

2012

Rozeboom, Tony

Sarah Bartz

Northwestern College - Orange City

Follow this and additional works at: <https://nwcommons.nwciowa.edu/vietnamveterans>

This Article is brought to you for free and open access by the Oral Histories at NWCommons. It has been accepted for inclusion in Northwest Iowa Vietnam Veterans by an authorized administrator of NWCommons. For more information, please contact ggrond@nwciowa.edu.

Narrator's name: Tony Rozeboom
Length of interview: 82:31
Date of interview:
Place of interview: Rock Valley, IA
Interviewer's name: Sarah Bartz
For: Northwestern College, History 351: America and the Vietnam War

TR: I was born and raised in Northwest Iowa and I went to Brookings for one year. I was going to learn for veterinarian and it was a little tough. Especially one subject was too tough for me and I – a chemistry course – and I just quit after one year. So then, I more or less, came back to my home town, start working, got married. I lived north of Doon. Yes, in 1967, course Vietnam started in '66, '67, or even before that, I guess you'd say. I – I was married and farming. I sold my farm – the cattle and so I had when I got drafted.

Then I went to the service then. I was drafted into the Army of course. So I took my basic training at Fort [inaudible 1:30] in California. That was just general basic training. You'd learn the nomenclature of your weapon and get physically fit and things like that. Learn obedience. After eight weeks of that, I went to – I had orders to go to Fort Polk, Louisiana. This was advanced infantry training. They called that Tiger land and preparation for Vietnam mostly. Kind of jump a war [inaudible 2:21] So I did my advance training in Fort Polk, Louisiana and there we learned more tactical skills. It was light weapons infantry. You would learn about M-16, the M-14, the M-60 machine gun, the Claymore mine, and the M-72 LAW or the anti-tank weapon. Course along with that you had training for skills for marksmanship. Along with all that it was building up your physical condition, mental condition, you might say. At about graduation time, they gave a proficiency test and I scored 100 on that. So I got a plaque for that. [Laughs] Then I became a hold over because my wife was going to have a baby. I was being held as a hold over and they decided to send me to Fort Benning, Georgia because they were beginning a noncommissioned officers school because of – And that way they would send you to Vietnam as a squad leader right off the

SB: Right after that?

TR: Right at the time. I went to Fort Benning, but when I got there, they went through my records and found out I didn't have enough time to do a tour in Vietnam plus take that training – NCO¹ training course. That was the first class that was going to go through Fort Benning. So they revoked my orders on the NCO course and just gave me a leave and gave me orders to go to Vietnam.

SB: Okay.

TR: I had orders to go to the 9th infantry division. We landed in Bien Hoa this is in November of '67 or late October, November in there. The next morning we was standing in formation

¹ NCO stands for the military rank of noncommissioned officers. Many U.S. troops in Vietnam were noncommissioned officers. (Dunn)

about three, four hundred of us guys and they announced that they were – for all the Eleven Bravos, or the light weapon infantry, to fall out. So we fell out and they said, “You guys are all going to the 4th infantry division.” So that’s where I ended up, was in the 4th infantry division. I think it was that day yet, we were put on a plane, flew to Pleiku and Camp Enari was the headquarters for the 4th infantry division so we were brought to the 4th division. There we were given three days orientation. That was more or less in-country orientation and it was mostly getting your gear together and make sure you were field ready and trying to understand the country and the people. The third day, probably four o’clock in the afternoon, I was put on the helicopter and sent to my company which was the Company B of the 122nd infantry of the 4th infantry division. I ended up with my company that time, they introduced me to my – to the rest of the platoon and – Course the army likes to use a lot of lingo and you know, they – I look back today and I – some of the guys we called, they had hand bows, you know like [inaudible 7:40] Texans. Okie was from Oklahoma. Charlie Brown, he was the – at first I didn’t know if that was his real name or the funny paper name – I found out it was the funny paper name. [Laughs] We were in the field then and we started to do our operations, quite a bit of patrols. And we operated in the central highlands, which would have been all the way from north of Dak To to south of BamiTue [inaudible 8:27] and along the western side of South Vietnam. Some of the maps show that the Ho Chi Minh Trail more or less speared off into different parts and that’s how the North Vietnamese infiltrated

SB: The South?

TR: Into there. We mostly tangled with the North Vietnamese Army. The troops that were along the [CoSu? 9:10] area and the south area had a lot more problems with Vietcong and booby-traps and mines and things like that. We didn’t have too great a problem with that. Ours was mostly dealing with the North Vietnamese Army. So the first couple months, November, December, and part of January, we would bump with the – a number of small unit North Vietnamese, but you could – they would never stand and fight. I remember they always broke contact and were gone in a short time. It was – never had the action, you might say. Unbeknownst to us they were preparing for the ’68 Tet Offense² when they occupied a lot of the larger cities.

