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### Oral History Interview: Sergeant David Sias

David Sias

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# Veteran's Release Form

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(In cases of deceased veterans, to be completed by the donor of the material.)

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### ACCEPTED AND AGREED

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5/3/05

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Interviewee: Sergeant David Sias

Interview date: 3/10/05

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J: So you said you were there for 6 months

D: A year

J: A year

J: So what was your primary objective?

D: I was a helicopter mechanic. I worked on helicopter.

D: I was in the 235<sup>th</sup> aviation.

J: Was that a branch of the air force?

D: The army. It was the first attack helicopter unit in the world.

J: So you flew missions where you saw people flying along the river.

D: Most of the missions that I flew were at night time.

J: Oh, ok. So you were the person who was piloting...?

D: No, I was...when I flew I was a gunner, a door gunner.

J: OK

D: Our basic job was to just throw flares out there and light it up so the helicopters could shoot it up.

J: So if you have enemy fire you retaliate, or were you on missions where you seek out people.

D: Well, we had what they call “?”, we had infrared sensors that if they would pick up a hot spot, they would go in a shoot it up, because it was considered a free fire zone.

J: Oh so they weren’t supposed to be there.

D: They weren’t supposed to be there, and if they did it was considered fair game.

Break in tape

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J: Did you enlist or were you drafted?

D: I enlisted, for 2 years but you had no choice in where they sent you.

J: Oh, really?

D: Yeah

J: So it was just the luck of the draw.

D: Yeah pretty much, it was just where they wanted to stick ya in.

J: So, how was it that they put you in a helicopter?

D: It was just the luck of the draw....the thing about that, I don’t guess many people enlisted for it, about half of us, I know the people that had enlisted had to serve 4 years, and they asked me, since they knew I just had 2 years, “How do you do this?!”

J: So you have to have more of a commitment if you say, “I want to do this....

D: When you choose your field, that’s what happens if you choose what you want.

(Phone rings) 044 on tape counter

J: Ok, so what was your title?

D: Well, it was called helicopter armament specialist

J: What was your training?



D: It was a 6 month school in Aberdeen, MD.

J: When you got in what was the year?

D: I went in in '69, December 69. I was a two year person. If you had less than 4 months left in the service in Vietnam they just let you out of the service, so I spent 20 months in there.

J: I've been reading that book, when was war officially declared?

D: I have no idea.

J: That's ok; I'll look it up on the internet.

D: I know we had advisors there in the early sixties.

J: People there before war broke out even you mean?

D: They were kinda guiding the South Vietnamese army.

J: But nobody knew about it right?

D: Well they knew about it, but there were very few advisors there. They started out with a few, then more and more went there.

J: Okay, so what rank did you achieve or what rank did you start at?

D: Everyone starts out at E1 I ended up at E5 which is the same as Sergeant. I got to SP5 which is the same as Sergeant.

J: SP5 is that what you said?

D: SP5 is basically the same as a Sergeant, a specialist in the field.

J: So were you in command of other people?

D: No

J: So everybody was for themselves or what...?

D: We had a couple of E6 in charge of armored shop, that's who was watching what we did.

J: And when you went on a mission, everyone's the same rank and is working as a team or what?

D: Well, it was a team everybody did their job.

J: And knew what they had to do, it wasn't one of those spur of the moment things where it's "you do this and you do that?" Just everybody knew starting off what to do?

D: Well one night we was over there supposed to be loading ammo up and this new guy was there, strange guy, and I said, "Hey bub, care to give us a hand and said bring some of this over here." He started work and then I noticed he was a major.

J: Really?! So did he have to do that kind of stuff?

D: No he just happened to be there and it was so dark he didn't see the rank. Then after we sit to eat in the light I looked over and saw his rank and said okay.

J: Did he think that you were a higher rank than him or...

D: I know no kid 19 years old....

J: Oh you were only 19?

D: 19 or 20 at the time. He just saw that it needed to be done so he did it.

J: All right that brings a new question up, I was reading that book and he was talking about their sleep patterns, were like an hour here and an hour there, was yours that bad?

D: No ours, I flew for about 4 months, and we would leave out about 5 in the afternoon and get back about 4 o'clock in the morning. There were 3 of us flying, we flew 2 nights and then took off one. 2 and off 1, so basically if it was your night you could do what you wanted to do.

J: and what was there to do over there?

D: Barhop,

J: Barhop

D: That's a polite way of putting it.

J: Gotcha! Did you go to the local village?

D: The downtown had a sin city whatever you wanted to call it.

J: Were you....what city was that around? What province?

D: It was outside of Canto, Canto was the biggest town, I can't remember the little town, it was just right beside Canto.

