

**Wisconsin Veterans Museum
Research Center**

Transcript of an
Oral History Interview with
JAMES J. JORDAN
Infantry, Army, Vietnam

OH
2090

OH
2090

Jordan, James J. (b.1945). Oral History Interview, 2016.

Approximate length: 1 hour 47 minutes

Contact WVM Research Center for access to original recording.

Abstract:

In this oral history interview, James "Jim" Jordan, a Portage, Wisconsin native, discusses his service as an Infantryman with the 9th Infantry Division, 5th Battalion, 60th Infantry Association, in the Mekong Delta of Vietnam. He attended basic training in Fort Campbell, followed by infantry training at Fort Lewis. Jordan was assigned to the Army's 9th Infantry, 5th Battalion, 60th Infantry, in Rach Kien, in the Mekong Delta. Jordan outlines living conditions on base and facilities. Jordan describes walking point, his unit's participated in ambushes, patrols, and guarding access to the bridge on Highway 4, leading to Saigon. Jordan became ill while in-country and was in the hospital several times, and then finally sent to Okinawa by August of 1969. He was diagnosed with Rieter's Syndrome and eventually sent back to the States and then Wisconsin to recuperate for 90 days. Afterward, Jordan was ordered to Fort Hood, TX, where he was on light duty but received riot control training. At the time of the interview Jordan was receiving medical services from the VA. He is the recipient of a Purple Heart, as when a mine exploded he took shrapnel in his hand, and later to his surprised, was advised that an x-ray showed that he has shrapnel in his chest, too. Of combat, Jordan says that it changes a person, your psyche changes. Following his discharge, the unwelcomed confrontations led him not to talk about his service experience. Only in recent years has he talked about his Vietnam experience, attended unit reunions, and linked up with other veterans. Other: PTSD, draftee, Agent Orange, survivor's guilt, body counts, punji pits, Claymore mines

Biographical Sketch:

Jordan (b.1945) was drafted in 1968 and served as an Infantryman with the 9th Infantry Division, 5th Battalion, 60th Infantry Association, in Mekong Delta of Vietnam, he was discharged in 1970.

Archivist's Note:

Transcriptions are a reflection of the original oral history recording. Due to human and machine fallibility transcripts often contain small errors. Transcripts may not have been transcribed from the original recording medium. It is strongly suggested that researchers engage with the oral history recording as well as the transcript.

Interviewed by Ellen Bowers Healey, 2016.

Transcribed by Matthew Scharpf, 2017.

Reviewed by Rachelle Halaska, 2017.

Abstract written by Rachelle Halaska, 2017.

Interview Transcript:

[Beginning of OH2090.Jordan_user]

Healey: Today is Saturday, August 27th, 2016 and this is an interview with James J. Jordan who served with the 9th Infantry, 5th Battalion, 60th Infantry, United States Army during the Korean War.

Jordan: No. Vietnam.

Healey: Excuse me, yes. Vietnam War. I should have known that.

Jordan: I am not that old.

Healey: This interview is being conducted in Poynette, Wisconsin. The interviewer is Ellen B. Healey and this interview is being recorded for the Wisconsin Veterans Museum Oral History. Now, Jim—do you go by Jim or James?

Jordan: Jim.

Healey: When I stated your unit, did I do that correctly?

Jordan: Yes.

Healey: Okay, great. Alright, tell me a little bit about your background. Where were you born and raised?

Jordan: I was born and raised in Portage, Wisconsin. I was born in 1945. Grew up there, graduated from Portage High School in 1963. Went to the University of Wisconsin at Oshkosh from '63 to '68.

Healey: Okay, and let me go back a little bit when you were raised in Wisconsin. You had both a Mother and Father?

Jordan: Yes. Both of them. My Father worked on the railroad and my mother was a nurse and my dad did not serve in World War II because railroad was considered a critical occupation.

Healey: Okay.

Jordan: And he never had but I had an uncle who was in World War II. Couple of uncles that were in World War II.

Healey: Did they serve in the Army?

Jordan: Yes. In fact, talking to one of my uncles, I went to Fort Lewis, Washington and for my AIT, my Infantry AIT, I stayed in the same barracks that he did.

Healey: Oh my.

Jordan: Which was kind of interesting.

Healey: How did you find out that you were in the same barracks?

Jordan: I talked to him about it and he did not talk much about it but one day, I was talking to him, I said "I was at Fort Lewis." and he said "So was I, where were you?" I said "Northport." He said "So was I." The barracks was very old so you could tell, so that was kind of an interesting little thing that happened.

Healey: And did you have brothers or sisters when you were growing up?

Jordan: I had an older brother that was a year and a half older than I was and he graduated. He ended up a career officer in the Navy, and we had conflicts about me calling him sir and I could polish his shoes, things like that because I was an enlisted man. Not enlisted, a draftee.

Healey: So, you were at the University of Wisconsin-Oshkosh or UW-O from '63 to '68.

Jordan: From '63 to '68, yea. Five year plan.

Healey: Five year plan, what was your Major?

Jordan: I had a Geography Major, History Minor and basically what happened, I was in a fraternity so I partied quite a bit and my draft board finally came down after my fourth year and said "you got one more year." So that was when I got my degree and graduated in June of '68 and got my draft notice and on June 28th, I was sent to Fort Campbell, Kentucky, August of 28 of '68, so it didn't take them too long because they needed people back in '68 at that time so that is how I got sent there.

Healey: While you were in college, you were there for five years, obviously you knew the Vietnam conflict was going on.

Jordan: Right.

Healey: What were your thoughts? Did you have a draft number? Was that before or after draft numbers?

Jordan: No. That was before draft number. I didn't pay a whole lot of attention to it until the draft board got ahold of me and the other thing that had happened at that time, some of my fraternity brothers were in a National Guard unit in Green Bay and I tried to get into that unit and they said it was full. But that fall, the Packers drafted Donny Anderson and Jim Grabowski and they both got into the unit. Somehow, two slots opened up and this doesn't seem right. But then, that was when I got my draft notice in '68, and I didn't want to, I felt an obligation to go because there were a lot of guys in World War II that went to serve and protect our way of life. So, I thought that I owed that obligation so that is why I didn't fight it or go anywhere. I went in basically.

[00:05:31]

Healey: Now, with a degree, was there any option to go as an officer?

Jordan: They, after basic, they asked me if I wanted to go to officers candidate school and I asked them what was open and it was artillery, infantry, and I think tanks or another one, and I thought the life expectancy of an officer in Vietnam was not very high. A lot of them First Lieutenants were getting shot and wounded at a very high rate and I just thought I will just do my thing and then, they asked me if I wanted to be a chief warrant officer and I asked them "What do they do?" and they said "fly helicopters." I thought that the life expectancy of those guys is not very good either so I just turned them down plus you had to sign up for more time and I just didn't want any more time than I had to.

Healey: How long was your draft obligation for?

Jordan: Two years.

Healey: Okay.

Jordan: That was it was back then. I did my basic and my AIT and got sent over.

Healey: Now, your basic was at...

Jordan: At Fort Campbell, Kentucky.

Healey: How much time did you spend there?

Jordan: I think nine weeks if I remember right. You get there and you have nine weeks and then they had what was known as a zero week. So, they indoctrinated you and did different things.

Healey: During the zero week?

Jordan: Yeah.

Healey: I have never heard of that.

Jordan: They had it and then you had nine more weeks up there.

Healey: The zero week was first.

Jordan: The zero week was first.

Healey: Okay.

Jordan: And then you had nine weeks of basic training but one of the weird things that happened was, they give you an ID after you get all of the tests and blood tests and I looked on my ID and it said I was A positive and I gave blood when I went to school at Oshkosh and I was A negative. So, I raised my hand in this meeting and I said "Something is wrong with this because you got me as A positive. I got a thing from the Red Cross that says I am A negative." and this guy said "The Army is always right." And I thought "Well wait a minute, if I get a blood transfusion, they give me the wrong blood, it's over with." So, I got to my unit and the head of the unit was a Captain and he asked if there was any problems and

I told him and he shook his head and he said to go get it checked again and it was A negative.

Healey: Okay.

Jordan: Than after Basic, we ended up at Fort Lewis, Washington where I did Infantry AIT. It was funny, all I kept hearing was that there were no college graduates in Vietnam and when we got to Infantry AIT in Fort Lewis, Washington, we had, I think, forty-two guys who had twenty-four college graduates. The average education in our unit was high school degree or better. So, that was kind of a fallacy. There were a lot of guys going over and at that point too, I also put in for two brothers in the combat zone because my brother was going in and out in the Navy, but they turned it down. So, that was when I went over.

