryan explains why he joined the unit and then recounts being activated in April 1968. He mentions his training at Fort Knox [Kentucky]. Ryan describes traveling to Vietnam and landing at Bien Hoa air base before being stationed at Long Binh. He details his job and the job of his unit managing the ammunition dump. He discusses preparing to leave Vietnam and how some of his fellow soldiers discharged early. He describes his return to the United States. Ryan lastly gives an anecdote about the Bob Hope Show performing on Christmas Eve and Cardinal Cook saying mass on Christmas Day of 1968.

**Biographical Sketch:**

Daniel P. Ryan enlisted in the 826 Ordinance Company Reserve Unit and was activated in April 1968. He was deployed for one year to Vietnam, serving at Long Binh as a records clerk. Ryan returned to the United States in October of 1969 but was not officially discharged until 1972.

Interviewed by John Weingandt, 2012.

Transcribed by Joshua Goldstein, 2014.

Reviewed by Claire Steffen, 2015.

Abstract written by Claire Steffen, 2015.

## **Interview Transcript:**

Weingandt: Alright Dan, we are interviewing Dan Ryan this morning. Today is the Twenty-Seventh of March, 2012. The interviewer is John Weingandt and Dan I ask you to tell us a little bit about yourself, what you were doing High School time and you were in the Vietnam War of course.

Ryan: Yes, I've been in Madison all my life.

Weingandt: Oh you are from Madison?

Ryan: Always from Madison.

Weingandt: Good for you.

Ryan: And after high school, I spent some time at the University. And then started working right down here on State Street just a few blocks from here at the Photo Art House.

Weingandt: I know exactly where that was.

Ryan: And I was there for quite a while and actually I got drafted but I knew I had a customer at the store who was on the Board of Regents at the University. And I called him one day I believe it was in the building that was here before this one was and said "I really don't want to do this." And within five minutes he called me back and said "You are enrolled in the University now and so I'll take care of the draft notice." Which was fine, I went back to school because I knew it was coming I joined the 826 Ordinance Company Reserve Unit.

Weingandt: That would be out at Truax?

Ryan: That was on Wright Street right by Truax. And everything was fine until we got activated.

Weingandt: That wasn't supposed to happen right?

Ryan: That wasn't supposed to happen at all and didn't happen to anybody. We were one of the first ones picked to be activated.

Weingandt: Dan, I heard something the other day, that peaked my curiosity there conscience effort by the Administration back then if this report was right you can comment on it; that they wanted not to take up units but to spread the draft around the country hopefully getting a person here a person there and so on rather than a big cluster of people per Reserve Unit. Try and keep this thing not--of course the War got bigger and bigger, but initially--

Ryan: I really can't speak to that because I don't know.

Weingandt: But the whole idea of getting in a Reserve Unit.

Ryan: Was to stay away from it.

Weingandt: Nice call.

Ryan: So we got activated, actually at the time the date we got activated, I can't tell you when that was first part of April '68, my wife and I moved into a new house First of April. I hadn't even made the first payment yet and when we were activated so of course that was an issue. But then we went in late April, first week in May we loaded up and went to Fort Knox and we spent the summer at Fort Knox.

Weingandt: Your unit was what?

Ryan: 826 Ordinance Company, they have been activated since also for Desert Storm and one other time since. Anyway we spent the summer at Fort Knox and getting all of our equipment and getting ready to go. Of course, coming home every weekend; driving back and forth to Fort Knox. Leave on Friday night and get back here in the middle of the night.

Weingandt: What Fort Knox is what in Kentucky?

Ryan: Kentucky, just outside Louisville, and leave at Six O'clock Sunday and get back in time for formation on Monday morning but that is what we did every weekend.

Weingandt: How much time did you have at Wright Street as a unit before you were activated?

Ryan: Well I was probably only there six or eight months.

Weingandt: Okay, so you are pretty green?

Ryan: Yeah, yeah very. I maybe was longer than that but something like that it wasn't a very long time. Then we--

Weingandt: What was the purpose of Fort Knox?

Ryan: They virtually put us through Basic Training again, that is why we were activated.

Weingandt: You weren't battle ready.

Ryan: We were activated because we were told we weren't battle ready and then we went to Fort Knox and were told we weren't ready so we started all over again. I really think it was to just stall and get all new equipment. We had all new

equipment when we went, everything because we were an ammunition company there was a lot of heavy lifting, so we had forklifts and cranes and all those sorts of things and big trucks.

Weingandt: What was your job?

Ryan: I was records clerk. I kept track of inventories.

Weingandt: Okay.

