

**Joseph T. Edwards
Veteran**

**Jay Olney
Mike Aquino
Rome Free Academy
Interviewers**

**Interviewed on December 20, 2004
Rome Free Academy
Rome, New York**

Q: What is your full name?

JE: Joseph T. Edwards

Q: What is your date of birth, and where were you born?

JE: Rome, NY June 18, 1946

Q: What education did you receive prior to your military service?

JE: I graduated Rome Free Academy in 1965, I was a part time student at NVCC, working full time at French Row Joe and Cable and then I was drafted.

Q: So you were drafted?

JE: Yes.

Q: When were you drafted?

JE: 1967.

Q: What branch of the service did you enter?

JE: United States Army.

Q: Why did you want to be in that branch of service (Army)?

JE: Because I was drafted into it.

Q: Before you left for Basic Training what were you expecting heading into it?

JE: I was a little reticent because I was the oldest child in a single parent family. I had a sister, brother, and mother that I had to take care of and was not extremely happy to be drafted, but there was nothing I could do.

Q: Where did you go for Basic Training?

JE: Fort Benning, Georgia

Q: What did they teach you at Basic Training?

JE: They taught me how to survive and all of the other things that applied to combat.

Q: What did you think about your first experience with the military life.

JE: I adapted, I knew how to do the hospital corners on my bunk before anyone.

Q: What units were you assigned to?

JE: Through Basic Training it was 1st Training Brigade, then at Fort Polk, Louisiana it was 3rd Training Brigade getting ready for Vietnam. It was called ARVN Training (Army Republic of Vietnam Training). Then I went to Fort Howard in the canal zone for jungle warfare school and then I rotated home for my thirty day leave prior to leaving for Tennis shoe Country. (Laughter)

Q: What type of equipment did you use?

JE: In the field we carried a rucksack, carried 38 hundred cubic inches of supplies, clothing, ammo, food, and everything else we needed.

Q: When did you leave the United States?

JE: I left the first week in August 1967.

Q: What were some of your first impressions when you got to Vietnam?

JE: We flew backwards in a C-141 from McChord Air Force Base at Fort Lewis, Washington to Yokota, Japan, from there we refueled and flew to Cam Rahn Bay, Vietnam. We disembarked the aircraft and they let us sit out on the runway for five hours in the sun and it was very hot(Laughter).

Q: What area was your unit assigned to?

JE: When we were brought into country we were sent to the 4th Infantry Division which was up in the central highlands, we were primarily in an area called 3 tango where Laos, Cambodia, and Vietnam met.

Q: What was the terrain like?

JE: Hilly, and then as you got closer to the coast it was highway ten or fourteen, it would have rolling terrain. Michelin had a rubber plantation there, the French had some tea plantations, but the closer you got to 3 tango where the countries met, the terrain got real steep.

Q: What was your first experience with combat and how did it start?

JE: My first experience with combat we were in an area near the Michelin rubber plantation. We encamped with an armored unit that had 8-inch Howitzers. About two in the morning a buddy of mine and I were sleeping in our little tent, our two poncho liners were together, they had a fire mission and this 8-inch gun took off and took our tent right with it. (laughter) There was my introduction to combat.

Q: What were your duties while serving in Vietnam?

JE: I started out as a gunner in a fire team. As combat increased, guys were wounded or killed and you moved up to fill in. I went from a fire team leader to a squad leader to a platoon sergeant.

Q: Can you talk about Operation Francis Marion?

JE: Operation Francis Marion was an operation that began right after the monsoon in 1967. I'd put it at about April or May, what the division was doing was trying to form a blockade against the North Vietnamese, when the rain stopped the enemy would start moving munitions and supplies to the south. The 4th Division became a blocking force and in May Francis Marion really took off and the 4th Division go in some real heavy combat. I met some fellas in September or October while we were heading up to Dak To (we were going to use the same maneuver) and they lost 70 something men out of a company and when you send a company to the field you have 150 men strong. But its gradually depleted from wounds, killed in action, guys getting sick. By the time we were in Dak To, from when we first went to the field in September. We had 145 men when we started out and when I assumed the platoon sergeants job just prior to Dak To we had 76 men. We were depleted.

