

Joe Pollicino
Narrator

Sean Quinn
Interviewer

Colonie New York

SQ: So for the record can you state your name, date of birth, and place of birth?

JP: Joe Pollicino, July 28th 1947, Albany New York

SQ: What was your life like before you entered the service?

JP: Well I was in High School, a senior in 1966 I was about 18, and a bunch of us, about five or six guys, talked about going into the service.

SQ: What were your personal thoughts on the war?

JP: I didn't really have one, I watch the news but I was too busy with being out of High School and just having a good time to be worried what the war was like

SQ: When did you Volunteer

JP: July of '66

SQ: So you joined the Marines. Why exactly did you join the Marines?

JP: We were sitting around and some of our buddies had joined the Marines the year before so we just decided that we would follow their footsteps and join the Marines"

SQ: What was your training like?

JP: For training we went to Boot Camp at Paris Island South Carolina in October of '66. We had physical training you know, PT, running, weapon firing, hand to hand combat. Very rigorous training, nine weeks of non-stop boot camp. Then advanced training at Camp LeJune North Carolina for another eight weeks and then training in California for another four weeks before we set out for Vietnam

SQ: Do you have any personal Fun stories from Boot Camp that you'd want to tell?

JP: Didn't seem like seem like a lot of Fun back then. We did some good times, met a lot of good friends, was a lot of physical training so there wasn't a lot time to have Fun. Constant on the go

SQ: What was your voyage to Vietnam like?

JP: We started in California and flew out in the March of 1967, out of El Toro California, there was a Full plain of Marines, we didn't know what to expect, me and three or four other guys that I knew, from Albany. We landed in Vietnam, remember it was very very hot, we stepped off the plane and you could smell the diesel Fuel. Jet landing and going, there was the smell of jet Fuel, like I said very hot, humid , there was a layer of like...smoke, I can remember that. We spent about a day in Da Nang and then we were sent to our outfits, were ever we were going.

SQ: What unit were you in?

JP: I was with in Lima Company 3rd Battalion 5th Marines, part of the 1st Marine Division

SQ: What Role did you serve in your squad?

JP: I started off as Grunt Infantry. You know when you first get there you start off as the low man on the totem pole. Then I was a radioman for a while until I was wounded. Then when I got out of the Hospital I stopped being a radioman and I became a fireteam Leader and then eventually a squad leader and eventually an acting platoon sergeant

SQ: Where in Vietnam were you sent?

JP: First place was called Ai Kor [phonetic spelling] which was in the northern part of South Vietnam , then a place called Chu Lai, and when we left I was in a place called Phu Bai.

SQ: Were you ever engaged in combat?

JP: Yes, combat was not every day, I don't want to say, but it was a lot of days. We were sent on a lot of missions which were called Search and Destroy missions, looking for the enemy. On any day there were numerous operations, patrols, ambushes and things like that.

SQ: What were the physical conditions like?

JP: The jungle, and it was very very hot, very humid, over 100 degrees. We were basically in either rice paddies or the jungle or climbing mountains.

SQ: What your interactions with the locals like?

JP: Well, I didn't have a lot of interaction with them; the only time was when we were sweeping through a village. If there were any young men in the village you'd presume they were Vietcong. You usually either saw older men, young kids, and women. Very rarely would you see someone who was like 18, 19, 20 years old. If anyone was that age in the village, they would be presumed to be Viet Cong. So you'd question people, if there was anyone there they'd have to have an I.D card. If they did have the identification then you'd take them back for interrogation.

SQ: Did any of them speak English?

JP: Very very few of them spoke English. Few of us wanted to talk to the enemy so we'd have the ARVN soldiers, what was called the Chu Hoi, a North Vietnamese or a Viet Cong who had come over to our side. They would act as translators for questioning.

SQ: What were your thoughts on the people you were fighting against?

JP: Well, what we saw was, we were fighting people our own age. Trained soldiers Viet Cong and NVA and I guess ... they were over there protecting what they thought they were protecting and we were over there fighting for what we thought we were fighting for, for South Vietnam to be free from the North. You know, I didn't have a chance to sit down and talk. You saw them, they were shooting at you, you were shooting at them. Protecting yourself.