Ryan: And that sort of thing and paper work for everything but that is what we were doing was stalling to get all this heavy equipment. And then I guess the first group left, I don't know when it was, probably middle of September. Went to the west coast with all the equipment and put it on a boat and started over. They offered me the chance to go on that trip but I said I don't think I could handle a boat for ten days or two weeks or whatever it was to get over there. All they wanted was for somebody to escort the stuff, you didn't have to do anything but I opted not to do that. So then we left from Fort Knox, well Louisville commercial airport, flew to Alaska, Alaska to Japan, Japan into Vietnam, into Bien Hoa air base. That was particularly eventful the landing in Bien Hoa we went in very high because of that activity on the ground. We just dropped that plane out of nowhere on that runway just plop. So that left your stomach up in the air(laughter)and on that trip we went over on C-141s. I think we got three of them from the Company and sat six across facing backwards. No windows on the plane, so we just sat there.

Weingandt: Did you know at the time why you were flying high?

Ryan: They announced what they were doing, there were no secrets.

Weingandt: But you are riding backwards.

Ryan: Riding backwards and they just dropped that thing right out of the sky.

Weingandt: Welcome to Vietnam.

Ryan: Welcome to Vietnam, we got there I don't know first week of October, maybe Tenth of October something like that, 1968.

Weingandt: Help me, '68 what was going on then?

Ryan: Tet had happened early '68 that is what set the whole thing up. Tet is over but that is when they realized they needed more manpower and well that was January/February of '68. We were activated right in beginning of April. So that time lag was to decide who was going to go. And then it took us five months to get there.

Weingandt: Okay, now what happened?

Ryan: Well we got there and the advance crew, the ones with the equipment; the equipment was on site by the time we got there. And they had gotten there I don't know a week or so before so we had tents set up for everybody, fourteen man tents.

Weingandt: Did you stay out by the airport?

Ryan: No, we went from Ben Hoa to Long Binh. It was probably twenty-five miles north of Ben Hoa where we landed.

Weingandt: Okay.

Ryan: And that is where the initial dump was.

Weingandt: Okay

Ryan: At that time it was the largest ammunitions dump in the world.

Weingandt: Say the name again.

Ryan: Long Binh,L-o-n-g B-i-n-h.

Weingandt: Long Binh okay.

Ryan: When we got there, tents were set up so we set to move. Well tents were set up and bunks were in there so we moved our personal equipment in and at least we had a place to go. And then we started just across the road to working at the ammunition dump.

Weingandt: As I recall Vietnam there were no fronts.

Ryan: No.

Weingandt: Stuff could happen-

Ryan: We were reasonably safe and I always thought I was probably in pretty good position because I wasn't a good target, nobody wanted me, they didn't care about me.

Weingandt: Why would they?

Ryan: Well I mean I wasn't an infantry guy that they would want to shoot.

Weingandt: Oh that way.

Ryan: But they would the rockets that they shot if they wanted to get the ammunition dump. Our area was probably and eighth to a quarter of a mile away from that. We weren't actually in there. They'd shoot rockets into it trying to hit the ammunition but they weren't very good with them. But that is the part that worried me. If they were good than I really wouldn't have worried about it because than I wouldn't have been a target but randomly they'd drop one in near us because they weren't very good. The rocket they would just lean it up against a tree and let it go. That is how they aimed them; they said it is over there so we will shoot at that. If they had the sophisticated stuff like the smart bombs that we've got now that they can drop through windows, I'd be fine, I wouldn't have been worried at all.

Weingandt: Well that is at night what about during the day.

Ryan: During the day we were over there. We had the office right on the perimeter of the place but we had a lot of people working in the ammo dump because it was so big most of it was fork lift and crane stuff. They weren't handing out individual boxes of stuff. They would give it to you pallet at a time; these infantry units would come in with their trucks their flatbed trucks and load up pallets all night then you'd get out of there. The only thing that is an exception to that was kind of an interesting story. I think it was interesting. I had a big desk in my office and it was the kind that was designed to take the typewriter that went on the little thing, the thing would come up. It was spring loaded and underneath but I didn't need a typewriter so they ripped that part all out. And I had, they were just changing from .45's to 9 millimeters and they were starting with the Generals. And I had this big space on the side of my desk so I got all the 9 millimeter ammunition. So I was the only one who could issue 9 millimeter ammunition to Generals, so Generals would randomly show up in the office and of course when you are in the military you don't see a General very often. They stay pretty well hidden and it would be quite an uproar when one would show up and walk into the office. They say they wanted some 9 millimeter ammunition. Everybody had to come to attention, it was a real disruption. But I had every 9 millimeter shell in country, I had in my desk.

Weingandt: I would say you elevated yourself to target status.

Ryan: Well they didn't know--.

Weingandt: They didn't know that of course.