Q: Can you talk about Operation Paul Revere?

JE: Paul Revere was another operation that was during the rainy season. You would chase around the enemy whether it was the North Vietnamese or the Vietcong, and just keep harassing them, and harassing them, and harassing them. That culminated in the Tet Offensive in 1968. We were in Dak To in November when the largest battle was held. It was the 4th division and the 173rd Division ran up against five North Vietnamese Army [NVA] Divisions. I think we were in the field 1,500 men strong against approximately 7,500. Greatly outnumbered we took a position on what is called a T bone or dog bone, Hell it all depends on who was describing it. It was two peaks with a saddle in between which is why they call it a dog bone, and we watched a third of the 8th Division get brutalized.

Q: Were these intense fights?

JE: Very intense.

Q: Would you say that Francis Marion was the most intense?

JE: At that time yes until the Tet Offensive of 1968. Then the Tet of 1968 they were downtown Pleiku, Vietnam which was about twelve miles from the 4th Divisions base camp.

Q: You said it was about 7,500 against 1,500?

JE: We had about 1,500 men If I remember correctly against 7,500 North Vietnamese, there was five NVA Divisions.

Q: Can you explain what your daily schedule was like?

JE: It all depends on if you were out on an LP which is what they call a listening post, or an ambush patrol and you would do that all night. Then prior to sun up you would come in, a lot of times you would come in after sun up because the north Vietnamese had a tendency to attack just prior to sun up and they would normally come from the direction of the sun. So the sun is in your eyes and we had difficulty firing at them. But we had a stand to at around 4:00 or 4:30 in the morning where everyone is awake.

Q: How about the food, did you have an empty stomach all day?

JE: Well I went there at 210 lbs and in great shape and came home at about 152 lbs.

Q: Reports say that you were injured, can you explain how you were injured?

JE: Our first major engagement in September 1967 I was injured and received a purple heart and a bronze star with a v device. We were taking enemy fire and by this time I was squad leader, and I moved my squad back to a secured area and we left some ammo out front. I wouldn't let my guys go back and get it, I had a straight shot at it so I took off running for the ammo. I put all the rucksacks together and tied them together then pulled them back up the hill. Then there was a recon lieutenant, I could hear him on the radio but we couldn't see him so I went out forward and dragged him back into the perimeter and then we continued to fight. Where we had set up there was a sniper in the tree and that's how I got shot right in the shoulder in the back. Terry Maza from California who I never liked and we were always at each other's throat when we were in country. I learned to love him because he shot the sniper in the tree and saved my life.

Q: Where did you go after your injury?

JE: I went to Qin Yan, Vietnam down on the coast and had it surgically removed. Actually I take that back the first time I went to the Trans area, we were still in the field and wasn't even back at basecamp. A medic took the shrapnel out of my shoulder.

Q: Could you talk about Sergeant Jimmy Moore?

JE: Drill Sergeant James Moore, Boxer Extraordinaire, had a big belly on him. He had a big neck, you could tell he was a boxer because his nose was from here to here (Points from his nose to his ears). I grew to like him because he had a way about him. He used to tip his hat down, the drill sergeant campaign hat, the DI hat whatever you want to call them, and he used to get right in your face and if you answered wrong. He would say with his old southern voice "You wouldn't be bullshitting a drill sergeant would ya"? Drill Sergeant Moore was the guy if you were ever in combat, he is the guy you want to be with. He was tough as nails, he drank every night, and I can tell he drank wine because he would be in your face the next day. But he would take us out for our five mile run and he would run

backwards the whole five miles, every day. He was a strag trooper and a wonderful man. I had the idea I would make a good officer someday but he wouldn't let me go. He said you are going to be an NCO (Non Commissioned Officer).

Q: Were there any officers that you did not like?

JE: Yes, our commanding officer Captain Charles F. Burke.

Q: Do you keep in contact with those back home?

