

YOUNGSTOWN STATE UNIVERSITY

ORAL HISTORY PROGRAM

YSU Vietnam Veterans Project

Military Experience in Vietnam

O.H. 96

WILLIAM R. LILEAS SR.

Interviewed

by

James Duffey

on

May 17, 1975

WILLIAM RICHARD LILEAS

William Richard Lileas was born March 4, 1947 in Youngstown, Ohio, the son of Henry and Mary Jane Lileas. One of eight children, Bill attended school in Youngstown and graduated from Ursuline High School in 1965 and worked at various jobs until May 10, 1966 when he joined the United States Marine Corps.

His basic training took place at Paris Island for approximately nine weeks and he learned all types of survival tactics, which he considered beneficial in later wartime experiences. After basics, Bill was sent to a six-week infantry training course in North Carolina where he learned guerilla warfare tactics, and then spent a month in California learning hand-to-hand combat stunts. When Bill arrived in Vietnam, he was assigned to the Third Marine Division.

On March 15, 1968 Bill was discharged from the Marines. He was troubled by the readjustment and resented the attitude that was being shown toward those who had served their time in Vietnam. He recalls that it took him a year or two to recover from his Vietnam tour. While in Vietnam, Bill was wounded and received a Purple Heart and a Presidential Unit Citation.

Bill and his wife, Mary, are now living in McDonald, Ohio along with their two sons William Jr. and Joseph. He is employed by General Motors Lordstown and lists sports as being among his many interests. Bill entered Youngstown State

University in 1968 and is currently working toward a degree there.

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INTERVIEWEE: WILLIAM R. LILEAS SR.

INTERVIEWER: James Duffey

SUBJECT: Marine basic training, infantry training, guerilla warfare, field experiences in 13 month tour of Vietnam, observations of the war and its outcome

DATE: May 17, 1975

D: This is an interview with Bill Lileas for Youngstown State University, Vietnam Veterans Project by James Duffey at 739 Oregon Avenue on May 17, 1975 at approximately 2:30 p.m.

Bill, would you give a little biographical information about yourself?

L: My name is William R. Lileas, Sr. I was born in Youngstown, Ohio on March 4, 1947. My mother, her name is Mary; my father's name is Henry. He works at the mill. There's eight kids in our family. I went to Ursuline High School and graduated in 1965. I work at General Motors presently, have been there for approximately five years; I've worked at the Leather Works for three years, the Arsenal for two years, in Ravenna. I was in the United States Marine Corps. I went in May 10, 1966.

D: What was your reason for going into the service in the first place?

L: At that time, I believed in the war. I was brought up to believe that when America went to fight, we were supposed to go fight. And I thought that people needed help, which I still believe they did need help, but I'm seeing now how wrong I was, or the country was. I think that if we'd have gone about it in the right way, we'd have been okay. I think, if somehow they would have fought for the people instead of the politics, we'd have been okay

and their country would have been all right. But they didn't care about us, they didn't care about the people, all they cared about was the politics.

D: One of the areas I'd like to get into is like, some of the training that you were involved in before you went over there. Once you went into the service, would you describe where you went for your training and the approximate dates and the type of training you got?

L: All right, I went by train to South Carolina. I was at Paris Island for approximately nine weeks. We ran every morning. We were taught to swim, a survival swim. We were taught to kill. There was a daily drilling out in the drill field with the rifles in order to get everybody to do the same thing at the same time, the same reaction. They wanted discipline right now. They didn't want it two minutes after they said it. As soon as they said something, you were supposed to do it. I don't care if you were taking a crap, I don't care what you were doing, if they said move, you moved.

The training was pretty intense. The bayonet training was intense. The rifle, the marksmanship, they wanted nothing but perfect scores. I can remember what they called "unq." It's U-N-Q, unqualified. And you were supposed to qualify everyday, at least a 190 out of 250. And some guys that didn't qualify everyday, they got a little real rough treatment. They took two clips from old M-1's. They'd put it between their trigger finger and they'd squeeze it until tears would come to these eyes of these guys. They wanted perfect marksmanship, at least to qualify.

I'll tell you, it was really something. I couldn't believe how much it meant to these people. But at the same time, after all this crap of going through it, you saw why. I mean, it was necessary to be able to maintain that discipline. That's the way I felt, anyway. A lot of people wouldn't agree with that. But I felt that that training was necessary for me to keep going over there. I was glad I had it. A little bit was unreal.

The swimming, you're supposed to get in the swimming pool and just swim for an hour. You're not allowed to touch the sides of the pool, you're not allowed to stop. And I know one kid that did try to get out of the pool. He went to the side of the pool, he grabbed the ladder. And they were pulling him back in and he said, "No! No way I'm going back in that pool." And he said, "You get back in that fucking pool." And he said, "No way, sir! I'm not going back in that pool." And the thing I was really surprised [about] is they didn't really force him to go back in, but they didn't like it.

And also, we were in boot camp, we were sitting there cleaning our rifles, our gear. You were supposed to have an hour free time or whatever, to write letters and stuff, but the thing you had to do first was shine your boots, clean your brass, make sure your weapon's clean, that was first. Then you could write a letter.

The junior drill instructors wore a big gold buckle on their belt with the Marine Corps Insignia, it was really nice. But they liked to keep that shiny; it's made of brass. And one of the drill instructors left it on my locker box and they said to put the locker boxes away. Well, I didn't know what to do. I was scared to death. I didn't want to touch his belt. I didn't know what to do. So, I walked up and I requested permission to speak to the drill instructor. And it wasn't the right drill instructor, but he turned to the drill instructor that owned the belt and he said, "Hey, this idiot's trying to steal your belt." And after he told the drill instructor this idiot was trying to steal his belt, he, in turn, came to me. He says, "What are you trying to do, turd? You trying to steal my belt?" I said, "No, sir. No, sir." He says, "Are you calling this drill instructor a liar?" I said, "No, sir." He said, "Then you're trying to steal my belt." I said, "No, sir." And then he punched me in the stomach. He says, "I told you not to fall. Get back up." And he hit me again. And I had a towel wrapped around my neck and he took both ends and he squeezed it around my neck. And he was telling me, "I don't ever want to see you touch anything of mine again. Now get back to your rack." I said, "Yes, sir," and I took off. And that's where I stayed.

But all this at the same time, we were supposed to realize that they're doing this for a purpose. Although, at that time, you didn't think about that. You think, "I'm going to kill that son of a bitch if I get the chance." And you really begin to hate these guys. They degrade you, they call you animals, they call you everything in the book that you can imagine. It's just something else, I can't believe it. But at the same time you're supposed to really recognize that they're doing it for that same purpose of saving your life or somebody else's life that you're going to be in some kind of combat with someday.

- D: Do you think the quality of instruction was good generally for what you experienced in Vietnam?
- L: Yes, I do. I think without boot camp, that kind of discipline, that kind of training, I don't think I would have made it over there. I really don't. I mean, you get that thing that the Marines are the best. And they drill it into your head that you are the best, that you can do any-

thing. You can win any kind of combat role; any kind of combat situation, you can put it well in hand. That's why they call us first, that's why the Marines are the best. And I really believed that, because if I didn't, then I would have been in some kind of trouble. But I really believe that they are the best. Even though the training was hard, it was rugged, it was degrading at times; but at the same time, they made us realize that we are the best and we can do and win any war. Although this one, there wasn't much of a chance of winning.

D: You mentioned that they taught you to kill. How do they go about teaching somebody to kill?

L: Well, first of all, we had hand-to-hand combat. They taught different ways of killing somebody, maybe pulling their eyes out. This is if you're in some kind of trouble. If they have you, or you're fighting a guy hand-to-hand, you can pull their eyes out, or maybe rip an ear off or pull their nose or something like that. I never really had to use anything like that, but it was nice to know that if I was in that type of situation I would know maybe a little, one thing or two that I can maybe save my life.

And the same thing with the bayonet, they taught us the different positions with the bayonet--how to use the rifle, how to hit somebody with the butt stroke, the vertical butt stroke, stab them with the bayonet. When you plunge the bayonet into somebody, you plunge it in fast. You step on the body and pull it out, so you're able to get the force in.

But the rifle was the main thing; how to kill with the rifle; how to be a marksman. That was their big thing, because the Marines are the best marksmen. They taught us how, with the rifle, the wooden handle, how dangerous a weapon that could be. And this was a big thing, too. But like I was saying, the marksmanship was the best. I didn't really know a thing about shooting rifles or anything like that. But they really taught you. You can really shoot something far away.

They taught us at two hundred meters, we had an offhand position. And at three hundred meters we had a sitting position, a kneeling position, slow fire and rapid fire. And then we had the prone position at five hundred meters. And the target itself is 12 feet by 12 feet, which sounds big, but when you're five hundred meters away, that bull's eye looks about as big as a postage stamp. And I couldn't believe it was possible to hit anything from that distance. But yet at the same time, they taught us how to do it. And I did learn how to do it. I shot a 47 out of 50,

and I was really proud of that, proud that I could hit something that far away. And they instill that pride into you, in your drill. They have drill competition against the different platoons. They have pungee sticks, which is bayonet fighting, so to speak.

D: Pugil sticks are those long sticks with the padded end?

L: Right. And you wear the football helmet with the guard mask and a jock strap, steel jock strap, and you wear hockey gloves. And it's really not dangerous, it's just something to get in there and really be aggressive. It was fun, and it was hard.

D: What kind of weapon did you use? What kind of a rifle were the Marines using?

L: At that time I was trained with an M-14. It weights 9.5 pounds. It's air-cooled, gas fed; magazine holds twenty rounds. It holds a bayonet on the end. Has a rear sight blade, front sight, and it's broken down into three groups.

D: We read a lot during the Vietnam War that there were a lot of complaints about the weapons. Did you find that the M-14 was a good weapon?

