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Narrator

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Interviewer

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WC: Today is the 11th of January, 2012. My name is Wayne Clark, I'm with the New York State Military Museum in Saratoga Springs, New York. Today we are in White Hall, New York at the Isaac Griswold Library. Sir, for the record, would you please state your full name and date/place of birth, please?

GR: Yes. Gary William Rudd. Born in Amsterdam, New York on 6-28-48.

WC: Did you attend school in Amsterdam?

GR: Yes. I graduated in 1966 from Wilbur H. Lynch High School.

WC: When you graduated from high school did you go to work or go on to college or did you enter the service?

GR: No, actually, I was in a delayed enlistment. I think I joined April of 1966 but went in August. But I was working with Mohawk Carpets for a brief period of time and then I got a state job. Because, back then, unemployment was rather high. I took a state job just to ensure that I had some kind of job to get back to when I was discharged.

WC: Now you enlisted in the Marine Corps.

GR: Yes.

WC: Why did you pick the Marine Corps?

GR: Because I knew that that was going to get me to Vietnam. That was my sole intention. Get bought into the evening news. The whole patriotic fervor kind of thing. I was really believing I could go over and make a difference.

WC: So you were anxious to go to Vietnam.

GR: Yes.

WC: Ok. Now where did you attend basic training?

GR: Parris Island for boot camp and then advanced infantry training in North Carolina. Camp Stone Bay, which is outside Camp Gregory, I think it was.

WC: And how long was that school for?

GR: Went in August and was finished by mid-December. I came home for vacation and went to Vietnam from there. So, technically, I was in boot camp in August and I was in combat in January.

WC: How did your parents and family feel about your desire to go to Vietnam?

GR: They were very much against it. As a matter of fact, I didn't tell them I was going to Vietnam until my last day of being on leave.

WC: Oh.

GR: Because my father was really upset.

WC: Now where did you report to once you left home from your leave time? Where did you have to report to?

GR: Camp Pendleton for more advanced infantry training.

WC: And how long did that training last, approximately?

GR: About two weeks because I was in Vietnam in January.

WC: And how did you get to Vietnam?

GR: Flew over to Okinawa and stayed in Okinawa for five days prior to going to Vietnam. In the Marine Corps, you stopped off at Okinawa, dropped off all your civilian gear because you have all your gear with you. But you dropped off your civilian gear and took your combat gear with you into Vietnam. So the tough thing about being in Okinawa was I was on a detail that we offloaded all the Killed-In-Action and Wounded-In-Action seabags, all the Marines that didn't make it back to Okinawa. To go on leave and go back home. It was kind of an eye-opener, like, 'Oh God, there's a lot of people getting killed or wounded here.' I wasn't even there yet.

WC: How long were you in Okinawa for?

GR: Five days.

WC: Five days.

GR: Yes.

WC: And when you went to Vietnam, how did you go? Was it a commercial flight?

GR: It was commercial. Flying Tiger Airlines, as a matter of fact, brought me into Da Nang. I went from Da Nang to Phu Bai and then into Khe Sanh.

WC: How did you get up to Phu Bai from Da Nang? By helicopter?

GR: No, actually, by a small commercial jet. There was a Chinese guy – a Marine of Chinese heritage. An hour in a plane and we're the only two military, it was all civilians, going to Phu Bai. People don't realize there's life outside the war. And Phu Bai was – well the funny thing when I got to Phu Bai I was looking for my regiment.

WC: Because there was a Marine installation right there at the airport.

GR: Correct. Well, actually, there was a Marine installation at Da Nang. And, not to get too far ahead, I was a replacement. I was just an individual that was given orders to report from Da Nang to Khe Sanh – or actually, to report to the 26th Marine Regiment in Phu Bai. So when I got to Phu Bai, I was walking around and nobody knew where the 26th Marines were and I thought that this was really silly. And I got pulled over for having my ID tags on too tight by a sergeant and he was wringing me out, he says, 'Who are you with, hippie?' He called me hippie because I had my ID tags on short. And I said, 'Well I'm supposed to report to the Golf Company, 26th Marines.' He says, 'They're at Khe Sanh.' And I said, 'Where's Khe Sanh? I have no idea.' So I had to be flown into Khe Sanh and according to the guy that flew in the day before me, he comes back and he doesn't have his rifle, he has nothing, he said, 'I had to leave everything behind.' I

said, ‘What the heck are you talking about?’ He said, ‘They’re under siege over there.’ And so I’m going up there the next day and it doesn’t go well for me. We flew out in a C-133. Very old cargo plane. There was about ten of us Marines in there on top of the cargo because there was no seating room. And as we’re coming into Khe Sanh, the plane all of a sudden takes a drop, fast, takes a drop straight down. And I thought we were shot, the plane was being shot down. And there was a dog with us and the dog’s flipping over and he’s peeing over everybody. And we landed up against the cargo net like that because that’s what kept us from the pilot. I’m thinking, ‘What the hell’s happening here?’ The plane landed, a taxi’s down the runway and as he’s taxiing down they’re telling us to throw everything off the plane. So we’re unloading all the cargo. And the plane slowly turns around, starts gaining speed, and one guys goes, ‘What’s going to happen?’ He says, ‘Jump!’ So we had to jump off the back of the plane because there’s mortar rounds chasing the plane down the runway. That was my introduction into Khe Sanh. I didn’t have any time to worry about what it was going to be like.

