

Wisconsin Veterans Museum  
Research Center

Transcript of an  
Oral History Interview with  
Michael R. Schott  
Light Weapons Infantryman, Army, Vietnam War  
2005

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**Schott, Michael R.** (b. 1948). Oral History Interview, 2005

User Copy: 2 sound cassette (ca. 68 min.); analog, 1 7/8 ips, mono.

Master Copy: 2 sound cassette (ca. 68 min.); analog, 1 7/8 ips, mono.

Transcript: 0.1 linear ft. (1 folder)

**Abstract:**

Michael "Mike" Schott, a Madison, Wisconsin native, discusses his service in the Vietnam War with the 4<sup>th</sup> Battalion, 23<sup>rd</sup> Infantry Regiment, 25<sup>th</sup> Infantry Division of the Army. Schott was born and raised in Madison, graduating from Central High School in 1966. He states he enrolled at the University of Wisconsin in September 1966 but learned in October that, despite his student-status, he was classified 1A and would soon be drafted. Schott left college and worked for the City of Madison Parks Department until he was finally drafted in March 1968. He recalls four other Parks Department employees were drafted on the same day. Schott describes in detail his basic training at Fort Campbell (Kentucky) and his advanced individual training at Fort Polk (Louisiana). He touches upon regional differences and interactions between Black and white soldiers at Fort Campbell. Schott emphasizes that Louisiana was hotter and more humid than Vietnam. He lists the weapons he was trained to use and assemble, including: M-16, M-60, .45, and the Light Anti-Tank Weapon. He feels his basic training field exercises did not adequately prepare him for real combat in Vietnam. Next, Schott describes his deployment overseas. He comments on his and his family's reaction to his deployment, stating that the antiwar protests in Madison had not picked up yet and that he had expected to be sent to Vietnam all along. Schott describes taking a commercial jet from San Francisco to Tan Son Nhut. His first impression was that Vietnam was more modern than he had expected. He comments that "it wasn't what John Wayne saw. It looked too built up, too commercialized already in '68." Schott was assigned as a replacement to the 4<sup>th</sup> Battalion, 23<sup>rd</sup> Infantry, 25th Division in Cu Chi (Vietnam). He recalls having "no idea what was going on" as a young soldier and feeling apprehensive when his buddies from basic training got their orders before him. He states veteran soldiers in his platoon treated him well and taught him survival tips he had not learned in basic training. For example, savvy soldiers rode on top of the track vehicles, not inside, so they could escape more easily if the vehicle hit a mine. Next, Schott describes a typical day in the field with his platoon. As a light weapons infantryman, his duties involved securing roads, minesweeping, and guarding the perimeter around Cu Chi and other villages. Schott describes in detail how the Army clear-cut all roadside vegetation and pulled down rubber trees with Rome Plows. Schott mentions he was assigned to live in a Vietnamese village, mingling with civilians by day and pulling guard duty at night. He states he was fortunate to have that experience because it made him appreciate the quality of life in the United States and exposed him to Vietnamese culture. While living in the village, Schott explains he also realized that the Vietnamese people "didn't want us here." He notes only old men, women and children lived in the villages because all the young men had joined either the North or the South Vietnamese armies. Schott compares the North Vietnamese and South Vietnamese fighters, stating he respected the NVA but felt the AVRN were not

serious soldiers. He also criticizes the Army for giving better equipment and newer track vehicles to the AVRN than the U.S. Infantry. After seven months on the front, Schott was sent to the rear guard due to a perforated eardrum and chronic ear infections. He spent the remainder of his tour of duty driving ration trucks to the front lines, which was dangerous because he often drove alone through villages to get to the troops. Schott tells of a few close calls and ambushes and notes ironically that with rockets hitting the showers and hooches, he often felt safer on the front lines than on base. In addition, Schott remarks upon interactions with Vietnamese civilians. In the village near Cu Chi, he attended the funeral of a South Vietnamese civilian casualty. He also tells of befriending two brothers who wanted to immigrate to America. Schott states the Americans learned not to go out on patrol if the merchants, who usually followed their units, did not come out. Next, Schott addresses military life and recreation. He mentions taking R&R in Tokyo and Taipei and passing a colorful temple in Ton Son Nhut. He also touches upon food, stating he ate mostly C-rations and popcorn sent in care-packages from his mother. Schott discusses at length marijuana and alcohol use among the troops. He reveals beer was hard to get except on the black market. He tells of smoking marijuana with his platoon sergeant and other soldiers before going on perimeter duty in the village near Cu Chi; however, he states he did not feel impaired on duty. Schott also comments on friendships between officers and enlisted men, which the Army discouraged. He was friends with his platoon sergeant (“the best platoon sergeant we ever had”), who was demoted after he was caught with marijuana. Schott also recalls officers who were not as well-respected. He describes how a new “shake and bake” platoon sergeant was killed in front of him while on a patrol. Schott also speaks negatively about a company commander who made the troops spit-shine their boots and march in formation in a combat zone, implying that this was against Army policy and that the commander’s plane was shot down by friendly fire, leading to his resignation. Throughout the interview, Schott remembers several incidents of cruelty and poor judgment in combat: his platoon fired in the air to scare Vietnamese civilians who were driving ox-carts on a road after curfew; the Americans “ravished the land” by excessively burning grasses around Viet Cong base camps; and one night when soldiers in his platoon were high, they radioed in an air raid on a group of moving bodies who turned out to be civilians. In March 1970, Schott returned to the United States with “no reception.” He reflects on the long-term effects of the Vietnam War, stating it made him “grow up in a hurry.” After the war, Schott had many college friends who were veterans, but he states nobody discussed their combat experiences. Shortly after his homecoming, Schott joined the Vietnam Veterans Against the War because he felt the Vietnamese did not want the Americans in their country. He shares his view that he “didn’t understand” why the U.S. was involved in Vietnam, but that “somebody was making a boatload of money” from the war. Schott reveals that he joined the VFW post in Middleton (Wisconsin) in 1986 along with his brother-in-law who fought in Vietnam as a Marine. Schott states he was the youngest VFW member at the time and initially felt wary about joining, but today is an active member. Schott sums up his Vietnam experience by stating: “It was probably fifty-fifty, good and bad” for him personally, but that politically “we didn’t accomplish a thing except lose fifty, sixty thousand people, because Communism is now in control.”

**Biographical Sketch:**

Schott (b. 1948) was born in Madison, Wisconsin and graduated from Madison Central High School in 1966. He dropped out of college in 1967 after learning he was classified 1A in the draft and worked for the City of Madison Parks Department for two years. He was drafted into the Army in March 1968 and served in Cu Chi (Vietnam) as a light weapons infantryman with the 4<sup>th</sup> Battalion, 23<sup>rd</sup> Infantry, 25<sup>th</sup> Division. In March 1970, Schott returned home to Wisconsin and became a member of Vietnam Veterans Against the War. Since 1986, he has also been an active member of the Veterans of Foreign Wars, Middleton Post. Schott currently lives in Middleton, Wisconsin.

