

Wisconsin Veterans Museum  
Research Center

Transcript of an  
Oral History Interview with  
**KENNETH STUMPF**  
Rifleman, Army, Vietnam War.

2000

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**Stumpf, Kenneth**, (1944- ). Oral History Interview, 2000.

User Copy: 3 sound cassettes (ca. 150 min.), analog, 1 7/8 ips, mono.

Master Copy: 2 sound cassettes (ca. 150 min.), analog, 1 7/8 ips, mono.

Video Recording: 2 videorecordings (ca. 150 min.); ½ inch, color.

Transcript: 0.1 linear ft. (1 folder).

**Abstract:**

Kenneth Stumpf, a Menasha, Wisconsin native, discusses his experiences during the Vietnam War with the 35th Regiment, 25th Infantry Division, including the actions that earned him a Medal of Honor. Stumpf touches on being drafted in 1965, basic training at Fort Leonard Wood (Missouri), advanced training at Fort Ord (California), and assignment to Bravo Company of the 54<sup>th</sup> Mechanized Infantry. After volunteering for duty in Vietnam, he talks about joining the 3rd Platoon of Company C, 1st Battalion, 35th Infantry Regiment near Pleiku in II Corps area. Stumpf reflects on his eventual promotion from grunt to E6 because everyone in his unit was killed, wounded, or rotated. He portrays his first helicopter ride, noticing the "thousand yard stare" of the combat veterans upon arrival, and getting in trouble as a newbie for using cologne. Stationed near the Cambodian border, he describes a "friendly fire" white phosphorus attack the first night he was on outpost duty, panicking, and losing his entrenching tool. Stumpf addresses catching malaria despite taking his pills, being hospitalized for a month, and, while delirious, swearing at visiting celebrities Roy Rogers and Dale Evans. Stumpf details his first fight: feeling fear, getting tangled and lost in the jungle, and unjamming his rifle. He discusses carrying a .90 millimeter mortar shell and a constant jamming problem with their M16 rifles. Stumpf provides a vivid sketch of another firefight, wanting to run away, confirming a kill, and hearing the dog howl when the unit's dog handler died. Throughout the interview, Stumpf characterizes some of the soldiers he served with. He mentions having a fourteen-day rest at base camp, promotion to squad leader, and missing the Bob Hope show because he didn't want to order anyone to do KP duty. Sent to Camp Montezuma in Quang Ngai Province, Stumpf touches upon the frequent violations of cease-fire agreements, firing at a moving figure during an ambush on the night of Easter Sunday, and his reaction to learning he had shot a priest. Stumpf details the mission near Duc Pho for which he was awarded the Congressional Medal of Honor. He tells of wading across a river, running into a barbed wire fence while chasing the enemy, and patching up wounded Vietnamese civilians. A few days later, he speaks of being sent to locate an enemy "spider hole" with a squad of seven men, two of whom were new. Stumpf details fighting from a trench while under heavy fire, being unable to see the enemy, and retrieving three of his wounded men from the field of fire. He analyzes his fear as he was running out of ammunition and fear he would not be able to get his men out of the situation. Stumpf describes carrying men to a helicopter evacuation site, retreating back to the trench, witnessing retaliatory air strikes, and charging Vietnamese bunkers. After night fell, he tells of being sent into the trenches to find a lost platoon and worrying about friendly fire. After the combat, he states he was

completely stunned and the only man of his squad left unwounded. Stumpf criticizes the higher ranking officers who prioritized their own careers over the well being of their men, as well as the general lack of intent to win the war. After his first tour, he comments on not being aware of marijuana use in Vietnam and returning to the United States with the belief the U.S. could not win the war. On his second tour, Stumpf talks about assignment to an air rifle platoon of the 1st and 10th Cavalry. He talks about problematic drug use at the base camps and the disinterest of officers toward disciplining drug use. He emphasizes that he was very lucky and discusses being wounded by grenade shrapnel at the end of his third tour. Stumpf comments on staying behind on a day that his unit suffered high casualties. He touches upon returning to the United States, hearing he would be awarded the Medal of Honor, going to Washington, D.C. with his family, having to borrow a hat for the ceremony, and meeting the President. Stumpf comments on the POW/MIA issue and a loss of personal freedoms in the U.S. He describes his homecoming to Menasha and attending welcome home parades in New York and Chicago in the mid-1980s. Stumpf comments on feeling unwelcomed by traditional veterans' organizations until he was awarded the Medal of Honor and almost turning down free life memberships. He touches on reenlisting in the Army, retiring after twenty-nine years, and his retirement and Medal of Honor benefits. Stumpf mentions his civilian activities and attending functions as a Medal of Honor recipient. He discusses serving with African-American soldiers, the bravery of the medics in Vietnam, food in the field, and the importance of mail delivery. Stumpf recalls getting sick at an outpost from drinking contaminated water. He states he clowned around to relieve some of the tension and shares some humorous anecdotes.

### **Biographical Sketch:**

Stumpf (1944- ) served with the Army during Vietnam War, including three tours in Vietnam from September 1966 to September 1967 and from 1969 to 1971. He retired as a Sergeant Major after serving 29 years and holds the Congressional Medal of Honor.

Interviewed by James McIntosh, 2000  
Transcribed by Marie Drumm, 2010  
Reviewed and corrected by Joan Bruggink, 2011  
Abstract written by Susan Krueger, 2012

**Interview Transcript:**

- Stumpf: There is only about a hundred and forty-six living Medal of Honor recipients. Well, there's three in Wisconsin, and this one guy tried to tell me, "Oh, there's two of 'em that live over in La Crosse," and I said, "No, I'm tellin' you the truth."
- Woman: Do you get together for a reunion at all?
- Stumpf: Yes, we're goin' to Pueblo, Colorado this year in September, then next year it's in Boston. We get invited to all the inaugurations and then we see each other at periodic things like for our local—you know, if they have somethin' local. Like Hal Fritz, he's my good friend down in Illinois, and when he has something, he's—what do you call it?—assistant director of the veterans—what do you call it?—veteran's affairs for the state, and a lot of times they have functions down there, like a lot, and he always makes sure I get an invitation.
- James: Are you comfortable where you are?
- Stumpf: Yeah, I guess so. Or should I—
- James: No, you're just fine. I'll go where you are.
- Stumpf: [unintelligible] I don't want to do this!
- James: Are you better sitting up a little? That's better.
- Stumpf: I get the class clown award [everyone laughs].
- James: Oh I see. Are you okay now?
- Stumpf: Yes sir.
- James: You're looking pretty, god, incredible.
- Stumpf: I didn't get a hair cut, though.
- James: When the movie comes out you get ten percent.
- Stumpf: I was in the Army for twenty-nine years, you know, so "cut your hair, cut your hair, cut your hair," and I've been out since '94.
- James: Okay, here we go
- Woman: What do you do now?

- Stumpf: I work for the county. I work for the county. What I do is a great job, but I only do it, like right now, three days a week, because they're short of money. I take prisoners out of jail and take 'em out to do community service, pick up trash, do this, do this; it's the greatest program. Some are Huber Law, but a lot of them aren't, they're just in jail, they don't have a job, and I take them out four times a week
- James: Just to exercise them?
- Stumpf: No! No! I take 'em out, we do all kinds of work, everywhere, for any nonprofit organization. This is the greatest program I've seen. I work—
- James: Do they get paid for that?
- Stumpf: They don't get paid. What they do is they get a day for day. Day out with us, day off your sentence. Yeah. And I worked with the homeless veterans after I got out of the Army and it was just a revolving door. I'm glad we got the program, but I tell you what, a lot of these guys, you got 'em jobs and then they—all of a sudden they'd quit and take off, you know, and you just can't do this, especially around Tomah. And then I worked with that boot camp. I was drill sergeant at that boot camp out there for the juveniles out here at Camp Douglas, and there's another one, a lot of money put into that program.
- James: How many patients roughly do you have at the hospital here, the veteran's hospital here?
- Stumpf: Patients, inpatients?
- James: Well, you know, customers, patients.
- Stumpf: Wow, inpatients, no, I don't know. I'll tell you, it's not that big, I don't even know.
- James: Here we go. When were you born?
- Stumpf: 28 September 1944.
- James: 1944. Here?
- Stumpf: No sir. I was born in Menasha, Wisconsin. Even though my citation says I was born in Neenah, I'm from Menasha.
- James: It doesn't make any difference to me, I assure you.

Stumpf: Well, I'll tell ya, it makes a difference to me. I was from Menasha.

James: [laughs] And what happened when you joined? You enlisted?

Stumpf: I was drafted.

James: You were drafted.

Stumpf: I was drafted in September 1965.

James: Drafted 1965. And where did they send you?

Stumpf: Sent me to Fort Leonard Wood, Missouri for basic training. Then after that to a—

James: Is that just standard Army, eight weeks?

Stumpf: Eight weeks basic training.

James: Okay. And did they move you into some type of specialty after that?

Stumpf: Exactly. All of us were—I was Eleven Bravo, I was an infantryman, and I was sent out to Fort Ord, California for eight more weeks.

James: And was the training different at Fort Ord?

Stumpf: Ah, the training. Well, it was a lot different as far as—we got trained in more weapons and tactics. Basic training was just qualifying with the M14, a lot of marching, and marching, and marching and doing all the things that the Army requires of basic training. But then when we got to Fort Ord, now I got my specialties, then I fired a M60 machine gun, I fired a LAW, I fired a 45, Claymores, grenades.

James: How many more weeks of that?

Stumpf: Eight more weeks.

James: Okay, then you're ready to do something.

Stumpf: I'm ready to do something. I get assigned to Fort Knox, Kentucky, my first duty assignment.

James: That's cavalry? Tanks.

Stumpf: Yes sir. I was with a mechanized infantry unit, Bravo Company, 54<sup>th</sup> Infantry, Mechanized Infantry.

- James: Now I have to put down some places here; I mean some things. Mechanized 50 what?
- Stumpf: 54<sup>th</sup>.
- James: 54<sup>th</sup> Infantry or—
- Stumpf: Mechanized Infantry.
- James: Okay.
- Stumpf: Now, I'll tell you a story, if you can back up one. First day, the first day I walked into my company to see the first sergeant I asked him, "Where can I get some paperwork to go to Vietnam because I want to volunteer?" He said, "You see the clerk right over there? You fill out this form called the 1087." So I did. That was—I got to Fort Knox in April and I was in Vietnam in September.
- James: September of '65?
- Stumpf: '66. So I've been in the Army now for about one year.
- James: When did you become a regular? Weren't you a regular?
- Stumpf: Oh, oh, later on. See, I got out in 1967; September '67 my two years were up. I got out. Then I was notified in '68 that I was going to go get the Medal of Honor. Which I went to Washington, got the Medal of Honor. There was a colonel there. There were five of us that got the Medal of Honor that day, and there was a colonel there that talked to the three of us that were not in the military. He said, "If any of you three want to come back in the military, I'm your representative," whatever, "and give me a call," whatever. I wrote the guy a letter 'cause I wanted to go back in before that, but I went to see a recruiter and it was, "We gotta wait and get a grade determination." I was an E6 when I got out, a staff sergeant. I went to Vietnam a private and I came back an E6. Of course I was—
- James: You were in Vietnam for two years at that time?
- Stumpf: No, I was in Vietnam one year; I was in the Army two years. I took over an E6 position in an infantry platoon, a squad, Army platoon; that's a squad leader position, E6. I was a private but everybody else was killed, wounded or rotated, and I became the ranking guy.
- James: You ascended easily.

- Stumpf: Yeah. The lieutenant asked me, Lieutenant Murphy asked me, “Do you want to be the squad leader?” I said, “Sir, I’ll be squad leader and I’ll do the best job I can.”
- James: Okay. And then you were off for a while, out of the military.
- Stumpf: Non-military, I’m back working at Banta’s Prints.
- James: It was two years later that they awarded you the medal?
- Stumpf: Actually it was one year almost to the date. I got out of Vietnam about the 12<sup>th</sup> of September of ’67 and the Medal of Honor was presented on the 19<sup>th</sup> of September of ’68.
- James: [pause] Okay. And then you decided to go back in the military?
- Stumpf: Three months later I was back in the military.
- Woman: What did you do in Vietnam?
- Stumpf: I was an infantryman, squad leader. It was all infantry, ground pounder, grunt.
- James: You joined the regular and then you were in for how long?
- Stumpf: Then I stayed in for twenty-nine years total. I got out in ’94.
- James: Twenty-one years, twenty-four?
- Stumpf: Twenty-nine.
- James: Twenty-nine years; oh, much longer.
- Stumpf: Yeah. I got drafted in ’65 in September and I got out of the Army in September of ’94; that was twenty-nine years. Even though that year, that year, I was still on what they call reserve status, so it counts for pay purposes.
- James: Now we will get into the stuff here. When you first got to ‘Nam, what was your assignment? Rifle company?
- Stumpf: Infantry soldier. Yeah. I was assigned to Charlie Company, 1<sup>st</sup>, 35<sup>th</sup>, 25<sup>th</sup> Division. We were up in II Corps, which is—
- James: 35<sup>th</sup> Division, did you say?



- Stumpf: 35<sup>th</sup> Infantry, 25<sup>th</sup> Division.
- James: 25<sup>th</sup> Division. Okay, and what was going on when you arrived? Was there a push?
- Stumpf: First time, when I arrived, well of course, I'm a private; I know absolutely nothing. And probably after about two weeks of training, going through inprocessing and getting assigned to a unit and everything else, I finally got orders from the company commander or whoever was in the rear echelon group that you're flying out to your unit, and all I knew was that it was along the Cambodian border, so we flew out west to Pleiku.
- James: We?
- Stumpf: That was about four or five other guys, new guys. We flew out west to a, towards the Cambodian border and we met up with our, my unit.
- James: You were replacements, obviously?
- Stumpf: We were replacements, exactly. And I remember—you know, two things I remember, a lot. One is that my first helicopter ride, [laughs] and we had all these big rucksacks on and it was like, it was like six or seven of us on this helicopter. I'm thinking—and I was the last one to get on—I thought, I kept on telling these guys, "Move over, move over." I thought I was going to fall out!
- James: This is a Huey?
- Stumpf: Yeah. Well anyways, and then I remember—oh god, I got stories I could tell you, ten hours, but when I got to the unit, when I got to the unit and looked at the guys that were there, you know, it was like I heard about that thousand yard stare and everybody had it. They were all soaked from walking through the jungle and they were just like, you know—
- James: Excessive combat?
- Stumpf: And then they called, you know, we were the newbies, you know, the newbies, and it was like, I mean, I was like "Wow." And then you look around, I looked around and said, "Oh man," My heart was beating so fast, you know, and everything else. I guess I'm scared, you know, now that I'm here, I'm out in this jungle
- James: Were they nice to you?
- Stumpf: Yes, they were. Yes they were. I had no problems because usually, you know—I don't know, I have this thing about watch and listen carefully

and you'll learn a lot more about people, things and whatever, so I'm kind of just listening and watching. One thing that I didn't know, I was a new guy, I shaved and showered and put cologne on, and I remember getting assigned to my squad, "Who's got that cologne on; who stinks? You don't—" Oh man, I've been here for like about one hour and I'm already in trouble! But, ah—

James: I'm sure they didn't want any cologne to attract the enemy.

