

**Today is the 21<sup>st</sup> of May 2009. We're at the New York Military Museum and Veteran's Research Center in Saratoga Springs, New York. The interviewer is Wayne Clark. Sir for the record would you please state your full name and your date and place of birth, please?** Maurice H. Crawford, and I go by Morrie Crawford. I was born Buffalo, New York on August 4<sup>th</sup>, 1946.

**Did you attend school in Buffalo?** No, my mother was a nurse at Buffalo General Hospital and so that was the connection to Buffalo, and we lived in Angola, New York, which is probably about 35 miles south of Buffalo, along Lake Erie.

**Did you attend school in Angola?** Yes, at Lake Shore Central High School.

**And did you graduate from high school?** Yes.

**What year did you graduate?** 1964. In fact, we have our 45<sup>th</sup> reunion coming up this summer.

**And did you go on to college at that point?** Yeah, in the fall of '64 I started at Valparaiso University in Valparaiso Indiana which is about 60 miles southeast of Chicago, and I originally went there because of the strong engineering school they had, but I realized early in my college career that I was not an engineer so I switched into Liberal Arts area.

**Now, did you graduate at that point, or were you drafted, or did you enlist?** Well, I, my grades weren't the greatest and I actually went through four years of college at Valparaiso, and then, because I actually flunked out of school, I was going part-time, and when you went part-time back then with the draft, and Vietnam as active as it was, I ended up being, getting my draft notice to get my physical done, which ended up transferring the physical to get it done in Chicago, and then it was only a short time thereafter that I got my greetings notice and got drafted in the spring of 1969.

**And whereabouts did you go for your Basic Training?** I reported in a basic training facility in Buffalo and then they took us to Fort Dix, New Jersey, where I went through Basic Training there, at Fort Dix.

**And when was that?** I believe the date was the 16<sup>th</sup> of April, 1969, and I think it was like 8 weeks at that time, through the early summer.

**So that was at the height of the Vietnam War, was the training geared toward going to Vietnam?**

Training wasn't at that time, because it was too basic at that, you know, time. I can still remember sitting on the floor at the, you know, place where we stayed, the barracks, and reading about the, at that point in time it was the Post-Tet Offensive of 1969, and it wasn't like the Tet Offensive of 1968, but there was a lot of activity in Vietnam, so we were all, you know, very much aware of what was going on down there.

**Once you graduated from Basic Training, where did you go for your AIT?** Well, it was kind of interesting that after Basic Training at Fort Dix, I ended up with Advanced Infantry Training, still at Fort Dix, and you know, a lot of our Basic Training group went in a lot of different directions, and I stayed right there at Fort Dix to go through Advanced Infantry Training, so I, you know, went through the training there.

**And how was that training? Was it pretty intense?** It was, again, the way that they kind of broke it down and then built you up over time and the physical nature of it was rather trying. I know at the end of my Advanced Infantry Training, I was probably in the best shape of my life at that point in time, and I was, you know, lean, and very much in good shape, so . .

**Now was that training geared toward going to Vietnam?** Well, that was the thought process, you know, once we, because I can remember sitting in a formation there, on the grounds at Fort Dix, as the First Sergeant was reading off where people were headed, and there was really a little more than a third of our group that went to Vietnam, you know, some went to Germany, some went to radar gunner school, some went to, you know, Korea at that time, so, yeah, it wasn't as many that went to Vietnam as you thought might then, but I still got my orders to go to Vietnam at that time.

**Most of your cadre, were they Vietnam veterans? You drill sergeants?** Yes, yes, very much so.

**Okay.** And, in fact again, some of, the drill sergeants we had not only were, mostly lifers in the Army, but they also had you know, Vietnam experience, and you know, after, you know, we got used to them, after the first few weeks of Advanced Infantry Training, they started sharing some of their experiences and what was going on. And a lot of them, because we were going through Advanced Infantry Training, a lot of them, you know, a lot of them had Vietnam experience in the Infantry.

**Did you get any kind of leave before you went to Vietnam?** Yes, I got probably 25 days, something like that, and I believe I had to report, actually had to report back to Fort Dix again, and go back to, we left out of McGuire Air Force Base. The flight was like 27 hours, total, something like that, and ah, so.

**Did you fly to Europe and go that way, or did you fly across the States?** We went across the States, in fact, we stopped in Oakland, and the men then went to Hawaii, and I guess it was typical of military transports at that point in time, is that a lot of times they landed after the normal hours for an airport, and we landed at Honolulu International, and it was deserted because it was kind of in the middle of the night but one thing I'll never forget is that as we were leaving Honolulu headed towards Vietnam, there was the sunrise coming up over Diamondhead, you know, at Oahu.