Interviewed by Jim Kurtz, 2005

Transcribed by Joseph Dillenburg, 2007

Transcript edited and abstract written by Darcy I. Gervasio, 2010.

**Interview Transcript:**

- Jim: My name is Jim Kurtz. I'm interviewing Mike Schott. Mike, where were you born?
- Mike: Madison, Wisconsin. April 1, 1948.
- Jim: April Fools' Baby?
- Mike: Yeah. St. Mary's Hospital.
- Jim: April 1st. April 1st, 1948, St. Mary's. And where did you grow up?
- Mike: Madison.
- Jim: Where in Madison?
- Mike: Central Madison, south side, near St. Mary's Hospital. Went to St. James Grade School for eight years, parochial school, and then graduated from Madison Central, 1966.
- Jim: And what year did—graduated from Madison Central, 1966. And what did you do after high school?
- Mike: I started at the University of Wisconsin, in September of 1966. And, in October of 1966, I received a 1A classification.
- Jim: You said you got classified 1A--
- Mike: In October of 1966
- Jim: So what happened?
- Mike: At that point in time, I went down to the draft board because I was in school. I asked them why I was classified 1A when I was in school. "Because that's the way it is." And so I said, "What are my chances of getting drafted?" "Pretty damn good." So I quit school. With three of my buddies and we decided we were going to go into the Navy Reserve, and because of some juvenile delinquency problems, two out of the three of us weren't acceptable to the Navy Reserves but we were all acceptable to the Navy. And I wasn't going to go four years anywhere, so I waited to get drafted. My other buddy immediately went to the Navy, for four years. And six months later, the other buddy went to the Navy for four years. I waited my chances. I didn't get drafted until March of 1968.

- Jim: So what did you do the year of 1967?
- Mike: I worked for the City of Madison Parks Department. In fact, there was four of us that were working together for the City of Madison Parks Department. We all went home for lunch that day and all came back with our notice to report for the draft.
- Jim: Oh, that's—
- Mike: And we all went in together. So, it was interesting.
- Jim: Okay, so you were drafted in April of '67, did you say?
- Mike: March.
- Jim: March of '67. And when did you enter service, go on active duty?
- Mike: March 17<sup>th</sup>. March 18<sup>th</sup>.
- Jim: March 18<sup>th</sup>.
- Mike: '68.
- Jim: Okay. '68. And when did you separate from the military?
- Mike: March 17<sup>th</sup>, 1970.
- Jim: Symmetric. Where did you go for basic training?
- Mike: Fort Campbell, Kentucky.
- Jim: Fort Campbell, Kentucky. Did, is there anything memorable that happened there?
- Mike: [pauses] That's when I first realized what was going on in the military, when they had us out shoveling snow with entrenching tools on gravel walks. That was the most memorable thing. And then, the other humorous thing that happened was the black people never saw snow before that were drafted that were with us, and we told them there were snow snakes, us from the North, and they were looking for snow snakes.
- Jim: [laughs] That's interesting. Then where did you go for AIT?
- Mike: Fort Polk, Louisiana.
- Jim: Tigerland.

- Mike: Tigerland.
- Jim: Anything memorable there?
- Mike: [pauses] It was hot, actually hotter than Vietnam.
- Jim: By hotter than Vietnam, you mean the humidity?
- Mike: Humidity-wise, heat-wise. I mean it was like being in a steam bath most of the time. I was there in July.
- Jim: Was that six weeks?
- Mike: I think it was eight weeks.
- Jim: Okay. And what did you think? Was the training any good?
- Mike: Nah. [Long pause]. I guess it was your basic infantry training. I mean we got used to—it wasn't anything like Vietnam. I mean they tried to make it similar to Vietnam, but I don't—heat-wise it was.
- Jim: Did you get to fire all the weapons?
- Mike: We had to fire every weapon. I mean, we fired everything. We fired everything that we had in combat. We fired the M-60, we fired the 45, the M-16, the L.A.W. [Light Anti-tank Weapon], threw grenades. Basically, you know, everything. We had, like, ambush training. We went out, we spent two weeks, two different weeks out in the field. I guess it got us used to it. We learned how to take apart our weapons and clean them and do stuff like that. It was a little more relaxed than basic training. More of a camaraderie rather than being treated as a bunch of idiots.
- Jim: Anybody you trained with who had been in Vietnam?
- Mike: Yes.
- Jim: Did you have a duty assignment before you went to Vietnam after AIT?
- Mike: Nope, home for thirty days. I think it was 30 days leave. Went home for 30 days leave and reported to Fort Ord.
- Jim: What was your reaction when you got orders to Vietnam?
- Mike: "I guess we're going." [Laughs] I mean, we all know in basic training that that's where we were headed. Those who went to Fort Polk, we knew we

were going to Vietnam, so it was no big surprise. I had a lot of time to think about it, I guess. If I'm going, I'm going, you know?

Jim: Did you have any impressions about Vietnam at that point in time?

Mike: None. Absolutely none.

Jim: Okay. And what was the reaction of your friends, when you were back on leave for 30 days, that you were going to Vietnam?

Mike: Nothing. I mean, there wasn't a lot of activity or not of lot in '68 of protesting going on about Vietnam in Madison, which was a hotbed of protesting. There wasn't a heck of a lot and there wasn't much reaction. If I'm going, I'm going.

Jim: So you said you reported to Fort Ord. And then did you fly out of San Francisco?

Mike: Flew out of, must have been San Francisco. Flew up through Alaska, stopped in Alaska for re-fuel or whatever the heck we did up there, and then we flew from there to [pauses], we stopped in Japan because we had engine problems. And from Japan we stopped in Korea somewhere and then from there into Tan Son Nhut.

Jim: You flew on a commercial transport?

Mike: Commercial transport.

Jim: And when you landed at Tan Son Nhut, when was it, what time of the day?

Mike: I believe it was in the morning. I'm real foggy on that. I know it was hot.

Jim: What was your first impressions when you stepped out of the airplane at Tan Son Nhut?

Mike: [Pauses] Mmm. I didn't expect it because I had seen John Wayne's movie, and I didn't expect what I saw there, and I was quite, it wasn't what John Wayne saw. It looked too built up, too commercialized already in '68.

Jim: Where they operating combat aircraft? You know, going out on missions.

Mike: Jets were going out on missions and helicopters were going out, you know. Gunships were flying out. But it was so, I was just, it was all new to me. I had no idea what was going on.