Healey: When you were in that unit that had twenty-four of forty-two college grads, what year and month was that?

Jordan: That would have been October, November of '68. It was really funny. One of the last weeks of our basic, our company commander was not giving you leave on weekends because he said nobody will get leave in Vietnam. So, the last week, almost the whole company went AWOL. They just all took off and went to Seattle and he basically couldn't say anything because you got three platoons going AWOL, that does not look good on your record. So nothing happened, but I got held over because I tried to get two brothers in the same combat zone and he really softened up. He started giving these guys leave and that because he knew where they were going. It was quite interesting. So, that was the only thing that happened in the AIT.

[00:10:45]

Healey: What did you think of the quality of your training? What was the focus of the training if there was a focus?

Jordan: You know, it seemed like it was just, let's get this done and we did have a couple live fire exercises but otherwise, it was just learning different weapons, how to throw grenades, how to shoot a grenade launcher, what Claymore mines look like, how to set those up. It was actually pretty good training that I remember, but everyone knew where they were going so it was kind of depressing basically.

Healey: Did you whole unit go as a unit over or not?

Jordan: You know, because I got held over, I think most of them did go over and I have no idea where any of them ended up because I never got in touch with any of the guys I went through AIT with. I did get after, about four years ago, get ahold of a guy I went through Basic with. So, we talked. So, that was pretty interesting.

Healey: How long were you held over?

Jordan: They must have left in early part of January and I was held over for about thirty days because then I got my orders to go to Vietnam. I got to come home and then I went over. I got in country in late February, early March, of '69.

Healey: Before we start talking about your experiences in Vietnam, you mentioned that there were forty-two college graduates in your training unit. Was there attrition? Did some of the people not make it through the AIT?

Jordan: You know, the one thing I remember, there was one guy who kept telling me he couldn't see, and he had glasses about as thick as a Coke bottle and we were on a live fire mission and he almost killed somebody because he could not see and they finally let him go, but I heard that a couple of the guys, one guy got sent to Panama to run a bowling alley and then, another guy got sent to Europe because he was a good tennis player and he got to teach people in Europe how to play tennis but that is all I ever heard were those two guys.

Healey: How about in boot camp? In terms of the number that started, how many made it through the boot camp?

Jordan: I really can't remember. I know there was one young kid that went AWOL a couple of times and they brought him back and he kept going and he was dumb as rocks and they ended up making him a clerk. I always wondered, how come this guy who is dumb as rocks is a clerk and I am a college graduate and I am going over there? I guess I don't understand it but that did happen but he was just a young kid and I talked to him. I said "Hey you, you can't just keep going AWOL. They going to throw you in jail and you will never last." So, he kind of shaped up and ended up doing that.

Healey: So, you got to Vietnam in February of '69.

Jordan: '69. Yeah.

Healey: How did you get over there? Did you have leave before you left?

Jordan: Yeah. I had leave and I went home and saw my parents and then I had to go to Oakland, and it was quite funny. When I was in Oakland, before I was getting ready to leave, I had a friend who was in the Air Force and he was up in the northern part of California in the air base and I called him and told him I was out there and he says, "Why don't you go AWOL?" He says, "Come up and see us. We will party. They can't do anything because they're going to send you to Vietnam anyhow." But I didn't, and I went on Tiger Air and we flew to Hawaii. From Hawaii, we went to Wake I believe and then the Philippines and then to Vietnam and it was the longest ride I have ever been on in my life because basically, nobody talked because we all knew where we were going. So, it was a long, quiet ride. You didn't hardly talk to anybody.

[00:15:29]

Healey: By that time, did you know some of the guys or were they all new?

Jordan: No. they were all new guys because all of my guys out of AIT were gone.

Healey: What did you do during that four weeks while you were waiting?

Jordan: They would try to find little things for you to do.

Healey: Okay.

Jordan: Duty, but if you got out of it in the morning, you were done for the day and I would always go to the library and hide. They never looked in the library. They always looked at the PX and all that, and sometimes they would send us out somewhere and told us to build a fire and stand around all day. So, we did a lot of that for a while. So, it was interesting to be held over, and they had a separate barracks for guys being held over before they went to Vietnam. There must have been eight or nine of us and I don't know why the rest of them were being held over either.

Healey: So, you got to Hawaii on a long flight. Long, quiet flight to Hawaii and to Wake and then to Vietnam. Where did you land in Vietnam?

Jordan: Tan Son Nhut Air Base and it was probably one of the most depressing things because when you walked off, guys who just served their year were going back on your plane and they are yelling at you, "Hey, give us your girlfriend's phone number, you're not going to need it for a year." And it was truly depressing. Now you know you have a year, and there all happy as all get out, because they're going back. That was a little depressing. And I think I spend two nights at Tan Son Nhut Air Base. And the first—

Healey: Explain where Tan Son Nhut Air Base is in Vietnam.

Jordan: That's in Saigon basically, on the outskirts of Saigon.

Healey: Okay.

Jordan: And the first night we had a rocket attack. I was under the bunk in about two seconds. It was pretty scary. So then from there I went—I think it was—I can't remember the name of the town, but it was south of Saigon. And, Kim[sp??]—no it wasn't Kim Ron Bay[sp?]. I can't remember where it was. And I was there for orientation into the night. And then they sent me to my unit. And we were in a little village called Rach Kein, R-A-C-H and then Kein, K-E-I-N, and it was just a small little village, and we had barracks. And we had foot and wall lockers, we had TV out of Saigon. Our barracks were made out of ammunition boxes filled with sand. And that's what they made the barracks out of. And we had a place to get out laundry done. We had a mess hall. It was in the combat zone, but kind of different than a lot of guys who would go out for thirty days and then come back, or longer than that. We were based out of that base camp.

Healey: You mention you had laundry facilities, or laundry could be done. Explain the laundry situation.

Jordan: Well, it was done by Vietnamese people. You'd take it down and they would clean your laundry—give you clean underwear, clean uniforms. We did have that. Our showers were showers with salt water. So that was—try to get shampoo to foam up in saltwater. It was a lot better than a lot of guys had, but it wasn't perfect. We would either get hauled out by trucks or helicopters to go some places, or walk out of there and go to different places.

Healey: Let me ask you a little bit more about your—is it Rach—say the name of that little village.

Jordan: Rach Kein.

Healey: Rach Kein.

Jordan: It was probably ten, fifteen miles south of Saigon, off of highway four I believe.

[00:20:07]

Healey: And it was built—you mentioned your barracks were built out of ammo boxes filled with sand. Was there a wire around the perimeter or not.

Jordan: No.

Healey: No. What was the security?

Jordan: We had guard shacks. Each night you'd have to sit in one of the guard shacks. They did—excuse me, they did have a gate to get in because there was like a marsh around one part. The other part—there was a Vietnamese cemetery in one part too. So, they thought they'd never go through the cemetery.

Healey: While you were in that base, did you feel secure?

Jordan: Yeah.

Healey: Okay.

Jordan: Yeah.

Healey: Why? Why did you feel secure in a war zone without—

Jordan: It's kind of funny. You're psychological outlook on life changes in a hurry when you're there. You get comfortable, at least we did. I never thought we'd ever get run over. And the whole time, talking to the guys who were there before I got there, they had never been. So, there we like four companies, transportation units, so it was a pretty big base camp.

Healey: Are you talking about a thousand army—

Jordan: I would think a thousand. That would be pretty much.

Healey: Now you got over there and you weren't with the people you went to boot camp and AIT with.

Jordan: Right.

Healey: So, did you link up with somebody? How'd you get to know people? How many were new? How many were old?

Jordan: There were some old guys there and it was a mixture. Because I was over there, you know I was about twenty five years old when I got there, so they called me the old man. So I got to know some guys. There was a little hut that there were like four guys in it, right at the gate. And they seemed to—there was one guy who drank a lot and did a lot of marijuana. And I always wondered why, and then I talked to one of my friends. About two weeks before I got there, our platoon and another platoon had an ambush set up. And, our platoon called these guys and said, "Are you in the right position, because we're seeing something." And I don't know if it was a lieutenant or an NCO said, "You damn right, we're not wrong." So our unit opened up with M60 machine guns and M16s and killed three guys in the other platoon because they were in the wrong place. And of course the guys in the platoon that got shot blamed our platoon. Even that whole thing kept on because I went to a couple reunions, and those guys weren't too friendly to guys from our platoon.

