

Wisconsin Veterans Museum
Research Center

Transcript of an
Oral History Interview with
TERRELL L. MORRIS
Air Policeman, Air Force, Cold War and Vietnam War.
1997

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Morris, Terrell L., (1944-). Oral History Interview, 1997.

User Copy: 1 sound cassette (ca. 55 min.), analog, 1 7/8 ips, mono.

Transcript: 0.1 linear ft. (1 folder).

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

Abstract:

Terrell “Terry” L. Morris, a Sioux Falls, South Dakota native, discusses his service with the 366th Security Police Squadron during the Vietnam War. Morris talks about his reasons for enlisting, basic training at Lackland Air Force Base (Texas), adjusting to military life, spending over three weeks as Personnel Awaiting Technical School, and graduating from Air Police training. Assigned to Truax Field, he talks about having security duty and law enforcement duty and once being put on alert when war protestors threatened to kidnap the base commander. While checking IDs at the gate, Morris recalls once detaining a colonel who turned out to be in charge of an inspection team. He comments on having practice alerts and concerns about Russian saboteurs during the Cold War. Morris mentions he was married in 1965 and received orders to go overseas when he had under a year left in service. After a few days of M-16 training at Hamilton Air Force Base (California), he talks about flying to Saigon. Assigned to Phan Rang Air Base (Vietnam), he tells of working security during the Panther Flight shift from six at night to six in the morning. Morris speaks of security measures, manning an observation post, and improvements of the base. He describes his impressions of Thap Cham and Phan Rang, two Vietnamese villages he could spend his free time in, as well as outdoor movies and occasional USO shows. Morris recalls being cautious and alert at the beginning and end of his tour, but having a more lax attitude in the middle. He analyzes his feelings about not being in combat and his survivor’s guilt at hearing how hard other troops’ experiences were. Morris comments on not discussing his experiences until the 1990s, getting involved in helping veterans locate each other, and attending reunions, including a reunion of the Vietnam Dog Handlers Association. He touches on regret at not reenlisting, having a second honeymoon, and getting a job in Madison after his discharge. He describes his brother-in-law’s experience as a Madison police officer who was assaulted during the sit-in demonstration at the Commerce Building. Morris recalls seeing National Guard riot gear while working at a State of Wisconsin print shop, and he touches on a few other minor war protests during the early 1970s and his negative view of the protestors. He reflects on the restrictions the military faced during the war, his frustration at not qualifying for state benefits, and being offered discounts by home realtors in exchange for not going through the paperwork for a GI Bill loan. Morris talks about eventually joining the VFW and the Vietnam Veterans of America, Chapter 221, but never really feeling like he fit in as an Air Policeman.

Biographical Sketch:

Morris (b.1944) served in the Air Force from 1963 to 1967, and was in Vietnam from April to February of 1967. Born in Sioux Falls, he moved to Estherville (Iowa) at age twelve and enlisted in the Air Force after a semester of college. After discharge at the rank of airman 1st class, Morris was hired by the State of Wisconsin in Madison in 1970, eventually settled in Pardeeville, and is an active member of the Vietnam Security Police Association.

Interviewed by Mark Van Ells, 1997

Transcribed by Telise Johnsen, 2011

Abstract written by Susan Krueger, 2011

Transcribed Interview:

Van Ells: Okay, today's date is March the 11th, 1997. This is Mark Van Ells, archivist, Wisconsin Veterans Museum, doing an oral history interview this morning with Mr. Terrell [tuh-RELL]—is that pronounced correctly?—

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Terrell: Uh, Terrell [TARE-ull).

Van Ells: Terrell, aka "Terry" L. Morris, a veteran of the U.S. Air Force in the Vietnam War. Good morning. Thanks for taking some time out of your day.

Terrell: You're welcome.

Van Ells: Why don't we start by having you tell me a little bit about where you were born and raised, and what you were doing prior to your entry into the military?

Terrell: I was born in Sioux Falls, South Dakota, on January 5th, 1944. And we lived there, uh, my father worked at the packing plant there. In fact, he was given a military deferment because he was more needed in the packing plant during World War II than he was in the Army.

And when I was twelve we were transferred to a small town in Iowa—Estherville, Iowa. And that's where I went to high school and graduated. And I took, like, a half a semester of--or one semester of--college, and, uh, that's why I started inquiring about enlisting in the Air Force.

Van Ells: Now, see, I was going to ask, "What prompted your decision?" You went into the Service in 1963. Now, this was before the big Vietnam buildup and the pressures of the draft and that type of thing. So I was interested in what prompted your decision to join, and why you selected the Air Force among the various choices you had.

Terrell: Well, I didn't like school.

Van Ells: Uh-huh, college.

Terrell: Yeah, college. And I wasn't even that fond of high school. But, uh, I really didn't care for the college. I was just sick of school. And this friend of mine that I grew up with had previously enlisted in the Air Force and went into Air Police work, which is the Air Force version of Military Police.

Van Ells: Right.

Terrell: And when he come back on leave, he had been assigned to Germany, and town patrol and the whole bit, and “see the world” and what have you. And that sounded pretty good to me.

So I enlisted in the Air Force in February of '63 and went through the Basic Training and so forth and ended up in [laughs] Truax Field, Wisconsin. And my friend had spent his whole hitch in Germany. So that's just the way things worked at the time.