- Jim: Did you travel on--fly with anyone you know on this trip?
- Mike: We all went over. All of our, pretty much all of our AIT unit went over together.
- Jim: So you had some people that you could talk to?
- Mike: Yup.
- Jim: So when you got to Tan Son Nhut, where did you go there then?
- Mike: We stayed in our reception station until our orders came through.
- Jim: Was that at Tan Son Nhut or up at Long Binh?
- Mike: I think it was at Long Binh.
- Jim: 90<sup>th</sup> Replacement Company then. Did you have any idea where you were gonna go?
- Mike: Had no idea. In fact, that was what even spookier. All of the guys, there was two of us that didn't go anywhere for a week because somehow our orders got all screwed up, and everybody else was gone. So, everybody else was already gone. So, that made it even scarier because when we did get sent, none of us, nobody ever, I didn't go with anybody I knew, so when I got sent to the 25<sup>th</sup> Division down in Cu Chi I was with absolutely nobody I knew. Everybody had already gone. Our whole AIT company was gone already.
- Jim: And how did you get from Long Binh to Cu Chi? Did you fly or--?
- Mike: Fly, on a transport.
- Jim: So you flew. So the roads weren't all that safe. While you were waiting for this assignment, did you have any different impressions of Vietnam?
- Mike: No, I had no idea what was going on.
- Jim: Did you get put on any details or anything like that when you were--?
- Mike: No, no, no. Didn't. Nothing that I could remember, nothing that brings back my memory at all.
- Jim: When you to the 25<sup>th</sup> Division, did you receive some in-country training before you--?

- Mike: One day.
- Jim: And what was it?
- Mike: Maybe it was a half a day's training or something where they, kind of similar to, almost exactly the same training that we got at Fort Polk, where they took us out, and a guy talked to us about the wires and the trip-flares and the tunnels, and about this and about that. It was basically, it was almost like AIT over again, except we were in Vietnam.
- Jim: Okay. Then, what was your impressions of the Cu Chi base?
- Mike: [long pause] I thought it was fairly modern other than the hooch that we stayed in, and it was hooches, it wasn't tents. The hooch we stayed in was right next to the 1<sup>st</sup> Cav's flight line. And there were always sorties going in and out, and gunships coming in and out. I was just, I was only 20 years old so I had no idea what was going on.
- Jim: So then you got assigned to the 24<sup>th</sup> Battalion, 20<sup>th</sup>--?
- Mike: 4<sup>th</sup> Battalion, 23<sup>rd</sup> Infantry Division, up in Tay Ninh.
- Jim: So how did you get from Cu Chi to Tay Ninh?
- Mike: Flew. C-130 or whatever the hell, one of those little puddle-jumper planes.
- Jim: What was the facility like that you got to in Tay Ninh?
- Mike: It was fairly nice, too. It had roads, dirt roads, and the rear area, company area was hooches. It was different from what I had expected there also.
- Jim: How were you received when you got into the unit?
- Mike: "Here comes another person." I mean it was nothing, nothing special. I mean, we had to get our TA-50 and then they hauled us out to the--
- Jim: Were you treated like an idiot? You know in the movies, they--
- Mike: No, just get your TA-50 and we'll send you out. You know, you're going out into the field.
- Jim: What's a TA-50?

- Mike: Your gear. Rifle and whatever else they gave you. I already had my clothes, and you got a rifle, and you got some magazines, and basically that's what you got.
- Jim: Did they tell you how to fill a magazine?
- Mike: That I don't remember. I had enough [training] only put 18 rounds in rather than twenty and stuff like that..
- Jim: What about keeping the ammunition clean?
- Mike: I learned all that once I got to the company I was with. Out in the field, then guys teach you things, different things.
- Jim: So they treated you pretty well?
- Mike: Oh yeah.
- Jim: Did you have any feelings as you were going out to the field? I mean apprehension?
- Mike: No. I just, I had no idea. I mean it was all new, it was all different. And I had no idea what to expect.
- Jim: What were your duty assignments when you were in Vietnam?
- Mike: I was light weapons infantryman.
- Jim: So you were eleven-bravo [11B, Military Occupational Specialty code for Infantry] in battle. So you were in a mech unit [Mechanized Infantry unit], so you weren't a driver?
- Mike: No. They asked me if I wanted to be a driver, and I said no.
- Jim: So was your full twelve months then as--
- Mike: No, six or seven months. Then I had some ear problems and I got out of the field, because I had a perforated eardrum and I was constantly susceptible to ear infections. And after, I think it was seven months, I got assigned to the rear area and basically ran rations out to the troops that I was with everyday.
- Jim: So and how did you run those rations out?
- Mike: Truck.

- Jim: Was that dangerous, trucking?
- Mike: Well, I guess it was dangerous as it could be. Yeah, it was dangerous. It was just one guy going out. I mean two of us. No, one guy would go out on the truck by yourself with a rifle. Go through the town and drive to the fire support base. And, I guess I never thought about it bein' dangerous because I was dumb and stupid, but yeah, it was dangerous. You didn't have any support with you. You had your M-16 and a bag of magazines, and away you went.
- Jim: And no radio.
- Mike: No. Who would I talk to?
- Jim: Can you describe a typical duty day when you were in the field as an eleven-bravo?
- Mike: Get up in the mornin', and whatever our mission was, we got in the track and we went. It was different because the platoon, Fourth Platoon is supposed to have four tracks, and when I got there we had one track and then we got a second one back. And I don't think we ever operated with four. I think we had three and at that point in time we only had, when I first got there I think there was only eight people in our platoon, eight or nine people in our platoon. And a track is supposed to have I think 11 people on it, and sometimes there was a track commander, and a driver and one person riding on the track. We weren't fully staffed, ever. And the way they taught us in training was, we all marched inside the track and rode inside the track and everybody had their seat and when you deployed you all marched out. Well, you never rode inside the track because that was more dangerous place to ride. We rode on top of the track.
- Jim: Why was it the most dangerous?
- Mike: Because if an RPG was fired at the track, it pierced one side and exploded inside the track, and you were a goner. If an RPG hit the track and you were on the track you would fall, be blown off the track and your chances of survival were much greater. That I learned in the field. Yeah, and I thought it was crazy.
- Jim: Were these newer tracks that had the diesel engines?
- Mike: They were diesel tracks but they were junk
- Jim: Because they had just been there for so long?

- Mike: They had been there for so long, and you'd be going down the road, and your tracks would split and you'd have to stop and fix your track.
- Jim: So you'd get out and do this mission--?
- Mike: Whatever we had to do. I mean, some of the first stuff we did was road security. We went out and--
- Jim: Could you describe what road security was?
- Mike: We were with two engineers who had minesweepers. The track would follow the road behind the minesweepers and the troops. And it was usually a battalion-sized operation, no, a company-sized operation, where we would spread out, five meters or ten meters apart, and walk the side of the road for ambush as the minesweepers would sweep the road. And when we'd clear our section of the road, and then we'd set up all day and do security, basically day long, along the roadside in little pods for the convoy to pull through on Route One.
- Jim: Did— was the vegetation removed from the sides of the road?
- Mike: My first series of operations, yes, the vegetation was removed. It was like the first, maybe five hundred meters was cleared, completely clear cut from the road and gone. And then, so nobody could set up near the road and we'd set up our security. And when we'd set up our security we were set up actually in the rubber plantation.
- Jim: And was it hot in the rubber—what do you remember about the rubber plantations?
- Mike: It was hot and it was hard to walk. Through the cleared area it was hard to walk. And it was just hot. I was in the field for the rainy season so when it would rain, it would rain and you'd get wet and you'd dry off. I mean, it wasn't like you stopped.
- Jim: Did you have much contact with Vietnamese people when you were out in the field?
- Mike: Yes. We always knew what to expect when we went out because if the Vietnamese followed us out, followed the tracks out and tried to sell us their goods, we knew it was kind of safe. If they didn't show up in the morning, we figured something was up.
- Jim: And that was probably true.

