
THE
FALLS HISTORY
PROJECT
"THE VIETNAM WAR"
SEVENTEENTH EDITION 2019

Introduction

"All historical experience must be imagined before it can be understood."
--- Historian David Blight

History often takes us in a circle. The Vietnam War ended in 1975, the spring of my senior year of high school, and I suspect that I have been conscious of it on one level or another for well over 50 years. Growing up with daily papers and in a home where history and politics were openly discussed prompted my curiosity about the war from an early age, including the realization that the draft might be in my future if the war continued long enough.[1] Questions persisted and when my junior-level history teacher suggested I read David Halberstam's recently published book, The Best and the Brightest, it became clear to me that studying and teaching history would be part of my journey. In the fall of 1975, I went off to college intent on learning more about my country, its history and role in the world. Early on I had a class from Peter Hovde, a young professor and Vietnam veteran, who opened my eyes to the complexity of war and the compelling need for us to understand the world community, particularly nations emerging from a colonial past. And it was during those years that I had the opportunity to join others in helping two refugee families, one from Vietnam and the other from Cambodia, in the difficult process of resettling to what must have seemed to them a very strange and foreign land.[2] That experience, more than any other, made me see Vietnam in personal terms and from the perspective of common people who were caught in the sweep of history. Since 1979 I have been serving in public school classrooms, navigating the complex waters of history with high school students, the first of whom had a living memory of the War. Forty years later, Vietnam is ancient history to my students, and remains as complicated as ever to teach. We may try to forget Vietnam but until those that were touched by its fire have died, it will continue to burn.[3]

Historian and Vietnam War scholar Marilyn B. Young postulated that U.S. involvement in southeast Asia by the early 1950s rested on several axioms that found consensus within the

[1] The draft, in fact, formally ended on 27 January 1973, as U.S. involvement in the War ended. Since that time, the military has operated through an "All-Volunteer Force" (AVF), although the Selective Service System remains in place and discussions of reinstituting the draft arise from time to time.
[2] By the late 1970s, hundreds of thousands of "boat people" were fleeing the war-torn areas of southeast Asia, especially Vietnam and Cambodia, for various locations, including the United States. The exodus continued for many years. Another wave of refugees, the Hmong people, came from Laos. California, Minnesota, and Wisconsin have the largest concentration of Hmong refugees in the United States. Today there are roughly 50,000 Hmong people in Wisconsin.
[3] The recent passing of John McCain, the longest-held prisoner from the Vietnam War, and the discussions surrounding President Trump's actions during the 1960s serve as a reminder of the complicated legacy of the War in our politics.

post-war political culture: the intentions of the United States were always good, Communism was fundamentally bad, aggressors must never be appeased, and all-out war against Communism was impossible in the nuclear age, but containment was viable and realistic.[4] Within that construct, the actions of U.S. leaders in Indochina were logical. The challenge of Vietnam persisted across several Presidential administrations, building to a crescendo from 1964-1973 under Lyndon Johnson and Richard Nixon. As the Vietnam experience dragged on, and especially after 1968, divisions about the War tore at the fabric of American society, an indication of the difficulty representative democracies encounter with extended wars. University of Pennsylvania international historian Walter McDougall suggests that a unique feature of the American style of foreign policy is to swing wildly from intense interaction with the world to a retreat from such involvement owing to domestic debates over our proper role.[5] This was certainly true in the post-Vietnam era. The many stages and sheer longevity of the conflict, coupled with the subsequent debates over the broader meaning of the War, complicate our understanding of it 50 years later.

Since 2001, we have been pursuing the history of our small city on the river. Through 17 projects, more than 50 interviews with residents of our region and research into various archives, we have introduced the practice of history to young people at Black River High School. In the process, we have developed a growing archive of more than 600 pages that can be utilized by future generations of students to better imagine how this place came to be. One of the themes running through all 17 projects is the connection of local history with the grander story of America, and there is perhaps no better example of that connection than during wartime.[6] Throughout this research, I was struck by how much our world has changed in the past 50 years with respect to how average people receive information. When the five young soldiers we interviewed went off to war in the 1960s, the "people back home" came to understand the war through newspapers, radio, and for the first time television. The advent of television, common in most homes by the early 1960s, certainly changed how people perceived the war. The daily reports of casualties and reports from the field brought the war into American

[4] Young, Marilyn B. The Vietnam Wars: 1945-1990. New York: Harper Perennial Publishers, 1991.
[5] McDougall Walter. A. Promised Land, Crusader State: The American Encounter With the World Since 1776. New York: Houghton-Mifflin Company, 1997. McDougall's discussion of what he calls, Global Meliorism, "the socio-economic and politico-cultural expression of an American mission to make the world a better place," provides excellent context for our actions during the Vietnam War and beyond.
[6] We have explored the experience of war in several projects. Our first project in 2002 focused on World War II and since then we have explored the Korean Conflict (2007), the Civil War (2010), and World War I (2014). We touched on the Vietnam War in our 2006 edition on "1968," and that is a good companion piece to this year's project.

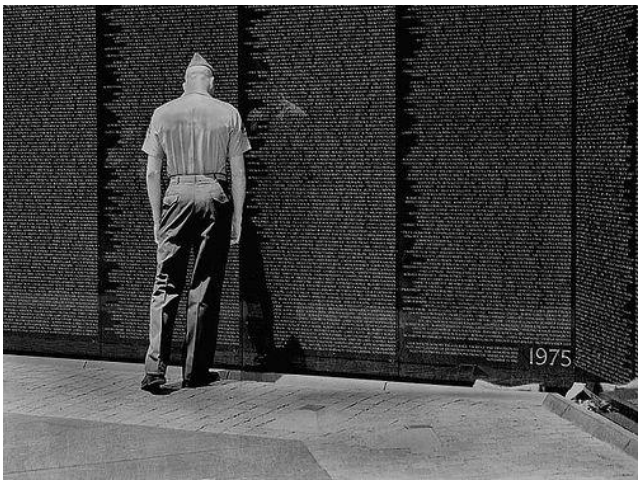
living rooms. On the other hand, the 1960s was pre-cable TV and pre-internet. News, therefore, was not nearly as consuming as today. In this atmosphere, letters back and forth between soldiers and their families remained vital.[7]

As has been the case with each of our stories, we are deeply grateful to this year's contributors, Andy Thundercloud, Al Ciezki, Gary Hoyer, Ken Schoolcraft, Chuck Buswell, and Xong Xiong. The five soldiers we interviewed had unique stories to tell and helped us better understand the complexity of war and the impact it has on those who served. Roughly 26 million men came of draft age during the Vietnam War. Of that number, just over 2 million went to Vietnam, with around 75 percent of those young men seeing combat – and they were predominantly teen-agers. As Marilyn Young points out, "over 60 percent of those who died in Vietnam were between the ages of seventeen and twenty-one, and the average age of those who served was nineteen, five to seven years younger than in other American wars."[8]

In addition to the individual stories of five soldiers, we also included Xong Xiong's story as a reminder of the impact the Vietnam War had on indigenous people in southeast Asia, victims of a proxy war fought on their soil, and soon-to-be refugees in a foreign land. The presence of nearly 50,000 Hmong people in Wisconsin stands as a stark reminder that wars have consequences that carry on for generations.

[7] It is almost hard to imagine how the Vietnam War would have been covered within the construct of the 24-hour news cycle and "wall-to-wall" immersion we live with in 2019. Clearly, however, the fact that it came in the advent of the television era impacted how Americans viewed the War.
[8] Young, page 319.

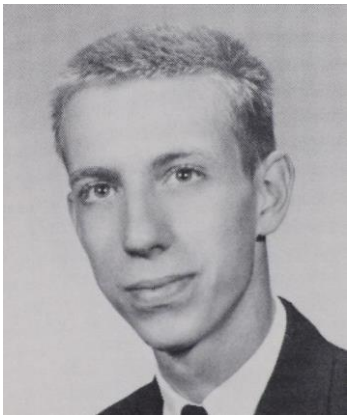
The Vietnam War Memorial was completed in 1982. It honors service members who fought in the Vietnam War.



Acknowledgements

As with all previous projects, we are deeply indebted to those that graciously shared their stories with us this year. All have reached elder-hood and carry a part of the War with them. Their service to country as young men is worthy of great honor and we offer our thanks here. Several voiced a sense of sadness, perhaps anger, that upon their return from an increasingly unpopular war, the divisions within the society colored the reaction some had toward them. Thanks also to Randy Bjerke, Jackson County Veterans Service Officer, for his support and insights with this and other projects we have done over the years. Ua tsaug! ("thank you") also to Xong Xiong who graciously shared her story with us. We had not intended to include that perspective at the outset, but Sydney and I both felt the refugee story enhances our understanding of the War. Special thanks to our senior intern this year, Sydney Sampson-Webb, whose dedication to the work was clear from the very start. She brought many and varied skills to the work, including great enthusiasm! Sydney will be attending UW-Milwaukee with the goal of majoring in Marketing. She took on the project hoping to gain more insights into our local history. Finally, we respectfully dedicate this year's project to all those from Jackson County who served in Vietnam, and particularly the five young men who lost their lives as part of that service. They remind us of the tragedy of war and the intersection of normal lives with the grander sweep of history.

Paul ST Rykken, FHP Director
Black River Falls High School
June 2019



Peter J. Carlson, Black River Falls
Killed in Action 5/11/67 Age 19

Leonard E. Dutcher, Melrose
Killed in Action 6/02/68 Age 21

Roger D. Goldsmith, Black River Falls
Died of Wounds 7/23/67 Age 21

Orlan M. Nelson, Black River Falls
Died of Wounds 2/23/69 Age 28

Stephen R. Ott, Black River Falls
Killed in Action 8/16/70 Age 20

They shall grow not old, as we that
are left grow old:
Age shall not weary them, nor the years condemn.
At the going down of the sun and in the morning
We will remember them.

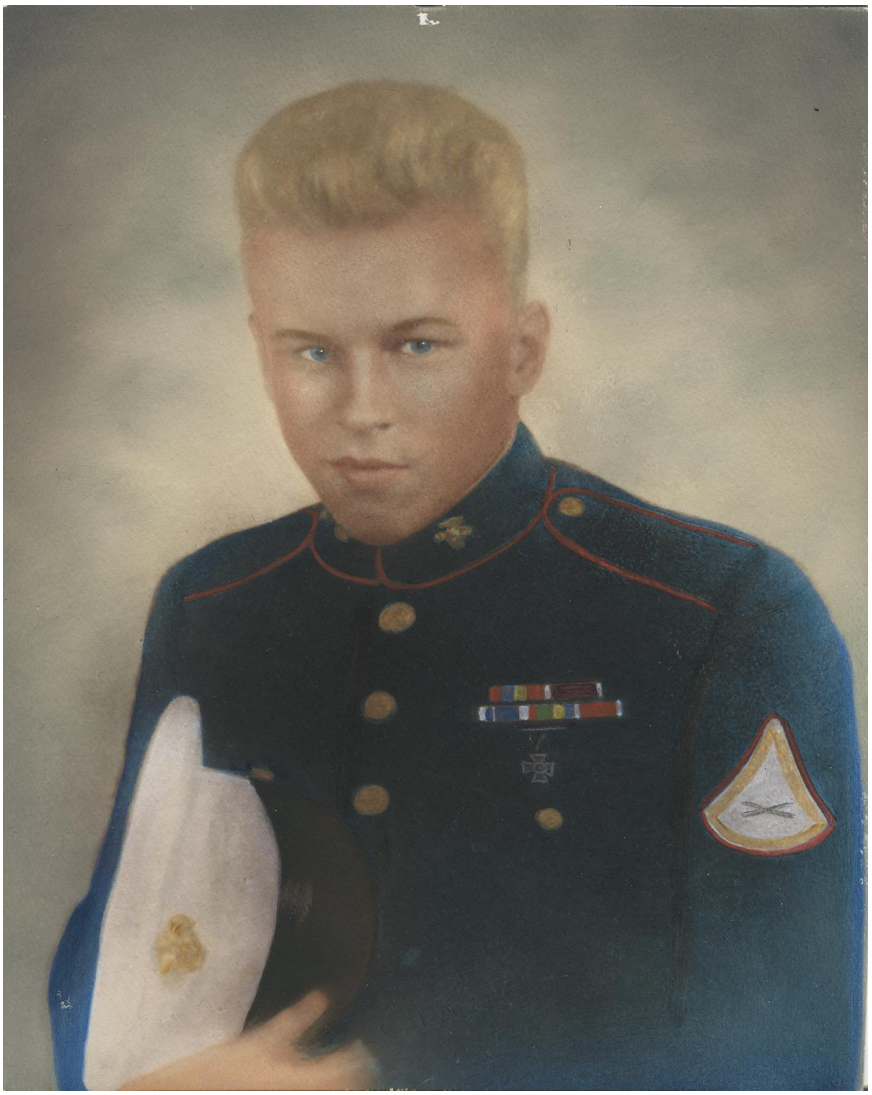
-- From "For the Fallen"
by Laurence Binyon

Allan Ciezki: Marine Corps

Interviewed by: Paul Rykken and Sydney Sampson-Webb 11/05/2018
Transcription by: Sydney Sampson-Webb

Rykken: We'll just start by having you give your full name.
Ciezki: My name's Allan Wayne Ciezki.
Rykken: And when were you born?
Ciezki: I was born December 17, 1949.
Rykken: And what branch of the service were you in?
Ciezki: Marine Corps.
Rykken: What was your rank?
Ciezki: I was discharged as an E-4 Corporal.
Rykken: Okay, and when were in the service? What years?
Ciezki: I entered boot camp April 24, 1967. I was discharged September 1970.
Rykken: Were you drafted?
Ciezki: No, I enlisted when I was 17. I wasn't going to graduate high school and have enough credits. I walked past the Marine Corps recruiting office, when I did go to school, and that was my decision.
Rykken: And then, one other question. I kind of chipped in on one here. Where did you grow up?
Ciezki: I was born in Milwaukee. I went to South Division High School.
Rykken: Thanks, that's just some preliminaries that we want to make sure we got.
Ciezki: Alright.
Rykken: So, if you want to ask.
Sampson-Webb: Do you remember your first days in service at all? Are there any experiences or stories you can kinda tell from that?
Ciezki: Well, boot camp was the first one, I guess. That was, an experience in itself.
Rykken: Where was that?
Ciezki: San Diego, California.

Rykken: So, you enlisted, and you shipped off to California. How did you get there?
Ciezki: By a plane, yeah. Took a physical, got sworn in, and took a flight right to boot camp.
Rykken: Had your father been in the military?
Ciezki: No, my mother and father were divorced.
Rykken: When you were going out to boot camp, what were your feelings at the time? What were your emotions at that time?
Ciezki: Well, I was looking forward to it. When I got there, I kind of questioned why I even did it. I guess, according to my son -he was put in for eight years after he graduated from here- it's changed quite a bit. It was a little tougher back then, I have to say. Once I got into the swing of things, I really liked it.



Rykken: When you enlisted, you knew that the nation was at war. Did you assume you were going to end up going?
Ciezki: To tell you the truth, I kinda didn't really think of it that much, until I joined the service. Then, I started really thinking about it, you know, because I didn't want to be an O3-11, which is an Infantry MOS once I got into boot camp. They test you when you're there. I got tested and they put me in to be a mechanic. Like, a truck mechanic, which I was pretty happy about that. Things changed quite a bit after that.
Rykken: Did you have friends that were being drafted?
Ciezki: No, like I said, I was 17. There wasn't a lot of people enlisting. You could enlist when you were 17, but you couldn't get drafted when you were 17. So, most of my friends were 17.
Rykken: Did you enlist with anyone from Milwaukee or was this on your own?
Ciezki: On my own. Like I said, I wasn't going to graduate. I thought if I joined the service, it would be a step forward.
Rykken: Sure, we'll maybe get into some of the experiences now.

Sampson-Webb: Sure, what were a couple of your most memorable experiences? If you'd share them.
Ciezki: I'd have to say some of the people I met in Vietnam. The people I served with in Vietnam will always be in my mind all my life. I guess that was probably the most memorable experience I had.
Rykken: And we've got a map right here. If you don't mind, where did you go first?

Ciezki: I was stationed. Well, what had happened there was in 1968, they took over the Pueblo -if you remember that.
Rykken: I do remember that.
Ciezki: And they were thinking about sending a brigade of the Army over there or Marines, a regimen of Marines. We knew we were going to need reinforcement, but they hadn't decided what kind of reinforcement yet. They were either going to send a brigade of the Army to get the Pueblo back or the Marines, or vice versa. Whichever group didn't go get the Pueblo; they were going to be reinforcement sent to Vietnam. It turned out they decided to send a brigade of the Army to get the Pueblo back. They gave it back, but I was already scheduled to go to Vietnam. They had made a regiment up real fast over there in California, and they didn't have enough infantry people to make up the unit, so they started taking everybody. We had cook surveyors and mechanic truck drivers. Every MOS they could find- they didn't care, as long as you hadn't been there once. So, they formed up a unit and send us over there. I ended up in the infantry is what happened.
Rykken: When you had that, would that have been a one-year commitment?
Ciezki: It's a 13-month tour in the Marine Corps. I believe it was the same for the army.
Rykken: How did you react to that? Were you just going with the flow because that's what was happening?
Ciezki: I was going with the flow mainly, you know. It was a challenge in the beginning. Like I said, we didn't train together. We didn't any training at all. Usually, they give you a two-week crash course before they send you over there. It was called the staging battalion. They taught you some of the language and got you familiar with some of the equipment. They didn't do that for us. They woke us up at 10 o'clock at night and eight o'clock the next morning we were on our way over there. We got a phone call apiece, our shots, and I got a pair of boots that didn't fit. Once we got settled in over there, they started providing us with the proper equipment and gear.
Rykken: How did you get there? Were you on a ship or a plane?
Ciezki: Plane.

Rykken: Did you fly into a base in South Vietnam?
Ciezki: Into Da Nang.
Rykken: Okay. Once you got there, how long was it before you were involved with combat?
Ciezki: On a way to our base.
Sampson-Webb: Wow, that must've been something.
Rykken: Oh, my goodness.
Ciezki: They ambushed our convoy from the airfield to our combat base. It wasn't a real bad one, but they did hit us. The thing was, we didn't have a lot of ammunition with us because we took our issued weapons that we were issued in the States, which were M14s. Most of their rifles were M16s. So, we didn't have any ammunition at all. We scrounged some up from the truck drivers and from the other people there that had M14 ammunition, which is the same kind that they use in the M16 machine guns. We broke the belts of machines down and took the ammunition. We each had seven rounds when we got done.

Rykken: Were there any casualties in that exchange?
Ciezki: No, we made it back there fine. I would say it was just mainly sniper kind of stuff, you know.
Rykken: It must have been kind of a reality check for you guys.
Ciezki: Oh, yeah. It was for sure.
Rykken: Do you remember how you felt at that point or how you were reacting?

Ciezki: Well, we just kind of had to react. You try to remember your training if you can. In most cases, the training helped quite a bit. Sometimes, it didn't matter.
Rykken: We better keep going with this part of the combat.
Sampson-Webb: Yeah, it's a really good story.
Rykken: So, once you got to your base, then how long was it before you were out on mission?
Ciezki: I would have to say the next day after that day. We were leaving a unit that was stationed before the Tet Offensive started. That's when we ended up getting there was towards the end of the Tet Offensive. We were sent there for replacements, and we relieved this unit that was there. The NBA Force came up the coast to Da Nang City, and we went right through their area, which is right where we were stationed. We relieved them and they took us out on our first patrol, which was a night patrol with an ambush. They showed us how to go about doing it. They were there for about a week probably. They were gone after that, and I don't know where they went. After that, we were on our own.
Rykken: It's interesting how it really happened fast
Ciezki: Oh, yeah.
Rykken: Suddenly, you were in a real-world situation. Can you just walk us through a little bit of that? You were there for 13 months. How did that play out?
Ciezki: The area that we were in was called the "rocket belt" and it was an area that was a proper distance for them to launch their D40 rockets to the airstrip, and that's what they would do. It was all DC. There was no NBA in the area at that time. It was all Viet Cong. That's what they did- they shot rockets, and our job was to prevent them from shooting rockets into the airfield. We had to run patrols in this area the whole time and it was heavily booby-trapped. The majority of our casualties was from booby-traps. I heard, but I never did try to figure it out. Anyways, that area was supposed to be the most heavily booby-trapped area in all of Vietnam. I don't if that's true or not, but there was sure a lot of booby-traps.
Rykken: Were you ever injured?
Ciezki: I never got severely injured. I twisted my ankle really bad by stepping in a hole that had a booby-trap in it that never went off. Everybody else in my squad either got killed or wounded. There were 15 of us that started off in the tactical full squad.

Rykken: And, you said that you were the only one that didn't get severely wounded or killed?
Ciezki: Well, I got a little bit of booby-trap shrapnel small pieces, but nothing too bad.
Rykken: How many of your unit were killed?
Ciezki: I never really counted, but I have it in there. It's in that book also.
Rykken: When, if you don't mind my asking, was the first time that happened? Was it early on in the experience?

