

William P. Aiello
Narrator

Wayne Clark
New York State Military Museum
Interviewer

Interviewed on September 4, 2007
Henry Johnson Charter School
Albany, New York

WC: Today is the fourth of September, 2007. We are at the Henry Johnson Charter School in Albany, New York and we are doing an interview with Mr. William Aiello. The interviewer is Wayne Clark. Sir, for the record please state your full name and your date of birth.

WA: William Patrick Aiello, sixteen March, 1949.

WC: Whereabouts were you born?

WA: Brooklyn, New York, Adelphi Hospital.

WC: Did you attend school there?

WA: No, I attended Sachem High School in Lake Ronkonkoma, New York where I grew up.

WC: When and where did you enter the service?

WA: I entered the Marine Corps in Fort Hamilton, New York, in Brooklyn, on twenty-five June, 1967.

WC: Were you drafted or did you enlist?

WA: I enlisted.

WC: And where did you go for your basic training?

WA: Paris Island, North Carolina.

WC: Was that your first time away from home?

WA: First plane ride, first time away from home, yes sir.

WC: Was that a rude awakening for you?

WA: Yes it was. I'll never forget the moment we got there. Nobody ever does I don't think.

WC: How long was that basic?

WA: For boot camp I got there the end of June, we graduated in August. People tend to forget what they did. Prior to Vietnam, you had a twelve-week recruitment training. During the war,

they reduced the length, but not the training [time]. In other words, prior to Vietnam, you had Sundays off at Paris Island, if you could call whatever they did “off”; I’m sure it wasn’t nice. But we didn’t have Sundays off at Paris Island. We trained later and longer to get in the mandatory subjects. What would be the mandatory subjects at Paris Island? You know, ninety hours of History and Traditions, you knew you were going to get that. Drill and Ceremony, you knew you were going to get that. You knew you were going to be on the rifle range for two weeks, those things you’ve got. They probably skimped on things like Junk on the Bunks, Things in the Springs¹, because they figured you would get that down the road, and basically you did.

WC: After your basic where did you go?

WA: We reported to Camp Pendleton, California to what they called staging battalion. You’d go through an additional thirty days of training and basically it was training geared toward Vietnam. Actually I take that back, first you went to Camp Geiger for infantry training. Then you’d go home on leave and then on your way to Vietnam you’d go to staging battalion. And then you’re waiting for shipment, we got shipped out and went to Okinawa, dumped our gear, and then we went to Vietnam. Landed in Da Nang and they honeymoon began.

WC: You went over on a commercial flight?

WA: Yes. We left on Thanksgiving Day out of El Toro Marine Air Station, which is no longer in existence which I feel bad about. We got to El Toro on Thanksgiving and you know in the service, Thanksgiving is always a huge holiday. So we’re there and all the officers and senior NCO’s are in their dress blues and the wives are there and they’re all in their best garments. Everybody was having a nice meal and then all of a sudden we walked in and there was dead silence. You being in the service [referring to Mr. Clark], you know people on mess duty and cooks don’t like you anyway. [But] They gave us so much food and kept on piling it on, because they knew where we were going.

And when we got back to the barracks it was kind of strange. We were segregated, isolated, and they actually locked us in; like we were going to go somewhere [Clearly sarcastic in tone]. Then we got on the cattle-cars to go to the airstrip. We got there and it was very funny. We had to line up alphabetically. The stewardess called off your name and you had to run up. It was just like reporting to your drill instructor, because for most of us that’s where we were coming from. Then you ran up into the plane. In the old days, all the lower enlisted got onto the back of the plane. Later on I guess they moved everybody [Enlisted men] to the front when they found out it was safer to be in the back. Then we landed in Okinawa and then we headed to Vietnam.

WC: When you stepped off the plane in Vietnam, what was your impression?

WA: Besides being a scared little puppy? It was kind of almost dawn, but not quite. The way Da Nang worked, I’m sure you know because you were in I Corps², planes didn’t stay on the ground. You got off, and the guys going home came right up and the plane took off. You’d hear

¹ An inspection of Marine’s uniform and equipment all laid out in a specific order on his bed.

² South Vietnam was divided into four tactical zones, the I, II, III and IV Corps. I Corps was the northernmost zone, bordering the DMZ and North Vietnam. This zone contained Khe Sanh, Hue, and Da Nang.

cat-calls from the guys, like “Hey you, you’re not gonna make it,” and “Haha, hey newbie,” and all the standard stuff that goes on. Then you’d come down and you were scared and you’d see what you probably thought was about a half a click³ away, but was probably really seven, illumination and outgoing [Artillery], but you had no idea what it was. Then you got on cattle cars and were driving to get processed, and the guys at Da Nang were taking PT tests. I always thought that was funny.

WC: Where was your destination once you left Da Nang?

WA: I got assigned to Lima Company, 3rd Battalion 26th Marine Regiment, 3rd Marine Division. We got into the infamous rear-rear, forward-rear, and then finally where you actually had to go, which was battalion rear at Phu Bai. We flew up to Phu Bai and thank god. The Marine Corps I think is a little different than the other services. We turned in our paperwork, we stood around for what we thought were hours, but it was probably an hour and a half. The guy just threw manila envelopes and yelled your name, and it had a letter on it and a number. In my case it said 3/26 [For 3rd Battalion, 26th Regiment], and that’s where you went. Then you’d have to say, “How do I get here?” and they’d say, “Go to the airstrip.” Well, then you had to go find out where the airstrip was. Being a good private, you latched onto some poor sergeant or corporal and they got you there.

When we landed in Phu Bai there was a sergeant there and he called up. A jeep came for the sergeant, and about a half an hour later a duce-and-a-half⁴ came up for the rest of us. Then we reported to the battalion rear where they gave us our equipment. They told us we’d be leaving the next day. I’ll always remember when they gave us the equipment, the guy gave me a helmet. There was obviously a bullet hole in this side and the ugly part of the bullet hole came out this side.⁵ That was the first time in the Marine Corps I told somebody, “No I don’t want this.” The supply sergeant said “What do you mean you don’t want this?” I said, “Obviously it wasn’t lucky for this guy, I don’t really need that.” So I got a new helmet.

The next day we convoyed up to Camp Evans, which as you know is north of Phu Bai and south of Hue. I was a machine gunner. So he asked for machine gunners and they put me on a .50-caliber. So I’m on a .50-caliber and it’s on a D-ring on a truck, and you know how that goes. It’s very heavy and it circles; that thing beat me up, I’m telling you. And it was monsoon season so it’s raining and the only thing we had was a poncho and we still had the stateside utilities on, and you know that thing just soaked up the rain and never let it go anywhere.

