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Jack G. Hand Jr.

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Interview with Jack G. Hand Jr.

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Interviewer: Guy Farmer III

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F: When did you join the military?

H: I was actually an ROTC Cadet at Davidson. I graduated and was commissioned a Second Lieutenant and then I went to law school. So I guess I was officially commissioned in the Summer of 1963, but I didn't go on active duty until 1966.

F: Until 1966? What branch of the military did you serve in?

H: I was in the Army.

F: In the army? And you said you were in ROTC...

H: Yes.

F: Then you went to law school at UVA? And you were married in law school, right?

H: I was.

F: When you graduated from law school and had to go to Vietnam, was there a resentment that you had for your classmates who were going to start practicing law and you had to leave?

H: No, because most of them were afraid they were going to get drafted, and I was fortunate to have already been commissioned and I pretty well knew what the situation was going to be. And, in fact, I did subsequently encounter some of them who had been drafted.

F: And, how old were you when you went to Vietnam?

H: I guess I must have been 25.

F: And you were already married and you didn't have any children?

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H: No.

F: What were your feelings about the war in Vietnam before you arrived there?

H: I would say, I was what I would call a moderate hawk when I went. I had bought into, to a large degree, the containment theory that seemed to be big in those days. Dean Rusk, who was the Secretary of State, was pushing hard for containment during that time and I had pretty well bought into that. I subsequently changed dramatically on that point.

F: When exactly did you arrive in Vietnam?

H: I arrived in Vietnam in April of 1967. I don't remember the exact day, but I think about the 20th.

F: Location?

H: I was assigned to the 25th Infantry Division in Cu Chi, which is up northwest of Saigon.

F: When you flew in there to land, when you first got out and your feet were first on the ground in Vietnam, was it a whole new feeling? Were you scared?

H: Oh certainly. More than scared, you were certainly very apprehensive about it. First of all, even though I had been assigned to the 25th Infantry Division, I knew that they could reassign me anywhere, so I was apprehensive about where I might end up. A lot of people with my particular military occupational specialty were going to Saigon, which is what everybody would like to do because it was a city and there was a lot more going on there. But my orders from the very beginning had me assigned to the 25th Infantry Division.

F: Which was in what city?

H: Cu Chi, which is I'd say about 25 miles north of Saigon. It's where the 25th Infantry Division was set up to more or less be a blocking force between the Cambodian border and Saigon.

F: What was your rank?

H: I went as a First Lieutenant and I was subsequently promoted to Captain.

F: How long had you been there until you were promoted?

H: Probably in June of 1967 – maybe July of 1967 – I was promoted to Captain.

F: Was it the time and the work you put in – is there any circumstance that led to your promotion?

H: No. That is pretty automatic. During the Vietnam Era, the rule was that you were commissioned to Second Lieutenant and 18 months later you automatically became (I think it was 18 months), you became a First Lieutenant and then I guess a couple years after that you were promoted to Captain, unless you screwed up badly. They needed a lot of junior officers obviously.

F: What was your job exactly in Vietnam?

H: Well, interestingly enough, I was trained as a Photo Imagery Interpreter when I went to Vietnam. When I got there in the 25th Division, it quickly dawned on me that they needed one officer and about two warrant officers in the Photo Imagery Interpretation Section of what we called the Military Intelligence Detachment there, and in fact, they had four officers and about three new warrant officers and we were all standing around with our hands in our pockets. So I went to the Detachment Commander and told him that as long as I was going to be there, I wanted to do something instead of just be standing around. He had a problem with his Commander or Detachment Leader of his

Prisoner Interrogation Section, so he said, You are a lawyer, and I said, yeah, I got out of law school, and he said, Fine, I'm going to put you in my Prisoner Interrogation Section. From shortly after I got there until just a month before I left, I headed the Section on Prisoner Interrogation of the 25th Infantry Division.

It was an interesting assignment. Much more interesting than it would have been to stay with the Photo Imagery Interpretation Section. The last month I was in Vietnam, they lost all of their officers from the Photo Interpretation Section, they all rotated home, and they didn't have anybody with an MOS and I had to go back over there and my replacement had already arrived at the Prisoner Interrogation Section, so I did spend my last month there.

F: I imagine that a lot of people who got sent to Vietnam or went to Vietnam – what they were doing as their job in the military wasn't what they'd been trained at at home. So you must have...

H: That's fairly typical in the military.

F: You must have felt pretty at home doing something that had to do with law?

H: Well, it really didn't have much to do with law, but at least there was some logical reason to put me there.

F: I see.