Ciezki: Yeah, it was that first week. The second day that I was there, because the boots that I had didn't fit me, I got some really bad blisters on my heels. Like, real bad. They were bleeding and my throat swelled up for some reason. For the first couple of days, I didn't go out with the unit. They were afraid my feet were going to get infected. They got my throat under control with mediation. I got sick and tired of sitting around there for three days, so I hopped on a resupply, which is an Amtrak kind of track vehicle that they use over there to resupply. So, I hopped on a resupply, and I went back out on my unit. They missed out on some of that stuff in the beginning.
Rykken: Yeah, they always say the soldiers' feet.
Ciezki: I still had a lot of trouble after that, you know, because I didn't listen to them. I took care of it myself and decorum helped me with it because I wanted to stay with my unit. The first KIA that I witnessed was a guy I went through bootcamp with. They ambushed us on the Amtracks going out one day. There were a few casualties. He was the only KIA. "Whiz Man" was his name. What had happened was one of the Amtracks had hit a landmine and ruined it. It couldn't move. My squad was in for security there that day, so they tried to get a tank record out there to get that Amtrak, and they didn't call it because it was no wounded. There was just a KIA. They figured when a tank record got there, then they could bring him back. Well, the tank record hit a mine on the way out there at night, so, it was kind of a mess. That was my first real heavy-duty experience.
Rykken: When were they finally able to treat the body?
Ciezki: They came out the next day with another force. They got the tank record first and then they came and got the Amtrak.
Rykken: And you were 17 years old?
Ciezki: Yes, I turned 17 in December. In April, I went to boot camp. I turned 18 December and I was in Vietnam in February. I was 18 when I went to Vietnam.
Rykken: Where were you and what were you experiencing? Because I know the bombing in Vietnam, by the Americans, started in '65. Were you seeing or witnessing that? Were you aware of that?
Ciezki: We knew about it, and we knew, you know, after being there for a little while how important it was because the bombing was supposed to stop them from resupplying their troops

down there. So, it was really, really important. Later on, it really became an issue, as far as I was concerned.

Rykken: Now, before you went, and we can get into more of this later, but were you aware or were you following the war before you went?

Ciezki: Like I said, it wasn't something that was on the news, I guess.

Rykken: Right, and at that point the protesting of the war probably hadn't started full force yet.

Ciezki: No, no, not hardly at all back then. That happened later on.

Rykken: Is there anything else about the combat experience itself you'd like to share?

Ciezki: Well, like I say, we did our patrol running there and then in May they came up with, they called them, operations. They'd get a couple of companies together or maybe battalion or something, and they'd go to an area and either try to flush them out or try to locate them and make contact. They said, Operation Alan Brooke, that they put us out on and like I say, we were it's called boot being boot and country, we're new guys. So, they put us with a company from alpha one seven, and company from golf to seven. I was with 327. We ended up kind of being their security and we were kind of involved with them, but, you know, that particular area hadn't been investigated a long time. They wanted to see what's going on in there. It developed and got worse and worse and worse. There happened to be a couple regiments and VA that we're staging in there and using that for a staging area to assault the different parts, like Da Nang and all the other areas. We kind of ran into the middle of that, and that turned into a full-blown big operation. That's where we lost all of our guys during that operation.

Rykken: How far into the deployment was that?

Ciezki: That was on the 17th of May, was the date. Well, it was on the 13th of May when we got there. They dropped us on a hill overlooking the area. It was an old LZ. Our artillery battery was up there. There were all these sandbags. Everything was sandbagged. We had to dig in that day and go down the next morning because they were going to arc light it and b52 that whole area before we went in there. When we were digging in, a couple guys decided to use sandbags for protection. Some were booby trapped and the LZ on the top was booby trapped. They were hoping another chopper would land. It never went off, but there was another really big one up there. That one did go off, and it took out three to four guys. So, we had to stay there that evening. The next morning, we went down in there to start with the operation on the 13th. We had some contact off and on until the 17th. On the 17th, we got ambushed pretty bad.

Rykken: Was anybody taken prisoner?

Ciezki: Not that I'm aware of, no.

Rykken: Was it a fire fight or was it all kinds of different things happening at once?

Ciezki: It started off contact when we were running the sweeps. When we were digging at night, they would mortar us. Then, we decided to make believe we were digging, and then move to a

different location. You know, just to try to time it right. Sure enough, that's what they were doing. We called that one right. I don't know whose decision it was. One of the regimental commanders or somebody, decided that we were going to start moving earlier. Matter of fact, in the dark just before dawn, to see if we could make contact, and we did. We got in and ended up walking through their outer perimeter early in the morning. That's when the fire fight started. We kind of chased them, and we were right in the middle of their regimental area, but we didn't know it. We got kind of pinned down all day there.

Rykken: How close were you to the Viet Cong, visually, like, within yards away?

Ciezki: Yeah, yards.

Rykken: So, what you were seeing them? Can you describe what the scene looked like?

Ciezki: There was a dried out riverbed before the tree line. We never made it into the tree line because we couldn't get into it- that's how heavy combat was. There was about 30 of us that made it across the riverbed, and half of them were wounded. We were pinned down against the opposite side, so, they couldn't really get at us, so to speak. They were only 25-30 yards on top.

Rykken: When some of your comrades were being wounded, what was the process on the battlefield? Were you having to go back? Were the medics coming in? How were they being cared for?

Ciezki: They weren't being cared for, that was the bad part about the whole thing. Choppers couldn't get in there. We were too close to them. We called in air strikes, gunships, artillery, and everything, but we were too close. They couldn't effectively do anything. They dropped in another company from our regiment behind them on the other side of the treelined. They assaulted through, and then they took off.

Rykken: Was the communication good, as far as what you could tell? Like, equipment-wise?

Ciezki: Yeah, it was okay. We used what were called PRC 25 radios for communications within the unit. We communicated with the jets and chopper pilots through those radios. All day long, they kept supporting us. Those were long days; it was always very hot.

Rykken: What happened with that number of casualties within your unit?

Ciezki: They had to pull us out the next day because we were tactically ineffective. We only had, I'm not sure of the exact number, but somewhere around 60 people left in our company. We started with 100. We lost 26 or 28 Marines out of our company that day alone. A lot of the others were wounded.

Rykken: Do you want to try to go into the next steps of this?

Sampson-Webb: So, when you first said you kind of didn't really have an idea on war, and how you didn't really know much about Vietnam going in, how did your military experience there influence how you thought about war afterwards?

Ciezki: Well, the way things were going with the protests and things like that, the reception we received when we got back it really knocked me out. I didn't want anyone to know I was in the Marine Corps or that I was in Vietnam. I kind of buried it. That was the worst thing I could have

ever done. Back then, they didn't know about PTSD that well. They might've, but I mean, I didn't know about it. I buried it most of the time. I tried to live with it. I drank a lot.
Rykken: Sure, and were you dealing with that a lot when you got back?
Ciezki: Oh, yeah.
Rykken: My father was in WWII. He was a tail gunner on a B-25. I grew up hearing stories.
Ciezki: Oh, boy.
Rykken: Anyway, the reason I'm thinking about that now is we're sitting here years and years later, and, yet this is very vivid for you.
Ciezki: Yeah, it never goes away. I ended up finally going for counseling around 2005 because I wasn't handling it well then. The counseling and therapy is the only reason I'm sitting here talking to you right now. Otherwise, I wouldn't have been able to talk about that at all. I can handle it now. Before, I couldn't. I still have my moments, and I still have problems with it, but I know how to deal with it.
Rykken: And that, if you don't mind my asking, and you don't have to answer, but you said that you kind of "buried" it.
Ciezki: Right.
Rykken: When you say that, does that mean you immediately got a job and started working?
Ciezki: I got a job. I went through a couple different things before I finally settled, and I ended up working at a Caterpillar dealership as a mechanic. I met my wife out in New Jersey, where I was discharged, and we started raising a family and all that. It was tough the whole time.
Rykken: Did you end up going back to Milwaukee?
Ciezki: Yes, I did about nine or 10 years after we got married. I didn't want to stay out there. New Jersey, New York, they just weren't my cup of tea. My wife had never been anywhere else, so I tried to explain to her what Wisconsin was like, and she agreed to move out there. We went out there and moved back to Milwaukee, but it was totally different than when I had been there. It was not a good place to raise a family. I came up here deer hunting with my brother. His friend had married a girl from Black River. He would come up here with her brothers and they would hunt during deer season. One time, he asked me if I wanted to come along and that's how I got up here.
Rykken: That's very interesting.
Ciezki: Deer hunting was when I first came up here and I knew this is where I wanted to live someday. That was in the 70s, late 70s. Then, in 89', I decided to move up here.
Rykken: We're in the post period now. I guess, one question I have is how did you react to the fact that you saw the war being protested? Did you just stay away from that or what did you do?
Ciezki: Yeah, that's kind of what I decided to do because I would lose it every once in a while. I was afraid it was going to hurt somebody or do something. I had a family take care of, and that was became one of my priorities. There was a lot of things going on there and I was it was irritating, you know.
Rykken: Did you feel like the government was trying to do the right thing? I'm sure you thought a lot about that, but what would be your analysis of that, coming from the standpoint of a soldier.
Ciezki: Then and now is a little different. Back then, a lot of us were disappointed that nobody helped us out and nobody defended us for what we did. That was where I was retaliation towards the government. And, you know, I didn't vote anymore. I didn't want to get involved with anything. You know, I was just mainly concerned about raising my family. That's all I wanted to

do. I got into the few protesters, you know, people that were against the war against servicemen, basically, against the war and have too much problem with that, because that was their choice, if they wanted to. When they started picking on the servicemen for what they were doing over there. That's, that really where I drew the line.

Rykken: I was growing up then. I was born in 1957, so you can kind of get my age. I was seeing people two, three years ahead of me that were being drafted. I've taught history for 40 years and looking back on it, I'm trying to figure out why people were angry with the troops versus the policy. Those are two completely different things, as far as I'm concerned.

Ciezki: Well, that's the same thing. That's exactly how we felt. Yeah, you know, after we got back and we seen and even as times gone by, up until now, you know, a lot more information available since then, about how they dealt with the problems over there. The government, you know, they tried to run the war from the White House is what they did, and that was the wrong thing to do. But, you know, back then, nobody knew that, you know, nobody knew. And it's hard to deal with that. The government, they're the ones that started it, so to speak, and they turned their backs on us.

Rykken: Did you feel that when you were in it did you feel like it was the right cause? Or did you just feel like you were doing what you were obligated to?

Ciezki: In the beginning, when I first got there, I did. We were there to help these people out. Over time, it started to surface, you know that we weren't really helping them that much. They were stuck in the middle. The VC would come and make them do one thing and then we would try to make them to another thing. They just wanted to grow their rice and raise their families. That's all they wanted to do.

Rykken: Having said that, did you have with south Vietnamese people?

Ciezki: Yeah, sure.

Rykken: Like in conversations?

Ciezki: I didn't spend my whole tour in the infantry there. In August or September, they transferred me out and transferred me back to my MOS, which was being a mechanic. I had a choice they said. They were going to be sending the unit back and told me I could go back with the unit, or I could stay and finish my tour. I thought, no brainer- I'm going back. They said, well, okay, but they told me that if I stayed and finished my tour, afterwards they'd put me back in my MOS. So, I ended up getting transferred out of the infantry unit back to a medical battalion as a

mechanic. I finished my tour in Vietnam as a mechanic. I had a lot of contact then with the civilians, before then it was just the villagers, when I was in the infantry.
Rykken: Were you able to communicate? Could they speak English?
Ciezki: Well, sure. I was first stationed north of the Da Nang. Then, they moved the medical battalion down to Da Nang. We couldn't get any more in the rear down there. I mean, that was the rear of the rear. There was no probability of getting hurt there.

Rykken: How'd you find the people to be, in general?
Ciezki: They were alright. Once we were there, they really tried to take advantage. I don't blame them. They didn't have anything. In Da Nang, when I was down in that area, they were just, to me, like city people, compared to country people. They weren't living in villages and growing rice. They were doing things that they do in cities.
Rykken: Did you ever have contact with Vietnamese people who came to the States after the war? You know, refugees? Anyone like that at all?
Ciezki: Well, a couple weeks ago, I had one fix the windshield in my car. He was Cambodian. He was probably 40 years old and living here. I've run across them, and I don't have any animosity toward them at all.
Rykken: And you've never been back to Vietnam?
Ciezki: No, they wanted me to go back two years ago. My friend, Dale, who was another guy who never got wounded, wanted me to go back with them. One of the fellas that tripped that booby trap on top of the mountain wanted to go back too because he never got to be involved in anything after that. He had lost both of his legs and went home right away. He wanted to go back, and he wanted either me or someone that had gone through the whole thing to go back with him and show him what we all did. I didn't want to go back. Dale went back with him.
Rykken: Do you think that will change?
Ciezki: I think I would've went back if it was a while ago, but I had no reason to at this time. I'm kind of over it, in a way. I didn't need to go back there for any kind of healing or anything because I don't want to say I'm completely healed, but I'm alright.
Rykken: I have one other question that I forgot to ask you earlier. When you were there, were you able to communicate with your family at all?
Ciezki: Just by letters.
Rykken: Did you do letters frequently?
Ciezki: Well, as much as I could. I wasn't much of a writer, but I did answer any letters that I got. My mom and my sister mainly wrote me.
Rykken: I'm assuming you were thrilled to get letters.

Ciezki: Oh, yeah. That made my day for sure. It was better than getting a can of peaches!
Rykken: Yeah, I bet, it's tremendously important to remind you of home.
Ciezki: Yeah, it sure is.
Rykken: Your age is something that I'm trying to wrap my head around. I have 16- and 17-year-olds sitting in front of me all day long. It would have been completely understandable for you to be homesick. On the other hand, you sound like you were a pretty independent kid.
Ciezki: I was. My mother and father were divorced, so I kind of had my own way when I was in high school.
Rykken: You grow up fast.
Ciezki: My mother was, well, they drank a lot. They weren't very good parents is all I can say. So, we were kind of on our own.
Rykken: Did you have siblings?
Ciezki: I had a sister and a brother.
Rykken: Did your brother serve?
Ciezki: He was in the Navy. He tried to join the Marine Corps, but they were full for that month. He went down to the office for the Navy, and they had openings, so, he joined them. He just passed away this last June.
Rykken: Did you serve in Vietnam too?
Ciezki: Actually, he was on a minesweeper. They'd go out and layout mines and pick them up. He was actually in the Gulf of Tonkin for a while. He said, he told me a couple of times that the riverboats would come out and get things from them. He said that once in a while, he would hop on those river boats and take a ride.
Rykken: One other thing that comes to mind right now. We've done a little on the Korean War about eight or nine years ago. One of the feelings that I got from that was that people felt like the Korean War was very forgotten. Did you have those feelings when you came back at all? Like Vietnam sort of just faded from view?
Ciezki: Yeah, it was gone, and like I said, I buried most of it. I thought I was over it in a way. Other than the nightmares. Then, they started coming out with the movies about Vietnam, and that started to trigger a few things. I started to read more about it, and I started to get information about what actually was going on there and what the government was actually doing. Vietnam was the first war that we ever really lost, so to speak, so it was disappointing. I can remember when we were on that operation Allen Brook, before we got wiped out, we were capturing prisoners. They were interrogating some of them and some of them said that they weren't even sure if a war was going on. They weren't getting ammunition. They weren't getting supplies. They weren't getting anything. That was because of the bombing, the effect that the bombing was having on that whole situation. That following November, the stopped the bombing, in 1968. If they would have would've continued bombing, in my opinion, I think that would have made a big different the way that thing turned out.

Rykken: Instead of carrying on the way that it did until 73'. Our troops continued in the war until 75'. It ended when I was a senior in high school, I remember it very well. Your story is really, really fascinating.
Ciezki: It was fascinating. It was an experience in itself. I was in both situations- I was in combat and the rear. I got to experience both sides of it, I always said. We had a lot of good times when we were in that medical battalion. I made some still really good friends there.
Rykken: Have you ever been to the Vietnam memorial?
Ciezki: Yes.
Rykken: And what was your reaction to that?
Ciezki: I had a hard time with it, a really hard time with it. My wife and son were actually there. My son was in the Marine Corps at the time. He was stationed at Quantico, Virginia, which is right near there. He joined a reunion that we had in Philadelphia. That was one of the things we did while we were there. We all went to the wall. We got some tracings. We had a Medal of Honor winner in our platoon. His name was Robert Burke, from Monticello in Illinois. I don't think I would be here today, and a lot of other people wouldn't be either if it wasn't for him. I got his etching, and I got my squad leader's.
Rykken: What had Burke down that has saved people?
Ciezki: Well, he was a machine gunner for one thing and that made a big difference when we were assaulting that position. They were kind of waiting for us, you know, and we managed to get up on top there with that machine gun and I think that's why that out of the 30 of us, the majority was able to make it across. Otherwise, I don't think we ever would've. We were too exposed. He took the heat off of us by being up there with that machine gun. He took out a couple of bunkers. It's in the book if you want to read it. His citations are in there too. It was two navy crosses earned. I don't know how many silver and bronze stars from just our unit. It's just amazing. You have to read that book.
Rykken: We're glad you brought that in with you. We'll try to incorporate it.
Ciezki: In the back there's a glossary and some other things. There's interviews and a lot of military terms. The glossary helps explain everything.
Rykken: Yes, very good. Do you have some closing words? We don't want to shut your interview off here, but do you have anything you want to say that we didn't around to.
Ciezki: I really covered pretty much everything.
Rykken: Do you want to maybe close with these questions and then we can get some pictures?
Sampson-Webb: After you came back from the war, what did you go about to have a career in or work?
Ciezki: Well, I got a couple of jobs in New Jersey that were just jobs, like unloading trucks and different things. I didn't really have any career or trade, or anything. A guy that I was stationed out in Jersey with, he was a gunner and a chopper. Believe it or not, we crossed paths before in Vietnam. He got discharged before I did, but we kept in touch. He got an apprenticeship at a Caterpillar dealership. He told me that I should give it a shot. So, I went out and applied for it. I had a six-month training program. If you passed at the end or they wanted to keep you, you got a union book and they hired you. That's how I got started with Caterpillar dealers. I worked with

them all my life until I started working for David Hoffman. I worked for David Hoffman for 10 years.

Rykken: So, once you came back here, you must've got connected with Hoffman.

Ciezki: Well, I took care of his equipment a lot. I was a foreman in the Eau Claire dealership up there. I took care of his equipment a lot. And, then he said that if I ever wanted a job that I should come see him. He offered me a pretty good deal. I already had 25 years with the Caterpillar dealers, but he gave me a retirement package that I couldn't refuse. He's one hell of a guy to work for, let me tell you.

Rykken: I know David, yes. I know it's like one big question, but how did your service experience affect your life?

Ciezki: I've thought about it a lot actually. My Marine Corps experience, I think, is what got me through a lot of tough times in my life. I mean, with the training that they give you and the things that I did, it's kind of like bittersweet because you push yourself, you keep trying to do better all the time. Sometimes it's not necessary, but that's what motivates you to keep on trying harder, keep doing better. You can try to be a perfectionist, but no one can be a perfectionist as far as I'm concerned. You can strive to be good at something or better at something. And that's kind of what I've always done. And I think the training I got in Marine Corps is what made me deal with life that way.

Rykken: Have you been active in veterans' organizations?

Ciezki: I belong to a lot of them, but I don't participate. I support a lot of them. I I've always had trouble. Like I said, up until a few years ago, my therapy, I kind of got released from it a couple of years ago but, I still support all the organizations.

Rykken: Yes, very good. We should make sure that we talk about some of this stuff here. So, this, I'm assuming is the booby trap.

Ciezki: Yes, I had to make sure all the explosives were out of it before I could bring it home.

Rykken: And, then you got letters in here I see.

Ciezki: Yes, a letter home. This is the letter you write when you're ready to go home.

Rykken: This one?

Ciezki: Yes, you send it to whoever you want to send it to. Everybody does it.

Rykken: Well, that's a tremendous thing to have. We'd love to scan it or something.

Ciezki: Yes, I just need them all back eventually. All these things, they belong to my son, really.

Rykken: No, we'll for sure get it back to you. No worries, there!

Ciezki: Yeah, now, this is a container of oil from MVA.

Rykken: Yes, and then you got some shells.
Ciezki: They're empty.
Rykken: Yes, they're empty of course. What about this piece here?
Ciezki: It's a flag they had. They hang it when they go out and pray and stuff. I never did find out what it says, so if you want to do a little investigating.
Rykken: Yeah, we might be able to figure it out. This is just tremendous. We really appreciate this stuff. How about this one?

Ciezki: That's a service medal. You spend six months in country and you're eligible for those.
Rykken: Oh, sure. Now, how about this piece?
Ciezki: It's a bracelet my granddaughter made. It has the same colors as the Vietnamese service ribbon. Also, don't open that canteen. Don't let anybody open it. I don't even know what's in there.
Rykken: No, we won't open it. Where are you in this picture?
Ciezki: I took it. Those are members of my platoon. I don't have pictures of me. That's the only one I have in my uniform, just the portrait.
Rykken: I think what we'll do is take care of this stuff within a few days here. We don't want you worrying about your things and us holding on to your stuff.
Ciezki: No rush at all.
Rykken: Well, we just had a phenomenal interview here. Thank you so much.
Ciezki: No problem. Thank you.
Sampson-Webb: Yes, it was nice meet you, Al!
Rykken: Like I said, we'll get this stuff back to you soon. Thanks again for coming in today.

Andy Thundercloud: Navy

Interviewed by: Paul Rykken and Sydney Sampson-Webb 11/05/2018
Transcription by: Sydney Sampson-Webb

Rykken: Alright, are we all ready?
Sampson-Webb: We're good to go!
Thundercloud: I'm glad you guys are all ready.
Rykken: We have a few questions, but it's basically just a conversation. If you could start by just giving us your full name.
Thundercloud: My name is Andrew W. Thundercloud.