J: So what were those cities like, were they pretty modern or were they pretty....like huts and shacks and stuff?

D: Beer joints prostitution and all that and all that, in the service...I didn't drink much before I went in but when you get in the service you drink a lot. We would go into town and drink and all that, you know.

J: Nothing else to do, right?

D: Well, it was just our way of letting off pressure.

J: That's pretty much exactly what our teacher said; he never drank or smoked cigarettes but...

D: Now there's some parts I won't tell you because I don't want (my kids) to hear it....but you could walk down the street and buy packs of marijuana for 50 cents. They would take a thing of name brand cigarettes like Salem or whatever and they would open the bottom of them up and take the tobacco out and fill it full of grass and 50 cents would buy you a pack of 20.

J: Okay

D: I think about Swanny and Kent (army buddies) one time, the Vietnamese anyway they could to make a buck they would make it, and we used to have a twisted flex watch like your band, that you slide off and on, if it was like yours they couldn't take it, but you'd be walking down the street and they'd run up and tore it off your arm and be gone before you realized what had happened.

J: Even a Velcro band?

D: Umm....it was more like a twisted flex like the expandable...? So Kenny and Swanny and Page said, "We are gonna fix 'em, we are gonna catch one of them little suckers. Kenny was in the middle, Swanny was in the back, and Page was up front walking down and Kenny going just goin' like this, "Come on, take it take it take it." And they told about it when they got back, nothing happened, they tried to chase the Cong stuck his arm out and some little kid took it and run like hell.

J: Laughs, so he was invited 'em and then when he wasn't looking...

D: When they dropped their guard it was gone. Cause I lost mine one time and I chased that little sucker and I could not catch him.

J: They have their hiding spots, little holes....

D: Just fast...

J: Really

**D: He's running for his life, I was just running for a watch.**

J: That's true.

J: Well, you said you enlisted, were you generally excited to go or was it something like....well they're gonna draft me anyway.

D: That's what I...I figured I was gonna get drafted anyway, I might as well just go over here till it's over with. Plus, all my, I had a lot of friends that were in. About a third of my class went, guys.

J: Ok, and are you originally from West Virginia?

D: Yes

J: Where did you go to High School?

D: Hamlin

J: Hamlin

Tape counter 138

J: And a third of your high school class went?

D: Yep, we probably only had like 25 guys in my class...

J: Oh, okay.

D: Graduating class was only 62 people.

J: And about a third of them enlisted?

D: I don't know if they enlisted, went in or what, we just did a count one day and figured about a third of the class went, which would have been about 9 or 10 people.

J: That's still a lot.

D: We were lucky, we all came back.

J: Do you guys still get together or anything?

D: No

J: Any of them...did you run into any of them over there or were you all spread out?

D: My best friend, I went to visit him when I was over there, I spent a few days with him.

J: Okay, this is kinda personal but did you were you excited or were you scared to death to go over there?

D: Scared

J: Did you feel prepared at all?

D: As soon as we landed at Camron Bay, they put us on buses, green buses with the wire mesh on the windows, you knew then that something wasn't right.....?

Like one guy said you learned the difference between incoming and outgoing because the sound of it. And you'd be taking a shower and it'd be outgoing and you'd try to figure where it is coming from, and then all the sudden you'd realize it's outgoing and you'd be okay. It's a....well, I wouldn't say that it would you'll get used to it, but it took about a month just to deal with the things.

J: Do you mean outgoing like a grenade launcher?

D: No I'm talking about a Howitzer or something like that.

J: So you can tell if it's getting closer...

D: Well you can tell when it goes off, if there's an explosion then it's outgoing you know what I'm saying, if you hear something without an explosion then that's incoming. That's the best way I can explain it to you, the quickest way.

J: So, you want to elaborate on when you first got there and they bused you in, I've seen Forrest Gump, I don't know if you've ever seen that...

D: Yep

J: You've seen that part where they bus them in and he goes and shakes the major's hand or the commander, and the guy is like, "Don't ever salute me, don't ever let the enemy know..."

D: No it wasn't nothing like that.