Ryan: But we a huge record section of cardex files if you remember those. Those were the old ones you pull the tray out and drop it down, flip the page up to get to the piece that you wanted. We had a section of those probably thirty feet long that we had somebody sitting every four feet flipping those cards out and running records and I had a desk behind them in the office there. My primary job was to make

sure that they all show up every morning. Then we'd send them to lunch and then we'd have to go find them for the afternoon. They would all be at the MC—enlisted Men's Club. I had to go in there and chase them out of there and get them back to work. And once I got them back to work I was all set.

Weingandt: What was your rank?

Ryan: I was E-5 at that time. So we'd run twelve hour shifts, six to six. Then we'd have a night crew run on a twelve our shift, seven days. The only time that that really stopped was Sunday morning because the whole place ran off a huge generator off the side of a semi-trailer. But that was parked next to the chapel, it made so much noise they couldn't hear so they shut it down for services on Sunday morning. And everybody had to plan ahead a little bit and have things to do that didn't require electricity. And when that was over they would start that thing up again and away we'd go for the rest of the week. We had it pretty good where we were other than what I described, the random shot. We had a swimming pool. Small PX although Long Binh was a big, big place so we had everything we just didn't have it directly in our area. There were big PXs and theaters.

Weingandt: Long Binh is that a town or is that a nickname?

Ryan: No, it was a military installation.

Weingandt: It's a base?

Ryan: Yes, it was where Long Binh Jail was, anybody who committed any crime in Vietnam was sent to it was Long Bihn Jail but it was called "LBJ". Which was--.

Weingandt: (laughter)

Ryan: But it was really a scary place. It had about a fifteen foot fence around it all with black tarps on it so you couldn't see in. And anybody that went there for any kind of crime, it was all bad time, so their year wasn't counted. They were still in Vietnam and still in a prison on top of it but their time didn't count.

Weingandt: I didn't know that.

Ryan: It was an ugly, ugly place. So they will be in country for six months get sent to jail for two years they would come out and still have six months to go.

Weingandt: Yup.

Ryan: So it was an ugly thing but we walked--that was very close to us. We had to walk by that to go anyplace.

Weingandt: How many people were on that base?



Ryan: Thousands.

Weingandt: Thousands? Okay it was huge.

Ryan: We were one company of four I believe it was in the battalion that ran the ammo dump.

Weingandt: Ammo dump was just part of this--.

Ryan: It was part of this but there were all other kinds of other supplies. Motor Vehicle parts and petroleum and well just about anything you could think of came out of there. It was a big central supply place.

Weingandt: I'd thought you'd be a huge target.

Ryan: Well the ammo dump was but the Vietnamese and Viet Cong ran on pretty small scale. They were after individuals. They couldn't shoot an AK-47 at us because they couldn't get close enough. So I mean if they had the airpower, the equipment that we had than yeah we would have been.

Weingandt: Were you involved with stolen inventory this whole time?

Ryan: Yes, that's what I did. Very rarely did I actually venture into the ammo dump. It was all built up with huge berms around where the piles were put. So if something did get hit the only place it could go is straight up. And all you lost was that pad of stuff. So it was pretty safe out there for the most part. Unless you were where a direct happened but that of course that would be a problem any place.

Weingandt: Did you have any spare time while you were over there?

Ryan: Oh yeah, you make your own. Like I said, we had a pool. I rarely used it but we had it. Again, I don't know what you are interested in but we had a group of four of us we had a group of fourteen in our tent. But we had a habit when we got done at work, we all worked together, same group. And so we'd come back and go eat at the mess hall which was a huge mess hall for the entire battalion. And then we'd go back, shower and get ready. Whose ever turn it was that night we had a little schedule, would bring a case of beer back with them from PX. And the four of us played board games and drank that case of beer. And that was it for the night.

Weingandt: Sounds okay to me.

Ryan: Well it was okay. Then watching football, speaking of buying beer, it was rationed but that was kind of a farce. You'd get a ration card for beer and cigarettes and some electronics. You can buy one camera or two watches whatever the numbers were. For cigarettes and beer particularly when you went

into the PX, on first of the month get a new card. And if you bought a carton of cigarettes and a case of beer they'd punch your card the first time. As long as you had a punch on your card that is all they cared. Because the next time that you walked out you had a card with a punch on it and so if you got stopped you were okay. So we were limited to four or five cases of beer a month.

Weingandt: Per person?

Ryan: Per person but effectively there was no limits because the cards were a fraud but we had them, so.

Weingandt: What way were they a fraud? I'm curious. The statute of limitations has run out.

Ryan: I wasn't particularly worried about that no but the idea was you can only buy so many but once you had the first punch on your card than they were covered in the PX because they said when you walk out with a case of beer that's the first once he bought this month. Even if it was the Twentieth of the month you got your card with one punch.

Weingandt: So the PX was pretty lax?

Ryan: Oh, they didn't care at all, they didn't care at all. I remember when beer was \$2.40 a case. I've always said--well I smoked when I was over there, I quit.