JE: Yes, I found some guys through the internet, the one I was just telling you about today, a couple of guys that I met on the internet just in passing. We hooked up at the division, the 173rd and just as a brigade of the 82nd Airborne Division. I had some friends over there and I still have some friends in the 4th Division.

Q: During the war how was your relationship with the Vietnamese people?

JE: The Vietnamese were wonderful people, However the mountain yards were much nicer. They were the villagers around the base camp, they were recruited heavily by the American government to be scouts, to assist division snipers.

Q: What do you remember most about your military service?

JE: The comradery of the guys, we were all sharing the same misery. You had some guys that were complainers, we had one fella who shall remain nameless who was up in Malongo, Vietnam who was a chow hound. He would always bitch if he didn't have enough to eat. But he was our point man, he swung the meanest machete you would never cross this guy. But it was our ability to share the misery with one another and to survive and pull together so to ensure that all of us survived. We had become great friends with all the best intentions just like any other soldier, we had the best intentions to hook up with each other when we get out, when we get back to the world, after the flight to America.

Q: What experience has left the greatest impression on you?

JE: The comradery, to know that I made lifelong friendships it's wonderful.

Q: How did you feel about the rotation system that was implemented during the war?

JE: Hated it, there was a definite distinction between the enlisted personnel, the NCO's, and the officer core. We all went together, we all started together, we should have all finished together. Mr Carey who got three purple hearts and it was noted that he got out of the field after four months. Even if you didn't get wounded the officer core rotated out at the end of six months and left the PFC (Private First Class), the Spec4 (Specialist), and the sergeants and all the other NCO's there in the field.

Q: Did you have a countdown for your tour?

JE: it got a little rough, the countdown was a short countdown and you didn't do a lot kind of like you were protective of yourself. You didn't go out of your area, once you got back to basecamp you didn't go near the flight line, you didn't go near the perimeter, you didn't talk to anyone and of course you would never speak to the Vietnamese because you didn't know which side they were actually on. I remember back in base camp our barber, a buddy of mine Duke Ingrich from Oklahoma City sent me a picture of him, and we found our barber at the north gate one morning with a Bangalore torpedo between his legs. (Mine that is linked together in eight foot sections). He was shot before he could detonate the mine, and that was our company barber, that's the guy that was putting the razor to the side of my face, he was the one being payed by the United State's government.

Q: When did you return home from Vietnam?

JE: The last time was January of 1969. I came home went back and then came home for good.

Q: So you vowed talk to your buddies when you got home.

JE: Yes, and now that I have more time and it's a lot easier with the computer I found a lot of friends. Im still looking for Freddie Kelly out of Nebraska I have a picture of him, Bob Sasky I haven't seen him, Fernando Cruz I found him, Donnie Allen I found, Nick Alvano I found, Darryl Tampa. I had these guys as friends since basic training to advanced training at Fort Polk. I went to the canal zone for jungle warfare school but we all hooked up together at McChord Airforce base. We all made the same flight over.

Q: When you were back in America what jobs did you have?

JE: I worked on construction and I went to college and I took a civil service exam for the Rome City Fire Department.

Q: Was it difficult to adapt back to everyday life?

JE: it's difficult to adapt every day of my life, and a lot of guys feel the same way. But we just adapt.

Q: Would you recommend going into the service to high school seniors?

JE: You have to understand that the military that I was in was primarily a draftee conscript army at that time because the forces after the Korean war were shrunken due to peace time budget just like after Vietnam. Everything shrunk down so the tax payers wouldn't be shouldered with unnecessary budgets. But now that the military is a professional military I don't see a thing wrong with it, I am very proud of the men and the women today.

Q: How has your military experience influenced your life?

JE: I was raised in a real tight catholic family, to be respectful to everybody, and that's the way military bearing is. Once you learn the military bearing it's hard to describe but you will have it for the rest of your life.

Q: Do you have any final thoughts?

JE: I wish this war in Iraq was over. Bring everybody home, but there will always be wars, so we just have to accept it.