

00:00:11:27 - 00:00:40:13

Unknown

My name is Palmer McKay. I am interviewing Vietnam veteran Olie Olson, who served in the Army and was in Vietnam from 1968 to 1969. Mr. Olson, this interview will have four sections. Your life before service, basic training, your time in Vietnam and your life after service. Let's get started with your background. Where did you grow up and what was your area known for?

00:00:40:15 - 00:01:10:19

Unknown

I was born in Florida, in Ocala, Florida, and which at that time was primarily an agricultural community, has grown way beyond that now, and we moved several times. We lived for a short time in Clearwater, Florida, and then we moved to Punta Gorda. And then I graduated from high school in Okeechobee, Florida, which is a cow town.

00:01:10:21 - 00:01:14:25

Unknown

That's basically it.

00:01:14:27 - 00:01:19:02

Unknown

Can you tell me about your family growing up?

00:01:19:04 - 00:01:38:15

Unknown

My dad was a Minnesota farm boy, and my mother was a southern Mississippi belle of the ball. He had to figure out how those two got together. I had they both had previous marriages, so I had.

00:01:38:18 - 00:01:51:12

Unknown

Two brothers by my dad's first marriage and a brother and sister by my mom's first marriage. And then in the family that I grew up in.

00:01:51:14 - 00:01:58:08

Unknown

There were three of us. I have a sister and a brother.

00:01:58:10 - 00:02:18:09

Unknown

Would you describe your dad's job as blue collar? White collar or something else? White collar. He was in the title insurance business, and whenever you sell a piece of property, they run the abstract to make sure the title is clear. So he was definitely white collar.

00:02:18:12 - 00:02:27:27

Unknown

Do you have any memories of your father or other men around you

telling war stories from World War Two?

00:02:28:00 - 00:02:59:18

Unknown

My dad. I think he had some political ambitions, and he wanted to be in the JCS, because that would have bumped his standings a little bit. But I think the JCS has an upper age limit of 35. Well, he was already over 35 when he ran for the tried to get into JCS. What did the JCS Junior chamber of Commerce and.

00:02:59:20 - 00:03:06:13

Unknown

World War II broke out. And dad was.

00:03:06:15 - 00:03:33:06

Unknown

I guess in about 40 or 41. And because he'd been telling that little story, he got drafted and he wasn't going to lie his way out of it because then everybody would have thought he was a coward. So dad served in the Navy on the on the battleship New York, and my oldest brother or half brother.

00:03:33:09 - 00:03:38:21

Unknown

Was 24 years older than me. I was not around.

00:03:38:24 - 00:03:44:09

Unknown

He dad were in the Navy at the same time.

00:03:44:12 - 00:03:50:19

Unknown

And then the other brothers.

00:03:50:21 - 00:04:04:18

Unknown

Once served in the Korean War and was a POW for a short time, was repatriated very quickly and one brother was.

00:04:04:20 - 00:04:19:00

Unknown

In the service during the Korean conflict, but served all his time stateside as drill instructor. And then my whole brother was.

00:04:19:02 - 00:04:27:18

Unknown

He just never got called. He carried a one day draft card for years, but he just never got called. So don't volunteer.

00:04:27:20 - 00:04:37:21

Unknown

Did your dad or brother ever tell World War Two stories? My dad? Not so much.

00:04:37:24 - 00:04:50:00

Unknown

He talked. He was mostly in the Caribbean. I don't think he saw any action as such. The the brother that was in.

00:04:50:02 - 00:05:00:10

Unknown

He served as a gift. The the modern day version of a seal, the underwater demolition team. And.

00:05:00:13 - 00:05:23:00

Unknown

He wouldn't talk about it, you know, he just unpleasant memories, I guess. And your brother, who was a POW. Did he ever talk about that experience? Only briefly. When I came back from Vietnam, he and I sat around indulging in.

00:05:23:02 - 00:05:38:12

Unknown

Adult beverages, shall we say. And he he just he just mentioned when he was repatriated that.

00:05:38:14 - 00:05:56:15

Unknown

A full bird colonel came to see him and asked him, and he said, anything you want, we can get it for you. And my brother told him. He said he wanted to speak to his mother on the telephone. Well, this is from Korea and this is before the days of cell phones and everything else. He said we can do that.

00:05:56:16 - 00:06:25:06

Unknown

He said it'll take a little while, but we can do that. He said, what else do you want? He said, I want a chocolate malted milkshake. And he said, I can get you a milkshake. He said, no, I want a chocolate malted milkshake, and that'll take a little longer. But I can do that too. So he did that, and that's really the only thing that he ever taught, told me about his experiences and.

00:06:25:08 - 00:06:33:15

Unknown

Did you have a favorite World War II movie growing up?

00:06:33:18 - 00:06:43:10

Unknown

Not that I can think of. I think my favorite World War II movie of all

time is Saving Private Ryan.

00:06:43:13 - 00:06:53:26

Unknown

There were just so many World War Two movies when I was a chap that it'd be hard to pick one. I liked them all.

00:06:53:28 - 00:07:14:12

Unknown

A lot of Vietnam veteran memoirs mentioned John Wayne as an influence on their expectations of war. Do you remember John Wayne that way? Oh, it seemed like, you know, he was in a a lot of war movies, had a lot of cowboy movies to.

00:07:14:14 - 00:07:25:00

Unknown

Just a manufacturer American hero, you know?

00:07:25:02 - 00:07:30:25

Unknown

Always seemed to do the right thing at the right time.

00:07:30:27 - 00:07:45:02

Unknown

Back then, did you see John Wayne as a manufactured American hero? No. I thought he was the real thing. You know, he was he was big and huge and.

00:07:45:04 - 00:07:50:08

Unknown

A towering screen presence, you know.

00:07:50:10 - 00:07:57:00

Unknown

Growing up, did you pay attention to politics?

00:07:57:02 - 00:08:01:15

Unknown

Well.

00:08:01:18 - 00:08:12:13

Unknown

I think well, it was when I was about six years old. I was I was making a drum and saying, I like Ike, you know.

00:08:12:15 - 00:08:26:22

Unknown

I don't know that I was greatly involved in politics. If I had been able to vote when I was a senior in high school, I would have voted for Goldwater, I guess.

00:08:26:25 - 00:08:45:00

Unknown

I've been a lifelong Republican. My my dad leaned that way. And when I was a senior in high school, I passed out literature for for Barry Goldwater and knocked on doors.

00:08:45:02 - 00:08:55:18

Unknown

Yeah. How did you get involved in the Goldwater campaign? Like I say, just.

00:08:55:20 - 00:09:09:19

Unknown

Went to some meeting somewhere in Okeechobee, and they just asked for volunteers, you know? Can you can you hand out literature? Can you knock on door? Sure. So I you know, I did.

00:09:09:21 - 00:09:26:18

Unknown

I know you said your dad perhaps some had some kind of political aspirations. Were your parents overtly political? No. Not really. You know, I think my dad, it was kind of a prestige thing, you know?

00:09:26:20 - 00:10:02:10

Unknown

Before Vietnam. Where did you go to college? And what did you study? Went to Indian River Junior College. It's a community college now. It's in Fort Pierce, Florida, and it's about 35 miles from where I graduated from high school. And we used to ride one of the short school busses over there. I went for a year and a half and then, I don't know, I guess I.

00:10:02:13 - 00:10:08:16

Unknown

I don't know if I was a college material guy or not. I.

00:10:08:19 - 00:10:23:00

Unknown

I thought I wanted to be a teacher, but I just and Mom and Dad were going through a divorce at that time, so that kind of screwed my head up a little bit. And I just dropped out and.

00:10:23:02 - 00:10:39:14

Unknown

When were you there? 66 and 67. Did you hear anything about Vietnam during. Well, it was it was a.

00:10:39:16 - 00:10:57:00

Unknown

I don't know, it was always on the news. I don't know, there was a topic of conversations, but I can remember sitting in a student center and people talking about we didn't want to drop out of school, because if you did, you were going to get drafted and you were going to go to Vietnam. You know.

00:10:57:02 - 00:11:12:22

Unknown

Just it seemed that way. We a little town where I graduated from high school, we were 100 people in my graduating class. And and that's a county high school.

00:11:12:25 - 00:11:27:12

Unknown

And we lost six guys in Vietnam. That's not a real good mortality rate, you know? But here we are.

00:11:27:14 - 00:11:47:28

Unknown

Now, I'd like to move on to the start of your service and basic training. Would you describe yourself as volunteering, being commissioned or drafted? Well, I was suspecting that I was going to be drafted, so I went ahead and listed.

00:11:48:01 - 00:12:07:26

Unknown

The Army calls an infantryman. 11 B 11 Bravo. That's infantryman Moss. And I didn't want to be an infantryman. So that's why I enlisted to have a choice of something else.

00:12:07:28 - 00:12:14:25

Unknown

Was that the main reason you volunteered, or were there other reasons?

00:12:14:27 - 00:12:21:13

Unknown

I just felt fairly confident that I was going to be drafted.

00:12:21:15 - 00:12:34:25

Unknown

Making that day what it was like. You had an obligation to serve. Now it's an option, you know.