Rykken: And when were you born?
Thundercloud: I was born in 1943.
Rykken: Where were you born?
Thundercloud: Black River Falls.
Rykken: Which branch of the service were you in?
Thundercloud: Navy.
Rykken: And what was your rank?
Thundercloud: I was the hospital corpsman first class.
Rykken: What years were you in the service?
Thundercloud: January 1963 through the April of 1968.
Rykken: That was just some preliminaries to make sure we got the basic facts. We'll kind of start with your entry into the service and walk through your experience. Were you drafted or did you enlist?
Thundercloud: I enlisted.
Rykken: I'm asking you this because I know other Ho Chunk veterans. When you enlisted, were you following a tradition in your family or were you doing kind of your own thing?
Thundercloud: That's kind of a rather difficult question to answer. I enlisted. It was my intention to become a pilot. I wanted to be a pilot. I enlisted with the understanding that I would become a pilot. I did all the preliminary things. You know, flew through their tests and all of these other things that you're supposed to do. Come time to take the physical exam, and I flunked it. I didn't

realize I had a bad left eye. My vision was bad enough that they would not accept me as a pilot. Then, they said, “Well, you still know that you have a six-year obligation to the service.” I said, “Oh, yes, I do.” At the time, they wanted to put me into nuclear powered subs. I told them that they weren’t going to do that. So, they said, “Well, what would you like to do?” I told them that I would like to become a hospital corpsman. They said “Okay!” So, I went to boot camp in San Diego, and then I went to hospital core training and The Medical Center in San Diego.
Rykken: What was your experience like in boot camp?
Thundercloud: It was a good experience; I can’t really say much about it. I didn’t have any bad experiences.
Rykken: How did you get there? Did you fly from here to San Diego?
Thundercloud: Yes, I did. When I did, it was in the middle of January. I was given a choice as to where I wanted to go for bootcamp. Either I’d go to the Great Lakes or San Diego. I chose San Diego.
Rykken: So, you were 20 years old? Did I get that right?
Thundercloud: No.
Rykken: I thought you said you were born in 1943.
Thundercloud: I was, but I was 19 when I joined.
Rykken: Was this your first time being away from home?
Thundercloud: Well, you know, I had been off to school. I guess that was being away from home. I guess you could maybe say that.
Rykken: Where had you been at school?
Thundercloud: Madison.
Rykken: Okay, so you had started there. You must have been part way in?
Thundercloud: I was two years in.
Rykken: What prompted you to want to be a corpsman.
Thundercloud: Well, my whole life I was interested in medicine. My grandfather and great aunts were renowned healers. Mom always wanted for me to be a doctor. You know how moms are. She always wanted to have a doctor in the family. It was something that I wanted too.
Rykken: Right, and at that point, we weren’t really in the Vietnam War, yet.
Thundercloud: In ‘63?
Rykken: We’d been inching closer, but we weren’t really there yet.
Thundercloud: We’d been in it for four years already.
Rykken: There hadn’t been any big deployments. It had just been smaller numbers of troops. Was it in your mind at the time that this was where it was all headed?
Thundercloud: No, it never entered my mind. It didn’t bother me. Didn’t faze me at all.
Rykken: So, that would have been ‘63 into ‘64. When did you end up first going to Vietnam?
Thundercloud: I ended up going to Vietnam in January of 1967.
Rykken: So, you had four years in the service at that point already. Where had you been prior to ‘67?
Thundercloud: I spent the majority of my time at Quantico, Virginia Marine Corps schools. I did go to school at national Naval Medical Center in Bethesda. Then, I went right, straight back to Quantico again. I spent the vast majority of my enlistment with the Marines.
Rykken: Was the medical training you were doing difficult training?

Thundercloud: I didn't think so. I mean, it was very intense. No, I didn't view it as difficult. It was very intense and good training.
Rykken: Then, what was the first experience in Vietnam? What were you initially doing in '67?
Thundercloud: We're going to get to some places that I don't want to talk about. I was with the 1st Marine Division.
Rykken: I guess just let me know if you don't want to answer questions about things. As a corpsman, were you right out there on the battlefield?
Thundercloud: Yes.
Rykken: That began how soon after you were out in Vietnam? Right away?
Thundercloud: Right away? There were 15 of us that went over together. We were E-5's and E-6's. When we got there, I lost my friend the next day. He was killed the next day. Of the 15-hospital corpsman that went with to Vietnam, only three of us came home.
Rykken: What was your friend's name?
Thundercloud: I don't remember. Smithy, that's all I remember. Obviously, his last name was Smith, but I don't remember what his first name was.
Rykken: Can you tell us a little bit about what you were doing, like your day-to-day routine?
Thundercloud: It's kind of hard, difficult to remember what I did. I was always with the Marines, that's what I tell people. Marines didn't have a medical department nor do they now, dental department, or a clergy. All the clergymen were Navy, and I don't think their dental technicians anymore. I think they've done away with those. Then, of course, the hospital corpsman. The hospital corpsman were all Navy. I have a good relationship with the Marines, I tease them a lot. They tease me a lot. I took care of them, whatever their problems may have been. It might have been something as simple as a headache, a rash, body lice, among other things. We'd go out into the field, and I'd ensure their wellbeing. I got to be known as somebody that would take care of feet. I think that was very important because feet were constantly wet. They would develop horrendous cases of athlete's feet. I was really notorious for watching out for feet. Needless to say, if they were injured in some fashion, it was my duty to fix them the best I could. If they were wounded, I did my best to see that they survived their wounds. Day after day, day after day.
Rykken: And you were in that phase of this for about a year? Does that sound about right?
Thundercloud: At the time, we were required to do six months in the field and if we survived it...it may sound strange, but my six months were up, and I was happy that I had survived my six months. I was going to be assigned another duty station away from the front lines. I was going to be assigned to the 1st Medical Battalion in Da Nang. It might sound strange, but I didn't want to leave the guys.
Rykken: That's a sentiment that we heard in our first interview tonight. That's a bond, apparently, that you can only understand if you've been there. My dad was a Word War II veteran. I had conversations with him all the time. It always seemed like there was a space that I couldn't really get into.
Thundercloud: It might seem selfish or whatever, but I thought to myself that no one can take care of these guys better than I can. I did my best. Sometimes, my best wasn't good enough.
Rykken: You must have been skilled at what you did.
Thundercloud: I think all of us corpsman were excellent in what we were trained at. If you talk to any members of any armed forces, they will always say the Navy corpsman were excellent.

Especially, the Marines! They all called us “Doc” and we heard it. Which, I don’t know if it’s a nickname or something but it’s something I’m very proud of.
Rykken: Yes, and when you came back, were you involved in the medical field?
Thundercloud: I went to medical school if that’s what you mean.
Rykken: Did you feel a calling to that?
Thundercloud: Well, you know, like I said, I think it’s something that I had with me my entire life.
Rykken: Did it translate into some work that you did after or not?
Thundercloud: It most definitely did.
Rykken: Okay, I’m not aware of your life after 1968.
Thundercloud: I went to medical school, and I joined Indian Health Service. I was with Indian Health Service for a number of years until I retired. My residency was in emergency medicine. I was an emergency medicine specialist. I don’t know why I went into emergency medicine. It was just something that I enjoyed immensely, and I was good at. I could have gone into any other specialty that I chose to. I couldn’t really see myself being a surgeon, neurologist, pedititrion, obstetrician or anything like that. Perhaps, I was chasing that adrenaline rush.

Rykken: It was work that you had done, and you were good at it.
Thundercloud: I tell people that it’s hard to understand unless they’ve been there themselves. You get into a situation, a firefight or contact with the enemy, and there’s actually combat with them, it’s such a rush. People might find that strange, but damn, that was one heck of a feeling.
Rykken: Your adrenaline must just be at its peak.
Thundercloud: When you’re finished, you look around, and you just feel such a rush. I’ve never experienced anything quite like that. I think other people find that odd.
Rykken: I’ve heard that from other soldiers.

Thundercloud: It's just something that I can't explain. It was a real, real rush. I hope I can tell a story here. It might be a little off color.
Rykken: You can say anything that you want. We are here to learn.
Thundercloud: Are you recording?
Sampson-Webb: Yes, it's going.
Thundercloud: I remember the first fire fight we got into. I just felt like all my senses were at the highest level they could be. There was things I was seeing, hearing, smelling, and I could even taste things. It seemed like that firefight was over in a flash. It probably hadn't been that long, but we withdrew and got far enough way. Things quieted down and I was asking people if everything was okay or if anything was going on. They were all saying "No, no, Doc. Doc, we're all fine. The leader of the group goes, "How are you doing, Doc?" I go, "I don't know about the rest of, but my butt is soar. They go, "Your butt? Your butt is soar?" I go, "Yeah, because I was puckered like this. After that, it became kind of a standing joke because we'd get into an engagement like this. He'd always come up to me and go, "Hey, Doc, how's your butt?" I guess that was one of the more humorous times.
Rykken: In those moments, where everything is that intense, I'm sure humor is important.
Thundercloud: I, or really, and vet, can take a look back, and, at the time, they weren't funny. There's always something that happened that was humorous and was funny. Maybe that was our way of letting off some steam. Maybe it was our survival instincts coming into play.
Rykken: In the military, did you experience any people that had any difficulty with racism or was everybody the same?
Thundercloud: It was there, but I personally never experienced anything like that. Perhaps, it was because I was a corpsman or because I chose to overlook those things. I mean, obviously with a name like Thundercloud, everyone knew that I was Native. Being identified as Native meant people immediately went, "Hey, Chief!" I think that was true of anyone that was Native. I think we were all called chief.
Rykken: And you weren't offended by that?
Thundercloud: Yeah, I was, but it depended on how it was said. I hope you get a laugh out of this because other people probably wouldn't. They don't understand. The unit I was with, everyone was calling me "Doc" or "Chief." I told them, "You know, you call me 'Chief' and I don't particularly appreciate that because I'm not a chief. I mean, take a look at what I got on my sleeve. I'm not a chief, that's a bit above me. I'm not a chief yet, maybe I will be one of these days." I told them that everyone always calls the corpsmen "Doc," and we all look around and wonder who you're talking to.
Rykken: Sure.
Thundercloud: I told them all that I was going to teach them my Indian name. I said, "It's very easy to say and that's what I prefer you call me." They go, "Oh, alright, well, then what is it?" I go, "It's dega." After that, all the guys in my unit started calling me dega. I remember my nephew was coming out to Quantico. I told dad to tell him where I'm at. I was with the H&S company, right there on the main street. When he got there, they called up because I was upstairs. Somebody goes, "Hey, Andy. Someone is here to see you." I was like, "I'll be right down." So, I grab my cover, went downstairs, and there was my nephew. It was right around lunchtime, so I told him we should go to PX and buy some lunch. Quantico is basic school for officers, so, there's tons and tons of officers there. When you're walking on the street, you're

basically saluting anything that moves. I saw this kernel coming. I go, “Morning, kernel.” He goes, “Morning, dega!” My nephew goes, “What did he say?!” He heard what he said and he couldn’t believe that a colonel called me dega. I carried that wherever I went. I told them to use my Winnebago name and that it was very simple to say. When we were out on the field, instead of hearing the call “Corpsman!”, I’d here “Dega!”
Rykken: You were bringing a bit of Ho-Chunk kinship into the situation. That’s interesting. There are a couple other things we’d like to ask, if you’re comfortable answering. When we came back to the States, was it a difficult transition back?
Thundercloud: The way that we were treated when we got back- I was always surprised by how much control each of us had. I’m always surprised that there weren’t more civilian casualties because I think most of us that came back... to use the vernacular, it really pissed me off how we were treated.
Rykken: Was it simply because you were wearing a uniform? Were people simply reacting to you in the uniform?
Thundercloud: I mean they were gathered there like they were having a demonstration. There were signs and hundreds of people.
Rykken: Was this at the airport?
Thundercloud: This was right off of where we landed. We flew back on a commercial airline, and we landed in El Toro. Once we got outside the main gates, it was terrible. It was terrible. Like I said, I’m always surprised that there weren’t civilian casualties. I’d like to think that we curbed our anger and didn’t harm anyone, but we were capable of it.
Rykken: We were talking about this in our prior interview- the very same subject. What’s hard for me, I was growing up during the war and was in high school, is how people weren’t able to differentiate the soldiers when they disagreed with policy.
Thundercloud: I don’t know, there were so many anti-war demonstrations. I don’t know what brought that on. Even today, I look at it and I take a look at people, and fifty years later, there’s a welcome home. I’m like, where the hell were you fifty years ago?
Rykken: Right, the atmosphere seems very different in that regard.
Thundercloud: I received an invitation when they were going to dedicate the wall in Vietnam, and I was still angry. I still get angry today. It wasn’t anything I chose. I went and did what I thought was necessary.
Rykken: Did you go to the wall?
Thundercloud: Eventually, yes. I didn’t go until the 90s, I think.
Rykken: What was that experience?
Thundercloud: Hard. It was very, very difficult for me. It’s still difficult for me.
Rykken: You’ve talked about your war experience other times. The reason I wanted to interview you for this is because I read the article you did earlier. Is it something you talk about often?
Thundercloud: I don’t talk about it very often. If there’s a group of us Vietnam vets that get together, eventually, we’ll talk about our experiences. I think that you know us as Ho-Chunk people. There are times that we are asked to share our stories and our times. Like, when we put a feather on one of our relatives. There are times that a feather is dropped in the arena and there are people, like myself, who have earned the right to retrieve that feather and have to tell a story again. Among our people, that’s about the only time I’ll talk about it. It’s just recently that I’ve started talking to my sons about my experiences. About a month and a half ago, I went to a

reunion with a unit I was. My wife was going to go with me, but then her schedule got a little complicated. I took my son, John, with and met quite a few people, heard quite a few stories. When we left, I talked to him about the things I had experienced. Nothing real horrendous, but I told him some of the things I had done. He was a little bit in awe. He said, "Dad, I was listening to you when you were talking to those other corpsmen and said you guys must have really been something because I saw how those Marines treated you."

Rykken: That must have been a beautiful thing for your son.

Thundercloud: He said those guys really hold you in high esteem.

Rykken: That was part of your life that he really hadn't seen.

Thundercloud: No, and I told him, you've heard them say, "If it wasn't for these guys, I wouldn't be here today." I told them that because they really protected their corpsmen. I couldn't believe the amount of things they did to protect us. It's just amazing how much mutual admiration there is.

Rykken: If possible, what would you want young people to know about war, based on what you have experienced? What do you think would be important for them to know?

Thundercloud: I would hope that they would never ever see war. I see so many of these young people that are in the service now and they say, "I want to go to Afghanistan!" or "I want to go to Iraq!" I tell them to be careful of what you ask for because you just might get it. I see a lot of these young men come back and they're changed. There's a lot of them that I work with now with their PTSD. I try to help them along as well as I can. I try to make them normal. Although, none of us veterans will ever be normal.

Rykken: It's a healing process.

Thundercloud: Yeah, a healing process. I've gone back to Vietnam twice.

Rykken: Wow, I guess I didn't know that.

Thundercloud: I went back initially in 1984.

Rykken: That's before we had the normalization of relations even. I think that happened in the early 90's.

Thundercloud: I also went back two years ago. My wife went with me.

Rykken: That must have been an experience.

Thundercloud: It was quite an experience for her. I think there was nine of us combat veterans. It was quite an experience for her and she was very emotional about it. There were things I didn't share with her. She saw things. We all had stories and I told her, "I was here. This is where I was at." Things were so different when we went back. We got to an area near the DMZ where I had been. When we were there and we were up on the Hill, the Qua Viet river was north of us. That was kind of the marker for the DMZ. The village was down below us. It was just a couple of huts and maybe a population of a couple 100. The population now is well over a million. I didn't recognize anything. We did go up to the

hill where we supposedly were at. There were some concrete hangers there now. From there, we went west and I distinctly remembered those.
Rykken: Why was it important for you to go back? You've gone twice now.
Thundercloud: I'm going again. It's just closure. I just don't feel like I'm done with it yet. Some people will say that I still have PTSD. I don't have as much of as I had 40 or 50 years ago. I've gone through a lot of treatment since. Deanna and I were both talking about getting jobs over there as ESL teachers.
Rykken: Interesting, we asked Al this question too. When you were there, did you have communication with South Vietnamese people much?
Thundercloud: I'm laughing because we had med-caps where they'd take me out into vill and I'd render aid to children, adults, whoever I could. I'd try to clean up their cuts, scrapes, and scratches. Some of them, there was nothing I could do. I told them that they were very, very sick and needed to go to a hospital or see a doctor. That was virtually impossible, but I had a lot of contact with them. I speak Vietnamese.
Rykken: Right, you told me these.
Thundercloud: I speak Vietnamese.
Rykken: You must've learned it while you were there then.
Thundercloud: No, I learned it before I got there. I went to language school.
Rykken: So, here's this Ho-Chunk man speaking Vietnamese? It's a fascinating image I have in my head.
Thundercloud: I look at it kind of funny because when I first spoke Vietnamese with them initially everyone would just laugh. They understood me, but they would just laugh. I became friends with this one little guy. He was probably early teens. 12 or 13 years old. I asked him once why everyone laughs whenever I talk and he told me I talked like a Northerner. I kind of wondered what my teacher was. I later found out that Northern Vietnamese dialect is very educated. It's a proper language. By the time I left, I was down and dirty with the rest of them.
Rykken: Did you ever have the opportunity to work with any of the folks that came back to the States after the war? You know, any of the refugees?
Thundercloud: I think, like most people, and it's taken me years to realize this. When we're at war, we try to dehumanize our enemies. We don't view them as humans. It takes us years to get over that. When I got back, I had a dislike for the Vietnamese. I saw what they had done and what they were doing. I was thinking, you know, that was just totally messed up. I was doing my residency in emergency medicine at the University of Iowa. That was about the time that these boat people were coming it. There was a family that came into the emergency room. None of them spoke English at all. The doctor had no idea what they were saying or what was wrong with them. When he was done talking to them, he came into the office and he just threw his clipboard down. He said, "I don't know what's going on. I don't understand them and they don't understand me. I said, "The grandmother that's laying on the exam table has very severe diarrhea and nausea. She's vomiting and hasn't been able to eat anything for the past couple of days. She can't even drink anything. The doctor looks at me and goes, "How do you know?" I said, "I understand them." He goes, "You understand Vietnamese?" I go, "I speak Vietnamese." He gave me a chart and goes, "They're all yours." At the time, I could've kicked myself in the butt for doing that. A couple weeks later, my mother came down and visited. I relayed the story to her. I don't think she knew how I felt about them. She got very angry. She goes, "I'm going to

tell you something and I'm only going to say it once. You took an oath. Do you remember that oath you took?" I said, "Yes, mom." She says, "They're people. People just like you and I. They come to you for help. You help them."
Rykken: Wisdom of the mother.
Thundercloud: That straightened me out. I never really thought about it. I never thought about the oath that I took. I guess, maybe I did because I did the best I could for them. I looked at them as patients and they were there for help. If I was the one that was to do it, I did it. I didn't like it, but I didn't let it interfere. I never forgot what my mom said.
Rykken: What was your mother's name?
Thundercloud: My mother's name was Irene. She was a nurse.
Rykken: There's the connection.
Thundercloud: I'm very proud of my mother. My mother at 50 years old decided she wanted to be a nurse. So, she became a nurse. I was proud of her. Really, really proud of her.
Rykken: She must've influenced you.
Thundercloud: A little bit.
Rykken: Is there anything else that you'd like to say that we didn't prompt? You've given us a wonderful interview here. It's fantastic.
Thundercloud: My mind gets racing at times like this. You know, I should say this or I want to say this. I think, you know, I should tell them about this. I spent six years in the Navy and I got home in March of 1968. My enlistment wasn't up until January. I still had eight or nine months left to do. They told me that they didn't know what to do with me and that I could get out. Out of the six years I spent in the Navy, I spent five years and three months with the Marines. The majority of my naval career was with the Marines. The Marines considered me a Marine. I never did consider myself a Marine until one day they straightened me out. I don't know what is was. They were asking me if I was going to go to the Marine Corp Ball? I said, "What the hell would I go to the Marine Corp ball for? I'm not a Marine." They said, "God, damn, right you are, Doc, Dega. You're coming with us!" They all considered me to be a Marine. I thought that it was an honor to be considered as one of them. My father was a Marine. I often tell people this. The first Marine we had was Howard Windbowl. Howard Windbowl was my maternal grandmother's brother. He was my grandfather. The second Marine was my father. The third Marine was Mitchell Red Cloud. The fourth Marine was Rick Funmaker.
Rykken: What was your father's name?
Thundercloud: Andrew.
Rykken: There's a sense of loyalty there.
Thundercloud: I always tell people that he was really disappointed when I went into the Navy. When I became a hospital corpsman, he couldn't be prouder of anyone. My father was wounded in Palau. There's a grave with his name on it. I became a hospital corpsman. He was proud because a corpsman saved his life. When I became a corpsman with the Marines, he was so proud. He didn't let me take my uniform off. He'd take me everywhere and go, "This is my son!" He was extremely proud of me. He was the second Marine that the Ho-Chunks had.
Rykken: Where did you say he was wounded at?
Thundercloud: Palau. It was one of the most horrendous wars in the South Pacific that no one even knows about.
Rykken: Those are the worst. Mitchell was there too.

Thundercloud: He was with the Raiders.
Rykken: Then he came home.
Thundercloud: Yeah, and joined the Army. My grandfather was there too, Howard. My grandfather was in World War II. I think that's where the Marine tradition started. There was a good majority of Ho-Chunks that go into the Marines. Why? I don't know.
Rykken: I just talked to Asia Rave. She was out to see her brother, Jeriah Rave. He just finished bootcamp. Well we really appreciate this interview and you coming in. Thank you very much for coming in.
Sampson-Webb: Yes, thank you.
Thundercloud: Now, what was your name again?
Sampson-Webb: Sydney.
Rykken: Like Australia.
Thundercloud: What's your last name?
Sampson-Webb: Sampson-Webb. My mom has the art gallery downtown.
Thundercloud: Oh, yes, yes!
Rykken: Thanks again for coming in, Andy! Can we get a couple of pictures?
Thundercloud: Yes.

Chuck Buswell: Army

Interviewed by: Paul Rykken 11/08/2018
Transcription by: Sydney Sampson-Webb

Rykken: Okay, Chuck, what I'll have you do is give us your name and when you were born?
Buswell: My name is Charles Chuck Buswell. I was born on July 23rd, 1944 in La Crosse. I was raised in the mighty metropolis of Wyeville. My parents ran a general store there for 12 and a half years. When I was a sophomore in high school, they sold their store the year before and they purchased a motel in Tomah. It was not a switch for me because I had been going to the Tomah School District since the seventh grade.