Healey: And what was your platoon number?

Jordan: Charlie Company. I think they were Bravo Company. And of course, I had nothing to do with it, so why are you mad at me. And it wasn't our fault. It was pretty, you know. Things like that happened over there.

Healey: Were you with Charlie Company your complete tour?

Jordan: My complete tour, yeah. And, I got to know a couple guys. One guy and I used to switch off walking point, and he and I became really, really close. And he called me—

Healey: Who was that?

Jordan: His name was Bob Litherland and his nickname was Duck because he walked like a duck. He and I were pretty close, and there were a couple other guys that I knew in our barracks that were pretty close. But, I was sick a lot of the time that I was over there. I ended up in the hospital about three or four times. And, they could never figure out what I had. I'd get high fever and they'd send me into Saigon, and the weird thing was, I got out of the hospital one day, and they told me to go back to my unit. I basically had to hitchhike back to my unit with no weapon. So, it was like, "Okay, thanks guys." But, he and I switched off walking point quite a bit, so we got to be pretty good friends.

[00:25:22]

Healey: I didn't ask you, so when did you get weapons issued, when you were at Tan Son Nhut?

Jordan: No, they flew me from Tan Son Nhut down to this basecamp down in the delta. And at that point they gave you a weapon and you zeroed it in. But then when I went up to my unit in Rach Kein, they took that weapon away and gave me another one. And I thought, What's this. This is kind of stupid. So, that's when I got them.

Healey: How much time did you spend down in the Delta?

Jordan: Actually, Rach Kein was in the Delta. That was part of—our whole area was the Delta basically.

Healey: But you were flown somewhere from Tan Son Nhut?

Jordan: Yeah, we went out to a place called Parrot Beak, which was near the Cambodian border. We did missions there. All around that whole area, we did things. We had one place where we had to pull guard duty on a bridge over the Mekong Delta River, which was a little north of us. We also pulled duty on a—it was like a Troller. The last three initials on the Troller was LBJ. And, when I was there we'd get time off and we would shoot stuff coming down the river to make sure it wasn't a satchel charge trying to blow up this boat. We'd shoot stuff.

So we'd sit there and we'd get time off and we'd get a hot shower, a hot meal. So, it was really good duty. I was talking to the Captain one day, and I said, "What does that LBJ stand for?" And he said, "Lady Bird Johnson, she owns every construction company in Vietnam." So they were making a lot of money off that war. Around then, you started questioning why you were there. Because it was basically like they didn't want to win that war. And we were also in a free fire zone, that we could not fire unless we were fired upon. So if you saw somebody, you had to wait until they fired at you until you fired. Which blew me away, you know. What's this? This is supposed to be a war.

Healey: So if you saw somebody that was armed that looked like the enemy—

Jordan: I'm sure it happened that we fired on people before we were fired upon, but we weren't supposed to. I can remember one of the few—we had three platoons out one day, and caught three guys out in a rice patty. And, they were just blown away, when you have three platoons all shooting at these three guys, they didn't last very long.

Healey: How were those three individuals dressed?

Jordan: Black. Black pajamas. And they had weapons, so we knew. They didn't make it, let's put it that way. And the big thing over there was body count. That's basically all they cared about was, you know, the body count we had. I can remember we had a lieutenant, I can't remember the guy's name. He said, that they don't want to win this war, and none of you guys are going home in a body bag. So he

protected us pretty good. We'd be out on a mission and he knew of an area that was full of booby traps, and higher up would call him and say, "How many bodies?" He said we'd check, and we'd sit for half an hour, forty five minutes, and he'd call in, "Ten," because he didn't want anyone roaming around in this area, because he got hit by a booby trap. So there were guys like that.

[00:30:01]

Some nights we were supposed to go on ambush. There was a place about a click away from us that had a steel building, and there were a few nights we just stayed in that steel building the whole night because he didn't want us to go out, which was really kind of nice. So, it was, you know. I saw enough combat that, you know, it's not great. I look at these young kids that play video games. They think killing is so neat, well it's not. Until you get a shot fired at you, you just don't know what it feels like. It bothers me to watch these kids do that. They don't realize what it's like to be shot at.

Healey: You mentioned walking point. When did you start walking point? You got over there in February of '69.

Jordan: Yeah, it was late February, early March I think.

Healey: You joined up with your unit by—when were you with Charlie Company?

Jordan: About the first part of March, pretty early. It was fairly quick that they started letting me walk point. Like I said, this one guy I would switch off.

Healey: Had you heard the term walk point before?

Jordan: Oh yeah, I knew what it was. I fell into a couple punji pits.

Healey: Describe what punji pits are.

Jordan: Punji pits are holes basically where they put something over and they have these reeds sticking up with real sharp points. And a lot of the times they'd have animal dung on them, so you would get an infection. And you'd fall in and they'd get your legs. And then sometimes they'd have also tripwires with 500 pound bombs under, or a grenade or something like that. And I can remember that I hated the place so much, that I'd think, "If I see a trip wire run, maybe I'll run at it and blow it so I get shrapnel in my back so I get shipped out of here. And then you'd go, but there could be a 500 pound bomb under there, and then you're going home in a body bag, but what people don't realize when you're in a combat zone, how much your psychological thing just changes. It's actually kind of scary how much you would change. And people said, "Well, how can guys in that situation kill a little kid or a woman?" And I said, "Well, it never happened to me, but I know some guys—a kid would come up and throw a grenade at you, or a lady would have a satchel charge on her and blow up, and when you see your friend get blown up that way, your whole psychological outlook changes immensely." It never happened, but you were always—that trigger was pretty close, because it's

either you or them. And, they're trying to kill you, so you try to kill them. It's kind of sad how that worked.

Healey: When you were out there walking patrol, was your safety off or on?

Jordan: Usually my safety was off because I was the first guy out.

Healey: Before you went into the service, did you have much experience with weapons?

Jordan: No.

Healey: Weren't a hunter?

Jordan: Weren't a hunter. Still don't. Don't own a gun. It doesn't bother me that people hunt and own a gun, it's just not my thing. I have an unusual story of when I got back. I came home a few times on convalescent leave when I got back because I got sick, and this friend of mine one time in September said, "Hey, I'm going to take you duck hunting." He had a place up at Lake Mason, Wisconsin and he had a chair sitting there because I was still having problems walking. Beautiful fall day. We're sitting in the duck blind, and he had shot a couple of ducks and I'm sitting in the duck blind. And, two drake mallards came in and set their wings, and I'd never seen this, God that's beautiful, that's really pretty. All of a sudden I hear my buddy, "Jordan you dumb," I won't saw what he called me. He said, "shoot." I just [gun sound], so that's the extent of my hunting. I just never got into it. But, it doesn't bother me that people go hunting and people have guns to protect themselves. I feel that's their right. That's just not my thing.

[00:35:25]

Healey: Let me go back to Vietnam and you're walking patrol with Charlie Company. How frequently did you go out on patrol?

Jordan: I would think we'd go out every other day. Some days we'd stay out for two nights.

Healey: What was your basic mission? What were you doing out there?

Jordan: Just looking for stuff basically. I know one time there was supposedly some guy we were chasing that had stole a lot of money and that, so. We were out there trying to find him.

Healey: A Vietnamese guy?

Jordan: A Vietnamese guy, and we were trying to find him. We never found him. We were out doing that. One day a track unit gave us a Vietnamese guy to take back for questioning. It was kind of interesting. We're going back and we get in this helicopter and tap the pilot on his shoulder, and he turns around and sees this Vietnamese guy, and he's got a smile from here to here. And I think we were going 120 knots about twelve feet off the ground all the way back. And that Vietnamese guy was just yacking like crazy. Nobody could understand him.

We're all sitting there laughing going 120 miles an hour in a helicopter. We were going pretty good. That was kind of interesting. But that's just some of the stuff we did. And there were days we'd come back—I remember one day they wanted us back in a hurry so it was basically a forced march and we were moving out really good and we walked into an area that had these huge red ants and they got on us and they wouldn't let us stop, so you're trying to walk and kill these damn ants. They're biting the heck out of you, so that's basically the stuff we did. And like I said, I got sick so I missed quite a bit of that stuff.

Healey: You got sick, and you said three, four times.

Jordan: Three or four times.

Healey: In Saigon?