00:12:34:27 - 00:12:41:13

Unknown

You were probably going to end up being drafted in due two years. You know, I mean, the.

00:12:41:15 - 00:12:53:20

Unknown

Seemed like I knew more people that were in than I knew that weren't ending, you know, during that time. That may not be true, but it seemed that way, you know.

00:12:53:22 - 00:13:18:24

Unknown

You noted off camera that you received a draft notice after enlisting. After enlisting. Was it a relief to know that you would have been drafted anyway? I, I just had a strong suspicion that I would be drafted, you know, and that's why I went. Excuse me.

00:13:18:26 - 00:13:31:18

Unknown

That's why I went ahead and made the jump. You know, like I said, I wanted a little choice rather than being a grunt and.

00:13:31:20 - 00:13:39:28

Unknown

Did you expect to go to Vietnam? Yeah I did.

00:13:40:01 - 00:13:56:02

Unknown

What, if anything. Did you know about the country of Vietnam before you enlisted? It was hot and rainy and.

00:13:56:04 - 00:14:08:18

Unknown

I guess they were thinking was on the news. You know, they talked about the domino theory of Vietnam fell. Everything in Southeast Asia would fall under communism.

00:14:08:20 - 00:14:19:16

Unknown

But as far as you know, the politics or the people or the geography, they have a clue, you know.

00:14:19:19 - 00:14:36:25

Unknown

Did you hear about that from classmates who had already been to Vietnam or people from your hometown? Mostly just the media. I think, you know, that's when they were still doing body counts and.

00:14:36:27 - 00:14:44:01

Unknown

What did you know about the Vietnam War?

00:14:44:03 - 00:14:52:03

Unknown

That it had been going on a while, and there was actually not much end in sight.

00:14:52:06 - 00:15:12:20

Unknown

You know, I've thought a lot of times that if you look at a lot of the population of that country where guys out there working in the rice paddy and trying to make a living and feed his family that.

00:15:12:22 - 00:15:26:04

Unknown

He really didn't care what kind of government it was. His life wasn't going to change that much where there was a communist dictator or a duly elected president, you know, was.

00:15:26:07 - 00:15:34:01

Unknown

They didn't care. You know, at least it seemed that way to me.

00:15:34:03 - 00:15:39:27

Unknown

How would you describe your boot camp experience?

00:15:40:00 - 00:15:52:18

Unknown

June, July and August of 1967. And at Columbia, at Fort Jackson and South Carolina. And.

00:15:52:20 - 00:16:03:06

Unknown

As I heard other people say, it's the only place I've ever been where you could stand in mud, up your knees and have sand blue in your eyes. It.

00:16:03:08 - 00:16:13:00

Unknown

Of course, as you know from the weather here, June, July and August. Just brutal. And.

00:16:13:02 - 00:16:17:03

Unknown

I made it through. I mean, it was, you know.

00:16:17:06 - 00:16:39:24

Unknown

It was relatively tough, you know, but they toughened you up some. You know, when I went in, I weighed 140 pounds. And when I finished basic training weighed 155. So, you know, they put some muscle on me and fed me. Not necessarily everything that you like to eat, but it's food.

00:16:39:26 - 00:16:51:00

Unknown

Did anyone around you struggle with boot camp? Well. There's.

00:16:51:02 - 00:16:57:22

Unknown

I remember there was a big.

00:16:57:25 - 00:17:09:20

Unknown

Jewish young fellow. When I say big, he was like 300 pounds and.

00:17:09:22 - 00:17:40:28

Unknown

What he got to eat was what he could get in his mouth. Between the time that he left the shell line and got to the first garbage can. He never got to sit down. It was just shove it down. And he had some trouble. And they and the our platoon sergeant told us, he said, and you don't walk anywhere in basic training.

00:17:41:00 - 00:18:04:24

Unknown

You run everywhere. He said, if we ever get anywhere and that fat SOB is not with you. You're going to crawl back and get him. So whenever we break out a formation and we go right face or left face, and then you double time and we start this guy out the head of the platoon and grab him by the belt.

00:18:04:26 - 00:18:29:22

Unknown

And we toted him all over Fort Jackson. And he lost close to 100 pounds in six weeks. And then they recycled him, which means he just started over. He went back to week one and he was just crying because we were crying too. We had to lose because we, you know, we you get close, you know, you have a camaraderie there.

00:18:29:25 - 00:18:55:16

Unknown

We had a couple of guys from New York that were, I guess you would say, for all practical purposes, gang members, they they didn't do real well with authority, you know, and I think one of those guys ended up going to the, to the stout house. You know.

00:18:55:19 - 00:19:06:00

Unknown

You know, I don't remember anybody else having trouble except everybody's homesick and lonesome, you know. But.

00:19:06:02 - 00:19:21:15

Unknown

You were at Fort Jackson for basic training in June 1967, right? Do you remember the Howard Levy court martial? No, I do not.

00:19:21:18 - 00:19:33:00

Unknown

Do you remember any kind of major court martial that was happening at the time?

00:19:33:02 - 00:19:49:16

Unknown

I'm trying to remember the exact date of when Lieutenant Kelly got brought up, but I think that was when actually, when I was actually in Vietnam. Was when he was on trial, for reference.

00:19:49:19 - 00:20:10:21

Unknown

Howard Levy was an Army dermatologist who refused to train Green Berets heading to Vietnam. He was court martialed at Fort Jackson in June 1967. It's when you're in basic training. You don't get a lot of time to read the newspaper and watch TV. So.

00:20:10:24 - 00:20:27:04

Unknown

Do you remember any other people at Fort Jackson who resisted the war? Who resisted the war? No, I mean, you're you're there. You may as well make the best of it.

00:20:27:07 - 00:20:36:10

Unknown

I'd like to move on to your time in Vietnam. Okay. What month did you arrive? In 1968.

00:20:36:13 - 00:20:40:12

Unknown

The 2nd of September.

00:20:40:14 - 00:20:50:09

Unknown

Could you describe your first 24 to 48 hours in country? Well, we got off.

00:20:50:12 - 00:21:15:07

Unknown

We left Travis Air Force Base and flew nonstop to Kyoto Air Force Base, Japan. And this is in the 707 stretch, about 250 I was on there. We stayed long enough for them to refuel and Kyoto, and we flew into Benoit Air Force Base.

00:21:15:09 - 00:21:49:01

Unknown

And even though you know you're cramped, you're in a cattle car, basically, it's air conditioned. And when when you go outside, it just

it's just an assault on your senses. The smell, the heat, the dust. Just fine. Red powder of dust that's in the air. And you go, damn. It's hot.

00:21:49:03 - 00:21:53:06

Unknown

And I was assigned to.

00:21:53:08 - 00:22:18:04

Unknown

You know, they sought you out where you were going and the other. And they put you in the back of a two and a half ton truck, and you're sitting on a bench seat and going into Saigon, which I don't remember what the mileage was, 15, 20 miles. And you have all these images in your head. And I'm thinking, looking at the guys in the in that truck bed with me.

00:22:18:04 - 00:22:35:13

Unknown

And I'm thinking, if a grenade comes in here, which one of these guys can I throw on top of it? You know, who am I bigger than? But it was just it's just such a slap in the face when you get there, you know? Just.

00:22:35:15 - 00:22:59:00

Unknown

Was there any barbed wire covering the truck? No, it was a wooden slats and a bench seat. And in your your gears just laying in the bed of the truck. And there you are. Can you describe the smell? Oh.

00:22:59:02 - 00:23:05:24

Unknown

Well, it's like nothing I ever smelled before.

00:23:05:26 - 00:23:16:06

Unknown

You know, I don't I don't know that there was a particular odor of war there, but.

00:23:16:08 - 00:23:28:07

Unknown

It wasn't like Florida.

00:23:28:09 - 00:23:40:03

Unknown

I'm trying to think of words to describe it. It was just different, you know?

00:23:40:06 - 00:23:47:24

Unknown

Diesel smoke and.

00:23:47:26 - 00:23:55:28

Unknown

Like, in dust. Lots of dust.

00:23:56:01 - 00:24:02:24

Unknown

I'm having a hard time describing odors.

00:24:02:26 - 00:24:10:27

Unknown

What did you expect when you arrived based on TV or stories you heard?

00:24:11:00 - 00:24:22:16

Unknown

Well, they told us that with the unit that I was in that we would we'd be transported to a hotel in Saigon.

00:24:22:19 - 00:24:28:22

Unknown

That's a loosely defined term there with the hotel.

00:24:28:25 - 00:24:42:20

Unknown

And we would be there for a couple of days while they figured out our eventual duty assignments. They.

00:24:42:22 - 00:25:10:15

Unknown

I remember from going coming in country and leaving when I, when I left that if you were coming in country, you stayed on the bottom 3 or 4 floors of this hotel. If you were, if you were leaving country, you stayed on the top 3 or 4 stories of the hotel. Everybody said, why, if it gets hit.

00:25:10:18 - 00:25:27:03

Unknown

The guys that are up there, they're going to go because they're going home. We don't need them anymore. We need the guys are there. So I thought that was kind of a kind of a cruel thing. When I came back, I didn't. I just slept in the lobby. I wasn't going to go upstairs. So.