Weingandt: Almost everybody did.

Ryan: Again, I have another story about that but when I went into a cigarette machine here in Madison cigarettes were thirty-five cents. And there they were fifteen cents a pack or \$1.40 a carton so I said I was saving so much money I couldn't afford to quit. But to jump ahead about the smoking, we were there as a Company but we got individual orders when we came home. And everybody--oh I don't know when it was--probably in August or even earlier we'd start to get orders. Individuals would get orders to go home on whatever date it was. I don't recall that, First of October, end of September-- I didn't get one but some guys--some days five or six guys would get them, next day three or four more and so on. I always said when I get my orders to go home I'm going to quit smoking but I never got them. Everyday I'd go to the mailroom and it wasn't there. I went to the mailroom one day and very unusual there was an ashtray sitting on the counter of the mailroom. And they handed me my orders. I had a cigarette in my hand, I put it out and I haven't had another one since.

Weingandt: Really? They knew that you were going to quit as soon as you got the orders.

Ryan: Everybody was on me about that.

Weingandt: So they had the ashtray ready.

Ryan: The ashtray was out there ready to go.

Weingandt: Saying you're up.

Ryan: I did quit, it wasn't easy. It was six bad weeks but I did and I didn't relate it to this but—.

Weingandt: I hope you didn't quit drinking beer though.

Ryan: No.

Weingandt: Okay.

Ryan: So let's see where else should we go here. Oh when we were there they decided it was a bad idea what they had done of activating an entire unit. As you mentioned earlier they wanted individuals because they thought all of a sudden come first of October or whatever date they are going to use this whole company is going to leave. And now we are right back where we were—we don't—we wanted to be leaving one at a time but everybody in the Company was due the same day, bad idea. So, in the middle of this thing they decided well the way to solve that is move us out so we are not all one Company. They started with our unit, the Operations section. And said "well we are going to move you from the 826 Ordinance Company to the 72nd Ordinance Company and that is going to solve our problem." Not thinking we are all still going to leave on the same day, same amount of bodies going out on the same day. So we got transferred to the 72nd Ordinance Company and they moved us. They brought the trucks in to move us only half a mile, maybe not even that to the other Company. And we got all our stuff, moved it, put it on trucks and moved it over there. And we hadn't fully unpacked yet when they realized what they had done. All they had done was--

Weingandt: Split you up.

Ryan: Shuffled the people around the same number of people were going to go home anyway, so we never even spent a night there. They transferred us right back to where we were. So it was just a complete waste of the day which is of course that's not surprising that is the way things were.

Weingandt: The way things were, maybe are. So your move to the 72nd didn't last very long?

Ryan: Just part of the afternoon but as you mentioned earlier they realized they wanted individuals and not the entire company because maybe a shock on the system when we went but it was too late, we were there. And we owed them a year.

Weingandt: So your term in Vietnam was one year?

Ryan: One year, we got there virtually everyone there had what you'd call short timers calendar. Calendar of Julian dates because January first is one, January second is two and so on until you get to December 31st is 365. So that calendars you can put those on reports; that date on reports. They showed what it was via columns with the dates and everybody got one. They started first day crossing off days. Some of them were very creative. They'd make little patterns so they can have pictures by the time they got done. So everybody knew what it was, how many days you had left. And everybody knew right from day one I have 364 now.

Weingandt: I'm sure some people even had it right down to the hour.

Ryan: Oh absolutely, so we got down to where we had--I'm trying to think what it was I think it was December 11th--October 11th the day that our year ended.

Weingandt: That'd be '69?

Ryan: '69 yeah. It was something like the tenth or eleventh. And of course you got time at the end of your thing where you have to do all the processing and all this stuff. So, you figure on quitting about a week before, a week or ten days before then you pull out and they send your replacement. Of course, we didn't have to replace the replacements because we had the whole company area full.

Weingandt: Let's jump ahead a little bit, if you arrived as a Company there is what about a hundred and twenty--.

Ryan: Two hundred and twenty.

Weingandt: Two hundred and twenty? Ok big company. When you leave how are they going replace you? It can't be piecemeal; it's got to be another unit right?

Ryan: Well a lot of individuals, so I suppose what they were planning on doing was transfer some out after six months, started them up again I don't know. I don't know if there was a plan. But if we were going to leave on October eleventh, I believe that was the dates it got scheduled. We were figuring on quitting work before that.

Weingandt: Your replacements were trickling in?

Ryan: They were but there was no place for them to go because we had all the buildings. Well by that time we had buildings and I'll get back to that but we --So I don't remember the dates, I'm not going to be able to try and guess.

Weingandt: That's all right. I'm just curious how they did that.

