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The Vietnam Archive  
Oral History Project  
Interview with Vern Greunke  
Conducted by Richard Verrone  
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Transcribed by Jennifer McIntyre

**NOTE:** Text included in brackets [ ] is information that was added by the narrator after reviewing the original transcript. Therefore, this information is not included in the audio version of the interview.

1 Richard Verrone: This is Richard Verrone and I'm doing an oral history  
2 interview with Mr. Vern Greunke. Today is April 1, 2003. It's approximately 2:37 PM  
3 Central Standard Time. I am in Lubbock, Texas in the Special Collections Library  
4 interview room and Mr. Greunke you are in Cedar Bluffs, Nebraska?

5 Vern Greunke: Yes, that's correct.

6 RV: Okay, great. Let's start with some biographical information on yourself, sir.  
7 Tell me a little about your childhood, where were you born, when were you born and how  
8 did you grow up?

9 VG: I was born in Fremont, Nebraska. Let's see I went to the local high school  
10 there, it was a town of about twenty thousand people and graduated from high school  
11 there. I went into the workforce with no particular career in mind, I just got a job, that  
12 was my goal out of high school was to graduate and get a job and I did. About two years  
13 after that is when we could see the draft was looming over us and that's when this all  
14 started then as far as enlisting and that.

15 RV: Okay, what did your parents do for a living?

16 VG: My father was a plumber's helper and my mother was a housewife. I had  
17 three brothers and three sisters and that pretty much took care of her time.

18 RV: Yes, I can imagine. Well, how would you describe your childhood, when  
19 you were a young boy?

1 VG: Pleasant. We were low-income and I guess you might say that we were poor  
2 but we didn't realize it. We made do with what we had and was happy with what we had.  
3 I think that we were all just average.

4 RV: Did you work as a kid?

5 VG: Let's see. Well I had a paper route when I turned about maybe about ten  
6 years old, ten to twelve I had a paper route. My folks didn't have a car, we kind of relied  
7 on other people for transportation and so I did the whole thing on my bicycle for two  
8 years. Which is a little different than nowadays where they haul them around in a car  
9 from door to door. After that, through high school I detassled in the summertime to have  
10 the corn in the cornfields for about three years for a few weeks each summer. Otherwise  
11 during the winter and fall months no, I just hung out and didn't really, wasn't really  
12 looking to get a job at that time yet, I just did without the money. When I turned sixteen I  
13 didn't get a car because my folks couldn't buy me one and I didn't have the money for  
14 one so I just didn't have one you know, but it didn't seem to bother me I guess.

15 RV: Tell me about your experiences in school, what kind of student were you?

16 VG: I was the kid that sat in the back and got Ds. I was quiet, pretty quiet, didn't  
17 say much, you had to ask me a question to get something out of me. I think I've turned  
18 around quite a bit from that and that was partly due to a sergeant in the Army, kind of  
19 pulled things out of me one time and kind of never went back. But I was, I don't know if  
20 I'd call myself an underachiever but I was smarter than what my grades showed. As I  
21 said my main goal in high school was just graduate. I had no true ambition as far as any  
22 career or anything just get that out of the way, get a job, get married and do what the  
23 status quo does.

24 RV: Did your parents emphasize education to you or did they just kind of want  
25 you to stay in school or go to college, anything like that?

26 VG: Oh, no college was out of the question. My grades didn't warrant it and they  
27 really didn't have the money and you know I didn't have the grades to get a scholarship or  
28 anything. It did turn out that pretty much all seven of us did get to college at one time or  
29 other; some of them got through and actually graduated. I tried a shot at it after I got out  
30 of the Army and I learned that I was not college material.

31 RV: Tell me what that sergeant did for you, you said that.

1 VG: Well, after I got out of Vietnam I wound up in Taiwan and I was in an  
2 operations building and I was forced basically to yell instructions across a room and he  
3 kind of gave the, "I can't hear you" that you've seen and heard of. So I had to vocalize in  
4 front of people and I think he kind of brought me out of my shell. That was well forced  
5 actually I had to talk in front of other people and loudly besides and it was in a situation  
6 where I really didn't know what was going on either, but got to kind of know how to fake  
7 it.

8 RV: Right, well did you have favorite subjects in school; was there something that  
9 you were particularly interested in?

10 VG: Oh, when I was in high school I was interested in cars, cars was my main  
11 thing. I took a drafting, a mechanical drawing class and one of the things was, was every  
12 so many assigned plates we got a free where we could draw anything we wanted. I  
13 would be drawing cars, that was my optional plate each time was to draw a car, copy  
14 something out of a car magazine. We were really into all the hot rod magazines and stuff  
15 at the time. That was what I had put down, as I wanted to design cars when I got out of  
16 high school but that was obviously out of the question actually. But that was my best  
17 subject was mechanical drawing and drafting type of thing and now I sit at a computer  
18 and do ad composition for the newspaper and I look at what I'm doing and its right down  
19 the line. That's what I was good at and that's what I'm doing.

20 RV: That's great, great. What years were you in high school?

21 VG: '59, I graduated in '63.

22 RV: Were you particularly interested in world events or did you keep up with  
23 what was happening around the world, news?

24 VG: Not really, no we, we heard a little smatter of someplace called Vietnam and  
25 there was something going on over there and so and so's buddy was in the Navy that was  
26 over there or something. Yes there was a war going on but we still didn't pay much  
27 attention, it was still far away and not in our minds, not in '63, no it was not a concern at  
28 the time, no.