We finally got there and reported out and went into the S-1 tent. There was some clerk-there’s always some clerk-who says, “Yeah, you guys better not want me to ever see your names again.” This kid is a PFC [Private First Class], which in the Marine Corps is an E-2, and we’re all PFC’s. So being a wise guy from New York I said, “Yeah? Why’s that?” and he says, “Because I’m the one who sends the letters home that you died.” So somewhere in my mind I said, “Someday I’m going to see that fellow again.” Then we got assigned to the companies. I was the

³ One click is one kilometer

⁴ Two-and-a-half ton truck

⁵ He is describing entry and exit holes. The exit hole would be larger than the entry.

only guy sent the Lima Company. Most of the guys got sent to Mike Company because Mike Company had just got into a big fight up in Con Thien doing Operation Buffalo⁶ and they were just getting replacements; we were the replacements.

So when I got to Lima Company the first sergeant gives the traditional “This is how it is” speech. All of a sudden the speech was over, so as everyone has been in the service knows, when the first sergeant is done, it’s now time for you to leave; and I said, “Excuse me,” and I got the look like “What are you doing?” I said, “I’m supposed to sign something.” He says, “What do you mean you’re supposed to sign something?” I said, “My brother’s in Special Forces in B-52⁷ here in Vietnam.” The sergeant major at Camp Pendleton had called me and said that I wasn’t going [To Vietnam] and I said I wanted to go, which was stupid but you know how it goes. Making a long story short, he said I had to sign some form, either in Okinawa or here. And the first sergeant said “Oh my god.” Being the first sergeant, he knew what was going on. He said, “Don’t worry kid we’ll make you the company driver.” There’s no such thing as company driver in an infantry company, but that’s okay. A year later I said, “Hey first sergeant, where’s the form? I never signed it.” I still haven’t.

Then I got assigned to a platoon. I met one of the guys who got wounded during Operation Buffalo, which was the big Battle of Con Thien, Tim Kewline [Spelled phonetically]. I was in his squad and he took good care of me when I got there. You know how you imitate everybody, especially when you’re the *brand-new*, new guy? We were in tents that had wooden supports, and he put his stuff up on the wooden part, so I followed him and put my stuff there. Well we went to sleep that night and I didn’t know incoming from outgoing⁸, and all of a sudden artillery goes off. Then *oh my god I’m hit*. I know my head is concaved, I just know it’s concaved, and I’m bleeding. So I’m trying to wake up Tim, but god bless Tim- Tim’s back from the hospital, Tim’s drunk; he’s in the rear and he’s not getting up for anybody. So I crawl out and it was all lousy red clay and little pebbles in that area so I’m cutting up my feet. I just remember where the corpsman’s tent is so I burst in and say, “I’m hit! I’m hit!” The guy looks at me and washes it. I think I got four stitches up here [Pointing just above the forehead]. I said, “Gee, my first night with my unit in the rear and I get wounded- this is going to be a long tour.” I lay back into my bunk thinking, “What’s gonna happen next?” and I go *Ow*. Turns out it was my helmet. I had put my helmet up there [On the wooden tent supports] earlier in the day and went into bed, and when the outgoing artillery fire from our own artillery pieces fired it vibrated and my helmet hit me. I think that’s funny.

WC: When is the first time you were under fire?

WA: Actually the next day we went out to Cobi Thanh Tan Valley, which was an area in the flatlands outside of LZ Evans that went to the mountains. The enemy had used it to infiltrate, so the battalion was out there operating. So I went out there, and I’m the new guy so what’d I know? I made a field transport pack, so I looked like shades of WWII. Of course I had five

⁶ July 2-14, 1967, up near the DMZ

⁷ Not to be confused with the B-52 bomber, this refers to Detachment B-52, a Special Forces reconnaissance unit.

⁸ Meaning enemy artillery being fired *at* the camp or friendly artillery being fired *from* the camp.

gallons of water and a case of C rations beside my rifle. So we get on the helicopter, then we get off the helicopter at the battalion LZ. Then a patrol from the company came up and we went through them. You know what happens- you see a guy fall or trip and you fall or trip, because you figure he knows what he's doing. So we finally get there and I get into the company and get sent to the platoon, and I'm beat already. All of a sudden my squad leader, Steve Pennett [Spelled phonetically], gives me the "This is how the world's gonna be" speech. Then he says to me, "Go see the platoon sergeant for a T-R double E." So I'm a brand new private, I go running straight up to the platoon sergeant and said, "Sir!" and he says "What?" I said, "I need a T-R double E." He said, "Boy"- Staff Sergeant James, great guy- "what does T-R-E-E spell?" and I said, "Tree." He said "Tell your squad leader I want to see him." I'll never forget that.

So I get out to the position, and they always told you from training that if you come into a position that's already been used, you check it for booby traps. So the guys that had been in this machine gun position for probably two days were short, they didn't have a full four-man gun team. So I got there and of course I do what you're supposed to do: I lay flat and use my rifle to hit the bottom. Lo and behold, it's a punji pit; it swung open and there were punji sticks⁹ there. I was lucky because I'm stupid, I'm a newbie. The other guys were lucky because they didn't have enough men to get into that position. So then I start to make clear fields of fire. They give me a machete, and the machete's winning, I'm not. I'm getting beat up by the machete. So I'm swinging and all of the sudden I fall and I land in the ground, about six feet down. The machete is over there and I go *Oh my god*. All I know is I saw a towel and a grape fruit, sound familiar? So I'm grabbing for it [The machete] and I can't get it and I thought it was all over. I must've scared the guy away because he was gone. Once I composed myself I went back and said, "Oh Steve I found a spider hole over there, you might want to check that out."

Then we moved out the next night and it was the first time they used Sea Stallions, the big Marine Corps helicopters. What's the worst thing in the world to be? It's the last squad to be taken out of an LZ. But with the Sea Stallion they could take a whole platoon out so it's a lot easier. So the Sea Stallion comes in and I was very lucky; the unit I was in was very good at what they did, so you learn just by osmosis. The perimeter kept getting smaller and smaller [As men were extracted] so there were always enough men to protect it [The LZ]. Now we all get on the helicopter and just as it's lifting, all hell breaks loose. All I remember was they said, "Stick your rifle out!" because the Sea Stallion had those big windows. We put our rifles out and we were firing at them, they were firing at us. We just laid fire as we were taking off and that's the first time I ever got shot at. I know I didn't hit anything, I was lucky if I hit the ground, but it was fun. I was scared.

WC: When did you get sent to Khe Sanh?