00:25:27:05 - 00:25:36:21

Unknown

You know, I don't know that I really knew what to expect. Just waiting on the aircraft to take me to my duty assignment. Yeah.

00:25:36:24 - 00:25:48:25

Unknown

Would you describe yourself as being in combat in the rear or something else? Well, I was a noncombatant. I was a.

00:25:48:27 - 00:25:56:00

Unknown

Excuse me? I fixed radios and.

00:25:56:02 - 00:26:04:22

Unknown

Receivers and and transmitters and.

00:26:04:25 - 00:26:18:13

Unknown

I did not see a lot of actual combat. Just because of my MOS. I just did my job.

00:26:18:15 - 00:26:36:02

Unknown

The the grunts or the infantrymen? The combatants. They called us RMF rear echelon, and you get the idea. So.

00:26:36:04 - 00:26:52:09

Unknown

What kind of radios did you repair? The Army at that time had a about 60 pound receiver that they call an R 390 tube type radio.

00:26:52:12 - 00:27:03:25

Unknown

And it almost every conceivable radio band you could dial in on this thing. And we use that to.

00:27:03:27 - 00:27:16:10

Unknown

Well I didn't I just think them but the guys that that were actually listening and decoding stuff were.

00:27:16:13 - 00:27:21:22

Unknown

They.

00:27:21:25 - 00:27:46:20

Unknown

They would listen to the NBA and Viet Cong and try to figure out of course it went through, you know, different code processes. Sometimes they were just listening to Morse code and didn't have any idea what it was, but they just you'd see we call them DD bumpers because they listened to the code and you just see them typing.

00:27:46:22 - 00:28:01:18

Unknown

No idea what they were typing. You v in seven, four, three. You know, it didn't mean anything, but they typed it. And then that went to hopefully decoding. So.

00:28:01:20 - 00:28:10:19

Unknown

But there are 390 was it was it was being phased out when I got there and they started getting some of the first.

00:28:10:21 - 00:28:39:16

Unknown

Solid state stuff in shortly before I left, you know, I think weighed about 60 pounds and the other ones came in weighed about 12. A lot easier to work on to, to back up just a little bit. How did you feel about being called an RMF? Oh.

00:28:39:19 - 00:28:48:09

Unknown

It didn't bother me. You know what I mean. You take the guys that are out there in the bush and in the field.

00:28:48:12 - 00:28:55:26

Unknown

You know, I'm sure they looked at us and like, you know, these guys are a bunch of beachcombers and.

00:28:55:28 - 00:29:15:03

Unknown

And, you know, they're they're actually in the trench. You know, they're out there doing it. I have a good friend of mine from Florida that he and I were in Vietnam at the same time, but he was a he was an infantryman. And.

00:29:15:06 - 00:29:30:06

Unknown

He got three Purple Hearts and a Silver Star. And I think 3 or 4 Air Medals for being inserted into combat.

00:29:30:08 - 00:30:02:25

Unknown

And they said, you know, he has a whole different perspective of the war that I did, you know. But he did tell me. He said he said, it doesn't matter what you did. He said there was really no place safe. You know, I was safer than he was and a lot of other guys. But the thing, you know, guys in the service rag on each other all the time, you know, we we, you know, the guys in the Army, they rag on the Marines and the Marines rag on the Navy and the Navy regs on the Air Force.

00:30:02:26 - 00:30:10:08

Unknown

And it's just just just part of being in the service. You know.

00:30:10:10 - 00:30:23:28

Unknown

Did you know at the time that you and your friend were both in country? Yeah, we didn't have any communication, but I knew he was there. You know, he was up country for me, but.

00:30:24:01 - 00:30:40:07

Unknown

Were you primarily based in one location, or did your work take you to different bases in the country? A primarily stayed in our train, which was about 20 air miles above Cam Ranh Bay.

00:30:40:09 - 00:30:49:06

Unknown

I did do a couple, a couple 3 or 4. Four.

00:30:49:08 - 00:30:58:18

Unknown

Temporary duties where somebody might have been short staffed, something I went to Foo by, which is up.

00:30:58:20 - 00:31:02:10

Unknown

Close to the DMZ.

00:31:02:13 - 00:31:12:07

Unknown

Went to play coup in the Central Highlands and I went to.

00:31:12:09 - 00:31:26:06

Unknown

A little field station we had outside of Cameron Bay for about a week, and I went to Saigon one time, but primarily I was based on a train.

00:31:26:08 - 00:31:46:25

Unknown

So speaking of being in the rear, did you know anyone in the rear who bought souvenirs to suggest that they had been in combat? Well, you'll find that with a lot of guys, it I think we refer to it now, Stolen valor, you know that.

00:31:46:27 - 00:31:51:00

Unknown

You know, around play coup. There was a.

00:31:51:02 - 00:32:17:06

Unknown

I don't know if it was dense, but there was a significant mountain yard population up there, which is the mountain people of Vietnam. And they had I don't know where they got the wire, but they they made bracelets and they had some scratches on them that I guess meant something to the yards.

00:32:17:08 – 00:32:21:24

Unknown

But a lot of guys bought those, you know, with.

00:32:21:26 – 00:32:28:09

Unknown

With the idea that it was showing that you'd been there.

00:32:28:12 – 00:32:42:04

Unknown

And I think most of the time they were given to the grunts by the Montagnards because they close relationship, you know, they were they were pretty good guys. The mountain yards were.

00:32:42:07 – 00:32:52:28

Unknown

Did you see people who sold VC battle flags or anything like that? I did not know. Yeah.

00:32:53:01 – 00:33:13:00

Unknown

I did see a guy at one time that had a little necklace with a little knots on it, and I asked somebody said, what's the necklace? They said, ears, you know, so. And you were only supposed to cut off one if you killed a guy. But.

00:33:13:02 – 00:33:19:13

Unknown

I'm assuming they were ears. I wasn't going to ask the guy, but it's.

00:33:19:15 – 00:33:46:00

Unknown

You were only supposed to cut off one if you if you feel you couldn't have two, that would have been wouldn't have been right. You know, I don't know. I don't know why that is, you know. Was that a social rule? No, it was just it was just the way it was. You know, I guess you'd say it was a social rule among the grunts, you know.

00:33:46:02 – 00:34:02:20

Unknown

How would you describe the people you served with in terms of economic background, race or religion? I was in the Army Security Agency, which was a division of intelligence.

00:34:02:22 - 00:34:12:20

Unknown

And it wasn't cloak and dagger stuff. It was all electronic intelligence. And.

00:34:12:22 - 00:34:20:16

Unknown

They always told us that we were the top 10% of.

00:34:20:19 - 00:34:32:18

Unknown

Mental capabilities, I guess you would say, of the service, most of the guys and there were were fairly short.

00:34:32:20 - 00:34:36:20

Unknown

We.

00:34:36:22 - 00:35:01:28

Unknown

In my company, when I was in Vietnam, I think we had three blacks or African-Americans, whichever term you prefer. We had two Native Americans and we had several Menehune, which which Hawaiians called themselves men. Who is a Hawaiian leprechaun, you know.

00:35:02:01 - 00:35:16:26

Unknown

But we had several of those were there, but everybody was pretty good guys, you know, and this is out of how many? I think there were 200 in my company. Right at.

00:35:16:28 - 00:35:34:08

Unknown

What's a Hawaiian leprechaun, a man that's the name that that Hawaiian young men had for themselves, you know. And when I was going through eight at Fort Devins, they had a.

00:35:34:10 - 00:35:44:03

Unknown

Which is in Massachusetts. They had they called TTC Tactical Training course that if you were going to Vietnam, you had to go through TTC.

00:35:44:05 - 00:35:57:09

Unknown

As the Army thinks, you know, because so much of the landscape of Massachusetts looks just like Vietnam, you know, if if you're high. But.

00:35:57:12 - 00:36:00:28

Unknown

The men who there were.

00:36:01:01 - 00:36:23:09

Unknown

The aggressors. So as you know, as you go out there going through the course, you're supposed to be moving from point A to point B, and these guys are going to raid you in one thing or another. And if they, you know, if they take out too many of you, you don't get to ride the truck anymore, which you never get right to truck.

00:36:23:12 - 00:36:40:27

Unknown

But that's the name that the the Hawaiian guys had for themselves. The men who and what they say. It's a, it's a Hawaiian leprechaun, you know, and most of the most of those guys were shorter of stature.

00:36:41:00 - 00:36:44:08

Unknown

Excuse me.

00:36:44:10 - 00:36:59:25

Unknown

Did the Native Americans or Hawaiians practice different religions than Protestantism or Catholicism? You know, I don't really know.

00:36:59:27 - 00:37:15:03

Unknown

I can only remember one time when we had a chaplain come through the company. Now, there was there was a a chapel on base.

00:37:15:06 - 00:37:20:28

Unknown

Sparsely, sparsely attended. But we had a.

00:37:21:01 - 00:37:46:19

Unknown

A lieutenant colonel came through the company at one time, and he set up shop in the company day room. And, you know, anybody wanted to come in and talk to him, you know, that kind of thing could. But I don't remember a lot of religious activity when I was there.