J: No

D: To give you an idea, my last week, I had one officer, he said, "Listen, Dave when we talk like this it's just Dave and John, he said if there's anybody of rank around I appreciate you calling by rank." I said, "No problem." And I flew 2 and off 1, I was notified I was flying, I had a half an hour to get the radio the supplies for the mission I was flying, the C rations and all, so I went over to get the radio and there wasn't anybody there and I knew the sergeant, I climbed across the wall and took the radio and left a note, and I came back through and it happened to be a visiting E6 in charge of shop, an E5 came up and got on my case and a captain got on my case real bad, and they said, I said,

"Listen I left a note, notifying a half an hour flying and I said, I had no choice." And they said, "well tomorrow you come back and I got an article 15 waiting on you, which is a court marshal for theft, is what he was gonna give me for it. It just so happened that night that I was flying with the CO, it was kinda like you said, there was no rank there, we sat that night eating the C rations and the CO looked over and said, "Uh Dave, I noticed you kinda got chewed out tonight, Captain ? is all over you, what was that about." I said, "Sir, I was notified a half an hour before flight time that I was flying, I had to get all this together in a half an hour to get on the chopper to get outta here, and I said, tomorrow when I get back I'm facing an article 15. He said, "Let me talk to him."

Anyway, to make a long story short, about 2 days later I went in wondering if I could borrow the Jeep, Sergeant said, "Dave, you better get outta here, the captain don't like you anymore." The CO got all over him and the last week there, I passed Banana, I call him Banana, I don't know how to pronounce his name, and John came up and saluted

him. I said, "Good afternoon sir!" Like that, and John returned it, and the Captain turned around and looked at me and said, "Don't you salute anymore?" I said, "Sir I got a week left in this place, do you think I give a shit!?" I just did it because I just wanted to put John on the spot; there was not a lot of saluting going on there.

J: I didn't know if the officers were paranoid because of snipers or anything.

D: Where we was at, there wasn't any snipers or anything, but now in other places that was very true I would say, but just where I was at.

J: Now you were in a base in a friendly area, or you were in a base...

D: We was in a base, I guess you could say a friendly area.

J: At least semi-friendly, did you guys get sneak attacks?

D: No, not very many.

J: You don't really have to answer these kinds of questions, but what was the overall casualty rate of a helicopter pilot?

D: I'd say, we were pretty lucky, in a year we lost maybe 6 people.

J: 6 people, that was what, one shot down?

D: Do you know what a Cobra is by any chance, it's a 2 man helicopter, like these Blackhawks, it was an older one, a 2 seater, a front seat and a back seat.

J: Okay, one flying and one shooting?

D: Yeah

J: Okay

D: Yeah, and out of the 6, a couple of times both of them didn't make it...

J: Okay, I guess one person could get shot...



D: We had one officer come back, he got shot right in between the eyes, and the time it went through the helicopter and the helmet and all, he just reached up there and pulled it out....

J: And he didn't die?

D: No....they laughed about it, because by the time, you know a helmet like a helmet on a bike, by the time it went through all that stuff, there wasn't much velocity left, plus you've got to consider he's 2 or 3 thousand foot in the air too.

J: What was it small arms, or just whatever they had?

D: Just probably like an AK-47 or something like that.

J: So something that is better at short range for spraying.

J: You ever take any close bullets, or did you ever take a bullet?

D: No, the closest I ever come was about a foot, it was just above my shoulder. That's the closest that I know of.

J: Was it open on both sides...the helicopter.

D: Oh no this was on the ground.

J: Oh, on the ground, what was that all about?

D: We just out one night, we was working and come under fire, the Cobras were out on a mission and we were staying back and loading ammunition and come under attack.

J: So, you saw them?

D: No like I said it was night time.

J: Just a shot and run?

D: Just a first time and then all the sudden all hell broke loose.

J: Oh, what do you do, just shoot in their direction.

D: We got on radio and got the helicopters back...

J: Got out...

D: They come down and cleared the area up and then we flew with them, they didn't leave us behind.

J: What kind of stuff did you guys use other than machine guns, did you use napalm and all that?

D: No, we had, well do you know what a minigun is? The cobras had one of those and like a grenade launcher on it. It also had rockets on it. And the rockets were various, because there were places where you could use certain weapons and certain places you couldn't use them over there, we had one thing called a Plachette, it shot little darts like that, I don't know how many darts were in a rocket, but they said it could nail a man to a tree and there were certain areas that you could use them, they were about like that, they were solid metal, and they were made just like a dart, with little wings on the back, and there were certain places you could use them and certain places you couldn't.

J: Sounds like a bad way to go; I'd rather get anything than that.

J: You didn't use any, what was that stuff they used to make all the leaves fall off?

D: Agent Orange, that was sprayed quite a bit in Vietnam, in fact, when I went to Vietnam, I was with the 235<sup>th</sup>, and I said, where's the 235<sup>th</sup>, he said, "on the other side of the runway.." and they said the 235<sup>th</sup> had an attitude, which you had to have an attitude to survive, and we were like a pain in the ass out there, but we got the job done. So I walked across the runway, and we had our own mess hall and everything over there. But within about 30 yards, there was a swamp and if you know anything about a swamp, this

swamp, for a year there wasn't anything that grew in it. Ever, I don't know how often the sprayed it down....