H: He had had a problem – the officer who headed that section had a drinking problem and an attitude problem and so shortly after I joined that section, he just sort of checked out and the other officers and enlisted men basically trained me in my job because he didn't stick around long enough to effectively train me.

F: I've heard a lot about that and I'm going to go ahead and ask about that now since you said he had a drinking problem. I know that a lot of Australian combat groups didn't go in with Americans because they said Americans were smoking weed and drinking booze all the time. And when you see it in the movies, it's probably over-exaggerated or under-exaggerated, I don't know, I wasn't there. Was there a lot of drinking – was it a problem over there?

H: I don't think of it as so much of a problem. There was a lot of drinking, but at that time in the Army, drinking was not particularly frowned upon and so a lot of the officers and men too were pretty heavy drinkers, but in Vietnam I didn't see that much of it. After I left I, understand that the weed became a big problem. The first time I even became aware of it was just shortly before I left – we held a shakedown of all the people in the Military Intelligence Detachment of their foot lockers and all because we were instructed to look for marijuana where most of us had never seen marijuana and didn't know what it looked like, didn't know what it smelled like. We didn't really know what we were looking for. That really became a problem after I left.

F: Were you ever in any combat situations in Vietnam?

H: Well, any Infantry base camp gets shelled and mortared a fair amount. We also – I was in the field a few times out visiting Infantry units. In January (in fact it was January 1, if memory serves me correctly) of 1968, we were up at a place called Dau Tieng. Our whole Division group had moved forward – most of it. And, the North Vietnamese tried to overrun this base camp we had out in what we called War Zone C. And like at 5:00 a.m. in the morning they came and got me and said we need all of your Interrogators and Interpreters up at this place and I flew with them and we went up in helicopters – there

was still some firing going on when we got there – but basically it was mostly cleanup at that point. But, they were still firing some mortars and artillery was being fired and all that sort of thing. In terms of ever being shot at personally by somebody with a rifle – I don't know. We did have sniper fire sometimes at Dau Tieng. It would go overhead, you could hear it cracking through the woods, but I think those were mostly “to whom it may concern.” Either that or they were terribly lousy shots. But we got a lot of rocket and mortar fire – yeah, that kind of thing.

F: Did you ever have to fire your weapon.

H: No.

F: I imagine you made a lot of friends though that were in your unit. Were any of your friends injured or even killed while they were in Vietnam?

H: Yes. Including one friend from Davidson, a man named Ken Kelly, who was killed while I was there, whom I had grown up with and gone to high school with and gone to Davidson with. During the Tet Offensive, he was shot down in a helicopter. He was also an Intelligence Officer, and he was leaving apparently a South Vietnamese base camp when he was shot down. Then there was a young man that I had gotten to know very well. He had originally been in the Photo Interpretation Section when I first went there and he was from High Point, North Carolina, and a big basketball fan and I was a big basketball fan and he and I got to know each other pretty well. He was an enlisted person and he subsequently went with the Headquarters Company and he was killed during a rocket attack on our base camp in Dau Tieng.

F: Those are pretty hard to get over, I imagine?

H: Well that one and the Ken Kelly thing were both very personal to me. Some of the guys I knew, I got to know, had also been killed. In the Prisoner Interpretation Section we frequently would have people come in to get information from us from the field, from Infantry units, and I got to know a number of those people fairly well because they would come in on a regular basis, and several of them were killed while I was there.

F: In the days following your friend's death, did you question why you all were even in this war and...?

H: It actually started long before then – after I had been there for three or four months.

F: So, the grief I imagine you must have felt when your friends passed away, were you bitter because you felt like you were – it was for no real cause or did you feel like they gave their life for their Country and for freedom?

H: Well, I guess you would say I was bitter and that probably is a good word because I felt like we were being put there and put in an untenable situation. It felt like – I began to feel like that was an un-winnable war as we were fighting it. I personally got to interrogate some Vietnamese, had to read every interrogation report that was put out by my section, and the feeling I came to is by and large that vast majority of the Vietnamese people didn't care one way or the other about the politics of the thing – they just wanted to be left alone. We were the outsiders. We were disrupting their lives. I just felt that the war had become basically un-winnable because most of the people didn't care and many of them that were brought to us were just poor farmers who had gotten picked up somewhere on a sweep. They didn't know who their province governor was much less who was in power in Saigon, didn't care, just wanted to go back farming in their normal life. I just began to feel that this was a war that was not winnable and that were not

winning the hearts and minds of people and that we were losing a lot of awfully good people, and I resented that. And sort of my attitude switched from, Oh, we're going to win this war and what I'm doing is important because it would get information to help us win it, to, I want to get information to try to save as many American lives as I can until we can get out of here. I mean that was ...