Van Ells: Now, as a young man in the early '60s there, you know things were starting to happen in Vietnam. I don't know if you watched the headlines or that type of thing. Did you have any inkling, when you joined the Service, that you might actually end up in a war zone?

Terrell: Uh, not really. Well, the possibility always exists. But, as you said, the real activity didn't start until probably '65. And, being in the career field that I was, we were involved with mostly security. And, of course, talked to some guys that are returned from Vietnam, and so forth, and you hear all the rumors and all the stories about troops being shot as they get off the plane there, and this sort of thing. But at the time I really didn't give it that much consideration, even though they were protesting and stuff out at Truax and various places on campus.

Van Ells: I'm actually very interested in that. But I want to go back a little bit to your Basic Training. I was in the Air Force myself. I don't know if I mentioned that to you.

Terrell: No, you didn't.

Van Ells: You know, I remember going off to Basic Training and the whole big adventure. Why don't you just sort of walk me through the steps of your induction? And, you know, [unintelligible] your induction. I suppose you had to go off to a Recruiting Office somewhere, get on a plane or a train or something, and go down to Texas or wherever the case may be. Why don't you just walk me through your actual entry into the Service?

Terrell: Okay. I talked to the recruiter, initially, in Fort Dodge, Iowa. Estherville, my home town, was too small, didn't have anything of that sort. I went to Fort Dodge, Iowa, and talked to the recruiter, and when I was actually [sic] left town to go to Fort Des Moines in Des Moines, Iowa. And that's where we had our physicals and made out all tons of paperwork and all that sort of thing, and was actually sworn in there.

From there we flew to San Antonio, Texas, or Lackland Air Force Base. And this was in the very first part of March of 1963. And I think it was seven--, eight weeks of Basic Training where you learn to march, and you

get all your shots, and you learn military courtesy and the ranks and all this sort of thing.

Van Ells: Some people don't adjust terribly well to military life. Did you?

Terrell: Uh, I think so. Uh, I had some advice from this friend that told me, before I went down there, pretty much what to expect. And he give me some very good advice. He says, "Whatever you do, don't let the drill instructor learn your name." And I didn't. And I've seen people that did [laughs], and, uh, that was very good advice. I tried to follow that and do what was required and just be a little mouse in the corner, as it were.

Van Ells: Uh-huh.

Terrell: And there were a lot of guys that did wash out, though, that just couldn't adapt. I can't give you any numbers, but there was a lot of them. And, of course, you have all the Mickey Mouse, the inspections and the fanatical way that you had to hang your clothes, and only so many dirty clothes in your laundry bag, and spit-shined shoes that were lined in perfect alignment on the bunks, and that sort of thing. And after graduation from tech school, I went into what they called the PATS, which is Personnel Awaiting Technical School.

Van Ells: What? Did you just hang around picking up cigarette butts and stuff like that?

Terrell: Well, we had KP one day and some sort of work detail the next. And we just alternated through the week that way. And my tech school was right there at Lackland Air Force Base. So I was doing this KP-and-detail for about three and a half weeks, if I remember correctly. And then I finally got into tech school, and that was a seven-week course for Air Police training, and graduated in the top of my class in the first part of June sometime. I think it was June 11th or something.

Van Ells: So, as I recall Basic Training, it sort of brought together people from all different parts of the country, you know, the East Coast and the West Coast and the southern people and all that sort of thing. Was that your experience as well?

Terrell: Oh, absolutely, yeah.

Van Ells: Any sort of cultural conflicts, you know, on regional lines or racial lines or anything like that? Or did people pretty much all get along?

Terrell: Not that I witnessed. Uh, you didn't have much time for conflict. It was a real experience for me, because I'd grown up in the Midwest all my life.

And I think there was only one black family in all of Estherville. And it was never brought up with any kind of bias or prejudice and didn't have any there. And, as you say, it is a melting pot. I know some of the guys that got along best were from the South.

And, uh, they really do teach you the team effort there, where if one guy screws up it hurts everybody. And you do work together. That's training that you can't buy in a school. It's difficult for people now to even understand, I think. But I never witnessed, anyway, any racial conflict or religious or whatever.

Van Ells: Yeah. So there were no Southerners still fighting the Civil War, or this kind of thing?

Terrell: Uh, yeah. I remember one guy, he was from Alabama or somewhere, I don't recall now. And he was a bunkmate or very close in the area there. And they always bring up the subject, or sometimes bring up the subject, of the Civil War.

And he was commenting on how he laughed at the way the Yankees said the word "oil." He thought that was so funny. And I said, "Well, how would *you* pronounce it?" And he said, "AHL." You know, and things like that.

But through Basic and tech school there was no problems. And my first assignment was up at Truax Field here in Madison.

Van Ells: Which in the early, in the mid-60s, I suppose, posed as a policeman there. I suppose you had some particular challenges having to do with the sort of political climate in Madison at the time.

Terrell: Yeah, uh, the only involvement--. When I got to Truax Field, we pulled security duty and law enforcement duty. Law enforcement duty was comprised mostly of just working the gates, directing traffic, giving directions, that sort of thing. And the Security work was guard duty, basically, walking around the flight line, alert hangars, the Sage[?] Building, uh, anything of that sort.

And we worked rotating shifts. We'd work three swing shifts from 4:00 to midnight, and then three midnights from 4:00 to 7:30, or whatever. And then three day shifts, and then we'd have three days off.