SB: Sure.

TR: One incident I remember of – I think it was in December, so we bumped into a unit. They were carrying mortars and I think they were supplying, getting their cache of mortars filled up. We captured their mortars and I think we wounded and killed a couple of them and then the other ones got away. It was kind of a small incident, but there were other units finding out the same thing. The commander of the 4th infantry division and the commander, I think it was of the 25th infantry division, were two of the commanders that were predicting a 1968 Tet Offense that they would make a major push for the cities. It more or less fell on

² The Tet Offense was an attempt by the North Vietnamese to conquer South Vietnam’s capital, Saigon, and other army bases in the area. A cease fire had been called for the Vietnamese New Year, Tet, but canceled when the first attack began a day early on January 30. Most of the offense ended by January 31 with the exception of one area that lasted until March. (Zabecki)

deaf ears for a lot of rest – for much of the rest of that army in [inaudible 11:57] because the – when – about the time of the Tet Offensive, they agreed to cease fire and the whole country laid down its arms. A lot of the South Vietnamese went home for Tet and that was the basic celebration – the New Year’s celebration for the Vietnamese people. They – So they – a lot of the South Vietnamese went home. Course the American soldiers weren’t supposed to fire and we were supposed to stop the war and North Vietnam had agreed to that. But it was their way of putting a surprise on the rest of the U.S. military and South Vietnamese.

SB: Sure.

TR: Anyway, the night before Tet or – yes, we were near Kon Tum, well we was near, about three quarter of a mile away from the village, and the village, and they were beating their drums and all night long they were having a high old time the way it seemed. While the next morning, then word came that the North Vietnamese were inside of Kon Tum and they had taken over the headquarters. We were going to go to Kon Tum and flush them out. We – oh it must have been about ten-thirty, eleven o’clock, the helicopters came to pick us up and they brought us to the airstrip of Kon Tum. There we set up our headquarters for our company and on the airstrip – because they wanted to keep the airstrip secure, so – Anyway, we start going uptown and first objective to was secure the headquarters of Kon Tum. Kon Tum city was a proud capital of Kon Tum province. We had to push through and get some of the North Vietnamese out of the capital area and it seemed like the biggest concentration of the North Vietnamese was in the northeastern part of the Kon Tum. There’s lots of confusion goes on with that. The people are running and trying – They were trying to get to the southwest part of the city because that was more or less the secure part of the city. That’s what our objective was, was to move the people to the southwest part of the city. There was dead bodies on the street and some people were blown apart and different things like that. That’s kind of what happened the first day and then that evening, that night we came back and – back to the airstrip to secure the airstrip. There was lots of – kind of long range firing towards the airstrip and stuff like that, but there was no assault on the airstrip.

The next morning, we got up and went to – went uptown again. We start trying to push the North Vietnamese out of the northeastern part of the city, is what we were actually trying to do. There was quite a bit of firing and action going on. We didn’t get too many wounded or killed. We – but we were at pretty good confrontation. And I remember one moment, coming out on the street, I hadn’t looked – she came from a business place it seemed like and she was – must have been looking for her husband or something. She was crying and both sides stopped firing and they – she runs from dead to the other dead, trying to turn them over and see who – I guess she was looking for a husband, I don’t know. She goes back inside the building, crying and the two sides continue the battle. [Laughs] See, you have odd things like that go on during war. At the – We kind of made slow progress going towards the northeast part of the city. We had to kind of be careful that the north South Vietnamese could filter through to the southwest. We had a couple tanks attached to our company for, more or less for artillery fire support. At one point, Charlie Brown goes to the tank commander and he says – there was a, I think it was a Catholic church, probably little

short of a quarter mile or so away from us. He says, "Blow that steeple off that church." He says, "There's been a sniper sniping at us all day." And the tank commander give his men the word and boom. [Laughs] The church steeple blew apart. I got kind of a mixed feeling, glad the sniper was blown away but the church steeple is always kind of the symbol of Christianity and you ended up with a mixed feeling about the whole thing in that way. It was getting towards the evening, so we go back to the airstrip. There's quite a bit of firing and stuff all going on. That night, they rocketed the airstrip several times.