J: Everything died basically.

D: Everything was dead out there, it was 500 yards across it and you couldn't see nothing growing, so it did its job.

J: Was that basically so that you had a place to put down stuff.

D: No that was in case you come under attack nobody could slip in on you.

J: Oh, so nobody could sneak up on you.

D: Yeah, and nothing to hide behind.

J: So did you have a lot of contact with, well if you were in the area, did you have a lot of missions to keep the peace or keep morale up?

**D: Ours was just like the old cowboys, we come and shoot the area up.**

J: Did other people around you have to do that kind of thing like go to the villages?

D: We just went to the villages at night, there were 2 different airbases that we flew out of. If there was anything out there to shoot up, we'd go out there and shoot it up.

J: As far as prejudice, did you have it before and did it change during, or anything like that?

D: How do you mean prejudice?

J: When you went over there, was it more than just war, did you hate the...

**D: No, when I went over thinking we was doing the right thing and we had a job to do, but the more time I spent there, especially now, I think it was a lot of bullshit.**

**Because the reason I say that is this, if they attacked our country, you'd fight for our country wouldn't you?**

J: Yeah

D: Okay, so maybe the best way to say it is I think we killed a lot of people for nothing because all they were doing was defending their country.

J: What else were they supposed to do is that you mean?

D: What now?

J: What else were they supposed to do is that you mean?

D: **Yeah, I mean it's like the north against the south it was still one country, it was like our civil war, nobody interfered with us, so I think that's the way it should've been over there.**

J: So, you didn't have anything against them when you went over there, I mean they were just like any other person.

D: Just like anybody else, anywhere you go you can find a bad seed. I bought mom and dad one time when I was downtown a helicopter sent home, a wooden model, it had RVN on it. I asked the guy that owned the store what RVN stands for, that's like me asking you what USA stands for. So I'm not sure, but the...like I said the country, you could walk, in the villages, 3 kids like on TV, 5 or 6 years old without any clothes on. And the people, the people were just different, and I'm sure they look at us and we're different too. Just like I had told you about the Sin City part... .....We lost a helicopter and somebody had to go turn some guys in and nobody wanted to, I didn't want to, so he said Dave you're going up and I said, "well OK." I went to Vontell, it was an R & R city, the Viet Cong and everybody used it just for R & R, rest and relaxation, and I went downtown and met a girl, went home and spent the night with her, she rolled over in bed

and her back was black and blue, and I thought some crazy guy done that, and I talked to her and finally she said her Papason did it.....

J: Her dad?

D: Yeah, that's why I say that their culture's different, and a long story short, I'm 19 or 20 years old, I flipped out, I kicked the door down and I had the guy down bout ready to kill him. She said, "no Papason, no Papason!" Because you know different values, I don't know how you want to put it, it's like 2 values crashing against each other their beliefs against our beliefs....

J: You mean religious beliefs? Moral beliefs?

D: Moral, religious...you know

J: What religion are they....Buddhist?

D: Buddhist, Catholic, I think, there were a lot of Buddha's statues.

J: So most of them spoke a little bit of English.

D: Oh yeah, a lot of them spoke English, better than some people here, but they spoke in, they always were direct to the point they didn't add extra words like: do you wanna go to this—you go there? You know what I'm saying; they would always go straight to the point.

J: Knock some of the adjectives out?

D: Exactly

**J: You said you didn't have a lot of contact with people, but did you hear of occasions when the Americans were cruel to the Vietnamese?**

**D: Do you really want to go there?**

J: Laughs

D: I mean, yes...

J: Did they torture them?

D: I didn't see any of it....let's put it that way.

J: People getting killed for nothing things like that?

D: Rumor had it over there, they had a guy in a Chinook, everybody had cameras over there, flying down....they'd take 'em up and if they wouldn't talk, they'd throw 'em out and go on to the next one.....and uh, in all honesty when you see a friend killed you, you can get a God complex over there, you put a gun in your hand, some people put a gun in their hand they go crazy. And it was on both sides, both, they talk about Abu Ghraib over there, I mean get real folks, war is not innocent and sweet, you do what it takes to win...

J: I saw where they had that guy hanging from the bridge....it's sick.

D: Yeah, how'd you like to go out in the field and find one of your buddies dead and his balls and dick sticking out of his mouth...?

J: That's what they did when they killed people...they desecrated them?

D: Just like guys would cut off ears and hang them on their neck.

J: Okay, so it went both ways is what you're saying.