WC: Did you have a weapon at that point?

GR: Yes. Thank God I didn’t throw my weapon off first. That’s what happened to my friend the day before. He said throw everything off so he threw his combat gear and his weapon right off the plane. But they didn’t get any chance to jump off the plane. So I don’t know if it was good or bad, but we jumped right off the plane.

WC: Alright. You’re on the ground. What happened next?

GR: Well, nobody told us what to expect so we just ran around to look for cover. I remember diving into what I thought was the normal depth of a trench. They’re a normal four feet. These things were almost nine feet deep and I almost broke my neck diving in there because I didn’t think it was that deep. But when the mortar attack ended, then we just got up, walked around, collected our gear, and we helped them move the cargo off the runway. And then, my unit still wasn’t at Khe Sanh base. I was at Khe Sanh base, where the airstrip was, which is what I just experienced. My unit was out in the jungles and it was about 558. So I said, ‘Well, how do I get out there?’ There’ll be a truck envoy taking me out to my outpost. It was considered an outpost. So I got out there a couple days later.

WC: Now, what was your first night like at Khe Sanh? Were you rocketed or mortared?

GR: No. I was taught, because Marines are taught to use all kinds of equipment, and they gave me a machine gun position. And they said to me, ‘If at all during the night, if you get any kind of incoming, we’ll give you orders to start firing.’ And here’s your field of fire. It was very specific. And nothing happened that night. It was very foggy, kind of scary.

WC: Were you with somebody else?

GR: Yes. There were some other replacements. But we didn't know each other, nobody had any background with each other. So, come morning, I hear voices. There was a road overlooking my field of fire and I heard laughing and talking and you could see fires being started. And I said to the sergeant who was in charge, 'Who's over there? The enemy?' He said, 'No. Those are our allies, the South Vietnamese.' He said if we get any kind of incoming, we shoot them as we do any enemy. So that was really kind of tough to take. And like I said, I was never given a break from the day I hit Khe Sanh. It was just a mad sprint to the very end.

WC: Now, what was it like when you got to your unit? How were you accepted as a replacement?

GR: Well –

WC: Besides being the new guy.

GR: Well, I actually was the only new guy. I didn't know what to experience. It was all jungle grass and bamboo and the grass would be that tall, it was eight to ten feet tall. You never really got to see a clear view of anything. You were always going through the dense grass. And I was brought out, I don't remember who came to see me, but the first thing they said to me was, 'You're here. You've got to break in to being a radio man.' I said, 'I was not taught how to operate a radio.' He said, 'Well that's your assignment. Unless you're going to be a grenadier.' Ok. I know what a grenadier is. You shoot grenades from a –

WC: M79.

GR: Yes. So he said, 'You're going to learn it fast. Especially the radio man. He's leaving in a couple hours.' He's catching his flight out. So I basically taught myself, walking up and down the perimeter asking other radio operators, 'What do you do?' I taught myself quite a bit, I'm quite proud of it. But also we ran early warning devices – wires that ran out to censors. We had a real crude form of radar. It was like a square box that you would aim outside the perimeter to pick up different sounds, especially engine sounds. So I got those assignments with only having a rifleman – M.O.S., Military Occupational Standard. That's what I was trained to be as a rifleman.

WC: How long was it before you were sent outside the wire?

GR: It actually was – we could go outside the wire but we couldn't go on any more patrols. When I got there shortly after, they lost a platoon of men. Never heard shots or anything. So they said, 'We can't afford to lose that many people in one clip.' So they suspended all patrols but we

had listening posts where we used to go outside our perimeter and lay down there at night to just stay real quiet and listen for enemy movement. Which was rather scary.

WC: Now, you were on a listening post. Just you or somebody else?

GR: No. Three or four of us would go out and one would man the radio and the rest would sleep. You had two hours on and the rest you could sleep. So I think that's why we had three or four guys. You weren't allowed to shoot anything, just to listen for movement.

WC: And did you hear any movement out there?

GR: No. It's amazing what's out in the grass at night. All these little birds running around. Everything would scare the hell out of you because you wouldn't expect to hear anything like snakes moving through the grass and other small animals.

WC: Did you have a starlight scope?

GR: Yes. I think they were worthless. Well, because I was a radio man, I had a bunker to myself. As a matter of fact, nobody wanted to be around a radio man because we were prime targets. Machine gunners and radio men were prime targets for the enemy. They would have grenades or shoot mortar rounds or rockets at us. But, I forget where I'm going with this, with being out of the perimeter?