Rykken: From Wyeville?
Buswell: Yes, Wyeville. We were bussed in.
Rykken: So, you were born in 44', so, you were in your twenties before America was fully into Vietnam.
Buswell: Not really, I was in high school. I graduated from high school in 62'. We were just starting to get involved in Vietnam.
Rykken: I guess we'll start at that point. You would have graduated in '62, then you went off to school?
Buswell: Right.
Rykken: Where did you go to school?
Buswell: UW-Eau Claire.
Rykken: And, you had intentions of doing what?
Buswell: Becoming a mortician. I had those thoughts since the eighth grade when my teacher, who...well, most of didn't get along with her. She insisted that we write for career pamphlets. And, I thought well, I'm going to shock her right away. I'm going to write for the ugliest profession I could think of. A mortician. Then, I actually got interested in it and she encouraged me. It turned out her late husband has been a Baptist preacher. She said that it was a noble profession and that I'd fit in it very well. I thought, oh nuts, this failed! Back then, the state of

Wisconsin required that you attend a college for two years and have at least 60 credit hours. Then, you could either apply for a one-year internship or go to mortician school. I chose to do both. I went home after my sophomore year and worked with the local mortician for three months, then went back to school. I did that for three summers in a row. I then went to what was called the Wisconsin Institute of Mortuary Science in Milwaukee. I graduated in 66' and then in 66' and 67' I went to mortician school.
Rykken: Interesting, you have a somewhat different path.
Buswell: Then, I was hired by a large volume funeral home in Racine. When I say large volume, we did close to 300 funerals a year.
Rykken: Wow.
Buswell: Now there is such an interest in cremation. There wasn't back then. The first year I was there, we did 288 funerals. One cremation out of there. The others were all what we called traditional. You know, visitation the night before, funeral the next day. I was so tired all of the time.
Rykken: It's a lot of work.
Buswell: It was a lot of work, alright, but it was a good experience. I was there for two years before I was drafted into the army.
Rykken: So, when were you drafted?
Buswell: It was July 28th of 1969.
Rykken: My immediate question that comes to mind on that is could you have been deferred?
Buswell: Yes, I was deferred. I had an occupational deferment for years. Then, you have student deferment for five. So, I was deferred for seven years. At that point, I was becoming an old man. I was 25 years old. I didn't have it as bad as my buddy, who was a year ahead of me in high school. We got drafted the same day. He was 26. Both of us were married at the time.
Rykken: I should know this, but what is the oldest one could be to be drafted. I'd have to look that up.
Buswell: I'd have to look it up to. It seems like it was 32.
Rykken: Yeah, that sounds about right. To me, it was lower than that I think in World War II era.
Buswell: I think in the World War II era it was like 35. My dad was 32 and they were about to draft him and he enlisted in the Coast Guard.
Rykken: So, this is 1969. I'm interested in the fact that you were going into a profession and were involved. At the same time, I'm interested that you would have been quite aware of Vietnam.
Buswell: Very much so. Not only from the news but also from working in a funeral home. In a city that was heavily populated like that, we were doing a lot of funerals from casualties from Vietnam. At that time, I started feeling guilty. Why am I any better? I wasn't going to fight if I got drafted. I wasn't going to enlist for three or four years, but I would do the two.
Rykken: Let's back up on that a little. That's kind of fascinating in itself. What was the process of the young man getting killed in Vietnam and ending up with you? How did that work? What I'm interested in how that played out. Well, the remains would be sent home.
Buswell: They would be sent home in a government-issued casket and were just hired by the government to do the funeral.
Rykken: And, what city were you in again?
Buswell: Racine.

Rykken: Racine, then that's a good size venue.
Buswell: To see these families torn apart...most of these returnees were a little bit older, like myself, and were married. You have to deal with these young widows. Sometimes, children were involved.
Rykken: Which makes me wonder now, were you married?
Buswell: Yes.
Rykken: When did you get married?
Buswell: In 67', right after I graduated from mortician school.
Rykken: That adds another dimension to it. You were married and you were in a career, and you were seeing soldiers returning. There's a lot of things going on there. That's very interesting, and I'm sure you thought about that a lot.

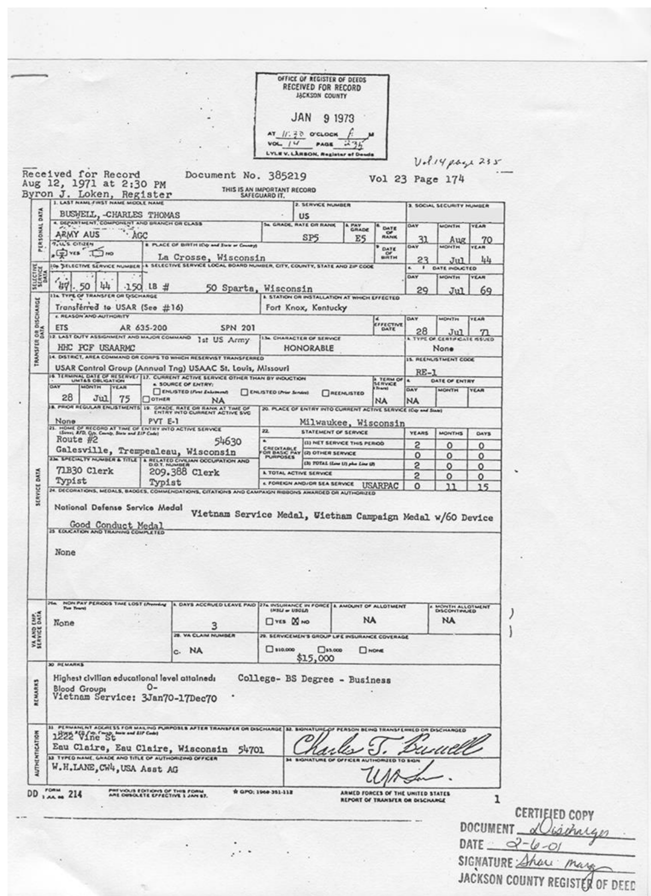
Buswell: It was interesting to be able to talk to the escorts too. Each time one of these casualties was returned to the hometown, he was accompanied by a military man of the same rank. To talk to some of these young men that were having doubts about Vietnam and all of this. You know, these were stateside soldiers who hadn't seen the action overseas. I say men

returning as casualties because, in those two years that I worked in that funeral home, we never had a female casualty.
Rykken: Just to put it in perspective from where I sitting. I was 10 years old in 1967 and my dad, because he was a clergyman, on occasion, would be brought along with military people to go inform the parent. He always said that was one of the really horrible things that he experienced.
Buswell: I'm sure it was. The family always knew when they saw the military car pull up in the front and two officers get out.
Rykken: I distinctly remember the day when two officers came to our house. I didn't really understand what was going on with anything. That's really, really interesting. So, let's talk about when you were drafted and what happened next. What was the next step?
Buswell: There were 50 of us in our inductee class. My buddy, Pat, and I sat side by side after we had passed the physical. 50 of us were sitting around. They announced that 48 of us would be going into the Army and two into the Marine Corps. I poke Pat and I go, "I hear the names now, Buswell and Risner." He said, "Will you shut up?" I had a good laugh over that. We dodged a bullet. The first two names that were called were the guys going in the Marine Corps. Pat and I got sent to Fort Campbell, Kentucky for basic training. While we were there, they kind of gave us a choice of military careers. I hadn't been licensed to do mortuary work in Vietnam. Furthermore, most of the work was being done by civilians who were under government contract.
Rykken: I didn't think about that either, that's interesting.
Buswell: I thought if I accept...They wanted me to, first of all, go into integration registration with my background and funeral work. I said I just as soon decline. They said, "Well, based on your record here, you qualify to either be a clerk, a mechanic, or a cook. I thought I'd like to be a mechanic to learn a different trade. They said, "No, you're going to go to clerk school." I had a business administration degree in addition to the mortician degree and licensing.
Rykken: You were a different recruit. There were a lot of different things going on there. It's interesting. So, you're going to be a clerk? Then what?
Buswell: After eight weeks at Fort Campbell, I was sent to Fort Leonard Wood for clerk school. There was a week gap in there, which was probably one of the longest weeks in my life waiting for school to start. The school didn't start right away at the end of our graduation from basic.
Rykken: So, you were just at Fort Campbell waiting?
Buswell: Waiting, yes.
Rykken: Then you went out to Leonard Wood.
Buswell: Yes, correct. I spent most of my time at Leonard Wood driving truck. The school was a self-study college graduate. It was easy peasy and it didn't take me long to get through the lessons. I had also driven truck in basic a little bit, not as much as clerk school.
Rykken: Let me back up a little bit from that. We'll leave you in the truck here. Let's go back to basic. Was basic training what you had expected?
Buswell: It was not quite as hard as I expected, but it was difficult. I was 25 years old. I hadn't done anything physical like that for eight years since high school.
Rykken: The physicality of it was tough? Was it mentally and emotionally difficult? Were they the whole "rah, rah" type deal?
Buswell: Not really, it wasn't so much.

Rykken: One of the other interviews we did, he had a very short kind of training, and then all of a sudden got thrown into it. Were they were in a hurry to process people through?
Buswell: No, it didn't seem that way.
Rykken: How long did basic last?
Buswell: 8 weeks, as did clerk school.
Rykken: Now, you're about four months in there. So, once you've completed clerk school, what was the next step?
Buswell: I went home for leave. I think that was about three weeks and then was told to Fort Lewis on the first of January. It was a nice way to start the new year, knowing that you're going to Vietnam, but they were sending clerks to either one of two places, either Korea or Vietnam. I prayed that I'd get sent to Vietnam because I can't stand the cold. Korea has horrible, tough winters.
Rykken: So, this would have been January one of 1970?
Buswell: Yes.
Rykken: Were your prayers answered?
Buswell: Yes, for sure.
Rykken: You went to Vietnam, where you could be warmer.
Buswell: Right, leaving a wife at home. She'd moved back home with her parents. Ruth was an elementary school teacher, she had taught first of all, in Waukesha when I was in mortician school. We got married and she taught two years in Racine. So, she moved in with her parents. We moved over all of our meager belongings in with them. She was a substitute teacher while I was gone.
Rykken: So, January 1st of 1970, you report to Fort Lewis, and how long were you there?
Buswell: Two days, then I was shipped off on plane. Landed in Cameron Bay.
Rykken: I have a map here if you want to just point out to me where you were.
Buswell: Let's see, Cameron Bay.
Rykken: Here's Da Nang. I'll let you look at it a second.
Buswell: Cameron Bay, right here.
Rykken: Way down south.
Buswell: I've always had trouble with night vision. This was just a temporary facility. I overheard some of the other guys talking about having to pull defense or guard duty. I was thinking, "Oh my, I hope I don't have to do that. I won't be able to see him until he's right up on me."
Rykken: So, how long were you there?
Buswell: Just overnight. Well, actually, not even a full day. We landed in the morning. That evening there was hostile firing going on. They were moving troops during the evening. Flying us from Cameron Bay into Bien Hoa, which is close to Saigon. Then, the next day they trucked us all down to Tan Son Nhut, which is a suburb of Saigon. Again, I spent about a day there, and the next day, we had temporary quarters and a runner came in and said, "Is Buswell here?" I said, "Yes." He told me I was supposed to report next door for an interview. It turned out to be the officer's assignments branch of the military assistance command. We were assigning newly arrived officers into the four provinces in Vietnam.
Rykken: So, you went there and that's where your work started?
Buswell: I stayed there for 11 months and 15 days. So, that was probably the fifth of January 1978 that I started there. Again, I was assignments clerk.

Rykken: Okay, and what did that mean?
Buswell: Next to my desk sat a captain. He would be given the names and social security numbers and ranks of all officers coming in. Then he told me how many he wanted to go where, and which ones were going to which of the four provinces. I would take those names down. I can't remember how the little process went, but there was another office I had take them to, and they would cut orders. Every time you had a transfer, you had about 20 copies of the same thing. You'd go to supply clerk and give them your orders, and he'd give you what kind of equipment you needed for that job
Rykken: So, you were in an administrative sort of thing?
Buswell: After about three months, the fellow that I was replacing left and they had given him a kind of cushy job doing specialized typing and reports. That was much easier. The only problem was that we were using typewriters and there was no spell check on the typewriters. Everything had to be done letter perfect. You'd be almost through writing a letter, discover a typo, and have to start all over.
Rykken: Reminds me of my college days. That's how typing was before we had all of this fancy stuff.
Buswell: The frustrating part was I never could realize how many relatives of senior ranking officers there were coming into Vietnam. Once or twice a week, we'd get a letter from someone addressed to General Abrams, who was our commanding officer. They were always the same. "Dear General Abrams, I am the son in law of General Smith and I'm just wondering what my assignments going to be in Vietnam. I have my orders." That would generate a whole series of papers. It was kind of like doing a term paper, only it was tabbed. So, it'd start out "Tab, tab, A." is what the cover sheet would read is a letter from Lieutenant Jones to General Abrams asking what is the assignment. "Tab, tab, B" is the course of action. "Tab, tab, C" is General Abrams response. The major in our office who is in charge of us would write the letter on behalf of General Abrams. When I finished typing all of this with the tabs and everything, it went over to our sergeant's desk. If he found a mistake, it'd come back to me. It passed him the second time, it went over to the major. The same thing though, if the major decided he wanted to change something, it would come back to my desk. From my desk, it went up the kernel's office, who was in charge of officer's assignments. If he saw something wrong with it, he'd send it back too. It would sometimes take a full week before we got that letter.
Rykken: You're reminding me of the bureaucracy of the Army. It's amazing.
Buswell: I often question if General Abrams ever read any letters at all. The premise was we never knew from one day to the next where we were sending people, and that was the basic line. At one point, I was typing these letters, I had a sample book and I'd read the letter that came to the office. I'd go through the sample book and go, "Oh, this letter fits the way that was written." I'd take that and type it up and take it down to the duplicating office and they'd run off several copies and a major would sign them and send them out.
Rykken: So, the process you were involved in there was assigning officers to different areas?
Buswell: Yes, different areas. Supposedly, this was a joint command of the Air Force, Army, Navy, and Marine Corps. During the first year that I was there, I saw very low involvement of Navy and Marine Corps, and it was basically just Air Force and Army.
Rykken: While you're doing this work day to day, you're in an office setting.

Buswell: Yes, the MACV headquarters was quite a large building. It was kind of a temporary steel building. Our little building was located close to there but in a different little complex. It had been an old hotel. I don't know, I never could figure out what our office actually had been but most of it was like an open ballroom on our floor. That was where they enlisted people.
Rykken: I'm going to guess that a lot of your days were kind of routine and boring.
Buswell: They were.
Rykken: You're doing that over and over again, and you're doing 11 months of it.
Buswell: Fortunately, there was a refrigerator in the enlisted area and you could go out and buy a soda pop. It cost the company 10 cents a can and they were selling cans for 20 cents. They were losing their shirts because no one was keeping track of it. A major asked a buddy of mine and me to keep track of it and watch people. We'd catch the people who were paying their 2 cents. 10 cents a piece, it was amazing how much money you could accumulate. We bought baseball uniforms with that money. We bought softball uniforms.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THIS IS AN IMPORTANT RECORD
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PERSONAL DATA
1. LAST NAME-FIRST NAME-MIDDLE NAME: BUSWELL, CHARLES THOMAS
2. SERVICE NUMBER: US
3. SOCIAL SECURITY NUMBER:
4. DEPARTMENT, COMPONENT AND BRANCH OR CLASS: ARMY AUS AGC
5a. GRADE, RATE OR RANK: SP5
b. PAY GRADE: E5
6. DATE OF RANK: DAY 31 MONTH Aug YEAR 70
7. U.S. CITIZEN: YES [X] NO [ ]
8. PLACE OF BIRTH (City and State or Country): La Crosse, Wisconsin
9. DATE OF BIRTH: DAY 23 MONTH Jul YEAR 44

SELECTIVE SERVICE DATA
10a. SELECTIVE SERVICE NUMBER: 47 50 44 150
b. SELECTIVE SERVICE LOCAL BOARD NUMBER, CITY, COUNTY, STATE AND ZIP CODE: LB # 50 Sparta, Wisconsin
c. DATE INDUCTED: DAY 29 MONTH Jul YEAR 69

TRANSFER OR DISCHARGE DATA
11a. TYPE OF TRANSFER OR DISCHARGE: Transferred to USAR (See #16)
b. STATION OR INSTALLATION AT WHICH EFFECTED: Fort Knox, Kentucky
c. REASON AND AUTHORITY: ETS AR 635-200 SPN 201
d. EFFECTIVE DATE: DAY 28 MONTH Jul YEAR 71
12. LAST DUTY ASSIGNMENT AND MAJOR COMMAND: HHC PCF USAARMC 1st US Army
13a. CHARACTER OF SERVICE: HONORABLE
b. TYPE OF CERTIFICATE ISSUED: None
14. DISTRICT, AREA COMMAND OR CORPS TO WHICH RESERVIST TRANSFERRED: USAR Control Group (Annual Tng) USAAC St. Louis, Missouri
15. REENLISTMENT CODE: RE-1

SERVICE DATA
16. TERMINAL DATE OF RESERVE/UMT&S OBLIGATION: DAY 28 MONTH Jul YEAR 75
17. CURRENT ACTIVE SERVICE OTHER THAN BY INDUCTION
a. SOURCE OF ENTRY: [ ] ENLISTED (First Enlistment) [ ] ENLISTED (Prior Service) [ ] REENLISTED [ ] OTHER NA
b. TERM OF SERVICE (Years): NA
c. DATE OF ENTRY: DAY NA MONTH YEAR
18. PRIOR REGULAR ENLISTMENTS: None
19. GRADE, RATE OR RANK AT TIME OF ENTRY INTO CURRENT ACTIVE SVC: PVT E-1
20. PLACE OF ENTRY INTO CURRENT ACTIVE SERVICE (City and State): Milwaukee, Wisconsin
21. HOME OF RECORD AT TIME OF ENTRY INTO ACTIVE SERVICE (Street, RFD, City, County, State and ZIP Code): Route #2 Galesville, Trempealeau, Wisconsin 54630
23a. SPECIALTY NUMBER & TITLE: 71B30 Clerk Typist
b. RELATED CIVILIAN OCCUPATION AND D.O.T. NUMBER: 209.388 Clerk Typist

22. STATEMENT OF SERVICE		YEARS	MONTHS	DAYS
a. CREDITABLE FOR BASIC PAY PURPOSES	(1) NET SERVICE THIS PERIOD	2	0	0
	(2) OTHER SERVICE	0	0	0
	(3) TOTAL (Line (1) plus Line (2))	2	0	0
b. TOTAL ACTIVE SERVICE		2	0	0
c. FOREIGN AND/OR SEA SERVICE	USARPAC	0	11	15

24. DECORATIONS, MEDALS, BADGES, COMMENDATIONS, CITATIONS AND CAMPAIGN RIBBONS AWARDED OR AUTHORIZED: National Defense Service Medal Vietnam Service Medal, Vietnam Campaign Medal w/60 Device Good Conduct Medal
25. EDUCATION AND TRAINING COMPLETED: None

VA AND EMP. SERVICE DATA
26a. NON-PAY PERIODS TIME LOST (Preceding Two Years): None
b. DAYS ACCRUED LEAVE PAID: 3
27a. INSURANCE IN FORCE (NSLI or USGLI): [ ] YES [X] NO
b. AMOUNT OF ALLOTMENT: NA
c. MONTH ALLOTMENT DISCONTINUED: NA
28. VA CLAIM NUMBER: C- NA
29. SERVICEMEN'S GROUP LIFE INSURANCE COVERAGE: [ ] $10,000 [ ] $5,000 [ ] NONE $15,000

REMARKS
30. REMARKS: Highest civilian educational level attained: College- BS Degree - Business
Blood Group: O-
Vietnam Service: 3Jan70-17Dec70

AUTHENTICATION
31. PERMANENT ADDRESS FOR MAILING PURPOSES AFTER TRANSFER OR DISCHARGE (Street, RFD, City, County, State and ZIP Code): 1222 Vine St Eau Claire, Eau Claire, Wisconsin 54701
32. SIGNATURE OF PERSON BEING TRANSFERRED OR DISCHARGED: Charles T. Buswell
33. TYPED NAME, GRADE AND TITLE OF AUTHORIZING OFFICER: W.H.LANE,CW4,USA Asst AG
34. SIGNATURE OF OFFICER AUTHORIZED TO SIGN:

DD FORM 1 JUL 66 214 PREVIOUS EDITIONS OF THIS FORM ARE OBSOLETE EFFECTIVE 1 JAN 67. GPO: 1969-351-112 ARMED FORCES OF THE UNITED STATES REPORT OF TRANSFER OR DISCHARGE 1

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DOCUMENT Discharge
DATE 2-6-01
SIGNATURE
JACKSON COUNTY REGISTER OF DEEDS

Rykken: What was the other part of your day? Besides work, what did you do?
Buswell: About three afternoons or mornings I would spend a couple hours, because again I had my military driver's license, so I would take the company car and probably four other recruits and we'd go shopping for soda pop for our refrigerator because you could only buy two cases at a time. One day, one of the guys complained. He said, "You know Buswell if we bought more, we could do this all in one day versus three." I said, "What don't you like about getting out of the office?"
Rykken: It was a diversion for you.
Buswell: It was a diversion alright. Some of my day was spent doing reports telling how many people were here and there, but I could never figure out casualty reports every day. By the end of the month, my figures were so far off I would have to go down to what they call the mourning report section and there was a buddy of mine from Madison who was heavy into marijuana and his eyebrows we're almost up to his hairline all of the time. He was so bug-eyed, but he was the only one in the mourning report section that could give me a straight answer. So once a month I'd go down and meet with him and we get those figures straightened out.
Rykken: Why were the figures off?
Buswell: I could never figure out why. Whether the company clerks weren't doing their jobs and sending in the figures like they should have been, I don't know.