F: I see. When you wake up in the morning to start your day, how do you go about your day doing your tasks when you feel like you're fighting an unjust war? But you did just answer to keep your comrades alive.

H: Yeah. It became all encompassing to me to just try to save – you know, to get the information that would save American lives. And it wasn't that I felt that the war was so unjust, I mean I certainly didn't have any respect for the North Vietnamese because they did a lot of terrible things to the Vietnamese people, or the Vietcong and they did a lot of terrible things. It's just that I felt it was a pointless war. I mean, after awhile it just became a pointless war. I got fairly close with a Vietnamese Lieutenant, a man named Lieutenant Tam. Of course, Ho Chi Min was the great enemy as far as we were concerned, but he explained to me that to all Vietnamese, both North and South, Ho Chi Min was actually a hero because he had driven the French out. And I began to see that we really were the outsiders and even though we were trying to do good things, when you're the outsiders, people just distrust you. That's the way I'd put it.

F: What cultural differences existed between Americans and South Vietnamese and did you find these very difficult circumstances?

H: It's night and day. I mean, most of the people – now I was in a basically rural farming kind of area. And most of the Vietnamese were poor peasants in that area just trying to

scratch a living out of farming. They were uneducated, not knowledgeable about their history or what was going on, just enormous cultural differences. And we were completely – we got no cultural training at all before we went to Vietnam and had no background on the history of Vietnam or any of those things and Lieutenant Tam, again my Vietnamese friend, was able to fill me in on a lot that. He told me that Vietnam, and this turned out to be true when I checked, had been at war constantly during his entire life. I think he was born in 1939 and at that point they were fighting the Japanese. When the Japanese were finally defeated, they were fighting the French. And now here he was involved in a war against the North Vietnamese. So, I mean, all his life he had been in a war zone.

F: Were you there to win the war or to just do your time and get home when you first got there?

H: When I first got there I perceived, you know, that I was there to help win the war. As I say, I was a moderate hawk at that point because I felt that Communism needed to be contained. Well, one of the other things I discovered the concern was that the Chinese were backing the Vietnamese, supposedly. Well it turned out that most of the aid to the Vietnamese was coming from the Russians. The Chinese and the Vietnamese had been enemies for centuries. They had no great love for the Chinese although there is a sizeable Chinese ethnic group in Vietnam and facts subsequent – again Lieutenant Tam – trained me on all this – that the Chinese were really not a threat because the Vietnamese didn't trust them and had been at war with them over the centuries so there was nothing to contain because China stood between Russia and us.

F: A misunderstanding, really.

H: Really. I mean, again, we were not trained culturally at all and I think that was a mistake. I think we needed some training in that area before we went, but it was a matter of the training. Typical training for an Intelligence Officer at the time I went on active duty was you went to nine weeks of Infantry Officer's Basic Course at Fort Benning, Georgia, because you had to be Infantry qualified. It was then called Combat Platoon Leaders Course, and then we went to Fort Holabird to train, which was at that time the Intelligence School, and then we went to Vietnam. I mean, then when you were through there, you went home. It was a strange situation.

F: Were the facts accurately reported at home, such as casualties on both sides and troupe reinforcement. I think history has shown us that it wasn't, but did you all know that we were being told, we were being lied to so much by the press?

H: I think that probably the U.S. casualties were pretty accurate. What was inaccurate was the famous body count. And I can tell you an incident about that. I mentioned Dau Tieng a couple of times. During, in December of 1967 a substantial portion of our Division moved from Cu Chi northeast to a place called Dau Tieng where our third brigade was headquartered. It was on the edge of the Michelin Rubber Plantation just south of this War Zone C. During the past several dry seasons, both the First Division to our east, and the 25th Division moved up to the edge of War Zone C and had operations in War Zone C which was a jungle area where the Viet Cong and North Vietnamese had base camps. We were at Dau Tieng we had a congressional group that was going to come through on a fact-finding mission and one of the sections of any Military Intelligence Detachment at that time was called Order of Battle. They accumulated – let me back up. The Military Intelligence Detachment at that time basically consisted of an