WC: Yes. The listening post.

GR: The listening post. But there was something else. Now my mind's going ahead of myself on this. But the listening post, we'd go out every night. Also, we would go out on water runs. Because we didn't have any source of water within our perimeter. So, we would go out to this river, I think it was a perfume river, and set up a perimeter of defense around there while guys were filling up these big 5-gallon containers. We used everything we could. Empty rocket shells, mortar canisters, anything that could hold water we'd fill that up with and then come back.

WC: Was that water purified at all?

GR: No [laughs].

WC: You guys didn't drink that, did you?

GR: Yes. We wondered why it was frothy. Some guys came down with dysentery. And they started doing some investigation. After this happened they said, 'Wait a minute. We've got to

coordinate these water runs. This platoon was on the river at this point in time, this platoon was down here at this time and that time. They started thinking we're drinking each other's bath water, which was why it was frothy. I avoided getting dysentery at that time. But every day, I would volunteer. I only had a shirt, a pair of pants – this is a little while into it, being at Khe Sanh, or 558, the outpost. We couldn't get food, we couldn't get supplies, and of course clothing was not high on the list. So I ended up having no underwear, no socks, one shirt, and one pair of pants. And I would volunteer to take the other radio operator's turns to go outside the perimeter because that way I could bathe every day. Didn't have soap, didn't have razors or anything like that but just to keep clean. Needless to say, the other guys were happy that I would take their water runs. But they thought I was nuts because just about every time you went out of the perimeter you'd hear fire coming from the NVA. So it was a constant shooting back and forth.

WC: Was it rifle fire you were getting mostly?

GR: Machine gun. Because they had some pretty good – it's kind of complicated about the Marine outpost there. You had Khe Sanh base itself, with the air strip, and then you had about six different outposts all around the base. We're 558, then there's 950, 1015, 861, and something to the south I couldn't remember. We were basically out there for protection from any assault by the NVA onto the base itself which, theoretically, we were like sieves out there. We didn't stop any NVA movement, they moved at will.

WC: Now you mentioned you didn't have food. Were you talking about fresh food or were you eating sea rations there?

GR: Okay, well – you see once in a while you jump ahead of yourself – they actually had a mess hall at the end of the runway. I remember having one or two meals there before I was shipped out to my outpost. And shortly after I was shipped out there, one of the C-130s got shot and it slid right into the mess hall, swept that all away, killed the mess sergeant and the crew in there. That was the last of anybody getting fresh food. And from that point on, because we couldn't get supplied that easily because of either fog or weather or the enemy shooting our helicopters. And the helicopters would go, 'Ok, that's too dangerous. We'll come back another time.' Because every time we would get supplied, they called it the "Flying Circus", it was the big choppers –

WC: CH-46.

GR: Yes.

WC: C-Nites or Chinooks?

GR: Chinooks is what they called them, that's right. They would be way up in the air, circling around. And of course, jets would come in and strike the area with bombs and napalm it. Then one by one the choppers would start to come down and drop off, in a pre-designated area, our supplies. So, because it started getting so tight with weather and we were getting into monsoon, you could only get two sea ration meals a day. And one of the biggest problems they had was, and it was kind of a breakdown to work out, discipline. Guys used to low crawls into the supply area and low crawl back out with a case of sea rations on their back. Because we were very hungry. There were no overweight Marines in that perimeter.

WC: Were you involved in any of the heavy combat or direct combat with the NVA?

GR: At the time I was wounded, that's what ended my – well I have it as April 6th, they have it as April 7th and I think it's because of the date change. But it was Palm Sunday when I was wounded. We were to be the first company out of the perimeter to test the NVA's strengths out there. And it was Good Friday, the French priest – and as a matter, think of an idea of what we had out there even though we were a combat base airstrip and all the outposts. There was a French coffee plantation in that area and they had a little French community. And a priest came up and gave us services. That was on Holy Friday. And then Saturday was our first venture outside the perimeter and we took quite a few casualties that first day, because we didn't know what we were running into. We didn't know if it was a company or a battalion or a regiment of NVA.

WC: What sized unit did you go out with?

GR: We went out with a company. Which is very unusual. When you look back, the person who made the decision to send us out must've realized that the NVA was very much aware of the sized unit that was going out there. If you're sending a company out, you're not scouting, you're looking to attack somebody. So they were very entrenched and we did it in broad daylight. By the time we hit the top of the hill, and I was very lucky, we were leap-frogging platoon at a time up through. And my unit was next to go over the top and they said, 'You guys hold it here and then the next platoon will come through you and set in at the top of the hill.' Well as soon as they came through us, all hell broke loose. That's when the NVA opened fire on our troops and machine gunners. And we lost quite a few Marines in that platoon and we realized we didn't have enough to continue with the assault. So we set in and to keep the NVA from counterattacking and coming through us, we had jets coming in providing napalm and bombing runs to keep the NVA away from us while we could retreat back off the hill. So, first day of fighting we lost, I don't know, wasn't much left of that platoon. I know they had to leave five Marines back because they must've been killed and because we didn't have enough help to retrieve their bodies. So we're just focusing on getting the wounded off the mountain. Choppered out, you know, MEDEVAC. So we had to withdraw from the mountain and get back to our