00:37:46:21 - 00:37:57:14

Unknown

Did you also serve in Vietnam with any other nationalities, like Koreans or Australians or members of Arvin?

00:37:57:16 - 00:38:13:00

Unknown

There was a battalion of Korean soldiers in the company area immediately next to us called the White Horse Cavalry.

00:38:13:02 - 00:38:27:12

Unknown

They went out on a regular basis into the countryside, and there were a lot of.

00:38:27:14 - 00:38:31:16

Unknown

Stories, tales about them.

00:38:31:19 - 00:38:50:16

Unknown

But everybody had the notion that they were damn good soldiers, you know, and they they had a little bar in their company area, and we used to go there and frequent them, you know, and pretty good, you know, pretty good troops.

00:38:50:19 - 00:39:02:21

Unknown

I met a couple officers did not serve with them. There were some ties there.

00:39:02:24 - 00:39:08:16

Unknown

Trying to remember any other groups there or not. That's all I can recall.

00:39:08:19 - 00:39:20:20

Unknown

Do you remember any women on base, either Vietnamese or American? Well.

00:39:20:22 - 00:39:35:26

Unknown

We had what we call house girls who cleaned up the barracks force, so. And you pay them a nominal amount? We like five bucks a week or something. And they would do your laundry and.

00:39:35:28 - 00:39:47:25

Unknown

That kind of stuff. As far as serving in the military thing, the only the only ladies that I saw were.

00:39:47:27 - 00:39:52:00

Unknown

In the dispensary, which was.

00:39:52:02 - 00:40:11:27

Unknown

Close to my company area, and I'm sure there were some at the

hospital, which is over at the air base. But I did not see a lot of women when I was there. Of course, there were one that a lot of women in Vietnam, period, but they they certainly did a job over there, that's for sure.

00:40:12:00 - 00:40:28:24

Unknown

Circling back to the topic of religion, did you or anyone you served with experience a change of faith in the war zone? Not that I can recall.

00:40:28:26 - 00:40:40:19

Unknown

How did living in Vietnam and meeting Vietnamese people affect you?

00:40:40:21 - 00:40:55:08

Unknown

Most of the ones that I had dealing with were were on a personal basis where they would say the house girls, that cleanup crew that we had and.

00:40:55:10 - 00:40:58:18

Unknown

We would.

00:40:58:20 - 00:41:20:14

Unknown

You know, when you're off time, if things were quiet, we'd go downtown to the bars and you end up talking to to bar girls. I don't know that I knew that many just everyday, ordinary Vietnamese people, you know, it was just you're there doing the job and.

00:41:20:16 - 00:41:26:02

Unknown

What did people chat about with the bar girls?

00:41:26:04 - 00:41:32:22

Unknown

I'm sure it's the same chat that's been going on for, you know, 500 years.

00:41:32:25 - 00:41:37:01

Unknown

GI you buy me drink?

00:41:37:03 - 00:41:48:03

Unknown

Sure. I'll buy you a beer with no champagne? No. You know, so it's a the same old story.

00:41:48:06 - 00:41:54:00

Unknown

Do you remember taxi girls who would dance for a drink?

00:41:54:02 - 00:42:03:16

Unknown

No, but they. You know.

00:42:03:19 - 00:42:14:19

Unknown

I guess the idea behind every gi was the hopes of having sex at some point in time.

00:42:14:21 - 00:42:17:16

Unknown

But.

00:42:17:19 - 00:42:23:27

Unknown

Part of being a gi, no matter where you're stationed.

00:42:24:00 - 00:42:33:15

Unknown

Did you witness prostitution in Vietnam? Oh, yeah. Yeah. There were.

00:42:33:18 - 00:42:38:25

Unknown

We had one guy in the company. He had a map.

00:42:38:27 - 00:42:51:10

Unknown

Of every little bordello or, you know, red light district or in the City of North Train or everyone he'd been to, you know.

00:42:51:13 - 00:42:56:26

Unknown

It was prevalent, you know. Of course.

00:42:56:28 - 00:43:07:21

Unknown

Even a wartime economy and a girl's got to do what you got to do to make a living. You.

00:43:07:24 - 00:43:12:03

Unknown

So that was.

00:43:12:06 - 00:43:21:02

Unknown

Did you know anyone who had a Vietnamese girlfriend? Yeah. One guy in

the.

00:43:21:04 - 00:43:45:07

Unknown

Black fella, he had a he was married and had children at home, but he extended and he fathered two children by the lady that was actually she was my house girl, along with several others. But he fathered two children by her.

00:43:45:09 - 00:43:52:09

Unknown

He's the only one that I. There were some other guys that company had, but he's the only one I knew personally.

00:43:52:12 - 00:43:59:12

Unknown

Do you know what happened to the woman or the kids he fathered? Well.

00:43:59:14 - 00:44:03:14

Unknown

There was a.

00:44:03:16 - 00:44:18:18

Unknown

A a prejudice towards not because they were black, but because they were American, but probably more so because they were, you know, half black and half Vietnamese that they.

00:44:18:20 - 00:44:24:10

Unknown

They were kind of looked down on, you know.

00:44:24:13 - 00:44:30:13

Unknown

I left country before he did. So I don't, you know, and.

00:44:30:15 - 00:44:43:03

Unknown

I'm sure whatever they went through wasn't pleasant, you know, and it wouldn't matter if they were white, they would have been, you know, they would have been.

00:44:43:06 - 00:45:18:18

Unknown

Half breeds, I guess you would say. Was this the case when you were there that mixed race kids were looked down on, or was this after the fact you were talking about them with the question one more time? Yeah. Was this the case when you were there that mixed race kids were looked down on? To some extent? I'm sure that it became worse after we pulled out of Vietnam, you know.

00:45:18:20 - 00:45:35:10

Unknown

But I didn't see that. I didn't see that many of them. I did see George's two kids. They were cute. But, you know, you don't know what happened to them, you know.

00:45:35:13 - 00:45:51:24

Unknown

You mentioned off camera that you saw many Buddhist monks in Vietnam. Did you know anything about Buddhism before you went to Vietnam? I did not then. I really don't know much about it now, you know.

00:45:51:26 - 00:46:06:09

Unknown

Did anything about the monks surprise you? Oh, no. I mean, they were. Seemed like they were always barefooted and bald headed.

00:46:06:12 - 00:46:18:04

Unknown

I remember the the one that I'd gone that set himself on fire.

00:46:18:06 - 00:46:21:03

Unknown

You.

00:46:21:06 - 00:46:29:12

Unknown

There were a good many of them over there. I never conversed with any, you know. Just saw them.

00:46:29:14 - 00:46:42:12

Unknown

Did you go into a Buddhist temple at any point? Went into one. And just looked around, saw a lot of cats. You didn't see many cats out on the.

00:46:42:14 - 00:46:54:26

Unknown

In in the areas of town. I understand that the lot of eight eight cats, I don't know that, but that's what they were told.

00:46:54:28 - 00:47:06:21

Unknown

But there were always a lot of cats in the Buddhist temples. You'd see them hanging around there. So I guess that was kind of a home base or safe spot for them.

00:47:06:24 - 00:47:17:20

Unknown

Apart from your friend George's kids. What do you remember about Vietnamese children? They were cute. I have some.

00:47:17:22 - 00:47:33:15

Unknown

A few pictures at home where I walk around downtown with a camera and take pictures of them. And you know, most kids are cute anyway when their little fella's.

00:47:33:18 - 00:47:46:06

Unknown

Did you learn any Vietnamese words or phrases during your tours? Mostly profanity. Yeah. And?

00:47:46:08 - 00:47:56:27

Unknown

Well, there was like, get away, dinky down! You're crazy.

00:47:56:29 - 00:48:03:25

Unknown

I guess the rest of it would be pigeon Vietnamese or pigeon English. You.

00:48:03:27 - 00:48:10:12

Unknown

Are you willing to give us an example of some of the profanity you learned?

00:48:10:14 - 00:48:20:28

Unknown

I actually forgotten my most all of that.

00:48:21:01 - 00:48:26:07

Unknown

I really don't remember.

00:48:26:09 - 00:48:29:27

Unknown

Anyway.

00:48:30:00 - 00:48:36:03

Unknown

Did you experience any culture shock in Vietnam?

00:48:36:06 - 00:48:49:09

Unknown

Well, aside from the fact of being a a basically a a country boy from a countdown. Yeah, it was a big culture shock going from.

00:48:49:12 - 00:49:11:03

Unknown

When I was growing up. I graduated from high school in 65. I was in the last segregated class in the in the state of Florida. I mean, the whole state integrated the following year. And.

00:49:11:06 - 00:49:34:16

Unknown

When I started going to college, we, we, we wrote a bus over there, but we stopped and picked up three young black ladies. And that was the first time I'd ever been exposed to black kids. And.

00:49:34:19 - 00:49:39:03

Unknown

But there were.