Order of Battle Section which analyzed all the material that was given to them by the other Sections and tried to get some sort of estimate of troops trained and that sort of thing. We had a Photo Imagery Interpretation Section which would gather information from aerial photographs, you had the Prisoner Interrogation Section which, of course, gathered it from prisoners and other persons, and then you had a Counter Intelligence Section which had agents that they ran, supposedly, and also tried to do counter terrorism kinds of things. I had a good friend, in fact, who headed the Order of Battle Section. And the Division G2 sent one of his people (G2 was the intelligence part of the Division) down and said, we've got all these congressmen coming and we want you to do an analysis for us of the number of North Vietnamese infiltrating into our area of operations every month and the number killed and the idea, of course, is to show that we are killing more than are coming in. And my friend absolutely refused. He said: first of all, I can't tell you how many are coming in. Second of all, I can't tell you how many are really being killed because commanders tended to greatly enhance the number of KIA's. And he said, third of all it wouldn't make any sense at all, so it was irrelevant, so he got in a little trouble about that. But like I was, he was a reservist and he didn't really care. But no, the enemy KIA's we felt were often inflated from what we could see and find out, but there was an accurate count on U.S. losses. I mean, that was reported accurately as far as we know.

F: Now, you were in Vietnam at the time of the Tet Offensive.

H: Yes.

F: Were you there – were you at Cu Chi?

H: We were actually at Dau Tieng when it started.

F: And now, it's been reported that like the troops and our government and army were very confident that nothing would happen on the Tet because it was New Year.

H: It was the historic Chinese New Year and it was a big event. In fact, we had released all of our interpreters – in Prisoner Interrogation we worked almost strictly through interpreters. I had one man who – a Sergeant – who spoke some Vietnamese. But everything else was done through interpreters. We had released all of our interpreters to go home for the holiday.

F: So there wasn't a sneaking suspicion in the back of your head like they might come in on it?

H: Well, just before – maybe even the day before – we began to get some reports that something was afoot. We didn't know what, but we felt like some big operation was coming up. And I'll never forget the morning that it started – I don't remember the date – but they came into our tent – as I mentioned I was in the same tent at Dau Tieng with the head of the OB Section and they said we've got something happening. We needed to come down to our operating center. So we all went down – we were operating out of a large tent sort of down this hill from our sleeping tent. And, we went down there and we were told that there were some of our units that they couldn't even make contact with – there was some kind of big offensive going on and some of the units just weren't even trying to do radio contact. As it developed, we began to learn more and more about what was going on during the course of that day and, of course, the following days.

F: How do you think they were able to mobilize from the North down South?

H: They had been mobilizing, it was pretty clear at that point, for a substantial period of time. It was a well-planned operation and they managed to keep it secret, which was the

big surprise. I mean, it was a big surprise! As it turned out, and this is not talked about a whole lot and it really should be more widely known, as it turned out the Tet was a wonderful military victory for the United States, when all was said and done, because it was the first time we had gotten the Vietnamese out in the open in open warfare where we could put the substantial casualties on them that we did all over the country. But it was such a shock because everybody had been told the country was pretty well pacified, I mean in the United States – what the heck, it was such a shock in the United States that it just became the turning point of the war.

F: While you were there, were you aware of the change in public support [in the U.S] after the Tet Offensive?

H: To some degree because you always knew people coming into your unit and they would tell you what was going on in the United States.

But, we also – they (the North Vietnamese) were able to stockpile a lot of people because things like this would happen. We captured – one of our units captured, a really not very smart peasant soldier who told us he was from a particular unit and we reported it to Saigon because we had no history of this unit. This was probably four months before Tet. Saigon came back and told us we were crazy, there was no such unit. Several weeks later, another one got captured. We reported it to Saigon and they said that unit doesn't exist. Well, when the Tet Offensive broke out, that non-existent unit was on the runway at Tan Son Nhut Air Force Base. I mean, they had been building that unit obviously, out to the west of Saigon, and you know, maybe if better interrogation had been done on some of these guys, and the facts had been checked, we might have known they were stockpiling units. Another thing that happened, we had a program

called the People Sniffer Program. This may seem strange, but we would fly – they had created a piece of equipment that would pick up human smells from a low-flying helicopter. And we were on the edge of the Michelin Plantation in Dau Tieng. A day or two before the Tet Offensive kicked off, the officer flying the People Sniffer mission got this huge reading like there was a giant group of people moving through the Michelin Plantation. The Division Commander and others in charge said no way – that’s a false reading, that’s just way off the charts. They discounted it. Well, there was a huge group of people moving through the Michelin Plantation. It’s just one of those things. You know, it seemed unlikely and so they ignored it.

F: Okay. How was your everyday life changed after the Tet Offensive?