And I do remember one day, there'd been some demonstrations and whatever. And we had just gotten off a midnight shift and had breakfast and was trying to get some shuteye. And they came and put us on alert.

The demonstrators were supposedly going to come out and kidnap the base commander.

And I remember them piling us all out of the barracks. And we were groggy and [laughs] mad, basically. And the disturbance was quelled, and nothing ever came of it. We were just kind of on standby.

Van Ells: But that was sort of an unusual occurrence. I mean, there weren't daily protests down at the airport. This was an unusual thing?

Terrell: No, uh-uh, no. This was a weird happening, yes.

Van Ells: So, at Truax in the '60s, describe a typical work day of yours.

Terrell: Uh, typically, during the day shift, we may pull a gate shack, where we would work there all day long, eight-hour day. We would check security badges, picture IDs of the work personnel, both civilian and military, that would come in. And there again, give directions or whatever was needed. If there was any disturbance, or someone tried to get in without proper credentials, then we had what they called a Sabotage Alert Team that would be called in. It was a mobile unit.

Van Ells: Was it ever called in?

Terrell: Yeah, on different occasions. I remember one day I was working a gate on the flight line. And they used to have regular inspection teams come down from headquarters, wherever, and test us during certain Alert exercises, and so forth. The visitors, if they didn't have a picture ID or a security badge, they'd have a badge with a big "V" on it to signify that they were a visiting member. And then you were supposed to check their ID cards to see if they were on an access list.

And a colonel come through one day and presented me with a visitor badge. And I checked his name on the visitor list, and it wasn't there. So I detained the colonel and called the Strike Team. And they come out and took him in to Central Security Control, which was our "bunker," if you will. And, uh, found out that someone had forgotten to put his name on the access list. And he was, indeed, the officer in charge of this inspection team. And, he was not a happy camper. [Laughs]

Van Ells: I suspect not.

Terrell: He raised all kinds of hell at the office. And, not too much later than that, I made Airman Second. [Laughs] So, we did have some occasions like this. We never had any--. We had a lot of practice alerts, what they used to call "fast turnarounds," where they'd bring the bombs in and load them onto

the F-102s, and that sort of thing. But no actual attempted acts of sabotage or anything to my recollection.

Van Ells: Yeah. Now, when it came to sabotage and that sort of thing, who did you fear the most? Did you fear protestors? Or did you fear, you know, like, communist agents or something like that? I mean, what was the major security concern for you there?

Terrell: Well in those days, the Cold War was a big factor, a very real threat. I mean, people were building bomb shelters and this sort of thing. And, uh, I guess they feared Russian saboteurs, or whatever. Terrorists, as such, were pretty much nonexistent back then.

Van Ells: Yeah.

Terrell: So it was just security against the Cold War.

Van Ells: Espionage and that sort of thing.

Terrell: Yeah, sure, uh-huh.

Van Ells: Now, I'm sort of interested in a stateside GI's view of the war in Vietnam, which at this time was slowly escalating. When did it dawn on you that, you know, we're really in a war, and that you might actually end up over there at some point? Or did it, until you finally got the orders to go?

Terrell: Uh, the only reason I was even aware of it is, is there was an occasional air policeman that would come there that was back from there or knew somebody that was there, or whatever.

Van Ells: And what did you [unintelligible]?

Terrell: You got a--, well that's where the stories come in of APs getting shot. And, depending on what base you went to, it was more dangerous than the other one, and so forth. And, uh, never really give it a lot of thought. And, uh, I had, I was married in September of '65. And right around that time I made the E-4, or Airman First Class. And by the time I got orders to go to Vietnam, I actually had less than one year of service time left. So I was only over there from the first part of April to February of '67, when I come back and got discharged.

Van Ells: And they didn't make you extend to go over there?

Terrell: No.

Van Ells: Well, good for you.

Terrell: I don't know as they could've made me extend. You sign for a four-year hitch, and that's it. Some people extended to get an early out or something of that nature. But I've never heard of them--. 'Course, I haven't heard of many people that went over there with less than a year to go in the Service.

Van Ells: Yeah. I think you're the first I've heard of, myself.

Terrell: Yeah.

Van Ells: Uh, so, why don't you describe your trip to Vietnam for me. You know, I talked to a lot of Word War II guys, and they'll describe going over in troop ships and that sort of thing. I suspect your case was quite a bit different.

Terrell: Uh, yeah, it was, uh--. We left here, of course, it was still cold. The temperature was cold. I had "winter blues," my winter uniform on, which was very snug because we weren't in the best physical condition. Out at Truax, all we did was sit in the gate shacks, and so forth, all the time.

And I left here; it was a cold climate, relatively cold anyway, the end of March. And, uh, we flew to San Francisco, and then we went to Hamilton Air Force Base for, I don't know, we was there for two or three days for M-16 training, basically.

Van Ells: Now, where's that, Hamilton Air Force Base?

Terrell: Uh, California. It's just, I believe it's north of San Francisco. It's a short ride. I don't even know if it's active anymore.

Van Ells: I don't think so. I never heard of it.

Terrell: And from there we went back to San Francisco. And we flew over in a prop job. And I remember it took us--, I think we were in the air, like, thirty hours. We stopped at Hickam [AFB] in Honolulu for a couple of hours while we changed pilots and changed the crew. And then flew to—I forget which is first, Wake Island or Guam—and did the same thing there; or, no, the Philippines--? Anyway, we had four, three stops before Saigon, and changed crews again. And then we finally landed in Saigon about--, it was about thirty hours we were in the air.