00:49:39:06 - 00:50:07:04

Unknown

I guess, the only culture that I ever saw to any extent was Cubans. After 1959, because there was a huge influx of Cubans came into Florida getting away from Castro or fleeing Bautista and and Castro coming in and. You know, they were kids and some of them, some of them light skinned, some of them dark skinned, you know, their kids.

00:50:07:07 - 00:50:19:13

Unknown

And but I never I never saw that I can recall seeing.

00:50:19:15 - 00:50:28:14

Unknown

An Oriental or Asian as a child growing up, you know. So that was kind of a shock for me, you know.

00:50:28:16 - 00:50:42:10

Unknown

Do you remember racial tensions in the war zone between black and white GIS? Yeah, that was kind of prevalent. And that was.

00:50:42:13 - 00:50:58:14

Unknown

Well, it was a pretty tense period. You know, I was there in 68 when I was at Fort Devins, when Martin Luther King was assassinated. And it brought up a lot of tension. And that carried over to Vietnam because.

00:50:58:16 - 00:51:25:04

Unknown

You know, no matter how you feel about him, there was a he was important to African American people, you know, and it just there was a different sense of tension. You know, we didn't have so much with my company because we didn't have that many. Like when I said 3 or 4 guys in the company were black. But.

00:51:25:07 - 00:51:33:16

Unknown

With other groups on base there. Yeah, there was a good bit of tension, you know.

00:51:33:19 - 00:51:57:25

Unknown

Do you remember any white service members celebrating King's death in Vietnam? Not in Vietnam. We had a couple of rednecks when I was stationed in Massachusetts that were it serves a certain right. You know, nobody deserves to be assassinated. You know, I don't think.

00:51:57:27 - 00:52:10:10

Unknown

Bad situation. Do you remember any white supremacy symbols or black power symbols when you were in country?

00:52:10:13 - 00:52:16:04

Unknown

There was a guy that I worked with in the shop was from California.

00:52:16:07 - 00:52:26:03

Unknown

He didn't have any tattoos or patches or anything, but.

00:52:26:06 - 00:52:36:03

Unknown

One of the most racist people I've ever met, you know, and.

00:52:36:06 - 00:52:44:03

Unknown

The N-word was really prevalent in his vocabulary, you know.

00:52:44:06 - 00:52:48:07

Unknown

But, you know.

00:52:48:09 - 00:52:56:24

Unknown

I don't recall seeing, you know.

00:52:56:26 - 00:53:10:10

Unknown

Overt signs and signals, you know. Did he get in with black guys? Oh, yeah. Yeah. And it was always just talk.

00:53:10:13 - 00:53:17:00

Unknown

And a lot of blustering posturing.

00:53:17:02 - 00:53:23:12

Unknown

Did you get sick or injured at all during your time in country?

00:53:23:14 - 00:53:26:27

Unknown

I had been there.

00:53:27:00 - 00:53:47:00

Unknown

I don't know, about three weeks, and we were moving some. I don't remember what we were moving. We were stuff off of a pallet and I cut my finger pretty good on some banding material. Got a couple of stitches in my finger and then.

00:53:47:02 - 00:54:09:22

Unknown

After that, the only thing that happened to me was I extended for three months. I was supposed to go home in September of 69, but I extended for three months because I didn't know where my next duty station was going to be, and I was going to be home for Christmas to see my mom. But.

00:54:09:25 - 00:54:15:12

Unknown

30 days after Ho Chi Minh passed away.

00:54:15:14 - 00:54:32:07

Unknown

We had a little push into the compound, and it's in the middle of the night. Of course, you don't turn the lights on, and I grabbed my weapon and my helmet and my flak jacket and.

00:54:32:09 - 00:54:54:19

Unknown

My two magazines of ammunition, and I started out down the hall, and it's a two story billets, and I get to the top of the stairs, and somebody was in a bigger hurry than me and hit me in the back, and I went head over teacup down the steps, and it landed on my hip. And.

00:54:54:21 - 00:54:58:22

Unknown

Ended up with a big.

00:54:58:25 - 00:55:08:03

Unknown

I don't know, you say cherry or strawberry bruise on my buttock and.

00:55:08:06 - 00:55:27:13

Unknown

After all that got over the next, next morning I went down the dispensary and they were. It was just jam. There were people that were really hurt and I said, you know, knew better than to go to the hospital because I knew it would be worse. And I was 22 years old and I was bulletproof. I thought I was I said, oh, hell, I'll be all right.

00:55:27:14 - 00:55:32:08

Unknown

Well, you know it.

00:55:32:10 - 00:55:55:01

Unknown

Time I got to be about 40. It starts talking to you, you know, so cold weather and wet weather, it it hurts, you know, it doesn't show anything on the X-ray or an MRI, but it hurts, you know, that's where. That's where I suspect it comes from. That's, you know, I didn't get any Purple Heart or anything, so.

00:55:55:03 - 00:56:04:27

Unknown

On a lighter note, what was the most interesting food you ate in Vietnam?

00:56:05:00 - 00:56:40:03

Unknown

Well, there was a French restaurant in them because the French were in Indochina before we were there. And the guy had stayed and opened a restaurant called frigates free G80, e s, and I ate escargot there. And of course, being a Florida boy, I had seafood, but it was the first time I had prawns. You know, big, big giant shrimp.

00:56:40:06 - 00:57:03:22

Unknown

I don't know what kind of what kind of meat it was. I think it was ham, but everybody was called rat meat sandwiches was from a street vendor. You know, I don't think it was me. I hope it wasn't me. Apparently it didn't kill me, but I. You know, I never ate any Chinese food. Oriental until I came back to the States.

00:57:04:00 - 00:57:15:25

Unknown

It's never around as a kid, you know, meat and potatoes and rice, you know, home grown vegetables.

00:57:15:27 - 00:57:38:27

Unknown

Can you tell us about C rations and the ration of cigarettes you received? Well, that's the first six months I was in country. We had.

We lived in squad tents and we did not have a kitchen as such. So we were issued C rations and.

00:57:39:00 - 00:57:50:00

Unknown

You just got a box and there were several entree there. Spaghetti and meatballs. There was ham and Lima beans.

00:57:50:02 - 00:57:59:14

Unknown

That's what I remember because everybody hated them. If you liked them, you could get all you wanted because nobody else would eat them.

00:57:59:16 - 00:58:10:08

Unknown

And then we came up with a little cookie, and you had you got a little package of toilet paper. I think it was like four pieces of toilet paper. You had to be careful.

00:58:10:10 - 00:58:35:16

Unknown

You got a little pack of cigarettes for four cigarettes. And if you were lucky, you got mulberries. A lot of times you get Lucky Strikes or you know, something you didn't care for. It's actually, I smoked a little bit before I went overseas, but that's actually where I really got into the habit of smoking was in Vietnam.

00:58:35:19 - 00:58:49:04

Unknown

Because they were there, you know. And there was a desert, and sometimes you got pound cake. Everything was in a can or.

00:58:49:07 - 00:58:57:12

Unknown

It wasn't the best food in the world. But as my dad said, you know.

00:58:57:14 - 00:59:02:09

Unknown

It'll warm up a cold, empty belly.

00:59:02:12 - 00:59:21:04

Unknown

Did you also get an alcohol ration? Yes. You know, if you were below the rank of E-6, you could not buy hard liquor. That was what they called a class six store, which I guess is alcohol.

00:59:21:07 - 00:59:27:07

Unknown

We had a ration card and you could get.

00:59:27:09 – 00:59:46:04

Unknown

I don't remember if it was two cases of beer. You could get a month or three and you could get wine. And it seemed like the only wine they had was, which to me is closer gasoline. But.

00:59:46:07 – 01:00:13:14

Unknown

You know, al Gore takes he takes credit for inventing the internet. I take credit for inventing the wine cooler because I couldn't stand Chianti. But if you took it and mixed, it was seven up. It was drinkable. You know, like, I take credit for the wine cooler, which I think is much more important than the internet, but my.

01:00:13:16 – 01:00:37:28

Unknown

My ration card looked like a shotgun that did it by the time I left country, everything that I could get a drink, I became a world class beer drinker over there. Well, I am honored to meet the inventor of the wine cooler. Do you remember any distinct animals during your time in Vietnam?

01:00:38:01 – 01:00:44:26

Unknown

I would only occasionally take some equipment.

01:00:44:28 – 01:01:09:19

Unknown

Down highway one to Cameron Bay, to a first class electronic shop. And going through the countryside. There you'd see the Vietnamese version of John Deere tractor, which was a water buffalo.

01:01:09:21 – 01:01:27:27

Unknown

You know, I don't I don't recall seeing any reptiles, and I know they're there, but I didn't run into any, any tigers or anything else. You know, I think the water buffalo would be the, the only thing exotic that I saw.

01:01:28:00 – 01:01:33:07

Unknown

Did you have any pets while you were there?

01:01:33:09 – 01:01:40:12

Unknown

There were. After we got our missile built.

01:01:40:14 – 01:02:01:10

Unknown

I think it's universal most anywhere, that if there's a bunch of guys,

there's going to be some dogs. Excuse me. And we would come out of the missile and there'd be these 5 or 6 dogs out there and thereby just empty their plate out. They were fat as bears. And.