D: It went both ways....like you do this to my buddy I'll do this to your buddy, you know.

J: It just escalates, huh?

D: Yeah

J: I was reading that book and they had, they said there was something, covert ops basically that if somebody said, go kill this person, it was done secretly, did you ever hear

anything like that, "Operation Rolling Thunder?" Note: (Actually this was the Phoenix Program)

D: I didn't know anything about it, but there was...well if this helps you understand, you know about Kent State, right?

J: Where the guy got up in the tower and shot people...

D: No, Kent State up here in Ohio, where they killed the 4 college students...

J: Oh with the riots...that was Texas I was thinking of...

Tape counter 400

D: OK, did you ever watch Good Morning Vietnam....

J: With Robin Williams?

D: Uh huh...

J: Maybe a long time ago...

D: They screened all the news and stuff, I didn't know about Kent State until I came home and went to Marshall....

J: Oh, they didn't tell you anything...

D: No, you didn't hear it, as far as the news wise, they just told you what they wanted you to know, we didn't know anything about the riots and the protests going on back here...

J: Do you think that still happens now...in Iraq?

D: What I'm trying to say is...they suppress so much, you don't know. Just like one night we was flying in Cambodia, I assume Cambodia, and they come over the radio and said, "Get the hell out of there, fixed wing on the way!" So we got the hell out of there....and I'm thinking, where was we at that night, nobody told us...

J: So they just told you where to go and what to do...?

D: They just told you where to go and what to do, It's like a need to know and you don't need to know we're not going to tell you. You just go do what we tell you to do.

J: Is that demoralizing at all?

D: No, at the time you don't think about it.

J: Too much to think about to question it?

D: Well, I questioned it afterwards.

J: You said you only trained 6 months in Maryland.

D: Yeah, I went to my school to work on helicopters.

J: Did they do basic there and everything.

D: No I took basic down at Fort Bragg, North Carolina.

J: How long did that last.

D: About 10 weeks...the reason I say 10 is we had 8 weeks and then we got 2 weeks off for Christmas.

J: What did your parents, what did they think about you going, were they...scared?

D: They didn't say.

J: They didn't outwardly say that they were scared.

D: They never did say either way.

D: I know my dad passed away about 2 weeks ago and we was talking, and he told me last year, "I never understood why you volunteered to go to Vietnam." I said, "I never volunteered, I knew where I was going." Because our class in Maryland, very few went to Vietnam, they made instructors.

J: Was your dad in the military.



D: Yeah

J: In...

D: Well I had an uncle that was in Pearl Harbor when it was bombed, my grandpa was in WWI, my dad was kinda lucky he got the tail end of the war, had an uncle in Korea and uh...

J: So did you think it was a duty at all? Or you just knew it was going to happen?

D: In all honesty I'd send (my son) to Iraq....if it's an all out war, I'll go again, but just with what were doing right now, I just, I don't believe in it...

J: Just chipping away, not playing it full out, that what you mean?

D: No I just, Saddam Hussein was an asshole, but he was theirs not ours, so why should we go in and police the area for them. We've lost roughly about 1600 people, and personally I don't think he's worth a one of them. And I just think that it boils down to oil. The government, I believe they just tell you they want you to know.

**J: What do you think the underlying reason for Vietnam was....communism?**

**D: That's what they said, but I still to this day I still don't know, I don't have a clue why we were there.**

**J: I don't know a whole lot of the history, so I can't say either way what I think.**

**D: But I will tell you this, the older you get, the more it bothers you...**

**J: Really, you mean you dream about it or what?**

**D: No what I'm saying is this, the people that we shot over there was just defending their country, what right did we have to go over there and try to take over their country, to go to war in their country.**

**J: You regret it now more than you did then?**

D: It bothers me more now than it did then, because back then, 19 or 20 years old, you don't think, you don't think about dying, you don't think about this or that, you just go do your thing and that's that. You do what you're told to do, now that, right or wrong, when I say you do what you're told to do, desecration and stuff like that you're not told to do it, but it does end up happening, not all the time, just like I was talking up to Williams one time, he told me he was up flying and they wondered what it would be like to fall out of a helicopter, they picked up one body, took him up to about 1500 feet and threw him out and he was just like a bowl of Jell-o. He was already dead, but you know that's desecration right there. But they wanted to....and I heard people talk about the Loach would fly down....

J: A what...?

D: Like a small helicopter or a gunship, and uh, I don't know, people that were working on a farm, they flew up to a mamason and told her to take her clothes off, she said no, he just lock and load the M16 point it at her and said take 'em off! She took her clothes off; they flew off and threw 'em right out the door. So I mean, it goes both ways, as far as stuff like that goes...