Stumpf: But anyways, anyways, that's where we were. Another incident—I don't know how long you got on this film.

James: Oh, I got tape after tape; we can be here until tomorrow.

Stumpf: Okay. Well anyways, I was assigned to the 3<sup>rd</sup> Platoon of Charlie Company and my squad, I was with Sergeant Simms, and this guy yelled at me—

James: How many in the squad?

Stumpf: Normally there was about twelve, but we had probably about eight or nine, and this black guy, Rankin, he came in on the helicopter with me, we both got assigned to that squad. So it was our—we were told, Simms was told, to go up on this hill and we were going to be an outpost, listening post, were on the OP, outpost, or LP, listening post, and we set up. You know, this is my first time. We dug in, we had entrenching tools, we dug in, says, "You guys, youse two dig over there" and "youse two dig over there" and this and that, and I'm going, "Oh, my god," and then all of a sudden, it's just before dark, and all of a sudden some Willie Peter rounds start coming in on us, white phosphorus, coming in on us! And I was in the foxhole, I was in the foxhole digging, and I had my weapon where I knew exactly where it was 'cause, you know, it was my first time, my first time at nighttime, you know, in the jungle, you know, and all of a sudden the Willie Peters start flyin' in and Rankin and I, we grabbed our weapons and it was droppin'—in fact, it burned a couple of the little poncho liners that guys were putting up for shelters. They were on fire, burning, and we were both lookin' in. Simms is cool, he's cool, because he's been there for awhile, and he says, he gets on the phone and he says, "Goddamn it, quit firing that shit in, it's landing right on top of us!" you know, and then all of a sudden it stopped. Because, you know, that stuff when it came in, it was throwing fireballs all over the damn place.

James: You could tell it was ours?

Stumpf: No, I didn't know whose it was—I thought I was under attack! Rankin and I, we were all facing that way, so what does Simms do? Simms turns

around, “Hey, what the hell are you guys doing?” He says, “If you were attacked, you look out the other way!” [James laughs] Looked at Rankin, he says, “Okay.” We thought ‘cause it was burning over there and Simms is cool, he’s cool. I became that way later on, I became cool, because oh man, I was scared to death. Well anyways, to my surprise, and this is a no shit story, we went back to the trench, we went back to the hole and start—and I was in the hole when all this shit came in. I don’t know what happened. I got so scared I think I threw my entrenching tool [laughing]; I probably threw it into Cambodia. [laughs] We couldn’t find the entrenching tool to keep digging. And I says, I said to Rankin, “Rankin, don’t tell Simms that this entrenching”—so we got up the next morning—because it was just getting’ dark, you know, and we had a hole about that big, we were supposed to dig big; I’d of dug that sucker into about nine feet deep if I could have. Well anyways, I said, “Rankin, don’t tell this guy that I lost my entrenching tool.” So anyways, we got up and the first thing Rankin and I did, we just looked out through the whole area. I mean all around, everywhere in front of us, but it was jungle and stuff, but we looked everywhere for that entrenching tool. We never found it. I don’t know were I threw it, but I was so scared, man—

James: You just went up like that—

Stumpf: No kidding! I probably just threw that sucker up and grabbed my weapon, ran over there and Rankin right behind me, and we pointed right at Simms. [laughs] I probably wouldn’t have [unintelligible] if it came. But anyways, I lost my entrenching tool, but nobody asked any questions, so that was, we just went on. Then it was along the Cambodian border where I got malaria. I was only in Vietnam two weeks and I got malaria—a mosquito.

James: See the mosquitoes bite you?

Stumpf: Oh, yeah, a mosquito. I was takin’ my pills and everything and I was never so sick in all my life and they couldn’t come up with a positive smear on me. And they finally sent me back and I went back to Pleiku and then they sent me to Quy Nhon and then the sent me to Buon Thuot and they finally got a positive smear on me, but I remember that as bein’ just an unbelievable experience, having a temperature so high and you couldn’t keep anything down.

James: How long do you shake and chill?

Stumpf: They packed me in ice, a rubber sheet, I was all packed in ice with a big fan sitting on, you know, just sittin’ next to me, and the fan, the fan just blowing, and finally about—oh god, it must have been a week and a half and when I would throw up, because I wasn’t eating, when I threw up, I

threw up some jelly stuff; it was green jelly, it's like [eewwh] god damn. Well anyways, I tried to go into the dining facility to eat one time and I couldn't even go; I just passed right out. The guys took me back to the bed, and I remember a story—I kind of regret the story, but it happened anyway, because I was so under, I mean my head was going crazy, like it was man, I don't know where—I think it was the only time in my life I felt just let me die, I was SO sick, and I remember Roy Rogers and Dale Evans came in. And Roy Rogers—they've got the cowboy boots and guns and all that stuff, and I'm sleepin', and I'm sleeping—

James: He came into the ward?

Stumpf: He came into the ward, and I'm sleepin' and I'm kind of delirious; [James laughs] you know, my head is like—I wasn't on quinine yet. So I wouldn't—no, they picked me every day trying to make sure I had malaria so they would put me on quinine and they weren't, and my temperature was going up and I thought the guy said it was like a hundred and six, a hundred and seven. And I was SO sick, and all of a sudden I got a tap—all I did was sleep, and then I'd wake up and I'm froze because of the ice cubes and everything. I get a tap on my shoulder and I kind of looked up like that, and it was, "Oh hello there, I'm Roy Rogers," and then she, all of a sudden, Dale Evans, "And I'm Dale"—you know what, actually—

James: You thought you were in another world, right? [laughs]

Stumpf: This is honest to god, honest to god this happened! I wish it wouldn't have because Roy Rogers and Dale Evans were, that's who I grew up with, and Gene Autry and [unintelligible]. I looked at them two and "I don't give a fuck if you're the president of the United States, get the fuck out of here, I want to go to sleep." And I rolled over and went back to sleep. [James laughs] Excuse my language sometimes, but that's the way I felt. I was like, "Oh, get away from me, get away from me, I'm so sick!" Anyways, I got on quinine.

James: How long were your chills before the fever started on these attacks?

Stumpf: Oh the chills, geez, I'll tell you, to be honest with you, I can't, I can't remember. All I know, I was so sick out in the field that I couldn't even, I couldn't even walk. They said, "Hey Stumpf, Private Stumpf, so and so wants to see you." I couldn't even walk, I couldn't even identify people. I was like, "What's wrong with you?" I remember Simms saying that, but he was a tough guy, "What's wrong with you?" you know, like I was a little sissy. I was sittin' there, "I'm sick, I'm sick."

James: You had these attacks of fever, then okay, and then fever, and then okay?

- Stumpf: I'll tell you what—to be honest with you, I think I just kept on with the fever. I just kept on—I was so sick and I had such a fever and whatever, but I remember—
- James: How long were you in the hospital?
- Stumpf: I was there for about, I was out for about one month, but I could have been longer. I got put on quinine down there, started gettin' to feel better where I could eat and everything else, started feeling better, and I remember a nurse and a doctor talking right next to my bed. And the nurse said, "Oh, we've got so many casualties coming in from the field, we don't have the bed space." And I was, I went down to about one hundred-ten pounds, about one hundred-twelve. Now that's not low, because I only weighed, I only weighed like one twenty-five, you know. I was small when I came out of high school and everything and I played a lot of sports. Well anyway, she said that and I sat up and I said, "Ma'am, sir, you can discharge me tomorrow." So I went, I went back to my company and guys that I knew didn't know who I was because my face was all sunk in, and they thought I was, well, a newbie, and actually I was a newbie, but, but they didn't remember me, because well—"My God, is that you?" I remembered them.
- James: But you were only gone a month?
- Stumpf: But I'm gone a month. I was supposed to be out for—geez, I had heard this, I don't know if it was true; I was supposed to be out when you had malaria as bad as I—I had the worst one. There is vivax and falciparum, and I don't remember which one, I think falciparum is the worst one, but I'm not positive. I had the worst of the two malarias. And a, a, somebody said, "Oh my God, you should have been out for at least sixty days." Because when I got back to the field, you know, I was, I was weak but I started, I started, you know, I'm gettin' on the old C-rations, and eating, and eating, and eating, and it wasn't long and I was back right up to—
- James: They put you right back on the line?
- Stumpf: Right back on the line. Right back out. But I asked for it, you know; I asked for it.
- James: Did you get in any firefights right off the bat, or no?
- Stumpf: I don't think so. I don't remember. Because I remember my first time, my first action. I got there in September; it was probably in the latter part of October or it could have been early November when I seen my first action, which I didn't even see. We were out on patrol and my platoon was told to go out and recon an area—this is out in the jungle in the mountains, and

the point person—and I was like the last guy in the back, almost—and the point person heard some talking up on the hill so our platoon got on line and all of a sudden “BAM” firing was going like crazy, but I didn’t know where it was. I got tangled in the vines and then I got lost. I didn’t have my, I didn’t have my, I didn’t know where the other guy next to me was [laughs] ‘cause as we went up the hill, it was all vines and jungle and everything else, and then so I just fired and my weapon jammed—first time, my weapon jammed. And I’m going like, oh here I am, I’m tangled in these vines, my weapon is jammed, I don’t know where the enemy is at, I don’t know where my platoon is at, and my throat just dried right up. It dried right up. I was, I was so scared it just dried right up

James: That M16, how did that jam?

Stumpf: That was, that was early, the early part. Oh it jammed, so many people got killed by, by, you know, the M16s jamming. They had a big issue about that, the M16, because it fed too fast. And then later on, later on, later on, it was, to stop it a little bit, we, we put in only eighteen rounds, or nine—eighteen rounds, I think it was. We put eighteen rounds in the magazine instead of twenty because it was feeding too fast. Well, you know, I’ve got little fingers and I couldn’t get that little, that little shell, 5.56 shell, I couldn’t get it out of the chamber, and it’s like, “Damn, it’s sittin’ in there and I can’t get it out.”

James: Did you keep it on full automatic?

Stumpf: Ah, I don’t know what it was. Oh, later on it did. It depended on the situation; it depended on where I was walkin’, you know.

James: When you were walking through the jungle, we are talking about a jungle with vines, ten feet?

Stumpf: Oh god! We was, we was down in, up there where we were at, I was so amazed, but I’m glad that I got to see it: the triple canopy jungle. And there was no sunlight, it was dark in there, it was dark, it was SO dark! I mean you could see the guy in front of you, but it was, it was SO eerie, like it’s, like it’s 7 o’clock in the morning, 9 o’clock in the morning, and it is so dark down here, and so quiet, and so eerie, and it was like WOW, the triple canopy jungle! So along the Cambodian border there was lots of that, and the enemy, of course, obviously used that as cover.

James: You could get pretty close and they could get close to you without the other noticing one another?

Stumpf: I’ll tell you what. Well, then your firepower up here, they couldn’t see it. But ah, I mean, couldn’t see the enemy through it.

- James: You couldn't drag a mortar through all that, could you?
- Stumpf: Ah, when I went out there, when I went out, when I first got out there, we carried, our platoon carried a one .90 mm; in fact, they gave me one round that I had to carry.
- James: How many millimeters?
- Stumpf: A .90!
- James: That's awful big.
- Stumpf: That's awful big is right! We had the biggest guy in the platoon carried the .90. And it was SO heavy and they gave me—'cause you know they loaded down all the newbies.
- James: With shells?
- Stumpf: Yeah, and they gave me one, they gave so and so one, and so and so one, and I had a pack, like it must have weighed seventy or eighty pounds, and—but I was in tremendous shape. I mean, I was—I played a lot of sports in school and I was in outstanding shape.
- James: But the malaria knocked that down.
- Stumpf: Yeah, well that was, that was when, that was later on. Later on I was feeling better but—and then it would go, if I can't hump it somebody else can take it for a little while, we'd trade off. But we had a .90 out there. That was the only time when we came out of there, the .90 was almost useless. But this, this was the start of the war. You know we had—'65, I'm over there in September '66, so there was all things that happened then and it changed as we went along. We got better 16s—I mean, these 16s that we had were terrible, I mean, because they jammed so many times.
- James: There was something about that receiver that didn't work right, that got tangled up maybe.
- Stumpf: It could be. All I know is that it went so fast that another round was coming in, but it wouldn't eject the round that was supposed to be goin' out, the cartridge, I mean—
- James: And you couldn't unjam it easily?

Stumpf: No, you can't! You can't do that! You had to take a rod or somethin' like that. Look at my little fingers, and I couldn't get it in that chamber to get that shell out! And here I was, I can't even hardly breathe, I'm lost, scared, and everything else, and I can't get that thing out of there. I can't get it out. So you can imagine somebody who's got bigger fingers, that they wouldn't be able to get that thing out of there. But it was hard. If it was jammed in there, you can't get it out. It was very difficult.

James: So what did you do?

Stumpf: Well I finally got it out. I finally got it out. I got it out with a cleaning rod. I had my cleaning rod with me. I run that baby down through there and like I said, I'm going like, "Hey, where are you guys?" The firing stopped over here, so I didn't see nothin'. Actually, actually, what I did, I found a canteen and a bayonet on the canteen, and then all I did was heard stories. I found it. I actually brought the bayonet back with me; that's one of the souvenirs I brought; I brought a couple of souvenirs back. But that was one I brought back. But anyways, then all I heard were the stories from the guys up front. Yeah, they were cooking this big, big pot of rice.

James: Oh, you missed all that went on?

Stumpf: HECK yeah! I'm sittin' there down there trying to breathe and swallow, I was tangled in the brush! I had missed everything. I didn't know, I didn't see nothin'.

James: When these guys came upon some of the enemy, they were cooking?

Stumpf: They heard 'em. They were cooking, and all were sittin' around, and they said, they said that the guys started firing—I don't know, I guess they were smokin' dope or something, and some of these guys when they fired at 'em, they was firing with their AKs like up in the air. [gun shot sounds] Like that, that's what these guys up front told me, and they was just plowin' them down. And they had a radio, they had a radio there that was like—oh, they said that that thing, that radio was so big that it could transmit back way, I mean miles and miles and miles, so they had—they had some foxholes there, so what we did was we went up and moved the platoon up and we stayed there that night. [James laughs] I think there was something like—oh, I'm just guessing, about three or four that were killed and probably it was like about ten or so because they seen some runnin' off, and then plus some of the weapons we had, we had about eight weapons. But I didn't see anything, I was [whistles].

James: That was your first experience. Then what?