WA: Well we went back to Evans and we were preparing to move up to C-2, which was an outpost on the [DM] Z. We were going to stay there until Christmas Day, then we were going to move back on Christmas Day because there was going to be some kind of big operation. But what happened was we got to Quang Tri- the battalion headquarters was going to be there- so we took a convoy from Evans to Quang Tri. It was the typical service, we were moving up and we finally get there. Everybody had a hardback- you remember what the hardbacks were, those

⁹ Sharpened bamboo spikes often used by the Viet Cong in booby traps.

permanent structures- except for *my* platoon; we had to set up tents, one big GP medium.¹⁰ So we just finished putting up the GP medium and all of a sudden they start yelling, "Task force Cotel X-Ray," and I have no idea what that is, why would I know? You know, you're a private, I'd only been there about two weeks; you just follow. They said "Come on!" so we load up on this garbage truck, it wasn't even a duce-and-a-half, and I look at Steve Pennett and I said, "What's this?" He said, "Saigon's being overrun." This was before Christmas Eve, so I'm scared. Next thing we know we get to the airstrip, but our truck turned over. You know the mud was just terrible, so the truck flipped. Nobody got killed but some broke legs or arms. Luckily I had that field transport pack and I fell on it so I didn't get hurt. We got on the chopper and flew out.

You've been to Khe Sanh, you know it's a whole different world. It felt like we were flying forever. So we land and I thought I was in Korea, it was so cold. People don't understand how cold it gets at Khe Sanh. We're used to 120 degrees and the next thing you know it's seventy-that's cold! I said, "Where are we?" and somebody said, "We're at Khe Sanh." I just said, "Oh." He said "Do you know what that means?" and I said no. He said, "That means the Wagon of the Dead." I just said *Oh*. We stayed there that day and night. The next morning we went out on an operation. We went to Hill 980 if I remember correctly; we were doing sweeps. I'll never forget, we dug in that night, and that's the first time I saw the torches the enemy carried. There were literally hundreds of them. All we did was watch and count. It was very scary. Then they called in artillery and all that. Tim Kewline, god bless him from Michigan, he had a canteen and said, "Here Bill take this." I said, "No, I have water" but he just said, "No, take this." It was whiskey, god bless Tim. It was just like the movies, he had a canteen of water and a canteen of whiskey-that's just how Tim was.

We moved back and then we ran into a recon team that was down in the gully. We made our way back to Khe Sanh. They moved our position to another area. We moved about three or four times at Khe Sanh base itself. All of a sudden, Christmas Eve, the 3rd platoon shot those six guys. Lieutenant Buffington, who was the company executive officer, went out with the react force. These were the guys that had all the plans on them. So Christmas Eve of 1967, when 3rd platoon opened up on these guys and killed them, Lieutenant Buffington went out. Captain Canton was the company commander- he's an author now and a historian at Quantico, Virginia- he sent Buffington out. That's when they found all the map cases and all the information about the siege- that it was coming. So they knew then, and I remember because the next day Westmoreland flew in, not that that was a big deal to us, we were just privates. But he flew in and that's when they knew something was coming. I guess it confirmed reports they had earlier from all different sources, but what do you know, you're a dumb grunt.

They changed us around again. Three companies went up to 881 and 861: Kilo, Mike and India. We stayed at Khe Sanh Combat Base. I'll never forget we were on the perimeter that night and all of a sudden guys came in behind us to where we had been before. Later that morning I found out they were the 1st Battalion, 9th Marines, "The Walking Dead"- great unit. So all these short-timers we had who only wanted to get home and didn't care about anything, I woke them up that morning from watch- from stand two, because in the Marine Corps you always do stand two- I said "Yeah, we had a unit come in behind us." He said, "Who are they?" and I said 1/9. And this

¹⁰ Typically 16' x 32'

corporal, god bless him, he started cleaning his rifle and the next thing you knew he was all business. He knew with the 1st Battalion 9th Marines there, we were going to get hit. He was very accurate about that. So I stayed there during the siege and I got wounded there, and then...

WC: Let me ask you this, how were you wounded, shrapnel?

WA: What it was, I don't know if you're familiar with the topography of Khe Sanh. It was the Montagnard¹¹ village. I had a .50-caliber position- I think they put a number on it, 101. Allegedly Lyndon Baines Johnson would walk at night to this sandbox of Khe Sanh with all these positions outlined with numbers.¹² Mine was 101, I'll never forget. Allegedly Johnson would look at that, no wonder the man had a nervous breakdown. So it was where the road was coming through and we had the .50-caliber position. The village was over here [to the right] and the Special Forces compound was here [to the left] and the main gate was always secured. The next position over was an anti-tank position because we knew this was the only way tanks could come. We had the 25th Chemical Company come from Korea, of all places. They laid the mines out, which was another joke I always loved. The engineers laid the mines but you know who'd dig the holes for the engineers? The grunts! So you'd dig the holes for them to put the mines in. Anyway we had a lot of anti-personnel and anti-tank mines in front of us, thank god. My position alone had fifteen claymores. We had the Imperial Japanese Marine Corps¹³, because every hole had a claymore that the last man alive was supposed to blow up the hole before it was overrun. Needless to say, thank god that never happened. Nobody ever had to see if we would play that.

So the village was right there, maybe as far as that skyscraper there [pointing out the window]. What happened was earlier that day we had seen them moving into the village and the snipers couldn't find them [Presumably enemy Vietnamese]. Work detail, a guy had dropped some wire and we said let's give him a hand. They had enemy snipers in there using mortars, and we were just a target of opportunity. They dropped the mortars on us. Gary Neely got wounded really bad, the guy who was doing the initial work got wounded really bad, Tim Kewline got wounded really bad and I got hit in the head. Corporal Boone- great guy- said, "Come on Bill, the guys are hurt!" So we picked them up and ran them into the hole- Tim, Gary Neely and this other guy- and all of a sudden it's like firemen or policemen: you never have enough corpsmen or you have too many. Right away all the corpsmen from the platoon got there, and that was great. So they're taking care of the guys and go into my position and start smoking a cigarette. I go *Gee* [Scratches head].

Next thing you know, Lieutenant Madison comes in and said "Anybody else hit?" and I was just scratching it because it hurt. When I initially got hit, it's the way everybody gets hit: I felt heat, a light, and I was on my back. When Corporal Boone had said "Bill" that snapped me out of whatever I was doing. So I said, "No sir it's okay, it's just bleeding." He says to the doc, "Put him on the casualty list and go to battalion aid station." So I went to battalion aid station and

¹¹ An indigenous group in the Central Highlands of Vietnam.

¹² President Johnson and Westmoreland attached such significance to Khe Sanh that a scale model of the base was built and put in the White House so Johnson could monitor the situation.