The next day, we got up and we kind of headed towards the northeast part of the city again. As we worked our way, we – Way in the corner of the northeast part of Kon Tum was the language school. They were trying to overtake that language school, but there was special forces there and they were more or less holding their own. It was getting pretty questionable if they were going to hold, so we made it to, more or less, their positions and – you know, our artillery was across the river on the other side and they were firing. They – a lot of their rounds were landing across the road. There was a road running east and west along the north side of Kon Tum and that – we didn't know quite at that time, but that whole – on the other side of the road was all honeycombed with North Vietnamese foxholes. The artillery was doing a pretty good number on them. Then we got across the road and we – there was just lots of dead North Vietnamese. I think they – that day we killed, like over two hundred and fifty North Vietnamese. And the special forces people said that the whole Kon Tum Tet Offense in that area, we had killed like six hundred North Vietnamese. There was some trying to escape from that. They had – we [inaudible 22:26] It looked like they were going to assault the language school and take over that, but when they see they were overwhelmed by us, I guess, they – the remainder tried to escape.

So the command came to pursue and annihilate. So we jumped on the two tanks and start going after. They were just literally running away and fading into the countryside. They had quite a few places to hide and different things like that. We weren't so effective in killing many more when we pursued and annihilated. They seemed like they just disappeared into the jungle and we – So then we continued on and we start heading north and east – west – no, north and east of Kon Tum and we start getting into some more hilly country. The tanks left us then because it wasn't good terrain for the tanks. We just start patrolling on foot and well, we – C Company was operating to our right and we were kind of on the battalion mission, I guess you might say. Anyway, I remember we spent the night on one hill and C Company was to our south, maybe a mile or more, a couple of miles or something like that. Anyway, in the morning, we got up and the night passed without incident.

But anyway, we got up in the morning, and we heard gunfire to our south, so that was – I don't know for sure which company was, I just call them C Company, but it may – it probably was B or A Company too, I'm not sure. Anyway, yeah, then pretty soon the radios start rattling and chatting and – Yes, C – I'll just call them C Company, they got ambushed on a ridge line. So, and then the mortars – the North Vietnamese mortared them also as they were trying to retreat. But they had two men, the two point men were either wounded or killed and they weren't able to get them back. So they must have attempted a couple times and it failed. So the command pulled them back and I think they were tore up

pretty bad. They pulled them out and then they had us come in and resume looking for the missing. So we come to their location on top of the hill that they had spent the night and we – while first, I was with second platoon, but third platoon was there ordered to go first. Third platoon went to see if they could recover the two missing. So they go along this ridge line. They get part way and they start finding battle gear and stuff like that and they find a G.I.³ shirt with a knife stuck in its back, pinned to a tree. So, then the mortars start coming and they had to fall back, so they pulled back to our position. That was – this was getting to be in the afternoon, so first platoon, they make a try for – they get probably about as far as third platoon did, kind of the same thing happens. You get about so far and the mortars start coming in and they had to pull back.

So they came back and then it was our turn, our platoon. We had about the same thing happen. We got about so far; it was probably about halfway up to the MIAs⁴ and yes, they – we had about so far and they start mortaring us and we had to pull back too. Then each time the lieutenant would get debriefed and told what the next step was. Lieutenant got debriefed and he came back and said that we were going to do a night rescue. So we went in and waited till dark. We started down the ridge line and we had a brand new lieutenant from the States because our other lieutenant had gotten wounded in Kon Tum. So we – it was a poor place to break him in. [Laughs] So we went down the ridge line and it was pitch black and it was hairy. We got farther and farther and we found helmets. We found battlefield dressings and spent magazines. All kinds of things that the company before had – just all kinds of battle debris, you might say, that was left behind. We – While it was hairy and dark and the lieutenant didn't know where the point man was and every now and then, "Woods? Where are you?" He was giving our position away, so we'd say, "Keep quiet!" That happened several times.

We kept on moving though forward. The – I think we were only – well we didn't find them that night, the MIAs, but later on we found the position where they were. Anyway, I think we were probably only maybe 50 feet away from finding where they had fallen and the order came back to pull back. Of course, we didn't know that and I guess higher and higher had thought we just weren't going to find them. Couple of the guys behind me, they said they could hear screaming on the other hill. I couldn't testify to that for sure, but maybe that was right, I don't know. Which would have meant that they were being tortured, I guess, if they had – if they were alive. We knew they were in enemy hands pretty much, so we pulled back. I personally think we were in a death trap; they were waiting for us to get a little further and they would have poured everything on us, I think. They had to know we were there and what we were trying to do. But we pulled back and nothing really happened.