Stumpf: Then what? Um, probably my next one was—this was the one that really, really settled things on me a little bit. We were up on this hill and we're still up not probably along the Cambodian border, but maybe we were in, oh, I know that we were in the Ia Drang Valley and I know we were above that. We were in Kon Tum, we were in Plei Ya Rang and Plei Me; this is what people tell me. I don't know, I was a private, they are telling me—but we are on this hill and the lieutenant is reading the map and he says,—**[End of Tape One, Side A]**—“We have to go, we've got to get some water.” We had to get some water. You know, everything was—like we had a lot of rations they gave us; they'd give us a case of C-rations. I mean you'd take what you think you're gonna eat and we'd just punch holes in the rest, we couldn't carry all that stuff. Well, on water, we had to get water out of the streams, beds, whatever we could, we just put a little purification tablet in it. Well anyways, my squad—Ranger was the squad leader—we had a dog with us, a German shepherd, and a dog handler, and I was told, we were told, go down this trail and the trail goes this way because Ranger told us everything we got from the lieutenant, that you go down this trail for I don't know how many meters and then you're gonna come to this trail, take that trail to the right and then according to this map there should be a water bed down that way, whatever. So we came down the hill. The first guy, the first guy was the dog handler and the dog, the second guy was me, the third guy was Hut, a new guy that came in not too long after I came in, the fourth guy was Ranger, then there was a fifth and a sixth and possibly a seventh guy. We just got about forty meters down the hill and we came into this saddle, which there was big rocks here and some rocks over there, and a saddle is a depression in the ground like a saddle; you come down one hill and you got that area there and then you go on back up, called a saddle. We came into the saddle and all of a sudden there was about ten seconds of automatic weapon fire. That was my first experience. I dove, I dove up into the brush that way. I lost my weapon and I lost my steel pot. And this is honest to God truth: Ken Stumpf wanted to run, Ken Stumpf was gonna be a coward that day. I, I was so scared, I was so scared, I'm thinkin' there's more guys up there on that hill than what we've got down here and these guys are firing. And then I see grenades comin' over the rocks. The rest of the guys just stayed there; I just dove. Oh man, my heart is beatin' so fast and everything else. Where's my rifle, where's my steel pot, and I can't find it. All of a sudden I got my bearings a little bit, but I wanted to run. I really wanted to run. And finally I got my steel pot, I got my weapon, then all of a sudden I seen some people running from behind these rocks and our guys are on this side and I was over here up the trail. They were running down the trail. And I seen 'em. 'Cause I didn't know, it's like when you first get to Vietnam, what do they look like? What do they look like? And I was told out there in the jungle, we all use the same path; if you see anything out here, lock and load and bury 'em. You know, it's like, okay, so I didn't see

really, except for back when I seen the three or four that were killed, did I see anybody that was actually alive!

James: Black pajamas?

Stumpf: No, they didn't have black pajamas on. They had, the guys that I seen had a—oh, I think it was like a mixture, not black pajamas, but a mixture of a fatigue and some type of a shirt, a greenish shirt or whatever. I would think, because later on I could identify them, I would think they were probably North Vietnamese. Don't know. I mean, I don't know, didn't ask, didn't care. But anyways, everything got quiet and Ranger, Ranger is the squad leader, and I got up, started looking around. The brush was about this high, and I start looking around. About forty meters in front of me was a guy standing with a rifle and so I went, I went BRRRRROMMM and fired my whole weapon there. And that was it, and I got back down, and Ranger got back up. The dog handler is hurt real bad; he was the first guy, I was number two. Hut was hit too, so I was like, geez, I'm the second guy, they got number one and three, and I was so lucky in Vietnam. I mean, the crap I pulled away in Vietnam and to walk away with [laughs] what I walked away with—oh man, I'm a lucky person. Well anyway, Ranger says to me, "What did you see?" I says, "I seen somebody laying over there, I seen somebody standing over there and I shot at him." And then some guys told me that I—they thought 'cause I just went off into the side and all the rest of them stayed by the those rocks and grenades were flying over the rocks and then those guys took off and see what that guy over there was, he was the slack man, he was the guy that was gonna keep our heads down while they took off. Well people thought I was running with them! That one guy, 'cause that one guy did have a steel pot on. One Vietnamese, Viet Cong, whatever, had a steel pot on. And I—

James: An American helmet?

Stumpf: Yeah, I seen it! Well, these guys said they didn't shoot because they thought it was me chasin' 'em. Me? I was running up the hill! And so I told Ranger, "I fired at this guy over here," and then he said—we went and looked, and I'll be damned if I didn't kill him. I must have hit him with everything from here on up.

James: I was going to say you emptied your—

Stumpf: From here on up. I just fired went [BBRRRRRR—shooting sound] and he had an SKS, an old SKS, that's what he was, that was the weapon that he had. So, um, you know, that was the first guy that I knew that I actually shot and it didn't—you know, I felt, I felt like "Man, I won first prize!" You know people think, how does it feel to shoot somebody? Oh man, it's

war and I was so—and man, everyone was patting me on the back and everything else, god what a—

James: The guy was trying to kill you.

Stumpf: You know, and I'm going like, "Whoooo," it didn't bother me none. It didn't bother me none, killing a guy. Well anyways, we're up on this hill. We go back up on the hill, we didn't get the water, we went back up on the hill, we had to call in a dust-off, we had to get a something chopped as fast as we can to get the dog handler out.

James: A dust-off?

Stumpf: A dust-off, a helicopter, Red Cross, these guys that take out the wounded.

James: I know; I've never heard that expression.

Stumpf: Oh, dust-off, that was a big, big term used over there. Medical, medical choppers came in or anybody, but we called in somebody to get this guy out. Well, Hut had to go out too. He wasn't wounded as bad, but the guy, the dog handler was wounded really bad.

James: And the dog?

Stumpf: And the dog, the dog wasn't wounded. Well, anyways, we get them out and now I'm thinking, all of us, but I'm a newbie, we're gettin', we get in these three man positions and we got our platoon formed up in a circle and I'm thinking, you know, I'm not even going to sleep, because they're gonna get me tonight. They are coming to get me; they know we're here. The people that we shot at out there, that shot at us, they know we're up on this hill and they're gonna come and get us. So all night long, we put out our Claymore mines and we put our trip flares and things like that.

James: No barbed wire?

Stumpf: No, no. We were in the jungle. We never used barbed wire. Barbed wire was back at base camps. We never had barbed wire anywhere; we wouldn't carry no barbed wire with us out in the field. But anyways, it was just, you know, something that—you know, all the time I spent in the field, you spent it under the stars and the tree that you could hide behind or we'd—after that first time that we dug that foxhole, that's the last time we dug a foxhole again in Vietnam. You just—wherever we are, on the side of a hill if it was raining, sometimes slide down the hill a little ways [laughs] and get back up, lean up against a tree, put the poncho liner over and just say, "I hope they don't come tonight." But anyways, we were sitting around and it was like 3 o'clock in the morning and we had the

German Shepherd with us. All of a sudden the German Shepherd started howling. Oh, Christ.

James: You mean, not barking?

Stumpf: [makes howling sound] Bad for the TV, but that sucker was howling! Howling like crazy! And there was three of us guys that were kind of brand new in this little group. One guy wanted to kill him. I says, “NOOOO! Don’t you—you can’t kill that dog, you can’t kill the dog. One, if you kill the dog, they’ll know we’re here.” And I says, “You can’t kill him, it ain’t right to do anyways.” And then Tartsa [?], who was an Indian from Oklahoma, and he used to kind of be one of my inspirations—Tartsa [?] was smaller than me, but much wider than me, and when he, when I always had him, most of the time, had him walking in front of me, unless when we’d go up hills and things like that, unless the squad leader said, “You go first, you go second,” or something like that. With Tartsa, Tartsa ‘cause he was so big, and I thought if he can make it up these hills, then I—I said, “I’m in great shape; if he can make it I can make it.” So he was my, kind of my inspiration. Oh, Tartsa [?] says, “The dog handler died.” I say, “What?” He said, “The dog handler died.” I said, “How do you know that?” He says, “Because that’s an Indian custom”—something, whatever—“when the master dies, the dog knows it.” Man, I was so happy when I see the sun come up the next morning. I was so happy, I was so relieved that I didn’t get, I didn’t get killed ‘cause I just thought [unintelligible] gonna come and then it wasn’t about, oh, an hour later, something like that, they gave us the word, the dog handler died last night. And I’m going like, “Damn, Tartsa [?].” I’ll never forget that. So—and that was, that was, that was my first kind of like real action. It was like—maybe there was eight or nine of them, I don’t know, but all I know is I shot one of them and I killed one and I was gonna run up that hill because I was so scared. I didn’t have my weapon, I didn’t have my steel pot, I wanted to run, and unbelievably scared. But, you know, later on, later on, you know, you get to become—I seen, now I seen some of these other guys, these old timers, watched these old timers; man, it was cool. They were really cool, they were cool under fire. Like Simms, he was cool. [laughs] Even what’s his name, when I threw my entrenching tool I don’t know where.

James: Did you find your helmet?

Stumpf: Oh, yeah, I found it, I found it right away. I just, it took me about five seconds or so and I took my bearings, get my bearings, where are they? I’m in the brush. Over here I see those other guys, that they were on the trail yet, but I didn’t know—I said there could be one over there. I didn’t know where, I didn’t know where those buggers are. But it didn’t take me long to get my bearings. But I had that thought, the thought entered my

mind that this bub is goin' up that hill. I'm going up there, [laughs] there are more guys up there than there is down here. But that thought did enter my mind. Sometimes you think about it, then sometimes its a, you know—

James: You react?

Stumpf: And this was a reaction, it's a reaction. And, ah, so then after that we got into some more skirmishes, but they were small and I don't remember a whole lot of them. But we came in in December of '66 for the Bob Hope show at Pleiku, where the 25<sup>th</sup> Division, 3<sup>rd</sup> Brigade was headquartered.

James: You were in a rest situation here?

Stumpf: In a rest, exactly. Fourteen days. And that's when I was selected as a squad leader. In my first job, we all wanted to go see Bob Hope. Oh! God, we all wanted to go see Bob Hope. You know, when we were out in that jungle, we just stayed out there, we didn't, we didn't come back. I don't know; the war changed later on. You know people went out for awhile, awhile, and then they'd come back to a base camp. That's the only time I'd seen the base camp except for when I was, went on R&R and I was going home. That was it. We went—after the Bob Hope show, about January 2nd or 3<sup>rd</sup>, we went, we went off again, but this time we went, we went east towards the South China Sea then north up to I Corps and—but, but, a little story. When I got, when my platoon leader asked me if I wanted to be the squad leader and I said, "I'll be the squad leader and I'll do the best I can," my first job he gave me, he says, "I need one man from your squad to do pots and pans." The whole battalion was in and we had pots and pans this big, and I just didn't have the guts to tell anybody in my squad to do it, so I did it. Even though I was a PFC, I was the squad leader, but I, I just—no, they'd talked about, we talked about how great it was gonna be to go see the Bob Hope show and I, I worked from about four in the morning until about eight, nine, ten o'clock that night.

James: So you worked in the kitchen?

Stumpf: I was in the kitchen doin' pots and pans, so I missed the Bob Hope Show. So that was the only time I had an opportunity to go see the Bob Hope Show and I missed it because I just couldn't tell somebody in my squad to do that, you know. You develop leadership skills over the, over the years, too, as you lead people here and there. So we went to, we went by convoy partway from Pleiku to An Khe to Quy Nhon and went up and spent some time in a place called Binh Son and then up into Quang Ngai Province, which is the, the most, the most southerly province in I Corps on the east coast, Quang Ngai. And the Marines had just left to go north and we took over that—we went to this Marine camp, it's called Camp Montezuma, Montezuma, and we took over that, and then of course we're infantry and

we went out—they built a firebase called OD and that was our, like our battalion and that was out farther into the jungle west, and then our companies would be anywhere, anywhere. So we had, we had different situations that came up during that time in January to April when I [unintelligible] One time—and I, I didn't tell this story, I didn't tell this story to very many people. I told it to Milwaukee Journal guys. And—but it's, again, actually a true story of things that happened in combat. And it was Easter, Easter Sunday, and whenever Easter comes up, when it's coming up, I always remember this incident, and what had happened is, I was still a young soldier and there was a sergeant by the name of Billy. He was in another squad and we were set up, we were set up and it's Easter Sunday. And they talked about this, "Okay, we have a cease fire—" but those things were never—'cause you—after New Year's or Christmas day you read in the *Stars and Stripes* where there was two hundred and ninety-four violations of the peace agreement [laughs] for that day or the—whatever, whatever they had. But here we're out on ambush. You know, we were out on a live ambush, it was no—and it was Easter Sunday. What was there was we went past this place—normally it was normal procedures to go past your, your ambush site to take a look, then continue on and make it, make believe like you're setting up three hundred meters from there.

- James: The ambush site was sometimes designated, probably held the enemy?
- Stumpf: No, it was that we were gonna hold our ambush site. We were gonna set up for the night.
- James: Okay. Your squad?
- Stumpf: No, my platoon, my platoon. Most of the time that I was out, we walked as platoons. We would put out squads or teams to be OPs, LPs.
- James: Your platoon was about what?
- Stumpf: Probably thirty-two.
- James: Thirty, forty?
- Stumpf: Oh, a normal platoon had about forty-four, forty-five, but everybody was low; we had thirty, thirty-one. Well anyways, we came back and we put out our Claymore mines and we put out our, our—
- James: Antipersonnel?
- Stumpf: Yeah, it's something you can, you can, you can control right from your area. It's got a wire on it and it's—inside this Claymore mine has about—

oh, I don't know, *thousands* of BBs and if you blow that thing [makes exploding sound] you're gonna hurt somebody. And then of course the trip flare is out in front of that so—

James: It's tripped by kicking the wire, right?

Stumpf: Say what?

James: Kicking the wire trips off the mine?

Stumpf: No, no, no. Your clacker back here by you, you have the cl—you have the wire, you have that thing right here in your hand, and the guy that's up and alert has it where if the trip, a flare goes off, you can make the decision to blow it, to blow the Claymore. And it shocks him or keeps him away or whatever it might be. Well anyways, there was a stream and I'm on guard duty now. Now what I see in front of us is a—there's a road, it's a dirt road, um, there's a rice paddy, a small rice paddy, and there's a village. And from where we were at there was hedgerows, about, just about five foot tall. There was hedgerows and we were in an area right along the hedgerows. So about 4 o'clock, 3 o'clock in the morning, something like that, I'm on duty and I hear *something* or *somebody* coming through the stream, walking in the stream. Because at night everything is so quiet, a guy could hear the trickle; I could, I could always hear the trickle, always hear the trickle. Something was in there, so I had Billy, Sergeant Billy, next to me and I said, [whispers] "Billy!" I said, "I think somebody is coming, something or somebody is coming through the stream." And we heard it and we had our weapons ready. And all of sudden on to, off to our right, where the trail led out of the stream, here comes a man—here comes a tall person and a short person and a bicycle. They weren't riding it, they were walking it. So we had—I said to Billy, "Dude." Remember, we had an Easter truce. He said, "Let's get him." "Okay." He says, "You take the big one." Me, I'll take the big guy in front and he'll take the smaller one in the back. So we drew our 16s up and had 'em on full automatic [makes automatic firing sounds]. They went down and fell into the rice paddy, then they got back up. I reloaded, we both reloaded and shot some more, and then we could see them both. They just—ducking way down low, they made their way to the village.

James: You missed them?