- Mike: It was true. And we had kids that followed us. I actually had—I actually had--Our track, which was Three-Two track. We had one boy and his little brother that wanted to come to the United States in the worst way. And they followed us out and they got us whatever we wanted. After we did road security, I mean we got to know them pretty well.
- Jim: Did you have any memorable experiences in this road security, like an ambush of a convoy or anything?
- Mike: Never had anything happen. When we did road security other than they blew mines. We found mines every day. We never had any combat activity then. And then--
- Jim: When you said you said you found mines, were they regular mines or were they these booby traps?
- Mike: We never saw 'em because they just blew 'em. We just knew that-- because I was never present with the engineers. We knew what kinds of mines they were or what they were or anything other than they blew 'em.
- Jim: What other types of things did you do?
- Mike: We did security for-- we set up one time for security for the Rome Plow operations, which were actually clearing the side of a road. And that's how we saw how they actually cleared it, where they actually put the two Rome Plows together.
- Jim: Could you describe what a Rome Plow is?
- Mike: It's like a D8 or D9 Cat, with a huge blade on the front and a big hook on the back. And what they would do is hook two large, the largest chain I ever saw, together, hook them together, maybe a hundred feet apart and pull the rubber down, push it in piles and within two days all the rubber trees were gone. All the gooks would come in, cut it up, haul it in their ox carts over to the brick kilns. And we actually pulled security out in the dense jungle, in the dense rubber plantations. They were overgrown. Well, actually some of the rubber plantations were being worked. And they had actually the bowls and they were—what we didn't destroy, they were working. We did that for a while. Whenever there was, I'm guessing intelligence said there was Vietnamese in the area, we would go out into the middle, beyond the rubber plantations, out into grassy areas, and we'd sent the tracks. A company would set up a lager position and we'd go out and search and clear it. Two or three times we actually found Viet Cong base camps, with fires going, and nobody around, food cooking, and nobody around. And we looked and looked and looked high and low and found nobody. We found medical supplies, bunkers.

- Jim: Were you ever sniped at when you were at these base camps?
- Mike: Never saw anybody in the base camp. Never saw anybody, never found anybody. Found evidence and then the engineers would blow the bunkers and stuff like that.
- Jim: Did you find any weapons or anything like that in the base camp?
- Mike: Found some ammunition, found basically medical supplies, food. It was like a staging area. They never told us, intelligence never told us--I was just a grunt, I wasn't military [intelligence], but we found evidence of people being there. Of course, they could hear us coming from miles with the tracks, you know. They could hear us coming through. Anyway they could hear if you'd come in a sortie too I guess. It wouldn't make any difference. We never ran into anybody, never found anybody, other than evidence, on that operation. We did, we at one time went out and picked up a prisoner-of-war that came back. We went far away and picked up a prisoner-of-war. They released him. And picked him up and came back. We never saw him 'cause we were just part of the mission, that was the escort, to go pick him up and come back. We did, many times we did search and clear operations. Sometimes we found evidence of old bunkers and nobody there.
- Everything we found we blew. We went on a battalion-sized mission one time where actually they never told us what was going on. The first night we were there we went out on an ambush patrol, being real sneaky. You'd go out on a track. The inside of the track was loaded and the top of the track was loaded and when you got out on an ambush patrol, the guys would jump off the track and go on ambush, and the guys that were inside the track would climb up on top the track and come back like you were just out doing a recon. We never did make contact. They were so many gooks on the patrol that we never fired on 'em. There was like a battalion coming through, and we never fired or we would never have made it back in.
- Jim: Okay, so you were on this ambush position and a battalion-sized unit went by you, is that what you're saying?
- Mike: Yup. And the decision was made not to fire.
- Jim: Did you have a radio? After they went by did you let 'em know that, what had happened?
- Mike: Yeah. And then once they went by, we stayed out the rest of the evening and came back in. I mean we would have been dead men. There were so many coming that—and the next morning—See they never told us

anything. The next morning we're all up in the morning, were back in in the morning about nine, ten o'clock in the morning, all of a sudden we hear this ka-boom, ka-boom, ka-boom! And we were actually a clearing operation for a B-52 strike. That's what our battalion-sized—that's why we were there. And I can't remember exactly, it was up near Dau Tieng is all I can remember. It was a brand-new area we'd never ever been in. And then within two hours of the B-52 strike, we were out searching and clearing and we found tons of bunkers, and tons of all kinds of shit. We never found any dead bodies but the B-52s were dropped within hundred a hundred yards of the bunkers.

Jim: So that's was some pretty good intelligence, then. Did anybody say anything to you guys about not springing the ambush on this battalion?

Mike: No. I mean it was a decision. "Come on guys."--It was either--Our chances were so slim.

Jim: So you had no officer going berserk about the fact that--?

Mike: No. But our platoon leader did get shot out of the ground. Our battalion commander got shot out of the air, or got shot at in his Loach [OH-6 Cayuse helicopter] and to this day, my suspicions were it was our own people because he was a complete asshole. And he was relieved of his command after he got shot out because he was the guy at Fire Support Base Rawlins where we were at made us come in from going all day long and then stand in formation, spit shine our boots and be clean-shaven and stand in a formation in a field-lager position, which was totally against anything we were ever taught in training, never to bunch up in the field, never to bunch, never to walk in large groups, never to congregate in large groups. And here we are standing in formation in a combat zone, in a fire-support base.

Jim: So he got relieved.

Mike: Yeah, I believe he was relieved of his command after he got shot down. I mean, the morale of the troops was so terri—I mean here—it was just stupidity. It was dumb things. You know, spit shine your boots and stand in formation at night? Come on, guy.

Jim: At night, how often did you have to go out on ambush?

Mike: It depends. It rotated, depending on what company you were in, what company had to go out on ambush, where you were at, what you did the day before. Part of my mission, we lived in a village.

Jim: Could you describe that, please?



Mike: Our platoon was chosen, because we were the top platoon in our company, to go and spread our battalion among two villages. And we actually had an interpreter with us, and we lived in a little compound at the edge of a little village, away from the main base camp. We were dropped off and that's where we stayed. And our mission was to go into the village in the morning, mingle with people. And at night, go in on ambush patrol basically, and secure the village from the Viet Cong coming in. First day in the village, we walked into the village and we were within fifty yards of the edge of the village, and a 105 round was detonated in a tree, and the person sitting at the café, it was a little nook meer[??] cafe, was killed. He was an ARVN that was killed. Now we weren't—and there was five of us, I believe, in this particular village, and from that day forward there was only two of us, my Doomsday Mao[??], our platoon sergeant and myself were the only ones would ever go back in the village. The people were so scared.