perimeter. And we kind of thought there'd be someone around to give you some hot food and stuff and there was nothing. We had to make due with whatever we had because we had to go back out the following morning. We had to leave our perimeter at four o'clock and re-assault that hill. And they had brought – we were Golf Company and they had brought Foxtrot Company from 861. It's kind of funny. We're 558, we had a company of Marines on 861, and the NVA were on 861 Alpha. And they were there the whole time, we never dislodged them. Shrapnel, and I'm talking some serious bombing runs, they never disengaged those guys. So, the second day, it was very hot. We were starting to lose people from heat exhaustion and heat stroke. So by the time we got on line for a charge, out of thirty-three Marines in my platoon there were only thirteen of us left. And they gave the order: we had to charge.

WC: Let me just interrupt you for a second, were you carrying a full field pack?

GR: I was carrying a radio pack, extra mortar rounds, and extra machine gun rounds in addition to the 400 rounds I carried on me. So I was pretty heavily weighed down. When we got on line to charge, the NVA was not only engaging us, but Foxtrot was coming across the ridgeline from 861 to 861 Alpha – again, the NVA was on 861 Alpha and 861 so they're coming across the ridgeline and the NVA were mortaring behind them and they had an ambush on both sides of the ridgeline. So they said, 'You got to make a move. You got to knock out that machine gun and mortar position that's wreaking havoc on Foxtrot.' So obviously we didn't make it. I was shot three times with a machine gun. But thank God only one round went through. But the other two – I had a double-over flak jacket, I was real skinny back in those days and I had an extra-large flak jacket and I had to tie it to me because it was so big and it would flop all over the place. I used to complain all the time about that flak jacket, I didn't know it was going to save my life because the second round actually broke my M16 right in half and then the third round, of course, got me.

WC: So you took two rounds to the stomach?

GR: Yes, I had broken ribs where it hit but no penetration, thank God, just giant bruises. But the third round, what's ironic is it was an armor-piercing round and I had my radio pack on and big buckles coming over the shoulder. It hit the buckle, blew the buckle through me, and right out my scapula. And I have a complete bullet here that they took out of me. That hurt, but I had no idea that I was shot. There was smoke and then blood was spurting. I was thinking I was must have got grazed or something. The machine gun and gunfire were just unbelievable, so I'm crawling around, looking for some place to go. And I see this fighting hole.

WC: And your weapon was useless.

GR: It was totally useless. I got all this ammo on me and no way to protect myself. As a radio operator you're supposed to have a sidearm, a .45 Caliber. But they didn't equip us with any of

that kind of stuff. So I crawled over the fighting hole and I remembered in our training, 'Don't go in the fighting holes because they're booby-trapped.' But I looked and I saw this NATO blue grenade lantern. It was like the whole pineapple thing and I'm thinking, 'Boy, it looks just like a training grenade.' And when these things are happening, of course I'm kind of loopy from being shot and then this grenade lantern is like ten feet from me and I'm thinking, 'Gee, it's not smoking.' Because I'm thinking like a training grenade that the smoke comes out and it pops and fizzes. And I said, 'I better not take any chances.' As soon as I dropped down, I thought I looked at the grenade and it exploded. It got me all across my lower right back, my right leg, this [right] arm, and then my cheek, and some other parts that were cauterized.

WC: So it was a Chi-Com grenade?

GR: No. It was an actual – I think it would've been a NATO grenade from World War Two – or not from World War Two, but like from the '50s. But it was NATO blue. Then I found out that the NVA had a lot of NATO equipment that they got from other encounters. And the machine gun I was shot with was probably NATO-issued. Because they got it from the Chinese or however they came upon it. They didn't use just all Communist-made weapons. So when that grenade went off, I thought that was the end of me. But they finally got me out of there. I maintained radio contact when I was in the hole and I kept hearing these gigantic explosions all around me. Then I thought they were the enemy using some kind of big guns or whatever. There was recoilless rifle in our position that was trying to push the NVA back. Of course, they had no idea where any of us were because you couldn't visually spot us. And I remember, with the serious situation I was in with, my battalion radio operator called out and I responded. He says to me, 'Where are you?' I said, 'I'm up here with the rest of the guys.' He says, 'You got to get out of there. There's nobody left.' So, I couldn't get out. I could only use my left arm. So, after a while, I was bleeding so bad here. It was very upsetting because I'm thinking, 'I got to stop this bleeding somehow.' I just kept putting dirt in there, packing it in, because what I don't see it's not going to bother me. I had no idea it was bleeding so bad out the back. But when we finally got reinforcements coming in, that's how I was saved. One other funny thing, you know how you always fight against certain things, I fought against having my antenna sticking up. I had a whip antenna. On the first day of fighting, my lieutenant had dysentery. My lieutenant was very nervous about going out. He didn't come with us. And that lieutenant allowed me to have a tape antenna so I wouldn't be advertising that I'm a radio man. Well my lieutenant, the second day, said, 'You're carrying a whip antenna.' And I remember saying to him, 'Well you might as well put a flag on it too. Why not advertise more that I'm a radio man?' But what's ironic is if I didn't have that whip antenna sticking out of the hole, they probably wouldn't have found me. So the weird combination of a flak jacket being doubled over because it was too big, that saved my life, and the whip antenna sticking up out of the hole.