Van Ells: Could you hang on just one second?

Terrell: Sure.

- Van Ells: Okay, sorry, there were people waiting for me here.
- Terrell: That's okay.
- Van Ells: So after three or four stops you eventually landed in Saigon--uh, Tan Son Nuht [Air Base]?
- Terrell: Yes, uh-huh.
- Van Ells: What was your initial impressions when you come off the plane? In some of the movies you often see, they get off the plane, and it's one of the big factors, very largely, in people's memory. I'm just interested in your experience.
- Terrell: Uh, just a vague memory, actually. Uh, I remember we were bivouacked overnight, or maybe a couple nights. And the airport I don't remember much about, except that it wasn't--, it was more like a carport than anything else. And just all the scurry and the activity and lots of airplanes coming in and stuff. And I just have a very vague recollection of it, as far as arriving there. There wasn't anybody [laughs] getting shot as they got off the plane, I do remember that.
- Van Ells: Yeah. Some vets will tell me that Vietnam had a particular smell, for example.
- Terrell: Oh, absolutely. Uh, I don't recall remembering it there, but in the villages where I went at Phan Rang and Thap Cham I remember the smell very--very distinctly.
- Van Ells: How would you describe it?
- Terrell: Uh, probably just like a, uh, a garbage-type smell—something that was spoiled, or whatever. It's unique. You can't really describe it. I remember in Thap Cham, there, there would be sewage pipes coming out of the buildings along the canal, there. And then, just downstream from that, somebody would be washing their clothes on a rock down there.
- And the cooking—they'd cook some pretty wild stuff--lots of vegetables and things of that sort. And that had a kind of a unique smell too, like cooking cabbage or something.
- Van Ells: Yeah. Did you eventually--you say you eventually ended up at your duty station, which was Phan Rang Air Base? I'm not exactly sure where that is in Vietnam. I meant to look it up before we did this, but I spaced it. Why don't you just give me a geographical sense of where you are, precisely.

Terrell: Okay, Phan Rang would be on the South China Sea coast. We were about eight miles from the coast. How many miles north of Saigon that would be, I'm not totally sure. It was just south of Cam Ranh Bay, if you're familiar with that. That was another key point of entry for a lot of supplies and troops. And I think that was about forty miles or so from Phan Rang, south of there.

Van Ells: I see. So, when you got there, what were your duties there—same basic things, security of the air base and that type of thing?

Terrell: Yeah. Again, they had some law enforcement personnel that worked the gates, the entry gates, and so forth. They broke them down into what they called "flights." And they had rotating flights at Truax too, but we had some more training there, classroom-type training.

And I was assigned to Panther Flight, which at the time I really kind of dreaded, because Panther Flight only worked from six at night to six in the morning. And that's, of course, when most of the VC activity would take place, is during the night. But after I'd done it awhile I was glad that I did that because, first of all, we were armed and, second of all, we were awake. So we wouldn't be caught, caught sleeping if an incident occurred, or whatever.

Van Ells: And, in terms of your security, I suppose your duties were different than they had been at Truax? You're now in a war zone. Why don't you just describe how much different it was, or how much different it seemed.

Terrell: Well what we did is, we pulled duty on three-man observation posts, or OPs, as they called them. There was three or four very large hills on the perimeter of the base. And on the flatlands they would build sandbag towers. These towers would be manned during the day shift. But at night they would double up and put one of the Panther Flight people in addition. And the three-man observation post, we would carry our gear, machine guns and whatever, up to these observation posts and just simply watch for any strange activity that might occur.

Van Ells: And did you see any?

Terrell: Uh, I saw all kinds of activity. Most of it was ours: Puff the Magic Dragon-type stuff and flares, constant flares. The Hundred and First (101st) Airborne was also stationed there, and they were constantly firing artillery into the hills and stuff surrounding the base.

Our squadron area was based right at the foot of a hill called Nui Dat. And on the eastern side of that hill it was all just barren land and pretty much

flat all the way to the coast. And on the west side of that hill, it was all forested. I wouldn't really call it a jungle, just a dense forest-type area.

And, uh, we just basically watched for any kind of activity. And the K-9 dog handlers were also out there and reported any time their dog would go on alert, and that sort of thing.

Van Ells: Now, one of the characteristics of the Vietnam War was that there were no front lines, per se. You know, people were going out on patrol and basically, even in the heart of Saigon, if you were stationed at the U.S. Embassy for example, your base could be subject to attack. Was your air base ever subject to, you know, terrorist raids and that type of thing? Or were you relatively safe and secure in there?

Terrell: It was never attacked while I was there. I was fortunate in one thing. I mean we had, like, a sniper shot here and there or little harassment stuff. But I never experienced a mortar attack or a rocket attack or sappers or anything of that nature. Later on, it did happen. I have a book at home that explains all the, uh, the attacks at all the airfields and the dates and the KIA and the whole works.

Van Ells: Now, that's after you left, you mean--that sort of thing.

Terrell: Yeah. This is just recently that I acquired this book. Like I say, I was very, very fortunate to come out without a scratch, basically. When I first got there—this was in 1966, again—they were just starting to build up. We lived in twelve-man tents and cots.