Stumpf: No, we didn't miss 'em; we didn't kill 'em, though. We, we didn't know, we didn't know. We knew, we knew they went down. They went down first; we knew they were both hit first. Where, how bad, I don't know. It's dark outside yet. So what had happened then, oh everybody in the platoon, they got up, "What's going on? What's going on? What's going on? Had we seen somebody?" Dah, dah, dah, dah, dah. And we told the story to

these guys and [unintelligible]. So at whatever time, 5:30 in the morning, it started to get light outside, Billy and I, we go out through the brush, we go out to the road. The bicycle is there. And then we get, we get some guys and we start walking, following the blood trail. Blood trail all over the place, going through the rice paddies, into the village. All of a sudden, man, we got into the village, people were *crying* and *screamin'* at us, and it was like, "What the hell?" So we had to get an interpreter out and I went over there—and I don't remember where Billy was, but he was probably next to me or something. I went over there to the lieutenant and the interpreter and I says, "What happened? What are they all screaming about?" And the interpreter said Billy and I shot a priest and an altar boy; they were going to church services. Oh man, I don't know if we killed them. I walked away. I walked away; I'm not even sure if we killed them or not. But that's what happens in war and that's, it's still on my—I don't have, I don't have tremendous, I don't have nightmares, but I feel kind of like, Oh man, I shot a priest, you know, and Billy shot the altar boy. But it's somethin' I never really talked about much, but I thought about for a long time, and it doesn't cause me to have any kind of flipouts or anything else; it's just—you know, Vietnam made me strong. I mean, for the guys that got killed, I'm strong for them. I says, "I'm not going to let, I'm not gonna let a nightmare bother me about this or that or whatever and I'm not gonna whine and snivel when I go see the Vietnam Memorial. I'm gonna be strong," you know. So it never bothered me, it doesn't bother me, but I never talk about that. I talked to that about—oh, I probably told ten people, ten people that story. But, you know, it was, it was an Easter—that was just the way we were. We got an Easter truce, all these other ones had been broke, why are we out on an ambush to begin with? We were. We didn't care if it was Christmas day, or Christmas whatever, if we were out on an ambush, we were out on an ambush. Days of Tet, their holiday, it didn't make a difference; we're still on ambush, you know. So that's just the way it was. What happened, it was dark, it was dark outside, we seen a big guy and a smaller guy, and of course, you know, a grown Vietnamese is about 5'1" and just that he was bigger than the other guy. So we killed, or we killed, we wounded and I, and I would suspect we killed 'em, that we killed them both or shot 'em up pretty darn, pretty darn bad just on the, on the blood, the blood that we followed into the, into the village. But I didn't even, I didn't ask, I didn't ask. When the interpreter told the lieutenant that we shot a priest and an altar boy that was going to serve mass down the road I guess, um, I walked away. Yeah I did. But that was, that was—it seemed like April, April was a really, really, really hot month for—then we got more action four days prior to the 25th of April of '67. That's the day of the action where I was recommended for the Medal of Honor on the 21st.

James: Tell me about that.



Stumpf: Oh man, on the 21st, we got—this one platoon was comin' across the bridge, it was a manmade bridge, it was made out of ropes, and the Vietnamese had it, you know, and they got, this one platoon got halfway across the bridge and the Viet Cong or North Vietnamese opened up on 'em . And, awwww, it was nothing but a total mess, guys running out on the bridge and they were wounded. Some just went over the side into the river and I don't know if they died or whatever. Our platoon was—we couldn't get across the river, it was too—

James: This was rifle fire? Rifle fire?

Stumpf: Oh this was rifle fire, yeah. And a, so my platoon had to go way down. I've got some, I got some pictures of this. We couldn't get across the river. But I had a rope with me, just a little slip about that big. And a, I told, I told the lieutenant, I said, "Lieutenant, I'm gettin' across that river." So I said, "Give me that rope." I went into the river; I didn't even, I didn't have my weapon or anything. And I went into the river and I got across the river—no, I'm sorry, I had my weapon, it was over my head, but I didn't know how far—the river was up to my neck. So when I got to the other side and it was just brush, got to the other side, now we figured we were about a hundred meters down from where the bridge was that they had tried, where the one platoon got hit, and there was still firing down there, so we had, we were trying to get a platoon across to come from the backside. So we went, we went, we finally got across. And I took some pictures. I sat on the other side [unintelligible] and I took pictures of the guys comin' across using my little rope and I still have those somewhere around. But anyways, we, ah—it was gettin' towards dark and so we were told to set up an ambush on this trail coming down this way. The trail was coming from that direction of the bridge and then it—we were on a corner, we were sitting right here in this corner because the trail turned and then it quick made another turn and see, I scooped that all out prior to setting up the ambush for my squad—[long gap in tape]—he had a—I told Sam things, John told things, it's a matter, you know, it's like I could only see what, what was here in my territory and John was talkin' about, he was talkin' about other things, and this and that, whatever, and some things that I'd seen, he hadn't seen, some things he'd seen I didn't see, and so he helped with that story. In fact, most things in that story right here is, is John's interpretation of what Ken Stumpf did. And it was like, it's like you know, it really makes a difference in reading a citation and looking like yeah, that's pretty darn close right there, John. And this bubba was scared.

But anyways, when we were out setting, when we got the ambush set up on the 21st, we had a—it was just about getting dark and all of a sudden, geez, here comes some, some Viet Cong or North Vietnamese coming from that direction, and they come around the corner and geez, I was just

standin' there and I was just trying to set up first, and, and three of them ran. Now they had to run, they had to run about fifteen yards before the trail turned going that way. So I had my weapon and, and I shot, and one went off into the rice paddy, but the rice paddy was kind of deep and I didn't know, I didn't know what happened to him because it was just, you know, it was just dark, almost, pretty dark, to see if one fell off that way or crawled away or what. Then I took off, I took off—now see, I had been around for awhile now, now I'm kinda gutsy and I say I knew where that trail went. The one thing I didn't know [laughs], I didn't know there was a barbed wire fence, and I was gonna cut 'em off. I ran smack, right off that way, 'cause I knew the trail went that way, and I ran smack into a barbed wire fence, cut my lip, [laughs] came back, came back and, and, "What happened to you?" I said, "Ah shit, I was gonna cut 'em off. I was goin' right through that trail and cut 'em off right there and I ran into a barbed wire fence." But you know, there are, sometimes there are funny things, there are lots of funny stories I could tell you about Vietnam that happened to me. And I laughed a lot, I laughed a lot to keep people cool. People get dear John letters and people are scared and, you know—and I was scared. I remember being a newbie, and I remember when, getting yelled at 'cause I put a little lotion on—[End of Tape One, Side B]—and things like that. I lost my—

James: What was the matter with the lotion?

Stumpf: Remember I was telling you about I had that lotion on when I first went out—

James: Oh yeah, when you shaved. Yeah. 'Cause they could smell that.

Stumpf: Yeah, shaving cream, smelling it. But I says remember my time when I—well, I was gettin' to be a vet. I was getting to be—now I'm gettin' to where I'm not so scared of you guys no more, 'cause now, you know, I know a little bit more. Well anyways, anyways, so I run right smack into that fence. Well the next day, the next day I went out and the guy was dead, the guy that I shot, that one that fell off; he was dead in the rice paddy. We went up, then we went north I guess it was, towards that bridge, and they were throwing artillery all night long and there were all kinds of civilians that were wounded. All I did was—and I got pictures of them, we were all using our bandages and patching 'em up and calling for helicopters to get them.

James: Patching up the Korean civilians? I mean the Vietnamese.

Stumpf: Yeah, the Vietnamese. Yeah, we were doing that. You know, I didn't even know there was a village there. I mean, I didn't know what was there. All I know is that somebody said they got going across this bridge and this and

that. Well, I seen the bridge the next day, what it actually looked like. But, but there was a lot of artillery that was fired into that area and a lot of civilian casualties and like everything else, everybody else disappeared. So that was on the 21st, but we lost a lot of people, and that's how I ended up in the situation I ended up in on the 25th. On the 23rd I got two, I got two, two brand new guys in my squad. We had to do everything. We didn't have, we didn't have a platoon leader; we had Sergeant Wells, he was our platoon sergeant. Sergeant Madonich had seven guys and I had seven guys, 'cause we had to give—

James: Where was the lieutenant?

Stumpf: We had to give lieutenants—out lieutenant went to another platoon. It was trying to make something out of something. We were walking, we were walking out in the rice paddy and Captain Caudillo, who recommended me for the Medal of Honor and then got killed about a week later—I was walking in front of him that day and we were walking through this rice paddy and he got a call, cause I could hear it, that, that somebody, a helicopter, a gunner on a helicopter had shot and killed supposedly a Viet Cong and one wounded crawled into a spider hole, which is no more than a hole in the ground, a hiding place. And Captain Caudillo told me, he said, “Specialist”—I was a specialist then—“Specialist Stumpf, take your squad.” And they popped smoke. It was about four hundred meters away, but it was all rice paddies; a direct walk would take us a few minutes to walk four hundred yards. And then it became hedgerows, villages, palm trees, and whatever. And so I had my squad and then they told me I'm going to have Madonich come along too because he's got a radio. I didn't have a radio, I had to give up my radio, that's while we were with the command group. But I knew—and that's one of the things that's wrong in that story—I knew Madonich was coming with a radio; I didn't just go out there without a radio. And I was supposed to go and see if I could find this guy that was, who crawled in a spider hole. They popped smoke. Of course smoke drifts away, and so my squad of seven guys, two are brand new: Hernandez and Bush. I just got them in my squad on the 23rd and Bush is a real big, tall black guy that has to be 6'6", 6'7". He's big and he's a skinny guy. And I looked at him and I didn't say nothin' to him, but I looked at him when I was shakin' hands with him. I said, I said to myself, I said, “How the hell did they ever get you in the infantry?” I said, “You will never—” he's a big target—I said, “You won't last three hundred sixty-five days,” that's what I said to myself. I said, “Whoa.” He was one of the guys I pulled out that got wounded on the 25th. So anyways, ah, off we go and I'm walking point. I'm a squad leader, I'm walking point, I walked point a lot. I felt comfortable walking point even though it was not my job because I'm supposed to control the squad and you walk in the middle of the squad normally, but I had two new guys.

James: What's your formation when you walk like that?

Stumpf: We walk in a line.

James: Single file?

Stumpf: Single file. But we're spread out. We're in a rice paddy now so we're spread out like fifteen to twenty meters apart. You know, we've already learned about one round will get you out. So I, I walk down this trail and, um, it's again my luck, my luck is unbelievable. I came to this one point and I stopped. I looked down the trail, the trail turned to the left, and I looked down to the left; it went over a trench. It was a trench, a pretty, pretty deep trench, actually. It was, it was probably about five feet wide and probably about, probably about four foot high. I seen the trench, the trail, and the trail bent around to the right and it became hedgerow. I stopped *right there* where I could see down the trail over the trench and see the turn. I stopped right there. Now we had been searching for probably a half hour or so, so I think. And all of a sudden I told everybody, I said, "You all stay here," and they were all spread out. I says, "I'm going back down the trail and I'm going to find Madonich." But I had no fear, I had no fear going through the jungle. Now I had been around for awhile. I had no fear at all about going to find Madonich because I knew he had a radio, you know, to call back in, tell Captain Caudillo that they were on hold and to call back and tell them that we looked, we didn't find, should we continue to look? I got back to the last man in my squad and all of a sudden, it's just like the whole world just exploded. What had happened was, the guys I told to stay here, they went around the corner, crossed, they went down the trail across the trench, around the corner where all the hedgerows was and there was a company of North Vietnamese or Viet Cong, whatever they were, in bunkers. And they opened up on them guys, and I came runnin' back through the trench, I came around the corner and a guy ran smack right into me. This is at the entrance of the hedgerow; he ran smack into me, and I said, "What happened?" He said, he said, "Three guys are really messed up and they can't get out." So the other four of us got back into this trench, and we were—you couldn't see nothin', you couldn't see nothin' because it was hedgerows all over here and there was people, there was rounds, big rounds like from B40s or something, rocket launchers or whatever, they was hitting in back of us! And I'm trying to think—I'm scared, I am *unbelievably* scared because I can't see the enemy. But I'm the squad leader and I also know that I'm in charge and that I have to make some decisions. This one, I'm not running, I'm not takin' off, I'm a vet now. [laughs] I'm not gonna, I'm not gonna go up that hill or take off. So anyways, anyways it was like we were just firing back and forth, and back and forth, and back and forth.

James: At whatever.

Stumpf: At whatever. At whatever. Sometimes we could see these guys. They were comin' through the brush and there was only four of us. It was like one, his little head would peek through and you'd fire at him. And then there would be grenades would come flyin' over the top of the hedgerow so you'd fire over there, you know, but we really didn't know exactly what the heck was goin' on. So I tried about three times—now my squad, my other guys in my squad, they're all wounded too, so now I have—not only do I have the responsibility of my squad, of taking care of them, you know, I have the mobility to do—and my thoughts after it sunk in, first thought I probably had was, “Mom, I can't believe I'm gonna die in this fucking trench.” [James laughs] That's my, that's one of my first thoughts. I was so scared. Then my thoughts geared mostly on my three guys who I didn't know where they were at because of the hedgerows, but I did know that I was pretty close; they couldn't have walked around the corner that far. So I was pretty close to being like straight out from 'em. And I knew that it couldn't of been too far of the distance, so I had it pretty well measured about how far down the trail they could have got and how, where that trail went to, how far I was away. I tried two or three times to get up out of that trench and then another bunker would open up or somebody else would start firing over here. And I go back down in that trench and I was really gettin' frustrated. And then Madonich came in. He came in with his seven and I—if I'm not mistaken, somebody got killed, one of his guys got killed comin' in. And then he had another one wounded.

James: He had the radio?

Stumpf: He had the radio. So we called Caudillo and then and then Caudillo, those guys, well they didn't get there for quite a long time because after we'd seen what it all was like, they got hit comin' in, coming in from a different direction. They got hit by bunkers and trenches, trenches that were like this wide and about three foot deep. And they had trenches all over going into, to, to the bunkers. Well of course, I didn't know it at the time. Well anyways, anyways, I, after, after about, I'm guessing, I'm guessing probably an hour to an hour and a half went by, and—this is another thing, true story. I used to carry about twenty to twenty-five hand grenades on my back in a sandbag. It was tied to my, my, ah, wet gear and when we were down in the lowlands, when I didn't have to carry a pack, I loaded up. I had forty-two magazines of M16 rounds. I had twenty to twenty-five hand grenades on my back, not counting what I got on my belt. And that first hour to hour and a half I fired, I was down to only about two magazines left and almost all of my grenades were gone.

James: You threw them all?