The next morning, they called and they just said, "We're loading up and we're heading to Dak To." In a little while, helicopters came and we were out of there. We spent ten days, a couple weeks in Dak To area. There was – no major things happened there, lot of patrolling and so. Then they sent – after that they sent us back to the area where the MIAs were and

³ G.I. translates as military slang for Government Issue. This term was used to refer to an American soldier. (Glossary of Military Terms & Slang from the Vietnam War)

⁴ MIA is the military acronym for missing in action. At the end of the Vietnam War it was estimated that there were 1,350 U.S. prisoners of war (POWs) and MIAs. (Glossary of Military Terms & Slang from the Vietnam War)

we were – oh, they dropped us off a couple miles away from the hill. A mile is much further in Vietnam than what it is here because it is all tough going. So we ended up going – well we – it was one night, our platoon was assigned to go back up to the hill where C Company had been and see if it was occupied by North Vietnamese or if it was clear. So we spent most of the night making our way up to the hill and when we got up to the hill, we stealthily examined whether the North Vietnamese were in their old bunkers there or what was going on. We had a support plane dropping flares and he – while the first bunker, there wasn't anybody in there. And we kind of went around the whole perimeter and cleared the perimeter. So we had the hill secure, you might say.

The next morning the rest of the company came and then the – we went on a broad sweep, a company sweep, we just all went – swept the ridge line, both sides of the ridge line. I think, first platoon was in the center and our platoon was on the right, and the other platoon was on the left, but anyway, as we got toward where the MIAs were first platoon called and said they found the MIAs. They had them buried in shallow graves with their feet sticking out of the graves. I don't know if they were dead that first day or if they had just died later or how that went. Anyway, they were used – the North Vietnamese were using them for bait, is what they were actually doing. Our first – the second and third platoon secured the area there and we called in a helicopter for some body bags. First platoon was assigned to put the dead in the body bags. The stench was real bad. Like three of the guys vomited while they were trying to put the bags. So they got them bagged and they carried the bags back to where our hill was because we had a landing zone there. Course they got flown to [inaudible 37:44] registration and then we – well our platoon kind of was stayed back. As I looked into the grave site, I seen a swatch of black curly hair, kinky hair and I realized one of the guys was a Negro. I never did find out who they were. That's the story on a couple of the missing.

So then we – after that we went to south toward BamiTue[?] and we patrolled in that area. For a couple weeks I think it was; we didn't get into a real lot of action. Then, well then they start building our company up in numbers. We never had – seemed like our company was never at full strength. We had eighty guys, maybe ninety, that would be about bit. Some guys would get wounded, some would get killed and then you'd be up and down and different things like that. Your platoon was – you know, if you had thirty in the platoon you were doing pretty good. Anyway, they built us up; they brought hot chow out to the field and we thought, boy this is getting good. I think we had – got up to like a hundred and thirty six, I think our company was. And I think the other companies were about at that number too or in the hundred and thirty or so which was about full strength. Then all of a sudden they said, "You're – We're heading west." So Tumor[?] Mountain was the objective, I guess.

So we flew out to one hilltop and you know we had cleared the trees and stuff like that down. Actually set up the fire base and the command post on top of this one hilltop. So then they had bunkers around it for defense. Then – yes, that took a couple days before that was really ready. Then they start sending out patrols and we first start patrolling to the east to the fire base. They had brought in some artillery guns and the other companies were kind of all in that area. We were first patrolling around the hill of the fire base and then we start

– then we started to push west further. We started to get more resistance and unbeknownst to us, higher and higher knew what they were doing, we were pinpointing a regimental headquarters of the North Vietnamese. We started working west more and more. One of the platoons, one day, they had gone off the trail some and they were more or less taking a break. Then – And watching the trail, and here a company of North Vietnamese come by on the trail. They counted, I think, about eighty-six North Vietnamese. They were – Most of them had a lot of, you know, quite a bit of new equipment and they were well equipped, well armed. So we pretty well knew there was – then I think C Company had also got into contact and they had found some North Vietnamese. They had new equipment and they was ready for war, you might say. We pretty well knew that there was some – a resupply center there.