L: The M-14 was the best weapon I've ever used. It was a good weapon, it was dependable. It always fired. We learned to treat them like babies. It was our friend-- if our rifle worked we were living. And that's what we wanted. In boot camp they taught us how to take care of a rifle. I mean take care of it. At one point we washed-- you're not supposed to wash them, but we washed them, dried them off, oiled them down, for eight hours. Every stinking part of that rifle was clean. We wrapped them up in sheets and put them to bed, for inspection. If you dropped your weapon in boot camp, God help you, because that is one thing you do not do.

D: What'd they do to you if you dropped your weapon?

L: Well, they have a front sight blade, which is about a quarter-inch long, and you hold your arm out straight in front of you and you hold it by the sight blade. The sight blade's resting on your finger. And you don't let it go down, you have to keep it up. Or you put your arms out, you extend them out in front of you and they lay it on top of you and you got to keep your arms there without dropping the weapon. Or they would smack you around a little bit. That's one thing they really didn't tolerate. You had to take care of that weapon. But I find that to be one of the best weapons I've ever used.

D: What would you say would be the most difficult part of the training? Is there any one thing that you could point out that gave you the most trouble?

L: I really didn't have trouble with boot camp. Among all the harassment, I had a good time because I knew I was getting in shape and I liked that. And I liked doing those things that we did--going up the A-frame or walking across a rope bridge, or jumping these logs or something. I enjoyed that kind of stuff. I wouldn't mind doing that today. I never really had much trouble with it. Not in boot camp, anyway. The training after that was a little bit stiffer.

D: Did they give you any specific training other than the normal military discipline that was specifically related to what you'd meet in Vietnam?

L: Not in boot camp. In training after boot camp, we went to Camp Geiger, North Carolina, which is part of Camp Lejeune, for six weeks of infantry training. There we were taught guerrilla warfare, how to hit hard, fast, and go. We were taught how to ambush, night and day, how to look for booby traps; just how to be as quick as you can without getting caught was the main thing.

D: What kind of booby traps did you expect to find when you got to Vietnam?

L: Mortars tied up for booby traps; bombs used as booby traps; pungee sticks; hand grenades tied in trees, on the ground. They had one that had nails or some kind of sharp steel objects coming out of two pieces of wood and they would put it down like this (demonstrates) under the ground, and when you'd step on it, it'd come in like this and grab your ankles.

D: Like a trap?

L: Right. And this was made because at one time, I think, in the Vietnam war, they were thinking of using steel soles underneath the shoes so you don't hit the pungee sticks and it wouldn't penetrate. This was used to combat that.

D: You mentioned the pungee stick. Could you describe what the pungee sticks were?

L: Most of them were bamboo, sharpened on the end, with the points up.

D: Embedded in the ground?

L: Right, embedded in the ground. And there were quite a few. At one point, if they would have a trap like that, there would be quite a few pungee sticks. And if they can find steel, they would use steel with points on them or anything. But it was mostly bamboo.

And they would excrete on them, or whatever the word is-- go to the bathroom on them. So, in case you did hit these things, the poison would take a quicker effect. You would get an infection a lot easier. It was a fast enough anyway, but with that kind of stuff, it was a little bit harder to combat.

I know one time we found, in one booby trap, it was a five hundred pound bomb. And they had it in the ground. I don't really know how they had it ready to go off or anything because our minesweepers found it with their detectors. But there it was, big as life, five hundred pound bomb.

D: Now, this would be a matter of you just stepping in an area where it was?

L: Right, we were in what they call personnel vehicles. We were going across this--it wasn't even a little river, it was like a stream. We were going across it, and if that would have ran over it, then it would have been all over for everybody. But at that point, as soon as we got across that stream, they let out the minesweepers just to sweep in front of us for a little while, and that's what they found.

D: In terms of your training, your infantry training school, is there anything else that you'd want to add to what you've already said?

L: Well, guerrilla warfare was the biggest thing they went over because they knew that was the type of war we were fighting. There was no front line; there was no no-man's-land or anything like that. We had our three-day war at the end of the training period, the good guys against the bad guys. And that was fun in a way, but at the same time, you can see how the guys themselves really starting to get into this thing, this military type and enemy type of thing. I was one of the bad guys.

If you got caught, they really put it to you. I mean, it was like you are the enemy, and that was it. Sometimes it was scary. They had this hole full of water, and they would make us kneel in it with our rifles across our shoulders so we couldn't do anything. They would dunk our heads in because they wanted some information--where our

people were; what we were going to do; is there any ambushes set up outside the perimeter, what have you. And I was really scared there for awhile. I thought, "Man, what's wrong with these guys?"

D: It really gets to them?

L: Yes. And I said, "I'm taking off." Whew! I ran. I was running for my life, I thought. I got caught though. And it was a funny thing because I told them I hurt my leg and they let me go.

But we caught a prisoner, too. I was reall good friends with this kid. I don't even remember his name now, but at that time I was really good friends with him. First of all, we rolled him in the water, and then we made him roll on the sand. Then we tied him to a tree and we put all this mud all over his face and sand. This was a friend of mine. And here I look back and I think, God, my mind was really starting to go away from that. This guy wasn't my friend, he was my enemy. And it was really, it's a scary thing, thinking about that. What can you do against somebody that's really your enemy?

D: What happened after infantry training then? Did you go directly to Vietnam from there?

L: After training, after I went through infantry, I went home for twenty-five days and then I went to California for a month of more training--hand grenade throwing, combat, going up in the mountains. I had a course called "I and I" but I can't remember what it stood for. Anyway, we'd go up in the mountains, you'd bring mothing but water, that's all you were allowed to take with you, and you had to go across these mountains at a certain range, maybe three, four, five miles. And they had like enemy hiding in between. You had to dodge them, get over these mountains, and if you made it then you got to get an orange, which most of the guys did make it. It was kind of fun in a way because, I don't know, I never was really up in the mountains before.

So, I made it and we got the orange, and at night, we had another test like that. We had to do it at night. You had to get through these booby traps and you had to get through these guys. It was maybe one or two miles. It was kind of rough at night. You didn't know where you were going, what you were doing. But most of us made it, and then that night we set up a fire, kept warm. We had about ten miles to go back to where we were at Camp Pendelton. And that morning they gave us food, they gave us macaroni, boiled, and a carrot. That was it. And we walked the ten miles in, finally, for lunch, which

was fantastic.

D: In terms of the time that this all takes--not this was a twenty-four hour day kind of exercise, or did you have some time off?

L: You mean the "I and I" course?

D: Yes.

L: Yes. That was twenty-four hours. I think we were out there maybe two or three days.

D: Now, from Pendelton then you went directly to Vietnam?

L: Well, from there I went to Okinawa. We landed in Okinawa--we were supposed to be there maybe one or two days and we ended up being there for a week. Somehow they lost our records or our records didn't catch up with us in time, and I was there a week. There was no training there at all. They gave you details just to keep you busy. But at night you could go to the bars, you can go into town or whatever you want to do. Most of the guys got drunk.

D: If I can backtrack for a minute--when you went home for the twenty-five days, did you talk much to your parents about going to Vietnam? What did they think about it?

L: My parents didn't like the idea of me going. They didn't like the idea of me going in the Marine Corps. But I felt somebody had to do it. I felt that's what I wanted to do and I, in a way, wanted to prove something to myself, because you hear so many things about the Marines. When I was growing up, they're the best or the toughest, and I wanted to be that.

They were scared about me going. They knew I was going to end up going when I went in because I only went in for two years. And that's the first thing the recruiter told them. They were worried about it. And I went in with a friend of mine from Girard. We went in together. And his parents were worried about it. But we felt good about it--that we knew that's what we wanted to do, we knew that there was a job to be done and we wanted to try and do it.

D: When you left--was it Okinawa?

L: Yes.

D: Where did you go in Vietnam? Where did you land?

L: From Okinawa we went to Da Nang. We arrived in Da Nang, and then we took . . .

D: Did you fly in?

L: We flew in on a commercial jet, stewardesses, the whole bit, but with nothing but military personnel on it. It was a nice trip, I guess, I don't know how many hours, from Okinawa, it must have been about four hours. When we landed there in Da Nang, we got out of the plane, it was hot as hell. I couldn't even breathe! And you walked out and you see all these guys standing around yelling, yelling at this plane, "This is our plane! We're going home," and they say, "You are just getting here. Get the hell off the plane so we can get on!" It was really something else.

And I sat down next to this kid inside this little station they had to report in, and he had a Purple Heart. And I was talking to him about it. He was wounded and and that, and I said, "How'd you get it?" He says, "Oh, I was shot." I says, "Oh, man!" He says, "But don't worry, you'll probably end up with one here. Most of the guys do." And right there I was scared to death. I says, "Oh my God, what am I getting into?"

And then from there we took another plane, a military plane down to Phu Bai, where I was to report into my outfit. We arrived in Phu Bai and I didn't know what to do. I was just standing there with my seabag and all of a sudden somebody come up and read my name off and I said, "Yeah, that's me," and he says, "Okay, come with me." So, I reported into my outfit--it was Second Battalion, 26th Marines, attached to the Third Marine Division. I was in Hotel Company. And I finally got a squad.

I reported in to my squad leader. From there he took me to get my rifle, my backpack, anything necessary that I would need out in the field--a poncho, a rack to sleep in if we were ever in the rear area. I met all the guys.

The first guy I talked to, really talked to was a corpsman--I don't remember his name--but he was an older man, he was in the service for quite a while. But he gave me the address and the first thing I did was write home, let them know I was there, and so far I was fine.

And I met guys in the squad and they were pretty nice guys. Cliff Schaffer, Billy Hader, Ed Wilkins, Harry Schaffer: a guy named Spinoza from Guam. I can't remember most of the other guys.

D: The guy that you went in with from Girard, did you end up being with him?