¹³ Aiello is being facetious in comparing the Marines to the Japanese because of Japanese suicide attacks in WWII

there were a lot of wounded there. There might have been twenty or thirty, but there were a lot of guys in this bunker. We had one battalion surgeon and the corpsmen at the battalion aid station, and they were working on them. I'll never forget I look in and I see Tim. By now Tim has been initially taken care of and Tim's as high as a Georgia pine on morphine. And he says, "Hey Bill, tell the guys morphine is better than pot." I love that line, to this day I think that was the greatest line I heard in the whole war. So I go there and because I was hit in the head- it wasn't serious, it really wasn't- they said, "We can't give you anything because it's a head wound." So they put a corpsman here, corpsman here, corpsman on each of my arms [Points to his legs and arms]. They put that towel on [my head], you know, with the hole in it where they're going to do it? So they start pulling. Obviously it wasn't a bad wound but you'd feel it as they were pulling the shrapnel out. By this time I just wanted to go to sleep. I was a dumb grunt thinking, "Hey, I can go to sleep here." But they wouldn't let me, they were holding my head up.

So they were pulling the stuff out and then they start stitching me up. The head corpsman says to the doc, "Oh doc why don't you do this kind of stitch?" and I said "Excuse me, the plain one will be alright." The doc said, "There's enough cooks in this broth, you just shut up." So they stitch me up and put me over where the other guys are. I think *Hey great, I'm going to get a full night's sleep!* Next thing you know, a guy comes through the flap and says, "All walking wounded, back to your positions! They're coming!" So I go back with a bunch of other guys. Luckily it was a very uneventful night- just long, like most nights.

Major Caulfield was the S-3, he later became a major general- good man. He came from Long Island, a different part than me, he was from Bayshore. We'd always have to redo the holes because they'd always check. We just finished digging a hole we thought was perfect. He [Caulfield] said, "No, you have to move it over a little bit more this way." You know, what're you going to tell a major? Then he says, "You're from Long Island?" I said, "Yes, sir." Then he says, "Remember, you're too smart to get hit." *Yes sir!* And of course that night I got hit; he came back the next morning and said, "I'm not going to tell you that anymore."

My platoon sergeant and platoon leader, Staff Sergeant James and Lieutenant Madison, and our platoon guide, but I forget his name- great guys. I mean, at the time I didn't think they were great guys but they were, they really cared about us. The strangest thing, our colonel, Lieutenant Colonel Studt- S-T-U-D-T- the best officer I served in all my twenty-four years in the service by the way, bar none. He had us go out on an ambush. Now, two-thirds of the platoon went, Lt. Madison led it. Here's a 21-22 year old person, he was old to an 18 or 19 year-old like me. This was a big burden to be on his shoulders. It's a patrol where in reality, we're supposed to be the early warning system. We're to go out by the drop zone, set in at this likely avenue of approach where a regiment is supposed to come in and hit the base. We're supposed to initiate an ambush.

So we did the rehearsal like we always did, god bless the Marine Corps. Then they said we're going to have communion. So the father came and did the service. I'll never forget, we were in a bomb crater, and I was the altar boy, which I thought was cool. In his sermon he said: "We are dead even to sin, but not to God." I guess that summed up Khe Sanh. Then we had communion and we passed around the wine and if the father was expecting to have any wine leftover, that didn't happen. I hate to repeat it but it was just like the movies. Guys who were owed five bucks,

all of a sudden people who weren't going on the patrol were showing up to give them five bucks- as if you were going to spend that MPC funny money¹⁴ anywhere.

So we went out that night and we set in, it was about one half to two-thirds of the platoon. It was a *long* night, I do mean a long night. Everyone knew we weren't coming back. We were just in there and it was just a long night. Dawn showed up, Lt. Madison says men out. As we get back to the perimeter, the battalion commander is standing there. Lt. Madison, god bless him, says "You guys go to chow." The colonel yells at him like, "What were you all sleeping out there? Didn't you see anybody?" He said, "Gee I'm sorry, they didn't decide to come down our road."

Then there was the day they gave us the big 1,200 rounds, the heaviest concentration of fire. I think that was the lightest day of injuries, I don't know if that makes sense. I could be wrong but to the best of my recollection, my platoon didn't take any wounded or killed and I don't think anybody else did. It was just coming all day. You've been there. Artillery is more damaging, but rockets sound so bad. I don't think anybody could ever understand what a 120mm rocket, what a terrifying sound that is unless they're getting shot at [with it]. So they through that on us and the next was almost as bad but not much, and I really don't think anyone got wounded that day. We saw a lot of Lt. Madison and Staff Sergeant James, and I'm so sorry I can't remember the platoon guide's name. Whatever your hole had- like my machine gun team was four people- that's who you dealt with. We had a lot of working parties, where we'd be digging holes and stuff, which was a lot better off than the poor guys on 881 and 861; the night they hit, that's who they went for. God bless those poor guys, they did a great job. They held them. They repulsed them from 861 and it was hand to hand, knife to knife. They were just super. Remember, they were all 18-year old kids most of them, that's what people have to remember. Eighteen-year old people can do that for their country. They should be given rights and privileges. They always did a great job.

Then I'll never forget when the Army came in. The siege was over, you could tell. We started playing football. I know that sounds like a terrible thing to say, you're not supposed to say that. But we started to play football. The first time I got sniped at, I actually thought it was a bumblebee. I thought *What the hell is a bumblebee doing in Vietnam?* But it turned out to be a sniper. So we were playing football, and that must've really irritated him [The sniper]. But we're Marines, we're eighteen-years old, we're grunts, we're at Khe Sanh- what're you going to do to us? So we were throwing the football and we said, "Okay, next time he shoots..." There must've been twelve of us. So we threw the ball, the guy shot, and we all fell down. I think the guy had a heart attack, we never heard another shot.

But then the Army came in and I'll never forget the Army guys. I never saw so many staff sergeants in my life. Our platoon sergeant was a staff sergeant, we had one. Every other guy in the Army was a staff sergeant, and they all came in. They were relieving us by hole, so they'd come into our hole, we'd give it to them, we'd give them our fields of fire, our range card, tell them what was going on. Now, here we are to attack 881 North, and we can't even get a helicopter out. The Army's coming in with Huey's dropping one case of C-rations. In those days a Huey was a gunship for us, and these guys are just dropping C-rations. When the Army guys were relieving us in our holes they'd say, "But this is just a hole." *Hey, pretty good!* Then the

¹⁴ Military Payment Certificates, used to pay soldiers in Vietnam

Army guys got even with us because they said, “Yeah, the Officer’s Club is opening tonight, we’re having a USO show.” They were all coming in and having C-rations dropped, so we figured maybe this was it.