- Stumpf: I almost threw them all. I just—get away from me! You guys get away from me! GET AWAY FROM ME! Stay away from me!
- James: Generally how far did you pitch them? Twenty yards?
- Stumpf: Oh not very far! I pitched, I pitched some twenty, some I just dropped over, just dropped over like they were doing. They were droppin' them, they'd come right over the top, and one time there was a grenade between my legs. But I didn't even know it was between my legs [laughs] until somebody yelled at me, "You got a grenade between your legs!" And I was called Stumpy, and "Stumpy, you got a grenade between your legs!" and I look down, goddamn, there was a grenade between my legs. Now John said, John told in that story, he'll tell you a different story, but this is true. The grenade, he said I picked it up and I threw it back. No I did not. There was nobody down to my right. I seen that grenade [laughs] and I *kicked* it, I kicked that sucker as far as I could kick it and it never went off! But I said, "Man, if that thing would have went off!"
- James: If that went off you wouldn't be here to tell it.
- Stumpf: Oh I pmmbf [sound blowing his lips]. Parts of me wouldn't be here to tell.
- James: The parts that count.
- Stumpf: I'll tell you what. I just, it was like gol-damn. But see, I'm gettin', I'm gettin' cooler now, cooler in the sense of, okay I don't know where you're at, but I know you're over there. But my main concern was for my men. I was, I was, I was scared that I would fail, probably. That I would fail, not getting my men out or—you know, I've gotta make an attempt. So finally I made that attempt. I told the guys, I says, "Hey, I'm going running, I'm going running right through this brush. I'm gonna try to get those guys back." I said, "You guys, you know, do what you can do." I didn't know if they would shoot me in the back or whatever. So I got up and I said, "This time I'm going." And I ran in and all three of 'em, I ran almost directly to 'em, about fifteen yards.
- James: Lucky, 'cause they didn't know where you were going.
- Stumpf: Lucky, I was lucky as crap! And all the firing, it was just like, when is it, when is it, when is the one, when's that slug gonna barrel me, just knock me right in the head. But I just, "Go, go, go!" And, and I got to, I seen White. White was the white guy and White had been around for awhile and White might have been the guy that took 'em around the corner, [laughs] I'm not sure. I knew it wouldn't have been one of my new guys; they would have followed—they'd have just "You stay here" and that

would have been that. So anyways, I got White, and White, he was like hurt, hurt the worst. He had a broken back. I rolled in right, right alongside of White and I said, “White, get on my back, get on my back and hold on around my neck.” And so he did that. I slid right underneath him and— ‘cause he said, “My back is broken, my back is broken.” And I said, “Slide,” and I slid underneath him, and said, “Grab hold of my neck,” and I kind of crawled as fast as I could to go get out of there and I got back to the trench and they grabbed, they grabbed White and they hauled him in. So then, then I said, [whispers] “Okay, I’m going again,” and I’m so scared, I’m huffing and puffing, my heart is beatin’ so fast and it kept on, all this fire, this fire was going on, and I just kind of blocked it out. It was noise, it was just crackin’ away, it was crackin’ away like crazy! And I just, just went back in and grabbed this other guy, Hernandez. Hernandez was, he was—oh god, he might have been wounded the worst, or hurt the worst, because I heard somebody in there, “Help, help”, you know that, “I need some help!” stuff like that. I knew, I could hear that sound in the trench. And when I get by him it was like man, he’s, he’s really messed up. And so I grabbed him by the shirt, I think, and I just grabbed him, and I grabbed him and I started taking him through the, through the brush. Crawling, crawling or dragging him, I was dragging, dragging and half crawling, or whatever. Got him back and then went back and then it was Bush, the big tall black guy, and I just grabbed him by the shirt and I says, “We’re going,” and got him back inside the trench. So now this thing is, I’m feeling a little bit better. I got—

James: Was the trench a safe spot at that time?

Stumpf: NO! No. Oh, they were still, oh they were still firing like crazy at us and we were still firing back and then we had to get the hell out of there because we had these wounded guys and we went back and see, that’s where I lose part of the story and Madonich picks up because he had the radio. We went back to this one area we, we thought—we’d seen, we’d both seen this area coming down through and it was a area that we could get a helicopter in and it was an LZ, a landing zone. We got back to there and the first helicopter that came in, I was standing right next to it when it came in, all of a sudden the whole windshield just exploded, it was blasted away. And the helicopter took off, so we didn’t get nobody, we didn’t get nobody out! But one of the gunners came off the helicopter and he couldn’t get back on cause they took off so fast, he couldn’t get back on. So he sat. I told him, “You’re in the infantry now.” So then, then Madonich—I had to leave, I was, I was draggin’ people up to get out. I don’t know, we might of went forty or fifty meters to get the hell out of that trench to get back here, so I was draggin’ people back and forth. I just happened to be there when that first helicopter came in which—now I have, I think it might have been, it could have been the second one, because I had heard that one—it might have been this one—that got

blasted, blown out of the air, but I'm not sure. Well anyways, according to John Madonich, they called in another chopper and got some of these guys out. Well in the meantime, in the meantime, they got us now surrounded again, 'cause now we had left and my company can't get to us, my company can't get to us. So we had, we had looked around, we were trying to figure things out, and there was a point that I told Madonich, "We gotta get the hell out of here," I says, "because I can't hold these guys." It was just us three.

James: You told him that on the radio?

Stumpf: No. I told him that in his face; he had the radio. I said, "We gotta get out of here." We was small, we was only like twelve or ten people now or something like that. And I says, "We gotta get out of here because we can't hold 'em here because they're coming through the brush and they got leaves and crap all over 'em and you can't see 'em." And so he called Caudillo, which I didn't know, and Caudillo says, "Go back to the trench." [laughs]. So we went back to the trench. We had to get the hell out of there. They were like chasing us all over the damn place. Well anyways, later on, later on they came, the platoon came, another platoon came in, Caudillo's command group came in. And we pulled back because we still couldn't see shit, but we had, now we had a whole bunch of guys in this trench. And we told—we fell back and, and we dropped some bombs in and, you know, when the bombs started coming down, it was the first time I seen an air strike up front and personal. And I actually thought I was gonna drop my undies.

James: Take you out too?

Stumpf: Oh, I thought so. We were in a trench about, we went down about a hundred yards we went down the trench, so we had the cover, the trench, and of course the bunkers were down there and were above the trench. And when these bombs started comin' down I looked up and I said, "The bomb's gonna drop right on top of us," and I started charging down the trench, and then all of a sudden I looked up and, oh man, the bombs hit right, right on the money. And it was bomb after bomb after bomb after bomb—

James: What was bringing those bombs in?

Stumpf: Jets, jets, I don't know what kind of jets. M—uh, F16s? F17s? F15s? I don't know what they were [laughs]. You know—again I'm a private—I don't even know where I'm at. I'm in Vietnam.

James: Who called that air strike in?



- Stumpf: Captain Caudillo did. Well, Captain Caudillo, or we had our four—observer out there too, that was a lieutenant, Lieutenant Stout. He could have called them in too. I'm not positive who called.
- James: Because obviously he had the coordinates.
- Stumpf: Oh! They had that thing wired. As soon as that—the last bomb I ran down that trench so fast and now some of the stuff had been separated, palm trees were knocked down, shrub was knocked down, bunkers were sunk, some of them were visible, and I was absolutely stunned and amazed that when I got down there, here they were! They're still in the bunkers and they're firing, but now I can see 'em! And I'm firing back at 'em. "Holy shit! These bombs! Where did they go?"
- James: They got everything but people.
- Stumpf: Where did they go during this time? So we pulled back again and we bombed again, did the same thing. Now there's—more bunkers are exposed and more shit fell down and there they are again, they're still firing away. And I'm going, "Whoa, I just can't believe this!" So it started getting, now it's probably 5:00 or 6:00 in the afternoon.
- James: Now what are we looking at? About four hours into this?
- Stumpf: Oh we're about—our first contact was probably about 10:00 to 10:30. The initial contact where the three guys got hit, 10:30, and again, I could be off by a half an hour or an hour, but it was, it was, we were like five or five, six hours into this. I am just like—I thought I must have ran a hundred miles that day.
- James: Back and forth?
- Stumpf: Back and forth, back and forth, back and forth, back and forth. And I was just dripping, I was just soaked and I was ripped, my fatigues, everything was ripped, but I'm not hit! And I don't have a squad now. My whole squad was wounded so I don't have a squad now and a—
- James: Did you get that helicopter to come in and take them out, after the F16s?
- Stumpf: Yeah, no, yeah—we were still, they, we were still doing some of that, because other people killed and wounded and I'm not even around. I'm, I'm on my own now, I don't even have nobody to, nobody to tell me, nobody to tell me what to do. [laughs] You know, I was the only guy left in my squad, and so I talked to Captain Caudillo and said, "Sir," I says, "we've got to make a charge, an infantry charge." I said, "We pull back one more time, we bomb them one more time, it's gonna get dark and

they're gonna disappear." So he says, "Okay." And I says, "I know where, I know where that one bunker is." See, I had gone, I had gone into—this is at different times, I had gone into these other trenches and were by some of the bunkers and so I knew where this one bunker was that was real—it was just pissed, just pouring out the lead, and I says, "I can get that bunker." And, and he gave some guys from his command who gave me some grenades and that's, that's when I went in there and took out, took out the bunker, the bunker that—

James: Describe the bunker, please.

Stumpf: It was made out of palm trees, palm trees with dirt on top and a slit about that big.

James: Six feet high?

Stumpf: How high?

James: Six?

Stumpf: Six feet high? It could have, it could have been, it could have been, but it was all surrounded, I mean, you couldn't even see these things, they camouflaged them so well.

James: So you had to put the grenades in the ports?

Stumpf: Yeah, yeah, you had to—threw one in and they threw it back out. And then Madonich was, was with me when we were weak, but we went out and got a couple other bunkers from different places. And, and then he was with me when we, we, we finally kinda made the final charge or whatever it may be, and it then was just before dark and we broke contact with them. We had our Bravo Company came in to help us out and they give, they, they were gonna firefight on the other side somewhere 'cause this one, one guy told me that later on, he was—I met him, he was the senior—"I was Bravo Company first sergeant the day you got the Medal of Honor." I said, "Really?" 'Cause I didn't know nothing. "Yeah, my company got called in to help you." I said, "Oh, really?" He says, "Yeah, he said, "we lost a lot of guys that day, too." But I didn't even know. I didn't know that. But anyways, we fell back, we fell back into an area and I laid on the ground and I, I smoked a cigarette. I laid it on the ground and was, I was stunned, I was absolutely stunned. I was out of—[laughs] I had no strength at all.

James: You must have been totally exhausted.

Stumpf: I was totally exhausted. I'm smokin' this cigarette [unintelligible] and I hear somebody say the company commander is looking for Specialist Stumpf. I said, "That's me." The company commander is over there somewhere, so I start walking over there by him and Captain Caudillo told me, he says, "We have a platoon that's lost and they're in one of the trenches." There was three trenches and then the bunkers, the bunkers were here, there, and they're mingled with these trenches and the trenches go this way then turn back that way and things. And he said they didn't know where we pulled back to, the command group, and he asked me, he says, "Can you go get 'em?" You've gotta be shittin' me. I thought, now I am terrified, now it's dark outside and I have to go in this bunker complex, in these trenches, and try to find a platoon that's lost. And I says, you know I— "Ahh, oh shit," but I knew he picked the right guy because I knew, I knew all three of the major trenches. I knew them and I knew where quite a few, quite a few of the bunkers were, so [sighs] what I did, I grabbed a radio and I told these guys to come with me. I don't know who they were, I could be talkin' to lieutenants, and I said, "You, you, you, you, you, come with me." I explained what the mission was. "We have a platoon that does not know where we came back to." I said that—it's dark outside, you could hardly see about that much in front of you, I mean, and I am pounding, my heart is pounding, and I'm walking point. I radioed the lieutenant from the other platoon and I told him, I says, "Don't put anybody up front that is gonna hear something and start firing," because I thought, awwh, Jesus. I said, "What's gonna happen out here? We might be in opposite trenches and we are gonna have a firefight with ourselves."

James: The platoon will take care of the enemy.

Stumpf: I told, I told everybody, I said, "Put your weapon on rock and roll." I said, "Put it on automatic." I said, "If there's any firing, basically you're gonna be on your own. I can't even see out here." So I got in this one trench and again [makes whistling sound] lucky, my lucky star up there. I got in the same trench with that platoon and about—and we walked past these bunkers that were, you know, just looking in these bunkers and I looked and looked and looked and there was no activity. They were just right off on the side, so I slipped past and slipped past, then all of a sudden I heard something and I stopped. Now Ken, what are you going to do? And so I did what I thought I should do. I will never kill an American, so I thought if this is the platoon coming, that they'll shoot me first; I will not shoot him first. So I told everybody, "Shhhh, quiet!" And then all of a sudden it came closer and it came closer, and now all of a sudden I recognized maybe from ten feet away just the outline of a steel pot. And I said the only thing that came to my mind. [laughs] I said, "Are you an American?" [James laughs] There was no password.

James: He must have gone straight up.

- Stumpf: And, “Yeah,” and I was so relieved. I was so scared that I was gonna get in a fight with this platoon. I was so scared that there was going to be Viet Cong or North Vietnamese still hanging around in these bunkers. And we went back, we went back to, I took them back. There was sporadic shooting during the night, but I think it was nerves. We called in artillery all night long on that position and we had flares; all night long we had flares going off. So the next morning that was, that was it. It was, it was over with. The press—not the press, but the brass came out.
- James: How many in the platoon that you took out? Twenty, thirty?
- Stumpf: The platoon that was missing that didn’t know where we went? Oh, I’m just guessing, it was dark, I’m guessing their platoon probably had twenty-five to thirty so—
- James: Tell me their reaction, before we leave that point, seeing you.
- Stumpf: Oh, their reaction? I don’t even know what it was; I was just relieved.
- James: Oh, I would have thought, they might have, didn’t know where the hell where they were going.
- Stumpf: No, no, no, no! They, they—I met up with the point man, and then, I just, they—I had contact with them on the phone when I told them that don’t put somebody up front that’s gonna open up if they hear something—**[End of Tape Two, Side A]**—So, but I couldn’t—
- James: So they half expected to run into you, then?
- Stumpf: Oh, yes. They knew I was coming, but nobody knew, I didn’t know, they didn’t know which trench, they didn’t know which side I was comin’ from or nothing, but dang Captain Caudillo gave that job to me because he knew I was in that complex, I mean more than once inside that complex, so, I mean, who else could he ask? But I was scared. I was, oh man, gotta do this. Well anyways, I was, I was probably—for three days we stayed in that area. And I was, I was stunned. I was, I was completely stunned. I sat by myself, I didn’t have a squad. I just sat by a tree all day long. I didn’t lead one patrol or nothing, we just stayed there. I’d just sit by a tree. It was like I had a fog in my head or something, I was just—
- James: You were exhausted.
- Stumpf: I was just out of it. I was just like, holy cow, and ah—but then, then the, one of the first days the guys came out and they started, they started, you know, wanting to know, wanting to know how many bodies, the body

count, the thing I could [unintelligible], body count. And I remember this major. And I asked the major—out in the field, you know, I never seen, I never seen anybody above captain out in the field. I had a lot of respect for lieutenants and captains that served in Vietnam, but I have very, very little respect for anybody above the rank of captain. [pause]

Woman: So you learned to develop that mile away look?