- L: No, not at all. After we were home on leave, he went to Lejeune for a while, and I thought he was going to be stationed there because he enlisted for three years. And one day in Okinawa, somebody said, "There's somebody in there to see you." And there it was this kid. He volunteered to come to Nam. He says, "Bill's there. I'm going there, too. That's what we joined for." And I saw him in Okinawa for the last time for about six months.
- D: During the time that you were in transit from California over to Vietnam, was there any kind of indoctrination or any briefing of things that you would . . .
- L: They went over mostly what would happen if you got captured--give your name, rank, serial number, date of birth, and that was it. They didn't try to put us in a building and get anything out of us or anything like that, but that's what they were worried about. Watch out for the booby traps, the type of booby traps that can possibly be there. The ambushes was a big thing. That was mostly what they really wanted was ambush, how to ambush. How to hit fast and go. That's all they really cared about. There wasn't really anything that was deep.
- D: Sort of reminding you of all the things you'd gone through?
- L: Yes, just a retraining. How to throw hand grenades and how to set off Claymore mines and on, a few other things, a little bit of explosives.
- D: Well, at this point in Vietnam now, how long was it until you actually got into combat?
- L: Well, let's see. First time out in the field it was about maybe two days after I got there we were going out in the field. I didn't see any combat, but there was a report of, I think, maybe fifteen or twenty VC spotted, so we kind of went after them. We didn't see anything. We didn't hit any combat situation, but that was the time I can feel I was really scared. It's the first time I walked in rice paddies and I had to walk in that mud and guck and I thought, "God, what can be in there? Pungee sticks can be in there. Anything can be in here." And I was scared and I walked into this big bush of ants. Ants were all over me and my helmet and my sack. I was just completely miserable.

But then, maybe a month after that was the first time I really got in a combat situation. We were up on a hill,

and I was writing home a letter to my brother. I had no shirt on, no shoes, socks, just my pants--it was hot. And I was sitting in my pup tent writing. And all of a sudden I hear this explosion and this machine gun fire; I couldn't figure out what the hell was going on. So, I grabbed the rifle and the magazine and we were being hit from behind us on the mountain and there was a foxhole not far from my tent and I jumped in, without my rifle, without my magazine, and was on top of about five other guys. And all I hear is this machine gun going off and all these explosions and I was scared. I didn't know what to do. I mean, all this training and all of a sudden, "Hey, God, what do I do?" And I see this kid behind me, he's standing up shooting just like John Wayne and these bullets are going in front of the foxhole; it's just like it was in the movies, this dirt flying up.

Somebody says, "Grab that rifle!" I says, "Fuck you guys!" I said, "That's my rifle!" So, I grabbed the rifle, but there was no (tape turns off) take off after them. I threw on my boots. I threw everything on so fast it was unreal. I couldn't believe I was going out there that fast. I didn't feel like I was prepared. But they were a lot farther away than we thought they were. By the time we got there, they were completely gone, cause we were out there the rest of the night. But we found casings from mortars and machine guns and stuff like that, but no VC, none at all. No firing back after that point of attack.

- D: I'm going to backtrack again one more time. I missed something here. Probably before you went to Vietnam you had some impressions of what you thought it might be like, what the country was like, what you'd see when you got there. Was there anything that surprised you when you arrived that might be different?
- L: Well, I'll tell you the truth, I really didn't think much about it because when I was in high school, we were talking about the Vietnam War, and I didn't really know who the Viet Cong were. I never paid that much attention. It really didn't hit me in the head that, this is something I might be involved in shortly. I really never thought about it. I never thought about the people. The enemy--I didn't know who the Viet Cong were, who the South Vietnamese were, who the North Vietnamese were. I didn't realize any of that stuff until I was actually in a situation where I had to know who they were, what kind of people.

But I was impressed with the country. It was pretty for as wet--the monsoon--and as hot as it is, it was

a pretty country. Rice paddies all over the place, beautiful mountains, and some beautiful streams to go swimming in--it was just unreal--and the China Sea. It was really a nice country. And the people, for the most part, were nice. I didn't appreciate some of the South Vietnamese soldiers; I felt they were lazy, and not very much in gratitude to our country. I really thought they were slacking off. I think that's why they ended up losing, because they'd just slack off. I don't think they had the initiative or the ambition to want to win that war because, when we were there, we did everything. But for the most part, I really liked the country. It was pretty.

D: Bill, you've given me a basic idea of what your first battle experience was. How was the rest of the year? What kind of experiences did you have during your thirteen-month tour?

L: Most of the things that we did were ambushes day in and day out. In the daytime we'd go on a patrol to find an ambush spot that we thought was well concealed and we thought the enemy would be there, off maybe, on a road we knew that they traveled or a village we knew that they'd go into. And that was mostly what we did--was ambush, day in and day out, day in and day out, all night and all night, just ambush, waiting for somebody to come in just so you can kill them.

As far as knowing who the Viet Cong were, to me, that's a hard question to answer because if you go down South during the Civil War, if you put two guys in civilian clothes together, who's going to be from the South, who's going to be from the North? You don't know. You don't know that. Only time you know who the Viet Cong are is when they're shooting at you, or when you captured one. That's when you knew who the Viet Cong were. There was no such thing as they have something on their body that you know that they're the Viet Cong because it wasn't like that. They could be farmers during the day plowing their rice paddies, and at night they can be shooting at you, wearing black pajamas, which, mostly, was what they wore.

D: Did that cause any problems for the soldiers over there or confusion?

L: There was a lot of problems. There was a lot of confusion because you weren't allowed to shoot anybody, first of all, unless they had a weapon. This is one thing that was hard about an ambush. Anybody who walks in an ambush, you were allowed to kill whether they had

a weapon or not because they shouldn't have been there. They shouldn't have been out there at that time of the night because the people know to stay in the village. But, a lot of confusion. They didn't know when to shoot and when not to shoot. It was hard to make up your mind what to do.

D: How'd you get your information as far as where the Viet Cong was operating and traveling?

L: From our officers. They would brief us when we'd go out on an ambush. Or if we'd go out on an operation, they would brief us on what they wanted to let us know--if there was supposedly any Viet Cong out there or if we were supposed to engage in any combat at any time or what. That's all they told us, if there were VC out there and if we were going to run into them.

D: Do you ever feel that you were kept in the dark about a lot of things you think you might have been better off knowing?

L: No, I don't think so. I think it's about all we really needed to know. Except maybe some of these different things I've heard since then, that they made it rain--how they'd drive these planes up and seed the clouds or whatever. I've heard they have done this. I don't know.

D: By "they" you mean the American government?

L: The Americans, yes, right. I don't know if they have done it. Like I heard they did it over the Ho Che Minh Trail so that the North Vietnamese couldn't bring their supplies in and people over with ease. But I don't know. I don't think I would have wanted to know that at the time.

D: When you talk about ambushing and being difficult to identify who the enemy is, are you aware of any kinds of problems where innocent people were killed or people who it was questionable as to whether they were Viet Cong?

L: Not as long as I was there. We never really had that trouble. The one ambush we went on I can remember that we had a bunch of new guys with us that just got over from the States, and that to me was scary, too, because I didn't know how they would react. And I knew I was there for awhile. I knew what I would do and I knew what the old guys would do, but I didn't know how they would react.

And we had a new squad leader who was a corporal and I didn't feel that he knew what he was doing that much at the time. And he set us up in this ambush and I asked him about rear security. And he says, "Well, why don't you watch it?" And I says, "Fine." And I saw this shadow along this hedgerow, this outline of a person, and I thought, "Holy, shit, man we got them already!" So, I raised my rifle and I took off the safety and I was going to shoot. And I thought to myself, "God, I don't know, I better check." So, I asked him again if he put anybody in the rear and one of the other guys in the squad, one of the fire team leaders, Harry Schaffer, he came over, he says, "Let's go check it out." And here it was our guys in the rear. I could have killed one of our own men. And besides being up shit creek with the government, how would that make me feel, shooting somebody else? But that was our own guys, and that would have been the mistake of the squad leader.

But we rectified it and we sat there for the remainder of the night and that's when we had about three or four Viet Cong come into the ambush. And it was into the rear. We opened up fire and we got one of them for sure--he's dead now. And the other, we don't know where they went, the other two or three. I can't imagine how they got away, I really can't because they had about eighty rounds on them in five minutes. I just don't know how they got away. But the guy was still alive--this is what amazed me--the guy was still alive laying there. He took the first twenty rounds in the groin. But he was laying there and he was in pain. He was trying to get up. And we radioed in to the captain about this guy and we found on him, we found a flag with a hammer and sickle; we found a VC permit to carry a forty-five (.45); we found plans on him to attack Da Nang. It was a big capture. He was an officer of the Viet Cong Revolutionary Army, but he was still alive and we didn't know what to do with him.

We asked the captain if we should bring him in and he said, "No." So, three or four of our men who remembered a friend of theirs that was killed, got on their knees, took their rifle off automatic, put it on semi-automatic and plowed him in there with about forty rounds. It was something. That was the first time I saw anything like that. And he just bounced like a basketball. His body was just bouncing flesh flying and blood just coming out all over the place.

D: How'd you feel about that?

L: I felt kind of sick. I felt; "God, what are we doing?" And then all of a sudden I thought to myself, "That's the

enemy. That's what we're here for. We're here to kill the enemy, that's that."

D: Did it take you very long to get hardened to that?

L: No, every time it got easier. After a while it's just nothing. The only thing that really hurt me most of the time was seeing our own guys. That hurt me. I didn't like to see bodies piled up. You'd walk along and you'd see these bodies piled up with ponchos over them waiting for the choppers to come in and pick them up. That bothered me. The enemy didn't bother me at all.

D: Did you have to actually kill anybody knowingly yourself?

L: Yes. And it wasn't hard. That was the weird part about it. It really wasn't hard. I didn't sit there and think, "This guy has a family, he might have kids. He's fighting for something he believes in." I didn't think anything like that. I just fired. I didn't even think. I'm over here in a war and I gotta kill this guy. It was just automatic, right there on the spot.

D: Yes. Do you think that was mostly due to your discipline and your training?

L: Yes, I do--to the training. I think they really put it in my mind. I don't know. It was easy. It wasn't hard to do. That's a shame to say, but it wasn't hard.

D: There has been a lot of talk in the United States about the My Lai Massacre. Were you aware of any kind of atrocities involving civilians or military personnel while you were over there?