SQ: How long were you in Vietnam?

JP: Thirteen months. March of '67 to April of '68

SQ: Were you involved in the Tet Offensive?

JP: Yes I was.

SQ: What did you do exactly?

JP: The Tet Offensive began at the end of January of 1968. We were protecting the area around Da Nang Air Base and then the company we moved up to Phu Bai and then we went into the imperial capital of Vietnam which the communist forces took over and we were there until March second or third of 1968.

SQ: What were your interactions like with the other soldiers?

JP: We made friends from different parts of the country. We tried to fit in, be friendly, but it was hard because you didn't know if they would be there the next day. But, it was easy to make friends because you relied on each other. You relied on that person to help you and they relied on you to help them. So, it was a mutual friendship and I am still in contact with these guys today so the friendship was 45, almost 50, years.

SQ: What were your thoughts on the war itself while you were there?

JP: I thought I was there to do a job, to rid the country of communism. I wasn't into the political thing, when you are in a war you are there to help yourself and defend yourself and your fellow marines, soldiers or airmen or navy personnel. So, to you it is not a political thing you are just there doing your job.

SQ: In retrospect then, do you think it was worth it?

JP: Well, we didn't really achieve our goals with the fall of Saigon. The U.S. forces won every battle they fought. We didn't lose one battle. People like to say we lost the war but I like to think that we didn't lose the war it was the political climate at the time that lost the war.

SQ: So when exactly did you leave Vietnam?

JP: I left in April of 1968.

SQ: After you left Vietnam, did you remain in the service?

JP: Yes, I finished out my active duty until September.

SQ: Where did you go?

JP: I was stationed in Quantico, Virginia.

SQ: How would you say your time in the service affected your life?

JP: I think it taught me discipline and respect which helps you when you go into the work field because when you go to work you need those skills to be motivated to do a good job.

SQ: So you mentioned that you are still in contact with some of your friends, are you a member of any military organization like Veterans of Foreign Wars?

JP: I belong to every single local organization the VFW, American Legion, Purple Hearts. Then I belong to the First Marine Division Association and while it is not an organization, the Lima 3-5 has a reunion every year, a way to keep in touch with my guys.

SQ: Do you have any personal stories you want to tell?

JP: My time in the service was two years, and out of those 24 months 13 were in Vietnam. So, half of my time was in Vietnam. I met a lot of great guys. WE lost some friends in combat over there guys that were close to me. Days we would just sit back and talk about getting home and what you were going to do. A lot of interesting, while you are in combat you are thinking, a way to keep in touch with my guys.

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SQ: Were you ever personally exposed to Agent Orange?

JP: Yes, anybody that was in Vietnam was exposed to Agent Orange. But, it affects different people different ways. You might get prostate cancer, heart problems or different ailments or you might not; I have been lucky.

SQ: So what was an average day like for a grunt on the ground?

JP: If you were out on the field you may be on a major operation which could include a whole company or out on a squad size patrol with 120-130 pounds on your back. You went out and patrolled what they called the tactical area of responsibility (TAOR). You would go out at 6 am and come back in the evening or if you are on an operation you would be out for dozens of days. You might get lucky and stay in the rear for a couple of days.

SQ: Do you have any closing thoughts about the war or your time in the service?

JP: The Marines were a big part of my life, even though they were only two years of my life, it taught me respect. The war itself.... I used to get angry people protesting the war, because of the way they did it, they weren't there. But when you get older you start to realize that everyone has their own opinion, I felt we did what we had to do, other people disagreed, but I never regretted doing it. Would I go back if I had known what I had known today? I'd say yes, because that's the way I grew, that's the way I was molded. Because... being in combat is an experience people who haven't been in combat don't understand, that's why combat veterans have an understanding of each other.

SQ: Just to tag it on at the end, you hear stories of people doing some pretty terrible stuff at places like My Lai. Do you have any thoughts on that?

JP: I, personally, never saw any of that where I was. Could it of happened before I got there or after I left I don't know. What happened in My Lai, I don't condone it and I don't think it should have happened,, but I don't think you can really judge unless you were there, and hear both sides of the story and find out what provoked the reaction

SQ: Alright, on that happy note, that's all I've got. Thank you very much.