Stumpf: Oh yeah, the thousand mile stare.

Woman: Is that what it's called?

Stumpf: A hundred yard stare, a thousand yard stare. I read it before somewhere. Oh yes, I had to develop that, [laughs] yes, because I remember people coming out, I remember people coming out after and I remember how I jumped in their shit when they was goofing off. I jumped in their shit just like Simms; I never forgot Simms. And I just jumped in their shit. Like, man, they must of said, "What a fucking prick this guy's gotta be."

James: So you acted just the way he acted towards you?

Stumpf: Oh, you bet I was. I said, "This is serious stuff out here. No bullshittin' around," 'cause they, they was like—see, I was, I was a looker and a watcher, but you get some of these guys come out and they think "Yeah, bring 'em on! Bring 'em on!" I says, "You bring 'em on for a while. You don't want 'em on anymore after awhile." [laughs] I says, "Get 'em away from me." [laughs] But ah—

James: [pause] Alright, we're going again.

Stumpf: Are we rolling again? Then the next day the brass came out—

James: Don't forget to back up a little. You saw very few of anybody higher than a captain in the field?

Stumpf: Oh no, there was nobody, you know, and it disappoints me, and you know, I stayed in the military for twenty-nine years and I never forgot where I came from and that's why I took care of those people underneath me. Because if I don't, who will? You know, I says that some, some of the rules, like if you're walking point, don't shoot at nobody until they shoot at you first; some kind of orders like that come out. You know, it's like, "Fuck you, Colonel, you come out here and you walk point! See what you think!" You know, it's like you know, takin' a, takin' a hill or something like that, it's just like—there was no direction at all, we had no intention of winning. It was like standing out in the middle of Highway 94, super highway, and you'd go out in the middle of it and you'd just stand there;

eventually you are going to get hurt. That's what we did in Vietnam, and I blame, I blame the senior officers. Nobody wanted to speak up and say anything. I remember long after, after Vietnam was over with, *Time* magazine or somebody did an article on retired generals, admirals, whatever from the Army, Air Force, Marine, Navy, and all of them said we knew the war was being fought wrong, but we didn't want to say nothing to protect our careers. And I thought, you pieces of shit, the little guys dying on the battlefield and you're thinking about your careers? And I've always felt that; I've seen that many times in the Army. You know, they talk about we care; they don't care. They only care if it's one thing that might be to their advantage or whatever it might be, but when it comes down to my promotion or my, my Silver Star, you know, they don't—they could care less. I blame, I blame a lot on the military and I blame a lot on, of course, the civilian, the civilian leadership. You know I hate to say this, but Brokaw's greatest generation is the generation that put us in Vietnam, and it was my generation, protestors and everything else, that got our asses out of it, with some type of sense, you know, so when they talk about that greatest generation, I respect them for what they did in World War II and things like that, but when we came home, then the greatest generation didn't have much use for us, and of course neither did the population. But ah, I think we did the best we could. We fought hard, we were just as dedicated as our fathers were, we took the missions seriously and, and whatever may be, and, and, a, but there was no intent, there was no intent to win, and that's what bothers me.

James: This is what you felt at the time, that you lacked direction? You felt that while you were there?

Stumpf: No; no, that's the way I feel now. While I was there—see I went back. After I got the Medal of Honor, I went back to Vietnam two more times and—

James: What do you mean? Tell me what you mean by two more times? You mean two, two six months?

Stumpf: No, I went back for twelve months and then I extended for six months, so I had about thirty, thirty months. I had thirty months in Vietnam, total, so I seen the start of Vietnam, '66, '67, I seen kind of the end of it, '69, '70 and '71, parts of it.

James: The last part, was your rank higher?

Stumpf: No. My rank was still the same. I only had like three, four years in the Army.

James: I see.

Stumpf: Thirty-one months in Vietnam.

James: Not much.

Stumpf: So—but I went up the ladder pretty fast in the military. I had, I had leadership jobs. I ended up being a platoon sergeant over there, rifle platoon, when I was went back again, and that's a, that's an E7 slot for—and I was E6 so—

James: Before we get back to your subsequent experience, tell me a few things outside here. Tell me about marijuana.

Stumpf: Marijuana? Honest to God, I never smoked marijuana before, during or after Vietnam. I came home my first year and one of my teachers from Menasha High School asked me about drugs. I said, "I didn't even see any; I don't even know what you're talking about." And I didn't. I didn't honestly know what they were talking about. And then she asked me another question; she says, "Do you think we can win the war in Vietnam?" And I said, "No," and I'm lookin' through the eyes of a private, not lookin' at the big map, and see where all this, all these regiments are and what's the stats here and what's are, what are we trying to do except for body kill, we get more of them than they get of us. So I says, "No, we'll never win the war in Vietnam," because of what I did the first time. All we do is we walk, we take a hill, we walk off the hill. We get in a skirmish, we walk away. And then, you know, it just keeps on going.

James: No resolution?

Stumpf: There was no territory that we held, you know, and so—but, but I will say when I went back to Vietnam, '69, I was, got assigned—first of all, I got assigned to the training detachment of the 4th Infantry Division. And they were getting ready to pull out and I ended up being, going over to an air rifle platoon of the 1st and 10th Cav; that was, this was the infantry part of the, of the, it was Delta Troop. We had, we had infantry, a platoon, and we had the Loaches and the helicopters and the Cobras, and our mission was to go out in the jungle and sit and the Loaches would fly by somewhere and they'd draw some fire.

James: What were the Loaches?

Stumpf: Loaches are those little bubbles, the ones that had a little bubble on top. It was like a one seater. It just has a bubble on top—a bubble, what am I saying? I'm saying a little glass, a little round glass—

- James: Not manned?
- Stumpf: Oh yeah, it's manned. It's a—
- James: An observation type?
- Stumpf: Yeah, it's a, it's a type of a helicopter. I don't know what they call it, what the number is, but we, we used to call them Loaches. But, ah, they were just a little glass bubble—
- James: They fly at what, a hundred, two hundred feet?
- Stumpf: I couldn't tell you, I don't know. I don't know how high they fly.
- James: But you could see them?
- Stumpf: But they would, they would fly—no, we wouldn't see them, we wouldn't see them around. They'd go all over. They'd be, they'd be five miles away from us. They could be a hundred yards from us, and then when they draw, drew some fire, then the Cobras come in and then, then our Hueys we'd get on, and then we'd come in, and then we also was used as the backup for the units that got in, had problems. But that's where I seen, that's where I seen the drugs. It was back at base camps. At base camps, *these* were these guys that were smokin' all that dope and all that crap. And that's where—
- James: Morphine too?
- Stumpf: Oh, I couldn't tell you. I didn't even know. Even, even people I suspected, 'cause I went to high command, the sergeant major, I suspected our officers that were flying helicopters and some of the enlisted guys smoking dope out in this tent, but the sergeant major was like, "Hey, I don't want to hear nothing about that." You know, nobody wants to hear anything about that crap, you know. But that was the last time I went to somebody higher. I thought, hey, they don't care; I can't worry about that.
- James: They were worried about going home when their time was up.
- Stumpf: But anyway, a lot of times people don't want to hear it because it is on their watch. It's on my watch, you know, and then the battalion commander might not get promoted if he knows at all, that fifty percent of his soldiers were smoking dope and does whatever.
- James: Was your experience the second time over there, and third time, different than your first?



Stumpf: Ah, different in a way, in a way it was different, because I did a lot of walking my first tour; this time I'm in an air rifle platoon and we fly, we fly into action. And you know, it was March 16, 1971 and I was just ready to finish up my third, my six month extension, that was my third trip over there, and that's when I got wounded, and so I was so lucky.

James: You waited long enough?

Stumpf: Yeah, I was very lucky, I was a very lucky guy. I used to tell these guys when I'd go talk in schools, I said, "Alright, somebody's gonna ask me this question right away, so let's get it out of the way." I said, "Somebody will ask me where I got wounded, so you remember the show Forrest Gump?" "Oh yeah, yeah I remember the show." "Remember when he got wounded?" "Oh, yeah, yeah, yeah!" "Remember who the president was?" "Yeah, yeah, I think so: President Johnson. Yeah, yeah, yeah." "Well okay. I got wounded in the same cheek he got wounded on, but I didn't pull my pants down when I got in front of President Johnson." [James laughs] So I says, "Where he got wounded, I got wounded," and then everybody laughed. And I said, "Okay."

James: That was shrapnel?

Stumpf: Shrapnel, I got shrapnel from a hand grenade. But anyways it's a, there was a, it seemed quite a bit—if I could, again, how lucky I was. I don't remember the date, but I was coming home for a thirty day leave because I extended in Vietnam for six more months and our platoon went out and I was left off of what we called the load list because I only had like three days to go and I was going home and I used to go out every day because I was the squad leader, and that platoon got chewed up bad. A highway outside of An Khe, I don't know if it was highway 14 or 19, got hit, convoy got hit. Our mission all the time was to come in behind it and work back, or stay in place and be a blocking force. Well, the first helicopter to come in landed, the second one got blown out of the air. They had the, the Viet Cong and everything had the, they had the LZ surrounded so they went to another LZ, the other two choppers. It was four choppers we had, seven guys in each chopper, and they went to the—and exactly the same thing happened over there.

James: At the other landing zone?

Stumpf: When it was all over, I would love to get, I would *love* to get the morning report of this action. When it was all over, it was like of the twenty-eight—you've got four choppers, seven in each chopper—of the twenty-eight guys in the air rifle platoon, about six to eight were still, that came back not hit or killed. I don't know how many pilots were killed. And I'd love to see that, see what, that they were there perfectly, they knew exactly

what the air rifle platoon did. One thing I was against in Vietnam, too, was all these hooch maids. They come in, they wash your little, wash your drawers and all that other crap, and I said, "They shouldn't even be here." I didn't spent time in base camp; this is my first time in base camp now. I said, "They shouldn't even be in here. They know everything what we do." But you know, you couldn't tell nobody, you couldn't tell nobody. You couldn't tell nobody up here. I says, "Geez, one of these days something is gonna happen." And that was October of 1970, or November. I would love to see the report of Delta Troop 1st and 10th Cav on that day. It was *awful*. And lucky me, I was left off the load list the night before. My platoon sergeant—and see, he got hit real bad and all these guys, ah, so many of my friends in the platoon got killed, and so I ended up being the platoon sergeant of that platoon, but I had to get a brand new platoon in. When I got a brand new platoon in, I was the only person in the platoon to ever see the enemy, [laughs] except for, including, including, including [laughs] the lieutenant, including the lieutenant. The lieutenant got shot, too, and—but of course I blame it on the lieutenant cause you just, he didn't see no action, you know, but the platoon sergeant had seen action before on a different tour in Vietnam. And he was just, he was like, man, you'd tell him these things, and hey, come on, better take me seriously. And they got, all those guys got wiped out, it was just, just—and who knows how many, how many pilots were doped up on, on, the night before, you know.

James: It's so hard to say.

Stumpf: But anyway, that's enough.

James: As a Medal of Honor winner, you really didn't have to go back into combat at all.

Stumpf: No, I had to put in a special request.

James: Because they would prefer that you did not get killed?

Stumpf: No, exactly. I was in Vietnam, I had one month or weeks to go and I was pulled out of the field because they said that my recommendation for the Medal of Honor had left to go back to the States and left through all these boards including MACV [U.S. Military Assistance Command Vietnam] where Westmoreland was at. It had gone through all these boards with eyewitness statements and everything else and had gone back to be reviewed back at the next higher level, Department of the Army or whatever. So they pulled me out of the field, but I still went out on a, I still went out on a, went out on a four day ambush. 'Cause this one guy told me, he says, "Oh, you've gotta go out on four day ambush." You know, I don't care. As time goes by, I didn't care what they say [laughs]; I'll go on

a four day ambush [laughs]. But he didn't know I was recommended for the Medal of Honor. I could have told him, "Hey, I'm not supposed to be going out," but I went out anyways. But then you know, I get the Medal of Honor when I went back.

James: Let's go to that experience. You flew back to where?

Stumpf: When?

James: When you went back to get your medal.

Stumpf: Oh, well I was out of the Army, I was back in Menasha working at Banta Printing Company.

James: This was in 1968?

Stumpf: 1968. I came off the 11 to 7 shift.

James: Well, you knew that you were getting it, you just—

Stumpf: No, no.

James: Oh, you didn't until then?

Stumpf: No. When I had left Vietnam, I knew I was recommended for the Medal of Honor, but when I left Vietnam, I left Vietnam. I gained a hell of a lot of experience over there. I, I, it's a—I think I became a better person. I became more dedicated to mission. You know I didn't give up my job, my mission, my job, but I left Vietnam, Vietnam's gone. Vietnam was out of my life. I just, I did what I felt was the right thing to do and I did my duty. One day in my life of the first two years, the day I was recommended, I was probably the best soldier that I could possibly be; I was the best person I could possibly be. You know, go in there and get those guys out. And the best warrior I could possibly be. That one five, six, seven hour period, I was a good soldier. And the best I could be, but I—no, my mom woke me up off the 11 to 7 shift. I was probably sleeping for a couple of hours, and she says, "Somebody from Fort Sheridan." I didn't know nothing about Fort Sheridan or where anyplace in the Army was except for Leonard Wood and Ord, Fort Knox.

James: Fort Sheridan was a lot closer.

Stumpf: Fort Sheridan, yeah, right. I ended up getting assigned there later on. But anyways, they said they're gonna have to bring a fly up, fly a plane up and pick you up because they want to take you back to Fort Sheridan to get your picture taken because you're going to go to Washington for the

Medal of Honor. And I go, “Whoa,” so now I thought, “Geez, could this be a joke or what?” you know, and then they called back. The next day they called back, “We’re all fogged in,” and they said, “can you go downtown and get a picture taken?” And I thought, “Oh, geez, could this be a joke or what?” [laughs] You know, then I got my picture taken and then I started getting official correspondence. My mother and my father, my sisters and my brothers, their husbands, their wives, I was not married, they, we all went to Washington D.C. and we stayed at the Madison Hotel. Everything we wanted was there for us. You order anything in the hotel, you just put ‘Medal’ on the tab. If you go down and get your hair done, somebody makes a remark about your hair, you go back down and get it done again [laughs], and put ‘Medal’ on the tab. We had two escorts, a captain and a staff sergeant, and they took us out to dinner. We rode in the big black limousines and it was awesome. It was just an awesome experience. But for me, but for me it was kind of, kind of, kind of a—and I feel that way today, it was a humbling experience, you know, because I did what I did because a job had to get done and I was in a position, ‘cause I was [unintelligible] to do it; it was my responsibility.