But we had to wait until we could get a helicopter to go fight the war. So we take off, and allegedly the division commander of the 1st Cavalry Division said, “This place is filthy!” He started a police call, so I think it was time for us to leave. We went up to 881. We were there and all of a sudden we were settling in that night and one of the mortar spotters- nice man, staff sergeant- came by. There was movement beneath us. We had learned that there were a lot of Rock Apes.¹⁵ There are true stories about Rock Apes and Marines: you’d hear movement and throw a grenade, and the Rock Ape would pick it up and throw it back. You’d think you were in a firefight with Mr. Charles [Viet Cong] but it could’ve been a Rock Ape. Anyway, we heard movement down there and we got him [The mortar spotter] here and he says, “Okay, we’re going to call in mortars.” We said okay, and then he says, “You guys are going to call them in.” And that’s how I learned to call in mortars, along with my buddy Chief Rodriguez and Barry Miller. We called in mortars on the gully, it was interesting.

Next morning we were getting up and were told it was going to be a raid situation when we took 881 North. Everybody said, “That’s great, that’s how it should be.” Not that we had any choice. So all of a sudden we’re waiting to fall in and everyone’s passing us. Here’s the new company commander; he’s got an ammo box for a machine gun. I’m a machine gunner and I say *Oh that’s cool, the company commander is carrying ammo*. One of the guys looks at me and says, “He’s not carrying ammo, he’s got dirty laundry in there.” I don’t even *have* laundry, he’s got *dirty* laundry! Because you know, everybody got dysentery. The sad part about being at Khe Sanh was there was no supply. So you know how dysentery goes; it’s too late. What you did was scrape it out and hope for rain, you didn’t get a new uniform. So that’s why it was really frustrating when this schmuck had dirty laundry. So we get in there and set in and the first thing we hear is the guys coming back saying, “Alright, the machine guns are going to have to go after the enemy machine gun nests.” Now Chief Barry didn’t smoke cigarettes until he heard that; Chief sucked down a whole bunch of cigarettes. I think between the three of us we finished a pack in ten minutes.

Then we go up. We get on line. God bless the Marine Corps: we have Mike Company, we have Kilo Company, India Company I think was in reserve, and we were Lima Company on the far end. And our battalion commander, [Lt.] Col. Studt, is leading the charge. He’s there, he’s not in some helicopter, he’s with us. The company commander of Mike Company who had such a great fight up when they attacked had just been relieved, but he was doing all of the firearms coordination with 106 [mm recoilless] rifles, artillery, aircraft, and mortars; and he did a superb job. He was Chesty Puller’s¹⁶ son in law- great guy. So we get on line and go right up the middle. So we’re cursing and yelling, all of the things Marines do. Then all of a sudden- I’ll never forget during the brief they told us we didn’t have to worry about any entrenched positions because aerial reconnaissance said so- I went in the gully and came up, and I’m telling you I saw the biggest bunker I’ve ever seen in my life. It was half the size of this room this way [across],

¹⁵ A kind of Bigfoot creature said to inhabit Vietnam. Veterans have reported encounters with them.

¹⁶ Lieutenant General Lewis Burwell “Chesty” Puller, a Marine Corps hero

and as long as this room, and as high as that ceiling. And it was in an opening; I never believed aerial reconnaissance for the next twenty-four years of my military career. But they swore it wasn't there. So I ran right up shooting my machine gun and we got up.

When we got up, my platoon [2nd] and 1st platoon were leading with 3rd platoon in general reserve with the company commander. We got just up to the last knoll. Next thing you know in the middle of the attack they stop us; why they stopped us [makes an "I don't know" gesture]. We get pulled. Next thing you know the company commander takes out his .45 with 3rd platoon and the 3rd platoon commander and says "Charge!" They go up the hill. The NVA were waiting right there. Third platoon took a lot of casualties: the platoon sergeant went down right away, most of the NCO's went down. Lt. Madison and Lt. Abram [phonetically] looked at each other and said "Let's go." We went. Well it was strange, we went to the top of the hill; 3rd platoon was led by a busted corporal- who needless to say after this made corporal again, good guy. He'd got what was left of the platoon up the hill and we reinforced him. We looked for the wounded and the dead for about fifteen minutes. All of a sudden this lieutenant, the platoon leader of 3rd platoon- who nobody has seen- shows up. Everybody looks at him. I was up against a dead NVA soldier; my gun was down and I'm using him as protection. He had his head blown off. It was done by the 106 [recoilless rifle] or by the mortar. I'm sorry for the guy but it was a perfect shot. It was obvious the crown of his head was gone. This idiot [The lieutenant of 3rd platoon] bayonets the guy; he says "Only 3rd gets souvenirs." First of all, who wants a souvenir? I only want out of here. My lieutenant looked at him like he was some kind of moron. Then out of nowhere came the battalion commander, because he was with Mike Company and Kilo Company. He looked down and said, "You're relieved of command, get down the hill." He did that to my company commander and this lieutenant. Evidently they took an exit, you know what I mean?

Then the next day was very interesting. We took the hill and brought the stuff back. When we go on the assault in the Marine Corps, as you know, we go up the middle and drop our packs. Well, they took our packs, so god only knows where they went. They found a chopper that had gotten shot down weeks before during the siege, and our corpsman who had been on R&R was in there. There were probably eighteen passengers and they were all dead. At least they got their bodies recovered, which was a good thing. So we're leaving- Sergeant Ernest, who's a good man- and were attached to Kilo for the night. We were between 881 North and 881 South on this knoll. All of a sudden choppers are coming in to take us out. Of course when you're attached to another company you're always the last schmucks to come out. It was a C46 Sea Knight, and they were coming in. Next thing you know, just to remind us they're still there, they drop mortars on us [The VC or NVA]. They'd hit us and we'd go to the side and return fire. Sergeant Ernest, god bless him, he's another guy who's under thirty and already has one tour in. He says, "*incomprehensible yelling*" and I said, "What Staff Sergeant Ernest?" and he said "*incomprehensible yelling*" and I said "What Sergeant Ernest?" Then he goes [Sticks finger in mouth and makes a *pop* sound, making the motion of pulling chewing tobacco out of the mouth] and says, "Give me the M.F. LAWs!¹⁷" We had LAWs but he was chewing tobacco so I couldn't understand him. I saw him knock out six mortar positions in a half hour, Sergeant Ernest was that good. Then this helicopter came, and Sergeant James, the platoon sergeant, was there with

¹⁷ M72 Light Anti-Tank Weapon, rocket launcher used in Vietnam

us. We've got wounded and dead and equipment. We know we're not getting back. Out of nowhere this chopper came in, a Sea Knight. This major comes out, the pilot, and says, "I'm leaving this goddamn hell in thirty seconds with or without you!" And we were very happy to see that.