**[End of Tape 1, Side A]**

Mike: We'd have to go on, not every night but certain nights, we would go into the village. We were supposed to go every night, but we didn't. And do the perimeter. So we'd march like through town just at dusk and then instead of coming back we'd either go to one side of the village or to the other. The village was basically one street and like a rice paddy berm on either side behind the hooches and we'd set up along the rice paddy berm on an ambush patrol. And we'd only stay out till like midnight or something like that. Then we'd come back in.

Jim: And why was that?

Mike: I don't know. That's what intelligence told us to do.

Jim: So, you said only you and the platoon sergeant would go in during the day. At night would you go?

Mike: Everyone would have to go. There was only five of us. And one evening when we were going into the village, it was [unintelligible], we were marching through the village and we happened to look back out of the corner of our eye and we saw this flame up in the sky. So we—"What the hell is that shit?" So we went back and here was two little kids with a rag soaked into kerosene or whatever the hell it was, waving that we were in the village that night for an ambush. We never made any contact at all during that ambush but one night when we didn't go in, supposedly the ARVNs made contact.

Jim: So the ARVNs would do--?

- Mike: We were in an ARVN compound. They were like National Guard or whatever it was sitting on the edge of the village and there was like maybe five or six of them in there, all young guys. And supposedly they made contact when we were in there. We never knew for sure because after this, we couldn't believe what the hell was going on.
- Jim: How did the villagers feel about you?
- Mike: We had no idea.
- Jim: Did any of them look hostile or did they just kinda ignore you?
- Mike: Well, they treated us fairly decent. I mean, we actually, after the person was killed, the guy that was killed at the café, we, Jim Legner [?] and I went into the village, I think we got one other guy to come in, we went to the funeral. We got asked to come to the funeral. We, actually, the village chief, or whatever he was, asked us to come in, and we got treated like guests of honor. We were supposed to eat the head of the, the comb of the chicken, and do all that shit. I don't know if you ever heard about that.
- Jim: Yes, I've done that. Did you eat the head of the chicken?
- Mike: No. We said we'd rather not. "Well you're supposed to." "Well, we'd rather not." So it was quite a—Even though it was difficult and different, I formed a lot of impressions of what was going on in the village. Like, "hey, they don't really want us here." It was obvious after the little kid was waving the flag. I mean, my impression was, "hey, they don't want us here." I mean, it's their brothers and sisters out there that are coming in to get food. The Viet Cong are their brothers and sisters. I mean, they're being nice to us because we're here, but I don't think they really want us here. It's pretty obvious that we never made contact on our ambush patrol. Only ARVNs made contact. So--
- Jim: So, how long were you there?
- Mike: I'm trying to think, it was a couple weeks. And then, somebody said, "Hey, these guys got it made. They're only going on ambush at night and they aren't doing anything all day long, but going in the village and screwing around or going to the market or doing this or that." So they'd come and picked us up every morning and took us out on a missions all day long and then we'd have to go back at night and still go out on ambush every night and then get picked up every morning by the track. So we said, "We don't want to do this anymore." So we went back to the regular unit and I don't think we were back—and then somebody else

pulled our mission or something. And then we went back for another week or something like that. It becomes foggy, because during that time we went on some missions, some security missions with the Green Berets. Medical team of the Green Berets, we did security for them, too. We did all kinds of different, crazy things.

Jim: What are the most memorable experiences?

Mike: Living in the village was the neatest part.

Jim: Did you ever have any, when you were pulling perimeter guard, did you ever have any difficulties then? Were you ever attacked on the perimeter?

Mike: Never attacked on the perimeter. Never attacked on the perimeter. And sometimes, I'd really wonder what would happen if we got attacked because we used to—our platoon used to pull bunker guard all night long. I mean all of us together because—there'd be like, I think there'd be ten in a platoon, and we'd all sit on one or two tracks and we'd smoke dope and stand guard all night long by our—All of us would stand guard all night long. I mean, not every night, but certain nights when we knew what to expect, if we weren't going out on ambush that night or whatever we were doing. Sometimes I'd wonder what would have ever happen if we ever got attacked.

Jim: When you were out in the field, did you ever get any time off?

Mike: We got to come in for, I think we were out for like six weeks, and we got to come in for like stand-down for one day or something like that. For two days stand-down and then the minute we got in we had to go back out and pull security on the bunker. It was kinda stupid. I mean, couldn't figure out. Then, one other time we came in and went to what was called a Tay Ninh Hilton, which was like a—I've actually seen it on some of the websites now, pictures of actually what it looked like. I've got pictures of it, also. It was like a big above ground swimming pool. And you got to spend two days there and not have to do guard duty and you got good food and stuff like that. So it was--

Jim: Did you see the Cao Dai Temple when you were at Tay Ninh?

Mike: Yeah, I went by there many times every day. Every day we went by there. When we left, when we left Fire Support Base Rawlins to go do road security we went by the Cao Dai Temple almost every day.

Jim: What was your impression of that?

Mike: “Man, this is incredible. This is just incredible.” It’s so colorful and so beautiful. I actually got a picture of it. And you do too, I know. So we did many, many different things. And probably the thing that makes me wonder the most was the time that I was walking--that’s what I got the Bronze Star for.

Jim: Tell us what that was.

Mike: We were out in the middle of nowhere walking down like an old runway or an old airport. We were within maybe, I’m guessing, within a click of the Cambodian border. I was walking right flank, and we had a brand-new, he was like brand-new, platoon sergeant, instant, “shake and bake” platoon sergeant. And I was walking right flank and he says, “You’d been out there long enough, I want to switch positions with you.” And I says, “I don’t think you should. You have no idea what’s going on here. You’re pretty new.” And he says, “Well, I’m out ranking you. You’re gonna come back in here and I’m gonna walk right flank.” And it wasn’t five minutes later, we got, took sniper fire and he was killed. Or he was shot, and of course our E-6 platoon sergeant and I stayed out and I covered for him, and he dragged him [Sergeant Mike] back in. And Mike died. Once we dragged him back, we pulled back in.

Jim: Mike died, now that was the sergeant?

Mike: That’s all I remember, his name was Mike.

Jim: Okay, the “shake and bake” was the one that was killed?

Mike: The “shake and bake” was--He changed positions with me and five minutes after he changed right flank with me, he was killed. And I just, I guess I don’t realize how lucky I was. And we pulled him back, called in air strikes, walked, we’re into Cambodia, looking for whatever and the only thing we found was a pith hat and evidence people being around, but we were well into Cambodia at that time, and that was, I don’t even remember when it was, but I just know that I can just count my lucky stars that I made it home because he pulled rank on me and made me switch positions with him.

Jim: Okay. Now did you have any close calls like that?