H: I was constantly trying to gather information because we were being brought prisoners constantly or information constantly or whatever. Just trying to figure out what was going on and who was where. Not too long after the Tet kicked off, we left Dau Tieng and went back to Cu Chi. Cu Chi had been pinned down by mortar and rocket fire while they (the North Vietnamese) were moving towards Saigon, because their big goal in our area was to take Tan Son Nhut Air Force Base, which was the big air base out of Saigon. This is where the headquarters of the whole U.S. operation in South Vietnam was located, where General Westmoreland’s headquarters was located, and they had tried to overrun it. So we moved back to Cu Chi which was closer to Saigon and operated out of there and one thing that changed was we were mortared and rocketed almost every night there for quite awhile. I know, a couple years ago, in looking through some correspondence I had written to my wife, I reported one night we had been mortared four times during the night or rocketed four times during the night.

F: Was there a period there after the Tet, you were talking about, when you were being mortared, whether you thought this could be it – I could be dying, I could die tonight?

H: Oh, you thought that anytime you were rocketed or mortared. That actually was not the closest I ever had one come to me. Back in November of 1967 I had one probably land 30 feet from me. Fortunately, it fell on the other side of a low sandbag wall and while I could feel the heat from it, all the shrapnel was apparently caught by the wall so it didn't come to me.

F: Like, besides feeling lucky...

H: ...very...

F: ...and, how does that make you – that's never happened to me before – how does that make you feel – I mean somebody just shot a mortar out back to you and it almost killed you?

H: It starts to get the adrenalin going. I don't know, there is something – you know, there's a famous Mark Twain quote something to the effect that, there's nothing as exhilarating as being shot at and missed. Well, sort of that's true. I knew exactly what he meant!

F: Your feelings about Vietnam before the Tet Offensive – how did they change after the Tet Offensive?

H: I don't think [they changed] substantially after the Tet Offensive. They may have been intensified somewhat, but I had already come to the conclusion that, you know, this was not a war we should be involved in. We needed to be out of there.

F: By then, did you just want to be out of there too? If someone had a first class ticket just for you, would you have taken it and gone?

H: Probably, although I don't know that I would have wanted to leave before my term was up. I mean, you know, if somebody else had to come, I don't know that I would want to do that, although everybody joked about getting the lucky wound or the "million dollar wound" where you would be wounded a little bit – bad enough that they had to send you home, but not bad enough where it would permanently affect you.

F: So, it's almost like you wouldn't wish that upon anybody else?

H: Yeah, exactly. I probably would have, I mean everybody who survived feels some guilt at having survived when some good people didn't. I particularly felt that in connection with, I mentioned Ken Kelly, who I had gone through high school and Davidson with. He was, Ken was an extremely bright, capable guy. He had been the President of our Student Body at Lee High School. He was a very good student at Davidson and actively involved in a number of things – a high profile guy. He went to Yale Law School, had graduated from Yale. Most of the people who had gone to high school with me felt that someday Ken would probably be the Governor of the State of Florida. Of course, he was killed. I mean, those kinds of things make you feel funny – feel bad about the situation.

F: Did you recognize any major policy changes from Johnson and his advisors after the Tet Offensive?

H: I was trying to think – I don't know that we noticed any changes from Johnson. One of the things that occurred, and I can't remember – this may have even actually occurred before the Tet Offensive – I think it became the feeling that this war was going to end at some point, that we weren't just going to keep doing this the same way we did. I was told by a friend who visited us involving the briefing before our Division General, that a Captain who had let his people engage in close combat was told that the official policy of

the Division was if you had contact with Vietnamese after that, that rather than try to engage them in close combat, you would drop back and call for artillery because we would suffer less casualties. So apparently – and whether this was an order that came down from on high or whether our General just felt this way – they were clearly trying to minimize U.S. casualties at that point. Again, that's anecdotal and hearsay, but that's what my friend came back and told me. He said they told us that we were not to engage in close combat if we can avoid it, but to drop back and call artillery and air strikes instead.

F: Did you almost feel that you had a two-year tour?

H: One year.

F: Oh, one year tour. Did you feel kind of a sense of relief after the Tet Offensive happened and back home people's opinions were changing?

H: That really didn't enter into it. I mean we were primarily involved in what we were doing. We had no other than maybe occasional guys coming in, we didn't know what was happening back home. We knew there were some protests. That was reported. But this was the days before the internet and everything. I would get letters from my wife pretty regularly, but I don't know that that was reported. I may have, for awhile, taken the *New York Times* which would eventually get to me and that would have obviously reported that. But, by and large, we were too preoccupied with what we were doing to be concerned about what was happening. You know, trying to do the job you were sent there to do.

F: Kind of getting off what we've been talking about, were there any African Americans in your company, and if so, how were they treated and how did they treat you? Did they stick together or were they...?