**Now, whereabouts did you land in Vietnam?** Ah, we, and again, we made one more stop, we stopped in Guam, and then we went to Bien Hoa Airbase in Vietnam, and I believe it was the Tan Son Nhut base at that time, processed in-country, and we went through a little bit of orientation and training at that point in time, for in-country.

**What was it like when you stepped off the plane?** Well, I think a lot of us, because I can still remember looking out over the ocean as we were flying across the ocean, and just wondering, you know, what it's going to be like, and I just don't know. I mean, a lot of us thought "Gee, do you just pop a steel pot on your head as you get off the airplane, and dodge bullets right from Day 1, and again, it wasn't that way, and again, you don't know, and it was probably, for as long as that airplane flight was, it was probably, for as long as that air flight was, one of the quietest flights I've ever been on. Because we were all kind of lost in our thoughts at that point.

**So once you processed in, where were you sent, did you receive some kind of in-country training for a week or two?** Yeah, I don't even know if it was a week, it was five days, something like that, and then we got our unit assignment to Zeon, I was going to go to the First Infantry Division, which was headquartered north of Saigon in a place called Zeon Basecamp in Zeon, and so we went, we got transferred by [duesenham] transfer up there, and again, we were, their formation, morning formation, was about 75 of us, waiting for our unit assignments within the First Division, and I'll always consider it one of the luckiest days of my life, from that, we were standing in formation, and the First Sergeant pulled myself and another out of the formation, sent us to the personnel, lost files, or whatever, when we get over there, they kind of had us sitting outside an air conditioned trailer, just, you know, not knowing what was going on. The guy that I was with was actually a college graduate from the University of Maryland, got drafted, and was going into the Infantry. So at that point in time, the guy called us both inside, and he said, you know, today's your lucky day, he said you're coming to the First Division and we're short on clerks, and he said both you guys have got college experience, and obviously, know how to type, so we'll give you a typing test, and if you pass it we'll give you a rear job. I never concentrated so hard on a typing test in my life! Even though I made some mistakes along the way, I typed well enough for them to give me a rear job.

**How about the other fellow, did he pass?** Yeah, he passed too. You know, the thing is, I think, unless we were just hunt and peck with one finger, they were bound to give us a rear job, just because they really were short of clerks at that time. So anyway, from that point, we got our assignments, I went to Lai Khe, which was another basecamp of the First Division, which actually, when you're on the bunker line and you looked out the west, you could see Nui Ba Den, which was a mountain out on the Cambodian border, so 25<sup>th</sup> Infantry Division at that time was in Cu Chi which is on the Cambodian border so our, Lai Khe kind of bordered the end of the operation for the First Division, and started it for the 25<sup>th</sup> Division which took over.

**Okay, so you became the company clerk . . .** Well, I became the information clerk, I worked with the information office, and what we did was, we wrote articles, and, on what was going on with, in the area of operations for the First Division and sent the articles to the wire services and also had our own newspaper we put out, and, so I became not only the typist, typing out the articles, but also at times a reporter.

**Did you operate as a reporter too, going out with the patrols, at all?** Well, we had reporters that could do the job, and did the job a lot better than I could and actually were schooled in it, you know. Now they did give me the opportunity on occasion to go out with a, if they found a cache of enemy weapons or something like that, or interview different people, there was, the guy's name's Woody Campbell, who was a halfback with the Houston Oilers, and I found out he was with the First Division at that point in time, and they said "why don't you go interview him?" you know, and talk about his football experience and write the article, which I did, took me to his new basecamp, and gave me the opportunity to interview him, and published it in the First Division's newspaper at that point in time, so –

**And what was he like, just a regular G.I.?** Just a regular guy, you know, he had a football, we kind of tossed it around, he was like a, not too many NFL players got drafted back in, although some did, in fact,

being a Buffalo Bills fan, Bob Kalsu, was a guard with the Bills, was the only NFL player that ever died in combat there in Vietnam.

**Yeah, he was with the 101<sup>st</sup> Airborne.** Yeah, so, in fact his name is up on the Wall of Fame in the stadium, the Ralph Wilson Stadium in Buffalo. So again, in fact, I was in Lai Khe then with the information office for just about five months, and the First Division got orders from President Nixon at that point in time that we were going to be one of the divisions to stand down and be headed home, but because I didn't have enough time in-country I was going to have to be transferred in-country to some other position. So we ended up spending about two months in [Zeon], again, doing our job, in some kind of temporary quarters, and then we all got our, you know, assignments. And very few people actually, it was kind of a misnomer, they thought everybody who was with the First Division went home with the First but they really didn't, I think you had to be in-country more than 10 months or something like that before the allowed you to go back, with the division.