L: No, not at all. I don't know what the difference was being there in the late 1960's, middle 1960's, to being there in the 1970's. I don't know if it was the officers that were different or what, but I heard of nothing like that. The only atrocities I heard of were from the Viet Cong to us. To what they did to our men. This is what I've heard.

D: What kind of things did they do to our men?

L: Well, like one friend of mine was transferred and he was killed in an ambush with about twelve other guys. And I heard that they burned their bodies, of the Americans, after they ambushed them. And then I heard this one guy was skinned alive, just left there to die. I heard of a guy that had his head decapitated. Anyway,

they sent it home to his mother. Now, this is what I heard. I don't know if it's true or what. But when you get mail, you're supposed to burn it, because if they do find your body or capture you, they do have the address of your family or whatever it is. But I heard they did send it home to his family and I don't know if that's true or not. I don't really know.

But I never had come into any contact with any atrocities or even heard of any while I was there.

D: Do you feel that during the time that you were there you were under a tremendous amount of pressure?

L: In one respect. In one respect we did because of the pressure from home is what hurt because of these things we heard, these protests, "Get out of Vietnam! Don't do this, don't do that!" And we felt we were doing this. We felt we were doing good there. We were there for a purpose, to help these people, and at home, we had no support. They were all against us. We heard of guys getting off the plane in California--going through Nam for a year and getting off the plane and some civilian shooting him because he was against the war.

And we were scared of going home. We didn't know what the people were going to do to us. And then we come home, we wanted to hide in the corner, be coward. We didn't know what to do. That's what hurt us most of the time. The pressures as far as the military is concerned, we can handle it because that was our job. Some things we didn't like, some things we didn't want to do, but that was our job.

D: Did you find a lot of drugs being used over there?

L: Marijuana. I smoked marijuana there. I know lots of guys that did. There were a few people that used morphine. They would steal it from the medical supply, but not much, not like it was free-flowing. This wasn't used out in the field on guys either. They never went out in the field and smoked grass. This was, we were back in the rear, if we happened to be back there for a week or two or a couple days, to relax, or beer, we used beer a lot. They would show us some stupid movie, a Combat or Batman or something like that, which was really strange. We would drink a lot of beer and get drunk, or smoke marijuana. But there was no heavy drugs, no addictions. It was nothing like that. And I was glad, too, because I wouldn't trust a person like that next to me.

D: Was the use of marijuana, for example, was it pretty open

or did the officers know about it?

- L: No. It was not open. I don't know if the officers knew. I don't think they knew. Because most of the guys, it was kind of done secretly, "Here's some grass," or, "Let's go over here and smoke this." No, it was not done in the open.
- D: And it wasn't done in the field, under combat conditions?
- L: No, no not at all.
- D: How about your food? Did they feed you pretty well over there? Was there ever any time when you would have liked to have had more or something better?
- L: I would like to have had more every day! It wasn't hard. I wasn't used to that kind of thing. I like five meals a day or whatever, but we didn't have that. When we were in the rear, we had pretty good food in the mess hall, but out in the field, it was C rations. And sometimes we were lucky if we got C rations. Thanksgiving of 1967 we were up in the mountains on this operation and you'd read in the papers that all these guys get these holiday feasts and all that stuff. Well, they do, in the rear. But we had nothing. We were pulling grass up from the stream and cooking it, boiling it, trying to make some type of soup because we had nothing. We had no supplies. It was really bad.
- But, I know I learned to eat a lot of things like ham and lima beans--and I hated those things, I couldn't stand them. I learned to eat those. Whatever you can eat you'd eat.
- D: When you talk about C rations, now what are C rations?
- L: Food that had been canned for forty years. I had one pack of C rations that was dated October 1942. That's before I was born. It really wasn't that bad. I guess they're--I don't know how they can them--but they're supposed to last years and years. We proved that. But in some of the C rations in cans, there were ham and lima beans, cheese, crackers, jam, peanut butter, fruit. I think the B-1A ration was the one with the fruit. Franks and beans, beans and meatballs, if you can fathom the idea of eating these, oh! Ham, ham slices, they were really, really salty, that was in eggs and ham. That was what we had.
- D: Did you have any training stateside as far as how to survive in the field, with food, what kind of plants you could use?

L: Well, plants, animals, how to clean them; snakes, rabbits and stuff like that.

D: Did you get a lot of chances to use that training?

L: No. I really didn't see many animals over there. We saw snakes, but I wasn't going to--no way I'm going to tangle with a snake. If I get that hungry, okay. But we never really got that hungry except for that Thanksgiving. That's when we had no food there. That was really bad. But for the most part, we had C rations pretty much delivered out in the field. So, it wasn't too bad.

D: How about medical--you mentioned to me before that you got the Purple Heart, so you might have some experience with the medicine end of it?

L: As far as the medical people are concerned, the corpsmen, the Navy corpsmen, they were outstanding. I couldn't ask for a better bunch of guys in my life. You'd see these guys, and they look like a regular guy, and they didn't even carry a rifle. Some of them did, but most of them didn't even carry a rifle. But when the shit hit the fan, they were there. I mean, man, these guys would run from guy to guy to guy. I don't care what kind of fire you were receiving--automatic, rifle, artillery, they were there. Out in the field, those guys were something else. I got a lot of respect for those guys. They really did their job. They knew what they were doing.

D: How did you happen to get wounded?

L: It was shrapnel from a hand grenade. I received shrapnel right between my eyes, in the back, and in the leg. And they were right there. I saw guys get shot in the groin, in the gut, anywhere, and those guys were there and they patched them up. They were something else. Those guys were really good.

D: How long did it take to evacuate people that had been wounded?

L: Well, in this one instance I can remember it was about maybe a half hour after we got hit, because there was so much fire coming in, the choppers couldn't land anyway. It was about half an hour. Sometimes it would take less than ten minutes, they were there. It just depended on what type of terrain you were in, what type of fire you were receiving, something like that. But for the most part, they were there pretty fast.

Medical facilities in the rear areas were good, too. You had your dentists there, you had doctors, you had hospitals. You had a lot of guys get venereal disease from going on R&R [Rest and Relaxation]. They'd come back to Vietnam and they'd be kind of low; and they'd drink a lot of beer and they end up with gonorrhoea. After they come back from R&R, that beer would just kill these guys; they'd be hurting so bad. But they were taken care of right away.

There was never any qualms about, "Don't tell anybody you got some type of VD." There was nothing like that. It was really out in the open. They knew when guys were going on R&R what they were going to do and the purpose of R&R. It wasn't just going to see what the City of Hong Kong was like or the City of Bangkok. They knew what they were going for. And they would have a lot of penicillin on hand for these guys.

And if your teeth were starting to go bad, from being out in the field, the food, and whatever, you were taken care of.

- D: Did the field experience have a lot to do with your teeth? Were there a lot of guys whose teeth went bad because of the water or food, whatever?
- L: I had a few teeth that started to get really bad cavities in them from drinking this water, and the food. I don't know what it really has to do with it. I don't know what kind of biological thing it is.
- D: But it did have something to do with the food?
- L: Yes, I think so. The food, the water, especially the water out in the field. Some of that stuff was really, really, bad.
- D: Was there any other kind of things besides venereal disease and tooth decay that either you or somebody else came in contact with in terms of medical problems? I understand there was a lot of fungus, foot fungus, and that, from the water.
- L: Yes, right. They call that "Mersian Foot." I had that myself. You're supposed to take your boots off whenever you can, powder your feet, put your socks back on--that's a lot of trouble. It sounds like a little thing, but it's a lot of trouble when you're moving a lot. And a lot of times you wouldn't do it. You'd go two, three days, you're always wet.

One day I took off my boots, and I took off my socks and my socks were stuck to my skin. I pulled them off and my feet were bleeding. It looked like a dried up sponge or something. They were, oh, it was just ugly! So, they'd send you back to the rear because you can't move, your feet are sore, your feet are bleeding; and you have to keep your feet powdered, and you have to wear some type of sandal or no shoes at all for a few days. That was a big problem. A lot of guys had that trouble.

D: Was there anything else that they had problems with?

L: I heard kidneys were a lot of trouble, because of water. When I ended up in the hospital with my kidneys, that's what they told me, that because of the water situation, being out there, that more than likely that's where I got it from. He said, "That's what a lot of people have had--kidney trouble."

D: Did you have intestinal problems, diarrhea, that kind of thing?

L: Yes. Dysentery was a problem with I first got there; what they call getting acclimatized, getting used to the food, the type of food you eat, and when you eat it. I had it for days, and I was miserable. I had it out in the field, and I was more miserable out in the field because you're always moving somewhere and every five minutes you got to go to the bathroom, till there's nothing to go, but you go anyway. I ended up using my T-shirt for shit paper. It was really something else.

I knew one kid who had dysentery for about a week. He was six [foot] five. He'd go to sleep in the rear area in the rack, he'd go to sleep, he'd go out and take a crap, he'd come back in and five minutes later he was back out again. Dysentery was a big thing. I know guys that crapped themselves. I'd done it myself. You can't hold it. It's just something else. I think that was the worst experience. I would rather face, I think, a thousand Viet Cong than dysentery.

D: How about sleeping: Because of the constant moving and interruptions, did you find it difficult to sleep?

L: No, not when I had the chance. Even in an ambush, I didn't have any trouble sleeping. One guy would stay awake and one guy would go to sleep. That's how it was most of the time. Nobody ever went to sleep all at the same time, unless you were in the rear. If you're out in the field, there's always somebody awake.

You've got to watch every two hours, or whatever the guys want to do, however they want to divide the night up. Every hour, every half hour, two hours, or they'd sit there and bullshit until three or four in the morning and then start their watch.

I had one experience of staying awake for 112 hours. That was the most miserable experience, I think. It was terrible. I couldn't believe I was awake that long. And finally, when I did get the chance to--nighttime, we were setting up perimeter watch. I had the first watch and I had my arms inside my coat to keep warm--it had been raining, miserable--and I fell asleep standing up. I just fell right over, boom.