J: Sounds like a product of boredom to me....

D: And also it's like a God complex when you've got an m16 in your hand and they've got nothing, you do what you want to, and there's no people, I guess, a lot of people shouldn't have done it,.....?

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J: What's some military slang that you had for random stuff? That book has all kinds of stuff, that he sort of explains.

D: You mean like nephew and stuff like that.

J: He called Vietnam the "heart of darkness" and stuff like that...

D: I never heard it called that...

J: Okay, anything...?

D: Well, I know the United States was called the World. Anytime you was going back to the World. You were going back to the world that counted?

J: Anything else, I mean other than vulgarity, I'm sure there was plenty of that.

D: Just typical military slang like SNAFU, (Situation Normal all fucked up) they had slang for everything like your guns, boots, stuff like that.

D: A newbie, someone that's there for the very first time, that's a newbie. Just like when I was when I was coming over, I was in Oakland, they were passing out pants and shirts, and they allowed us 5 pants and 5 shirts, and when you're over there, I said I might just take an extra pair with me...and when you go downtown in brand new fatigues all the local bar girls just jump all over you, because you're new and you don't know what's going on. (Phone rings) Tape counter 552

D: But you go downtown with new clothes on and they'd be all over you, and I was downtown one day, I started wearing new fatigues last week or two there, and one bar girl got up and said, "I don't need you, you've been here long time!"

J: So that was your little trick you just kept one....

D: Just to draw attention and stuff like that, I don't know if it was true or not, one guy had been growing a big handlebar mustache, one guys laughed and said the night before he left he cut half of it off.....just like one night on guard duty, Swanny was laying in bed and I went in to get something, and I laid a big sandbag beside his bed and he woke

up 2 or 3 o'clock in the morning wondering what it was and hollering for help. You just, there were different ways to mess with people, you know, just fun things, nothing to hurt anybody, I guess it might've pissed him off, but....

J: Nahh. ☺ So, that was how you entertained yourself I guess?

D: Well, they did have movies that they showed over there, I mean the first time I saw Butch Cassidy and the Sundance Kid, prerogative was the word they used in the movie, and the next day everybody that come in was using the word, I never forgot that, that's your prerogative.....

J: I have that movie, but I've never watched it, I should watch it I guess. So what's the best prank that they pulled on you?

D: I can't think of any...oh ok, I can tell you exactly the best prank, It was Christmas eve and I hung up an old GI sock on a nail, I said I'm gonna pretend I'm home for Christmas, one guy took a rubber and put cheese and a little bit of pop in it and tied a knot in it, some C rations cigarettes and stuff like that in there, it was good for a laugh you know.

J: yeah

D: One morning we was getting ready to go to work, and Tom Jones did a song called the "Green Green Grass of Home", and Bart had his cheap record player, and I sit there listening to it, and then I looked down and everybody in the barrack had stopped and was listening to the song.

J: Any other songs or anything that take you back?

D: Like I said the bars in town, I'd go down there, the song Lodi, by CCR....just about a year ago.....when I'd go in I didn't even ask them to play it for me, they'd just start playing it for me.

J: So, didn't Creedence have other songs that were anti-war?

D: Well I don't know, I just liked the song, "just about a year ago....seeking my fame and fortune...." It was about a year and I was ready to come home. We had another song like San Francisco. There were some protests songs.

J: Did you ever have anybody that was just like....forget it I'm outta here!

D: That never happened.

J: It never happened.

D: The people like that, the screw ups they were the shit burners, they had to burn the shit. We had a latrine with about 5 or 6 55 gallon drums back there, when people were screw ups, they would have that job.

J: They had to put it in a pile and get rid of it?

D: They would take it out and put gasoline on it and burn it, put the barrels back underneath the trash cans.

J: What about showering...did they have anything for that?

D: I didn't have a warm shower for the entire year.

J: Not the whole time you were there?

D: We had a big rubber tube outside and the put water in it, just normal sunlight, that's all we had.

J: OK, that was something that he had in his book, he said that was one of the best things.

J: Did you guys have the attitude to trust nobody even the locals or was it pretty lax...

D: Basically you trusted the people you were with.

J: Never go to town alone...or did you?

D: Oh I went, the town I was in, you could go alone. We usually always went together, go down drinking and stuff like that. You see as far as combat, in our company, there was people over there that never saw combat at all, like clerical and stuff like that and everything, one guy working the HQ, I was walking through and he was laughing, he said you won't believe what just happened, and I said what's that, he said so and so called in and said receiving hostile fire, and he said what's your coordinates, and he called back and said that's friendly fire, and he said ok, return friendly fire. You know that's the attitude over there, if you shoot at me, I'll shoot at you.