Then one, I think, I don't know what it was – one day, it was probably the fourth day or so, we – our company was going down a trail kind of in the valley beside a small creek. All of a sudden the command came that we should drop our packs and double time down the trail because they must have seen an enemy unit up a head somewhere. So they dropped the packs and the lieutenant told me. He says, "Rozeboom, you're staying back. You guard the packs." So I thought, boy this is a piece of cake. But anyway, we – they took off double timing and probably twenty minutes later, I heard gunfire and they had made contact. I was guarding them packs all by myself and your mind starts to think, what if these North Vietnamese comes down the trail to help their comrades and me – Am I going to fend off a company of North Vietnamese? [Laughs] So my nerves got worked up pretty bad. I looked for my best fighting position and I only had four grenades, which was standard, usually, and which would have been the best thing to use. If you use rifle fire, they can pinpoint you easier than grenades, so anyway I'm getting myself all nerved up. Well, nothing happens. I thought I had found a – probably the best fighting position. But anyway, it was like three – it was probably twelve, quarter after twelve when they left and it was like three-thirty when they came back. I was very happy to see them back. [Laughs]

We had a real good captain, and he asked that we all take time to pray, so we all put our weapons at parade rest and put our helmets on our weapons and we prayed. No one objected and it was good for everybody. I think our captain knew it was it was bumping with big stuff. Then we went – we backtracked down the trail that we had come on that morning. Our objective was to, well, go – get to the top of Mount Shumore[?] so up the hill we went. We start climbing up the mount and when we got to the military crest, I guess about you'd call it, then our platoon was the point platoon and there was – we had – they had left a space between our platoon and the other two platoons or the rest of the company in case we made contact. That we could fall back and – so then he asked – the lieutenant asked if anybody volunteered to check the top of the hill, see if there was any North Vietnamese up there. I said, "Yes, I'll go." [Laughs] I don't know why, but I usually didn't volunteer. Another guy volunteered. So we took a radio along. We went to the top of the hill and it was clear. We circled around a little bit, made sure it was clear all the way – the whole hilltop was cleared. We hurried back to our platoon and in a little while they sent the whole platoon to head up so we all went up.

Then as we got to the top the lieutenant, he start assigning positions for our perimeter and

another guy had taken a crap so he went outside the perimeter with his shovel. And in just a little bit, he came running back with his pants mostly down. [Laughs] “There’s gook⁵ out there!” he says. They were encircling us. And they were. [Phone rings] Their plan was to stamp us out while we were digging in. [Phone rings] While, anyway, we start throwing grenades [Phone rings again] and we – and of course, rifle fire and they more or less got us horseshoed in. Well there was a lot of firing, a lot of [inaudible 50:13], a few guys were wounded. I don’t think we had anybody killed right away then. But then the rest of the company came up and we was getting a hold of the hill. A decision had been made to hold the hill so we – then the rest of the company came up. It was getting late, get – starting to get dark, so we were trying to dig in in the dark. The rifle fire more or less subsided and later on as we set up guard and got our bunkers pretty much in – put up. Then in a while, we would listen and see what was going on. You could hear them climbing the trees getting ready for the next day. So we – but nothing happened that night really. You always wonder what’s going to happen.

The next day, well, the order was to kind of clover leaf our perimeter and see – so I think it was, first platoon kind of went out towards – and they kind of clover leafed around their position. They found dead Vietnamese – North Vietnamese and then they – as they got a little further, they made contact and they pulled back. Then the other platoon clover leafed around and almost immediately they were in contact. This was mostly on the western side of the hill. It seemed like they wanted to – they didn’t want us to get further west. And they kept us in a horse shoe more or less and we – I think that same day – later on that same day, a helicopter tried to come and resupply us with ammunition and he – he was going to just fly over the tree tops and kick it out. So they were – as soon as they got over our position treetop, there’s all kinds of firing broke out from the North Vietnamese. And whoa, I don’t know, they probably killed the pilot and the copilot. Took the helicopter back to the fire base and by the time they got to the fire base the helicopter had run out of hydraulics and it more or less crashed landed. We had to get resupplied from the opening of the horse shoe and that’s where we took our wounded out and killed.

Anyway, while this is going all, C Company is on another hill and they’re trying to get to the top of that hill, but the Vietnamese are up on top of that hill and they’re having a terrible time. They lost a lot of guys and they would call in airstrikes. You know there, there was trees two feet in diameter, or even more than that some of them, and big tall trees. And they would call in airstrikes and the branches would fly off and that whole hill was actually bare. It was just stumps of trees, tree stumps. They would try again – C Company would just try again and they would still be up there. They had dug in underneath the tree stumps and every time a jet would come in with bombs, they would duck down in [Coughs] in their holes. You would have had to blow up the whole tree stump, more or less, to have a direct hit on their hole – to get them out. I think they finally got them out by just putting lots of napalm on top of that hill and – but they – C Company suffered bad.