01:02:01:13 - 01:02:05:19

Unknown

Like I said, we didn't see many cats.

01:02:05:21 - 01:02:14:19

Unknown

And we had all the dogs named, and some of them would come in the barracks and, you know, sleep in the same room with some guy.

01:02:14:21 - 01:02:18:27

Unknown

The Koreans next door to us.

01:02:19:00 - 01:02:44:10

Unknown

The dog is a delicacy to them, but they would not bother our dogs. You know, their dogs either had enough sense to hang around our company area and not go across the street, but every now and then you would see one, not one of ours, but you see a stray dog come through and go to the go through Korean area, and the cook would be out there day and you'd see him go in the mess all, and he'd never come out.

01:02:44:13 - 01:02:53:15

Unknown

So I'm sure he got butchered in there. But the dogs were hit primarily as pets.

01:02:53:18 - 01:03:20:00

Unknown

Do you remember any memorable experiences with the rats? No roaches, I do, but not rats. I don't know. When I was a kid, I just had a strong aversion, roaches wanting to crawl on me, and I screamed like a child. And. After I was over there, about three months, you get where you get off of me, you know?

01:03:20:02 - 01:03:31:21

Unknown

One of my friends used to say he had. There was a root so big in our barracks that he carried a butter knife, you know, and rode a rat. So.

01:03:31:24 - 01:03:45:21

Unknown

Did you ever see Vietnamese civilians collecting or using American trash? Yeah, all the time.

01:03:45:24 - 01:04:05:10

Unknown

What's not useful to us might be useful to somebody else. And the other thing that you have to watch for when you're throwing things away is going to be used against you. Can you can you make an IED when you call them IEDs in the call them booby traps? Is it something that, you know, like a tin can you don't think about?

01:04:05:10 - 01:04:25:06

Unknown

A tin can be dangerous, but if you put a grenade inside it, pull a pin and put a tripwire on it, it's deadly, you know, just a simple thing, Ken. So you have to be careful what you throw away.

01:04:25:08 - 01:04:29:20

Unknown

Excuse me.

01:04:29:22 - 01:04:42:12

Unknown

And, you know, there were a lot of poor folks there.

01:04:42:14 - 01:05:07:21

Unknown

And they must have had some uses for some of the stuff they picked up. You know, I can remember seeing houses down there that would have beer cans had been peeled at. It was like siding, you know. You know, the beer cans about the size of your tablet there when it spread out, or maybe not quite that big, might take a hundred of them to cover the wall.

01:05:07:24 - 01:05:20:00

Unknown

It looked like a patchwork up there. So somebody salvaging something, there's some use somewhere, so you have to be careful what you throw away.

01:05:20:02 - 01:05:26:16

Unknown

Did you personally encounter the Viet Cong?

01:05:26:19 - 01:05:30:27

Unknown

In a face to face? No, I.

01:05:31:00 - 01:05:37:14

Unknown

I was on guard duty one night and we had a penetration into the.

01:05:37:16 - 01:05:55:02

Unknown

Compound. And the odd officer of the day called up a perimeter fire, and, you know, it's pitch black, dark, and you're just shooting. And they light the next day.

01:05:55:04 - 01:06:13:18

Unknown

Between my guard shack and the next guy going down, there was two people out there in the wire, and whether I hit them or the other guy hit them, I don't know. But that's I never had a face to face confrontation with a Viet Cong or an NBA guy.

01:06:13:20 - 01:06:37:27

Unknown

How many people generally were on your compound? In my in my company, there was like 200 of us, but there was also the Korean battalion. Next to us was close to a thousand people. 54 Signal Battalion was there, and there was probably a thousand people.

01:06:38:00 - 01:06:51:25

Unknown

MP company, probably about our size, about 200 or so. And then there was a, you know, I'm guessing.

01:06:51:27 - 01:06:58:07

Unknown

You know, 3500, 4000 people in that area.

01:06:58:09 - 01:07:04:28

Unknown

Did you encounter Vietnamese POWs? I did not.

01:07:05:01 - 01:07:10:21

Unknown

Do you remember seeing Agent Orange being sprayed?

01:07:10:24 - 01:07:18:03

Unknown

I did not see being sprayed, but.

01:07:18:06 - 01:07:48:13

Unknown

Where I was stationed, it's on. It's on the South China Sea. And we were on one side. All the groups that I mentioned to you. And then on the right side of us, if you're looking in from the ocean, was was not trying Air Force Base and they flew Agent Orange out of there all the time. But I never saw it being sprayed.

01:07:48:15 - 01:07:58:26

Unknown

Were you concerned at the time about Agent Orange? Didn't didn't have

an idea what it was. You know, it was clueless.

01:07:58:28 - 01:08:10:22

Unknown

Was your compound cleared by Agent Orange before you got there? Yeah, when I got there, was, of course, they were calling it Tent City, and.

01:08:10:25 - 01:08:20:24

Unknown

You had all the makings of of a little community, except everything was canvas.

01:08:20:26 - 01:08:27:08

Unknown

So, I mean, you know, there was no wasn't any brush or anything. It was all.

01:08:27:10 - 01:08:32:21

Unknown

A cityscape, I guess you'd say.

01:08:32:24 - 01:08:50:16

Unknown

What were some of the ways you coped with the war? Drank a lot. I, I said my ration card looked like a shotgun. Hit it.

01:08:50:19 - 01:09:06:21

Unknown

I'm not proud of it now, but that was a world class beer drinker. And, you know, I'd go to breakfast and come back, open a beer and keep a busy one all day long.

01:09:06:24 - 01:09:24:10

Unknown

There was a marijuana was prevalent and it was cheap, but I never did it because back in those days, you know, they had that life sentences. If you get caught with with a significant amount of marijuana.

01:09:24:13 - 01:09:29:28

Unknown

I guess, you know, drinking was the way I coped.

01:09:30:01 - 01:09:39:09

Unknown

How did people around you cope with the war? Drink it? Well did.

01:09:39:11 - 01:09:49:04

Unknown

So in your opinion, it's fair to say that alcohol was a key part of how people coped and. Oh yeah. Oh yeah.

01:09:49:07 - 01:09:58:14

Unknown

Did people mostly drink alcohol that was part of their rations or did they go to a lot of bars? Oh.

01:09:58:16 - 01:10:07:15

Unknown

If you had time off, you know, and, and and things were quiet, you could go downtown.

01:10:07:18 - 01:10:14:03

Unknown

And drink. But.

01:10:14:06 - 01:10:36:21

Unknown

You know, if you went to the class six door, I think a case of beer was like \$2 and a half a \$.10 a beer. If you went downtown, it was a buck, you know, and I think I was making not counting hazardous duty pay. Well, counting hazardous duty pay was making just a shade over \$200 a month.

01:10:36:24 - 01:10:43:12

Unknown

But I was trying to send my mother a little money, you know, and.

01:10:43:14 - 01:10:50:02

Unknown

The downtown budget wasn't there, you know.

01:10:50:04 - 01:11:05:07

Unknown

Do you remember humor or slang or jokes or pranks being a part of life in Vietnam? Oh, yeah, it had to be it.

01:11:05:09 - 01:11:16:12

Unknown

Every new guy that comes in, new guy that comes in, you always make them do something. You're sitting with the motor pool to get a bucket of steam.

01:11:16:14 - 01:11:21:19

Unknown

And they they'd head out that way.

01:11:21:21 - 01:11:33:09

Unknown

Similar to wash trucks. You know, just that's not my that's not our company. It's not our needs. Wash it. Go wash it. Yeah.

01:11:33:11 - 01:11:42:09

Unknown

But that's just that's just being gi, you know, you can pick on each other all the time.

01:11:42:11 - 01:11:51:15

Unknown

Were you aware of military personnel who opposed the war while in country? No.

01:11:51:18 - 01:12:01:00

Unknown

What was the most memorable friendship you had during your time in Vietnam?

01:12:01:02 - 01:12:06:21

Unknown

J.P. Morgan. And that's his name, J.P..

01:12:06:24 - 01:12:12:15

Unknown

And he and I kept up with each other for.

01:12:12:18 - 01:12:23:25

Unknown

Damn near 60 years, and we still correspond. He's a Oklahoma boy. After we left.

01:12:23:27 - 01:12:44:01

Unknown

Vietnam, we were stationed at Fort Huachuca, Arizona together. And then I haven't seen him since then, but we just, you know, we just keep up with each other. So did you meet him in country? Yeah.

01:12:44:03 - 01:12:58:06

Unknown

Today. Do you call each other or email? We mostly call, you know, but once a month or so, just. Hey, how are you doing that kind of stuff?

01:12:58:08 - 01:13:06:08

Unknown

What was the most beautiful thing you saw in Vietnam?

01:13:06:10 - 01:13:11:18

Unknown

On the end of the compound, there was a.

01:13:11:20 - 01:13:34:27

Unknown

I guess you would say it was a small mountain or a big hill, one or the other. You could go to the top of that, and you could look out of the South China Sea. And it was absolutely gorgeous. If you looked out toward the ocean, if you look into it, it was a pile of poop. But.

01:13:35:00 - 01:13:43:00

Unknown

That South China coastline was just amazing. I've not been back and not going back, but.