Jordan: In Saigon. High fever. The last time when they finally figured out what I had, my knees and ankles were swollen up, I couldn't walk. I had pus coming out of my eyes, yellow pus. They finally figured out what it was. So then they shipped me—it was in late August of '69—they shipped me to Okinawa. They determined I had a rare tropical disease called Reiter's syndrome. That's what they finally determined.

Healey: Is that something that's chronic? Is it reoccurring? Did it go away after Vietnam?

Jordan: I still have a lot of arthritic problems and some other things from it, pancreatitis. I have that, which they think might have been caused from that.

Healey: Were they able to treat it successfully?

Jordan: Yeah yeah, basically they give me aspirin. That's what they gave me when I was in Okinawa for thirty days. I had lost—I was down to 125 pounds.

Healey: What was your normal weight?

Jordan: About 170 when I went over. So, I'd lost about fifty pounds. I could not sit in a bathtub because there was nothing on my butt. I don't have a big butt anyhow, but it was worse than that.

Healey: You had rashes?

Jordan: I had rashes. I had eye problems. I basically had the whole syndrome when they told me. I'll go back to when I was in the hospital in Saigon. And it was right around when John Glenn walked on the moon in July, and I had a weird feeling that this friend of mine, Duck, got hit. And this guy come up and he said, "do you know Bob [inaudible]?" I said, "Yeah." "We just got him off the operating table for eight hours." He had got—I ran in to him in Okinawa, but he doesn't remember it because he was so high on drugs—but he got hit right on the left inside, here, and missed the artery by about a quarter of an inch.

Healey: Did he get hit by a round or with shrapnel?

Jordan: It was a mine that blew up.

Healey: A mine.

Jordan: He's not sure because, later on I talked to him—I finally got a hold of him probably about five, six years ago. He said he's not sure if he tripped it, or somebody in the bush blew it. So he doesn't know. But he says he's lucky to be alive. But it was the weirdest feeling, laying there knowing your friend just got hit. It was really kind of a surreal feeling. And like I said, I did see him in Okinawa, but he has no recollection of it because he was so drugged up. In his lower leg he has a big hole where he got hit too.

[00:41:06]

Healey: Is he still living?

Jordan: Oh yeah. We—must have been five, six, seven years ago, I was taking a computer class. When I got out, I had not had any contact with anybody in the service because when we came back, you didn't want anybody to know you were in the service. I had an experience, when I was in the hospital I had a convalescent leave, and I ended up seeing a girl that I knew in college. I flew into Minneapolis and she picked me up at the airport. I had my uniform on, because you could fly cheap then. She took me into a bar, and we're sitting there, and this guy comes up to me and said, "You f'ing baby killer." And I'm ready to go at him. He could've blew at me and I would've fallen over. And I said, "Listen, you don't know who I am, you don't know what I did, but I went over there, so you have the right to call me a f'ing baby killer." And he shut up and apologized, so that was kind of a neat little thing.

But to go back to this Bob, I was taking a computer class in Portage. I just typed in 9th Infantry, 5th and the 60th. Found out they had a website, and found out they had reunions for years and years which I knew nothing about. They had a list of guys in there and their email address. I found his, and I emailed him a few times, but it kept bouncing back. So, finally about maybe two years, three years ago, it came back. He says, "Hey old man," he called me the old man. He was living in Estes Park, CO, and I had a son in Colorado at the time. So, the girl I lived with, she and I drove out, and we went up to Estes Park, and found his house, got out of the car and walked out, and he goes, "Hey old man, how are you doing?" And it was like we had just been together. And we must have sat and talked for about two hours. And got it all done. I've seen him probably two times since [inaudible] in Colorado.

Healey: Have you gone back to any of the reunions?

Jordan: I've been to two of them. I've been to one in St. Louis. There were only two guys that I knew that were there. The one guy said to me, "The last time I saw you, you had pus coming out of your eyes." [Laughs] But there were only two of us, and that was in St. Louis. A couple of years ago we had one in Washington D.C., right around 9/11, and we ended up going to the wall. A lot of guys had never been to

the wall, so it was really an emotional day for everybody, and there was only one guy I knew. And this friend of mine, this Bob, this Duck, he went to one and never went again. I asked him why, and he said, "It all went back to when those guys got killed." The other platoon just wouldn't—they were mad at them.

[00:45:06]

Healey: Was Bob there then when it happened?

Jordan: Yeah.

Healey: So he was in the unit before?

Jordan: He was in the unit before. He said he'd never go again, and he never did. But, I've been out to see him one time—after I saw him the first time he says, "Come on back next year, and I'll take you fly fishing in the Rockies," because he's a fisherman. I said, "Bob, I'm a golfer. I'm not a fisherman." So I go out there, and he says, "We're going to go up to Rocky Mountain National Park and go fly fishing." So we get up in the morning, we drive up and get out of the truck and I'm looking around, I'm like, "Where in the hell is the lake, there's no lake." He says, "It's two point eight miles up that hill." So we walked up two point eight miles up into the Rockies. And it was really neat because we got to talk about forty years about what each one of us had done. So that was a really neat experience. And then I had a wedding to go to two years ago out there—a friend of mine's son got married, and we went out there and saw him again. I do keep in touch with him, he's probably the only guy that I keep in contact with that I was in the military with.

Healey: In addition to Bob did you have any buddies or friends that you recall from Vietnam?

Jordan: I had a very weird experience when I was in the hospital. This kid from Portage that I knew ended up seeing me in the hospital, because the Red Cross got a hold of my mom, and my mom knew this guy's mother and got a hold of the guy, and he came and saw me in the hospital. So a guy from Portage comes to see me when I'm in the hospital. And I still know him. We laugh about it.

Healey: Does he still live in Portage?

Jordan: Oh yeah. Yeah. Very good friends. So we get along pretty good. And then when I was in the hospital down in Fort. Reilly, Kansas, I was there from August '69 till almost March of '70. I ended up with ninety some days of convalescent leave, because they felt you would get better by going home. Mom's home cooking, all this. Also down there was another guy from Portage that I knew, and then I was down there with Rocky Bleier. I don't know if you've ever heard of Rocky Bleier?

Healey: No.

Jordan: Rocky Bleier was a Notre Dame football player from Appleton, and he got wounded pretty severely, but he ended up going back and becoming a really good football player for the Pittsburg Steelers. He's written a book about how—he could hardly walk, let alone run down there. So, I saw him a couple of times, another Wisconsin guy down there. That was kind of neat. And that's about it. I did get a hold of one of the guys I went through basic with, and sat down and talked to him. That was about three or four years ago, but that's been about it. That was the only guys.

Healey: While you were there in Vietnam—I take it was basically from end of February, March until August when they sent you to Okinawa to rehabilitate. How did your unit fare? How did Charlie Company fare in terms of casualties?

Jordan: I think we only lost one guy when I was there. That I remember. And, I don't think he was in our platoon, but he was in another platoon. That's the only one I remember. But, before I got there, they had lost quite a few. They had lost quite a bit of guys.

Healey: Was some of that due to the fact that the war was kind of tapering off?

Jordan: Yeah, I believe so, and I believe it was. Like I said, we had that lieutenant that wouldn't take any chances.

Healey: Did you have one lieutenant all the way through your time there?

Jordan: We had a couple. I can't remember names; I can't remember who they were. Before I got there, one of the lieutenants became a general after Viet—and worked his way up. He came to one of our reunions and talked.

Healey: Can you remember who he is?

Jordan: Yeah, I had the name and I can't remember it right now. Tommy Franks. So, Tommy Franks was a lieutenant in the 9th, the 5th, and the 60th. He was there before us.

Healey: He was there before you were in Vietnam?

Jordan: Yeah. Right.

Healey: Just a member of the same unit.

Jordan: And then another thing I do remember about this friend Bob. When I was out to see him was the shooting in Denver in theatre, if you remember that. And I said to Bob, "Can you really get that much ammunition through the mail." "Come here," he said. So I walk over to his gun safe, open it up. And he's got so much bullets. And I go, "Why do you need that much?" And he said, "Well, before you got in country, we were in a firefight and I ran out of ammunition." And he said, "And I swore I would never run out of ammunition in my life." So that's how—it's funny how things stick with you when you come back. I have trouble, even right now with my back to the door. It bothers me. The back of neck stands up. You talk to

most combat veterans, they have to see the door. I keep going like this once in a while. But that's just one of the things that—you know, that was fifty years ago, and that still bothers me.

[00:51:41]

Healey: Going back to your living situation there. You said you didn't think anything of your laundry being done by Vietnamese, and I take it other Vietnamese were doing some of the transportation, maintenance.