Up on our hill, I think it was the second day, that one of our guys says, “We aren’t going to make it.” He says, “We got to get out of here.” Well, higher and higher didn’t think so, so

⁵ Gook was a derogatory term used to designate an Asian. It was a twisted version of a Korean slang word for ‘person’. (Glossary of Military Terms & Slang from the Vietnam War)

course we stayed, but I think it was like twenty minutes, half hour later, he burned all of his personal stuff. He burned his maps and he was convinced that, I guess, that the army teaches that you think you're going to get overrun or killed, that you're supposed to dispose of your things. And that's what he was doing, I imagine anyway. We say he was a premonition that like some guys know that they're going to get killed, you might say. They found – different companies had found men with letters where they're – they had written their girlfriend or wife or parents or something that they didn't think they would make it that day and they'd get killed that very same day.

Then we had one guy, he – we were just kind of, you know, in battle sometimes there's lots of firing and all of a sudden it gets quiet. During the quiet time, it seemed both sides are kind of positioning themselves around and then they go at it again. Anyway, it was quiet and one of our guys says, "I see a gook in the tree over there." I says, "Shoot! Shoot the bastard." Bang. "I got him! I got him! I got him!" He was like a little kid that shot his first rabbit. [Laughs] I just thought that was comical.

Then they tried to mortar us and we had a jet flew – course for airstrike – we had air support. The lieutenant, he was talking to the pilot of the aircraft and he told him – they use triangulation when they pinpoint a enemy position and they told them where they thought the enemy position was. And he swooped down, dropped his bombs. There was secondary explosions and they didn't try to mortar us anymore. [Laughs]

So anyway the next day, they – I don't remember – all of a sudden, command was "We're pulling out." So we – the whole battalion pulled back to the fire support base. Then they pulled us all out of there and brought us back to base camp in Pleiku and they called it re-outfitting, but it was kind of like licking your wounds. When I was playing back, you know your emotions kind of go on a rollercoaster. You're happy. You're sad. You're thinking about the dead. You're – you know.

C Company had twenty-seven back – functional people left. Our company, D Company, had I think forty-two. And E and B Company had, I think, like sixty, I don't know, sixty-two, sixty-seven is in my mind. I don't know, something like that. So but, when they pulled us back. I think two hours later, they had a B-52 strike over that whole area. I think headquarters pretty well had it pinpointed where they're – where the regimental headquarters was and then they sent in another battalion, or a couple other companies in to assess the damage of the B-52 strike. They found a hospital there and a supply center. They found a guy – North Vietnamese that had tied themselves into trees and that type of thing.

There were times the North Vietnamese wouldn't stand, but there's times that they would, you know. They were pretty selective about how they fought. Which was – which made the war a little more advantageous towards them, you might say.

Then they re-outfitted our company and went – we started to – well they had quite a few new guys come in them. They kind of took it easy on with us, the way it seemed. I think we guarded some bridges and did more several patrols and stuff like that. Then we – well we worked some villages and stuff. There was some – some of the villages were the mountain

guard villages. They were still loincloth type people. We would more or less check to see if they were supporting the Communists and generally the mountain guard people were more anti-communist than the villagers more inside the – as you go into the Vietnamese people more. The – I think the special forces liked working with them quite well because they were pretty good fighters. They didn't want much to do with communism. We – when we checked these villages we didn't find very much suspicion. They were generally pretty good towards us. Of course, they always liked to trade with and things like that for C-rations⁶ and different things. So we did some of that and we were working south of Banwe[?] – south of Pleiku and in the hills of that way.

Before I came home then, we were kind of put on a, well, it was kind of maybe a fire support base and we were bunkered in around the hill. The North Vietnamese must have had us pegged, but anyway, that night – that afternoon I flew out and then that evening, or that night, my buddy got killed. That's kind of how my story went. Right towards the end my tour, my buddy gets killed and I go home. That's how the story went, more or less. [Laughs]

SB: Did you write your wife a lot when you were over there?

TR: Sadly, no. Mostly because of – I think I'd only write – It seemed like we hardly had time to write. They kept us real busy. She'd write quite a – she wrote way more often than what I did. I would probably write her maybe once every two weeks, ten days or something like that maybe. And yes, I think a lot of guys didn't get to write as often as they should. But sometimes guys would just write a short note. And I probably should have done more that. Just write: I'm okay. Time to go. [Laughs] Something like that. So that's kind of how that all went.

SB: When you flew back was it hard for you to readjust?

TR: Pardon?

SB: Was it hard for you to readjust to life after you got back to the States?