Mike: Ah, one other time. This was when, when I was in, actually doing rations and stuff, and I had less than a month in country, and somebody asked for volunteers to go down to, fly down to Cu Chi, and my old platoon sergeant was down at the Cu Chi Hilton, so Steve Van Camp and myself volunteered to go down to bring a deuce and a half back from Cu Chi and drive it up to—actually to drive it up from Long Binh to Tay Ninh. And

we went to Long Binh, picked up the deuce and a half, and then drove it with a convoy to Cu Chi. And then our old platoon sergeant was in, or platoon leader, Paul McGuire, was at the Cu Chi Hilton, and I'd seen him when I had to go down for medical stuff. I'd stay with him rather than stay where I was supposed to stay. And then him and I would do our thing, smoke our dope and do whatever we had to do and just party.

Jim: He was an officer?

Mike: He was an officer. And he got relieved of his command because he got caught. He was the best platoon sergeant we ever had. He got caught with us on a stand down one time in one of our hooches, and the first sergeant said, "You're done."

Jim: So the first sergeant fired the platoon--.

Mike: Then he became company commander. But he couldn't go out in the field with us, supposedly. And anyway, him and I were good friends. Anyway, coming back from--we spent the night in Cu Chi, and then the next day we were heading up to Tay Ninh with the truck, bringing it back to our area. And I had like thirty, I had like two weeks left in country. So in the morning we said, "Well, this is pretty safe." We each had a rifle with one magazine because we figured y'know, we're in a convoy, they already had to wait for the security to go through. So Van Camp and I got toted all up, and said: "We're gonna have a nice ride." And he's riding, we were heading up and we weren't maybe three miles out of Cu Chi, and we got ambushed. And Van Camp, he'd never--Van Camp had always been rations. He says, "What do I do." [Loudly] I says, "Get your head down! I'm gonna get on the floor, and put the pedal to the metal and just keep right on fucking going and don't stop!" [Laughing] And I'm on the floor, I'm so fucking scared, I only had one magazine. What the fuck am I gonna do, you know? I was so fucking scared because what did we have? Van Camp, he's looking over the steering wheel, and I'm on the floor, and I says "just put the pedal to the metal and go." And we took fire, and got out of the ambush. So, whatever the hell, we didn't stop. We just kept on going.

Jim: On these memorable experiences—

Mike: One other time when we were a blocking force and we had no idea, somebody was getting attacked and we were actually a blocking force for it. And we were set up. They never told us anything, so basically we were--We never did go into any combat at that time so--Um, I guess, while in the rear area, also, as doing, I felt safer sometimes out in the field because rocket attacks--One night we were, I was in the shower area taking a shower in the middle of the--you know it was dark, and the rocket

came into the motor pool, and landed within a hundred yards of the shower stall. Basically, you got on the ground and--Every night the rockets would come in. You got on the ground and crawled into the bunker, which was next to the shower and hoped it would be over. I came back from R&R, and the hooch that I slept in when I was in the rear area was gone, from the rocket attack. From that point on, I was pretty sure I slept in the bunker every night. So it was not safe anywhere. I mean, they had us zeroed in. They had us zeroed in with whatever they were, their little twig stick rockets that would come in.

Jim: Those were the 122s.

Mike: Yeah.

Jim: Did these experiences have any long term, have any residual effect on your life or anything like that?

Mike: Umm, I don't know, I guess I learned a lot about the people. I formed a lot of impressions about the government and—

Jim: What impressions did you have about the government?

Mike: I immediately joined the Vietnam Veterans Against the War in Vietnam when I came back because I thought it was stupid that we were there. Well, let me back up a little bit. We were on a clearing mission, going through a jungle area that was so bad that we were machete-ing our way through, trying to clear this area, and we asked recon by fire, and they told us we couldn't recon by fire because we might hurt somebody. And I says "Wait a minute--

Jim: Who, your people--?

Mike: Our commander asked if we could recon by fire and they called up whatever, and they told us, no, we couldn't recon by fire. We were searching and clearing this area, but we couldn't recon by fire. We couldn't get any strikes in, or anything in, because we might hurt somebody. And we're searching and clearing. I had no idea what the mission was but I said, "That's"...after thinking about that I said, "Man, this is the most chickenshit operation we were ever on." The only time we could ever fire on anybody, basically, was if we became attacked. We weren't on any sort of a--we were more on a holding mission.

Jim: You mentioned pot a few times, and I'm reluctant to ask about that.

Mike: Go ahead. I never did it. I never smoked before I went over there. I thought it was stupid. And, for the first couple weeks I just kind of sat

around and watched these guys and “what the fuck are they doing?” “Why don’t you try it?” And once I tried it I said “Well, what the fuck? Why not?” I mean we couldn’t get beer. We could never get Class Six out in the field, and the only way we got to drink any beer is if we went out on road security and the gooks would come by after the road was secure and sell us beer or something like that.

Jim: What was your impression of that beer, Beer 33?

Mike: Oh, we had Falstaff. They had, let me tell you, the gooks had more of our stuff, and I know how they got it because when I was on R&R, we snuck out of Camp Alpha and went into town, and actually made a couple money orders up, and we traded a money order for MPC, and we’d also go to the PX, with our ration card and buy cases of beer for two dollars and forty cents, ten cents a can, and sell ‘em for ten bucks out at the stand. We’d sell them out at the stand for ten bucks. We’d make ourselves seven fifty, just by selling our cases of beer. We’d figure all this out when we down in Saigon. So it was all black market shit, and we’d pay a dollar a can for beer, and we knew that they paid. Well, we knew we paid two bucks a can for beer, and whatever. We know how they got their beer, and we got Pepsi and--

Jim: So it was socially acceptable in your peer group to smoke pot. Was there any--?

Mike: Well, in our platoon--We had one guy, Denny Berryman [?] we called him “the roller.” He never smoked. He was from LA, and he never smoked, and he would be the roller. He’d take all those cigarettes, take all the tobacco out of them. He’d pack ‘em for us. He had all his little tools, and he’d sit with us, and talk with us, and then we’d eat C-rations and do whatever we had to do and just have a good time.

Jim: So you never felt like you were impaired?

Mike: I guess I never thought about it. And when we lived in the village, man, one night we got, we were pretty well smoked up and we had the starlight scope up. We were right at the base of the, actually we were within like probably three clicks of the base of the Black Virgin Mountain. And we were out with the starlight scope and were kinda looking and looking. And God, we see lights out, it was like ten o’clock at night. “I think we should call in some air strikes.” So, Doomsday Mao[??] says okay. He gets on the horn and he says, “We see lights.” And he gets out the map and calls in the coordinates and pretty soon the lights go out. After not the air strikes, but the arty fires in there the next morning they were dragging civilians, dead civilians out to the road.