And when I left there, they were constructing permanent barracks, wood barracks. And we had built up to a six hundred-man squadron, which is quite large for a security police squadron. The beach area, when I first got there, they had a twenty-four-hour duty post down there manned by two Air Police. And all that was down there was a couple of these landing craft with the fronts dropped down, you know, LSTs, or whatever they are.

And when I left I went down there. They had patio furniture [laughs] with the umbrellas and a place like a cafeteria built up and all kinds of stuff down there—activities for the GIs. So it was just massive construction and buildup right from the get-go.

Van Ells: And so on a typical day you were on duty how many hours, do you think?

Terrell: Uh, twelve hours.

Van Ells: Yeah. And so when you weren't on duty what sorts of things did you do, you know, to sort of keep yourself occupied. Did you get some leave, did you get to go into town. What did you do with your free time?

Terrell: At that time we could go to the two villages. Thap Cham was the first one, a very small village, and then on into the bigger one, Phan Rang. And at that time we were allowed to go in there. They had restaurants, if you could call it that, and bars and the usual.

Van Ells: I was going to say, as a kid from South Dakota, it must've been a rather different place than you were used to.

Terrell: Oh, this was true, yeah--naïve at best, but still cautious. It was funny, at least my experience was, when I first got there I was very cautious, alert, aware of everything, because of the rumors you hear. And you don't know what to expect, and you don't know what's going to happen.

And then as time went on, you got a lot more lax, and just "I don't give a damn" attitude, and whatever. And then as you approach your rotation date to go back to the States, then you revert back to this being extremely careful and, uh, "Don't screw it up now" kind of thing [laughs]. I remember distinctly feeling that way.

And they also had a big white **[End of Tape 1, Side A]**

Terrell: They also had a big white billboard that they built on the base, there. And you could, they would show movies at night. So we had that option. They had the Airmen's Club and, uh, occasionally they'd have some kind of USO entertainment come there and so forth. I never saw anybody really famous, but there were some shows there, magicians and that kind of stuff.

Van Ells: Now, one of the things you read about the Vietnam War is the problem with drugs and alcohol and that sort of thing. Now, early in the war it was somewhat different, from what I gather. What was your experience with that type of thing? Did you see a lot of the drug and alcohol abuse at that point? Or especially, being among the Security Police, perhaps people weren't going to let on to you particularly. But I'm just interested in your personal experience.

Terrell: Well, the Air Police basically just hung with the Air Police anyway. Uh, it was not my experience so much. Alcohol, of course—beer was so cheap that you couldn't afford not to drink it. And the only thing—I don't remember ever seeing anybody smoking marijuana.

And the only, even recognition, things that I can remember, was being offered cocaine in, uh, or opium or something, right down in the villages.

Sometimes a Vietnamese national would come up and ask if you wanted some or if you wanted to buy some. But bear in mind, too, that, uh, comparing our duty and what we went through, it just didn't compare to what some of those guys went through, also.

Van Ells: You mean in the combat zones?

Terrell: Yeah, exactly. And maybe, had that been our circumstance, it would have been a lot different.

Van Ells: Uh-huh. Now, did you have much actual contact with those who were in the field, so to speak?

Terrell: Not really, no. Like I say, the 101st Airborne was headquartered there for awhile. And the Air Force guys pretty much hung with them, or with themselves. And the 101st did their thing. So I never really became aware of it, really, until just recent years--some of the things that these guys have been through, and that.

I guess you could say I have, probably, worse trouble with survivor's guilt than anything else, because of what some of these guys did go through and how lucky I got by. There was a lot of security policemen that were killed, and dog handlers, and so forth. And some of the bases, just like the rumors said, were a lot worse than the one I was at.

In fact, when I was there, they used to say that Cam Ranh Bay was invincible because it was built on a peninsula, and all they had to protect was the part that joined to the main body of land. And it was never attacked while I was there, to my knowledge. But I remember—one of the few things I remember after coming back—was that the Viet Cong had hit that and blew up I don't know how many millions of gallons of, uh, airplane fuel.

Van Ells: Hmm. Now, is this something that you understood and appreciated at the time? Or did this sink in later, in later years, you know, this idea that others were perhaps--?

Terrell: Later, yeah. When I came back, uh, even though I'd watch—well, like everybody else, I would see this stuff on the news, while you're eating your supper, and whatever. And, but, I never heard of Phan Rang again, and never even heard of security police again.

In fact, I had a guy tell me, just a year or two ago, that he was down at the Wall in Vietnam, and he saw a guy there standing that had an Air Police shield on the back of his jacket. And he went and touched him on the shoulder and said, "I see you were an air policeman." And they started

talking, and the guy broke down and started crying because he thought he was losing his mind—that he was the first one that he had ever talked to or heard of since then. And that was pretty much my case. It was just a forgotten deal. Get on with your life, and just never heard of it again.

Van Ells: Hmm. Until later on in your middle age.

Terrell: Uh, well it was even as recently as, probably, 1994 when—I had joined the VFW, I guess, was the only thing I had done. And I wasn't even active in that. I was only a member, I think, for a year or so.

And then one day I got a letter from a guy out in California that thought I was a dog handler. And we worked with the dog handlers. We provided backup for them and took coffee around and that sort of thing. So I was very familiar with the dogs and had a great deal of respect for them guys. And the Air Force dog handlers were volunteers from the Air Police. If you were an air policeman, you could volunteer to be a dog handler. And in retrospect I probably would have done that, if I could do it over again.