Ryan: It came the first part of September several of us had taken the test to be promoted to E-6. So we went through the promotion board and everything was fine, came down to where, again I don't remember maybe first week of September or something like that that the promotions came through. And there were about half a dozen of us that they were going to promote but they didn't like that idea because we were Reservist, the active military didn't like it because we were Reservist taking their rank and going home with it. But they also knew if they didn't promote us the next time it came around they wouldn't get any. You didn't need them that time, you don't get them now so they had to promote us so which was advantageous to me because I got more paid more when I got out for the leave time that I had. So that helped then we quit work and really didn't do anything just laid around for the last week that we were there. We actually left--if we were scheduled to go on the Tenth or Eleventh, October but we left the first so they got us out early part of Nixon was touting the big withdrawal at that time so we were part of the withdrawal. So people say they spent a year, I actually spent eleven months and nineteen days. Again, you know that is forty-five years ago and I'll never forget that number. And you never forget that feeling when the wheels go up on that plane when you are leaving.

Weingandt: That has to be a great feeling.

Ryan: And that was on a commercial airline we went out on. We came in on military transports but we went out on commercial.

Weingandt: Was the War still--did you have to get out and just get up as quick as you can?

Ryan: Not as pronounced, I don't recall. They probably did some but it wasn't as dramatic as coming in.

Weingandt: The ground fire wasn't that much as an issue when you left?

Ryan: No. Well I don't know about that I just don't know. Again, I just say I don't know.

Weingandt: You didn't get shot at?

Ryan: Not that I know of. I did get shot at when I was in a helicopter once. I did that also a few times. I went out to set up records for smaller ammunition dumps.

Weingandt: Okay, tell us about that.

Ryan: I was the one who was picked quite regularly to go on those trips. And the smaller places had to have records the same as we did but the scale was dramatically different but they still had to have the same records, so I would go out and set those up. First time I did that they sent me out from Long Binh. They called me out and said "You are going to go tomorrow or the next day and you are going to go and they will take you up in a helicopter up to Tie Nam." And they were going

to leave very early in the morning like five or six o'clock in the morning which was fine with me because I am a morning person, so that was no big deal. But in the middle of the night, the night before I went, they roused everyone out of bed into a Company formation, very rare. We didn't have formations. We didn't do that sort of thing. But they put everybody in a big company formation and took everybody's money away. We had a military MPCs; we called them Military Payment Certificates. It wasn't --we had funny money. It wasn't real money to be used but it was getting out on the local economy. And they were using it on the black market. We didn't know but they did it periodically that was the first time that they did it when we were there. They called everybody out, took all your money away and gave you a receipt. And the next day they'd issue new money to you. You got your money back but the money—and they'd lock the base down. We had people coming on and servicing things, the local population, and they'd get this money and take it out and use it on the black market. So they locked the base down so nobody can get on, take all the money away from everybody. So now anybody out there with that funny money, their money is no good. And there was a lot of money involved and so they had a very limited sense of humor about that sort of thing. But later in the day I went to Tie Nam with no money. And that was much, much smaller, much more intimate setting as it was. We were right on the edge of where things were going on. And of course there was a lot of real unhappy people because their money wasn't any good. They had all this money out there and it's no good anymore.

Weingandt: You talking about Vietnamese?

Ryan: Vietnamese and so that first night it was pretty nasty out there but the three or four days that I spent there I didn't have enough money. I didn't have any money because they had taken it away from me.

Weingandt: Sure.

Ryan: So we were just -- you mind if you go to work and go back and just sit in the place that had money, that was all I could do, couldn't go have a beer, couldn't do anything.

Weingandt: No Cigarettes.

Ryan: No cigarettes, no nothing. I had what I had but no nothing. And then coming back, we came back on the helicopters. They were shooting the howitzers at a trajectory that they did not want us flying at so we got down right at tree top and flew all the way back to Long Bihn right at tree tops and they were shooting them over the top of us.

Weingandt: You don't want a short round.

Ryan: No, so and then that was the one time I remember where [inaudible] and they were changing the money. That was the story there but this one other time they sent me some place on an airplane. This little bitty airplane that they sent me out on was probably a five or six seater. The windows broken out of it, it was a real wreck. Okay and they will pick me up tomorrow or whatever day it was. Well I go back out to the place that they are going to pick me up and sorry were loading bodies onto your airplane. I said "well that is okay." No that was against the rules for me to ride with them when they had so I spent another pointless night there. Because my work was done, but I couldn't go so they finally sent another helicopter up to pick me up and get me back but they wouldn't let me take my airplane, they commandeered it. It's hard to fault that you know. They want to get those bodies taken care of.

Weingandt: Sure and you didn't care to be on board?

Ryan: Well I was fine with it but they didn't want me there. It was regulations that I couldn't be. I wasn't part of the group that took care of them. So as I say it is hard to find fault with that.