Rykken: I don't know if you know this or not, but would it have been easy to locate a soldier that was in the field somewhere or was that quite easy?
Buswell: That would've been very easy.
Rykken: Okay, I feel like I've studied in World War II and that was not the case.
Buswell: No, telephone service wasn't the greatest. You'd pick up the line. It was like a party line, and someone would cut in new. And you'd have to say, "Working, working, working!" to get them off the line because the reception would start going down.
Rykken: Were soldiers that were in combat situations coming in your area at all?
Buswell: Yes, a lot of them had come in because that was the Air Force base. Also, the US troops were flying in and out of there all of the time. I waited until October to meet Ruth in Hawaii for what they called "rest and recuperation."
Rykken: How long were you there?
Buswell: A week. We never left Honolulu.
Rykken: I bet that was a relief.
Buswell: I had never told her. She knew I had been driving truck and whatnot in basic and also clerk school. I hadn't told her that I was driving in downtown Saigon, which was just unreal. An officer would want to go someplace and I would take them.
Rykken: It was chaotic.
Buswell: It slipped out one day when I was like, "Man, this is like driving in downtown Saigon!" I was in Honolulu, where the traffic was terrible, but nothing like that.
Rykken: Obviously, you had a lot of people there.
Buswell: Yes, mopeds, motorcycles, buses, cars, and trucks.
Rykken: In light of that, did you have much contact with Vietnamese people?
Buswell: Yes. Quite a bit.
Rykken: Okay. And when did that happen?
Buswell: Well, it's kind of like affirmative action. We had to have so many Vietnamese nationals working. Most of them were female. Janitorial services were done by Vietnamese males. We had one gal assigned to her office. Nice gal, but I never could figure out what she did. She typed all day long, but I never saw any results. She was kind of our go-to gal if we wanted something special off the local market. She'd come in, we'd give her a little bit of money and she'd stop and buy a fruit.
Rykken: Could she speak English?
Buswell: Oh, yes. More so if she wanted something.
Rykken: Oh yeah?
Buswell: We were kind of clowning around one day and she said, "You know, I'd like to get married to a GI and go to the land of the big PX." I said, "Well, I'll write the ad for you, and put it on the company bulletin board over in headquarters." She said, "Put on there 'Must be Captain or higher rank'."
Rykken: In the setting and the whole situation you were in, you must have had trouble processing all of this. Was the reality of the war present day to day?
Buswell: You could hear bombing, but it was always far away. I don't know if the story was true or not, but the only time our unit came under attack was during TET of 68'. We only had one injury. Someone got excited and shot his buddy in the rear end. Of course, he survived. For the first three months, every other month, we had guard duty at night. That was hard. The first time,

I was a rifleman, and again, with my night vision problems standing there and the perimeter looking out...after while I started managing things. It was two hours on and two hours off. The second time, this would be the third month there, I was a grenade launcher. I had a sawed-off shotgun and they put these great big shotgun shells. I was supposed to figure out where the target was. It was in metrics. It kind of reminded me of trying to shoot a slingshot. The trajectory wasn't straight- it was up and over. Fortunately, my position was next to a chimney under an office building. There was a staff sergeant, a young man, who was in charge of me and he was so out of shape. I'd be up there long before he was. Then, he'd come up huffing and puffing. Then, they suddenly decided that the MP should take over guard duty. I always question how effective that was because one of those guard towers was right outside our sleeping area. In the mornings, you'd often hear, "Hey, Joe! Joe, Joe! Wake up, it's time for breakfast!" You'd often wonder how long Joe had been asleep.

Rykken: Interesting.

Buswell: We were on our quarters. We're in a three story steel, temporary building. The officers mess was on the first floor and then sleeping quarters for the enlisted in the second and third, and I think there were like nine double bunks in each area. That was interesting. We had maid service. You were supposed to provide a can of starch, spray starch, a box of laundry detergent, and a container of shoe polish. Plus, you had to give her $8 dollars a month. For that she'd shine your boots, do your laundry, and make your bunk. With 10 GI's, she was making 80 bucks a month. Some maids made more than that though because they would sell shoe polish and other items on the black market. One day, and it was a hot job, we'd get locked into this little outdoor cubicle. There was two ovens in there and you'd have to go through. You couldn't have anything more than a little scrap of paper left. When you got through, you'd be hot and dusty and you'd be sweating. One day, I went back to take a shower and I walked into the shower room and there was one of the maids doing the laundry on the floor of the shower room. She wasn't using any soap, and you know, they had wash racks outside. Some of the guys were complaining of itching and scratching. I didn't lose my cool with her, but I told her to get outside with that and to start using soap.

Rykken: While you were there, were you in good health?

Buswell: Yes.

Rykken: You didn't have any trouble with anything?

Buswell: Nope, I never had to go on sick call. The only downside was where my office desk sat. It was in front of a high mounted air conditioner. You get used to something. Every once and awhile, it would go out and the guys around me would just laugh because I would sweat profusely.

Rykken: Let me kind of transition a little bit here. You were doing 11 months, but then what was the next step?

Buswell: The first part of December 1970, I was given an option. I could either chose to go home to the states and get reassigned or I could extend my enlistment by three months and then go home and be permanently discharged. I thought that it'd been a good tour, why rock the boat? Christmas was coming up. I was married, in love. I thought anything stateside has to be better than this. We had enlistment redeployment. That section was ran by a major called Tony the Touch. If you scratched Tony's back, he'd do something for you. I had orders for returning to Fort Leonard Wood which probably at that time was one of the meanest and toughest posts. I

went to him and asked what I could do for him to get my orders changed. He asked me where I wanted to go. I told him that I'd like to go to Fort Sheridan. He asked me, "Well, why there?" I told him that I was a funeral director and I know they were always short of help at the funeral home I worked at before I was drafted. He said, "Sure, no problem!" I asked him, "Well, now what do I have to do for you?" He said, "Well, you and your buddy have all of those recordings, primarily of The Beatles. I have a teenage son and he'd love those recordings. Could you make tapes of those?" So, that's what we did. We spent a couple days making tapes. He got my orders changed. On the 18th of December, I got to San Francisco and they told me that they weren't accepting anybody else for Fort Sheridan. They said that I should go home and they'd give me a call. Well, sure enough, two weeks later, I got a call asking if I'd like to go to Fort Dix, New Jersey, Fort Ord, California, or Fort Knox. I chose Knox and I became a company clerk at a company that was processing people for dishonorable discharges and hardship discharges. They would round up AWOL victims and bring that handcuffed two by two. There was a 115 people in our company. Most of them were people that had been rehabbed or that had gone AWOL. Some continued to go AWOL. I never finished one complete report because the guys would stay well for a couple of days, then come back, and you were just starting the paperwork.
Rykken: How long were you at Fort Knox?
Buswell: I was there for six months, then I processed out of there. That would have been 1971.
Rykken: I want to kind of shift back to a little different topic here. When you came back, how were you sort of processing the world as it was in terms of how to country had reacted to war? Were you just living your life day to day? Was that affecting you in any way?
Buswell: There was a lot of anti-sentiment. It was kind of winding down for me. I thought I'd encounter a lot coming home from clerk school. I ended up in Madison, and was walking around in my uniform at the Capitol. There was no reaction from anyone.
Rykken: Two years earlier it probably would have been different.
Buswell: They probably would have been stoning me, calling me a baby killer.
Rykken: That gets me into the next part. I just want to get your take on this. Were you upset by the war or were you upset by the way the war had been prosecuted? Or were you sort of living your life?
Buswell: I guess was more living my life. I'm not gonna go by someone else's opinion that this is all wrong. I went over there with an open mind. Another guy in the office said to me, "Chuck, if you had to do it over again. Would you come over here?" I said, "Let me think about that for a day or two." Couple of days later. I said, "You know, answer your question. I don't think that would I said, this is worthless. We're never going to win this situation. We're just losing people. Right and left."
Rykken: With that sentiment, did you feel anger toward the government or anger toward the way the war was being approached?
Buswell: Yes, because this was a third generation war and I couldn't see any way out. The Vietnamese civilians had become almost totally dependent on us. What were these people going to do once we pull out? Vietnam went on. The communist threat wasn't as bad as they thought it was going to be.
Rykken: While you were growing up, had you absorbed the whole world view of the Cold War somewhat?

Buswell: I grew up in that era. My parents were not pleased with the education I was receiving in the public school in Wyeville. My dad was a big push for consolidation. We only had two classrooms and they were overcrowded. Once they signed into the Tomah School District, the seventh and eighth grade went to Tomah. I'm not going to use any names but there was a fellow from up in this area was a neighbor of ours who started accusing different people including our superintendent of schools of being a communist. That sent some red flags.
Rykken: What year was that?
Buswell: It would have been about 58' or 59'. McCarthyism was rapid you know there was a lot of fear over the Cold War.
Rykken: McCarthy died in 57' but that whole atmosphere was still there.
Buswell: I was always surprised that fellow never got sued. He was a local businessman and would tell everyone that came into his store that the superintendent of schools was a communist. Why he had it in for him is beyond me.
Rykken: I wonder what he was basing that on. It's very interesting. I asked about your view on the war at the time because it doesn't feel to me like when I'm talking to you that there was a feeling in your mind about a crusade of any kind.
Buswell: No.
Rykken: You were just in the circumstance.
Buswell: I was there. I don't know if everyone was as naive as I was about the whole situation. I looked at my orders and saw MACV. You know, this was before computers, Paul, and I had no reason or way to look up what MACV even was. Fortunately, I flew from La Crosse on the first of January to Seattle. A lifelong family friend was on the same flight. She asked me where I was staying. I told her I was staying with some relatives in the Seattle area. She was flying out to see her daughter who happened to be an old girlfriend of mine. There had been a new baby and the husband was in the Army also. She said that Laurel and her husband could take me over there. Laurel, her husband, their new baby, my duffel bag, and me were all crammed into a Volkswagen Beetle.
Rykken: That's a classic from the period, right?
Buswell: Yes. Laurel's husband asked me what my orders were. He looked at my orders and told me that I couldn't get a better assignment than MACV. He had just returned and had been an interpreter in MACV.
Rykken: Wow. So, in the years after, did you stay in touch with people? Were you a reunion person?
Buswell: My one buddy, Steve. We worked in the same office and did everything together. We promised each other we would never lose touch. I took his field jacket. That was going to be the common thread. We'd meet up some place in the future and he'd get the field jacket back. He finally wrote to me a couple years later and said it's not going to work.

Rykken: It was a good thought, but the emotions drifted away.
Buswell: Yes, in the heat of the moment you can make all these promises, but we lost touch. He was from the Quad City area.
Rykken: I was in high school when the last American troops were brought home. The war ended when I was senior in 75'. When it ended, and when all that was happening toward the end of it, were you following that closely?
Buswell: I was following it pretty closely because I still hadn't received my permit discharge yet. It wasn't until July of 75' that it arrived. I have that proudly framed in my man cave.
Rykken: Was there a feeling or a sense of disappointment at how it ended?
Buswell: It was. I put in 11 months and 15 days in, you know, for what? We didn't accomplish anything.
Rykken: If you don't mind me asking, did you have feelings one way or the other at all of Lyndon Johnson or Richard Nixon?
Buswell: No, I didn't until afterwards. A war economy is always a good economy for the States. My parents had a general store during the Korean War and they did very well then.
Rykken: Those are confusing aspects of war.
Buswell: I would get down in the dumps when I was in Vietnam. Just about the time, I don't know if it was divine providence or what, but I would get sent over to the third field hospital, which is right there in Tan Son Nhut, and I'd see fellows with wounds, limbs missing, and I'd have a reality check with myself all of sudden. I was totally a different person when I came out of there.
Rykken: You saw the tragedy of it for sure. You'd seen some before with your mortician work.
Buswell: I can remember walking down the street in our complex and meeting an enlistee with the same rank as me who had been on the field and his uniform was not pressed. It had been days since it'd been washed. His boots were the same model as what I was wearing, but they were all scuffed up. I wanted to go like this and scuff mine up a little bit and wrinkle up my uniform.
Rykken: You were counting your blessings, but did you ever feel any remorse or anything about not being out in the field?
Buswell: A little bit, but I was so grateful. I remember my interview was with the surgeon in the office I eventually ended up in. He was from South Carolina and there was a lot of racism going on. He was asking me pointed questions about how I felt about the blacks, which had nothing to do with this job. I was thinking, man, I hope I don't blow it. "How do you feel about the blacks?" Well, I'd had some bad experiences in clerk school. We had some soul brothers. They had the pick combs and giant music. I'd be pulling guard duty in the evening and then trying to sleep. They'd be in there slamming their lockers. I was starting to have strange feelings about the

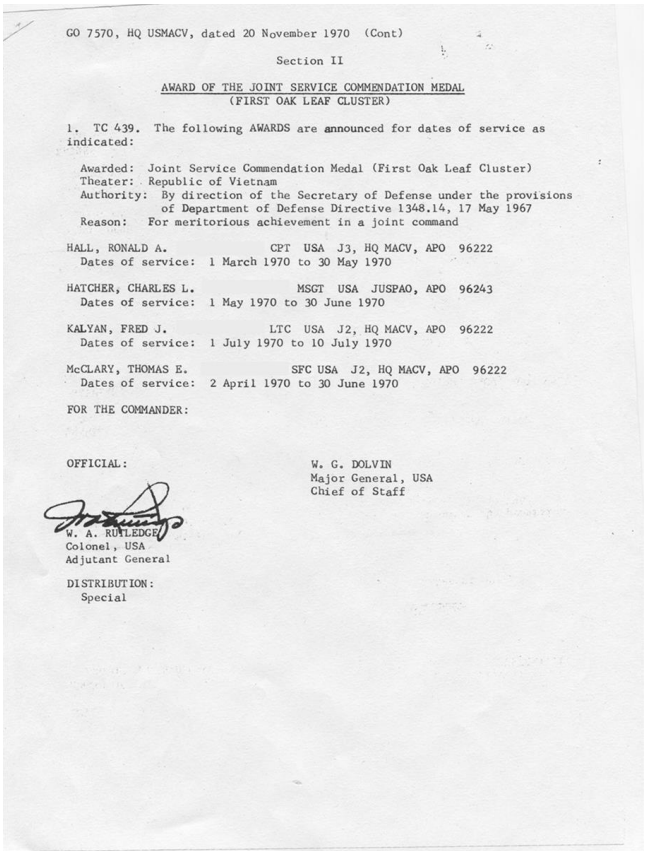
blacks. “How do you feel about them?” I said, “I guess at this point, Sergeant, I can them or leave them. He called over to the captain, and said, “Captain Mason, we found one of ours.” Captain Mason pulled out a confederate flag and said, “We hired a man. One of ours.” Our Colonel saw him do that. Colonel apparently saw it once too often. His replacement was a black man. The nicest guy. Charles’s only fault was that he was a PX junkie. If one of us went to the PX, he’d go, “They have anything new in the camera line?” He was always trading up. He had enough rank, so he could stay downtown in a fancy hotel. There was never one good enough for him. I think I helped him move three times. Finally, I said, “Sergeant Pinkston, I’m not going to help you. I’m sorry if it’s a direct order, but I’m going to disobey it because I’m not going to help you move again. Everytime I do, you have more stuff.”

Rykken: The other question that comes to mind there...My father was a World War II veteran. He was a tail gunner on B-25. The war service for him was an important part of his life. He enlisted and you enlisted, but how do you feel at that time or how do you feel now about the draft?

Buswell: I think the draft is good.

Rykken: He did, too. I just wanted to ask.

Buswell: Yeah, I've had nephews who would be better people today. One regrets it dearly that he never served because he’s now a border guard and can’t make rank because of no military experience. He’s married, three youngsters, 35 years old- too late for him.



GO 7570, HQ USMACV, dated 20 November 1970 (Cont)

Section II

AWARD OF THE JOINT SERVICE COMMENDATION MEDAL
(FIRST OAK LEAF CLUSTER)

1. TC 439. The following AWARDS are announced for dates of service as indicated:

Awarded: Joint Service Commendation Medal (First Oak Leaf Cluster)
Theater: Republic of Vietnam
Authority: By direction of the Secretary of Defense under the provisions of Department of Defense Directive 1348.14, 17 May 1967
Reason: For meritorious achievement in a joint command

HALL, RONALD A. CPT USA J3, HQ MACV, APO 96222
Dates of service: 1 March 1970 to 30 May 1970

HATCHER, CHARLES L. MSGT USA JUSPAO, APO 96243
Dates of service: 1 May 1970 to 30 June 1970

KALYAN, FRED J. LTC USA J2, HQ MACV, APO 96222
Dates of service: 1 July 1970 to 10 July 1970

McCLARY, THOMAS E. SFC USA J2, HQ MACV, APO 96222
Dates of service: 2 April 1970 to 30 June 1970

FOR THE COMMANDER:

OFFICIAL:

W. G. DOLVIN
Major General, USA
Chief of Staff

W. A. RUTLEDGE
Colonel, USA
Adjutant General

DISTRIBUTION:
Special

Rykken: My dad’s take on the draft was that it brought people together. It was very democratic, in a sense, except, of course, there were a lot of deferments. My son, he’s been in the military since 2003, is not in favor of the draft. They have two different takes on it. Jake’s take is that he doesn’t want people to be there that don’t want to be there.

Buswell: My take on it is you get some of the best that you’d never get before. With enlistments only, you get some people that can’t do anything else.

Rykken: It’s a complicated question. The war, in a way, snuffed the draft. We had an all volunteer force in 74’. I guess I’m in the line of thinking that there should be some sort of national service of something great. I don’t know what that would be, but I think that would be a worthy thing for our government to do.

Buswell: Not necessarily training people to go out and kill.

Rykken: Right, some sort of service because we do have two to three generations that don’t have a real sense of that. I think it’s important.

Buswell: I thought it was strange and kind of pathetic that in basic training, they didn't teach hunter safety or gun safety. We would have these exercises where we'd pile out of a truck and we'd be pretending that we were shooting each other? I thought, if this was a real situation, what would happen? Some of those guys had never handled a rifle of any sort before. I had been taught by neighbors and my dad how to handle firearms.
Rykken: Do you want to say a little bit about what you brought?
Buswell: Let's start with the ribbons. This is the National Defense ribbon. That proves that I was in for 120 days. Anyone that served in the military gets one of these. This the Vietnamese medal proving that I served at least 60 days in Vietnam. This is the one that I'm proudest the most of. This is a Joint Service Commendation Medal for doing an extra job. An outstanding job being faithful to the cause. This is a campaign ribbon from Vietnam. Then, there's another little one that goes along with each of these. You'd wear them on a suit coat or what not. I often wear my commendation. Once in a while, I'll get asked about them, but usually not. These are...
Rykken: A source of pride?
Buswell: Yes. They awarded these to me in November. This is the citation too. When anyone from our office was going home, we'd all chip in and have a local trophy shop. This lists all of the fellows that I was with. This is a shoulder patch or the emblem for unity. The wall represents the Great Wall of China. It's bent inward, holding the aggressor out. The sword represents the US forces standing guard at the entrance of the wall. The orange, red, yellow are the Vietnamese colors.
Rykken: What about this?
Buswell: This is my proudest accomplishment. This is my 214 discharge paper.
Rykken: Yes, wow. We'll make sure to get all back to you in a timely matter. We'll scan it and get it back right away. Is there anything else that you want to add?
Buswell: Yes, I want to show my challenge coins. Are you familiar with challenge coins?
Rykken: No, I'm not.
Buswell: Anyone that has served in the military supposedly carries a challenge coin that shows his unit branch of service or whatever. If you go into a restaurant and order a soft drink or anything stronger, and you meet up with someone. You say, I challenge you, show me your challenge coin. If he doesn't have his coin with him, he owes you a cup of coffee. If you're in a bar, he owes you a drink. I carry two just to be on the safe side. This is my MACV coin and this is my Vietnam Wall coin.
Rykken: Those are your prized possessions.
Buswell: Yes, I carry them with me all the time. I've only been challenged once. The guy that challenged me did it because I'm on the local American Legion Military Honors team. I had presented the widow with a coin. He thought I had a similar one, but I didn't. I owed him and his wife drinks that day. I've got the coins. I've since picked up one from Floyd Pratt from his unit in World War II, but how many coins can one person carry?
Rykken: Yeah, Floyd. Floyd is still living isn't he?
Buswell: He isn't doing real well.
Rykken: He's gotta be up there.
Buswell: I think he's 94 or 95.
Rykken: Yeah, we interviewed him. The first project we ever did in 2002. We did on World War II. We interviewed Floyd. My dad was included on that one too.

Buswell: I remember reading that, yes.
Rykken: Well, this has been great. It was a good interview. Every story is going to be a little bit different. That's what makes this interesting because what we're trying to capture in the projects how the war interacted with our region.

Gary Hoyer: Army

Interviewed by: Paul Rykken and Sydney Sampson-Webb 11/12/2018
Transcription by: Sydney Sampson-Webb

Rykken: We'll have you start then, Gary, by just giving us your full name.
Hoyer: Gary Edwin Hoyer.
Rykken: And, your date of birth?
Hoyer: September 2nd, 1950
Rykken: Where were you born?
Hoyer: La Crosse, Wisconsin.
Rykken: What branch of the service were you in?
Hoyer: I was in the Army.
Rykken: What was your rank when you left the army?
Hoyer: Sergeant.
Rykken: I guess I'll leave it there.
Sampson-Webb: Where did you serve?
Hoyer: I served in Vietnam.
Rykken: We have a map over here if you want to point to any places at any time.
Sampson-Webb: Were you drafted or did you enlist?
Hoyer: Me and another guy enlisted under the buddy system. He ended up in Korea and I ended up in Vietnam. We hadn't seen each other since until probably about 10 years ago.
Sampson-Webb: What was it like to come back together again after so long?
Hoyer: It was different.
Rykken: So, you had no contact with him?
Hoyer: No contact at all. We went to school together.
Rykken: Where were you in school?
Hoyer: Melrose-Mindoro.
Sampson-Webb: My mom went there too!
Hoyer: Oh wow, yeah.
Rykken: How old were you when you enlisted?