But, a, so I’ve always kind of felt that way about the Medal of Honor and things that—I changed, some things, you know, my feelings about, about certain things, Vietnam and POWs, MIA issue. I’m so, I’m just so disappointed in that, that after ’73 that they kind of, they kind of shoved it off like nobody else was there, we got them all. And that wasn’t true. I mean, I read Bobby Garwood’s book, the Marine that came back in 1979. It’s an awesome book and the Marine Corps wanted to court martial him and everything else. But I still believe that there were prisoners of war left alive, that were alive. And then when you start reading memoirs and history, and you listen to the History Channel, and you find out that that Eisenhower’s chief of staff back in the '50s said the hell with, forget about those eight thousand POWs from the Korean War, just like we weren’t there. See, the Vietnam veterans started bringing a lot of this attention about the POW/MIA issue which helped out in Desert Storm or anywhere else that we may be involved in. This is some serious stuff, because bottom line, the government could care less; they could care less about you. You’re a number, you’re not, you’re not anybody, you go fight a war, you know. I think we’ve lost a lot of rights. I think—I’m one person, but I’m not the only person and but, but I’m a person that says what’s on my mind. And I’m glad that they didn’t, they didn’t pass that amendment to change the constitution to protect the flag. And, and people, “God, you would say that?” I love the flag, I can’t, I wouldn’t stand, I couldn’t stand anybody burning it.” But I look at the experience from Vietnam and say, “Look at all the flags that were burned during Vietnam. Who’s gonna go out there and get, if we have a law, who’s gonna go out and arrest them? If you do arrest them, they are gonna bring out a hundred more flags tomorrow. What are you going to do then?” Then I think about, I really

think we've lost a lot of our personal freedoms. And they may not sound, they may not sound like, like, well that's not a big deal. Like say, wearing a seat belt. Why do I have to wear a seat belt if I don't want to wear a seat belt, just because somebody says it saves more lives? This is my life. When you sent me to Vietnam—of course I volunteered all three times, but most, a lot of guys didn't—you can send me to Vietnam and you could have me get killed, no big deal, but I've got to wear a seat belt because here it's a law. Or you gotta wear a helmet. I'm not a biker, but you gotta wear a helmet. If I don't want to wear a helmet, why do I have to wear a helmet? Because we said so. And I thought if we get going on this flag thing and we pass, the law gets passed to change the amendment to the Constitution, I think we're gonna run into some more problems than what are the veterans going to say when we go to the Packer games. Ah! They're gonna pass a law saying that you didn't stand up and put your hand over your heart and sing our national anthem! How far is this gonna go? You know, I hate to see anybody burn the flag. And if I did, I don't know what my reaction would be; maybe a baseball bat to his head, and then I'd go to jail. But I feel, I feel, and there is a lot of other people who feel the way veterans feel, that feel the same way I do. There was fifty, maybe two, Americans that jumped on hand grenades in Vietnam to save their buddies from getting killed. And all but about two survived that jumping on that hand grenade, that actually survived it. We weren't fighting for our flag, they wouldn't be jumping on no flag to save anybody. We were there—

- James: Tell me about getting the Medal of Honor. Your family was there for a week?
- Stumpf: Oh my family, we were there for four days or something like that, and then, you know, we came back. The one thing I remembered was—
- James: Wait a minute; tell me about getting the medal. You said there were four other guys.
- Stumpf: Oh yeah, okay, alright
- James: Where did you go?
- Stumpf: Where did we go? To the White House. I met the President.
- James: To the Rose Garden?
- Stumpf: [unintelligible] Well, if we were in a rose garden, I didn't know it. I went and met the President in the Oval Office first.
- James: Tell me about meeting him. Was he charming? Or did he—

Stumpf: I was too scared, really, to take in what was going on. I, I do remember something that was funny though. We were told, all five of us were told—we were all in our uniforms, even the three of us who got out—we were told to not take our hats because the ceremony was going to be inside. Well when we got over there, they said the ceremony was going to be out on the White House lawn, the South Lawn. So here's General Westmoreland, the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, Wheeler, oh God, all these guys, all these guys that had stars, but these were the big hitters. Well anyways, they said, "Did you guys," we were in the Oval Office, "did you guys bring your hats?" "No, we were told not to." Westmoreland tells them that—I just think it's the funniest thing in the world—he tells these other two star generals and three star generals, "You guys, go out there in the crowd"—there was a big crowd outside—"go out in the crowd and bring a bunch of hats in for these guys." [laughs] I said, "Look at these, everybody works for somebody around here, bubba," and to see those three stars and two stars, one stars, chasing like privates, go outside, "Give me your hat." We were all enlisted, so they are taking hats from these guys, "Give me your hat, give me your hat." They didn't know what head size we had, so here comes all these generals, about three of them, they come in here, they got like five, he's got four, he's got five, so we are trying them all on, but I thought that was cool, I always wanted to tell—

James: Moment of revenge.

Stumpf: That's it, that's it: "Get out there and get that, get that young boy a hat," that general, "Go get it, bubba!" [laughs] So anyways, anyways we went out on the White house lawn—I got a tape of that, they sent me a tape of the ceremony and I got some pictures downstairs in the basement of that I have of the ceremony. It was awesome. We came up there, we came up there, President Johnson, he asked me, he says, "Where are you, son, where are you from?" And I didn't have a clue [laughs], I was so stunned.

James: Opened your mouth and nothing came out?

Stumpf: I was like "eeeh," then I said, I thought about it for a second and then I said, "I'm from Menasha, Wisconsin," and that was it. [laughs] And he said something else and I ain't got a clue what that was. I don't know, he said something like, "Well, you did a fine job" or something like that; I was still in shock. I said, "I'm more scared here then I was scared in Vietnam that day." But ah, so then, I—well, we got our medal and everything else and then it was like I got word that there, in the town square in Menasha there was going to be a big ceremony when I got back and the Veterans of Foreign Wars was going to give me a life membership, the American Legion was going to give me a life

membership, Amvets was going to give me a life membership, and I thought about that and I thought about that, thought about that and I almost did this because at that point, at that point I thought, wow, at that point I seen more of what was going on, and the protests, and the people that, God, you can't even tell you were in Vietnam, they, they just didn't want to hear that, hear anything about Vietnam, or they assumed you were a dope-smoking whatever, whatever. But I almost, I almost, because no veteran organization ever called me up and wanted me to join, whatever, they had their own little clubs and they were, you know—

James: They didn't want you?

Stumpf: They didn't want us, they didn't want us, but now that I got a Medal of Honor, they're gonna give me a life membership. When I was in Chicago, I almost did this, I almost missed the plane on purpose, and just, just to protest that I really didn't want their life membership.

James: Well, they wanted to use you.

Stumpf: Oh yeah, yeah, now, now—

James: You were a poster boy.

Stumpf: I says if I have to get, if people have—**[End of Tape 2, Side B]**—to get the Medal of Honor to be accepted by veterans organizations, you know, I says, “Wow, this is bad news,” you know? And I, and I—god, you know, I, I went to Vietnam, I volunteered to go to Vietnam only because I wanted to pay back the veterans who served before me. I realized that it was, geez this is gonna be a, be a thing about we were in the biggy and you guys are losers and this and that. A lot of veterans, Vietnam veterans, they didn't join traditional organizations. They got their own: Viet Now and VVA, and this, that and whatever it may be. And they said, “Hey, if we can't have a, if we can't have a—if nobody wants to say thanks, we'll get together and say thanks to ourselves.”

James: The VFW is in trouble, you know; their membership is dropping.

Stumpf: Oh, they're going like crazy. Well, what's gonna happen, see, they're looking at that now and they're looking at the Cold War. Everybody that was in the military during the Cold War, they're looking to award them an Occupation Medal or something to make them eligible for it. I just read that. You know, it's sad, because, God, it's not like all these guys are like that, but it was just that was the thing; it was like, geez, like it was hard. I remember going to the first welcome home parade in New York, and I had heard a lot about Donald, Donald Trump. Well Donald Trump put up a million bucks, and I, I broke down, I cried. I said, “Hey, I know you've

got a lot of money,” and I says, “but to have this that you sponsored this or you were the big pusher behind this”—and I met him and his wife, Ivanna at the time. I met them two or three times, and I said, “Man—

James: Where?

Stumpf: In New York. They had the first welcome home parade in New York, for Vietnam veterans; it was in New York. It was '84, maybe—

James: That was a long time after—

Stumpf: —and then Chicago had the next one. Well, I had tears in my eyes in New York. They built a beautiful museum, a memorial, in Manhattan and it's all glass and it has letters like that book called *Dear America*, letters that were sent back from soldiers to their loved ones and letters that come back this way and, and it's really awesome. And then we had the ticker tape parade, and it was—to see *all* of these people saying thanks. The one in Chicago, a couple of my friends organized the Chicago welcome home parade, and I was in, I was at Fort Sheridan at the time and Chicago was ah, awesome! And then, I says, you know, I told some guys, “I cried, I cried at New York,” but I said, “this time, this time [laughs] every body else cried.” I went through it already, you know. And I had the shock of all these people saying thank you, thank you, thank you, thank you, and I says, “You know, really I don't, I didn't care that much about a parade, I didn't ask for a parade when I came home.”

James: Cause they weren't around in '68 when you got home.

Stumpf: I didn't want, I didn't want, I didn't want to be looked at as some kind of dope-smoking, baby-killing, piece of crap that's a loser. Because, I mean, we weren't losers; we had a job to do.

James: Did they have parade in Menasha when you first got home?

Stumpf: What?

James: Did they have a parade in Menasha?

Stumpf: No, they didn't have a parade. It was just a get together in the square, you know, and I was kind of like—

James: And the folks back home? Tell me, how did they treat you?

Stumpf: Oh it was, it was pretty good, but they still—

James: I don't mean your folks, but I mean the people in your home town.



Stumpf: Oh just it was nothing.

James: No problems?

Stumpf: No, nothing spectacular or anything.

James: But they were nice and there was no hostility?

Stumpf: But I kind of, I kind of shied away from a lot of stuff. And then I made my intent known that I was going back in the Army and everything, so around there nothing changed, as far as, you know—

James: Well that's good. Did you use the G.I. Bill?

Stumpf: No. I went back, I'm going back in the military and just worked my way up the ranks and a lot of them did.

James: You retired at twenty-nine?

Stumpf: Twenty-nine.

James: Twenty-nine years. What does that pay, twenty-nine years?

Stumpf: What is the pay? At the time I got out, I was a sergeant major and that's the highest enlisted rank. I think my base pay was around \$3100; it's not bad.

James: What year was that that you retired?

Stumpf: '96.

James: '96. At \$3100, they'd give you what, seventy-five percent of that?

Stumpf: Seventy-five percent.

James: That's standard for over twenty-five years, right?

Stumpf: Ah, no, not quite. It's for people that got thirty years in. You get fifty percent at—well now they've got some different retirement programs. The one I was under, fifty percent at twenty, two and a half percent for each year up to thirty, which equates to seventy-five percent, but because I had the Medal of Honor, I got an automatic ten percent, but not to exceed seventy-five percent. So I got seventy-five percent.

James: [unintelligible] say they get a check for \$500 a month.

- Stumpf: Six hundred..
- James: Six hundred, \_\_\_\_ [?] forgot, I guess.
- Stumpf: Oh, sometimes I do too, I forget—
- James: And you get free license plates and—
- Stumpf: Yeah, that's the State of Wisconsin.
- James: I understand.
- Stumpf: There's a lot of them.
- James: And you get to fly around the country? Free air transportation? That's what he told me.
- Stumpf: No.
- James: He and his wife can fly commercial.
- Stumpf: No, no, no. We have a card, I have a card in my pocket—no, I don't, it's outside here. It's a card, it's a military aircraft travel card, that we can fly, it says here, you can fly on a military aircraft as long as it is not carrying top secret dada dada dada. Now when you talk about flying to conventions and whatever, yes, the airlines pick 'em up. Let's say that I wanted to go, I want to fly to Las Vegas tomorrow; I just don't go down to La Crosse and say give me a ticket, here's my travel card. No, that's just not—but there are a lot of states—Wisconsin, believe it or not, and I'm not, I'm not complaining, but there's a lot of states that do a lot for Medal of Honor recipients. You know they, they give them tuition for their kids to go to school, they give them tax breaks on—you know, a lot of people think—that's why the money went up because at the time, at the time there was like—this is, I don't do the checking, but whoever checked, like thirty, thirty-one, something like thirty, thirty-one percent of all the Medal of Honor recipients that are living, were living at below the poverty level. That's why they changed, that's why they—
- James: When?
- Stumpf: Like four years ago when they jumped it up to six hundred; it used to be four hundred.
- James: Below the poverty level?

- Stumpf: Below the poverty level, whatever that level is; \$10,000 or something like that.
- James: It's thirteen now.
- Stumpf: Thirteen? They lived below the poverty level. There's a lot of these guys that—you know people think that geez, the guy got a Medal of Honor and he's got a this and that. I'll tell you what; I'm a soldier just like everybody else and I have, I have to compete against jobs out here, just along with anybody else. I said that, that fortunately, we saved a little money and we got our kids in college, almost; the second one just about through college now, the first one graduated. But, you know, it doesn't mean that you have, you have a lot of money, 'cause a lot of these guys don't have anything and, and then I'm not saying they didn't gamble it away, they didn't drink it away, they didn't smoke it away, [laughs] or they didn't whatever, but they raised it to a, to \$600, but that comes from the federal VA.
- James: Let me ask you another question. What about the black soldiers? Good soldiers?
- Stumpf: The black soldiers, tremendous. I'd serve with them soldiers. I'd say if I had to go to war right now, you give me those guys that the Army doesn't want, right now, give me—I don't care if they are black or whatever. I want, I want people, I want people that are gonna fight the war. I mean, it's almost a normal thing that the more education you have, the less of a fighter you are. Because, because, yeah, they think why the fuck should I die? Not one of those, not one of those fifty guys who jumped on hand grenades were officers. Oh! That would be a dumb thing to do! I'll take those guys, I'll take those guys and I tell you what; they did a fantastic job and they came back with *two* stripes, they were black when they came back and they fought hard. I respect—you give me those guys from the South side of Chicago, from New York City and stuff like that and you give me some of those white boys from the hills of Kentucky, and I'll tell you what—now they won't even accept them in the military, but when war breaks out, yeah you'll have 'em, you'll have 'em in the military alright. And then—but they're the warriors, they're the warriors, the ones that—
- James: I took care of a guy that sat on a grenade. I was in Korea on a hospital ship, and one of my patients was a guy who sat on the grenade and survived it.
- Stumpf: Sat on it or jumped on it?
- James: Sat on it.

Stumpf: He sat on it?

James: And survived, yeah. Of course he didn't have any cheeks left in his rear end.

Stumpf: What, he just sat on it because he didn't know it was there?

James: No, because he was in a bunker with two other guys. Bad choice.

Stumpf: [Laughs] That's not a good place to sit.

James: No, he lost all of his genitalia.

Stumpf: I bet ya, I bet ya, everything.

James: His rear end was cut off; it's a miracle he survived.

Stumpf: Oh I'll tell you what, it's a miracle that Einar England[?] survived. That guy got hit pretty good too.

James: Yes he did.

Stumpf: He is one of my, he's one of my heroes. And he is such a quiet [unintelligible] people never complained about not being [unintelligible] life goes on, and it's like wow, you know.

James: Do you keep in contact with anybody from Vietnam?