J: Even if you know it's friendly fire...?

D: It doesn't matter, you give me friendly fire, I'll give you friendly fire.

J: You said you had C rations, in that book he said he ate rats and they were really good, he said they love rats.

D: they love rats, dogs, cats, anything like that. I was downtown hungry one day, and I bought a sandwich off a little salesman, about 4 or 5 bites into the guy says, "You know what you're eating?" I said no, he said you're eating rat, and I said OK, I couldn't handle that.

Tape Counter 708 End of Side 1

J: So, you had plenty to eat?

D: I don't know, when I went over I weighed 175 pounds, when I got home I weighed 145.

J: Wow, in one year you lost 30 pounds!

D: At that time, the C ration was better than what the mess hall put out and the C rations weren't that great, C rations were in a can, like Beenee Weenees were the best thing you could get in C rations back then, they had a little cake in there, and also what some people call cigarettes, always a four pack of cigarettes in a C ration...

J: Really?

D: Yeah...

J: Did you trade those for other stuff or did you use them?

D: I smoked 'em while I was over there, helped keep the mosquitoes away.

J: Why the nicotine or something?

D: The smoke I guess, I don't know I just had seen that it works I didn't argue what it was....

J: At least burn them right?

J: Did you have any supply problems?

D: Not that I know of...

J: No, that's good. You had all the modern weapons that you could have?

D: Modern at the time, all the weapons you needed...and when I say at the time, nowadays they'd be obsolete, but back then they were modern, you go back 30 years they were the most up to date thing....

J: At least that anybody knew of...

D: Just like the Cobra was the best attack helicopter there was back then...

J: and it was the first one....

D: it was the first attack helicopter ever made...it was only 36 inches wide....sitting here is like sitting in its seat, looking down here and looking down in front of you, that's about as wide as the helicopter was...

J: So did it have landing wheels or landing...

D: Skids

J: Skids

D: Skids

J: I'll probably get on the internet and get a picture if I can find one....?

D: I've got a picture here if you'd like to see one....

J: Ok

J: What are some things that still affect you today other than.....I mean do you kinda regret it?

**D: It's just the thought of taking someone's life that is just defending their country....cause that's all they were doing just defending what they believed in and it was their country, it wasn't ours.**

J: How do you deal with that, just say you were doing your job, doing your duty?

D: Just....doing, just doing your job. You see the older you get the more things change, back then they were gooks and dinks and stuff like that, but now to me they were people...

J: But when you went over there that's what you called them...

D: Yeah

J: Then you realized that they were....

D: Just like, basically they are a human just like us, that was later on...



J: What did you call them? Gooks and what else?

D: Dinks, Charlies, VC...

J: Dinks cause they were little...?

D: I don't know why they called 'em dinks...it was just kinda slang that everybody used it so I kinda fit right in.

J: If everyone else is using it you might as well use it too, so you know what they are talking about.

J: Okay, this, no relevant, I don't know, what's the best memory you had?

D: Best memory? Getting on the "Freedom Bird" to get home. When it took off, you were just floating through the air...and there's another slang, freedom bird because....

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J: What was it?

D: Airplane

J: What kind?

D: Just a big old jet.

J: A lot of people on it?

D: they would bring over a bunch and take a bunch home.

J: You mind me asking you the worst memory?

D: I'm thinking on that one....yeah, I guess, the worst memory, I felt sorry for a guy, we had a newbie that just come in country and he was working the ammo dump and one

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night somehow, somebody screwed up and launched a rocket, launched 2 of 'em, and one of them went in the ammo dump and blew it up and the only thing left of him was just fingers and toes....

J: and it was his first day?

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D: bout the 2<sup>nd</sup> or 3<sup>rd</sup> day in the country.

J: and you were friends with him?

D: I didn't even know him, but I just felt for him, because at 2 or 3 days in the country it's hard to get to know anybody. And there's another one, but uh, he's the reason I quit flying. I had a warrant officer Seven Mason was his name, he was flying a flight one night and on his mission, he's was ready to come home, he had 3 days left in country, and he didn't make it back, he was shot down, both of them, both of them were killed that night and it was around Christmas.

J: you knew him pretty well...?

D: I knew him well enough, and I started thinking later on, he had 3 days left in country, what am I flying for? So I just quit, people ask me how you quit, well you just quit.

J: How long did you fly?