01:13:43:02 - 01:14:14:26

Unknown

Where I was stationed in the train, they capitalism apparently has done them some good. They have huge oceanfront hotels and there's a giant Ferris wheel there, which none of that was there when I was, you know. So they're taking advantage of that seascape, you know, and it was a and, you know, with the right things being put there, I'm sure it's gorgeous.

01:14:14:28 - 01:14:24:09

Unknown

What was the worst thing you saw in Vietnam?

01:14:24:12 - 01:14:29:25

Unknown

Well that would have been.

01:14:29:27 - 01:14:47:24

Unknown

As I was telling you, the, the, the night that we had the incursion into the after Ho Chi Minh had passed away 30 days previously, and we took significant rocket mortar fire that night and.

01:14:47:26 - 01:15:03:11

Unknown

Two guys got got killed in a company up the road from us that never got out of bed. The rocket just hit on the roof and caught both of them in the bed.

01:15:03:13 - 01:15:09:02

Unknown

It was a lot of destruction that night.

01:15:09:04 - 01:15:20:06

Unknown

Did you expect to survive the war? I think everybody does. That was, you know, hoping to.

01:15:20:08 - 01:15:29:22

Unknown

Who did you write to or receive letters from while you were in Vietnam? My mom and.

01:15:29:25 - 01:15:37:20

Unknown

My mom saved every letter that I wrote her. I still have them. And.

01:15:37:22 - 01:16:04:00

Unknown

We had one time when we got right busy with the with a campaign. And I would write to her about every three days, and we went about two weeks where I didn't she didn't get a note from me and she she sent me a self-addressed envelope with a new one and said, write something to me.

01:16:04:02 - 01:16:26:04

Unknown

So being a smart ass, I took the top off of the box of c rashes. I got turned over on the blanks that wrote something stuck in the end, mailed it back to her, you know, so I wrote something. She was primarily the only one I wrote to I.

01:16:26:07 - 01:16:39:24

Unknown

I got a Dear John letter shortly after I got in country, so I didn't have any lady to write to anymore. So, you know, broke my heart. But we got over it.

01:16:39:26 - 01:16:49:12

Unknown

Do you remember any American TV shows or songs from your time in Vietnam? Oh yeah, the rascals were. And.

01:16:49:14 - 01:16:54:21

Unknown

I think Clearwater Revival.

01:16:54:24 - 01:16:59:24

Unknown

If you here, I can tell you where I was, but.

01:16:59:26 - 01:17:22:12

Unknown

When I did watch the I watched it live. You folks had to watch it the next morning. But watch it live on AFN. Was the was the moon landing because it happened like 2:00 in the morning in American time. It was 2:00 in the afternoon in Vietnam because and but we watched that black and white TV.

01:17:22:14 - 01:17:46:16

Unknown

That was pretty interesting. Did you watch it in a group? Oh yeah. Yeah. Somebody had it's a somebody they brought in like a little nine inch black and white TV. There was probably 20 of us sitting in this one guys room with their eyes all pegged on it.

01:17:46:19 - 01:18:10:19

Unknown

What was the reaction like? We were kind of amazed. You know, it it was quite a step. Can we go? It just unbelievable. It still is to me today. You know that. As President Kennedy said, we put a man on the moon and bring him home.

01:18:10:21 - 01:18:14:25

Unknown

Point. Accomplishment.

01:18:14:27 - 01:18:30:19

Unknown

Do you have any memories of USO shows or recreation on base? Oh yeah. We and Margaret, bless her heart. She came to Cameron Bay and.

01:18:30:21 - 01:18:53:06

Unknown

I don't remember how I got to go, I guess. Wiggled some time off somewhere and I went down there and there's just a sea of olive drab uniforms and and Mark. And she was about that big, you know, on stage. But she came.

01:18:53:08 - 01:18:58:27

Unknown

And Bob Hope were there. Of course, I don't remember who else was there.

01:18:59:00 - 01:19:09:21

Unknown

That's the only USO show I saw. Every now and then we would have a well, wait a minute. We had the Serendipity Singers came to the Air Force base.

01:19:09:24 - 01:19:16:27

Unknown

And that's who Kenny Rogers was with before he went out on his own.

01:19:17:00 - 01:19:33:27

Unknown

There's one other group that came through, and then. And then you'd have some guys that just, you know, like a local band would show up, you know, be Americans. And we'd we'd go, you know.

01:19:34:00 - 01:19:45:10

Unknown

Were there any other forms of recreation on base? Well, we had a basketball court.

01:19:45:13 - 01:19:58:27

Unknown

Didn't have a swimming pool. We didn't have tennis courts. I think basketball was about it. And nobody played soccer back in those days.

01:19:59:00 - 01:20:04:08

Unknown

That's all I can remember.

01:20:04:10 - 01:20:10:22

Unknown

What was your most expensive or frequent purchase at the.

01:20:10:25 - 01:20:30:14

Unknown

Most expensive thing I bought was to SRT 101 camera, and it was \$126, which was about my spendable income for that month. But I took a lot of pictures with it.

01:20:30:16 - 01:20:37:13

Unknown

And you can't even get parts for that camera. And I still got it. But.

01:20:37:16 - 01:20:43:22

Unknown

Then nobody uses film anymore. Everybody uses a cell phone.

01:20:43:25 - 01:20:46:25

Unknown

And.

01:20:46:27 - 01:20:50:03

Unknown

I bought a.

01:20:50:06 - 01:21:00:00

Unknown

Stereo receiver while I was over there, and it was \$126. Also, it was a Kenwood.

01:21:00:02 - 01:21:05:02

Unknown

That's about it as far as the big ticket items go.

01:21:05:04 - 01:21:09:14

Unknown

Did you buy any Vietnamese souvenirs?

01:21:09:16 - 01:21:16:28

Unknown

Not really. I.

01:21:17:01 - 01:21:29:26

Unknown

I think the only thing I have ever say is souvenir. I've got a couple of coins and I have a 20 or note.

01:21:29:28 - 01:21:47:00

Unknown

South Vietnamese, and it was worth about \$0.20 then, so it's absolutely useless today except as a keepsake. But no, I don't have any anything that's near and dear to my heart, you know.

01:21:47:02 - 01:21:53:26

Unknown

Did you buy anything for your mom? I did, I bought.

01:21:53:28 - 01:22:01:10

Unknown

A bottle of nail number five for her. I bought a.

01:22:01:13 - 01:22:13:01

Unknown

Pearl necklace. It was a large single pearl.

01:22:13:03 - 01:22:19:18

Unknown

Some other piece of jewelry, but I can't recall what it was.

01:22:19:20 - 01:22:25:14

Unknown

Sounds like you were a very good son. I hope so.

01:22:25:16 - 01:22:30:02

Unknown

What was R&R like, and where did you go?

01:22:30:04 - 01:22:33:26

Unknown

Well.

01:22:33:28 - 01:23:07:07

Unknown

In February of 69, I got sent on temporary duty to Bangkok, Thailand for a school on a piece of long range directional finding equipment. I

was there for 30 days and I thought Bangkok was a fantastic town. So when it came up for time to go to answer, I was debating between going to Australia or going back to Bangkok, and I said, I'm going to go back to Bangkok.

01:23:07:09 - 01:23:14:01

Unknown

It was it's quite a city, you know, I liked it.

01:23:14:03 - 01:23:28:07

Unknown

That's the end of my in-country questions. Is there another story we haven't talked about from your time in Vietnam that you'd like to share? No, not really. I think we've covered about everything.

01:23:28:09 - 01:23:49:27

Unknown

You returned to the US in early December 1969, and you brought us a Stars and Stripes from that date. Can you tell us what it was like coming home when the mill massacre was front page news?

01:23:50:00 - 01:23:56:24

Unknown

It's been so long ago.

01:23:56:26 - 01:24:02:09

Unknown

I think, as an enlisted guy.

01:24:02:12 - 01:24:22:26

Unknown

I think the majority of the people that were my peers would have thought it was a classic thing of poop rolling downhill. That.

01:24:22:28 - 01:24:36:28

Unknown

I'm not sure that Lieutenant Kelly did that without orders, you know, I don't know, because he's dead. Gone now. Nobody knows but him and the Lord, you know.

01:24:37:01 - 01:24:48:10

Unknown

But it was, you know. It's a significant piece of history. And obviously it did happen, but, you know.

01:24:48:13 - 01:24:53:28

Unknown

Like I said, I have personal doubts about whether.

01:24:54:01 - 01:25:00:20

Unknown

I think he was guilty. Yes, but I think he did it under orders.

01:25:00:22 - 01:25:19:25

Unknown

You continued to serve in the military until 1971. In that time, did you see morale change or an increase in things like antiwar GI newspapers? No. But you know, when.

01:25:19:27 - 01:25:33:01

Unknown

When I got to Fort Huachuca, probably half of the guys in the company were Vietnam vets.

01:25:33:03 - 01:25:47:26

Unknown

You know, in short time, as they say, you know, waiting to get out.

01:25:47:28 - 01:25:55:20

Unknown

Didn't see any war stuff. I had I had a friend of mine that.