Weingandt: Except you had to spend another night on this space.

Ryan: I didn't want to be there and there was no point of me being there anyway, because I was done with what I was doing.

Weingandt: Sure. You said you got shot at in one of these helicopters.

Ryan: Just shot over with the howitzers.

Weingandt: Oh, our friendly fire was going over you?

Ryan: Yeah, look see, I was never a target that I know of, maybe they shot at the helicopter and I don't know about it. You are flying in a helicopter with the doors open. You are strapped in and facing sideways.

Weingandt: It's pretty noisy.

Ryan: It's noisy, it's really exciting, it is fun. I really like to do that again now, not in that situation but I'd like to do that again now.

Weingandt: I've done it, it was enjoyable.

Ryan: I'm skipping around I guess it probably doesn't matter but I told you when we first got there we had tents, fourteen man tents, so somewhere along the line we decided-- that was given to us because it was supposed to be temporary, the War is going to be over soon send you guys home first. That was of course-- it ended in '75 so we weren't sent home but we decided we didn't like those tents anymore,

we wanted something a little bit more substantial than that. So somewhere along the line we had people out acquiring things, like I said it was a large supply place. So all of a sudden these guys would appear back with loads of lumber, loads of cement. All sorts of supplies and of course we had no budget for that. So we don't really know where they were coming from it was questionable source at best.

Weingandt: Called scrounging.

Ryan: Scrounging but it was all new stuff that they were scrounging. So they started--at the end we had all these tents in a row, actually two rows. They moved one and where that one was they put down a cement slab.

Weingandt: They being what not your people?

Ryan: Our people, they just quit working at the ammo dump and started doing this instead. The ammo dump was big so if it was missing a few people. And we had all the heavy equipment so we'd come in there and they put the cement slabs in, built a building. Just that those buildings were half buildings and it was screened up to the roof, a frame up, a screen up wide open and then a tin a roof. It was protection, that was all we needed, just keep the rain off.

Weingandt: Structures were pretty modern though?

Ryan: They were but it would be a hundred and twenty during the daytime and seventy at night, you better have two blankets on. But then when the first building was built the next tent down moved into that. They tore that tent and got rid of it because it was shot by then and they started building theirs. So they just leap frogged down the road until everybody had brand new buildings. They actually weren't very luxurious but they were a lot better than tents.

Weingandt: What would you call them, shelters?

Ryan: Yeah, they were adequate, they had electricity.

Weingandt: Vietnam has monsoons right?

Ryan: Yes, seasonal

Weingandt: Seasonal what time of year I forgot.

Ryan: I really can't tell you for sure. I don't remember although I do remember the first night we got there it rained so hard it knocked many of the tents down, so that was in October so but I really don't remember when the monsoon season lasted. Three or four months and it would rain like crazy and then the sun would come out and it would be a hundred and twenty, two hundred percent humidity, it was just



oppressive. But I don't remember what the season was. It is well documented when it was but I just don't remember. So then we had all new buildings. And of course since we were all from here and a big portion of us were also from Baraboo, Wisconsin Dells area. They had a smaller attachment up there. That was probably out of Two-hundred and thirty probably seventy-five, eighty were from there. So I still see a lot of those guys when I go up to the Dells. I run into people every day. When I go up there is someone I know.

Weingandt: That's kind of nice.

Ryan: We had the street swerved. The streets were named Madison Street and Wisconsin Avenue and things like that we put up. We flew the Wisconsin flag the whole time we were there. It was my own little form of rebellion. I said I told everybody that I wasn't going to change my watch. We were thirteen hours difference, so I just left my watch on Wisconsin time. And I said "I'm not going to do it." Which it didn't make any difference but it was a fun thing to do. The only way you could rebel so I did that. That's where we went.

Weingandt: Tell me about pulling up stakes and going home. You know that you were going to leave in October right?

Ryan: Again I am kind of vague on the dates but I believe October 11. We called them De-ros dates, date expected to return from overseas.

Weingandt: You touch on this but you were a unit and of course when you are gone everybody is gone. Battalion got to start all over again?

Ryan: Battalion still had three or four more companies.

Weingandt: Right but your company.

Ryan: We left a pretty good hole.

Weingandt: A big hole, how are you replaced? They bring in yet another unit?

Ryan: Again, I don't remember that although I say we all went back a lot of people started, particular the guys from the Dells, someone came up with the idea that because they were so seasonable maybe they should try to get back so they could get a little bit of work in because they weren't going to work because in October they weren't going to work anymore.

Weingandt: That's right.

Ryan: And it worked for a lot of guys so then the flood gates--

Weingandt: It doesn't operate that way anymore.