**How long were you in-country at that point?** Just about seven months. So I was going to be, the interesting thing was because my MOS was still 11 Bravo, which was an infantry, I, you know, pleaded with my CO at that time in the Information Office, I said "Look, I've been an information clerk ever since I came in-country, you gotta get my MOS changed to a Clerk-Typist MOS, otherwise I'm going to be transferred into the field, someplace I haven't been in seven months, other than pulling guard duty and things like that, that was as close to the front as I was really getting, so, he kind of kept it on the QT, but shortly before we left they gave me a ceremony and changed my MOS to 71L20 or something like that, which was clerk-typist. So I ended up getting transferred to Lan Bien, to US Army Headquarters, which was almost kind of like a glorified rear area at that point in time, because it was pretty safe because we were just outside of Saigon.

**What was life like there for you?** It was, you know, probably a lot more like stateside, there was a lot more, you know, military B.S., you know more formations, and you know a lot of, you know, Mickey Mouse things that you'd end up having to do. Because it was, you know, a pretty safe rear area. We pulled guard duty, we worked six days, seven days a week, so you know you didn't get much time off.

**When you pulled the guard duty, did you have the M16s, or M14s?** M16s. We had all M16s, and in fact when we were in Lai Khe, and we pulled guard duty, each of us had a 50 caliber machine gun [inaudible]

**Now were you ever under fire or attacked at any time?** Lai Khe at the time I was there was called Rocket City, and we constantly had incoming rockets coming, the Ho Chi Minh Trail was close enough to where we were that they always said that the North Vietnamese and Viet Cong were shooting rockets back toward Lai Khe because they didn't want to carry them back with them. So, many times we were under rocket fire and a number of times, you know, we'd, you could hear them coming, you'd listen and you could hear them coming in and you'd, once you realized what it was, then you'd obviously try to get into the bunker, dive into one, you know, as quickly as you could, so, the closest I came was when I was on guard duty, and I could hear rockets coming and it was fairly loud and I realized it was fairly close so I dove in a ditch along the road along where I was walking, and the rocket hit a tree about fifty yards

away and it exploded so, it was the closest I came at that point. Along the bunker line at times, some of the gun ships that patrolled the perimeter would shoot tracer rounds in and around the bunk, not the bunker line but the perimeter line we had, and, but a lot of times it was false alarms. So again, in Lon Bien, because I actually worked in an air conditioned office, it was a fairly comfortable setting at that point in time for Vietnam, I reapplied for Valparaiso University, and I got accepted to go back, you know, once I got back to the States, it was going to be the spring of 1971, and I realized that if I extended my tour of duty 66 days in Vietnam I would have one day less than five months left in my two year commitment, you know, because I was drafted, and if you had less than five months coming back to the States after being in a foreign country, they didn't reassign you, they ended up processing you out earlier, so I extended my tour 66 days and ended up spending 14 months in Vietnam rather than just 12 months, and when I came back, went through Oakland, and the processing was right before Thanksgiving in 1970, and ended up spending some time with the family and then went back to Valparaiso in the spring of, or like January of 1971.

**When you were in Lon Bien, what were your living conditions? Did you have air conditioned barracks, or two story barracks, or what were they like?** You know, I think they were two story barracks at that point in time, because they weren't at Zeon, and I think they were two stories, and it wasn't air conditioned, but we all had fans that we'd use, and so, you know, a lot of times we'd use the fans a lot, just to cool off at night.

**Were you able to go into Saigon at all?** Yeah, I was, in fact, a few times I had overnights in Saigon. We had people that made regular trips from our office into Saigon to MACV Headquarters, and, you know, taking paperwork back and forth, because in, some of the clerks in our office there at Lon Bien had top secret crypto-clearance, there was, you know, some, you know, top secret information that'd be, you know, ferried into MACV Headquarters, so they usually had something going every day, you know, into Saigon.

**What was Saigon like?** Well, it was, kind of interesting in that it, it didn't seem, it didn't look like a kind of a city in the Far East that you would see, I think the thing that you kind of noticed, you know, was a lot of soldiers running around, but I think the curfew was either eight o'clock at night or ten o'clock at night and everybody had to be off the streets. So I mean, where you were staying, you had to be off the streets at that point in time or the M.P.s picked you up. So, you know it was just something that, you know, with everybody hustling to get off the street by curfew.