We flew into Khe Sanh and got off the helicopter, then got onto another helicopter and flew to Quang Tri. When we got to Quang Tri we landed and the division band was there. They played "When the Saints Come Marching In," which is the standard. Now you're in the rear and you see these people: they've got clean clothes, they're shaved and washed, they've got haircuts. So the first thing they do is let us eat. This is the first time we've eaten good food in at least eighty days, if not more. So what happens? You go through that whole thing of going to the bathroom again. But then they give us new uniforms. They let us sleep by the airstrip in tents, which in hindsight was probably the wrong thing to do- not by anybody's part, but it was just wrong. That night they hit us with mortars and rockets. We lost a lot of guys. It was just Mr. Charles' way of saying, "We'll see you again." We were really down a lot of people. That's the Khe Sanh thing.

WC: After Khe Sanh how long was it before you ended up going back home?

WA: Oh geez! We got out of Khe Sanh in April and I didn't go home until December. So that was just my "Hello, how are you?" Then we went on Operation Mameluke Thrust¹⁸, which was a very big operation. We cleared Charlie Ridge. Our clearing of Charlie Ridge made the Red Star Army Magazine in 1971-72, because our battalion's task was to clear Charlie Ridge of all its rockets. That's where they had the rockets for Da Nang. The interesting thing about that was General Westmoreland had gone and General [Creighton] Abrams was the commander. So we did what we always did but the next thing you know, we didn't have to move out this time. Why didn't we have to move out this time? Dumb grunts don't think about anything but setting in and moving out. Next thing you know you see Konnix boxes [spelled phonetically]- we've never seen Konnix boxes formed by helicopters before. They land- it's a mobile PX. We've never seen a mobile PX in our lives, never saw one again. We were getting #10 cans of juice- we never got any #10 cans of juice before that we didn't rob and we never got any more after that we didn't rob. All of a sudden all these helicopters are over us. General Abrams jumps out, and he's got all his staff. These schmucks are walking around with M14's with slings, you know what that said. So we just laughed. I guess they were showing this was a typical Marine unit in the field, *Haha*. Of course, when he got his briefing and left, so did the Konnix boxes.

Oh if I can step back, one thing about Khe Sanh. We get out of Khe Sanh and they moved us around a few times to do different things in the area. All these Red Cross workers came out, all nice women. Our battalion commander was there and he had a lot of things on his mind, but he was handing out writing pads. He says, "I want you to write your wife, your mother, whoever your next of kin is. I just want them to know that you're out of Khe Sanh and you're alive and well. Then you can say anything you want, you can say you hate the Marine Corps, you hate me, but just let them know you're safe." So we do that, because mail wasn't a priority. He [Battalion commander] collects them and hands them to this pretty girl, and then she collects *all* the writing pads and takes off. I'm not a big fan of the Red Cross for a lot of reasons but that's one of them.

¹⁸ May-October 1968

Where's a dumb grunt going to get another writing pad? A dumb grunt can't go to the PX and even if he could, he's got no funny money. The Red Cross is notorious for that, you know.

So we did our operation and I was going on R&R. In the Marine Corps they told you where you were going for R&R. They told me I was going to Okinawa. I said, "But First Sergeant, I don't want to go to Okinawa, I just came from Okinawa." He very nicely told me I had no say in it, I was going to Okinawa. I said, "But I want to go to Australia" and he said only officers go to Australia. Well next thing you know, he says, "Aiello, you're going to Australia, get your gear." So I get my gear and get on this chopper and a guy from Mike company gets on the chopper. In the meantime, we had a company clerk; nobody likes company clerks. This clerk- very mousy kid- says, "Oh yes First Sergeant, I'm ready to go." He said, "You're not going anywhere, I'll see you in the thirty days" and left him out in the bushes. Colonel Studt did the same thing. During the Siege of Khe Sanh when we were losing guys- and we lost a lot- he really believed every Marine was a rifleman. Remember the "You better not want me to see your name" clerk? Well he ended up coming to spend many a night in my machine gun position because we short of people. He learned a different respect. It turned out well because we had cooks and everyone else doing that too so when they went back to their regular jobs after two or three months, they no longer treated you like trash. Because you know how everybody treats a grunt.

So I got down and I had to report to the sergeant major. Our sergeant major and our colonel were always in the tree line with us, they were there. We had to report to him and he's fixing up this hooch. He's got a wireman and this other radio guy. He turns to us and says, "Where are you from corporal?" and the guy says "Mike Company," then he says to me, "Where are you from Aiello?" and I say Lima Company. The sergeant says [to the two radio men in the tent], "Which one of you is senior?" and the corporal's not stupid and says, "I am." So he looks at the other guy and says "Okay, you're going to replace Mike Company. Be out on the strip in twenty minutes, I'll take you out. Don't worry Aiello we'll get a cook for you. As soon as that landline gets up get me a cook." So the sergeant major took a cook and a radioman out to replace us- one out, one in, that's how it was.

We got into Da Nang that night and everybody's looking at us. We were eating food- and it was really good, the guy's giving us all we want- but we notice people are moving away from us. We don't understand why. But then we realize that it's because we stink to high heaven, we've been in the jungle for forty or fifty days. Then we flew up to Quang Tri because that's where our battalion rear was. We get there and the first sergeant says, "Aiello, what's going on out in the field?" Now I was only a PFC, I'd been a PFC for a long time. In fact I was the senior PFC in the battalion, I had status. I told him the guys are doing a great job and what was going on. He gave me my one allocated shot of hooch that he had and then he said, "Okay now when you get done, I want you to go take a shower, go get your haircut, go get a set of new utilities and report back to me at 1300." And you don't say anything but "Yes first sergeant."

I go to the supply sergeant and he tells me to go away- typical supply sergeant. So I don't have a towel but I know I have to take a shower. So I take a shower and I wipe myself off with my uniform. I'm not the only private in the Marine Corps who does that, everybody does that. So I got to the barber shop and the barber shop says it doesn't open until 1400, but I had to be back at 1300. So I go and report back to the first sergeant and of course the first sergeant has a baby- I told him what happened. He said, "Come with me." I'm not walking abreast with the first sergeant, I'm walking behind him. He goes to the supply tent, looks at the supply sergeant and

says, "You're out of here, back your gear, you're going to the bush." [He looks at] Corporal Bruno, who used to be my squad leader and who had many Purple Hearts- good guy- and says, "Bruno, you're now the supply sergeant, give this guy a uniform." So Bruno gave me my uniform. Then he said, "Aiello, don't cause anymore problems."