Ryan: The flood gates were open so we lost a lot of people. We lost anybody who had seasonable jobs. We lost one guy who was a life insurance salesman. He said he had a convention to go to.

Weingandt: What?

Ryan: And they bought it. And he got out; they cleaned out probably I don't know forty, fifty guys figured out ways to get out early. One guy decided instead of going back first week of October can I get out in August in time to get back so I can start law school. They let him. Considered things like that, once people got the idea there the flood gates were open. So, there weren't quite as many. As I said we quit working and we just lay around the company area there getting our stuff packed. And getting some of your stuff shipped home because it was too big for your duffel bag. And so they went one day, not sure where it was but somewhere on post where went and took all our stuff, threw it all in a big box and sent it home for you.

Weingandt: And that worked?

Ryan: Worked fine. It took--I didn't get it till probably middle of November when I got home but it was there. Big wooden crate, there it was one day.

Weingandt: Did they bring in--they the battalion-- replace your company with a whole new group or by piecemeal?

Ryan: We had some holes because what I was saying about the guys who went home but we filed those up right away.

Weingandt: With others?

Ryan: Yeah. They were storing them pretty much as it were someplace. they had empty barracks on the other side or something they could put people in and get ready as soon we left they could move in that same day. But the logistics of that I really don't remember. I guess I didn't care.

Weingandt: You just wanted to get out.

Ryan: I just wanted to get out of there.

Weingandt: I'm fascinated I don't know if i know anyone up at the Dells that was in Vietnam in that period.

Ryan: You must know John Van Wee? He ran the lumber yard up there. George Field, his family is big in the restaurant business.

Weingandt: Oh the Fields restaurants, of course.

Ryan: George runs one of the duck things.

Weingandt: Okay, duck ladder?

Ryan: No the boats. The duck boats, there are two of them operating up there. I can never remember which one he runs.

Weingandt: I know the family.

Ryan: I still go by; we were up there just last week. A family member had an event up there so we went up so we drove by Zap's Tap; you've seen that was Bob Bueschelak. He was one of us, he's dead. He's been dead for quite a while. Actually, we've lost a lot of people already.

Weingandt: Well the Dells is a year round operation now, that wouldn't have worked with water parks they would start around Memorial Day then close up a couple of weeks--

Ryan: A couple of guys were painters I know, so we've got to work in the summer, you know. It was a scam but they weren't that anxious to keep us at that point anyway.

Weingandt: They had your replacements there so why worry about it.

Ryan: They had it figured out so we can clean it out for them.

Weingandt: They were actually probably ahead of ya.

Ryan: Yeah probably, to really depart from things I do have one other interesting story--

Weingandt: Go ahead.

Ryan: It doesn't involve me, it involves my wife. I told you we bought the house and she lived there by herself.

Weingandt: She's waiting for you to come back.

Ryan: She's living there by herself and one day two uniformed Officers, military officers showed up at the front door, which of course is about the worst thing that she'd want to see. And it turned out they didn't know, they hadn't done their research very well to know what was going on with me but they were coming to see me about doing a security check on a friend of mine that was going to work for the C.I.A.

Weingandt: But you were in Vietnam.

Ryan: I was in Vietnam but as I said they didn't do their homework. She sees two uniformed Officers show up at the door. It is not a good thing. Like I said, that is what they were doing, it was innocent enough. They were doing background check on a friend of mine.

Weingandt: Background check on a man in uniform.

Ryan: Yeah, I suppose but that was an ugly scene when she wrote to me about that.

Weingandt: Had to restart her heart.

Ryan: Yeah. I guess that is something that didn't happen to anyone else, I should tell you that.

Weingandt: I'm just curious, what did you do when you came home? Did you have a job waiting for you?

Ryan: Yes, I went right back to where I was. A matter of fact we got in late in the week and Monday morning I was back to work.

Weingandt: At the--

Ryan: Photo Art House. I didn't want to wait at all; I had bills and a house that I was barely able to make payments on during this whole time.

Weingandt: I was going to say an E-6 doesn't make that much money.

Ryan: I wasn't an E-6 when I was working. I was E-5 when I was working. I got promoted after we stopped working. So it helped me on my leave pay. I got leave pay at the higher rate.

Weingandt: You came back you are still part of the unit right?

Ryan: I was still part of the unit but we were given the option of just disappearing. If you wanted to stay in and get paid some guys choose to do that. Otherwise they said they'd just put us in the inactive status and sit around and wait for your discharge to come. I got back in '69; didn't get discharged till '72 because that is when my six years was up but I didn't have to do anything.

Weingandt: Okay, Dan anything else that you want to touch on? You can jump back to Vietnam if you want.

Ryan: I said we came back commercial. We came back through Hawaii--well we didn't talk about R&R and leave.

Weingandt: Tell me about that.