01:25:55:22 - 01:26:08:08

Unknown

He bought a Peugeot four door sedan. It was about ten years old or older and.

01:26:08:10 - 01:26:15:27

Unknown

Somewhere or another he found a peace sign decal.

01:26:16:00 - 01:26:23:08

Unknown

That had a black outline of the piece on, but it had stars and stripes.

01:26:23:10 - 01:26:32:13

Unknown

And he got hassled by a colonel at the for having that. And.

01:26:32:15 - 01:26:47:00

Unknown

And Bob wasn't necessarily anti-war. He just thought it was cute. You know, he he did get out. But he had to scrape it off his car. So the colonel didn't like it.

01:26:47:02 - 01:27:04:12

Unknown

Let's talk about your post service life. What relationship in your life was most changed by your service?

01:27:04:15 - 01:27:12:22

Unknown

A relationship change? I guess I'm a lot more grateful.

01:27:12:25 - 01:27:37:00

Unknown

For everyday life here. You know everything. Everything. You know, I've had a few bumps in the road, one thing or another. But since December the 2nd of 1969, life's been pretty good. You know, nobody's shooting at me anymore. You know? So.

01:27:37:02 - 01:27:46:18

Unknown

You know, I been married twice and.

01:27:46:20 - 01:27:52:10

Unknown

Just day to day life. You know, had a job, worked.

01:27:52:13 - 01:28:10:09

Unknown

How did your mom react to you getting home from Vietnam? She was elated. You know that I was her baby boy. And she said.

01:28:10:12 - 01:28:35:20

Unknown

Easter. Just passing makes me think I got an Easter basket from my mother every year that I was alive. Up until I put her in a nursing home. I got an Easter basket from her when I was in Vietnam. And you were supposed to be over there and be rough and tough. And here you get this Easter basket with a damn toy rabbit in it.

01:28:35:22 - 01:28:43:19

Unknown

But in all the guys ragging me, of course they all helped eat the candy or the cookies, but.

01:28:43:21 - 01:28:48:11

Unknown

I was her baby boy and.

01:28:48:13 - 01:29:06:03

Unknown

My siblings all say I was the favorite child. And I tell them that. Well, look what she had to choose from. So it's easy to see what he should see. Why was a favorite? But she and I were pretty close. You know.

01:29:06:06 - 01:29:21:10

Unknown

And I had some health scares when I was a young lad. And I think that's one reason why mom worried about me more than she did the others. Not that she loved me any better. She just worried more about me, you know?

01:29:21:13 - 01:29:32:08

Unknown

You mentioned being a Republican growing up. Did the war in any way shape your view of Richard Nixon?

01:29:32:10 - 01:29:41:25

Unknown

No. He got us out of Vietnam. You know that.

01:29:41:27 - 01:29:47:24

Unknown

Watergate changed my view of him, but.

01:29:47:26 - 01:29:53:26

Unknown

I don't think the war changed my opinion of him.

01:29:53:28 - 01:30:00:22

Unknown

Did you know any antiwar veterans?

01:30:00:25 - 01:30:06:26

Unknown

I can't tell you that I did. I went to Florida.

01:30:06:28 - 01:30:33:10

Unknown

About four months ago and took my one of my pups with me and went to a dog park in Ocala, Florida. And I was wearing a hat that says Vietnam Veteran on it. And the guy walked up and you were in Vietnam and he said, yeah, I protested, where do you think about that?

01:30:33:13 - 01:30:45:07

Unknown

I said, did you dodge the draft? Well, yeah. Okay. Bye. You know, I just but that's.

01:30:45:09 - 01:30:51:24

Unknown

I don't.

01:30:51:26 - 01:31:05:21

Unknown

I knew some guys who were draft Dodgers, but I think I think they were

scared. Hell, I was scared. You know, they were scared. If you're not scared, you're crazy.

01:31:05:24 - 01:31:15:06

Unknown

But I don't think I ever knew anybody that was just adamantly anti-war. You know, just.

01:31:15:08 - 01:31:40:24

Unknown

By draft dodger. What do you mean? Well, the draft was right. Conspicuous. Then you know it. It's why a lot of guys stayed in school. And why a lot of guys got married. Because there was a there was a a college deferment. There was a marriage deferment.

01:31:40:26 - 01:31:54:15

Unknown

And you had some guys that got married solely for the purpose that, you know, if you get married to have a kid, you you'd get a deferment. You wouldn't go.

01:31:54:18 - 01:32:12:15

Unknown

Like, like my dad used to say about being in World War Two. He said, anybody asks you what you did, the war. He said, well, I didn't get a college deferment and I didn't hide behind a woman's skirts. So.

01:32:12:18 - 01:32:19:24

Unknown

Did you know anyone who moved to Canada? No. Not personally.

01:32:19:26 - 01:32:26:10

Unknown

Have you been to the wall in DC? I have not. Now the.

01:32:26:13 - 01:32:34:04

Unknown

Wherever they called the mobile wall or the wall that he was the one that came to came to Aiken.

01:32:34:07 - 01:33:07:28

Unknown

What, 12, 15 years ago? And I went up and saw that. And of course, they were reading all the names from day one to day. Last of people that were killed. And it was a surprising amount of emotion came out there. And even though, you know, like I said, even though I never come back and you think about 59,000 guys have been a majority of them, 18, 19 years old.

01:33:08:01 - 01:33:35:15

Unknown

Yeah. And you think, of course, back then you think, well, that's that's men that died when you get my age, you know, nearly 80. They're just kids, you know. They really are. You know, I think the youngest woman, one of 15. And there's eight ladies. They went from Allendale and.

01:33:35:18 - 01:33:50:26

Unknown

But just, you know, it really surprised me how emotional I got over there. I keep saying I want to go see it in person and.

01:33:50:28 - 01:33:57:24

Unknown

But I don't want to turn into a big blubbering mess there either, you know? So.

01:33:57:26 - 01:34:13:01

Unknown

Have you seen pictures of the wall? See? What do you think of it? You know, when it was when they were talking about it, I was kind of skeptical of the design.

01:34:13:03 - 01:34:19:20

Unknown

And then once it was built, it just.

01:34:19:22 - 01:34:24:00

Unknown

It's just overwhelming. You know?

01:34:24:02 - 01:34:28:18

Unknown

It's a big, huge gash in the earth.

01:34:28:20 - 01:34:32:02

Unknown

And.

01:34:32:04 - 01:34:41:12

Unknown

For all practical purposes, the names on that wall equates to the city of being gone, you know.

01:34:41:14 - 01:34:48:22

Unknown

59,000 young men and women.

01:34:48:25 - 01:34:51:13

Unknown

It's.

01:34:51:15 - 01:34:57:26

Unknown

I don't know, I get choked. I don't know what to say.

01:34:57:28 - 01:35:13:18

Unknown

Do you remember it being controversial? Oh, yeah. Yeah. There were a lot of people that didn't like the idea of the wall. They didn't like the idea that the lady that designed it was an Asian.

01:35:13:20 - 01:35:23:21

Unknown

It was an unfitting tribute. I think all of that's changed now, you know.

01:35:23:24 - 01:35:48:25

Unknown

You mentioned that you haven't been back to Vietnam and not going. Why not? I didn't lose anything there. Nothing I want to go see again. You know, there's some beautiful parts of the country. Just have no desire to go back. Would you like to go back to Thailand?

01:35:48:27 - 01:36:03:16

Unknown

That'd be okay. You know, I would probably rather go to Norway, where my dad's people are from. Another significant world traveler.

01:36:03:19 - 01:36:10:01

Unknown

This is my last question. Good. I hate tests.

01:36:10:03 - 01:36:18:22

Unknown

Do you have a favorite book, poem or movie about Vietnam?

01:36:18:25 - 01:36:24:22

Unknown

I can't remember the name of the book.

01:36:24:25 - 01:36:30:09

Unknown

I guess I can say yes, I do, but I don't remember the name of it.

01:36:30:12 - 01:36:41:08

Unknown

But you could tell that the guy that wrote it had been there, you know. What is the book about?

01:36:41:10 - 01:36:49:25

Unknown

Him going back to Vietnam after the war? And.

01:36:49:27 - 01:36:58:03

Unknown

Only a covert mission to.

01:36:58:06 - 01:37:07:13

Unknown

Repatriate some remains?

01:37:07:15 - 01:37:12:02

Unknown

And I guess the reason I read that was.

01:37:12:04 - 01:37:38:09

Unknown

I mean, in the Vietnam Veterans of America, and that's that's one of our mission, is to make sure that nobody gets treated the way that Vietnam veterans were treated when we came home. And that same thing applies to anybody during that time period, because there were folks that served in Europe that never went to Vietnam, that got the same abuse, just strictly because they were in uniform.

01:37:38:15 - 01:37:55:24

Unknown

That's one way. And the other thing is we we were seeking to repatriate the remains of enemies. There's still some missing in Vietnam and Laos and Cambodia and surrounding areas.

01:37:55:26 - 01:38:03:25

Unknown

So. Well, Mr. Olson, thank you so much for talking with us and for sharing your stories. All right. Thank you.