I go get my haircut and everything, then I go on my R&R to Australia and have a great time. Then I come back to the rear, and I guess I had my malaria incubation period from the time I went on R&R to the time I got back. The first night I was back, I got my malaria attack. I fall out of my tent, and god bless Corporal Bruno, he finds me. He picks me up and brings me to the corpsman's tent. The corpsmen at the battalion aid station are all new people, they've never been in the bush, they weren't at Khe Sanh, they don't know anything. Because corpsmen, god bless them, they did six months in the bush and six months at battalion aid station, and it could rotate either way. The officers did six months in the bush and the rest of the time in the rear. The only grunts in the Marine Corps who stayed in the bush the whole time were the staff NCOs and you. All of a sudden this young kid says, "What is he on drugs?" They said, "This guy doesn't even drink." So I had my malaria, and they caught it very early. I was alright, then I went back out to the field.

Then I remember coming back, and we got a brand new first lieutenant. This guy was an MP. We were back at Da Nang and all ready to go back out and the sergeant major's there. He said, "Aiello, you want to go back to Australia?" I said, "Sergeant major I have no money." He said, "I didn't ask you that, I'll lend you \$500, do you want to go to Australia?" I said, "No sergeant major, thank you but I can't."

[Pause for tape change]

WC: Okay now the first sergeant offered to pay your way to Australia.

WA: Sergeant major, that was a big deal! So we were going to go back to the unit. We were going by convoy, which was fine, but were going to convoy by Amtracks- Amphibious Tracks. So all of a sudden there's a new lieutenant because they had used all these people and needed replacements. We had none, we'd used up a whole lot during Khe Sanh. Then after we got out of Khe Sanh, of course, we didn't have a priority anymore; now they needed to give us more bodies. They disbanded one of the MP battalions, so we got an MP officer. We thought we were being nice, we were filling up our canteens and we said, "Hi lieutenant," or "Good morning, sir," or something like that. This schmuck said, "Take the cigarette out of your mouth and salute me." So we made sure we saluted him in the field too. But yeah, he was a schmuck. He didn't last long. Our company commander hated him.

When they got rid of that one captain, the next company commander we got and the company gunnery sergeant- Gunnery Sergeant Brewster, Major Bennett was the company commander- the best Marines you ever met in your life. They were both enlisted guys before this and they worked as drill instructors together for years. They were the epitome of the Marine Corps. In fact the first time I met Gunny Brewster he was going to kill me, and I knew he would've. When you got out of Khe Sanh you really thought you were a bad guy. You thought, *What're you going to do to me? I fought this big battle.* I came back on a one day sweep on a convoy, and I got into the bunker and the guy said, "Hey Aiello, the new gunny came by and he said you better straighten up your gear, it looks terrible." I said, "Tell him this isn't the drill field and he's no drill

sergeant.” By that time, he ate me up. But he was the nicest man. Gunny Brewster was the first man in a firefight- great man. Major Bennett was even better. They were just that good.

We did the convoy that night and set in. We did a nifty insertion. You know how normally when you insert people they’d drop choppers, so the NVA would say *Oh they just inserted people over there*. We took them with us and dropped off reconnaissance teams behind us, which was a very smart thing. The Amtracks left and we did our operation in Elephant Valley, which is north of Da Nang. There was nothing really special about good old Elephant Valley, but the worst mosquitoes I have ever, ever, ever, *ever* felt in Vietnam were in Elephant Valley. They were as big as this table and they could pick s big as this table and they could pick up. They’d tap you on the shoulder and say, “You coming the easy or the hard way?” It was just terrible.

We were doing one day sweeps and they put us up in Phu Lok. Phu Lok was north of Da Nang, by the Hai Van Pass. I remember during Tet the NVA had cut off the Hai Van Pass and just destroyed the villagers, they did terrible things to them. What was interesting about that was we went on our first patrol, a little patrol. We were relieving the 2nd Battalion 5th Marines- great outfit, they were the guys that took Hue with 1/1, 1st Battalion 1st Marines- can’t get better than that. We see this old blown up schoolhouse, and we know it’s a schoolhouse because there was a blackboard in there; and it said, “Welcome 3/26 and goodbye 2/5.” It was amazing, just amazing. Probably the guys did it, but nobody knew. We had an interesting time there.

One of the things that was interesting was about 5:30 that night, a lieutenant showed up. In the interim we had a Motor T officer as a lieutenant two [2nd lieutenant] and platoon leader- good guy, he tried, but he was a motor transport officer. Next thing, he says, “I’m the new lieutenant.” There’s something strange about this guy; he looks a little bit older. He doesn’t have that typical 2nd lieutenant look. So I get on the radio and call the company- because we were in platoon patrol bases- and I said, “You know anything about a new lieutenant?” They said, “There’s no new lieutenant, he’s a turncoat.” We had to deal with turncoats, you remember that, you remember what happened at Marble Mountain in ’68.¹⁹ That had just happened and everyone was looking for them. They said battalion knows nothing about him, snatch him up and take him to battalion. We put an M16 on him and they drive him off to battalion. Hey, I’m a hero! I caught a turncoat! I can see the citation now, I’m thinking, *This has got to be good for a three-day R&R. This is great*. What happens? It was your old, *Oh, we forgot to tell you. This is Lieutenant Hooper*. He’d been a mustanger, spent twelve years on the drill field. He came back. He was a very good man, he actually promoted me to corporal. So he walked up and told the lieutenant, “Pack your gear, the jeep’s waiting for you, get out of here.” He did a very interesting thing. We had the LP’s out, and he opened up an M79 [Grenade launcher] and he fired- out of the danger zone so no one would get hit- at the LP. Nobody ever went to sleep anymore on that LP.

We were doing what they called killer teams. You’d take a patrol out- we called it the afternoon patrol, a four-man killer team, one machine gun, a squad leader, or assistant squad leader, two riflemen, and you’d set in. You’d set in and you were a mobile ambush, you’d go all night long. They copied this from the British. If we made contact we’d to a “ring of fire,” they’d surround us with mortars and artillery, and we’d keep on moving. We had pre-set locations and pre-set times. Well, don’t be the patrol that thought they’d sandbag. A sandbag patrol was, as you know, you

¹⁹ Aiello explains what happened on the next page

wouldn't move from position and everybody would go to sleep except for one guy- that was known as sandbagging the patrol. Well, we didn't have to worry about that because Lt. Hooper ensured that that wouldn't happen- he'd call in artillery on the position you just left, and you better be where you were supposed to be, because the only safe place to be was where you were supposed to be. He was very good, he taught us a lot.