Jordan: Cleaning up our barracks.

Healey: Never had any doubt about their loyalty?

Jordan: Never had any doubts. We also had a ARVN guy that would go along with us, and his name was Bobo. And we always thought that he was with us during the day and with somebody else at night. You always wondered about him. But no, most of the other people you never did, but they could've been. I never thought about it. I thought they were pretty nice people. I tried to treat the people like I would treat anybody else. We'd be out in the field and some people would walk into these people's houses and take anything they want. And I would kind of go, would you want that happening in your country. You got to treat these people with respect. They would always give us rice, but I'd always give them some C ration that I wouldn't eat. There were some that nobody liked. Lima beans and ham was one of them. So we'd give it to them, and they loved it. I tried to treat the people with respect. And who knows, they might have been at night being out on an ambush, but you didn't know that.

Healey: What was your daily uniform like? What did you wear, and what were you wearing when you were out on patrol?

Jordan: When we were out on patrol we never wore a hardhat. The big hard top. We always—

Healey: Why?

Jordan: Too heavy. We would wear these little—even like the hats you wear golfing, the floppy hats. We would wear those. You would probably carry maybe two or three clips with enough ammo. I always carried—my parents would send me little cans of fruit cocktail, peaches. I always had put them in socks and put them around you and carry those. I always took those out in the field for something to eat, because sometimes the C rations were terrible. They were absolutely horrible. So I had that. So I got stuff from my parents. And that's [inaudible]—boots. Combat boots.

Healey: Did you wear a flak jacket?

Jordan: No. Never. Not our unit. Our unit never wore them.

Healey: Even when you were walking point?

Jordan: Never thought of it. Never thought of it.

Healey: Did you have them available?

Jordan: I can't even remember getting a flak jacket.

Healey: Now you were there in March. Was it hot or no?

[00:55:08]

Jordan: Oh it was hot. Monsoon season. Rain. There were days it rained so hard when we were out one [inaudible] it was the coldest I ever was. It was freezing, because it rained so hard. It was just damp. You'd think you'd be warm but I froze. Growing up in Wisconsin I thought, This isn't going to bother me, but I was really cold. And then a couple other things. I remember one night we were out on ambush. I had such a fever, and it was raining and this guy and I found, where two rice patty dykes came together, so that's where we slept. He had a poncho, and I kept him warm all night because I was burning up with fever. I remembered I had prolonged dysentery. I'd have to go to the bathroom out there, and I would drop my drawers, and I'd get nine million mosquitos coming in and biting me.

Healey: Did you carry or have deet or ant repellent or anything?

Jordan: No. None of that. It was kind of funny that—it was like nothings ever going to happen to us. You were kind of cocky. Even now, the gal I live with, Nancy, sees some of these guys coming back from Afghanistan and Iraq, and she says, "Some of those guys are pretty cocky." I said, "Nancy, if you're an infantryman and you're in combat, you better be cocky, because that's how you survive." It just breaks my heart to see these guys coming back and not getting any help. It's sad—and they did the same thing in the Vietnam War. They want you to be a killer, and then you get dropped off in Oakland and now you're supposed to be this good all-American citizen. They never decomposed anybody. It was hard. I can remember when I came back, I would not kick leaves. I would step over stuff. I still do. When I walk, my head is down looking, because when you walk point you're always looking for tripwires. So, that stayed with me for over fifty years.

Healey: Describe the terrain a little bit. You're talking about being in the Mekong Delta. When you went out, was the—was it jungle? Was it rice patties? Was it river?

Jordan: Down in the Delta, it was everything. We had rice patties; we had to walk on dykes. There were areas where they had these small palm trees, they were probably five to six feet tall. They were called nipa palms. Going into that was just absolutely horrible, because it was really close. It was really tight. And the Vietnamese people that basically just carried a rifle could go through there, but we had all this junk with us, and we were getting caught in it. And I remember one day, we were in one of these areas, and there was a bubble helicopter, one of these small two man helicopter, up there flying around, and there was a general in there. He's telling us to "Go there, go there."

Healey: How was he telling you? Radio?

Jordan: Yeah. All of a sudden, his plane got shot at, and I don't know if it got shot at by the Vietnamese or us. I have a sneaky suspicion it was some of us. It was terrible, we had trouble moving in that area. So then he took off and left us alone. A lot of what was—and there were a lot of little rivers we were on that you'd go by, and there'd be a village, and we'd stay there maybe at night. We also went out on a couple ambushes on the river reeds, those little boats—not boats, they were Navy guys. I think they had fifty caliber machine guns on them and that, but they were basically made out of plywood. They'd take us up a river.

[01:00:11]

Healey: And you said you liked that duty better than—

Jordan: Well, the barge that we guarded was great. I didn't really like going on these river boats, where they'd take you up and drop you off and then come and pick you up. Because those things were—they were always getting shot at. But, the guard duty on the boat was really wonderful. That was really great.

Healey: How long did you do that?

Jordan: We did that maybe two or three times, because it would rotate. One platoon would go for a day or two. And another two—

Healey: [Inaudible] Were you guarding the boat? Something on the boat?

Jordan: We were just guarding the boat from having stuff floating down the river and—satchel charges. So, you'd shoot at stuff. That was one of the duties we had. We guarded a bridge. And we'd also guard the bridge there, in case somebody came up, but nobody ever attacked us. So, it was pretty nice duty.

Healey: And you were guarding the bridge from being what?

Jordan: Attacked by the VC.

Healey: Was it a bridge that the Americans had built?

Jordan: Yes. No, it was a bridge on highway four, going into Saigon.

Healey: So a lot of transports were using the bridge?

Jordan: A lot of transports. A lot of buses with Vietnamese people using it. Motorcycles, etc. going across. So we guarded it. So that was pretty interesting. Well, it was nice duty.

Healey: So you had a variety of duties.

Jordan: Yeah. Yeah we did. In our unit, we did. We took trucks out, we were shipped out on helicopters, and we were shipped out on these little boats up and down canals and the river.

Healey: And again, where did you see the LBJ? That was on what?

Jordan: That was on—it was right by this bridge, the one over the Mekong River. I don't know what it was doing there. It was drudging something I guess, to make it easier for ships to come up the river. So that was our job, sitting out there and shooting at stuff floating down the river, which was really kind of nice. And then when you didn't, when you weren't doing that, you'd have time off to go jump in the river and swim and then come back. So it was kind of nice.

And I remember one time—I have a great fear of water, because I'm not a good swimmer, and I was walking point—I think it was one of the few times I had my hardhat on. We had a Vietnamese scout ahead of us, and he went right in. And I'm going behind him. I took one step and [whooshing noise] right to the bottom. I thought I was going to drown. I thought I was done. And I didn't know whether to let me weapon go and try to swim out—I let my hat go, to hell with that. I barely made it out of there. I was so scared. Somebody grabbed me and pulled me out of the river, because I thought I was going to drown. I thought I was over with. It was one of the fears I had. I had a fear of water.

Healey: Were there any snakes in Vietnam?

Jordan: Oh there were snakes.

Healey: Poisonous or not?

Jordan: There supposedly were. I never saw any. Saw a lot of rats, and they were big. They were huge rats. Funny story. We were out on patrol, we were doing something, and we ended up at this villager's house, and they gave us rice with this meat in it. We gave them C rations. Everybody going, Oh this is pretty good. And, we asked mama-san what it was, and she looked at us and she goes like—like the little things. Oh, what's that? We were eating rat. Everybody just went, Enough of that! I'm not eating any more of that! So that was kind of funny. I mean, they ate rats. They ate dogs and cats. They basically ate anything.

I remember one night we were out on an ambush, and all of a sudden we hear this scream. And we thought, we were going to be overrun. And what it was, was the guy wakes up, and he's sleeping in a patty basically, and he looks right into the face of a rat about four feet long and he just screamed like crazy. There were rats. There were supposedly snakes, and they called them two-steppers, that if you got bit by one, you had two steps, and after two steps you were probably dead. I never saw any snakes, but I know there were snakes there.

[01:05:37]

Healey: After you were sent to Okinawa because of your high fever—how much time did you spend on Okinawa?

Jordan: Thirty days.

Healey: Okay. And then where'd you go from Okinawa?

Jordan: From Okinawa, they flew me to Japan. And from Japan to Alaska, and then down to Fort Reilly, Kansas.

Healey: And that was just pretty much a straight flight? You didn't stop there at those places, other than to refuel?