WC: Did you lose consciousness at all?

GR: No. As a matter of fact, after they carried me out of there, they stripped me naked. They threw me on a helicopter just totally naked. And they put an 'A' on my forehead for being alive – they give you either 'A' or 'D'. I acted quickly when they're offloading the bodies and I remember being at the bottom of that chopper thinking, 'I can't pass out.' Because I won't take a chance before they might decide, 'Well, he's dead.' I didn't want them to throw me in the dead pile. So I stayed conscious the whole time. Very painful. As a matter of fact, I don't know how I didn't go into shock. But I didn't either though so I stayed awake until they took me into the operating room.

WC: So did they bring you directly to Khe Sanh?

GR: They flew me down to the combat base hospital there. I was like in unbelievable pain. I couldn't believe it. The grenade caused more pain than the bullet. But I was flipping around thinking, 'Oh my God, give me something for pain. This is really hurting.' And they said, 'We can't because the shrapnel wounds are in your spine.' They didn't know if it went into my organs or whatnot so they couldn't give me any pains. That was their rationale.

WC: Did you have feeling in your legs?

GR: No, I thought I lost my legs. They were still there but the percussion from that grenade going off caused some paralysis for however long, I can't remember. There's a guy in a stretcher next to me and they were giving him last rites because his stomach was all falling apart. And I'm saying to myself, 'You know, I think I'm going to live; this guy obviously isn't.' So that kind of calmed me down and I'm saying, 'Just deal with the pain and sooner or later you're going to be operated.' So they choppered me out of there and into a hospital in Phu Bai. That's where they did the operation.

WC: How long were you in Phu Bai for?

GR: Quite a short period of time because I remembered – it may have been a couple days. Oh an interesting thing, they were putting me on the chopper, it was a Korean vintage chopper, like a little MEDEVAC chopper. They threw us all on there, there was no stretcher, you weren't put on a stretcher, you were just thrown in, naked or whatever else was in there. And so they put me on a stretcher to be taken up to Phu Bai to be operated on. They were stacking us in the side of the chopper, orderly, they were just trying to get as many people on the chopper and get them out of there. And I remember as they put me in there and the helicopter's taking off, the door slides open and the machine gunners start shooting. I'm thinking, 'They're killing everyone while I'm right here in the stretcher.' But that's when I did pass out on the chopper. And when I came to, it was like some real weird movie, I heard some sucking sound to the right of me. I look and

there's a Vietnamese person – I'm in a hospital ward – there's a Vietnamese guy to my right on some kind of ventilator or something, real loud sucking sound that was causing him to bend with each contraction or whatever. I looked to the left of me and there's a Vietnamese women naked from the waist up on the bed next to me. I'm thinking, 'I got shot. I'm in an NVA hospital.' My heart's racing like crazy. 'What the hell's going on here?' Then I see this corpsman walking towards me with a washbowl and washcloth and I looked at him and said, 'I think you're American but am I in an NVA hospital?' He says, 'No, you're in the overflow wing.' At Phu Bai. He said there are a lot of civilian casualties going on at the same time as there were military casualties. So they just didn't have enough room in the military ward to put me until a couple days later. But then I was flown down to Cam Ranh Bay Hospital, a big Air Force base. And that's where I spent a month before condition went worse and they sent me home so I could be closer in case I died from the infections.

WC: Now you said your condition got worse. What happened?

GR: Well, this may not have been a contributing factor, but when I was packing the dirt in the entry wound I got bone infection through the scapula, which wasn't too far back in there. Of course, I did say I packed a lot of dirt in there. But I had staph infection and bone infection. And even though I had a fractured scapula from the gunshot wound and I had quite a few holes in my back and right leg, it was the infection that was going to kill me, not the wounds itself. I was in very bad condition for almost six months. Just, again, not from the wounds so much as the infection.

WC: So you were at Cam Ranh Bay for about a month?

GR: Cam Ranh Bay for roughly a month, yes.

WC: How did you go back to the States? On a hospital ship?

GR: A plane.

WC: An airplane.