Stumpf: No. I tell you, I haven't seen probably five to, five to eight people that I actually served with in Vietnam that I've seen. From either one of my tours or one of my months over there. I still have contact with John Madonich quite a bit; I call him up [unintelligible].

James: But he's the only one?

Stumpf: Yeah, I don't know where the rest of them are at. Someday I'd like to, you know, I wish I could find out.

James: Was the training you got before you went over there adequate or did you learn most everything in the field?

Stumpf: Learned everything in the field. And I'll tell you one thing, one thing that I will—two things I was glad the Army—no, one thing I'm glad [laughs] the Army did is they made us stay in shape. Basic training, running,

running, running, running, running, running, because that was, boy you had to have, you had to be in good shape to do some of the stuff.

James: That turned out to be your salvation?

Stumpf: That, that, that turned out—but the one, the greatest thing that I wished they had given more emphasis on, which they're doing now, is medical aid, you know.

James: We didn't talk about that; tell me about your medics.

Stumpf: We'd lose—our medics were the greatest people in the world! There should be more of them, like that one guy that just got the Medal of Honor recently from Nebraska from Vietnam thirty-eight, thirty-two years ago, just got the Medal of Honor a couple of months ago; he was a medic. The 173rd. Oh, the medics were awesome. There should be more of them that were decorated. See, the Medal of Honor sometimes is, I don't know, I, I just, I think gee whiz, you know all the people that, you look with the eyes of a private and I don't have nothing to do with medals and things like that. I don't write them up, I don't do this, I don't do that. But it's, it's, it's, I don't know, it's kind of strange sometimes when you think about who's got one and who should have got one. Or maybe, maybe—don't put this in the museum—maybe some that have them, maybe shouldn't have. I think about, I think about the helicopter pilot. He makes the decision to go in and rescue some people. For his rescue and bravery he got the Medal of Honor, but his copilot and his two door gunners both got shot, but they didn't get the Medal of Honor. It's like, no, when you've taken somebody else into this action, you'd think you'd get the same thing as that guy got. What, you don't think they were any braver?! You know, I mean I don't know, I think that hey—

James: How many medics did your platoon carry, generally?

Stumpf: One. Yep, one, one per platoon.

James: He's well trained?

Stumpf: I thought so.

James: You kept one of your riflemen that stayed with him all the time?

Stumpf: No, he was a lot of times a rifleman just like us. There was a command group in the platoon which consisted of the platoon leader, the lieutenant, the platoon sergeant, E7, E6, the radioman for the lieutenant and the medic. That was—they four guys stayed within like, that was the command post within a platoon. Like at nighttime, they would be inside

and we'd be, we'd get the perimeter outside. So ah—but if something happened the medic, the medic a lot of times, I mean, a lot of times became a rifleman too. But their primary job, they knew what their primary job was and they patched people up. Like I didn't have a medic when I went. When I went there, out there that time, I didn't have a medic, there was no medic in our platoon, you know, so you did the best job you could. You take your little old, take your little old first aid pack off of here, read it, it says this side to the wound or whatever.

James: Your jacket had a place for—

Stumpf: Yeah, pouch; well it's in my wet gear. But, no—Oh God, do I have, do I have the respect for the medics. Oh, geez! They were awesome, they were awesome! What they did, the bravery. And it's like, you know, it's just not seen and I'm sure in other wars it's the same thing, that so many people should have gotten it, but, you know, the action wasn't seen or, *or* somebody thought the way I'm thinking. I was just doing my job, that's all I was doing. Medal of Honor, c'mon! I mean that's—

James: One more question, tell me about eating out in the field. Just C-rations?

Stumpf: C-rations. Sometimes, sometimes we had a hot meal. When we were down in the lowlands we had hot meals.

James: Brought in to you?

Stumpf: Brought in to us. And there were times when we were up in the highlands in the mountains where we had stuff, but a lot of times if we could cut an LZ and there were some times that we just couldn't cut a LZ and we told them to throw it out. You know, the Mermite cans. But a lot of times, the hamburgers would break open, and they had a hamburger ball in there; and they were all over the place. [laughs] We'd just pick them up and eat them anyways. I mean, we ate, we ate, oh God, we had all kinds of stuff that we just, we just ate; we would eat anything. But the biggest thing, I remember that one time when this happened, I remember the biggest thing for gettin' excited, we didn't give a damn about the food: where the hell is that red mail sack? That's what we went after.

James: Did they bring it to you out in the jungle?

Stumpf: Oh, yeah. Oh Jesus oh [unintelligible].

James: Of course you could lose some out there, toss it among the trees.

Stumpf: We wouldn't even fight without our mail. [laughs] We'd say, "We ain't fightin' unless we read our mail." No, the mail, the mail is a big, big thing

in any war and back here. When you get mail, man, when I got mail. You know, I didn't have a girlfriend or anything like that; I got letters from my mom and letters from my sisters and stuff like that, but man, I was so happy when I got mail. When I got a care package—we called them care packages, but you know, and we all got them, we all got them, you know. Some guy likes peaches, here's your peaches, and a lot of them were busted apart and this and that and the other.

James: I never got any cookies or anything that wasn't crumbled.

Stumpf: We used to bring that—like the, like the Kool-Aid packs that you put it in the water and make the water—the water tasted—I got sick one time, very sick and I threw up. I was out on an outpost and out on an ambush kind of like thing at a listening post, outpost, and I was throwing up, and I was compromising my position. And I called back, "I've got to get out of here, I've got to get out of here! I can't, I'm throwing up. I can't, I got something wrong with me." And so we went back in, we went back in, and I went back into the platoon area. Shit, the next day we found out that there was two dead bodies up the stream, and I got my water out of there and I got, I got [vomiting noises] blaagh!

James: One last question now: malaria, did you ever get that back?

Stumpf: No.

James: After that episode, that month episode, it never recurred?

Stumpf: No, and I'll tell you what—

James: How long did you take the atabrine?

Stumpf: Quinine? Quinine? I took the quinine for, I don't know how long it was, maybe, maybe, a few weeks maybe. I don't remember, but I took quinine—

James: You never had any chills or fever since that time?

Stumpf: I think I had chills, I had chills and fever one time, but I don't think it was a relapse. It was just something, I got sick or whatever it may be.

James: Alright, I give up; I can't think of anymore questions to ask.

Stumpf: Oh, that's alright.

James: Thank you, you are a really good interview.

Stumpf: Ahhhhh [laughs], yeah, right. I get, I should let you hear my funny stories I got. See, I always thought Vietnam, you had to be funny. When I was a squad leader, you had to keep people, you had to, you gotta be a clown, you know, and I was kind of clowning around, but serious, serious things, but we gotta keep it kinda, you know, you got to keep people going. Don't sit on the edge all the time and everything, and I was always the kind of, like the guy, I wouldn't, it was always—I laugh, to this day I laugh at myself when I do something stupid, whatever. But I remember, I remember—and I'll tell you the story, that picture, you don't see it, but if you look at that picture, the guy who is on the ground, the guy who is on the ground, I seen, I seen this guy was coming bobbing, running, trying to get away from another guy that is shooting at him. He was coming right into our position and it was a hedgerow, and there was a break in the hedgerow and I told the guys behind me, I said, "Watch this," 'cause I see this head bobbin' up and down. I says as soon as he gets about five feet from the hedgerow where I was standing, 'cause he can't see me, I'm gonna come around the corner and I'm gonna blast him. And I came around the corner and my weapon jammed [laughs] and I told the guys behind me, I said, "Awwww shit! My weapon jammed!" They told me I was laughing, and I think I was. This guy chased me for about two hundred yards out in the rice paddy. He's got a carbine [laughs] and I'm looking over my shoulder and running as fast as I can, and I'm thinking, he's gonna shoot me in the back, he's gonna shoot me in the back, and all of a sudden we get out so far and I'm runnin', just anyplace, just to get away from this guy. And he's chasing me, and I go pat, pat, pat [shots fired sounds] and he's missin' me, then all of a sudden he breaks. When he broke, he broke right into where my squad was, but, you know, they were about fifty, sixty yards away. They opened up on him and he got hit. The guy is laying in the rice paddy and I'm over here, I get behind this dike, and I just, my weapon jammed again. I can't get my, I can't get that damn bullet out, the shell out. And this guy is shooting at me and I'm going along the dike, I'd pop up like that and then I'd get down right away and then I'd [laughing] go down about ten feet here, and go, "Okay," and he'd shoot again. And I would keep, I'd get down and get down. All of a sudden I looked up, his weapon jammed and he took his weapon and he threw it. And he said, "I give up." No; hey, you're havin' a bad day today. And my squad come out, "What do we do?" I said, "Kill him!" So they killed him. They killed him, but I took a picture of me with his carbine. [laughs] It's the one picture you can't see. But I had, I had, I had a funny story, one time—I'll tell you two of them.

One time I was, we got up in the morning time and we were gettin' ready to leave. And I put on, I put on my rucksack, not my rucksack, but I put on my wet gear and I have, I have, usually I carry two or three canteens, but most of the time two, 'cause we were down in the lowlands and you get a lot of water, they brought us water. Well, I reach over like this to put my



canteen in the pouch, and I couldn't get it in. And you know how the canteen cup is, it's, it's like the canteen itself; it has to go in a certain way because it fits the mold of the cup. So I'm jamming that thing in there, jamming it, I can't—it's kind of like I have to reach way back here and I can't get it. I can't get my canteen back into my pouch, so I said, "Son of a gun." So I reach down with my left hand, I reached down, "What the heck is in this? There has got to be something in my pouch." And I reach down and I felt this hairy old thing, and I threw it up in the air; it was a tarantula! [laughs] A tarantula was in my, in my canteen and I'm beating the sucker over the head. And it's like, holy man! That thing—and I heard that tarantulas, they bite you, they can kill you. Well anyways, that old hairy thing—bbbllll [makes sound] I threw it up in the air like that, "What the hell is that?" Then the guy told me it was a tarantula.

And then we had, we had a night one time where you know, like I said, when we would stop we would figure out where our ambush site was at and then we'd come back, but it was after dark. So we came back to this ambush site. We set up in this rice paddy and—

James: How deep are those rice paddies? Was there water in the bottom?

Stumpf: No. No water in the bottom, not this time there wasn't. Later on when they have the harvest and all that other stuff, yeah, they'd flood them and everything else, but these were dry. And they're probably, they're probably knee high, and it could be some higher, but not many that are lower than that. Well, anyways, we were gonna set up in this rice paddy; there's all rice paddies all around so we have a clear vision of fire in case anything happens. So we get in there and I'm the squad leader, so I get out and I put out the trip flares and I usually helped with all that because a—

James: Tell me how a trip flare works.

Stumpf: It's a, like a can that has a wire, a wire, and you take it and wire this thing across and then you, it's tied into—I don't know what it's tied into—it, it's tied into something, you know, and if you hit it, that'll set that flare off. I can't remember exactly, exactly how that works. But anyways, ah, we'd set that out and the Claymore lines out, and then everybody else was kind of, here's your position, here's your position, here's your position. We were connected with the platoon around us in this big old rice paddy. So I'm over in this corner and now it's dark outside and so I'm gonna lay down, it's like nine o'clock at night. You usually don't even go to sleep until later on cause you're so—even though we walked all day and this and that and you get tired, but the adrenalin that now that you're out in the woods and we were always out in the woods, in the jungle. And I laid down and I had my poncho, that rubberized thing, and my poncho liner, that was like my bedroll. And we had no sleeping bags, they were too

heavy to carry and whatever, and I set up and I laid my head down, I laid my head down and I said to the guy next to me about five minutes later, I says, "God, doesn't it smell like shit around here?" And he said, "No." I said, "Can't you smell doo doo?" He said, "No, I can't smell anything." So I said, "Holy cripes, I'm getting' up." So I moved to another position with some of my other guys and I laid down there. And I said, I said, "God," I says, "do you smell shit?" [laughs] And these guys say, "No." So I moved again and all night long, and I ask the guys, "Do you guys smell shit?" "No." That was it; I stayed there that night, I slept there that night and every time I woke up, every time I smelled shit and nobody else smelled it. All of a sudden it got light outside, it got light outside, everybody started laughing at me, I asked them "What are you guys laughing at?" When I put my head down, way over in that other position, I put my head in a fresh pile of buffalo shit. And I had it all over my face, in my nose and everything else, and they we are all laughing like crazy and I said, "I knew there was, I smelled shit!"

James: They knew it all the time?

Stumpf: No, they didn't know it. It was just I had it up my nose and everything and I could smell it and they couldn't. They says, "I don't smell nothing, I don't smell nothing." But when I got up the next day I went, "Ohhhh man, I'm telling you what." But then we laughed, I laughed at myself, we laughed, we giggled and—

James: That's a cute story.

Stumpf: But there is a lot, a lot of times, but you know you're scared, you're scared, but you gotta try to stay relaxed a little bit too, but don't get overconfident and too relaxed. But, you know, you can't just stay in a state of fear and shock for three hundred sixty-five days, you know, you gotta, you gotta be a little bit relaxed.

James: Is it possible I could borrow this and copy this story about you?

Stumpf: I got it right here; I'm giving you a copy.

James: Oh super, great story.

Stumpf: This is, this is kind of closer to the activity because of Madonich's input. See, I've seen what was in my area. I seen some things, or I actually, I did, I did another thing that was never even mentioned there or anywhere, is that we ran so low of ammunition that first two hours that I ran out and got, I brought back, I must have brought back seven, eight, nine, ten weapons. I just policed 'em up. I had AK47s, I had little things that go—UZIs or whatever, I had SKSs, I had all kinds of weapons, because we

didn't have any. We didn't have hardly any ammunition left and I told Madonich, I says, "Hey, I'm gonna run out there; I'm going out there because I know where some are." You know, by bodies, and I just took off running and I came back. You know, that to me was something probably brave because we needed ammunition, but that was a part that was, well, was never thought about when they did up the citation. But I went out there and got all that ammo, all them weapons, and we used them when they came, when they came in again, when they start coming in again, but yeah. So I don't know. But I'm getting—right now, I'm considering that I want to give my medal away to a museum.

James: How about to our museum down in Madison?

Stumpf: No, [laughs] and the only reason I won't give it, I won't give it to that museum is because—not now; I have very much hatred towards Ray Boland.

James: Oh I see.

Stumpf: I wouldn't give him nothing; I wouldn't give him the time of my day. So—but they're looking at building a museum over in the Fox Valley and I've been considering—that's what people are doing now. There is other recipients that they want—you know there are so many people that don't, they don't, they don't know what this is. They don't know, even in the military, the Army. See, we've lost a lot of traditions in the Army; they don't know what this Medal of Honor is. And it's like, I, I don't want it to sit in someone's desk drawer. I want to give it to, I want to give it to—I've got all kinds of pictures downstairs from the ceremony and whatever and just have a, and not a Ken Stumpf museum, but a little section over there where I can say this is what it is or this is what it is and then whatever you got out of that tape, well that's his medal or whatever. I mean that's okay, but I may consider something else down the line because I have it when I pass away, that my son has the Medal of Honor, so I'd only loan it to them. I don't, I don't appreciate Ray Boland and some of his stuff.

**[End of Interview]**