One of the other strange replacements we got was this staff sergeant. We were in Dodge City²⁰ now, this was July. Dodge City is a mean place. We were doing a reconnaissance kind of thing- the whole battalion was there and we were doing reconnaissance. Next thing you know, we see this new platoon sergeant, and we're saying, *Gee, he's trying. I mean he's got the wrong camouflage on.* He had the camouflage on his pack. Next thing you know, Lt. Hoop comes over and punches him and throws the stuff off his back. We're nineteen-years old, we're from New York, we're the heroes of Khe Sanh- no one knew this idiot was drying out marijuana. So Hooper dumped this schmuck. We we're going on and getting a lot of fire. That night we set in and I'll never forget- they fired at us from underneath us. They were in the perimeter underneath us. We had a guy who had malaria real bad. You know how malaria hits, it's just *bang*. In the Marine Corps the choppers don't come out at night. God bless the corpsmen, they worked this guy all night and they saved his life. At first light they took him out.

That next day we were humping again. It was hard- miles and miles of nothing but old, dried out rice paddies. In the middle of it was a Marine outpost. We had gone there and were coming back. Tough patrol. The Marine Corps always believed in having a pilot on the ground with you. So we just happen to be by the colonel, and he said, "I need the air officer, where is he?" He was back there. This pilot could probably do a triathlon, but he couldn't hump. You know how people can't hump? This boy could not hump. He comes running up and the colonel takes his radio and beats this guy like a dog, saying "Where are you when I need you!" Nobody felt sorry because he should've been there. So he calls in and gets the fighter aircraft. Remember the OV-10's²¹, they were brand new? I'll never forget the guy came down swooping- it looked like an old P38- and he threw cigarettes to us. We thought *Oh thank god, this is a great guy.* All of a sudden, Charlie, stupid as he is sometimes, opened up on him. Unlike the piper cubs²², he [The OV-10] can fight back. I guess Charles thought he was a piper cub; he wasn't he opened up with that machine gun and made his day all bad.

Then we went to Anwar. I'll never forget, we went on a five-day mission looking for ten turncoats. We didn't walk passed 2 o'clock in the afternoon at all. We set in and were told that if anyone came to us from the left, right, front or rear and spoke English, we were to shoot them- we were told don't trust anybody, because we were looking for turncoats. We found base camps and other stuff, but we never found them. Those were the guys that did Monkey Mountain and Marble Mountain where one guy dressed up as a major in Special Forces and he was a turncoat; he wasn't a major and he wasn't Special Forces. What he did was he cut the wire. Then that

²⁰ A roughly 5 mile area southwest of Da Nang

²¹ Light attack and observation aircraft

²² An old, unarmed, propeller-driven observation plane

night Mr. Charles came in where he had cut the wire and they blew up thirteen helicopters I think.

Then of course we did [Operation] Meade River²³- which was again of course in Dodge City. I think we had found so much stuff in Dodge City that they planned the operation around that later one. That was my last operation in December.

Then I went home. I left 12 December, 1968. I'll never forget two things getting on that plane: one, I saw my junior drill instructor, who was a real pain in the butt- a mean, nasty guy. You know what his job was in the Marine Corps? To put you on the plane. There was a guy named Rodriguez, and they made poor Rodriguez's life miserable at boot camp. They told him how he was going to die in Vietnam. Rodriguez was carrying four AK47's on his shoulder and that meant that he killed- those AK47's were his, he earned them the hard way. To make a long story short, we went back to Okinawa, then we landed in El Toro. It was just simply amazing, I'll never forget. We were taxing up and some very bored old admin guy, a lance corporal came onto the plane- he was very bored that he had to give this speech. "On behalf of all...[gradually becomes incoherent]." You could see all these officers' wives and senior NCO's wives, who were stationed in Camp Pendleton, waiting to see them. And he says, "And nobody will jump over the white fence because they'll be in trouble." So what happens as soon as the doors open? The majors and the colonels and the captains and the sergeant majors and the staff sergeants jump over the fence and see their loved ones.

The flight out of Da Nang- the stewardess later said she never got over the fact that when the guys left Da Nang, especially the Marines, it was silent all the way. That's just how it was. Then we get on the lines and they hand us these cards- remember the Hong Kong Flu²⁴? The guy says, "You'll keep these cards on you at all times." Why? "Because if you fall out the Health Department with know where you came from, that's why." Then they told us about the Hong Kong Flu and of course we got blamed for it. So we get on line, and the guy standing there's where we got our orders, we got our orders to get out of the country, now we got our real orders. -says, "Okay, you're going to the 2nd Marine Division." Okay, like I had a choice? He says, "How are you getting there?" Now I'd bought a first-class ticket in Freedom Hill in Da Nang- only time I ever flew first-class in my entire life. Leaving Vietnam, I was going to go first-class home from California. So did my buddy Jimmy, who's from New York too. He says, "No you're not, you're going by train." I said, "No, I'm going by plane, I got a ticket." He said, "No, you get extra travel time if you go by train." He'd asked me what unit I was in in Vietnam and I told him and he said "Okay you're going by train." My buddy's behind me and then he asks, "And how are you going home?" and my buddy says, "I'm going by train" then the guy says, "No you're not, you're going home by airplane."

I'll never forget we got up to the airport, and I'm not even in the country two hours yet. So we go up to the bar and sit. The bartender must be 23 years old. He says, "Can I help you guys?" I said, "Yeah can we have a beer?" He says, "You can't have a beer, you're not old enough." We're corporals, but we're 19, okay. "Can we have a soda then?" Because we didn't want to make

²³ November 20- December 9, 1968

²⁴ There was a worldwide flu pandemic in 1968-69

trouble. He said, "Yeah but you can't have it at the bar you have to sit at the table." So we go into the restaurant. I got an egg salad sandwich with French fries, and we had the rudest, nastiest, most rotten waitress you could ever imagine. She was really rude and when we left I gave her a \$20 tip, we both did. She was shocked. This was 1968, \$20 each around Christmas time, that's \$40, that's a whole week. So we're walking down the airport and there's a college kid with his wife and a brand new baby. We're just sitting outside on a bench and this lady screams in the middle of the walkway, "Oh, baby killers!" They did that. It was just unbelievable. We didn't do anything.

We both had first-class tickets, so as soon as we got there we went up to the counter, the lady said get back and wait in line. Of course it's a long line, so we got back up there twenty minutes later and she said, "Why'd you wait in line? You have first-class tickets you didn't have to wait." That was the negative side. But like I said, I enjoyed the service, I stayed in the service. I think the reason I didn't have any problems or most of my friends didn't have any other problems was because we stayed in the service.

WC: Well thank you very much for your interview.

WA: Anytime.