Jordan: In Japan, we spent a night in Japan. And I had an experience. They were putting me on the plane after going out of—and there was a guy laying there and he basically had no face. It was all gone and I kind of looked at him. And he—

Healey: An American serviceman?

Jordan: Yeah. He had a pad of paper and he wrote—I said, “I'm sorry, I'm staring at you.” And he wrote, “I'm alive.” And then I never saw him again. Then we flew to Alaska. From Alaska we flew to, I think it was Rantoul Air Force Base in Illinois. And then from there on a stretcher I went to Fort. Reilly, Kansas.

Healey: On a stretcher?

Jordan: On a stretcher.

Healey: Okay. So you were that weak. Or were you having difficulty walking?

Jordan: Walking. When I got to Fort. Reilly, Kansas, the doctor said to me, “You better start walking.” Because I basically didn't walk at all for thirty days in Okinawa, and a lot of July I didn't walk.

Healey: Because you were too weak to walk? Or too sore?

Jordan: My knees and ankles were swollen; they were taking fluid out of them, and just too weak to walk. So, I finally started walking, and I still to this day shuffle my feet. And the gal I live with, “Pick up your feet. Pick up your feet.” So I still shuffle because of that—because basically, I had to learn to walk all over again. I was a sick boy. And then one time when I came home, my eyes—one of my eyes starting hurting, and it hurt like heck. I went to the local doctor in Portage, and I was home on convalescent leave. He sent me right to an eye doctor in Madison. I remember the name, Dr. Doolittle was his name. He covered my right eye and put his hand in front of my left eye, and I couldn't see it. I had something called irocyclitis. It's when the iris and the pupil become bound together. And it was terribly painful, just terribly painful.

Over the years, I think that came back twice. What they did—I was in Omaha one time when it came back. And the guy said, “I can put you on steroids, or I can give you a shot in the eye.” And I knew the guy because I played gold with him. He was a doctor at the VA. All of a sudden he comes walking in, I can see he's got a needle in his hand. I said, “I think you made my choice for me.” He gave me a shot in the eye with some type of medicine that got rid of it. Everybody said that

must hurt, but it really doesn't, because they put it in the white of your eye and all you feel is the fluid going in.

Healey: Did that give you some relief?

Jordan: Oh yeah. Yeah. A lot of relief. It was probably the worst pain I've ever had was that irocyclitis I had.

Healey: So after that convalescent leave here in Portage, Wisconsin, did you go back to the Army?

Jordan: Yes. I ended up at Fort Hood, Texas.

Healey: And had they finally diagnosed what you had?

Jordan: Oh yes. It was called Reiter's syndrome. I got to Fort Hood, Texas, and I remember there at—when I got my orders from the hospital, I had a profile, no prolonged standing, running, jumping, standing, or sitting. Basically, I couldn't do a damn thing. I went to the head of the hospital—I only had like six months left. I went to the head of the hospital there at Fort Reilly, and I says, "Hey, look at this. Why can't you just let me go? I only got six months, what am I going to do?" And he said no. Then the next day I saw a friend of mine, and he said, "He's letting anybody out with five months or less out of the service—out of the hospital. I went to him, I said, "What about me?" He says, "Your orders are cut," but he said, "You made a very good point, so I decided to let these guys go." So I had to go to Fort Hood, Texas for like six months.

[01:10:42]

Healey: And what did you do?

Jordan: I was with a unit that our job was going to be riot control training. Now this was in the 70s, so there were still quite a few—no it was late '69, would have been late '69—no it would have been '70. I would have been early '70, excuse me, when I got there. We were supposed to—they had new guys in the service in this unit, and combat veterans. They were going to have us do a riot control, and all these combat veterans like, "Somebody spits in my face, he's gone." Because they had seen their friends blown away and all that. We never went, thank God, and what happened too when I was down there—

Healey: Never went to a riot?

Jordan: Never went to one. We practiced going, but we never got called.

Healey: Was this supposed to be riot control for civilians, or in the military?

Jordan: No, it was riot control for protesters at university and things like that. That's what we were going to be doing, was stopping those riots. We never went. And the other thing that happened—I went to a country western bar. And, I see this ugly orange sweater. And this friend of mine from Oshkosh, he and I went through

basic and AIT together, but he left for 'Nam before I did, and there he was. I usually don't go to country western bars, but—and he said, “Jordan, you mf. I thought you were dead.” And I said, “I thought you were dead.” We connected and we ended up getting an early out to go to summer school. So, we went back to Oshkosh. And that basically was three months of nothing but drinking.

Healey: While you were still in the service, or in Oshkosh?

Jordan: We got an early out to go to school at Oshkosh, so we went to school at Oshkosh for three months.

Healey: But you had already graduated.

Jordan: It got me out of the service three months early. Everybody said how long to spend? They said, Twenty one months, nine days, twelve hours. But it was counting. And we went back.

Healey: Went back where?

Jordan: Went back to Oshkosh to go to school.

Healey: Where'd you live in Oshkosh?

Jordan: We got an apartment. He and I got an apartment. And it was pretty much drinking quite a bit.

Healey: So that was the summer of '70?

Jordan: '70.

Healey: And you were already discharged?

Jordan: Yup. We were discharged. He had seen a lot more action than I did, and about the only time he talked about it was when we were really drunk. And that was quite a bit of the time. I took an abnormal psych course, and the teacher always bragged about how nobody had his test, but my fraternity had his test file, and I had all his tests. So I got an A. I was hard to take tests when you knew all the answers, so you'd get a couple wrong. He thought nobody could have any of my tests, but we had ways of getting them, the fraternity did. I finally, after summer school, went back to Portage and ended up working at a couple places.

And about four years ago, my fraternity had a reunion down in Lake Geneva. And I had heard that this John, this guy that I had gone to summer school with, was down in Lake Charles, Illinois, as a superintendent of schools. And I had a friend down there, so I got his phone number, and we met in Lake Geneva, and had a nice long breakfast talk. He and this Bob Litherland are about the only ones that I keep in contact with in the service.

[01:15:15]

Healey: So after a couple of jobs in Portage, then what did you do?

Jordan: Then I worked at Badger for a while, Badger Army Ammunition. Then I ended up working with the Republican Party of Wisconsin, and did that—

Healey: How did you get connected with the Republican Party in Wisconsin?

Jordan: There was a lady in Portage that I knew, and when I was going to college, I tended to bar out the Portage country club. And I got to know her. I was also her paper boy when I was about twelve years old, so I knew this lady. And she says, “Hey, I can get you a job.” So I interviewed, and I got the job. It was very interesting. It was a very interesting job. I got frustrated with it because there was infighting within the Republican Party. There were two groups, and you were either in one group or the other group.

Healey: And this was in the mid ‘70s? Late ‘70s?

Jordan: Mid ‘70s.

Healey: Mid ‘70s.

Jordan: I don’t know if you were around then?

Healey: In the ‘70s? Yeah, I was around in Wisconsin.

Jordan: Jody Jackson was—I don’t know if you ever heard of Jody Jackson [sp??].

Healey: No.

Jordan: There was a lawyer, Heyney[sp??], he was there.

Healey: Actually I take it back. By 1973, I was not in Wisconsin.

Jordan: Okay.

Healey: I missed the Wisconsin Republican Party in 1973.

Jordan: It was—I got frustrated because there was one gentleman in the state legislature that voted with the Republicans seventy-five percent of the time and twenty-five percent with the Democrats. Basically, because he had to do that to keep his seat, because he was in a very highly Democratic district, but they really liked him. So, some of these Republicans in their ultimate wisdom decided to run somebody against him because he wasn’t voting with them 100% of the time. Of course the guy they ran wins, but he loses in the general election to a Democrat. I said to someone, “What? I don’t understand this, I’m a pretty practical guy. Why would you do that?” “Well, he didn’t vote with us all the time.” I says, “Now you got a guy who never votes with you.” “Well, we proved our point.” And that got frustrating.

And then how I lost the job was, they fired my boss, and then they let all of us go. A new group took over in the state Republican Party. And then at that time, I ended up going to Oscar Meyer and interviewing with Oscar Meyer. I got hired by Pat Richter. Pat Richter was the athletic director eventually at Wisconsin—

University of Wisconsin. He was personnel manager at Oscar Meyer at the time. So he hired me, and then from there I went to Davenport, Iowa.

Healey: With Oscar Meyer?