Anyway, he wrote this letter and asked if I would be interested in joining their Vietnam Dog Handlers Association. So I wrote back to him and said, "Well, I wasn't a dog handler. I worked in support of them, and so forth. But I'd be glad to." This was the closest I had ever been to being with my own troops, or whatever. So I went down to their first reunion in Washington, DC, and they had a really good thing going there. But I still didn't quite fit in, because I never had a dog. And all of these guys were from all branches of the Service that had canines.

So the president of the Vietnam Dog Handlers Association was also an air policeman. And so him and I thought about trying to see if we could round up some of the air police and security police that served there. And that's when I really started getting active in it. And then I started doing some locator work. I got this computer program to help us look up members with the telephone directories on CD. And then I started doing it for any veteran that was looking for an old buddy, or something, and got really involved with that. And then I started going to reunions, like at Kokomo, Indiana, and Indianapolis, and that sort of thing too. New Glarus has one.

Van Ells: Yeah.

Terrell: And I just, just, that's when I became more involved with what some of these guys have gone through. And then that and reading books and whatever.

Van Ells: Hmm. We're starting to get into some of the post-war types of things now.

- Terrell: Yeah, okay. I'm sorry.
- Van Ells: No, that's just fine. I think we're about ready to more on to that. I was just going to have you describe your voyage back from Vietnam. How did you get back from Vietnam? Where did you go, and that type of thing?
- Terrell: Uh, when we left Saigon, we left in a jet, and I think we stopped at Tokyo. It was late at night. We weren't even allowed to get off the plane, and then flew straight to, non-stop to San Francisco. And it was like, just a fraction of what the trip over was like.
- Van Ells: Uh-huh. You mean in terms of time.
- Terrell: Yeah. And, uh, from San Francisco we went up to Travis Air Force Base, where we processed out. We were there from--. I think I left Saigon on the ninth of February, and my discharge was on the thirteenth, or something like that.
- Van Ells: Okay, this is your discharge from the Service, then?
- Terrell: Yes, uh-huh.
- Van Ells: Your four years was done, and you're out and gone.
- Terrell: Yeah.
- Van Ells: Did you give any thought to re-enlisting?
- Terrell: At the time, no. It was the furthest thing from my mind. I'd only been married, like, six months when I got orders. I just wanted to get out of there and get home and get out, period. And, uh, in retrospect, though, I think, many times I've thought, "Geez, if I'da stayed in, I'd have thirty years in and be retired," [laughs] and all that.
- But when I was in Phan Rang, there were "lifers," as we called them, with twelve/fourteen years in service getting out. Because what they would do is send them to Vietnam for a year, send them back stateside for a year, and then right back to Vietnam again. And this was not a popular place to be for most career people.
- Van Ells: I suspect it got less popular as time went on.
- Terrell: And, exactly. So there was a lot of people with a lot of years invested in the military that were getting out for that very reason. And so I didn't give any thought to re-enlisting at the time.

Van Ells: Huh. So you got out. You got discharged in California. And where did you go, and what were your priorities with getting on with the rest of your life?

Terrell: Initially, I was going to take some electronic courses here in Madison. And whatever happened to that, I don't even remember. But I came back, and my wife and I we took kind of a belated second honeymoon and went down to Florida. And come back and I had opportunities to get two different jobs, pretty much right off the bat. And I took one of them and got into a repair job for a duplicating equipment company.

Van Ells: And that was here in Madison?

Terrell: Yeah, uh-huh.

Van Ells: Now, your wife is from the area here somewhere?

Terrell: Yeah, she was from Oregon [WI]. See, in Estherville, my hometown, if you didn't work at Morrells Meat Packing Plant or the railroad, you didn't do anything. And neither one of those looked too good to me. And I'd been to Madison, or been in Madison, for, like, two and a half years--well, a little over two and a half years—and really liked it here. And my wife was from here. So, when I come back, I just stayed here. And that's when I got into all this post-war, or not post-war, but the rioting in the '70s, and stuff.

Van Ells: Yeah. Now, why don't you describe that to me, as someone who was a veteran and had been overseas, the sort of climate that had only grown more, more turbulent, I suppose you could say, during that time. What was your reaction to what was going on in Madison as you came back?

Terrell: Oh, I, I was very upset about it. I didn't experience the spitting on and calling you "baby-killers," and all that stuff. I just came into Madison quietly and ditched the uniform, and that was it, basically. But I had several experiences with the rioting or knew of people that did have experiences with it.

My then-brother-in-law was a Madison police officer when they had the sit-in demonstration up at the Commerce Building. I don't remember what year that was. That was probably one of the first experiences. He described it as, they went in there with the idea that they would probably just have to drag these people out or carry them physically out of the building. And I guess when he got in there things got ugly and, uh, they had him pushed up, pinned up, against the wall and was stripping the patches off his uniform and whatever. And he was in real fear for his life, and somehow managed to get loose--he was a pretty big guy. And they

started just beating people with batons and so forth. And he had some real bad experiences with that.

And I was working at my first job, I believe, when they blew up the Army Research Building.

Van Ells: On campus there.