GR: Yes. Actually, a Starlifter I think is what we called them. They converted them to flying hospitals. So we went from Vietnam to Japan to Alaska to Andrews Air Force Base. Yes, Andrews Air Force. Stayed at a hospital there and then shipped over to St. Albans Naval Hospital outside of Brooklyn. I think it's actually in Queens, St. Albans Naval Hospital. I spent roughly five months there before being discharged back to Active Duty. But when I was in the Air Force Hospital, all the nurses were officers and this one woman, she was probably, of course I was 19-20, so she was like middle-aged and she was like a lieutenant colonel. And I used to get

a kick out of saluting, because I couldn't use my right arm, so I saluted from my left hand and of course they snapped and saluted right back to me. I didn't dare tell them that I shouldn't be saluting left-handed but it was just my little inside-joke. So she was a lieutenant colonel and she said to me, 'They're going to offer you a medical discharge, but I recommend you don't take it.' And I took her advice.

WC: Did she say why?

GR: She felt it would be a detriment to me for any career I wanted to get into. Because of the "so-called" stigma of being disabled. Even though it's combat disabled you would be disabled, as MEDEVAC, and it probably would have prevented me from what I retired as, as a parole officer. So I took her advice and stuck it out.

WC: So you spent five months in the hospital. You went through rehab program?

GR: They didn't have that back in those days. I don't want to damn the Navy but you had one nurse who was administrator and then you had a couple corpsmen who would take care of all the seriously wounded Marines and sailors and soldiers.

WC: But was there any sort of therapy because of your shoulder?

GR: Nothing.

WC: You just had to let it naturally heal.

GR: Yes. As a matter of fact, because of my infection, all the sutures that they gave me they had to cut loose and let me heal from the inside-out. I guess they went back to what I figured was World War One technology, or medical treatment. It kept me high on antibiotics and high on painkillers. So, as consequence, my scars were probably bigger than they would've been had they not been infected.

WC: Now while you were State-side and in the hospital, did you get to go home at all on weekends at all?

GR: Yes. Every other weekend I'd get to go home on leave. What's funny is I had to be healthy enough to go on leave. So I had to pass certain urine tests and they did blood tests on you. I'm at fault, for my first time out on leave, I should've probably returned back to the hospital because my thigh started swelling on me. And I said, 'It's so good being home.' Of course, I had a girlfriend at the time, dating and trying to get back to a regular life although they had no clue – that's another old story – but they just looked upon somebody, 'He's walking around in a limp

and he's got scars all over. Actually, they were all open wounds and so when I should've gone back, I didn't. I waited till my last day and they had to do emergency operation on my right thigh. Because the infection had traveled up to my right thigh. I had to cut my utility trousers in order to keep my pants on, that's how bad my leg got. And they were thinking of court martialing me for that. They said, 'You were in an awful lot of pain. You should've been back here sooner.' I said, 'Well can you blame me? [Laughs] You gave me fourteen days, I was going to take all fourteen days.' But I should've come back maybe on the seventh. Oh, this is how they did this operation: I've got this big drain coming out and I'm high on Darvon or Percocet or whatever they'd give us for pain control. Then they said, 'You got to clean your own wound. We don't have enough people to take care of you.' I remember taking all this panicking-out stuff and I'm taking a cue tip and I'm hitting it thinking, 'This stuff doesn't want to come out.' And I guess it was my bone. I'm thinking, 'Oh my God!' But that's the kind of treatment you got because they were short-staffed. Because if you think about it, most of the military – corpsmen and nurses and whatnot – were over in Vietnam. That was my way of thinking because I think that's why there was such as shortage of medical staff in State-side hospitals. But if you loved staying high, it was a really good place to be because it's much easier taking care of patients who are high and deal with their pain that way than have to deal with them under normal circumstances.

WC: Once you were discharged from hospital, where did they send you next?

GR: Well, I had two choices: I could've gone to California. But because I was dating a girl and saying I was going to marry her, I decided to stay in Brooklyn. So they assigned me to the Third Naval District Correctional Center, also known as the Brig. So I went from being a patient one day to being on 12-hour standing duty a day working the Brig. There was no easing you back into an assignment. I hadn't done any full duty in six months. That was a really tough adjustment because they didn't say, 'You're clear to come back full duty, so we're not going to have you stand.' There's no such thing as light duty. So I went back to full duty.

WC: What kind of quarters did you have? Were you living in civilian quarters?

GR: No. Actually there was a wing there set aside where the Brig section is. And of course we're in a naval base and the Marines were isolated. There was a lot of animosity back in those days between Marines and the Navy. I could never buy into it. The Marines want to get all souped up and want to fight some sailors in a bar. I used to say, 'What does it say on your paycheck?' It doesn't say 'United States Marine Corps', it says 'Department of the Navy'. These people are paying us. I don't feel like I want to fight with people who are paying me. That was my approach to it.

WC: How long were you there for?