Hoyer: I was 18, I turned 19 before I went over.
Rykken: That would have been 1969.
Hoyer: Yes.
Sampson-Webb: Do you recall your first days in service at all?
Hoyer: The first day?
Sampson-Webb: Yes.
Hoyer: Oh yeah, I was in Fort Bragg, North Carolina. That's where I started for basic. From there I went to Fort Gordon, Georgia. That's where I did my infantry training. From there, we had jungle training, then we came home for two weeks, and shipped out.
Rykken: Where did you do jungle training?
Hoyer: Fort Gordon, Georgia.
Rykken: What did that involve?
Hoyer: Survival. It was like a two week crash course on how to survive in the jungle, heat, and different environment.
Sampson-Webb: Can you tell us about some of your most memorable experiences?
Hoyer: Oh, yeah. The first day we got there it was hot, humid. We got to the reception center over there. From there, we got dispersed out to our different infantry units. I started out with 198 Charlie Company. I was a fill on from a bad incident they had over there. I'm sure you've probably heard of the My Lai Massacre. Well, that was my first unit. I was there as a fill in because they'd lost a lot of people.
Rykken: So, that had occurred before you got there?
Hoyer: Yes.
Rykken: You were coming in with folks that had been in that experience then. Did they talk about it much?
Hoyer: Some did, some didn't. A lot of them were pissed off. It was supposed to be a ceasefire. And a ceasefire over there, means you ain't supposed to shoot, and they're picking our guys off one at a time. Well, we fired back. That's how we lost a lot of our people.
Rykken: Now, Lieutenant Calley, he would not have been there at that point.
Hoyer: No.
Rykken: He would have been under arrest
Hoyer: He was under arrest. He come back to the states. I'm sure the government system proved him innocent. He had a breakdown, just like any other officer. You sit there and watch your people get shot down, sooner or later, you're gonna break down. That's just what happens. We got the bad name for it.
Rykken: That ceasefire, that wasn't being honored, happened just before the incident where they went into the village and burned and destroyed it. Those men that you joined some of them had seen some pretty awful stuff. The real stuff.
Hoyer: Oh, yeah. It wasn't the prettiest sight, I guess. It wasn't nice. Nothing is nice over there. I was with our unit for about eight or nine months before I went to a recon unit. None of us had nice.
Rykken: When you say "recon unit" help me on understanding that?
Hoyer: A recon unit is where we work in small bunches, like a hit and run outfit. We get told about certain areas where stuff is going on. Usually two to three, maybe four of us, we go in and

hit, and get the hell out of there. I mean, do what you gotta do and leave. You get a lot of intel reports from the Vietnamese people, and sometimes we were set up.
Rykken: The eight or nine months that you were with the first unit, what were you doing?
Hoyer: I started out walking about fourth in line and in the last six months, I walked one. My job then was to try to find the booby traps before we hit them and to try to work different things out. I was supposed to keep everyone in line and keep all the tempers down.
Rykken: Walking point must have been frightening and nerve wracking...how would you describe that?
Hoyer: It was very frightening. It was nerve wracking because you always had to really look for booby traps. As for walking point, it was probably safer because the next guy behind you was my machine gunner. He covered my back. It was a rough job, but someone had to do it. I guess I did it because I had a good guy that taught me.
Rykken: I guess I want to back up a little bit. When you went in initially to the Army, did you have any choice of what you would be doing in Vietnam?
Hoyer: They'd tell you that you had a choice, but you didn't. We had a lot of people that came in that went to clerk schooling in the army back here in the States. When they got over there, they were stuck in the bush with us. They were grunts. That's what they called them. They really thought they were going to have a great job over there, but they didn't get it. They were the worst ones because they were never trained in what we were trained in
Rykken: Did you feel like your training was good?
Hoyer: Not really. It was just like a crash course over here. Eight weeks they pushed you through basic training just to get you into shape. The other weeks, they pushed you through to get you ready to go overseas. Everything back then was a big push because they needed troops. The draft board was high in numbers.
Rykken: It all kind of happened fast for you. You were 18-19 years old and...
Hoyer: Yes, you grew up fast. The only reason I think I survived as good as I did is because out in the bush, you live like you're an animal. You're not a human anymore, you're an animal. People live and people are going to die. We lost a lot of guys. I carried a lot of guys out. When I went over there, I weighed 168 pounds. Six months after I was there, I was 135. My rucksack weighed 208 pounds. More than I did!
Rykken: You were in terrific shape.
Hoyer: All of us were probably in the best shape we could ever be in.
Sampson-Webb: Did you see any combat at all?
Hoyer: More than my share.
Sampson-Webb: Yes, more than your share. Do you care to share any stories about anything combat-related that you can remember?
Hoyer: We had our good times over there and we had our bad times. Combat-wise, I've been overrun, I've been in a lot of firefights, and I probably had more KI's under my belt than most people. They weren't nice, but that's the way you lived. If you didn't, you weren't going to make it.
Rykken: Were you ever injured?
Hoyer: Not really. I mean, I've had cuts and scrapes. Over there, they give out Purple Hearts, a dime a dozen. Most of us in the bush, we didn't care for a Purple Heart. Most of us in the bush, we didn't even know what a Purple Heart was. We didn't even know what a disability was. I had

a buddy of mine who lost his leg. He was my backup and he wanted me to shoot him while he was still alive. He had one leg missing. I got him to the hospital and before he shipped off and was on the that chopper, he told me to shoot him. I couldn't do it. He said, "What good am I? I can't support my wife or my kid." We didn't know anything about disability. I'm sure if he would've, that might have been a different story. He got into the hospital and I found out a couple of days later that he got a hold of a MP45 and shot himself in the head. Never did come back, only in a bag. That's why we lived. I never knew anything about it. If something happened like that to me, I'd want to be gone too.

Rykken: Did you ever experience or see incidents where troops were doing anything against their officers? When you read about the Vietnam War, you come across incidents of that. Did you ever see any of that?

Hoyer: I never experienced it, but I heard about it. You see, officers over there. They go to NCO academies in the States. They come over there as Newbies and they have no clue what's going on. They'll try to tell us old guys, you have to do it this way. You don't do that. I know a couple of guys that tried to mess with them, usually in their bunks. Over there, you didn't mess with us old guys or you didn't make it.

Rykken: Did you serve under officers that were really good and memorable at all?

Hoyer: Usually the older ones. The younger ones would come over and be kind of scared of everything. Just like I was when I first got there. Yeah, you've got your rules and regulations, but they did listen to us. In the bush, it's different. It's your life.

Rykken: Did you have contact with South Vietnamese soldiers at all? Were you working with them at all?

Hoyer: Yep. We did work with them, but we couldn't trust them. The only ones you could trust were the mountain yards. The mountain yards guys kind of worked out in the field. They were hard working people who could fight. He was good at it, but you had to be good over there to survive. We had to go on certain missions and requested them. One time, I had to go on a mission to blow up a church and I requested four mountain yard people. They used crossbows and they were deadly with them. They knew the area and could speak the language. It was a big advantage for us.

Rykken: Were the Vietcong...how would you describe them?

Hoyer: They're just like everyone else. They're fighters. They work during the day and like to hit you at night. They're human just like us, but they're just like animals too. You learned to fight them.

Rykken: How long were you there in Vietnam?

Hoyer: Two years, two months, and 11 days.

Rykken: Wow, that's quite a while. A lot of the men weren't there that long.

Hoyer: I was more scared to come back to the States than I was to stay in the bush.

Rykken: Why was that?

Hoyer: We were getting shit on over here. Even our own people over there shit on us grunts. Our helicopter pilots dropped us off at the wrong place. We were all hungry. There was six or seven of us. All we wanted was something to eat. We stunk, I know it. We went two to three weeks without a bath or shower. We went in to eat and the clerk people, they wouldn't serve us because we stunk. The guys come back out and said, "They won't serve us. They're not going to let us eat." I got mad, pulled my knife. They pulled their machetes, and we went back in there.

I figured if I can't eat and my men can't eat, no one's eating. We went in and we busted everything up. I got hauled to jail that day. We all did. My CO come down and asked me, "Well, what'd you guys do it for?" I said, "We were hungry and they wouldn't let us eat. I'm over there fighting for them and they can't even serve me. In my case, no one's going to eat."
Rykken: So, there was tension.
Hoyer: They all thought they were better than us.
Rykken: Interesting.
Sampson-Webb: When you were over in Vietnam, how did you stay in contact with your family, or did you stay in contact with them at all?
Hoyer: I wrote letters, that's about it. I wrote a letter about once a month just to let everyone know that I was okay.
Rykken: Did you get letters back?
Hoyer: Oh yeah, we got letters back.
Rykken: Was that important to you?
Hoyer: Oh yeah, that was important to us. We wanted to know what was going on. The Red Cross did me good because my sister was in a bad car wreck back here in the States and they flew me back to the States for 30 days.
Rykken: Now, I've always wondered about that. You were here for a month. Was it difficult to go back? Do you remember your emotions at that point?
Hoyer: My emotions, back here, I was in jail quite a bit. George Johnson was sheriff back then and he never put nothing down on my records, never told my dad. I mean, they were good friends. I got a lot of respect for him for doing that. Me, I was angry.
Rykken: Was that due to what you'd been experiencing?
Hoyer: That, and the accident. It was time I went back. George took me to the airport himself and told me to come back in better humor next time. I went back to my old unit and I was pretty ornery back then. I was pretty ornery a year after I was out of the service. I used to get into a lot of fights.
Rykken: Was that something you'd experienced before or was that something that was maybe caused by what you had been going through?
Hoyer: Well, I tried to go to school when I first got out, but being I was a Vietnam vet, we were shit on.
Rykken: I guess we've been hearing that from others, what did that look like? What did that feel like? What was going on then?
Hoyer: Well, I'll tell ya. If I ever had the choice to do it again, I'd stay over there.
Rykken: The transition back was that difficult?
Hoyer: People...you know, I was a baby killer to them. I probably did.
Rykken: Where did you experience that when you came back? Where did that come through to you?
Hoyer: In the bars, in school. Mostly in school. You just didn't talk about it or say you were overseas. Some people just knew it though- you were in that age group and you hadn't been around for two and a half years.
Rykken: Now, this is kind of a personal question, but when you see the way that troops are always kind of thanked and honored today, how does that make you feel?

Hoyer: I trained a lot of troops when I worked for the government in Fort McCoy, and it bothered me a lot of send people over there. They weren't going to go through what I'd been through, but still, they're doing the same thing that I did. Mine was just a different atmosphere. I think it bothered a lot of Vietnam vets because of how they get treated now when they come back versus how we were treated. There's a little bitterness there.

Rykken: Now, a bit on that, and we talked about this with the other interviews as well. When you were there, were you aware of what was going on in the States? Were you keeping up?

Hoyer: We didn't have no way of keeping up over there out in the bush. We didn't have no communications with the States or people. Just letters we'd get from our parents, but they aren't telling us anything. We didn't know what was going on over here in the States.

Rykken: So, the protesting that was really starting to hit hard in 69', 70', 71', you weren't really aware of that?

Hoyer: Out in the field, we weren't. The rear echelon people they were, you know, they could keep up on it. When you were out in the field, you don't have any communication. The only communication you got is a walkie-talkie radio if you got that.
Rykken: There's just one other part. When you enlisted in Vietnam, I'm assuming you felt proud of what you were doing. You were a young man doing something courageous. Did your parents feel good about that?
Hoyer: They were scared. They were worried.
Rykken: Had your father been in the military?
Hoyer: World War II, so he knew what I was going through. Just a different phase of it. Every war is different. It's all kinds of different fighting. I mean, World War I, it was calvary mainly. World War II, it was cold. Korean War, fighting the cold and the heat. We were fighting the heat.
Rykken: You were in a really tough environment.
Hoyer: The cold environment was just as tough as the heat.
Rykken: Sure, we've talked to people from Korea and they've said that. I guess what I'm getting at, you went in and you felt proud of that and you came back, and the politics had shifted in the country.
Hoyer: Right.
Rykken: You were caught in that, unfortunately. Did you feel angry or disappointed in the government, at that point, and how they had fought the war?
Hoyer: I was disappointed with them. And, angry, in some senses. They'd sit there and tell us that they gave us schooling. You didn't get no schooling. They didn't want you in the school. The politics, yeah, they did make us mad. They blew it all out of proportion. They were the only ones that made money in the whole situation. It wasn't the people fighting or the ones doing clerical work.
Rykken: This is kind of a hard question, but did you feel any sympathy at all for the South Vietnamese people at all or were you just doing your job day to day?
Hoyer: We were just doing our job day to day. We didn't have no sympathy out on the field. I mean, it ain't fun being overrun at night.
Rykken: Did you ever just feel lucky? How did you think you were surviving?
Hoyer: You feel lucky. It's the luck of the draw. We lived like animals. My buddy sat there and told me, "I'm like a cat with nine lives, and I'm on the third cat."
Rykken: Right, there's such a randomness to it- it's amazing. Mentally, that has got to be a lot to go through.
Hoyer: It is. You sit there, and then you go out on patrols, and come back. Yeah, there's a lot of luck. That's the way I look at it.
Sampson-Webb: Did you have any superstitions at all? Or maybe, good luck charms?
Hoyer: No, I didn't have any charms or anything. I didn't believe in them. You learn to live with it and try to live with it. We had our good times and we had our bad times out there. Every three months, I got three days drunk. I got to come to the rear area. All the whiskey and beer we can drink. All the steaks and eggs we can eat for three days, then back to the bush for three months.
Rykken: Were you ever in a situation where you were able to save someone?
Hoyer: I saved a few people. Lost a lot of them.
Rykken: When you say save, did you go out and get them when they were wounded and carry them out?

Hoyer: Yeah, one guy, I carried for five miles wounded before I got him to a chopper. When you're scared, you can do anything.
Rykken: You must've been strong.
Hoyer: We were all solid. There wasn't any fat on us. We were in shape.
Rykken: Is there anything else you want to say about your time there before we get into the after period?
Hoyer: After I was in the bush for about a year and six months, I got a rear job. It was the best job in the world. I worked for a general and a staff. I was his personal bartender. How much better can a job get?
Rykken: That's interesting. Who was the general?
Hoyer: General McDonald.
Rykken: How'd you get that duty?
Hoyer: I had a heatstroke and was laying in the hospital. General McDonald comes through. He saw my record and all the time I had over there. He says, "Well, you're done with the bush." I told him, "No, I'm not. I got six more months. I ain't going home." He said, "No you're not going to go home. You're gonna come work for me." I told him, "I'll work for you, but I ain't taking no shit from any officers." He goes, "You won't have to take shit from anyone. You've seen enough." I how it was and he liked me for it. I go, "And, I ain't sitting behind no desk either." He goes, "Nope, you're gonna be my bartender."
Rykken: That must have been kind of a relief. Did you feel bad leaving your unit?
Hoyer: Yeah. Some of us had been together for quite a while.
Sampson-Webb: Did you have a lot of good friends in your unit?
Hoyer: Nobody gets close. Not out in the bush. You never knew how little or how long they were going to be with you. I had some special people out there. They'd always call me "Mad Dog." I lost a lot of good guys.
Rykken: Can we talk a little bit about when you came home? Is that okay?
Hoyer: Sure.
Rykken: What did you transition into once you were out?
Hoyer: It was rough. I got drunk right away. I went home and saw my folks after a few days in the VA hospital. They locked me up and called it diffusing you. Bringing you back to reality. I'm use to living like an animal. I remember, when I left, General McDonald had said, "Mad Dog, you fought one hell of a war, but you got another one coming." I almost committed suicide. There was seven of us in my unit that came back alive. Me and one other guy are the only two left living. The other five committed suicide.
Rykken: The transition was difficult. Was that due to what you had seen or some of the anger you felt with what you were seeing here?
Hoyer: It was both. There was a lot of anger here. There was a guy in this other unit. He came back to the states and had never been wounded in all the time that he was over there. He walked across the airport in Washington, and when we got through the crowd, someone shot and killed him. Thought he didn't deserve to live. What were we supposed to think of that?
Rykken: It's coming across to me that airports were difficult locations.
Hoyer: They were, a lot of troops were all getting off there.
Rykken: Did anyone during your memory of this time treat you well? Did anyone say, you know, "Thank you"?

Hoyer: No one.
Rykken: How about your parents?
Hoyer: My parents are probably about the only ones.
Rykken: They were happy you came home safe. What did you begin to do? What kind of work?
Hoyer: The first year, I was in and out of the VA. I saw some psychiatrists and drank a lot. Worked out at the D&S factory here for a while. Then, I worked as a bartender at Pines. From Pines, I worked for the government at Fort McCoy.
Rykken: What did you do in Fort McCoy?
Hoyer: First, I worked in housing. Then I got to supply, and then I went to logistics. I worked on laser equipment and helped train troops until I retired.
Rykken: Did you like being at Fort McCoy?
Hoyer: It wasn't bad once you got use to it. It took a few years to get used to it. There was planes flying around. Machine guns going off. It got tense sometimes.
Sampson-Webb: Did it remind you a lot of your time in Vietnam?
Hoyer: My time overseas, yeah. Like I said before, if I had to do it all over again, I would have stayed over in Vietnam until I died.
Rykken: Were you experiencing PTSD? Was that a term that was being used?
Hoyer: Yeah, the term was being used. I got diagnosed with it when I almost committed suicide. There was a lot of us that got it. Some got more than others.
Rykken: Were you with other Vietnam veterans much when you were done?
Hoyer: A few, not many. A few of us kept in contact.
Rykken: Did you feel like the government was helpful to you when you came back?
Hoyer: No, they didn't help us.
Rykken: Did that change ever?
Hoyer: No. Not until after the other war started.
Rykken: More recent history. That's a feeling you hear from Vietnam veterans. They feel ignored.
Hoyer: Thrown off to the side? Yeah, whatever you want to call it.
Sampson-Webb: Before you went into the war, you must've had some thoughts on it. Were those thoughts changed or different at all when you looked at the war as a whole after coming back?
Hoyer: Well, when I went in, I was still young. I graduated on a Thursday night. Monday was Memorial Day, and I left on Tuesday morning for the service. Life changed in a hurry. When I got back, we didn't really think much about that. It was different for sure though. I came back after having been gone for two and half years. All my classmates were gone. You sit there and feel out in the middle of nowhere.
Rykken: Have you talked about the war a lot? Or, not so much?
Hoyer: I never talked about the war at all. Very, very little. Not until probably about 86' or 87'.
Rykken: Why then?
Hoyer: Well, I had about five different psychiatrists then working on me. Some of them were crazy with what they wanted to try. Burning brain cells and really heavy medicators. I went through one surgery. I spent a lot of time at the VA.
Rykken: This leads me to a question that I wanted to ask you. You know, I teach history. What would you like high school students to know about the Vietnam war based on your experience?

Hoyer: They should learn the real truth of it. What really did happen. Not just what they say in history books, it's altogether different than what really went on. They should know what we did and how we had to live like animals. Nowadays, and I'm not trying to pick on you.
Sampson-Webb: You're fine.
Hoyer: These kids don't have any realistic view on what's going on with life. I mean, Vietnam made me grow up fast.
Rykken: I think we do a disservice when we try to sugar coat things.
Hoyer: That's what bothered a lot of veterans. Everything got sugar coated. They made us out to be the bad guys.
Rykken: Those are important areas to get into with kids. We do study the Vietnam war nowadays. When I was in school growing up, no one ever talked about it.
Hoyer: Even in my high school years, when it was going on, no one talked about it.
Rykken: Yes, well, we're just about done, if there's anything else you want to add at all, please do. It's been a really interesting interview.
Sampson-Webb: You've given us a really different perspective.
Rykken: We appreciate it very much.