D: Well I had been in country 3 or 4 weeks when I started flying, and just when I quit, just like I took the guy's place that quit ahead of me. There was an expression over there, what are you gonna do give me my dog tags and send me to Vietnam...I'm already here. When I quit, Mark quit, and you are gonna think I'm crazy, but I go by gut feelings and something told me to quit, and when I quit, 3 weeks later, the guy flying got the dickens shot out of him, and something just told me to quit and I did.

J: A bad feeling huh?

D: Just a feeling that it's time to quit, in other words, quit while you're ahead.

J: So, you made a lot of friends I guess.

D: Not a lot

J: Didn't want to get close to people or what?

D: I mean friends, maybe 4 or 5.

J: Did they come and go too quickly to make them?

D: No you just didn't make them, I don't know why?

J: go about your business and didn't have time for them?

D: A lot of people will tell you they didn't make friends because you didn't know if they would be there tomorrow or not, I don't know if that's it or not. Because like I said we didn't lose a lot of people out of our company, but just like, everybody had a job to do, like, different jobs different areas, our shop had like 10 people and like 4 or 5 of us spent the year together, when I say that, I mean 5 or 6 months between early time of the war.

J: Mostly people that you went in with?

Tape counter 807

D: When I was at Maryland met Wells, John Wells, from Ashland, Kentucky and we spent 6 months in the AIP at Aberdeen, and I can't think where we was at over there, Camron, we flew out of Camron, to another place, and I can't think where it was, in the barracks, there he was, we sit down and started talking we ended up going to Canto together and we ended up going to ? together, it was the best time we ever had together.

J: Still talk to them often?

D: Not that much, Bart lives in Florida, Carl lives in Texas, we're scattered all over the place.

J: Want to tell me that story about the kid and that M16, a more detailed story, because I don't think the recorder was on last time.

D: OK, the area we was flying out of they'd always have the Vietnamese to guard the runway, and kids were kids, and we would be there working at night doing our thing, and

I kept looking at him and I noticed he was young and I started up a conversation, and like I said they could speak English, and I got talking to him and found out he was 12, 13, or 14, I don't remember, I'm gonna say 13 to be in between, and the gun he was carrying was as big as he was. And I just like I said, back here at that age you're riding bicycles and playing ball and stuff.

J: So who gave him the gun?

D: South Vietnam, they gave him a uniform and everything, just to me he was like a toy soldier, but don't get me wrong, he could've probably blown your head off with no problem at all?

J: So they were pretty disciplined soldiers there, the South Vietnamese?

D: No, one night we got hit, they run like you wouldn't believe, but then again, they could run and fight again another day, we had nowhere to run, that's why we got the helicopters back real quick. But, now some of them, friends I've had, I've heard from others that some of them were tough son of a guns. But I just experienced it with them that night on the ground, and believe me, they, not all of them, but some of them did, they was getting the hell outta Dodge.

J: They had all kinds of little fox holes and stuff? I'm just going on what I've seen on TV.

D: No, just like bunkers, sand bags and stuff like that.

J: They didn't have crazy tunnel systems and stuff like that?

D: They had them, but I didn't see any of them.

J: So, probably when you almost got shot was the scariest moment, you think?

D: It woke you up and let you know that this is for real.

J: How long had you been there when that had happened?

D: About 2 weeks.

J: Oh, really, I didn't realize that, you'd only been there 2 weeks, and everything was going fine and dandy and that snapped you back to reality?

D: You know, it's a combat zone, but until you get shot at personally, it doesn't dawn on you I guess, that they're playing for keeps.

J: Just takes once right....ok did you have anybody that had emotion breakdowns, or anything like that, it seems like to me that that would be common when somebody got so stressed that they would....

D: I know that one night we was on guard duty, a helicopter come in with about 6 body bags and they just treated 'em like sacks of potatoes, I thought to myself, at least treat them with dignity, but they didn't they picked 'em up and threw 'em out on the ground and go on. I just said I hope they are all Vietnamese because I can't, Americans doing Americans that way, I just can't, you know....but to them it was just like a job I guess, to them as a mortician. Somebody brought in 5 or 6 body bags and they just threw 'em off, threw them on the ground. I just turned and walked away.

J: I guess they were going with the no time to waste attitude.

J: Well, I'm out of written down questions, is there anything else that I should no as far as good stories?

(Discussion of what the project is about)

D: Well I can tell you a good laugh I got one night, I was downtown like I said at a hotel staying with a couple of gals, about 2 or 3 o'clock in the morning I looked out and heard a commotion, and you asked me how well trained they were, they were training like

D: Been over 20 years, long enough to forgive and forget but some people can't, it'll bother them the rest of their life.

D: As far as pick out something special, I don't know if I could, just everyday was a different day, but in fact it was same shit same place.