GR: October of ’68 to September of ’69. And I was blessed with some really unusual experiences, being in both astronaut parades. They landed on the Moon, it was January when they had a ticker-tape parade for when they landed on the Moon, and then July of ’69 one day. I’m sorry – they orbited the Moon, so the ticker-tape parade was in January. And then when they landed on the Moon, it was in July. We were out there in our dress coats so we were freezing to death. All you get is a t-shirt underneath that jacket so we’re freezing to death in January. Of course in July, we’re out there sweating to death because the dress coats absorb so much heat. But being in both ticker-tape parades was quite an experience. Not only did we run the Brig but we’re the colonel’s ‘crack-parade’ unit and also we did a lot of burial details too. It was quite interesting. So was the serving, especially the burial details, and the parades were always kind of neat. When you were off duty – they never gave much thought until you got to sleep – you were off six hours, on six hours, off six hours. During the day you got six hours off and you somehow got stuck in some parade detail, funeral detail, and plus you had to relieve the on-duty guys to go off and have their lunchtime, or suppertime, break. So you never, ever, ever got a 6-hour stretch for you to sleep because you could never get six hours. Guys didn’t like it very much. We had a lot of guys go AWOL. In the Marine Corps, if you go AWOL, they really, really treat you bad. I had to supervise some of the guys I was sent to the barracks with. So that was tough. The guy that I was sharing meals with a week ago went AWOL and he’s now back in the Brig as a prisoner.

WC: When you were in the hospital, did you encounter anyone that had been under fire with you, when you were wounded?

GR: No. I ran across a guy years later, as a matter of fact. Before we started this, I told you about a guy in my unit that went back to Vietnam. He was in there before I was. He was wounded on that Saturday, I was wounded on Sunday. And a good friend of mine was killed on that Saturday and he went back and got some soil, souvenir soil, for anyone else you was still alive in the 0861 Alpha. But no, actually, spending time with anybody that was experiencing that, no. There may have been a few guys in the short period of time when I was at Phu Bai. But after that, when I went down to Cam Ranh Hospital, I was with sailors, soldiers, and Marines down there, so they had all units of branches of service at that hospital. So just like going over to Vietnam, I was by myself when I was in hospital. As far as not being with anybody I served with.

WC: So you were discharged from that last duty station?

GR: Yes. Not because my time was up. The Marines were being pulled out of Vietnam in ’69. They had all of us ‘old salts’ like, seventy per cent of the Marines in my barracks were Purple Heart recipients. Solar Stars, Bronze Stars, all kinds of awards for valor. We were very, I can kind of say a salty unit too. I kept thinking, ‘I’ve got another year to go.’ Because it was really

tough duty. Our colonel was a real tough disciplinary. If he caught you out of uniform – if you're ribbon was not quite right – he'd say, 'Did I promote you?' 'Sir, yes sir!' 'I'm demoting you. Report to my office.' That sort of thing. So he was a real tough colonel. You had to play fastball with him too, he was a real dirty player. But that's the way he operated. I remember getting called in by the warrant officer, my gunnery sergeant, people in charge of – oh, I became a sergeant in charge of the Brig because I was one of the few guys who messed up and I kept saying, 'I signed up for the Marine Corps for three years and I'm not going to give it a day more.' My attitude towards the Marine Corps started changing at the Brig in Brooklyn. And I get called in, my gunnery sergeant and I were close and the warrant officer. Those two were close with me because they liked the way I manned the Brig. And they said, 'Gary, we have some good news and bad news for you.' I said, 'Well, what's the good news?' I wanted to hear that first. He said, 'Well, we're going to allow you to re-enlist.' I said, 'What's the bad news?' He said, 'You're going to go home soon.' I said, 'Well I'm going to go home.' They said, 'The reason why we called you in here is we want you to re-enlist to become an officer.' And that's when I said to them, 'This is off the record. I've got so much respect for you guys but I've seen the way the colonel has disrespected you. I want nothing more of this Marine Corps. Because they were two combat vets also. I don't remember what the colonel's history was but the treatment of his officers, his enlisted ranks – I'm saying officer ranks above E5 – was very poor. So that's what allowed me to get out early. It was for the convenience of the government, is how I got my discharge. I served just under twenty-six months.

WC: Now once you were discharged, you came back home?

GR: Yes.

WC: And did you go to work or go to school?

GR: No, I went straight back to my state job as mail and supply clerk. In the interim I had to take a Correction Officer exam. Because when I was working in the Brig – we also took continuing education courses in the Brig and so I got into Corrections. And Correction Officer was a pain. Out of 8,600 dollars a year, I was making 4,700. So I said, 'This is a no-brainer.' Of course, little did I realize that after going into – I got discharged in September, I was back at my job as mail and supply clerk, had taken my Correction Officer exam, and they wanted me to report for duty February of 1970. And I showed up thinking it was an interview. I didn't think that they wanted me to work that day. So I started March 5th as a Correction Officer.

WC: Whereabouts?