Terrell: Yeah. And I remember that quite well. I was living at Oregon [WI] at the time, so I didn't actually hear the explosion. But my work brought me to the university quite often, and so we was well aware of that.

And then in 1970 I started work with the State of Wisconsin in the print shop, which was up at One West Wilson Street. And I was working the night shift, 3:15 to 11:45 at night. And I remember going up to the cafeteria one day, and the whole hallway was lined with helmets and riot gear from the National Guard. And, uh, I don't remember that particular incident, but there's a tunnel that runs from One West Wilson up to the Capitol Building. And I guess that's where they were protesting. And I heard that, just out of the blue, here comes the [laughs] National Guard out of this tunnel in the Capitol Building. And nobody could figure out where they came from, because they were bivouacked down at One West Wilson. And I remember that time.

And, uh, of course, there was a lot of other little skirmishes. And then one night I was leaving—let's see, that would have been, probably 1970, or '71 at the latest. I was driving home from work after a midnight shift, going down West Washington Avenue, there. And people were running and scurrying around, and I didn't pay too much attention. And, all of a sudden, I got this blast of tear gas while I was driving. And I was, I'd experienced tear gas before, but nothing like this. I mean, my eyes just, just burnt. My throat burnt, and it was really bad stuff. And I have no idea how those people running could, could tolerate it.

But I got down as far as Park Street, and I pulled over and went into the old Office Tavern down there and had a couple [laughs] beers. Because I, it just, it was unbelievable how painful that was.

Van Ells: Yeah.

Terrell: But I remember resenting the, the, you know, here's these guys over there, giving their lives, some of them. And back home they were running off to Canada and doing those what else to get out of it, and then, on top of that, creating violence to protest violence, which I never could understand anyway.

Van Ells: Now, also during this period the war escalated and escalated, after you got home, pretty much. The 1968-69 peak of the war, for the Americans anyway, you were home during that time. I'm interested to know if you watched the news and followed the war and what your thoughts were as the war progressed, or digressed, or whatever the case may be.

Terrell: I don't remember what, what I felt, uh. Like the Tet Offensive was in '68, and I probably wasn't fully aware of what was happening over. You know, I didn't read about it in the papers or anything. I guess, maybe it was because I was naïve, or whatever, that you were fighting for freedom and so forth. And I just thought we were doing the right thing at the time. And I'm still not convinced that we weren't doing the right thing. It's just that, uh, I feel that the military wasn't allowed to do what was the right thing to do. It was run by the politicians and so forth.

Van Ells: Now, is that something you thought at the time, or have come to reflect upon later in life?

Terrell: Uh, probably thought about it some at the time. It seemed like, instead of--they had restricted targets. Or one thing that really hit close to home to me was, uh, here we were, semi-combat trained. I mean, we had M60 machine guns and M16 rifles and grenades and the whole bit. But we lived in hooches at the base of this hill, and totally unarmed. We did not get our weapons until we checked in to go on duty.

And on the other side of that hill was *nothing*. I mean, what sense does that make? A small group of people could have come over that hill undetected and done a lot of damage. And there's nothing we could have done about it. And guys were writing their senators and congressmen and everything else. But it never changed, the time I was there. And, now maybe it did after they experienced more attacks, and so forth.

But this is the--they had so many restrictions. Uh, the canine people couldn't let their dog loose unless they had permission. And, and, uh, you couldn't shoot. There's a book out now--*The Battle for Saigon: The Tet Offensive*, I believe it's called. And there was some security policemen involved in the first part of that book. It gives a real good accounting of their actions during the Tet Offensive at Tan Son Nhut. And there again, they were restrictive: "Well, don't fire. Just keep us posted on the radio," and this type of thing. It's just nuts.

And then the Air Force and the Navy pilots, they had certain targets that they couldn't bomb. They wouldn't let them bomb them. They'd go out and they'd blow up a bridge somewhere. And the Viet Cong would have it rebuilt the next day.

- Van Ells: Uh-huh.
- Terrell: Those types of things is what was so frustrating, just the restrictions. “You can’t do this, and you can’t do that.” And this wasn’t the attitude of the soldiers, by any stretch of the imagination.
- Van Ells: Yeah.
- Terrell: And I guess I’ve always carried that thought, you know, uh, I would go back again today if, if they did it right, you know. If they’d carried it on like they did Desert Storm, it would have been a different ball game--my opinion.
- Van Ells: Well, that’s what these interviews are for [laughs].
- Terrell: Yeah [laughs].
- Van Ells: Now, getting back--well, let’s go over some of these benefit programs first. On the data sheet I had you fill out you seemed to express a little bit of frustration. For example, “didn’t qualify for state benefits.” Did you try? I know you’re from out of state originally.
- Terrell: Oh, yeah. I wasn’t a Wisconsin veteran. So you were required--initially, to get a State mortgage through the VA, you had to be a resident of Wisconsin for ten years after discharge. So, I never even tried that. And when we purchased the home through the GI Bill—
- Van Ells: That’s the federal one, now.
- Terrell: Yeah, uh, you would get the lower interest rates and stuff. And, uh, but you go to a realtor and say, “Well, I’d like to finance this through the GI Bill,” and they’d say, “Oh, geez.” You know, they’d see this paperwork and all this stuff, and he says, “I tell you what, we’ll knock \$2,000 off the asking price if you go conventional mortgage,” which we usually ended up doing. Well, we only purchased a couple houses where I tried to do that.
- And then as time progressed, if we bought another house or something—I remember one time calling some veterans’ group about a mortgage. I told them the cost of the house, and she asked, “Well, how much money do you make?” And I told her, and she says, “Well, how much does your wife make?” And I told her, and she says, “Well, I’m sorry, you make too much money to qualify for our program.” And I says, “Well, what if my wife quit?” Then she says, “Well, then you couldn’t afford to make the payments.” [Laughs] So I says, “Well, who needs you?” And these are the kind of experiences I had.