Ryan: I went on leave to Japan which we just had a lot of fun there. I played golf in Japan at the military installation. Not many people can say, even the Japanese can't play golf in Japan because it is too expensive. They go to Hawaii to play; the people with money go to Hawaii to play. So we went there, I met my wife in Hawaii for R&R.

Weingandt: Oh fantastic, how long did you have?

Ryan: A week so that was nice.

Weingandt: I never thought of that, I never hear of Japanese golf courses.

Ryan: They have some but mostly there just driving ranges but the rich people go to Hawaii.

Weingandt: Is that because of space limits?

Ryan: Space is so limited. But of course camps I was on, military always has one. We came back through Hawaii, then through Washington and in to Kansas, Fort Riley Kansas to process out and that was not good. They couldn't get it done because it wasn't a place you processed out from. There are a few places, that wasn't one of them. So they had people who didn't know what they were doing. It took us more than a week to process out.

Weingandt: I bet you guys were fit to be tied, you wanted to be home.

Ryan: And then finally it was time to come home so they brought planes in. I think there were two planes by then there weren't as many. And the first one they brought in didn't work, there were problems with it. So they wouldn't go until everybody could go together so they sent that plane back. It was a charter company. And brought in another one and that one there was a problem with. So we sat there, all day after waiting a week to process out before we could get back.

Weingandt: From Kansas you can take a bus.

Ryan: Finally we got going and we got into Madison and compared to what they have now, they have big greetings and things. The National Guard Band was there but we got off the planes and got to the bottom and we had a very loose formation because nobody was going to cooperate very much. And they said "okay you're done you can go." and that was it and everybody went home with no fanfare, no Governor there to speak and no nothing. It was just okay you can go. And we all packed up in our cars and went home.

Weingandt: I think history will bear out the fact that Vietnam was the first War that wasn't popular.

Ryan: That's right, that's why it was. And that is why we just wanted to get out of there. Get out of there, get home, get the uniform off because we had to travel in uniform but that was the end to that.

Weingandt: Okay, anything else Dan?

Ryan: Not that I have unless you have some things you want cleaned up?

Weingandt: I think you've done a good job here. So your military career ended in?

Ryan: '69. It was officially '72 but from '69 to '72, I didn't do anything.

Weingandt: You didn't go to meetings?

Ryan: I wasn't interested in that, I got the magazines and that was about it.

Weingandt: And you weren't paid?

Ryan: No

Weingandt: Okay well good enough. I appreciate your time Dan and you will be getting a copy of this.

Ryan: Okay well actually, I hope I had something to add.

Weingandt: You did.

Ryan: I do think it might be advantageous if you got one of your people to come to one of VFW meetings. And just present a little thing--particularly about the artifacts. Artifacts may be the wrong word. I gave all my slides and all the little stuff I had in my dresser drawers and I brought them up here. I had some insignia, name tags and a little thing of bullets that I found that had been spent that were laying around on the ground, .45 shells. I found a bunch of flachettes, which are those little dart things. I gave them all, my kids are going open that stuff up and say "I don't want this" and that's going to go in the trash because I remember as a kid going to the museum across the street here in the Capitol.

Weingandt: Before we moved over here.

Ryan: Before you moved over here but we did that kind of regularly, it was a lot of fun. So listen I hope somebody gets enjoyment out of this and learn something.

Weingandt: Okay back to Dan here, back to Vietnam.

Ryan: You were just going to talk about Bob Hope. There is a very big natural amphitheater that the Bob Hope Show was at; I don't know probably thirty, forty thousand people there. But Christmas Eve '68 because we were about the biggest post op in Vietnam we got the Christmas Eve show. Some people got it on the Tenth of December; they got their Christmas Show that was okay. But interestingly we had the Christmas Eve one but we were in the back of this huge, huge amphitheater and television cameras dominated. They had their stuff set up a little higher than stage level so they could shoot down on him from above. From the twentieth row, so really you knew what was going on out there but you really couldn't see anything. So then you get home and you get to see it but I didn't see it there. Interesting this huge place was like twenty-five, thirty thousand people, I don't know how many people, thousands of people in there. Then the next morning, Christmas morning, went back there Cardinal Cook was there from New York because he was the military--he was in charge of all the military chaplains so I went to mass at the same place. And he said mass on the same stage Bob Hope was on the night before. We were second row--

Weingandt: Good for you.

Ryan: Well But there was only five rows full. That's all that were there a few hundred people but to just to see a Cardinal say Mass is a big deal. So we went to that and got to meet him and that was on Christmas morning. Again, we got the Christmas mass rather than some other date. And what someone else got because you could only be in one place at a time. So he goes to the biggest place there.

Weingandt: That's nice.

Ryan: So I don't know I guess that's about the only thing I can think of to tell you.

Weingandt: That's great.

[end of interview]