D: Why were you awake so long?

L: Just moving, constantly moving, getting into a few combat situations, but it was just the constant moving. It was really miserable. We really didn't know why we were doing things, you just did them.

D: When you moved around so much, how much territory in Vietnam did you cover? What areas were you in?

L: I was all the way down south, near Chu Lai. I was only down there once, all the up to the DMZ [Demilitarized Zone]. North is where we--after the first, maybe, six months--worked out of mostly: the DMZ, Quang Dien, Que Son.

D: What's the DMZ like?

L: Well, I saw a good description of it when I came home. When I was at my mother's house, I looked out the back and they were building a highway. You know how they tore all the trees down? It looked just desolate. That's exactly what the DMZ looked like. It looked like it was purposely built that way so you tell the difference between North Vietnam and South Vietnam. But that's what it looked like, just a desolate place [like] they were building something and had all the trees torn out, blown down, burned.

And that was what they called the only place we had a free fire zone. That was the only place where you didn't have to worry about if a man had a weapon, you can shoot anybody, at any time, as long as you're in that demilitarized zone.

D: Did you have any special instructions other than those, as far as coming in contact with the enemy at that area?

L: No. No, we did the same thing up the DMZ as we did farther south. We had ambushes every night, patrols trying to find the Viet Cong, platoon-sized patrols, company-sized. We had one experience--it was on May 25, 1967--we were on Operation Hickory. And the night before, our squad set up an ambush, and we had a new kid with us, and he was in the rear security area and he fell asleep, which was a no-no. You just don't fall asleep.

His fire team leader, which was Jim Boyington, he went back and kicked him in the head and he says, "Get the hell up! You want to get us killed?" So, the kid sat up the rest of the night and we were sitting there waiting, and waiting, and waiting. And the rest of the company was behind us. Then all of a sudden we heard mortars going off, and the company was receiving mortar fire. And we were in radio contact with them and we couldn't see anything, and all of a sudden, about a hundred yards in front of us, there was three mortar tubes. We could see the flashes, when they were putting the mortars in and going out. We could see them, just big as life, just prt-t-t-t. So, we opened up fire on them, and we knocked them out for the rest of the night.

There was no mortar fire, no nothing. We moved our squad back, and on sunrise, on the 25th, we called in to see if we can go down and check and see if there was any bodies. I didn't like that idea. I thought to myself, "This is no good. Not down here, not just our squad." And then we got on line to sweep the area. And we walked maybe five minutes, 150 yards, and then we were ambushed. Bingo! Three-fourths of the squad was hit, chopped down. And that's where I was really scared. These guys were shooting. We were shooting back and forth; and these guys were right in front of us. It was like they were only ten, fifteen meters away. You can see them throwing hand grenades.

This is when we had the M-16 rifle. This was a bad rifle, when I was there. It was good as far as killing somebody, but if it doesn't fire, it doesn't kill anybody. And a lot of them were jamming at that time.

And it was a nasty fire-fight. We finally got reinforced. But a lot of guys were hit that day. We lost a lot of people. And I remember one kid, Jim Boyington, he was right next to me. And he was shot in the shoulder. I never knew it the whole time. I mean that amazed me that he never said, "Ow!" or "Ugh!" He never said nothing, not a word!

And my squad leader was hit pretty bad. He was hit twice and he was hit with shrapnel. And the corpsman come run-

ning over and he says, "Help me carry this guy." So, I was dragging him. I didn't want to stand up because the fire was heavy, so I was pulling him. I was crawling and pulling him. I thought, "This is no good." That poor guy's in pain and I'm dragging him through all these weeds and shit." So, another guy finally come and help me. We each had an arm. Here we are, not even thinking of fireman's carry or nothing like this. We each got an arm and (clap) took off.

That's when the planes come in. They called in the jets, and the jets come in with napalm. That was beautiful to see those guys come in there. Oh, it was just great seeing those jets coming in.

And we pulled back and, I don't know, it must have taken us an hour to get the wounded out. There was quite a few, quite a few guys that were hit. And that day we were sitting there waiting and waiting and waiting. We didn't know what we were going to do next. So, our great captain--he got a Bronze Star, by the way, for leaving his chow up on the hill and taking us in the combat situation.

And we went down into this gully after these guys. And they were in bunkers with machine guns. And they ambushed us again, only company-size ambush this time. I couldn't believe it. I mean, there was rifle fire coming from everywhere! I could not believe. You couldn't even stand up, that's how thick it was. You couldn't even stand up. The guy in front of me was shot, three guys on my left side were shot, the guy in back of me was shot. Right in front of me there was a machine gunner, and he had an assistant machine gunner that fed the bullets in. And he was on the wrong side at the time, so he crawled over on the right side of him, and he got shot. And if he wouldn't have been there, I'd have probably got that bullet. I couldn't believe it. It was just unreal.

I was carrying the M-79. It was a grenade launcher. But I couldn't even fire it, because if you fire that, it's a forty millimeter grenade that goes out of the barrel; and if it goes fifteen meters, if it hits anything, it'll go off. Well, fifteen meters is too close. I couldn't even shoot my weapon.

But I couldn't believe it. I really couldn't believe that that many bullets can be coming at you at one time. Finally, we got reinforced again and we pulled back a little bit and we were crawling back. This one kid says, "Well, you could stand up now cause it's okay." There's a gully in back of us, it was all our wounded. I mean

just guys wounded all over the place! And not five minutes later, this same machine gunner that said, "You could stand up now," come running back screaming, "Fuck you guys! Fuck you guys! I'm going home! I'm going home!" He had two and a half fingers shot off, but he was happy at the time. He was full of dope, morphine. But, oh, it was just unreal! That same guy, I just talked to him five minutes ago, and he was, two and a half fingers, gone.

D: What did you think about with all this rifle fire coming at you? Did you really think about anything?

L: Yes. I thought about death. I thought, "This was it." I really thought this was it. I mean "We are gone, every one of us." I thought we were going to get over-run. I looked at one of my platoon sergeants. I looked at him, I says, "Sergeant Hampton, we're not going to make it. We're going to die." I really believed that. At that time, I really believed it. I knew we weren't going to make it out of there. I was scared to death.

D: How much time elapsed during this period?

L: This is a period of a whole day, twenty-four hours. It was a bad day, a really bad operation. It was heavy. A lot of combat within Operation Hickory. It was really tough.

D: A while ago you mentioned that you were wounded and you had shrapnel. How did it feel to get hit with shrapnel?

L: It burned. It penetrated the skin. It felt like a pinch. It really wasn't that bad, because the shrapnel pieces weren't that big. It burned, though, from flying through the air and exploding, hot, and it hurt. Just like you cut yourself on a barbed wire. And you'd sweat, and sweat would run into your cut and it would burn. That's how it felt. I mean I wouldn't know how it would feel to get a chunk this size and chop half of my leg off or anything like that.

D: As far as impact, there wasn't a great deal of impact?

L: No, because they were small pieces. It wasn't bad at all. I was lucky. Guys that do get shot or hit with shrapnel bad, I don't want any part of it. I had one friend of mine that was shot three times in the stomach with the M-60, 7.62 millimeter. And he was in bad shape for a while. But it wasn't bad for me.

D: In Vietnam, what kind of organization did you use as far as securing areas? How did you take over an area, and did you set up camp or anything?

L: If we took over an area or if we were just going out for, say, an operation, and we wanted to get this one area set up for the night, maybe for the command post, they would set up a perimeter, 360 degree perimeter, maybe two or three, whatever you can afford, how many guys you can afford per foxhole. Then you would dig a foxhole and that would be your home for how long you would stay there.

We didn't build bunkers, or we didn't use tents, or nothing like that. Only once we used tents, and that was when I first got there, and we didn't use them again. You weren't there long enough to set up anything like that. Just the foxhole, that was it. If you were lucky enough to have a poncho, you had a poncho.

D: You mentioned before that the Viet Cong had some bunkers. Were they in the habit of setting up permanent establishments?

L: Well, depending on where you were at. They'd been there for how many years? So, they had a lot of time to do everything. But they had the same type of tactic we did, hit and run, hit and run. But if you come into some bunkers or something like that, you knew they were there for quite a while. These underground tunnels and stuff like that.

D: Did you have an experience with underground tunnels?

L: Yes, I had a few. The first time, I was asked to go in a tunnel. I was never told. I was never forced: "You are going in that hole because you are small." I was asked and I said yes because I felt it was a little bit of pride, mostly, I guess, but I felt it was my job. And I went in, I carried a forty-five, and I carried a flashlight. And the first time, I had no contact with the Viet Cong, but my heart thought I did. It was going and going and going and going. We fired green smoke in the hole before I went in, and I got sick as a dog after that, because that green smoke just went up my nose and, oh, it was terrible. But it was interesting because you can see these different things, these little underground tunnels. They have hospitals in some of them, weapon caches or something. But it was interesting, too.

- D: You say, "the tunnel." Now, when you talk in terms of the tunnel, a lot of people will think a small opening that you had to crawl through as . . .
- L: That's it. That's right. That's exactly what it is. It's a small opening in a hole and you crawl in.
- D: How extensive, then, were they once you got in there?
- L: Some of them were pretty big. I mean, some of them could be as big as this room, and some of them could be probably as big as the whole house, where they had hospitals, underground, they dug out, they had beds. But it can be really big. I never saw one that was really, really huge, like a hospital or something like an infirmary, but I have heard and seen pictures of them that big.
- D: We hear a lot of stories about using children, the Viet Cong using children or using women. Did you ever have an experience with any kids over there that might have given you some trouble?
- L: Not as far as trying to shoot somebody. We had trouble with the kids stealing your wallets or something like that, but that was about all. They never had any hand grenades tied to them or something like that, no. No problem.
- D: Did children or other civilians come around the army camps very much or were they pretty much restricted?
- L: Out in the field, we were near a village and we were around them quite a bit. It was interesting to see the kids. I don't know where these kids pick this up at, because they don't see movies or anything, but they would always call you "Joe" just like they did in World War II. I don't know where they got this thing at: "Hey, Joe, give me a cigarette, Joe." Little kids, three years old, four years old, smoking cigarettes. It's really strange.