Even to this day, I make too much money to refinance my house, or whatever programs they have nowadays, which are a lot better. I think now there isn't any time requirements as long as you're a citizen of Wisconsin, I think.

Van Ells: I know they're some changes in the legislature pending. I don't know what's going on anymore, myself, frankly.

Terrell: But I didn't pay much attention, because I always made too much money to qualify, and I just never had any luck with programs like that. And I never took advantage of the schooling. I did get on, I got a flat bonus from the State of Iowa--seems like it was two or three hundred dollars or something, just for being a Vietnam vet.

And the first job I had working for the Mitchell Company, he got me on some kind of an apprenticeship deal for a short while, there, where the government would supplement my income as I learned on the job, type of thing. But was just for just a few short, couple short months, I think.

Van Ells: Now, in terms of veterans groups, we've already touched upon this a little bit. Let's just sort of cover this, and this is the last area I really have to discuss.

Terrell: Okay.

Van Ells: When you first came back, did you join any groups? Apparently not.

Terrell: No. Not till--.

Van Ells: Any particular reason for that--you didn't want to, you didn't like them, you never thought of it?

Terrell: Well, I just never give it much thought, I guess. That was a done deal in my life, it was over. And I think a lot of people were like that. I think if we'd tried to start this organization we have now in '77, lets say, that we wouldn't have had near the response, because people just--. You know, they were home. They were back with their families and working somewhere, or whatever. And this didn't enter their mind too much.

Then—oh, gee, it's been—probably about twelve years ago, I joined the VFW.

Van Ells: For what reason? Someone talk you into it, or--?

Terrell: Well, I don't even remember that. I don't know. I just joined the local post down on Cottage Grove Road, there. And I didn't go to the meetings and

stuff. I thought it would be more just a social type of thing, and discovered that most of the vets were World War II-era.

Van Ells: And what was your response to that? Was that something you minded, didn't mind?

Terrell: Well, there again, it's like something you didn't fit into, quite, you know? Your story wasn't the same as theirs.

And then—oh, what year was that? It was after we moved up to Pardeeville, probably about five years ago, I joined the Vietnam Veterans of America, Chapter 221, up there. And I was, I tried to be very active. I volunteered for everything they had coming up, and so forth.

And it'd been established quite a while. And it was, kinda, everybody knew everybody. And I won't say they were cold, but they were very, you know, you had to be a Green Beret or a Grunt or whatever. There was only one other Air Force veteran in there, and he wasn't with the Security Police. And I'm still a member to this day. I'm just not active anymore. I didn't feel like I quite belonged in there either.

And then the, uh, the dog handler thing came along. And that's how it just all snowballed from there, because you have that common bond. Even though we're all Vietnam veterans, they can be very cliquish, I guess, for lack of a better word.

Van Ells: Oh, you know, I do have one other question involving benefits. You worked for the State of Wisconsin. I'm wondering if, being a Vietnam veteran, you got veterans preference points when you took the civil service exam. Or, not being a state veteran, perhaps you didn't. I was interested if it was a factor in getting the job that you have now.

Terrell: My initial entry into the State, yes, I think I did get five points. You cannot use the points again, however, for promotional exams or that sort of thing. But your initial entry into the State, I think they still get some preference points. I think it's five.

Van Ells: Yeah, they still do.

Terrell: And, uh, I did use those, I think, to get in. So, I'd forgotten about that.

Van Ells: And when did you start working for the State?

Terrell: 1970, March 16th.

- Van Ells: Well, you've pretty much exhausted all the questions I have. Anything you'd like to add? Anything you think we've skipped over or anything?
- Terrell: Uh, not really. I'm glad I got the opportunity to do this. I wish I had more exciting things to talk about.
- Van Ells: Well, it was just fine, as far as I was concerned. You know, I mean, most guys weren't combat soldiers, as you mentioned. So your experience was, perhaps, more standard than you realize.
- Terrell: Well, we had real tough duty. I mean, here's the canine guy out there all by himself. He wasn't in a squad or a platoon or nothing. It was him and the dog. And the same with the sentries--we might have been in groups of two or three, and that was it. And we were out in the rain and the cold and the blowing and you name it.
- Van Ells: Uh-huh, precisely.
- Terrell: I spent many a night out at Truax walking at twenty [20 degrees] below or walking around some F-102, you know. So it was not good duty. Some militaries used guard duty as a punishment, and that's what we did.
- Van Ells: Okay.
- Terrell: And I just, again, I want to thank you. And I think the work you're doing down there is just fantastic.
- Van Ells: Oh, you bet. I'm glad to hear that.
- Terrell: I enjoy the museum. I've been there—what?—three or four times now, and I enjoy it every time.
- Van Ells: Well, good. Glad to hear that.
- Terrell: Okay. And let me know if there's anything else I can do for you.
- Van Ells: Yeah.

[End of Interview]