TR: The thing was, it seems crazy, but I didn't want to be in the firefight. But I kind of longed for the adrenaline rush of hearing the grenades and artillery and the rifles going off. It gives you an adrenaline rush and it – I actually missed that. I – It became part of me I guess. I guess I could have – if I would have had a tape of that, just – I should have just sat in the living room and listened to that and go on and it would have been satisfying. Whereas some people would think you're nuts. [Laughs] But it – you hear the artillery shells. They whistle as they come in and you know, boom! And machine gun has its rat-tat-tat. And the AK-47, you can distinguish that. You can – it makes a different sound and the M-16 and I didn't want to be in it, but I would have loved to heard it. [Laughs] It – I was lonesome for that and I don't know.

⁶ C-rations were combat rations that U.S. soldiers carried. These were canned meals for the field consisting of a basic course, fruit, dessert, cigarettes, and gum. (Glossary of Military Terms & Slang from the Vietnam War)

SB: You know, a lot of guys experienced marital problems when they got back. Was that an issue for you and your wife?

TR: No.

SB: No?

TR: I read a book and I think there's truth in it. The soldiers that had come from large families and had a Christian background fared much better than broken homes and other things like that. I would bet my dollar that its very true that they can stand up better to hardships, I'd guess you'd call it. No, we were glad to be together again. [Laughs]

SB: Yes, I bet. So, once you were back. Like for instance, this obviously very controversial event, very you know, earth shaking was the My Lai.⁷

TR: Pardon?

SB: The My Lai episode. When you found about that were you surprised at all?

TR: The what?

SB: My Lai. The massacre in My Lai.

TR: I'm not hearing that.

SB: Oh, sorry.

TR: Come through again.

SB: The My Lai Massacre.

TR: Oh!

SB: Yes, when you heard about that was that a surprise to you at all?

TR: Well, I kind of wanted to – well, call it a surprise. Not really a surprise. It was – It made you wonder if it was revenge or if it was a real thing, you know. And I had a hope it wasn't just that some soldiers were on a revenge or part of an insane revenge type thing. But I can see it happening quite easily because they were losing men one, two, three a day and they knew – I think they almost knew for sure that that village was almost entirely Viet Cong. That they were on the side of the enemy and I would suppose Calley had his belly full⁸ and

⁷ The most well-known U.S. atrocity during the Vietnam War, the My Lai Massacre occurred on March 16, 1968 when U.S. soldiers killed between 350-500 Vietnamese civilians. The incident was exacerbated by the following cover-up. (Frame)

⁸ 1st Lieutenant William Calley of the 1st Platoon of C Company was found guilty of murdering 22 civilians but his sentence continued to be reduced until in 1974 he was paroled by President Nixon. (Frame)

he just said, "This is enough." Well, killing children – I don't see myself wanting to do that at all, you know. Or women – when you go fighting, man to man is different, but if you got children killing your own men. Say your leader of a platoon and they're killing your men, and you got women, and there were women at – they were helping. I don't think there's any doubt about that, but I can see it wears on you. Not that it makes it right, but – and I imagine that is was quite a lesson to the other villagers when they heard that. But it turned out to be real controversial and yes, he was sentenced. [Laughs] I don't know what to say.

SB: No, that's fine. It's just interesting –

TR: I can see. I can see it happening. And where do you draw the line with war?

SB: Right.

TR: You know, when it gets to be guerilla warfare and it seems like the whole population starts gets involved. It isn't just army against army. And when you got units against units, you can distinguish. When you got women and children, you've got a terrible time distinguishing and if you – pretty soon if you know that these – I guess that the best thing that command could have done was probably pulled them out of that area and then let somebody fresh come in and – I don't know. I would say, if they were – it was also a lesson to the other Vietnamese that were compromising with the enemy.

SB: So, as a veteran have you participated in, you know, veterans organizations or anything?

TR: Not really.

SB: No? So this is the second time you've ever told your story, is that right?

TR: Yes.

SB: Okay.

TR: Otherwise I would drop bits and pieces, but never a whole –

SB: The whole thing. Sure.

TR: So it's kind of the way that went. And as time goes on it gets a little easier to talk [inaudible 1:14:09]. When I did speak at the school, I had some nerve jerking times.

SB: So, just kind of a general question then. After – before and after Vietnam, did your opinion on war change?

TR: I didn't understand war enough when I went in and you – I guess you'd think of it as – before you kind of think of it as – you know that you're going to do this and you're going to do that and you find out a lot of that isn't the way it happens. Just like when you – when I first came in the company and so on. You're there a little while and pretty soon you try to

size up whose going to make it and who isn't going to make it. You know, this guy, he's pretty good, he should make – he's going to make it home. This other guy, I don't know, he – I don't think he'll ever – you know, you're saying this in your own head, but it isn't that way. I just – I decided that God does the picking and the choosing.