Ken Schoolcraft: Air Force

Interviewed by: Paul Rykken and Sydney Sampson-Webb 11/19/2018
Transcription by: Sydney Sampson-Webb

Rykken: Could you start by giving us your full name and date of birth?
Schoolcraft: Yes, Ken Schoolcraft, I was born the eighth month and third day of 46'.
Rykken: What branch of the service were you in?
Schoolcraft: Air Force.
Rykken: What was your rank?
Schoolcraft: When I got out, I was in for four years, and I was equivalent to an E4.
Rykken: That's just the basics.
Sampson-Webb: Were you drafted or did you enlisted?
Schoolcraft: Enlisted.
Sampson-Webb: Do you recall your first few days in service?
Schoolcraft: I was very homesick. It was the first time I've ever been away from home. Except for a boy scout trip I took to Colorado Springs, but other than that, we had family trips and stuff in the summer, but it was the first time I had gone anywhere on my own. I was only 17.
Sampson-Webb: Oh, wow.
Schoolcraft: My granddaughter, she can't get over that. She says, "You were only three years younger than me when you went in."
Rykken: Most of my students are 17.
Sampson-Webb: I'm 17!
Schoolcraft: Yeah, that's a pretty hard break from home. As time went on, it went better.
Sampson-Webb: Can you tell me about your boot camp and training experience?
Schoolcraft: We went down to Lachlan Air Force Base in Texas down by San Antonio. That's the air force's basic training base. It was hot, I remember that. You did things you didn't know you could do. You developed muscles you'd never had before and hollered at a lot. That made the homesickness phase. Basic training was the worst time for home sicknesses. After you got

out of that and went on with your service, it wasn't a big factor anymore. It was only eight weeks though.
Rykken: Were you at Lachlan the whole eight weeks?
Schoolcraft: Yes, and then, I got a leave home and went to individual training at Sheppard Air Force Base in Texas.
Rykken: It was hot, I imagine.
Schoolcraft: It was still hot, yes. And the ground, it was as hard as this table. Every time it rained, it was a river. It's no fun marching with red clay on your boots. After a while, your boots just get stuck with a bunch of clay on the bottom.
Sampson-Webb: Did you always know that you wanted to go into the Air Force?
Schoolcraft: I kind of picked the Air Force. Maybe they had a little more glamorous recruitment thing with the planes and everything. I always kind of liked airplanes too. I thought I'd give that a problem. I didn't know how to swim very well, so I didn't want the Navy.
Sampson-Webb: Can you tell me a couple of your most memorable experiences from being in Vietnam?
Schoolcraft: I would say the most memorable would be just the sheer amount of material and troops that the US poured in. When I got there, we got to Cameron Bay. That was the largest deepwater port in Southeast Asia. All the Navy supply ships come in there. They got two construction companies from the United States and they built a two-mile-long runway to handle big jets so they could bring in more material. We worked in air freight and we worked 12 hours a day, six days a week. It never quit. Things just kept coming in. All the commercial airlines over there had contracts with the government troops because the military couldn't get things in fast enough. They subcontracted airlines to bring in all the soldiers. We'd be on the next plane loading caskets out. That's what sticks, stuff like that. I got an award over there. The Air Force Commendation Medal. There was a Marine unit pinned down in the country. We call that a combat emergency. We had to get ammo, barbed wire, rations, and fuel on this plane and get it there as fast as we could. We were having trouble on the plane with too many officers in the way. I told the craft commander that if he got everyone off the plane except for me and the loadmaster that we would have an on-time launch. He booted everyone off the plane. We tied everything down, I said that it was all ready to go, and we jumped off the back of the plane, closing the back doors. It ended up being an on-time launch. So, here I've been standing in the middle of Vietnam in the middle of a 2000 foot runway. The plane's gone, but here come these two little headlights. "Nee, nee, nee," was just screaming down the taxiway. It was the full bird colonel. He said, "What's your name?" I said, "Schoolcraft." He said, "Spell that!" So, I did. Two weeks later I got called into the commander's office and I got a nice medal. When you do something like that, you're not thinking about a medal, you're thinking about those guys out there.
Rykken: I want to back up a little bit. Let's leave that story for a minute. I want to go back to when you were 17 in 1964. We were just starting to get more involved. What was your mindset then? Did anyone go in with you?
Schoolcraft: I was by myself. The mindset then, and I think it went all the way to the top, was, okay, we're worried about communists taking over South Vietnam and the Domino Effect. They thought that we'd intervene and if they want to have a North and South Vietnam, well, that's just the way it would have to be. I think they were looking at a Korea scenario of country division. At

that time, it was the right thing to do. Guys were volunteering to go to Vietnam. They were sitting stateside in duty and they wanted to get some action.
Rykken: One thing on that, so, you're 17. Did your family have military experience? Were there people pushing or encouraging you? Anything like that? Or was it just your own intuition?
Schoolcraft: I could lay this all on my mother, I suppose. She said, "You're going in the service." I think she was worried about me having a rough summer, you know, once you graduate and stuff, you kind of got that dead zone where you don't know what you're going to do in the fall and you just kind of party all summer.
Rykken: So, you graduated at 17?
Schoolcraft: Yes, she thought it'd be a good idea if I went into the service. My dad couldn't go in due to medical conditions. He only had one lung, for one thing. My uncle Jim Schoolcraft went in during World War II and fought in Italy. My brother went in after me in September into the Air Force. He started up in Michigan and ended up in Guam. We were both combat Vietnam era veterans.
Rykken: At 17, you weren't thinking about Vietnam, you were thinking about just going into the service.
Schoolcraft: Yes, get my four years in and learn some stuff.
Rykken: Each of the veterans has had a little different experience with that due to the timing. For you, the timing was a little earlier.

Schoolcraft: Everything was good for a while. I mean, at first, even the public accepted it.

Rykken: If you went in in June of 64, then in August of 64, just for a little timeline, is when Lyndon Johnson would have got authorization to start really sending. That would have started really accelerating thing.

Schoolcraft: I was in Vietnam when it peaked. I think we had 400 and some thousand troops there. You know, they just thought that the more troops they poured in, the sooner it'd all be done.

Rykken: Let me backup now to another thing you said that caught my attention. You were working with supplies and transport, and we talked about caskets. I'm sure that's a painful memory. How was that actually happening?

Schoolcraft: What they did is they had the body bags on the field and they either processed them in either Saigon or Da Nang. I can't remember which had the registrations. That's where they processed them and then an aluminum casket was the shipping casket to the United States. So, we had a lot of body bags coming through us, but that's the way they did that.

Rykken: The reason I bring that up is that I was growing up in that period and I always tell my students that each night on the news they would announce the number of men that had been killed in Vietnam that week or day. That was quite a thing.

Schoolcraft: Is that happening now? I think of how I react now. I don't listen to the news all the time, but when I do, some people are getting killed over in Iraq or Afghanistan. It doesn't really sink in, you're busy doing other things. I don't think the public is really shocked anymore.

Rykken: Yeah, I think it has to do with how many different ways we can get our news nowadays. Not everyone is tuning in at 5:30. Those are my backup questions, so pick it up again!
Sampson-Webb: Did you see any combat at all?
Schoolcraft: The closest I got to combat was when some of the planes would go in country, we could get a pass, and go along if we wanted to. Sometimes, we flew in country with aircrews. I flew into Bien Hoa once, and when we flew out of Bien Hoa once and we lost two engines because they were shot out. You could hear stuff hitting the plane. That was the closest I got.
Sampson-Webb: Was it common for them to shoot up at you guys?
Schoolcraft: Oh yeah, they shoot at the planes all the time.
Sampson-Webb: Were there any casualties at all in your unit?
Schoolcraft: No, no.
Sampson-Webb: Did you stay in contact with your family while you were away?
Schoolcraft: That was interesting. We had the mail, but we had what they called MARS Station. There was a guy from Hixton...Doug-somebody. He was a Ham operator. They had Ham radio stations in Vietnam. They'd batch you through and you might go through to the Philippines, Japan, Guam, or Hawaii. You might go through three or four operators before you got to the States. Once you got to California, they'd batch you to Hixton. When I talked to my mom and dad, at the end of each sentence I had to say, "Over" so they knew they could talk back. Then, they'd have to say over so they knew that they were done. It was kind of like a two-way radio. It was called the Ham radio or the Military Air Radio.
Rykken: Was that common?
Schoolcraft: Oh yeah, you didn't just get on the phone. You didn't have cell phones. You didn't get on the phone and call home.
Rykken: How about letters?
Schoolcraft: Letters, I wrote. Tip the hat to my mother- she wrote every day. I would write too and a lot. If you had a low and didn't have any letters for three or four days, then you just read the old ones over and over again. She was a good letter writer. I enjoyed letter writing. I was on the South China Sea and on my one day off, I'd go down to the sea and collect seashells and they were beautiful sea shells. My mother sent me cookies like can you'd get a fruitcake in, and I sent her seashells back. My mother just passed and we found a whole box of seashells.
Rykken: That's good you still have them then. Good memories there.
Schoolcraft: Yes. And, about those cookies, when you got treats, everyone got treats. You didn't hoard them. Might have to eat them with a spoon sometimes because they're so busted up, but they were still good.
Sampson-Webb: Did you have plenty of food and supplies, other than the cookies?
Schoolcraft: Oh yeah, and actually, I had diarrhea the first week I was there because at Cameron Bay, the wind is always blowing and it's sandy, so there's sand in whatever you're eating. After a while, eating all of the sand didn't bother you and they even gave you pills for it.
Sampson-Webb: Wow. You mentioned before that you kind of became friends with those that you worked with?
Schoolcraft: Yeah, we were a pretty tight knit group. We always had rotation. You didn't go in as a unit and come out as a unit. That was one bad thing I thought. It's nice if you can keep your unit together. You know each other and how they act and react. The group I was with, there was

about six of us, we were there in the start and the whole year. There were others that came and went, but that core group kind of ran the shifts.
Rykken: Do you still have contact with them?
Schoolcraft: No, and I kick myself for it to this day. I wish I did. I always watch the American Legion magazine and the VFW magazine for outfit reunions, but I haven't seen anything yet. Maybe someday I might.
Sampson-Webb: Was there anything special that you guys did for good luck at all while you were there?
Schoolcraft: No.
Rykken: How about a superstition?
Schoolcraft: Well, Sydney, you wouldn't know this because you're underage, but...it was a bottle of Seagrams Crown Royal and it had a yellow ribbon on top that tied that blue bag on. You would get that ribbon off the Crown Royal, and when you were "short," which meant less than a month, you'd have that short ribbon in your hat. That way everyone knew you were short and close to leaving. That was just kind of a superstition, I guess. I've read stories and I'm sure guys would agree. A lot of guys got killed on the day before they were supposed to leave. I just want to add to what you asked before about going with a group or a buddy, I think that was one of the reasons one of the Vietnam vets would go back for a second or third tour. When they left, they felt like they were abandoning their comrades and they wanted to be there to help them get through this. With Post Traumatic Stress Disorder, the more you went, the worse that it got. Some guys got through that okay, but not everybody.
Sampson-Webb: Do you have anything else that you want to add about your overall service experience at all?
Schoolcraft: I think I grew up about six years in about a year. You're just too busy and too occupied for anything else to take over. I could have been homesick, but we were just too busy.
Rykken: One thing you told me once, Ken, if I'm correct, is that you remember Lyndon Johnson?
Schoolcraft: Yes, I shook his hand.
Rykken: Yeah, you shook his hand, that it. Why don't you talk about that?
Schoolcraft: What bothered me about that is that I made the mistake of standing by myself and not in a group. So, right away the media picks you up. They come over to me and I guess, someone from around here said that they saw me on CBS News. Over there, they didn't have the sanitation facilities that we have here. They'd have these big outhouse with a door in the back and there were these 55 gallon drums sitting there cut with kerosene or diesel fuel in them. That was the bathroom. When those would get full, they'd light it and burn it, and then push it back in. This guy is interviewing me and he was asking me if that operation was going to be successful and if the people were cooperative. I said, "Well, I don't know. See that black smoke over there? They're burning human waste. If they can't build a bathroom, I don't know they're going to build a society." I guess that message got back here. Then, of course, President

Johnson is coming along shaking everybody's hand. I could have shook hands with a wet noodle. I like a firm shake

Rykken: That doesn't seem to fit with him. He seemed like he was a big guy.

Schoolcraft: I didn't really get to talk to him, you know, just the "Thanks for your service" type of comment he made.

Rykken: Do you remember anything else, like why he might have been there?

Schoolcraft: I think he was coming to see it for himself. Like I said, it was before TET, people were thinking, "Boy, we get a few more troops now and we can finish this off." He came over there and gave a speech saying that we're going into the right direction and blah, blah, blah.

Rykken: Do you remember the year?

Schoolcraft: Yes, 67'.

Sampson-Webb: Do you recall the day that your service ended?

Schoolcraft: I remember it very well. When you got on that plane as soon as that captain announced that we cleared Vietnamese air space- the whole plane just roared. You just sat there and you were thankful.

Rykken: Have you ever been back to Vietnam?

Schoolcraft: No.

Rykken: Did you ever have any desire to go back?

Schoolcraft: It would be like going to a totally different country. It's a thriving Metropolis now. Tourism and everything. I don't know what Cameron Bay is like. I'm sure the runway's still there, but other than that...I don't know.

Sampson-Webb: When you got back home, what were the first few things you did in the first few days and weeks afterwards?
Schoolcraft: I went to the G's Cafe, which was a truck stop before we had the interstate. I ate a cheeseburger with raw onions. To this day, I still love cheeseburgers with raw onions. In fact, I might go have one when this is over with. I just enjoyed myself. When I got back, also, thanks to my meeting the right guy in Vietnam, I got my resume wrote. This guy was a panel rep that was running all of the airlines. I sent my resume to five airlines and five answered. The first line he had wrote said, "I recommend this veteran for any job with any airline anywhere in the world." I could have went to Chicago with Northwest, California with World, or went to United in New York. There were a few more options too. Braniff answered in Minneapolis and I thought that two hours from home wasn't too bad. So, I went up there and I was hired. I was only home for about a week or two and then I was working.
Rykken: So, you came back in 68'?
Schoolcraft: No, October of 67'?
Rykken: Did you experience any negative reaction or service?
Schoolcraft: It hadn't got to that yet. I was a little bit early yet. Your stories on baby killers and things like that? Yeah, I didn't get that. When we were coming back though, the others guys and I, we decided that if there was any protestors, we'd lay into them. There wasn't though. I think in some places it was starting.
Rykken: When you got back, were you following the war closely?
Schoolcraft: Yes, and here's a story with that. When I got back from Vietnam, I went to Columbus, Ohio for my last eight months of service. We had a guy there, Sergeant Pike, and he'd been in the war, and he kept track of it and would always come in saying what place got hit. We all had a lot of optimism and thought that Nixon will get in and end it. It wasn't that quick though.
Rykken: Did you feel like the government was not handling it right?
Schoolcraft: It's too bad it had to be the lesson that it was. Also, this makes me think of this. We were hearing a lot about working with African Americans. We thought it was all normal, soldiers on all sides of us. If you went to a job back here in the states though, there were race riots going on and in the news. I think that the government was more concerned about that.
Rykken: How was that experience in the service? That's one thing about the military. You were thrown in with all sorts of people. You were a young kid from Black River, Wisconsin. How was your interaction with black soldiers?
Schoolcraft: We got along and we never had any trouble with any of them. If there was something they didn't like about you, they'd call you a name, but you didn't know what it meant. They had a different terminology.
Rykken: The military had been integrated by Truman. By the time you get to the Vietnam period, the Military was probably head of society.
Schoolcraft: I think so. I never knew why guys would have a desire to go back. You know, I never had a desire. I thought that I got through it and why push my luck. TET had happened and I was watching that on TV every night. I could have gone back.
Rykken: I know you've been very active in veteran organizations for years and years. In that capacity, have you talked to or have been involved with veterans that have had PTSD?
Schoolcraft: I haven't dealt with that directly.

Rykken: I have another question for you. Based on your experience and knowledge of this war, would you like to see the nation go back to a draft?
Schoolcraft: I know in some nations that it's mandatory. You got to have two years of service. That never killed nobody. Well, unless there's a war going on. Through the draft, some of the people don't have the qualifications they should've had and they don't compare to the people that wanted to be there.

Rykken: It's an interesting question and comes up every once and while. The draft stopped in 74, so it's been an all volunteer force. One of the things I struggle with with my students is that more and more students have no connection to the military at all. No one in their family is in the military. I don't think that divide is necessarily healthy. One more question I have for you is, what would you like kids to know about the Vietnam war?
Schoolcraft: That it wasn't the soldiers' fault. It's not the only war we ever lost. Vietnam was complicated. I think our government didn't know how to get a handle on it.
Sampson-Webb: You've done a lot of stuff with the school district for veterans assemblies, correct?
Schoolcraft: Yes, and I enjoy it. I've done it for so long. I think since 1982 and on. I'm glad we do something at the high school, not just the elementary school. My grandkids out in Minnesota, they do something in the elementary school but nothing in the junior high or high school.
Sampson-Webb: Yeah, I mean only doing it then, by the time you grow up, you don't remember it.
Schoolcraft: Exactly.
Rykken: Well, thank you, Ken. This was excellent.
Sampson-Webb: Yes, thank you!

The Story of the Hmong

Hmong Introduction by: Sampson-Webb and Rykken

Though our project has focused on the story of five soldiers from our region who served in Vietnam, it became clear to us throughout the research that we wanted to also include background on the significant presence of the Hmong people in Wisconsin. Our exchange with Xiong Xong that follows further solidified this desire on our part. The story of the Hmong and their arrival in Wisconsin beginning in 1975 is complex and we are only scratching the surface here. There are roughly 50,000 Hmong people living in Wisconsin in 2019, and it is fair to say that many of our citizens do not know their story.

The Hmong people lived high up in the remote highlands of Laos and had little contact with other people. In the late 1960's, the Vietnam War spread to Laos, and the United States CIA recruited Hmong people to participate in the so-called "Secret War" in Laos to help in the struggle against North Vietnamese forces.[9] The Hmong people fought on the ground, flew in combat, and gathered intelligence for the United States. They also died at a rate 10 times higher than American soldiers and an estimated tenth to almost half of the Hmong population died during the Vietnam War.

Following the war, North Vietnamese troops combined with the new Lao communist regime led to numerous Hmong people becoming refugees in their own country. In 1973, the Vientiane Agreement was signed and declared Hmong people as enemies as the state, owing to their alliance with the US Government during the War. This act forced Hmong people to flee their home country. A refugee camp called Ban Vinai formed on the Thailand and Laos border. From no electricity to a lack of sewage disposal and running water, camp conditions were horrid for the more than 40,000 residents. Eventually, the Thai government closed Ban Vinai, which led the many of the Hmong to seek refuge elsewhere, including the United States.

The first Hmong arrived in Wisconsin following the withdrawal of the United States from Vietnam in the middle to late 1970s. Originally only Hmong veterans were allowed to immigrate and by 1980 there were approximately 400 living in Wisconsin. Churches and social service agencies were heavily involved in the resettlement process and Wausau became an early center for the refugees. The decade of the 1980s saw dramatic increases in Hmong immigrants and by 1990, nearly 17,000 were living here. With the relaxation of restrictions by the US

[9] We largely relied on two sources for our background information here. Vietnam and America: A Documentary History (edited by Gettleman, Franklin, Young, and Franklin) provided good information on the "Secret War" in Laos. We utilized Wikipedia for demographic information and the sourcing was solid: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Hmong_in_Wisconsin.

Government, more families were allowed to immigrate. In the early 2000s, Governor Jim Doyle appointed a Hmong Resettlement Task Force to review state policies regarding the Hmong and provide recommendations regarding social programs aimed at acculturation, social support, and educational programming.

Roughly 200,000 Hmong live in the United States today and mainly reside in Minnesota, Central California, and Wisconsin. Although many have successfully relocated to the States, they have not been widely accepted into American culture. Many Hmong today struggle to find employment, opportunity, and acceptance. As of 1998, for example, the Hmong had the lowest socioeconomic status of all ethnic groups in Wisconsin. Education remains a barrier, in part, due to language issues. Communities that have a significant Hmong population include Milwaukee, Appleton, Eau Claire, Green Bay, LaCrosse, Madison, Sheboygan, and Wausau.

Xong Xiong was born in ban Vinai Refugee Camp on the border of Laos and Thailand. She came to Wisconsin as a child refugee and her life story illustrates the power of resilience within the human spirit. She has accomplished many great things in her young life. She earned her undergraduate degree in Art and Philosophy and UW-LaCrosse, as well as a Master's Degree in Education. She recently earned her Ed.D. in Teaching and Learning with an Emphasis in Language and Cultural Revitalization from the University of Minnesota – Duluth. This picture captures a moment of great celebration and pride for Xong and her family. She is flanked by her sisters, Maij Xyooj and Khou Xiong. We hope you enjoy her story!

Xong Xiong

Interviewed over email by: Paul Rykken 03/08/2019
Transcription by: Sydney Sampson-Webb

Rykken: What is your name, your age, and where you are currently living?
Xong: My name is Xong Xiong and I am 40 years old. I live in La Crosse, WI.
Rykken: Tell us briefly about your Hmong heritage -- your family background -- and how you ended up in the United States?
Xong: My family are refugees who resettled in La Crosse area in 1987. We were involved in the Vietnam War that took place in Laos. In Laos, it was called the Secret War because the Geneva Accords in 1954 stated that Laos was was a neutral country and was not to have any outside interference, especially with politics. The US went into Laos illegally and recruited Hmoob folks and other tribal people to fight the Vietnam War in Laos on behalf of the United States. The US CIA funded the whole covert operation in Laos and Hmoob soldiers were paid around $2 to $4 a month. When the war ended, my family tracked through the jungles of Laos, and crossed the Mekong River to the safety refugee camps in Thailand. We were going to go to France because the US did not open its borders, for the US had not disclosed its involvement in the secret war due to violating International Law. When the UN threatened the US, the US later opened its borders to Hmoob refugees from Laos, my family applied for asylum and was accepted. We were in the camps for 8 years before resettling in Wisconsin.
Rykken: Were members of your family involved in the Vietnam War in any capacity? If so, please provide some background on that.
Xong: Yes, my whole family was involved in the war. We tried to stay neutral, but you can never in a war. My aunt said that, if you did not side with anyone (Americans or Viet Cong) the harassment was worst. Numerous people from my family would say that if you did not join either side, in the day time, the Americans would come and harass you, and say that you did not join them because you've sided with the Viet Cong, and then during the night, the Viet Cong would come and harass you and say that you were on the side of the Americans because you've refused to joined them. So, at the end our family ended up joining the CIA. Most of the men in my family fought in the CIA's war in Laos. The ones who did not fight were too young or too old. My family joined the Americans because my cousin was recruited by General Vang Pao early on to fight and because my cousin was a pretty high ranking military official our clan decided to join the American covert operations in Laos. Clan loyalty was everything so many people did not have a choice but to fight when their clans have joined. The CIA were really strategic about this, therefore, many Hmoob people ended up fighting for the US. When the American's pulled out, they left all Hmoob people to be slaughtered by the communist forces, whether they were on the side of the Americans or the Communist because of the strong presence of the CIA, all Hmoob people were guilty. Historians estimate that between 1/3 to half of Hmoob people perished during the war.
Rykken: I know that you have done much work to advance awareness of the Hmong story within our schools and communities. Why do you believe that is essential?

Xong: Wisconsin has one of the highest hate crime rates against Hmoob people. It has the third largest Hmoob population but the people here still do not understand why Hmoob people are here. I think it is important that folks living here understand Hmoob people and why they have resettled in the US. This understanding is not only is essential to the reducing hate crimes against Hmoob people, but it also challenges the idea of what is a democracy and our interference in other countries democracy. It challenges this idea of the US being the greatest nation in the world and our promotion of that idea. Hmoob people are a testament to that very unreal American myth.