- Jim: They were moving.
- Mike: They were moving at night.
- Jim: In a free-fire zone.
- Mike: Yeah. I mean, it was so dark. One night we're out in the middle of a rice paddy on ambush. We spent the whole night out, like in a little island in the middle of a rice paddy. We marched out there and in the morning before dark, before sun-up, we could hear 'em coming out. So we says "We're gonna scare the fuck out of these people." So, we said, "Well, okay, here we go. One, two, three, fire!" And we let go over their heads. We weren't trying to hurt anybody. You should have seen. Their ox-carts and everything were off into the ditches on the sides of the road. They were so fuckin' scared, they had no idea. But they weren't supposed to be out. We said we were gonna teach 'em a lesson. And we did that. And that was another, that was just cruel. We could have got ourselves into some serious poop for doing that. But no one ever said anything.
- Jim: Okay. What was your feelings about the ARVN? Did you have any strong feelings one way or the other about it?
- Mike: Chickenshit.
- Jim: Could you explain?
- Mike: [long pause] I know we were supposed to be training them. That was part of, one part of our mission. Part of the time we actually took 'em with us on the tracks, and all they did was grab our balls and try to steal our magazines. And they were chickenshit. The other thing that bothered me the most, when we'd be going through the towns, where their base camps were set up, they had brand-new tracks, brand-new tracks. [Loudly] They had brand-new everything, and we're riding around on junk. That's another thing that pissed me off. I mean just something terrible. I mean, I think we spent, I think they traveled with us for—I don't know some battalion we were supposed to be teaching 'em, I think they were with us for two weeks. There was a lot of stuff is cloudy, I mean I--They were with us for two weeks, I think, and alls I know is that I would never want to be in combat with them because they were chickenshit. And I guess they were really chickenshit because in '71 when they gave up the ship and jumped ship and left the country, I said, "That's even stupider." You know.
- Jim: Did you have any impression of the VC or the NVA?



Mike: Not when I was there, but when I came home I says, “Well, I guess I understand what they’re doing.” I mean, they—the NVA I knew were hard-core people, ‘cause they were from what I’d seen, they were pretty dedicated to their mission, and they knew when they came here they would probably never go back home. The VC, I guess, were sympathizers and I guess my feelings are that—in any of the villages we ever went through there were never any young people. The only young people were the National Guard. It was only old people and women and children in the villages and either they were in the National Guard or they were Viet Cong. And I’m guessing from what my experiences are that it was about 50-50. Either they were Viet Cong or they were out on the edge of the village in the National Guard. That’s what the whole country was about.

Jim: Let’s just cover briefly off duty a little bit. Did you have access to any clubs or Bob Hope show or anything?

Mike: Yes, at Christmas of ’68, they picked out of a straw, out of a hat, only one person from each company or platoon could go and that’s how they got to go see Bob Hope. And he was in Cu Chi. Other than that, the only time we ever got to go to an NCO club or an enlisted men’s club was when we were in a stand down and that was you watched the Koreans. Basically, it was Korean people, sing. And they were excellent at mimicking our songs and stuff like that. They couldn’t speak English, but they could sing everything we did.

Jim: Did you listen to Armed Forces Radio? [Noise in background]

**[Tape is paused and starts again with a different question.]**

Jim: Good-luck charms did you use or superstitions when you were in Vietnam?

Mike: One thing I learned from the village, which I did and when I came home my wife told me I was crazy, I grew my—The village chief, for luck, grew his fingernail, his baby finger on right hand, super long. And I have very tough fingernails so when I came home I had about a two-inch-long fingernail. Always wore a Rosary around my neck, and wore a aluminum bangle. I think I still have it. Or whatever it was. In fact I’ll go down and get my box out and see what I can find.

Jim: Were you ever sick or wounded? Did you have malaria or--?

Mike: I had major ear problem and that’s how I got off line. My ears never cleared from the day I arrived in Vietnam until I got off line. My ears never cleared. I always had--could never hear out of one ear or an other. We slept under—in a fire support base under 155s or 105s, all night long,

without ear, hearing protection. I mean we were within 50 yards of the 105s going off all night long and we never had, I never saw an earplug the whole time I was there. And for some reason, must have been the conditions that caused ear infections. I have a perforated eardrum. I'm not sure if it was because of the fire support base mission or from the-- [background noise interrupts]. I was constantly--Finally, after I made many trips to Cu Chi to the major doctor, he says, "Your ears are gonna fall apart if you don't get out of the conditions." That's how I ended up getting out of the field but I still was in contact with every single person in the field. In fact, the guy I went on R&R with, he was so scared 'cause he had to pull his whole year in the field, that he actually came into the base camp, and I hid him for three weeks in my hooch before he DEROSed.

Jim: Where'd you go on R&R?

Mike: Taipei.

Jim: Taipei. Was that a good experience?

Mike: It was exciting. It was different. I also took a leave to Tokyo with a bunch of guys. I didn't realize this but you could apply for leave and actually go down to Camp Alpha and wait for an opening on a--like a cancellation on an R&R flight, and we ended up going to Japan for seven days. Tokyo and that was quite different, too.

Jim: So that counted towards your tour too?

Mike: That was a leave.

Jim: Yeah. But I mean that counted in your year?

Mike: Yeah, that was in my year over there. I actually went to Tokyo for seven days. And it never got taken off my leave time so I'm guessing the record-keeping was pretty fucked up over there. And I was gone for twelve days. I think it was twelve, I can't remember.

Jim: Well, it was seven and five. It would be twelve. Okay, now what I want to ask you is kind of an assessment of your experience. What did you think of the climate, terrain, and all in Vietnam?

Mike: The climate was hot. The terrain where I was at was pretty much flat other than the obtrusion of the Nui Ba Den, the Black Virgin Mountain. Everything else was flat and it was either rubber plantation or jungle. Some of the areas we were in was like old, I'm not sure what it was, grassy farm fields. I know that when we were coming in we would, after we'd gone--we did a series of--in this area that we found the, the base

camp that was left, it was out in the middle of the grass, so on the way in every night, we would come back, we got into trouble for this, too. We would drop C-4 off and light the place on fire and by the time we got to the road all you could see was smoke and flames. We were ravishing the land. I don't know why we did it, but we did it because we thought it was funny or what the hell was going on.

Jim: What was your impressions of the food supply and weapons that you had?

Mike: We ate, when we were out on the fire support base, we had I think one hot meal a night. And the rest was C-rations. It wasn't bad. I mean, I guess what I looked forward to, my mom would always send a package over with Jiffypop popcorn and cheese and salami and mayonnaise, which we could never get. And we used to make sandwiches, and in the bunkers we'd cook Jiffypop with C-4 and stuff like that. The food, I didn't the food was that bad.

Jim: What about the weapons? Did you have any problems with any of the weapons?

Mike: The M-16, I mean if it wasn't kept completely spotless or clean. When we were out on road security, it was so dusty, that we'd put the weapons in a sandbag until we needed them to keep the dust off them, so if something ever happened we could, we wouldn't be jammed up with dust and everyday--this was in the dry season. During the rainy season, you didn't have to worry too much about it.

Jim: What did you think of your leaders? Talk about platoon leaders, company commanders, and any other.

Mike: The experienced platoon ser--I think that the NCOs--I had more respect for than the officers. And I mentioned before the one officer, who we had who was an [unintelligible] officer, we got rid of. We actually told him he was ass and an idiot and we didn't want him and we didn't respect him. We just asked for--to get away from us. We didn't want him. And he left. He was gone within a couple weeks.

Jim: What did you think of the President [Nixon] and I guess General Abrams was there. Did you have opinions of those guys?