H: Actually, we had only two that I remember. One was a Lieutenant who was assigned – I mentioned Dau Tieng was our third brigade base camp. They were the only group that was away from Cu Chi. He was the Intelligence Officer up there. And he was treated very well. I mean, he was a great guy, everybody really liked him. Actually we had three. I had an interpreter – well he wasn't that – I guess he came from some other section, who was our Military Intelligence Detachment First Sergeant. He was in charge of that and he was certainly well treated, a well-respected guy. Just before I left, we had a young guy come in and he was not in the Prisoner of War Interrogation Section, he was in one of the other sections. He was protesting the war, protesting because he was black, protesting everything else. So I would say two out of the three African Americans who were there were just accepted as part of the group, got along great, highly respected I think in all cases. The third guy was a real problem.

F: Today in Iraq we see that women have integrated into the world of the military, the American military. What role did women play in the war in Vietnam?

H: The only women in our Division, who were military, were the nurses that I can remember. The nurses at the hospitals. We had a number of those. I think by and large they were certainly well respected and well liked because of the job they did. We also, interestingly enough, and this is not talked about a lot in history the way it should be, the Red Cross with every Division had a group of women who were affectionately known as

the Donut Dollies who got out among the troops. They would go out to guys and basically do coffee and do donuts, just try to cheer up the guys, do song and dance routines, that sort of thing and you never hear them talked about. I think they were a real morale lifter for the most part. Because it was the most contact most of us had with American women at all while in Vietnam.

F: Now, you did have times while you were over there, I'm sure, that you weren't working – you went into the city or had some off time?

H: Not very often.

F: What did you do on your off time if you could go somewhere or stay?

H: Well, we were in a base camp. You didn't – sometimes you could go to Saigon. I had to send somebody to Saigon several times a month. My Lieutenants loved to go to Saigon.

F: Why do you think they loved to go to Saigon?

H: Wine, women and song. They would enjoy themselves while they were there and they were all young and not married and so they always wanted to go to Saigon. I only went if none of them would go, because you had to go by jeep or helicopter. I flew to Saigon a few times on helicopters when I had to and I had to get something there in particular, but other than that, generally one of the Lieutenants went, but it was for wine, women and song. Some of the people would occasionally go into – there was a little village in Cu Chi – it was actually the District Headquarters. And again, they would go in and mingle with the women there in the village, including, I guess, a fair number of prostitutes, yeah.

F: Do you stay in contact with any of your buddies from Vietnam?

H: No, I don't and I'm sorry. There's was one guy in particular over there that I keep swearing I'm going to run him down but I don't have an easy way – I've joined the 25th

Infantry Association, which is sort of an alumni group if you will. But I haven't been able to find any of them through that. I'm apparently the only one who was there at that time who's joined the Association from my particular Detachment. But there's a guy that I got to know very well, in fact, he was my first commander when I first got there, who I think I have a way of finding, so I've been intending to do that if he is still alive.

F: Do you think that the war in Iraq we're repeating ourselves?

H: I see a lot of similarities and I've got a good friend that I grew up with who was an Infantry Officer in Vietnam. He and I still fish together some and we're both seeing a lot of things happen that we saw there. It's obviously become a guerilla war, which it was in Vietnam for the most part, although there was some major unit activity. I mentioned the attack on a fire support base in War Zone C, which was a full-scale attack, but generally a lot of it was, you know, the same kinds of things. They would fire mortars and rockets, they would set off bombs on convoys, they do ambushes, so a lot of guerilla tactics. And the worst part is they seem to be in for the long haul and they'll keep snipping away for years and years and years and try to wear down the resolve to stay there. It's like, once again, we've hit the tar baby and we can't let go and that's kind of the situation I see us being in in Iraq, except I consider Iraq more dangerous simply because if we pull out, the whole Middle East could become unstable, whereas I think that we finally came to the conclusion that that was not true in Vietnam.

F: One other question. Did you get any ribbons, awards, or medals.

H: I was awarded the Bronze Star, yes.

F: Do you still have it?

H: I still have the certificate. In fact I've got it in my office in there. I don't know where the actual medal is though. I think it's probably hidden away in my closet somewhere at home, but I don't know.

F: Are you proud of what you did in Vietnam?

H: Yeah. I really am. I'm not sure that proud is the right word. I'm glad I did it because it was sort of the significant historical event of my lifetime, and sort of a crowning thing and I was there, I was a part of it, I got to see it first hand. I think I did a good job there. I have pride in that. It was a bad war; it was one I hoped we had learned a lot of lessons from, but I wonder if we did. I think after the First Gulf War in 1991 or whenever it was, I thought we had learned the lessons. They went about it entirely differently. This war really does bother me because this Iraq war, the current one we're in, because of the way it's been conducted and the fact that these poor guys are stuck there and they are going through a lot of the same things we went through.