Jordan: With Oscar Meyer. And then I ended up in Omaha with Oscar Meyer. And then through some different things out there, I had a guy who told me I could become a millionaire selling insurance, so I left Oscar Meyer. Probably one of the most stupid moves I made in my life. Then I had a couple of other sales jobs, and got fired from one, and I'm going, What am I going to do, I'm forty two years old. I'm going to need something, because if I wait ten years—so I ended up—because I'm a disabled vet—I ended up taking a test at the post office, and basically they had to hire me. So, I started working at the post office.

Healey: Out in Omaha?

Jordan: Yeah. And that was the late, late 80s.

Healey: How long did you work for the post office?

[01:20:01]

Jordan: I worked until I was sixty two. Because I'm not postal retirement, I'm social security because six months before I got hired, the post office went to social security and not postal retirement. But the thing they did which was nice, if you put five percent away, they matched five percent. So, there were years I was making really good money in that fund. And then when I turned sixty two, I retired. Had enough.

Healey: So you spent at least twenty years or more in Omaha.

Jordan: I did. I did.

Healey: Not just with the post office, but in Omaha.

Jordan: In Omaha, Nebraska. I was married for twelve, then she and I got a divorce. I had three children; three boys. They're all grown. Two of them are still in Omaha. One's in Boston.

Healey: And I know you told me before we started the interview, but when did you move back to Wisconsin?

Jordan: I moved back to Wisconsin in about 2000. And I was still working with the post office. And I ended up working nights. Which was not the greatest thing in the world. Going to work at nine at night and being done at five thirty in the morning. When I moved back, I kept seniority as far as pay and as far as vacation, but I went down the lowest part of the totem pole as far as jobs, so basically it was like starting over. So I had to work nights, and that got old in a hurry. So then when I became sixty two, I said that's it, I'm done.

Healey: I didn't ask you, what was your rank in the military?

Jordan: I ended up being a spec four. Because you couldn't—when you were in the hospital they would not give you any rank. Right before I left, I was up for staff sergeant, a hard five but I was—

Healey: So spec four equates to what for pay purposes? It's an E-what?

Jordan: No idea. Wasn't very much. But, when you were in the hospital, you got combat pay. If you were taken out of a combat zone and went to the hospital, they paid you combat pay. So the whole time I was Fort Reilly, Kansas, I was getting combat pay.

Healey: I was just about to ask you if you had to be overseas to get combat pay.

Jordan: No, if you were taken out in a wounded, sick, whatever, you still got combat pay until you were let go from the hospital. But you couldn't go up in rank. They would not give you rank in the hospital. And even now, I still have some stuff with what—I have arthritis in both knees, ankles, hands.

Healey: Can you utilize the VA?

Jordan: Yes.

Healey: Have you throughout most of your life used the VA?

Jordan: Not as much as recently.

Healey: Okay.

Jordan: Right now, they're exclusively all my medical stuff is through the VA. I have diabetes, which is supposedly from Agent Orange. I have diabetes. I have knees and ankles. I have some anxiety disorder problems. I do go see a shrink basically about once a month I go see him. Talk about stuff.

Healey: Had you been doing that throughout your life?

Jordan: No. I started that basically maybe five, six years. I had a son in Omaha that had problems, and that kind of started some of going to talk to somebody. And he's okay now. See and I'm a recovering alcoholic. I've not had a drink since 1982. And he had alcohol problems. I had an uncle who had alcohol problems. I had an aunt who died of cirrhosis of the liver, and it was all on my dad's side; nothing on my mom's side. So, I have not had a drink since 1982.

Healey: You talked about the people you kept in contact with, just a few of them. Have you been a member of any military organization?

[01:25:07]

Jordan: I'm a member of the VFW. I'm a member of the Vietnam Veterans of America. Member of the American Legion.

Healey: And have you been a member of those organizations for the last forty or fifty years, or just recently?

Jordan: No, just recently. When I moved back to Wisconsin there was a gentleman who worked with my dad on the railroad who was a World War II vet. And he just always all over me, “Come on Jordan, your dad would’ve wanted”—so I got a lifetime membership with the VFW. A couple guys and I ran a couple golf tournaments for the American Legion, so I join the American Legion every year too. I’m not a lifetime member, I just pay the thirty dollars every year. Then a friend of mine who was a classmate got me to join the Veterans of—Vietnam Veterans because they had a deal, one hundred dollars for a lifetime membership. I’m not one that does a lot of meetings. I’m just not that way, but I’ll join and—I do help out, but not like I should. They’ve always wanted me to do the honor guard for funerals, but I had an experience when I was at Fort Hood, Texas that we had to do military funerals and I’m getting ready to go and I get a letter from this friend of mine that a fraternity brother of mine had been killed in Vietnam.

So I go to this funeral, and I balled through the whole funeral cause all I could see was this friend of mine's face. So that’s why I just say I can’t, I can’t do it. I’m sorry. I know I should, but I can’t. I can’t get over it. I tried to get a hold of his wife for years and years and years, but never could to tell her I was sorry I never got to go the funeral. It bothered me for a long, long time, and I finally got her email address about six months ago—about a month ago and sent her an email. And she never responded, but I said, you can respond or you—I’ll respect whatever you want to do. I never heard back, but I’m sure she got the email. It was just part of my—I had to do it. The other thing that had bugged me for years was that I felt guilty that my friend Bob, Duck, got hit and it probably should’ve been me. Because it might have been my day to walk point, if I wouldn’t have been in the hospital.

Healey: Did the people switch off with him?

Jordan: I don’t know. Once I left, I think he did it all himself.

Healey: Was he walking point for a fire team or a platoon or what?

Jordan: Platoon.

Healey: Platoon.

Jordan: Platoon. It always bugged me. So when I was out there the first time I said, “Bob, I got to tell you this.” I said, “It’s been bugging me for forty years.” “Ah, don’t worry about it.” But it still does. It still sits there that—and even—I don’t know if you saw the—they were called—they were games on ESPN, where people in the military who had lost legs, they had a sports thing with them and all that. I think one of the guys from Britain, one of the—Prince Henry I think, or one of them, had these games. I can’t think of the name right—

Healey: It’s not Prince Henry but I—Harry. Prince Harry.

Jordan: Harry. Harry did it. I couldn't watch it. Nancy says, "How come you're not watching it?" I says, "I feel guilty that I got legs and they don't." So that bothered me. There are still little things that still bother me.

Healey: Now you said you took films and all but one disintegrated—

Jordan: Tapes.

Healey: Tapes. Are they audios?

Jordan: They're audios.

Healey: Just audios? Okay.

Jordan: They're just audios.

Healey: And one remains? What's on that?

Jordan: Well [both laugh], it was quite funny when I got it. One of them was I'm saying—by our base camp is a house of ill repute. And I said, "Some guys go over there, but I don't go over there because I'm afraid I'm going to get that social disease where you put your hands together." I wouldn't say the word "clap." I was politically correct in 1969. So that was one of them, and there was some other stuff on there that was quite funny. And I said, "Say hello to this guy, and this guy, and this guy."

[01:30:26]

Healey: Now is this to your mom and dad?

Jordan: No, it's to my friend.

Healey: Oh, it was to your friend.

Jordan: My friend. And he had never opened it.

Healey: When you made the tape, you made it in Vietnam.

Jordan: I made it in Vietnam. I sent it to him in these little—they were about this big. And he gave me that. And I gave that to the Veterans thing that I sent it to. And he had never opened it, because he never had a tape player.

Healey: Now is this your friend Bob?

Jordan: No, this is a guy from Portage, that lived in Portage. And he now lives in Cincinnati, but he found it and it had never been opened because he never had a tape player. He never told me this. And his son got it to some guy who made the disc. And the guy said, "Well, I can't believe this tape is still—must have been a really high quality tape that it's still." But it had never been opened, was in this same package. I've got that, so it's kind of funny listening to that.

Healey: And then you've already turned over some letters that you wrote to your mom; your mom saved them.

Jordan: Yup, she saved them. And I turned them all over—

Healey: To the Veterans Museum in Wisconsin.

Jordan: To the Veterans Museum. But I did get copies made, so I'm going to give my kids copies of that and copies of the disk. I'm going to give them to my kids and give them to my grandkids. And when I get this, I'm going to give that, so they all know what transpired. Because a lot of people don't talk about it. I had an experience, I'm a curler. And my kids were really good curlers.

Healey: Curlers?