SB: Sure. If you were given the opportunity, do you think that you would go back to Vietnam today?

TR: [Long Pause] Well, I guess I wouldn't spend a lot of money doing it. [Laughs] It would be interesting. I've gotten interesting in military history and it would be interesting just to look at things from that point of view rather than from a combat type of a view, you might say. I don't think that people are at liberty there today. I don't – it might be disguised.

SB: Do you have any closing thoughts?

TR: Well, [Long Pause] I wrote a couple little things.

SB: Okay.

TR: When our government – when our country goes into war and from a political point of view, the people should be unified and the government should be correctly focused on world matters. Appeasing what the enemy isn't going to solve any problem, I don't think. And I think our government has began to appease what the – some of the enemies of our country, like beginning most obviously at Korea and especially Vietnam and – Then militarily is probably to focus on the root of the problem before commitment. You need sharp tactical operations or good tactical operations. General MacArthur said that we should – well he said that war was a necessary evil, but he also said if we go to war we should fight it with speed and ferocity. The older I get the more I think that's a very true – not that it's fun, but that's the way it should be handled. There's – since the recovery of that MIA, I think after you look into the POW/MIA issue, yourself some?

SB: A little bit, yes.

TR: You need to look into that. Do you know of the Phoenix program?⁹

SB: I've heard of it but nothing extensive.

TR: Look into is soon.

SB: Will do, yes sir.

TR: There was a big [inaudible 1:19:46] program that the Communists used on the United States. You know of that?

⁹ The Phoenix Program was established to find and eliminate Viet Cong infrastructure in South Vietnam. With the withdrawal of U.S. troops from Vietnam, the program eventually ended. Media labelled the program as a cover for assassinations, but CIA officials and leaders of the VC labelled the program successful. (Dunnavent)

SB: Yes.

TR: Those are all reasons why we – well, I mean the [inaudible 1:20] was – I think that was the reason why the United States became divided so much. They fought us on two fronts.

SB: Yes.

TR: And I think American people were unaware of what was happening on their own land when we were over there and you know, the news media wasn't for us. We – I think we only had the new media – news people were joined to our company only one time, probably, for a little – but not very long. And most of the time our company – captains and so didn't want nothing to do with the media. And they knew that they were on the other side or they'd slant the reporting a very bad thing. Well, that's the way it went, but it was a bad deal, you know? And the news media still is pretty lopsided on a lot of issues, you know? As I got older, I got into studying military history and it become real interesting to me. It is very much so. And I'd like to go back along ways. Right now, I'm studying some of the battle that Europe has – seems like a lot of the battles have take place in Europe and I don't know for sure why it would be in Europe, if they were more of an aggressive people, or a [concrete? inaudible 1:22:14] or why that be that. Maybe you know? [Laughs]

SB: Well, thank you so much.

TR: Yes, that's fine.

SB: For talking, I appreciate it.

TR: Yes, thank you.

Bibliography

Dunn, Joe P. "Selective Service." *The Encyclopedia of the Vietnam War: A Political, Social, and Military History*. Ed. Jr. Spencer C. Tucker and Paul G. Pierpaoli. 2nd. Vol. 3. Santa Barbara, CA: ABC-CLIO, 2011. 1032-1034.

Dunnavent, R. Blake. "Phoenix Program." *The Encyclopedia of the Vietnam War: A Political, Social, and Military History*. Ed. Spencer C. Tucker and Paul G. Pierpaoli Jr. 2nd. Vol. 2. Santa Barbara, CA: ABC-CLIO, 2011. 909-910.

Frame, Arthur T. "My Lai Massacre." *The Encyclopedia of the Vietnam War: A Political, Social, and Military History*. Ed. Spencer C. Tucker and Paul G. Pierpaoli Jr. 2nd. Vol. 2. Santa Barbara, CA: ABC-CLIO, 2011. 784-786.

Glossary of Military Terms & Slang from the Vietnam War. 28 January 1999. 23 February 2017. <http://www2.iath.virginia.edu/sixties/HTML_docs/Resources/Glossary/Sixties_Term_Gloss_D_J.html#Letter 'G'>.

Zabecki, David T. "Tet Offensive and the Saigon Circle." *The Encyclopedia of the Vietnam War: A Political, Social, and Military History*. Ed. Jr. Spencer C. Tucker and Paul G. Pierpaoli. 2nd. Vol. 3. Santa Barbara, CA: ABC-CLIO, 2011. 1105-1108.