F: And one more thing about Westmoreland – General Westmoreland. My Dad used to take me to autograph shows – Mickey Mantle, all these guys, and I think I was 10 and Pete Rose came and my Dad wouldn't take me. I didn't understand why and now I do. That's not the same thing as Westmoreland, but know after the Tet Offensive, Westmoreland wanted to send 20,00 more troops there and Johnson said no.

Well, if you were sitting in the bar with your two sons and General Westmoreland walked in, would you introduce him to your sons and tell him who you are and you served or would you just let him walk by and ignore him?

H: Yes and no. I felt like he made some bad decisions, and I'll give you an example.

Thanksgiving time, November of 1967, I was going on R&R to meet my wife. I flew out

from Tan Son Nhut Air Force Base and the night before I was sitting in a bar in the Officers' Club at Thompson Newt and I guess Westmoreland came on the TV and said that certain areas of Vietnam had been pacified. And he mentioned parts of our area of operations as one of them and Boi Loi woods which were next to Cu Chi and he said that the roadways were free to ride without convoy on certain roads. But we all went into hysterical laughter and were saying, you know, He can ride it without a convoy, we're not going to ride it without a convoy because it wasn't pacified despite what he was saying. But by the same token I feel like he was largely misled by the officers down the line. I think things were being reported to him which simply were not true and he was accepting them at face value. Many career officers during that era, in my observation, were there primarily to enhance their careers. I know one officer kept saying, well it's not much of a war, but it's only war we've got. Well, a lot of people died from that not much of a war. They were there to serve their tour to try to enhance their career and they were going to put themselves in the most positive light that they could. Consequently, I think, more optimistic reports were being reported up the channels than the facts justified, and I think just General Westmoreland was misled by a lot of his subordinates and I don't know how to say that subtly. Yes, I was angry that he, I think, misled the American people and he certainly said things we thought were ridiculous from time to time, but I think he was misled and I think that was one of the great tragedies of the war. And I don't know how he could have avoided that. And I don't know whether the same thing is going in Iraq right now. I worry about that, although a lot of the reports I read – where they get unofficial quotes from officers and all – it sounds like they're being more candid about the problems than some of our officers were. But nobody wanted to report

they were having difficulties in their area of operations because they figured they were there for a year and they were either going to make or break their careers at that point.

F: Have you been back to Vietnam since?

H: No, and I really want to go.

F: You do?

H: This 25th Division Association I mentioned a few minutes ago, has a company that runs tours to our area where we were once a year and the first year they ran it, I was planning on going but my wife said, no, that's during your younger son's graduation from high school and you're not going and I thought that was reasonable. And I just haven't worked out a time to go back since, but they run it once a year and I do plan on going back.

F: One of the things we've heard a lot about in all the history classes I've taken, veterans have a lot of problems with sleeping and nightmares and post-war stress, have you experienced any of that?

H: No. And, and a lot of the Infantry guys – let me try to draw this differential. The guys in the Infantry lead an entirely different life. They went through hell every day. They were subject to snipers, to booby traps, to ambushes. The rest of us, we may have gotten rocketed or mortared a lot, but we didn't go through what those guys went through by a long shot. There was a big gap between what they went through and what we went through and I can never express enough respect for the guys that were out there in the field. I made an interesting observation one day. I was traveling by jeep out of our base camp somewhere and there was an Infantry Company sweeping the fields right outside our base camp to make sure nobody was there that wasn't supposed to be there. And I

looked at that company and I said to the guy I was with: Did you notice that everybody in that company is short and everybody in that company is young? That literally sort of – you didn't want to be tall because you were a target, and the young are the ones who survived and that's basically who was in the Infantry companies. Most of them were, you know, kids 19 to 23-24 years old – was the typical Infantry man. It just really struck me that day. You know, I knew that objectively, but that day it sort of really struck me.

F: What date did you return home?

H: April 20th, I believe, of 1968.

F: Were you well received by – obviously by your family – but the public as a veteran at that time?

H: Yeah, I don't remember having any backlash. I was in San Francisco, interestingly enough, for a week right after I got back. We flew into Oakland Air Force Base and I met my wife there and I probably wasn't paying a whole lot of attention to what was going on around. We were there a week and then I spent late May, June and most of July in Rye, New York. My wife was teaching still and so we lived with her parents – she had been living with her parents while I was gone and she was teaching up in Connecticut, so we had to stay there. I was interviewing for jobs and I don't remember anybody there – there were some people who opposed the war and I had some interesting conversations with them, some of their friends. But I don't remember seeing any reports or anything of that nature or any demonstrations. Actually, I guess the first demonstrations I actually saw were after I came back to Jacksonville.