Jordan: Curlers. Out of Nebraska. They ended up winning junior nationals three times. And the curling community is kind of like a fraternity, once you get into that competitive thing, you get to know everybody. About two years ago, I was at a senior national thing in Wausau. And I started talking to this guy who I'd known since 1987, Mike Liapis was his name. And somehow we got talking about Vietnam. And he said, "You were there?" And I said, "Yeah." And he said, "Where were you?" And I said, "I was in the Delta." He looks at me and says, "So was I." He said, "What unit?" I said, "9th Infantry." He said, "So was I. When were you there?" I told him, he says, "I was there at the same time." But he was not in the 5th or the 60th. He was in another unit in the Delta. Never talked about it until about three years ago, and then you find out he was in Vietnam the same time I was. Because when you came back, you just—you never talked about it.

Healey: When did you start talking about Vietnam? I see you're wearing a Vietnam veteran cap, you weren't have done that in the 70s?

Jordan: No, no. No way. I think it all started when people finally started giving these guys from Afghanistan and Iraq coming back, saying we appreciate what you did and all this. And then finally it was like, Boy it would've been nice if they would've done that for us. I'm a patriot, so I don't know. The gal always says, "You wear that to get thanks." And I go, "Well, I probably do." [Laughs] Just to let them know. And recently, I got with some guys and we went to freshman, sophomore high school class in Portage and talked about the Vietnam War. They have no idea. One kid said, "Would you like to go back?"

Healey: Oh, you went to the classroom?

Jordan: Yeah. And there were about five of us sitting there. It took two seconds in every one of us, "No." And it's like I didn't like it the first time, why in the hell would I want to go back? And I have no desire to go back there. A couple guys in our unit at the reunion went back. They couldn't even find the place we were at. That was forty years ago. Forty, fifty years ago. And most people over there had no idea about the Vietnam War, even in Vietnam. I mean, It was really interesting questions that they ask.

[01:35:23]

Healey: Have you talked to other high school groups?

Jordan: No, that was the one time. One of the guys—

Healey: Would you go back?

Jordan: Yeah, I would go back. These guys, there's about five of them that go around to different high schools. I told the one guy, he's a member of the Vietnam Veterans of American in Portage. And I said, "Get a hold of me. I'll go. I'll go talk to them." Because, I don't think the schools are even teaching it, what it was. I mean, it was a big event in our history. A lot of bad things happened, the protesters, that whole area. It basically affected getting Richard Nixon to be president, the protestors did. I'd talk about it.

Healey: When you got back, did you even observe any of the protests back here?

Jordan: No.

Healey: See them on TV?

Jordan: Some on TV, but never—I always felt they had the right to protest. That's part of our heritage. Everyone has a right to their own opinion. No, I never—like I said, when you got back, you didn't tell anybody. About the only time I remember being in Omaha, that ever was when I had to go to—I had the eye infection come back about two times, and I had to go to the VA, otherwise never talked about it. My kids have read all the letters, but we haven't talked much about what went on.

Healey: You had three boys. Did they ever talk about going into the service?

Jordan: No, never.

Healey: Had they wanted to go into the service, what would your attitude been?

Jordan: I probably would've said yes. The discipline you get in the service is always good. Everybody thinks you should go to college, but I don't think everybody's cut out—I'm a perfect example of going to five years of college. Got a degree, but never used it. It was good sociably, it was very good. I never became a teacher, never used my degree. That's just how it is. I probably would have backed them if they would've wanted to go. But there wasn't much going on when they were at that age. In the nineties there wasn't a lot going on, so none of them ever went.

Healey: Was there anything about your service that surprised you; that you didn't expect? I ask that kind of from the standpoint that—although you said you weren't terribly concerned about what was going on, or paid much attention, Vietnam and the war in the 60s was kind of all over TV and all over the news, and certainly by the time you got on the flight to go overseas, you knew what you were headed into, but when you got there was there anything that really surprised—that you thought, Gee, I didn't expect this.

Jordan: Well, I think when I got there—like I said, the time they let me out of the hospital, and I'm standing there with no weapon and they told me to hitchhike back to my unit, was like, Are we in a war zone? I think that surprised me. And it also surprised me that our basecamp had foot and wall lockers, TV out of Saigon, and we would hear the news about that. And now I'm seeing all these films that these guys were out in the bush for ninety days, this friend of mine, when they got to Vietnam, there were 137 guys in his unit. They went out for three months, came back. There were thirty-seven out of the original 137 still there. They were either shot or wounded.

[01:40:09]

Healey: So that's what you kind of anticipated going in there.

Jordan: That's what I thought.

Healey: And your tour didn't—

Jordan: Didn't do that. But, like I said, I saw enough that I didn't want to see any more. I always tell people, maybe I was lucky I got sick. Because I got to get out of there. One wound was a piece of shrapnel, got a purple heart, it's still there. And that was—we were out on ambush, no we weren't on ambush, we were on patrol. We had probably fifteen guys walk over a pressure detonated booby trap, and nobody hit it. Then somebody saw it, and we all backed off. And we're sitting in rice patties and this one guy dropped a grenade to blow it, and he's running away.

And all of a sudden, you see his mouth open, and he's got two pieces of shrapnel in the butt. And I'm sitting behind the rice patty dyke, with my hand of the dyke. And a piece of shrapnel hit there, and I started bleeding. "What's this?" The medic was next to me, "You're getting put in for a Purple Heart." I said, "What do you mean? I've bleed more cutting myself shaving." And he said, "Well, if it hit here, it might have been a big difference." So I got it. Now, years later, I cannot get a MRI, the magnetic thing, because supposedly there's a piece of lead in my chest, and they don't want it to move. So, I don't know. This is here. It's still there.

Healey: Oh, the shrapnel's still in your hand?

Jordan: Still right there.

Healey: You can feel it?

Jordan: Oh yeah. I can feel it all the time. And somebody said they eventually work out, but fifty years and it's still there.

Healey: And you just don't know where you got the piece in your chest?

Jordan: No, have no idea. And I do remember being in Omaha to the VA for something. And they had an x-ray in there, and there's a dark spot there. And I said to the

guy, “What’s that?” “Oh, it’s nothing.” But the care I’ve gotten at the VA, I cannot complain about. Not at all. It’s been very good.

Healey: Well, you went to one group you indicated, at high school and talked with a group of guys. I guess one of my last questions if not my last question here is, what would you tell someone who doesn’t know about combat and war?

Jordan: We had a saying, “War is hell, but actual combat’s an mf.” You don’t think you’re going to be scared, but you are. Even going out on ambushes—I can remember the first time we went out, I had to set out a Claymore mine. Claymore mines are probably bigger than a wallet pulled out. And it’s got C4 and ball bearings in there. And, you set it off with electric charge that’s in there and you squeeze, and the electric charge will blow it. And we were out on ambush, and it was one of my first times out, and I was just scared as can be. I crawled all the way out, and I set it down, and crawled all the way out, and I’m three feet short to put the detonator—I can’t get to the detonator. So, now I got to crawl back out and move it. I was just scared as heck.

I think the biggest thing that happens to you, you’re whole psychological—changes, your values, your thinking. I don’t want to kill anybody, but if someone’s shooting at me, I’m going to shoot back. I think that’s the biggest thing. I think you don’t know what it’s like until you been shot at. I wasn’t shot at maybe ten, fifteen times, but it was scary enough that I’m glad we weren’t in many more firefights. And I really feel bad for the guys whose—I’ve seen there was thing on TV about the 9th Infantry that I saw on the History channel, and it was probably two years before I was there about some of the stuff I went through. And, they had like twenty guys killed in one ambush. I saw that and I thought, I guess I’m really lucky, because I don’t know psychological how you can handle that, to see your friends getting killed like that. I think that would be very, very hard. That’s what I tell them about. You think it’s so neat, but it’s not. It affects you for the rest of your life.

Healey: Anything else you want to add that we haven’t talked about.

Jordan: No, I don’t think so. I think that’s pretty much it. And I’d like to ask you, am I typical of the people you interviewed?

Healey: They vary. It depends upon what your assignment was.

Jordan: So yeah, I don’t have much else, unless you have something.

Healey: I don’t. And I thank you very much.

Jordan: Oh, thank you.

Healey: We’ve gone for an hour and forty six minutes. And, you’re very conversational, so I appreciate you doing this.

Jordan: I do yap.

Healey: This is great for the Wisconsin Veterans Museum.

Jordan: My dad's nickname was Yappy, so I get it from my dad.

Healey: I guess that's a good way to end. Thanks so much for this interview as well as serving.

[End of Interview]

[01:47:00]