But I've gone into villages and had pop. Like one time we got a Pepsi. But it was fifty cents a can at that time. Or we got what they call "tiger piss." It was a form of beer, Vietnamese beer. Just depending on what type of village you were in, if they were Viet Cong sympathizers, you didn't really trust the people. Of course, I never really trusted the people in the first place, because I didn't know whether they were good guys or bad guys or something like that.

But one experience I can really remember was first time I was out in the field, a gunnery sergeant--he was a big black fellow--he says, "I want you to get a haircut." And I said, "I don't have no money." And they got a Vietnamese barber, and I got a haircut with those hand clippers, and it was terrible. But I walked back to my pup tent--this is one time we did use a pup tent--and I saw this line of guys standing outside my tent. And I see my tent flapping up and down in the breeze. I thought, "What the hell is going on here, man?" And here there was some broad in there taking five dollars for each guy that come in. I couldn't believe it. This is one of my first days out in the field in Vietnam. I couldn't believe it! I crawled inside my tent and there was this broad, naked, in there. I says, "What are you doing in here?" She says, "You boom-boom, five dollars?" I says, "No. Get the fuck out of here. I'm here to kill you people, not fuck you!" That was my attitude when I first got there. But she said, "You get out while I get dressed?" And I said, "No! This is my tent. You get out!" So, she got dressed and she left. But it was unreal. Just right in the middle of our perimeter, there's some broad screwing all these guys. I couldn't believe it.

D: How about your commanding officers? Do you feel that you had pretty good leadership, generally?

L: Generally speaking, yes. Our first commanding officer I was under, he was kind of strange. I don't remember his name, but he was a mean bastard. And he was really aggressive. He was the type, "Let's go get them," gung-ho and all that shit. That's who we were up in the DMZ with. I don't know if I like that type of guy or not.

Then at the same time, we had a lieutenant who was a baby. This guy went through Officer's Candidate School and was supposed to be intelligent. And he never swore, he never smoked. And I never saw a Marine that never swore or smoked. All he did was eat candy. He'd come on a daytime patrol with us and he ended up leaving his forty-five out in the field and we had to go back and get it.

We were near Chu Lai for an operation and we were setting up with Gulf Company and he got lost, by himself. All night he was lost! Could you imagine? This guy's leading men and he got lost! Just from going from one company to another! His squad leader come over to me, he said, "If you see anything out there tonight, don't shoot, because they can't find the lieutenant." I couldn't believe it. And then that operation ended up in a disaster, because we were sweeping one way and the

First Battalion, First Marines were sweeping the other way; and the Viet Cong were supposed to be in the middle, and here we were getting artillery fire from our own . . .

D: From your own people?

L: From our own people.

D: Did that happen very often?

L: Just a couple times, maybe two, three times. But that was a nasty one because when they fire artillery, they shoot it and they shoot it farther. They just follow up on it, every shot. I was scared to death. Your hear this whistle going, whew, boom! I was scared to death. That was a bad time.

D: You think that your experience in the war affected you emotionally at all? Did it change you in any way?

L: Oh, I would say definitely. I don't think I've forgotten a lot of things deep down. I mean, I feel I may have forgotten them on the surface, but I really don't think I have done it deep down because I, myself, am a lot more aggressive than I used to be when I was younger. In high school, you're used to getting in fights and stuff like that because it's just a thing. But I'm just more irritable. I recall certain things, I judge people quicker.

Yes, I think it really affected me. I think I could use a good psychiatrist to tell you the truth, because I'm not as tender as I used to be with Mary. I can see that difference right there. I can see where I'm not that tender; and I can see where if the kids are going to get in a fight, I tell them to go out and fight, "Don't mess around." And I can see that. I can see where my feelings, I don't have a lot of feelings anymore. I don't feel sorry for a lot of things like I should. If I see somebody that's hurt, I don't really feel, "That's too bad." Fuck it, that's the way I feel. And that's bad, to me. Yes, I'd say it really affected me.

D: How about some of the guys over there? Is there anybody that had nervous breakdowns because of their experience or anything like that?

L: I saw one really bad one and one kind of comical one. One kid was from Cleveland--I think his name was Tinkerbelle. I think that was his last name. No, his last name was Tinker, they called him Tinkerbelle. That was it. But he was a black dude. I saw him go crazy. I

mean, just babbling and running around. I heard--now this is what I heard--that he ran over to one of the general's offices in the rear and jumped up on the desk and started dancing around saying, "I want to go home! I want to go home!" But he did end up home because I saw him in the hospital when I got home. He was in the psychiatric ward.

And another kid, when we first went up the DMZ, he was a new kid and we were telling him about the experiences we had the first time. And he was getting kind of scared, which I don't blame him. But he was pouring water over his head and he was saying, "They're not going to break me! They're not going to break me!" that kind of thing. But that was all I saw as far as that was concerned.

I saw one, I guess what they call "battle fatigue," or oh I forget what they call it. But one of the guys were wounded and we were up at that Operation Hickory. Well, not wounded, but I mean he was in a stupor, like. And I was helping him along. Me and this other guy were helping him. I couldn't find any wound on him. I couldn't see him bleeding or nothing like that. And I looked at the gunnery sergeant behind me and that's when he told me that he just had some--what do you call it? It's not really battle fatigue, I forget what they call it. But he was like in shock. He didn't know where he was at, he just walked along like he was blank. That was the only thing I saw there--once. But it was strange. The guy just walked along, not knowing nothing. It was unreal.

D: Did you ever have to take any prisoners? Did you have any experience with taking prisoners?

L: Yes. We went to one village--I can't remember the name of it--we took all male prisoners from the age of twelve to nine thousand if they had them. And this one experience I had, I was taking this man and he had three children. One was about five, one was about four, and one was about one or two. And he was saying something in Vietnamese. He was going like this (demonstrates) and putting his hands in front of him and bowing and everything. And I had to take him. I had no choice. If it was up to me, I'd have said, "Go ahead and go with your family somewhere." But I had no choice. And he was begging me like, that's what it was like, begging me. And his kids were crying and hanging on him. I felt about one inch high. I felt like an ass! And I was shooting at his feet, I was pushing him. I was being really aggressive with this man. But I knew I felt bad for the man. And I finally turned him over to one of the other

guys. I says, "You take him. I cannot do it. I can't do it to this man. I can't bring him over there." I mean, I don't know if they were going to bring the guy back. They're going to question all these people and bring them back. I don't know. That's what they told us. I really felt bad.

But my squad leader, he said to me, "Why didn't you just shoot the man?" And that, to me, made me sick, because I thought, "Shoot the man in cold blood right in front of his kids? Not me. Never!" I could shoot a man that is going to shoot me in a minute, but never something like that.

D: What did they usually do with these prisoners, just interrogate them?

L: Supposedly it was to take them away in choppers. I don't know where they did the interrogating at. But to take them away, interrogate them, and supposedly bring them back to their village when they were finished, if they were not Viet Cong.

They also passed out to the South Vietnamese people, these ID cards. If you had an ID card, you're not a VC, which is kind of stupid to me. Anybody can get one. They have their picture on it, but God. We even captured a guy that was a Viet Cong and had an ID card. That was kind of stupid on the government's part. I don't know whose idea that was. They even made us carry around Geneva Convention cards. I have it still at home. They said, "If you get captured, you hand them that Geneva Convention card and demand your rights. My name is so and so and . . .

D: Name, rank and serial number.

L: Right. And then demand your rights. I'm sure!

D: You mentioned that they were taken away in choppers. I talked once to a guy who was in an airborne division and he said when they interrogated them, they sometimes let them out about a thousand feet in the air if they didn't know the answers. Is that pretty accurate?

L: I'd say that would be accurate, but I wouldn't say it was like that to everybody all the time. I would say, if you would get a hard core Viet Cong, say three or four of them in a chopper, and you want to know something--guys have done this--they said, "Well, you won't tell us? Throw out the first one!" Then the other three are going to start jabbering away. They're going to

talk about anything.

You don't just take up anybody and say, "Okay, we're going to throw you out." I suppose you can get somebody that's really that kind of animal, but I never saw anything like that.

D: You mentioned the South Vietnamese before and you said that you felt they were lazy and that they sort of lost it here recently at the end of the war. What experience did you have with them?

L: Well, we'd go on ambushes with them, or daytime patrols, or something like this. We never kept them in the rear, never kept them in back of us. There was always two Marines to every Vietnamese, because we knew we couldn't trust them. We don't know if they'd run. We couldn't even be sure if they were Viet Cong. But to me, they were lazy and shiftless. They had the attitude: "Well, they're here, let them do the job, let the United States guys do the job and we'll just sit back on our ass and clean our weapons." And that's exactly what they did.

Don't get me wrong. There were some good South Vietnamese regular army. But for the most part I saw, the guys were lazy. We'd go out on ambushes at night, it'd be pouring down rain. They'd be sitting in their hooch, nice, dry, smoking cigarettes, drinking coffee. And we'd be going out and do the job they're supposed to be doing. That upset me.

We had one guy--we were on this river, and we were in Cao-Dai, a little village. And we were setting up a perimeter watch along the river. And to every foxhole, there was one South Vietnamese guy. So, we figure, we're going to put this South Vietnamese guy on watch first. It's the earliest, you don't have the chance of falling asleep--and the son of a bitch wouldn't even do it. He had a BAR, Browning Automatic Rifle, that was given from the United States government. He had it covered, his poncho covered, so the rain wouldn't hit it and rust it. It was nice, it was shiny, boy, it was really a nice weapon. And we told the guy to get up and get on watch, and he said, "No." The language barrier was tough too, but he knew what we wanted him to do, and he said, "No."

So, our fire team leader went over and uncovered his weapon. We knew that'd get him up, because they don't like to get their weapons rusty. So, he got up and sat up.