F: Really?

H: Yeah. I actually participated in one.

F: Anti-war?

H: Well, what it was at the time that Kent State and Jackson State occurred, there was a big demonstration here in opposition to Kent State and Jackson State and my wife and I participated in that one.

F: So, it was an anti-war rally? Did you wear your...

H: ...It was partly anti-war and partly anti-what had happened at those two places where the National Guard killed some students and that sort of thing.

F: Right. Did you wear your uniform?

H: No. I was out of the military then. Haven't put it on since.

F: You still have it, though?

H: Yes.

F: That sums up my questions unless there's anything you'd like to add?

H: No. I think it's an interesting assignment because I guess people in your generation really – it's ancient history. I mean...

F: ...It almost is ... I feel like so many people have been lied to about so much of it and facts, and being a history student, I mean, I'm scared sort of. I mean, the possibilities of what...

[TAPE DISTORTION] continues here:

H: I was saying that while I was in Vietnam in the 25th Division we had a lot of Vietnamese civilians that came on our base camp every day. Did their various menial tours or worked in the kitchens, they did that sort of thing. And we always joked that they were actually doing damage assessment from the rocket and mortar attacks and I think probably some of them were. We assumed that they were in constant communication

with Viet Cong and Vietnamese because the fact that I began to finally accept it was we were the outsiders, we were the foreigners, and think they began to dislike us because we were occupying their country, a lot of them. And I think they probably were, many of them giving information to the Vietnamese and Viet Cong and North Vietnamese.

F: Can you almost blame them?

H: No, not really. I mean, you know. Because not intentionally, but a lot of civilians were killed and wounded by our air strikes. One strange event that happened demonstrates that. Some of our Photo Imagery Interpretation people flew in small aircraft and called artillery fire because they were trained to look at the ground from sky. And one of them came back one day, he had actually been one of my teachers at Fort Holabird when I was taking Photo Imagery Interpretation. He came back and the man was unbelievably distraught. He was calling artillery fire for the Division and some shell went where it wasn't supposed to and hit a school and he was a father, he had children, he was just distraught. Well, it subsequently turned out the school was empty at that time, nobody was hurt, but that kind of thing happened. I remember one day we got a report that they had shot five enemy soldiers or five Viet Cong in a field. There were certain areas that were known as free fire zones. And anything that was seen in those areas was fair game. And some of our helicopter gun ships had seen five people in one of these free fire zones, fired on them and they were bringing them in. I sent my interrogators down to the hospital and they came back and said, sir, they were five kids (12-13 years old). They didn't know they weren't supposed to be there. Fortunately, none of them was killed, but they were wounded and I subsequently that day, or the following day, got a call from a friend of mine who worked in Saigon at the headquarters – U.S. headquarters up there –

he said, I understand you all got five Viet Cong yesterday? I said, Jeff, they were 12 and 13 year old kids, just in the wrong place playing and they got shot as a result of it. And, that kind of thing happened often enough, totally unintentional. I mean, you know, you can't tell from a fast-moving helicopter that they are kids. We probably made five more Viet Cong right there, plus their families. And that kind of thing happened and you would see kids without arms and legs who stepped on mines or got hit by shrapnel. It just, you had to understand that people probably over a period of time really did begin to be opposed to us, a lot of them, even if they weren't in the beginning. And I see that same thing happening. I saw in the paper yesterday that at a checkpoint a car didn't stop and they opened fire on it and two adults were killed and six kids were in the car with them. They were civilians. I mean, you know, those things just happen in a combat zone. It's totally unintentional. You don't – artillery doesn't always go where you intend for it. Bombs don't always go where you intend for them to. And if somebody is coming at you and you don't know what their intentions are, you're going to shoot first and ask questions later, like happened yesterday. Innocent people get killed. And it's a sad commentary and they're saying you're the bad guy.

F: Yeah, pretty much. Well, that about concludes it. I really appreciate the interview.

H: Oh, you're quite welcome.

F: I learned a lot.

H: Tell Dr. Pleasants that I remember him from Davidson...

F: ...I will...

H: ... it's some interesting project he's running. I'm glad he's doing that.

F: Yeah.

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Jack G. Hand Jr.

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H: He will remember Ken Kelly, I'm sure. There's actually a scholarship at Davidson named for Ken Kelly.