GR: The Green Haven Correctional Facility. It was almost like going from the frying pan into the fire because, then, Attica jumped off that year in 1970. Green Haven wasn't a tough prison to

work at. There was mostly lifers down there and they followed the rules so they wouldn't get transferred out for bad behavior. Because number one, the assignment down at Green Haven was visiting. The visiting room was constantly packed seven days a week. But coming up to Comstock – that was six months after I started at Green Haven, I went up to Comstock to work. Got a Brig medal. It had quite a tough reputation. And it was. But I was in the Marine Corps so I could handle that. It wasn't like I was a civilian going to that kind of environment.

WC: How long were you a Correction Officer for?

GR: I think four years. Then I was a Correction Sergeant. Then I became a Personal Administrator. Then I became a Correction Counselor. Then in my last fifteen years I moved up to parole and was a Parole Officer before retiring in 2003.

WC: Did you have any college with that or was it all –

GR: Ok, when I came back from the Marine Corps, at Great Meadow, I took a two-year leave of absence to get my Associate Degree through Adirondack Community College, which is now Sunni Adirondack. And then I got my Bachelor's Degree through Empire State College, and it's pretty much in its infancy. So I got my Bachelor's in Applied Science with Criminal Justice being my major.

WC: And when did you retire?

GR: December 2003. People said it was military time too you got. And I said, 'Yeah, think of how many people spend military time. It was quite a bit different. I have no regrets about it. Everything that happened to me in the Service, I survived it and I benefited from it. It kind of kept me a little different from my peers. They're going to find out more as these Iraq and Afghanistan war veterans come back. That whole can of worms is going to re-open itself because the population has no idea what these people really encountered. And that was my problem also. I couldn't relate to anybody. I remember going back with this mail and supply clerk, and obviously I must've changed in my behavior, and she had the nerve to say to me, 'We'd like to have the old Gary back.' And it's like, 'He died. This is the new guy you got to deal with.' He went from being a kid to being a sergeant in the Marine Corps. And of course I didn't know I changed. They really made me aware that I changed. They were actually part of the reason why I was in such a hurry to get away from. That office scenario. Because I was the little darling. I was, at that time, an 18-year-old. And that office complex of four hundred women, male supervisors and whatnot. And they used to send me packages – O.S.R. Haram. O.S.R. meaning Out-of-State Residence Office and then Haram. They adored me. But they adored only this little 18-year-old. When I came back they're like, 'Oooh!' [shocked expression], shocked at my behavior. The way that they received me just pushed me into Corrections that quick.

WC: Have you had any ongoing medical problems from being wounded?

GR: Knock on wood. Things that come on with age, that's going to be a problem. But I stayed very active and the Albany VA called me in, they re-evaluate you periodically. And I still had shrapnel in my shoulder and all these doctors coming up with different ways too – 'Let's go through his chest to get the shrapnel that's underneath his scapula.', 'Let's do this.', and 'Let's do that.' I called and said to the chief surgeons, 'I just saw two doctors and they have totally different diagnosis.' [Chief surgeons] 'Just pick the one you think is best.' And I said, 'Thank God I don't need this.' But you got to be careful because if you refuse an operation, they would say, 'Oh. Then we're going to take this disability away from you.' Because I was receiving compensation for – and that's another thing, people misunderstand disability is different from compensation. I was compensated for the gunshot wound and the fragmentation wound to my lower back and right leg. So I was actually receiving compensation for three different injuries, or wounds.

WC: Have you suffered from post-traumatic stress at all?

GR: Yes. I wouldn't like to go into that.

WC: Ok, sure. Alright, I'm actually getting low on film now so I'd like to put in another cassette and we can look at some of the artifacts you have.

GR: Sure, yes, agreed.

WC [to Speaker #2]: Do you have any questions?

S2: Yes.

WC: I've got a couple minutes left.

S2: Was there any time that you and the other Marines thought you could lose that base?

GR: As a matter of fact, we never thought we could keep it. We knew we were badly outnumbered. So the answer to your question is no. We were surprised we could stay there as long as we did. But we also realized the only thing that kept us there was the air support. If we didn't have any air support, we would've gone out like the French did. Khe Sanh was known as Dien Bien Phu with the French. And that's when Johnson used to say, 'I don't want another damn Dien Bien Phu!', he used to call it. He didn't want Khe Sanh to fall like it did with the French in the '50s.

S2: What's your estimation of the fighting abilities, not just the NVA and Vietcong, but also the ARVN?

GR: The ARVN I never got to experience much with them, other than maybe shooting them if we got hit that night. But the NVA, I have a lot of respect for them. Really well-disciplined. They knew all of our names in the perimeter because they always used to come down and listen to us at night and even during the daytime. So a lot of times you hear, 'Hey Gary!' It's not in the perimeter, it's them down there. They had tunnels dug up along our trench lines. Periodically, some bombing runs would come close and would collapse their tunnels outside our perimeter. Then you start thinking, 'We got to run some bombing runs close periodically just to collapse all those tunnels.' Because our big fear is they're going to come and tunnel up into our perimeter.
WC: Right. Let me stop there.