**Now, in the city of Saigon, what was the restaurants or sanitation facilities like, I mean, were the restaurants safe to eat in?** Yeah, I mean, I'm trying to think of the, Tu Do Street I think it is, where a lot of the G.I.s spent time and it was a fairly safe area, there were a number of restaurants there and a number of hotels, and again, some of the restaurants, again, were very good and they didn't have much security, at all at that point in time, and, other than a lot of M.P.s patrolling at that point in time. It actually, you know, didn't seem all that bad at that point in time.

**All right, well, did you see any USO shows at all while you were in Vietnam?** Yeah, in fact, working in the Information Office, the Bob Hope Show came up to Zeon and because we worked in the Information

Office we actually had some backstage clearance and could actually get back there and actually get close-ups with Bob Hope, and I think Connie Stephens I think was with him, and I'm having a hard time remembering who else was there with him, but you know, again, it was, obviously, a very popular show, it was well attended by the First Division.

**All right, once you got back to the States, and you got your discharge, where were you discharged from?** Out of Oakland, out of the terminal at Oakland, and again, because I'd been in Vietnam, you know, you do have a six year military commitment, but it was inactive reserves, and I really never had to serve any active reserve time, and some people had to do, you know, had to finish off their six year commitment, but coming from Vietnam I didn't.

**Did you join any veterans' organizations at all?** You know, I really didn't, in fact you know, I kind of really wanted to stay away from it at that point in time when I went back to school, you know, when I got out in November of 1970, and I let my hair grow through the following May before I actually had another haircut, so I, you know, grew a beard, a goatee, mustache, had long hair, really kind of got into the college scene at that point.

**So you did make use of the G.I. Bill at that point in your education?** Absolutely. In fact, I had been working in a clothing store back in Valparaiso part time, The Oxford Shop, Chuck Hefner was the owner, welcomed me back, so I was able to pretty much take care of all of the cost of my schooling at that point in time through the G.I. Bill and working at the Oxford Shop. It took me two semesters, the spring of 1971 and the fall of '71 until I was able to graduate.

**Did you stay in contact at all with anyone you served with?** We did, in fact, they had a reunion in Minnesota, of a group that, we were in Army Headquarters and, because I was actually in Indiana at that point in time, and I thought about trying to go up there and meet with those guys, however, it came right at the time that I had a major test, and I was, you know, because I was really knuckling down when I went back to school, I didn't feel like I could afford that time, and so, I think gradually over time I kept up with one of the guys that I served with for about a year, year and a half, he lived in Iowa, and then gradually we kind of drifted away, there was one of the guys that I knew from the 25<sup>th</sup> Division in Cu Chi, we exchanged Christmas cards for about ten years before we kind of drifted away too. One of the guys I worked with several years in the pharmaceutical industry, Kevin O'Conner, was a Marine in the, with the Marines in Vietnam, two tours of duty, actually, and a lot of times we kind of hit it off, just because of our common experiences in Vietnam.

**How do you think your time, your service, changed or affected your life?** Good question, I mean I would never like to think that I would encourage someone to go into the military to try and become more disciplined, try and find your roots, you know, what you really need to do, but I kind of whiled around in college for four years, and once I had been in the service and got out, I found myself a heck of a lot more disciplined than I ever was prior to that. In fact, I think even today, you know, like I'm an avid jogger, I do keep, sometimes, rigid schedules, I kind of look back on military training as where some of that kind of started. And the other thing too, is that I got an opportunity, when I was in Vietnam to travel to Hong Kong for R and R, and also took a leave to go to Australia, went down to Sydney and

actually up to, just south of Brisbane, Australia, while I was there, and then stopped there on my way back, so you know, places that I, you know I've only been to Hawaii in 25 years later after that, but never back to Hong Kong or to Australia.

**All right, and you do have a photograph to show us, okay, if you just bring that back towards you I can focus in on it easier. And when and where was that taken?** This picture was taken in the fall of 1969 in Lai Keh Vietnam which was really my first duty assignment, and I was with the First Division, and I was standing in front of what we used to call our hootch, and alongside you can see these 155 millimeter howitzer shells that are filled up with dirt for protection. The trees in the background are rubber trees. One of the things that happened right before I arrived in-country was during one of the rocket attacks, the rocket hit just right outside one of the tents, and killed a number of G.I.s, and so at that point in time is when they put up the protection around the hootches to make sure that that wouldn't happen again.

**Well, thank you very much for your interview.** Thank you. It's been fun.