And then in an ambush, we went on an ambush one night and we got a Viet Cong, and the son of a bitches, the just don't want to do anything. They just want to sit there. I was harassing one--maybe I shouldn't have been--one time on this truck. But there was a colonel on the truck, too, and he got mad at me for harassing this man.

And as I look back on it, I think that's why they lost the war. They weren't aggressive. I mean, there were a few that were aggressive people, that really wanted to win the war and get away from Communism. But for the most part, to me, they were lazy.

D: The South Vietnamese Army, I have heard other people sort of mention instances where there were some black market activities with American military equipment and civilian supplies. Do you have any knowledge of that?

L: No, not really. The only time I've ever seen any type of military stuff like clothing or boots--all right, when you drive along the roads you would see these, like, how farmers sit out and sell corn alongside the road--these people would be selling boots and all kind of military stuff. That's the only time I really saw anything that has to do with . . . It has to be black market.

The reason why they weren't closed, I don't know. It seems to me that the government would go right up to these stands and close them right now. But they would sell these jungle boots and jungle utilities, and wet belts and stuff like that. It was kind of uncanny. Pepsi Cola, they had Pepsi Cola over there.

D: Was there anything that really frustrated you, that really made you mad during the time that you were there?

L: The only time I really felt frustrated was in June of 1967. I found out that the kid I went in the service with was killed. First of all, my brother was ordained in May, on May 25, 1967, the day he was killed. That day is big in my mind because that's the day everything really happened--that big battle we had, the death of my friend and my brother's ordination. It all happened that day. And I waited eight years for my brother to be a priest and I wanted to see him be a priest and all of a sudden I can't even be there. And then on top of it, my buddy was killed on the same day.

Every time I got mail I would put it in a pile, like I would open up ones from my friends first and then from my family and then from Mary. I would sort of like

save the best for last. And the first letter I opened up was from a lady, her son was in the Marine Corps, and she wrote to me and she says, "How beautiful the ordination was and how beautiful the first Mass was. It was just a fantastic day." Then all of a sudden she says, "The day was marred by the fact that your very best friend, Joey Siciliano, was killed."

And I sat there, and I could not believe it. I had nobody to run to. Nobody to say, "Hey!" Nobody can understand the friendship that we had. We were really close. And I couldn't go to anybody. I cried. I was frustrated I couldn't be there hugging his mother or somebody hugging me. I wanted somebody to hug me and say, "Hey!"

I told the captain about it, and I says, "My friend was just killed." And he says, "That's the way things go in war." And I thought, "You son of a bitch, man! It's not the way things go in war, not to me! That was me! That was personal!" I take it very personal. And I was hurt and I was really frustrated. I couldn't do anything. I couldn't go to anybody. I just sat there. I wanted to kill somebody so bad, I wanted to get every Viet Cong in front of me and just kill every son of a bitch that was there. I was really frustrated. I was sick. I couldn't believe it. He was dead.

I saw him, we left on the operation--that happened in May--and we left for the operation on Mother's Day in May of 1967. He ran into me. He walked up to me and I says, "What the hell are you doing here?" Cause he just got out of the hospital in Japan, he was wounded, he stepped on a booby trap. So, he was back in the country about two months. We spent the night together talking and bullshitting what we were going to do when we go home. "We're going to paint the town red. We're going to get drunk. We're going to all get together with our friends and really have a good time." And then, two weeks later I saw him on Mother's Day. And I said, "What are you doing?" He says, "We're leaving on an operation." I says, "Yes, us too." Never figuring it was the same operation. Because usually they'd brief you and this one they didn't brief you. And we thought that kind of strange, why there was no briefing for this operation. And the last thing he said to me was, "Take care. And remember, you never walk alone."

D: Why was it that you weren't briefed for this operation?

L: I don't know. I really don't. I don't know why. It was the only operation we were never told, "Well, there's

going to be a lot of Viet Cong, or a few Viet Cong," or "We think there's going to be a lot of contact." I don't know why. But it was the only one we were never briefed on. And it was one of the biggest. It was the first major operation inside the DMZ. In fact, when we come back, our company was one of the worst hit companies. In our platoon alone, out of fifty-five people, we had about twelve. It was twelve people. We had to wait in the rear area until we got more people to go back out in the field again.

Another time we were frustrated is when we were in the DMZ at that time. We crossed back to the river out of the DMZ. We were out of the DMZ and we felt we were safe. We weren't safe, but we felt, "Oh, God, out of there." And all of a sudden, our captain says we were going back up there. With twelve guys in the platoon. Everybody started bitching and screaming. They're scared. And then a guy says, "Hey, what are you guys, mice or Marines?" Or something like that. And we said, "Piss on you! We don't want to go back!" (Laughter) That was our job. We had to go back, with twelve lousy people.

You'd see your friends carried out. Here they have guys just carrying guys, upon guys, wounded, killed! It was terrible! And it was frustrating that you couldn't do anything about it, you couldn't do anything! You just sat there, and oh, God, all these people, all these friends of mine. I don't know if I can ever do it again.

D: During the time that you were in Vietnam, how much--it's a difficult question, I suppose, to sort of put your finger on, but how much time would you say you actually were out fighting in the field as opposed to sitting around and just killing time or doing details?

L: I wouldn't say it was a whole hell of a lot, because the only time you really fought is when they wanted to find you. You really didn't find them very often. I'd say out of the, I think, maybe it was eleven months I was there, I'd say maybe four months was actually some type of combat operations or ambushes.

D: What did you talk about in your off time? What did the guys talk about?

L: Oh, we talked about our girls, if you had one, or any type of girl. Or R and R, if you went on R and R. Favorite food, pizza, pop; what we're going to eat when we got back. How they're going to get drunk, drink a

lot of beer, a lot of booze. That was about it. Cars, sports.

A really strange thing happened one night. We had a radio, it was just one of those regular military radios, and we had an armed forces radio station, and we were listening to a Cassius Clay boxing match. And all of a sudden, something broke in on the radio and it said, "And it's going, going, gone!" And it said, "Babe Ruth hit his sixtieth home run. And back to the boxing match!" And we don't know what it was. No type of commercial. It was really strange.

And another time with the radio, we were up north and Hanoi Hanna broke in on the radio and said, "Two-twenty-six better turn around and go back because you're fighting superior forces, you're going to be wiped out." She wasn't too far away from that, because we damn near got wiped out.

D: This was in Operation Hickory?

L: Yes, right.

D: What about Hanoi Hanna? Did you listen to her very much? How did she affect the guys?

N: No. I don't think she bothered us too much. We knew if there was a lot of guys out there we were going to have trouble, but hell, that's only normal. I mean, we didn't sit there and really listen. She didn't psyche us out. No. She didn't do that. I mean, we never had anybody think, "God, this war is useless." We never had dissent among the guys, ever. They were always ready to go do their job. They didn't like it. We'd bitch a lot. We'd say how screwed up the Marine Corp was, but all those guys had the pride that went along with it, too.

I'm glad I was there when I was. I'm glad I wasn't there in the 1970's.

D: Why not?

L: I think I'd have been disappointed, because I watched on TV some of these specials they would have on how these guys would get orders to move, and they wouldn't move, they would just sit there. And I don't want anybody around me like that in that type of situation because I don't think I can depend on them.

I mean, okay, I finally began to realize that we weren't there for what I thought we were there for. I just wouldn't want to be around people like that. I couldn't

trust them. And if I couldn't trust somebody that was behind me . . . I'm just glad, I'm glad I wasn't there for the drugs, the heroin or whatever they were doing. I'm glad I wasn't there for that.

D: What do you think caused the change? Do you think it was the political atmosphere at home that caused the change in attitude in the soldiers over there between the time you were there and then, say, in the early 1970's?

L: Yes, yes. I would think everything started coming out then about the Vietnam War, how useless it was and why we were there. Because when I was there, there was never much talk before that about why we were there. Cause we didn't go there until March of 1965--that's when the first ground troops went in. I graduated in June of 1965, so there wasn't a whole hell of a lot.

But I think the politics of the country, the people, the feelings of the people, that's when it started to come on a full scale. Why? They knew. A lot of guys started to think, "God, this is wrong." But I never thought that. I never thought it was wrong. And even today, I don't feel I was wrong.

D: Would you go back again, if a war broke out again, or no? Would you want to go back?

L: I would want to go back if I knew it was to help somebody, to help a country get away from Communism. Then I would want to help them. But I wouldn't want to go back for this crap again, not to lose fifty thousand people and to lose three hundred thousand arms and legs for nothing. No. I wouldn't want my kids to do it either. And I would send my kids to--I would rather see them in Canada than go there and do something like that.

If you've got a purpose, if you're going to do it for a purpose, if these people need help and they want help and you want to give them the help for that purpose of giving them a Democratic society, okay, I can see it. I mean, war isn't good for anything. I mean, I don't want to see any type of war, but if it has to be, and if it's--I don't know how you can say--"A right war," because sometimes I look at World War II, I don't know--you're a history major, but I look back at some of the things in there and I think, "That was politics."

D: Do you think that the South Vietnamese might be better off under a Communist government? From the things that you saw over there and the type of people they were, do

you think that they could handle a Democracy?

L: I don't know. If you think, "Oh, man, these people might be better off in a Communist society," but then you're saying, "Russia would be better off in a Communist society," "East Germany is it, some type of Communism, Hungary." Then all these little countries are going to go into Communism and all of a sudden it's going to spread to bigger ones, and who's going to be left but us?

Where's it going to stop? I mean, what country isn't better off with Communism? That's what I'm getting scared about. Too many countries are starting to think they're better off with Communism. That means we're wrong. I don't think we're wrong. I think a Democratic society is a good one.

But the leaders, I thought, in Vietnam, were politics and crooked and I don't think they give a shit about their people

D: Would you go back to Vietnam as a tourist if you had the chance?

L: Yes. I would love to go. I would love to go with my family, and show them the different things. It's history. And I'd appreciate going to somewhere like Africa for World War II to see different things. But yes, I would like to go back. I've told Mary that a lot of times. I mean, I wouldn't want to go with a threat of some Communist taking me away or anything like that or shooting us or something, but I would like to go. Yes, I really would.