Rykken: Based on your age, were you born in a refugee camp? Do you have memories of the camp?

Xong: I was born in Ban Vinai Refugee camp in Thailand. I came to the US when I was 9 so I have memories of the camp. Most of my memories are feelings of being hungry all the time because food was very limited. I remember thinking how good it would feel to just eat ice cream because it was always hot in the camp and I knew of ice cream because I would see the Thai kids eating it. It was so hot and there were few trees for shelter. I remember funeral drums going all night and day because there were so many deaths, mostly from suicide. Young people who couldn't part with their lovers would commit suicide. Other things such as malaria as well as all kinds of diseases that were part of the heat and humidity. I remember missing my extended as they left for the US before us. There was much sadness and depression. It was a scary time. I remember being scared of ghosts, monsters, and other creatures because death was always so close.

Rykken: Do you have memories of the journey to America? Were you sponsored by anyone here, or simply making that journey as a family?

Xong: I remember being sick the whole way to America. It was my 1st time in a moving vehicle, and I got motion sickness. So, for 3 days I was sick as a dog. It was also the 1st time that I threw up. The food was strange, and we were starving for 3 days. I remember the only things

we ate were the fruits. Everything else was foreign looking and tasted disgusting. We were sponsored by my older sister who came 8 years before we did.
Rykken: Have you been back to Laos? I'm assuming you still have family there. Or not?
Xong: I have been to Laos a few times. We still have family there. It is always hard to go back because it’s a poor country so it's hard to see that. There are so many things wrong with the government and the people suffer. It's a really corrupt country so it's hard to go and have the laws made up as you go. we go and see our family once every few years.

Reflections on the Project

Adrenaline, blood, sweat, and tears – such are the components of war. Passion for a cause runs through the veins of any individual, but especially those interviewed for this project. Whether it be a love for airplanes that led to joining the Air Force or an interest in medicine that led to becoming a first-class hospital corpsman, the Vietnam veterans from Jackson County interviewed for this project all felt a calling to serve their nation in diverse ways during a time of war.

Al Ciezki and Gary Hoyer both knew that they wanted to start serving their country immediately after high school, which led them both to enlist at the age of 17. At the time of their interviews, I was the same age, and I don't think I would have been nearly as brave as they were. Ciezki and Hoyer had a desire to serve and carried that into the rest of their lives. Ciezki worked with Hoffman Construction and Hoyer served a General as his personal assistant and trained future troops in Fort McCoy. A dedicated soul is never done serving others.

Although Andy Thundercloud was a corpsman in the Navy, by the end of his service term, he was considered a Marine by his fellow soldiers due to his passion for helping others. In Thundercloud's family, there was always a desire for a doctor. Thundercloud shared that, initially, his father was mildly disappointed that he went into the Navy, but when Thundercloud became a corpsman, there was no one prouder of him than his dad whose own life had been saved by a corpsman during World War II. When you're in the midst of war, having good family and friends standing beside and behind you can sustain your courage under fire.

Despite being drafted, Chuck Buswell had a prior connection to Vietnam through his mortician work with Vietnam casualties. Buswell became an army clerk and assisted with the business side of the war when it came to typing letters and assigning duties. Buswell went to Vietnam during the later stages of the war, but this didn't stop him from making an impact as a clerk. His story shows us that it takes everyone to fight a war, even those behind the scenes.

An interest formed a career when it came to Ken Schoolcraft and the Air Force. Schoolcraft claimed that he had always liked airplanes, so the Air Force was a natural draw for him. After his involvement in the war and a highly esteemed recommendation from a panel representative, Schoolcraft went on to work for Braniff in Minneapolis. Our interests and talents make us who we are. In battle, our unique qualities will always shine through to help us take home the glory.

The US went to war in Vietnam as part of the larger Cold War struggle. While many of our interviewees were in Vietnam risking their lives, the US society was losing confidence in the

war effort and thousands were protesting the War. This complicated the experience for them and made their return from the War difficult. In their young lives, the politics of war was not their main concern.

War has the power to change a nation and its citizens. During his interview, Al Ciezki said, “You can try to be a perfectionist, but no one can be a perfectionist as far as I'm concerned. You can strive to be good at something or better at something. And that's kind of what I've always done. I think the training I got in the Marine Corps is what made me deal with life that way.” The veterans we interviewed learned skills both on and off the battlefield -- skills of survival, communication, and much more. Each one of their stories is inspiring and shows what extraordinary things everyday individuals can accomplish by fulfilling their passions in a time of war. We graciously thank them for their service.

Sydney Sampson-Webb
Falls History Project Intern
Black River Falls High School Class of 2019

THE VIETNAM EXPERIENCE: REFERENCE TIMELINE

Note: This timeline was adapted primarily from chronologies in the following sources:

Gettleman, Franklin, Young, and Franklin (editors). Vietnam and America: A Documentary History. New York: The Grove Press, 1995.

Karnow, Stanley. Vietnam, A History: The First Complete Account of Vietnam at War. New York: The Viking Press, 1983.

PART I: THE FRENCH IN VIETNAM (1859-1954)

1859	French capture Saigon
1862	Treaty of Saigon gives France control of the three southern provinces.
1884	Treaty of Hue confirms French protectorate over central and northern Vietnam.
1900-1940	Various uprisings against French rule in Vietnam (or what is being called French Indochina).
1940	Fall of France to Germany; Japanese take Indochina.
1945	Fall of Japan; French return to their "lost empire".
1946	Start of the first war of Independence -- Ho Chi Minh, Communist and Nationalist leader leads the Vietnamese against the French. US supports France, even though during the war we had supported Ho against the Japanese.
1949	Communist victory in China alarms US officials
1950-53	Korean War is fought with the intention of stopping Communist aggression in the Far East.
1954	Vietminh (Communist) forces of Ho Chi Minh defeat the French at the Battle of Dienbienphu in North Vietnam marking the end of French power in Indochina.

PART II: AMERICA'S COMMITMENT TO THE WAR (1954-1964)

1954	Geneva settlement divides Vietnam into two parts -- North Vietnam under Ho Chi Minh, and South Vietnam under Bao Dai. The US does not sign the Geneva Accords and shifts its support to Ngo Dinh Diem in the South, a conservative nationalist with prominent American friends.

Southeast Asia Treaty Organization (SEATO) is formed as a defense pact against further Communist aggression in the Far East.

1955 US begins economic aid to South Vietnam, Laos, and Cambodia.

Diem wins a controlled referendum against Bao Dai and becomes the leader of South Vietnam (with US support).

1956 Proposed elections (as prescribed in the Geneva Accords) to decide the fate of a "unified" Vietnam are NOT held. Ho Chi Minh would have had the greatest base of support had elections been held. Vietnam remains divided -- a Communist north and a US supported south.

1960 Viet Cong, backed by North Vietnam, establish the National Front for Liberation of South Vietnam (NLF), opposing Diem and US support for him. US military personnel in Vietnam stands at 900.

US warns North Vietnam and Communist China not to intervene militarily in Laos.

1961 Kennedy dispatches Green Beret advisors to South Vietnam, along with increased military aid including American-piloted armed helicopters. US military personnel in Vietnam stands at 3000.

1962 US troops on training mission in Vietnam are ordered to fire upon the enemy if fired upon first. New US military command, known as Military Assistance Command (MACV) is set up in South Vietnam. US Army officers are killed by Communist guerillas near Saigon. US military personnel now number more than 11,000.

1963 South Vietnamese opposition to Diem increases. Buddhist monks are burning themselves in protest to his rule. Diem loses his popular support in Vietnam as well as the confidence of the American government. A military coup (with the approval of the Kennedy administration) deposes Diem and in the process Diem is murdered.
US aid to South Vietnam continues. US recognizes the South Vietnamese provisional government following the overthrow of Diem.
US President Kennedy is killed in November. Military personnel in Vietnam numbers 16,000.

1964 January: Nguyen Khanh overthrows Minh government.
February-August: Johnson authorizes intensification of harassment of North Vietnam under OPlan 34-A, including raids by Saigon commando units against North Vietnamese coastal islands.
June: General William Westmoreland replaces Harkin as head of MACV. General Maxwell Taylor replaces Henry Cabot Lodge as ambassador. French President DeGaulle calls for an end to foreign intervention in Vietnam and offers

to mediate.
August 2 and 4: US Destroyers Maddox and Turner Joy report attack by North Vietnam patrol boats: Johnson orders retaliatory air strikes.
August 3: Hanoi endorses Soviet call for reconvening the Geneva Conference.
August 7: Congress passes the Tonkin Gulf Resolution which gives Johnson great authority to use any action necessary to repel armed attacks on US forces.
September: North Vietnamese again call for Geneva Conference.
October: First unit of Northern-born regular troops sent to South Vietnam; by May they number more than 6500.
December: Bombing of Ho Chi Minh Trail in Laos begins.
US military personnel now number more than 23,000.

PART III: THE UNITED STATES TAKES CHARGE (1965-1968)

1965 February: US forces at Pleiku are attacked by NLF; Johnson authorizes Operation Rolling Thunder (bombing of the North); China warns it will enter the war if US invades North Vietnam.
March: UN Secretary General U Thant proposes peace conference; first US combat units arrive in Danang. First "teach-in" against the war held at the University of Michigan.
April: Johnson calls for "unconditional discussions" with North Vietnam; Hanoi announces four-point peace proposal.
May: First bombing pause ends after six days. Teach-ins against the war are held at universities nationwide.
June: Air Vice Marshal Nguyen Cao Ky selected to head the ninth government in the South since the overthrow of Diem in 1963.
July: Henry Cabot Lodge returns as ambassador.
October-November: Antiwar demonstrations in Washington D.C. and other US cities.
November: Battle of Ia Drang Valley.
December 24: Second bombing pause begins. US military personnel now stands at 184,300.

1966 January 31: Bombing pause ends.
February: William J. Fulbright, Chairman of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee, begins public hearings on the war (note: Fulbright had a young intern working with him named Bill Clinton).
March-May: Ky uses ARVN (Army of the Republic of Vietnam) troops to repress Buddhist demonstrations in Hue and Danang.
June: Oil depots in Hanoi and Haiphong bombed.
US forces stand at 362,000; "Third Country" forces are at 50,000; ARVN regulars number 315,000 in addition to about 300,000 regional and self-defense forces. Ho Chi Minh's forces include 114,000 members of the People's Liberation Armed Forces (PLAF), which includes 46,000 PAVN (People's Army of Vietnam) regulars; also 320,000 regional and militia forces.

1967 January: Operation CEDAR FALLS (Iron Triangle region near Saigon).

February-March: British Prime Minister Harold Wilson and Soviet Premier Alexei Kosygin attempt to mediate in the war.
April: Major peace demonstrations in cities throughout the US.
May: Ellsworth Bunker replaces Lodge as ambassador.
September: Nguyen Van Thieu and Nguyen Cao Ky become president and vice-president respectively. President Johnson orders bombing halt in exchange for "discussions."
October: Antiwar rally at the Pentagon.
November: Westmoreland gives Congress an optimistic report on the war.
December: Hanoi offers to talk after a bombing halt.
US troops increase to 485,000.

1968: January: Siege of Kh Sanh; Tet Offensive
February: Westmoreland requests additional 206,000 US troops; Senate Foreign Relations Committee hearings on Gulf of Tonkin.
March: Senator Eugene McCarthy wins New Hampshire Democratic Primary (challenging Johnson); "Wise Men" advise Johnson against any further increase of US troops; General Creighton Abrams replaces Westmoreland. Johnson orders partial bombing halt over North Vietnam and announces that he will not seek re-election.
April: Martin Luther King, Jr. assassinated.
May: US and North Vietnam agree to preliminary peace talks in Paris.
June: Senator Robert Kennedy assassinated after victory in California Democratic Primary.
August: Hubert Humphrey wins Democratic presidential nomination in Chicago as police battle demonstrators in streets outside the convention.
October: Johnson orders total bombing halt over North Vietnam; bombing of Laos increases.
November: Richard Nixon (Spiro Agnew) elected President.
US troops number 535,000; South Vietnam regular forces at 427,000, with 393,000 additional regional and militia troops. Combined North Vietnamese and NLF forces approximately 600,000 at time of Tet Offensive.

PART IV: VIETNAMIZATION (1969-1975)

1969 January: Representatives of Saigon government and NLF join peace talks in Paris.
February: Operation DEWEY CANYON I into Laos.
March: Operation MENU, the "secret" bombing of Cambodia, begins.
June: Nixon announces the withdrawal of 25,000 US troops as first step in process of "Vietnamizing" the war. NLF announces reorganization of Provisional Revolutionary Government of South Vietnam (PRG).
September: Ho Chi Minh dies.
October-November: Massive anti-war demonstrations.
November: The 1968 massacre of My Lai villagers exposed; Nixon calls on the "silent majority" to support his policies.
US troop strength declines to 475,200.

1970 February: Kissinger and Le Duc Tho begin secret talks in Paris.

March: Prince Sihanouk overthrown by Lon Nol in Cambodia.
April: US invasion of Cambodia to destroy Communist "sanctuaries".
May: Protest demonstrations continue throughout the US. National Guard troops fire on anti-war protesters at Kent State in Ohio and four students are killed.
December: Congress bans US combat forces in Cambodia and Laos.
US troop strength drops to 334,600. ARVN troops total 1 million.

1971 January: Winter Soldiier Investigation in Detroit, Michigan.
February-March: Operation DEWEY CANYON II; US supports ARVN invasion of Laos.
March: Daniel Ellsberg offers Pentagon Papers to the New York Times.
Lt. William Calley found guilty in My Lai massacre.
April: Operation DEWEY CANYON III; US Vietnam vets demonstrate against the war in Washington.
June: New York Times begins serialized publication of the Pentagon Papers.
July: Nixon announces that Kissinger will visit the People's Repubic of China.
Nixon's staff organizes "plumbers" to investigate Daniel Ellsberg.
October: Thieu runs unopposed for president of SouthVietnam.
December: Nixon announces end to bombing halt over North Vietnam.
US military forces down to 156,800.

1972: February: Nixon visits China.
March: Hanoi launches Spring Offensive.
April: B-52 bombing of North Vietnam.
May: Communist forces occupy Quang Tri City; Nixon orders mining of Haiphong Harbor: bombing intensifies in North Vietnam.
June: Watergate break-in.
September: ARVN retakes Quang Tri City
October: Kissinger and Le Duc Tho reach agreement in Paris.
November: Nixon wins landslide reelection victory.
December: Le Duc Tho rejects changes in agreement demanded by Thieu; talks break down on December 13.
December 18-30: Operation LINEBACKER II; B-52 bombing of Hanoi and Haiphong: 36,000 tons of bombs dropped.
December 26: Paris talks resume on basis of October agreement.
US military personnel stands at 24,200.

1973: January 27: Representatives of South Vietnam, North Vietnam, the NLF, and the United States sign peace agreement.
February-March: Release of US POW's
March 29: MACV closes down; last US soldiers leave Vietnam.
June: Graham Martin replaces Bunker as ambassador; Congress bans bombing of Cambodia as of August 15. John Dean, former White House legal counsel, testifies before Senate on Watergate cover-up.
October: Vice-President Spiro Agnew, under investigation for bribery, extortion, and tax evasion, resigns.
November: War Powers Act is passed over presidential veto; Congress bans use of funds for US military action anywhere in Indochina.

1974: April: House rejects administration request for increased military aid to South Vietnam.
May: House Judiciary Committee begins impeachment hearings.
August: Nixon resigns; Gerald Ford is sworn in as President.
September: Ford pardons Nixon.
November: Lt. Calley is parolled.
Fighting between North and South Vietnam continues, although at this point, the US is out of the picture.

1975 January: Khmer Rouge besieges Phnom Penh; Communists take Phuoc Long Province.
March 10: Fall of Ban Me Thuot; ARVN retreats from Central Highland.
March 26: Fall of Hue.
March 30: Fall of Danang.
April: Lon Nol leaves Cambodia for Hawaii; Congress refuses Ford administration request for emergency military aid to Saigon; Ho Chi Minh campaign to take Saigon launched; Thieu leaves Saigon for Taiwan.
April 28: Duong Van Minh becomes Chief of State.
April 29: Ambassador Bunker leaves Saigon for Washington.
April 30: Saigon falls to North Vietnamese. South Vietnam surrenders.
May: President Ford orders Marines to rescue crew of Mayaguez from Cambodian forces. Pol Pot has taken control of Cambodia and begins his reign of terror. An estimated 2 million Cambodians (and others) are killed by his regime.

PART V: THE EPILOGUE (1975 TO THE PRESENT PERIOD)

1976: Jimmy Carter is elected President of the United States.

1977: January: Carter pardons most of the 10,000 Vietnam War draft evaders.
March: Leonard Woodcock leads delegation to Hanoi to discuss normalization.
April: Khmer Rouge attacks Vietnamese villages on border.
May: US-Vietnam normalization talks open in Paris.
June: Congress bans all aid, direct or indirect, to any Indochinese state.
December: Vietnam attacks Cambodia; Cambodia breaks diplomatic relations.

1978: March: Vietnam issues severe restrictions on ethnic Chinese.
May: Carter's National Security Adviser, Zbigniew Brzenzinski, visits China; Chinese denounce Vietnam for treatment of ethnic Chinese and cancel aid to Vietnam.
June: Vietnam joins COMECON.
October: US-Vietnam normalization talks break down.
November: Vietnam signs friendship pact with USSR. Exodus of ethnic Chinese begins.
December: Carter announces normalization of relations with China (initiated with the Nixon visit of 1972); Vietnam invades Cambodia on December 25; Thousands of "boat people" leave Vietnam.

1979: January: Victorious Vietnamese establish new government in Cambodia. Thailand and

China agrees to support Khmer Rouge guerrilla war.
February: China invades Vietnam.

1981: January: Ronald Reagan becomes President of the United States.
Backed by the US, China supports Khmer Rouge at ASEAN meetings and blocks resolution calling for the disarmament of the Khmer Rouge along with Vietnamese withdrawal.

1982: Prince Sihanouk and Son Sann join Pol Pot in a coalition government-in-exile in which Khmer Rouge is the dominant military force; US supplies coalition with "non-lethal" aid. Chineses support for Khmer Rouge increases; Khmer Rouge continues to occupy Cambodian UN seat.
November: Vietnam Memorial unveiled in Washington, D.C.; Vietnam withdrawals from Cambodia begin.

1985: Vietnamese announce that the single condition for full withdrawal from Cambodia is the exclusion of Khmer Rouge from power.

1988: Jakarta informal meetings include ASEAN, Vietnam, Cambodia, and all Cambodian factions: Vietnam begins cooperation with the United States to resolve fate of American servicemen missing in action (MIA).

1989: January: George Bush assumes the Presidency.
July: Sihanouk and Hun Sen meetings.
August: International Conference on Cambodia meets in Paris; conference breaks down over the issue of Khmer Rouge inclusion.
September: Vietnamese announce complete, unilateral withdrawal from Cambodia. intensified warfare leads to return of small combat contingent.
November: Australia proposes UN-supervised interim administration of Cambodia; plan is backed by Hun Sen and Sihanouk.

1990: January: Last Vietnamese troops leave Cambodia; Khmer Rouge rejects Australia plan.
April: UN mission to Cambodia.

1991: April: US and Vietnam agree to establish US office in Hanoi to help determine MIA's fate.
October: Vietnam supports UN peace plan for Cambodia. Secretary of State James Baker says Washington is ready to take steps toward normalizing relations with Hanoi. Washington presents Hanoi with "roadmap" plan for phased normalization of relations and lifting of US embargo.

1992: April: Washington eases trade embargo by allowing commercial sales to Vietnam that meet basic human needs, lifts restrictions on projects by American non-governmental and non-profit groups and allows establishment of telecommunications links with Vietnam.
October: Retired General John Vessey, US Presidential envoy on MIA issue, makes sixth trip to Hanoi, obtains Vietnamese agreement on wider MIA cooperation, which Washington describes as a breakthrough.
December: President Bush allows US companies to open offices, sign contracts, and do

feasibility studies in Vietnam.

1993: January: President Clinton assumes office. His record of protesting the war and avoiding service have been an issue during the election campaign.
September: Clinton eases economic sanctions against Vietnam to allow American firms to bid on development projects financed by international banks.

1994: Head of US Pacific Command visits Vietnam, the highest raning active-duty US military officer to do so since the war's end. Admiral Charles Larson later says he has concluded that lifting the trade embargo would help efforts to account for Americans missing from the war.
January 27: Backed by broad bi-partisan support, the Senate approves non-binding resolution urging Clinton to lift embargo, a move they felt would help get a full account of Americans still listed as missing in the Vietnam War.

January 28: US and Vietnam sign agreements settling old property claims and establishing liason offices in each other's capitals.
February 3: Clinton announces the lifting of the trade embargo.

1995: April 30: Vietnam celebrates the 20th Anniversary of the end of the war.
May 15: Vietnam gives US Presidential delegation batch of documents on missing Americans, later hailed by Pentagon as most detailed and informative of their kind.
May 23: Senators John Kerry (D, Mass) and John McCain (R, Arizona), both Vietnam vets urge Clinton to normalize relations.
July 11: President Clinton announces normalization of relations with Vietnam, saying the time has come to move forward and bind up the wounds from the war.
August 5: Secretary of State Warren Christopher opens US embassy in Hanoi.
September 4: Former President Bush visits Vietnam.
November 7-10: Former Secretary of Defense Robert McNamara -- one of the key architects of our Vietnam policy in the sixties, visits Vietnam.

NOVEMBER OF 2000

President Clinton makes an historic three-day visit to Vietnam. The visit puts an exclamation point on the NORMALIZATION process that has been going on throughout the 1990s. The ironies abound: Clinton, of course, had avoided service in Vietnam due to his moral indignation against the war. During the visit, Clinton works to build more cooperative relationships concerning the remains of American servicemen being located and recovered for their families. He also talks about the future of US-Vietnamese economic relations.

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