Mike: Nope. Never had much contact. The only battalion commander that forced us, the new battalion commander that forced to stand, stand in formation in a free-fire zone was absolutely an ass, an idiot. Spit shine our boots, have white sidewalls and all that shit. I says "Come on, we're combat people, you know."

Jim: Did you understand what your mission was when you were over there?

Mike: No.

Jim: Do you know why the US was in Vietnam?

Mike: I don't know why but I believe we were there because somebody was making a boatload of money. That's my impression. The CIA made a boatload of money, and there was more money made on the black market than anyone could ever begin to imagine. And I think it was a political thing. I don't think—to this day I never did do any reading on it but my impression was we were there, and finally McNamara said we shoulda never been there, we shoulda been out of there after what, just a couple years ago he said. He made a mistake, we should have never been there.

Jim: Well, how did you react to that?

Mike: I says "It's about time." I mean, it was my feeling after I got home, it was my own personal feeling, and then he finally admits it. I mean, I'm not a stupid person, and I could see after I got back what we did, basically we were there for, because somebody wanted us to be there. And we didn't accomplish a fucking thing except lose fifty, sixty thousand people because Communism is now in control.

Jim: How did your Vietnam experience affect your life?

Mike: Well, I grew up in one big fuck of a hurry. I went over there as a kid--

**[End of Tape 1 Side B]**

Jim: You were saying that you grew up and had a different perspective on life. Could you describe what that--?

Mike: I guess I saw the world, I saw how other people live and never—I guess, to this day, I think I was very fortunate to actually live in the village and actually see that, how made the people in the United States have it. And how—I don't understand how, I couldn't understand how people could complain about the way we live here compared to seeing what other people have. But then again, that's all they ever—after going through college and taking some classes in, anthropology classes or however you want to--some psychology classes and stuff, that I think those people would have been just as happy with us not being there or—That's the way they lived and they don't know any better so, umm, I don't know. It's just—I wrote a paper when I was going to the university and received six credits for cross-cultural experience. Just, you can't read it in books, you have to experience it, you have to see it. It's just different. And I believe

today from what I've seen, it isn't any different. They don't live any different other than they're a little more modernized. I'm sure they don't have running water in all the hooches and all the villages. It isn't much different than it was thirty-five years ago.

Jim: Would you say your experience on the whole was good or bad in Vietnam, personally?

Mike: It was probably fifty-fifty, good and bad. I mean I've got some—I learned a lot, I gained a lot of experience but I also got some things that now are finally coming to light that I think are, I'm having problems with because of my experience. And I'm not sure where it's coming from but I'm thinking that it's from my impressionable years, ya know, when I was young.

Jim: How did you come home? Did you fly--?

Mike: Flew home commercial. That was probably the neatest part because I did get to see—in fact two of us met at Tan Son Nhut and hugged each other and said we made it home and we were the only—L. Z. Welker[??] was his name. And we flew, sat side by side, and we went all the way through basic, AIT together and finally came back home together. And we were asking about other guys that we'd seen and who, what happened to this guy and what happened to that guy. And we were crying and it was just—  
[Mike's voice begins to break]

Jim: Did you ever see these guys again?

Mike: No. One of the guys that I went through basic and AIT with ended up in the Wolfhounds which was part of the 1<sup>st</sup> of the 27<sup>th</sup> [1<sup>st</sup> Battalion 27<sup>th</sup> Infantry Regiment] and he, I ran into him. He was stationed, he actually got his leg blown, shattered, and he was out at Fort Carson where I was stationed for six months when I got home. And he was still, actually he was still in the hospital when I got out of the service. He was still out there recovering. And I've talked to him but I've never actually seen him. He lives up in Door County.

Jim: How were you received when you got home?

Mike: Wasn't. I mean just, there was no reception.

Jim: Did you ever talk anything about it in these early years after you got home?

Mike: Just with, basically I hung around when I went to college with people that were Vietnam vets. That was pretty much my friends.

- Jim: And what was their reaction?
- Mike: We didn't talk about it.
- Jim: Just didn't talk about it. So you said you were in Fort Carson for six months, and after, was that kinda anti-climactic?
- Mike: It was kind of crazy. I mean, I was in an infantry battalion, an infantry company. And it was quite interesting because there was a couple Vietnam vets in there and the most of 'em were people out of Basic Training. In fact there was still some residual of the 32<sup>nd</sup>, which got called up out of Madison that were stationed out there. And that was part of the company. Some of those guys were still there. And so when we went on missions, when we went on our little deployments out in the field it was kind of a joke. I mean, they're trying to tell us how to set up ambush patrols and how to do search and clear stuff. And we thought "Wow, why are they teaching us this? I've already been through it. I've already done it." It was kind of redundant. So, and I was basically pulling my six months in the service, was it. I was asked if I wanted to re-up, asked if I wanted a promotion to Sergeant. I wish I would have taken it but I didn't because I figured, give it to somebody that's gonna stay. I learned the system, was the strackest[??] troop in the company. Made battalion, volunteered for guard duty, made Battalion Supernumerary, or Brigade Orderly every time I went on guard duty. Because I learned the system.
- Jim: Did you like the military better when you were there, after Vietnam?
- Mike: No, I just—I got in trouble there too because I wasn't an NCO, because I didn't want to be an NCO, and my best friend was an E-6. Got in trouble from the First Sergeant because I wasn't supposed to pal around with him. So I just told the First Sergeant, "Hey, listen. I'm not staying in, just let me and John alone. He's not staying in. We're best friends and we're gonna do our own thing."
- Jim: You said that you joined the Vietnam Veterans Against the War when you got home. How long were you active in that?
- Mike: I just got a pin and joined 'em and paid my dues or whatever it was. That was John Kerry's organization if I remember. And I think all of us vets that hung around together, there was Jim, Jim Picard[??] and Mike Guess[??] and myself all kind of hung around together and we were all Vietnam vets.
- Jim: So you joined it and just--?

- Mike: Just belonged and wore the pin.
- Jim: I know you belong to the V.F.W. Post 8216 in Middleton and have been active in that. Is there any reason why you joined that post?
- Mike: I was afraid to join for many, many years. I didn't join until 1985 when my brother-in-law, who is a Marine Vietnam vet, asked me to come and join with him. And at that time I was one of only three Vietnam vets in the post. I was the youngest member of the V.F.W. And I didn't know what to expect. And I got hornswaggled into running up the chairs immediately. I joined the Color Guard immediately, and, joined the beer tent immediately and became very active and I'm pretty proud of it.
- Jim: Did you join the Vietnam Veterans group, the other--?
- Mike: No. I just, I'm a believer in only joining what I have time to take care of and I guess I only, at that time I also belonged to the Knights of Columbus, so I kinda did my duty, one or the other. I would like to, but sometimes I think those guys get a little carried away [laughs].
- Jim: Have we missed anything in our discussion this morning Mike?
- Mike: I don't think so.
- Jim: Okay, good.
- Mike: I was kinda—

**[End of Interview]**