It's a pretty country. There's a lot of pretty things to see, a lot of nice things to see. Hue, before the battle of Tet in 1968, Hue was a beautiful city. Big, beautiful cathedral, statue of Christ out in the front, big, white statue. It was marvelous, beautiful country! In fact, when I was in the city of Hue, that was the first time I saw street lights. I didn't know Vietnam had street lights. I didn't know there was such a thing like that in Vietnam. I thought it was all these small villages and rice paddies and fish and all that stuff. That's all I ever thought it was. That was the only big city I ever saw there, but it was beautiful, a beautiful city.

D: How did the war affect the civilians? How was their life affected by it?

L: They had bad times with the Viet Cong. They were terrorists. They would kill village leaders; they would kill kids; they would steal their rice, burn their villages. This is what killed me. People would get mad in this country about us shooting napalm or dropping bombs. Like Jane Fonda went to North Vietnam and she saw all these things the North Vietnamese were showing her how they were treating the prisoners. But she only saw what they wanted her to see. I mean, didn't she realize that? I mean, is she that naive? They're not going to show her anything.

And the Viet Cong treated the people a hell of a lot worse than we ever did. We'd give them food. We'd give them C rations. We'd give them money. Those people had it made when we were there. But the Viet Cong, they would murder them, rape them, burn their villages, steal their food, force people to join them. But we were the bad guys, we were the heavies. And I didn't understand that. Because they were bad.

D: There are just three final questions I'd like to ask you, Bill. First of all, how do you evaluate what you did when you were in Vietnam? Do you think that the Marines or the United States government did anything of value during the time that you were there? Is there anything that you can say, "This is what I accomplished."

L: Just a little. I feel like we helped some of the people. We helped them to know what Americans were like. We didn't treat those people bad. A lot of us treated them really nice. We were nice to the kids. I loved the kids. We had a few idiots that would call them names and stuff, but for the most part, we helped clear their villages of Viet Cong. There was an old lady one time told me, "When the Army was here, the VC was here; when the Marines were here, VC wasn't here," which made me feel good. We were keeping them away from some of those people for the most part, from these villages. We helped them keep away from that terrorism because they were afraid of us. The Viet Cong were afraid of us. And that made me feel good. That's all I can see that we accomplished. I don't feel we did anything major.

D: Militarily?

L: No. I just don't see it. Maybe in the higher echelon they could have, but I couldn't see it. We really didn't do much for those people. We would protect them, but when we left, they were vulnerable again. So, I really don't see where we did any good. It makes me sick. It makes me heartsick, because I wasted my time, my buddy

died for nothing. He could be alive today. So could 49,000 other ones. They could be here and they're not. I felt like we were wasted, by our government and by the Vietnamese government.

D: When you left Vietnam, how were you processed out? What did they do?

L: I got sick. I think it was Med-O-Vac. That was in Charlie Three Med in Phu Bai for about four days. I had some type of kidney trouble at the time and they were giving me morphine. From there I went to Da Nang, the hospital there. And they were going to send me on the hospital ship, Repose, but they knew I was a short timer and I only had a few days left, and they says, "Do you want to go home?" I says, "Hell, yes I want to go home!" What kind of idiot wouldn't?

So, from there I went to the Philippines for about a week and then from the Philippines we stopped in Japan, we stopped in Alaska. That's where I had my first hot dog and my first look at a round-eyed, blond-haired girl. And it was really a nice feeling. And then we went to New Jersey--I stayed in a hospital there, an Army hospital, overnight. Then I was finally transferred into Philadelphia Naval Hospital, Philadelphia, Pennsylvania. And it was an experience, too. Really strange.

D: Was the kidney problem that you developed--that was as a result of Vietnam, through the water and that, as you said before?

L: Through the water, right.

D: Now, you've made now, several stops at hospitals. Is this just par for the course? Is this the way they handle it? It wasn't anything real serious?

L: No. But most of the guys, I mean, the guys I was flying home with that were Med-O-Vac, they were a lot worse off than I was. Guys had legs missing, arms missing. Some of them were in pretty bad shape. I was in [good] health compared to those guys.

D: Did you get to talk to any of these guys that had lost arms and legs?

L: Yes. In fact, I saw one in Philadelphia that I went through Infantry Training with.

D: How do they take that?

L: They weren't bitter.

D: No?

L: No. In fact, there was one right across from me in the hospital. He had both legs missing. Twenty-year-old kid. He was a damn good-looking kid. He had a real baby face on him, he had black hair. He had both legs missing. We used to call him, "Stump." And he'd race that chair of his up and down the halls. He was well liked by everybody. And his attitude was amazing. I could not have that kind of attitude. I would be very bitter, very bitter. I know I would. That's the type of person I am. That's the type of person I was made into. But he was fantastic. He was going to get married. He just had no bitterness about him. And they had amputee wards. Amputee upon amputee, and I never saw one that acted bitter. It was amazing. I know I couldn't do it.

D: How about your own adjustment, coming home to a peacetime situation and everybody else has not experienced what you've experienced? Was there a problem of adjustment.

L: Yes. I had a hard time for a while. I was drinking a lot. My mother would verify that. Every night I would get drunk once I got out of the service. That's all I would do, is drink. I'd have nightmares. I almost killed my sister one night. She woke me up. She was coming home from a date. She was in an apartment, her and her girlfriend. And her girlfriend's family was there, or her brothers and sisters were staying overnight and I was sleeping on the couch and my sister woke me up and I just went crazy, berzerk. I don't even remember it.

Her boyfriend at that time said, "Do you want me to stop him?" I says, "You black son-of-a-bitch!" The guy wasn't even black. And I says, "I'll kill you!" And this little kid started laughing, I threw him across the room, and I ran outside. It was the middle of December. I had no shoes and socks, no shirt. My sister said, "You get back in here!" I says, "I'll kill you, you mother fucker!" And she locked me out all night. And my mother and father come the next day walking up the steps. Here I am sprawled out on the steps!

I had a few nightmares when I was up at Mary's house and she was telling me about that I would wake up saying, "Get down! Get down! They're coming! There's too many of them!" or something like that. Or I would see Joe, I would be talking to Joe.

And it was hard for me for a while. Nobody said, "Hey, you guys did a nice job." A lot of times you would talk to somebody: "You're an asshole for going over there." And I thought, "Jesus! Really ungrateful."

D: Did that bother you that a lot of people didn't appreciate what you did?

L: Yes, right. I really felt bad. It makes you feel kind of like an ass. You're dumb. You should have stayed here or went to Canada. Cause everybody hated these guys that went to Canada. All of a sudden these guys that went to Canada are the heroes. I mean, I give them a lot of credit, but we have to get some too, I feel.

But we were wrong. I mean, those guys that went to Canada, they thought, at least they had the mind, they had their own mind to think, "We were wrong." At least we went about it the wrong way, because we could have won that war, probably in a month. It was too many politics. They didn't want to hurt nobody. But I felt we could have won that war. There was too many of this, "Don't shoot this, and don't shoot that. You can only shoot this." You're not going to win nothing like that because the other guys, the bad guys, could do whatever they want. And they don't get busted for that kind of stuff. They do what they want. They want to kill a village, they kill a village. They want to burn it down, they burn it down. They want to steal food, they steal food. If we talk back to somebody, they get pissed off at us. Our hands were tied.

D: What did they do, sort of reverting back to when you were in Vietnam as far as military discipline, when you were over there, was there any example of discipline?

L: Almost the same type as the States. You'd clean your weapon, you had inspections, stay out in the field. You were standing out in the middle of the field, you have an inspection. If you went on an ambush, they told you what type of personnel was supposed to be out there. You had to watch for booby traps. I mean, it wasn't as rough as the States, but there was discipline there. They had their same type.

D: How long after you were back would you say you were finally settled down? How long did it take you to sort of readjust?

L: I'd say about a year-and-a-half, two years.

D: Really?

- L: To get back and get used to this idea of being wrong, adjusting to the fact that Vietnam was wrong and being able to say it: "I was wrong. I wasn't supposed to be there."
- D: How long has it been now since you've been back?
- L: Eight years.
- D: Do you still think about it a lot?
- L: Yes. Quite a lot. Actually, because it was the only real experience I ever had in my entire life being on my own. It was the only real experience I ever had. I think about it quite a bit.
- D: Do you still have any nightmares?
- L: No.
- D: Pretty much over that?
- L: Yes. It doesn't bother me now.
- D: How do you feel about the recent events in Vietnam where South Vietnam has been overrun by the Communists and the government, of Saigon's fall and the Communists have taken over? Do you feel that your time has pretty much been wasted?
- L: Yes. Yes, I do feel it was wasted. I mean, that's what I thought we were there for in the first place, was to stop the aggression of taking over these main cities of the government, saving the people from Communism. And that's exactly what they're doing. They're taking over and doing everything we were supposed to stop. And yes, I do, it was wasted. Why? I look back and I'd say, "Why? Why all of this? Why all this death, all of this killing? Why all this dissent in our own country? For what reason? Kent State, for what? Those kids dissented for what?" It was a complete waste of time.
- And I feel bad. I feel guilty that those people were left over there. They have to get used to the Communist regime now because they have no choice. And I feel bad for the people that are here, the Vietnamese people that are here. Nobody likes them. Why? Because they got slanted eyes? Because they were Communist? Because they should stay in their own country and defend it? Or what? No. I think we owe them something. But at the same time, they owed us something, too. And they didn't come out with that either. They didn't come over and do what they

were supposed to do. That's what they owed us. They owed us to defend their own country and they didn't do it.

D: Well, before we conclude this interview, Bill, is there anything that we have missed that you can think of that you might want to add to this interview?

L: No, I really don't think there's anything I can think of that would be significant. I suppose if I thought about it a lot more there would be different things, but no, not right now I can't.

D: Okay, well I'd like to thank you for the interview and I think it'll be of great value to us. Thank you.

END OF INTERVIEW