29 RV: Okay, so when you graduated high school you said you were basically out to  
30 find a job, what did you do?

1 VG: Right, I went out and put applications at different places, especially the better  
2 paying places in Omaha since we were about forty-five minutes from Omaha and then.  
3 Let's see, I even went to a job employment agency, I figured well if they can find me a  
4 job, I'll pay him. The guy gave me a battery of tests, one time he asked me if I had  
5 cheated because I had finished the test in the allotted time and most people didn't and he  
6 thought I was pretty sharp and maybe I was sharper than I thought because well then  
7 when I did get a job, I just got a call one morning from a buddy of mine that had been in  
8 high school, well get down to the *Tribune*, they need a clean up kid and one of the first  
9 things the guy says is "How do you stand in the draft?" and I go, "well, about the same as  
10 everybody else". You know I hadn't really thought about it and anyway I got hired on  
11 sweeping the floors at the newspaper and helping run the Linotypes part of the day and  
12 that was my introduction into the workforce then. But I had to apply to different places  
13 and nothing, no one had called me anyway up until that point, so I had spent about three  
14 months out of high school just looking.

15 RV: And then after that, you stayed there for about three months, what did you do  
16 then?

17 VG: Well, during the three months I was looking, I graduated in June and I got  
18 hired in August.

19 RV: Okay, I got you. Okay, and so how long did you stay at this position?

20 VG: For two years. Two years, I didn't miss a day of work because of sickness  
21 and first day actually that I took off was the day to go down and take my pre-physical  
22 exam. That was the first day, I hadn't even gotten a day of vacation, I happened to start at  
23 the wrong time and the bottom of the ladder seniority and so that was my first day off  
24 was the day I went down for my physical. We took a battery of tests there to see what we  
25 had as far as aptitude and stuff. We had tired to volunteer for the draft, there were three  
26 of us, there was my buddy and then there was a guy that I worked with. We were each a  
27 month apart birthday wise and the oldest one had some people that were a little bit older  
28 than him and we could kind of see it coming down, month by month. You get your  
29 notice to take your physical this month and then a few months later they were getting  
30 drafted, so the three of us thought, well let's go volunteer and get it over with. So we  
31 went to the draft board lady and she said, you know we wanted to volunteer for the draft

1 and she says, “Well, if you’re going to go into the service, why not get something good  
2 out of it. Why don’t you see the recruiter and maybe you could get some schooling”? So  
3 three of us headed over to the recruiter and I was all set to go into printing school. I  
4 figured if that was already my occupation and I was pretty happy with him, I might as  
5 well get some training courtesy of the government. And another guy was going to do  
6 something else, I don't remember what the third one was, but in the meantime because of  
7 the tests we had taken it showed that we had a little higher IQ than the average draftee.  
8 They talked us into seeing the Army Security Agency recruiter, which the Army Security  
9 Agency had a higher level of, I don’t know what you call it, but intelligence was  
10 something that you had to have. I think you had to have an IQ of over a 110 or  
11 something or other, I don't know. It was considered the top ten percent of the Army and  
12 we went to see him and he talked to us about the secret stuff and radio transmissions and  
13 oh, all sorts of stuff but he couldn’t tell us much about it. It was all secret and classified.  
14 But he gave us a little folder and actually the day the three of us got on the bus to go to  
15 Omaha, we were still going to go in for three years. My buddy had this folder that was  
16 from the ASA, the Army Security Agency and it said in there, non-combatant agency.  
17 Well, this was when President Johnson had just started another push for, need more guys  
18 and that sounded pretty good at the time, you know, non-combatant. I’ll get some  
19 schooling out of them, but the catch was you had to give them an extra year, it was a four  
20 year hitch rather than three because it had so much schooling, because of the background  
21 checks they had to do to get your security clearance and stuff and so we said, yes, well  
22 that sounds pretty good so two of us opted for that when we got to Omaha, we signed up  
23 for the ASA not knowing what we were getting into. The other guy went into Signal  
24 Corps, went to Germany, spent his three years, got out a year ahead of us, but you didn’t  
25 know, it was still luck of the draw, we still could have ended up in Vietnam something  
26 anyway. Which turned out my first tour then was Vietnam because they have radios over  
27 in Vietnam and yes, we were non-combatant, we could go looking for trouble, but over  
28 there you know they were still looking for you.

29 RV: Exactly, you’re in a war zone.

30 VG: Right, yes. And my buddy, after we both went to Fort Devens to school  
31 there and he wound up second in his class and volunteered, he got, supposed to have

1 gotten a choice of where he wanted to go. He put in for Vietnam and they sent him to  
2 Panama instead. He did wind up finally getting there anyway because he was looking at  
3 the money aspect; you got a little bonus there for hazardous duty pay and stuff. I put in  
4 for the States, I wasn't too adventurous and wound up in Vietnam anyway.

5 RV: Did the two of you go through advanced training together?

6 VG: Yes, we did. It was strange, we had serial numbers one number apart and so  
7 I knew his, he knew mine and we made it through basic training and to the same  
8 company at Fort Devens at advanced training. Only a couple months, oh maybe a month  
9 or so into I was accelerated two classes ahead, we were in the same barracks, in fact we  
10 had to top and bottom bunks in a bunk. So, in fact we were there for quite a long time  
11 and one time they lined us up for a detail and they had this long line and they split the  
12 line right between me and him. Otherwise we pretty much you know hung out together  
13 and it was nice to have another friend from Nebraska you know and somebody you knew  
14 and could hang out with.

15 RV: Did it help you get through it?

16 VG: Oh, yes it did. Yes, it did definitely although I'd have made it through  
17 without him but it was nice to have somebody else around. And he was a good buddy  
18 from high school so I knew him real good, it wasn't just like another person from  
19 Fremont, it was a good friend to start with.

20 RV: What did your parents think about you being in the military?

21 VG: Oh, they pretty much accepted it. My brother had gone; my oldest brother  
22 had gone into the National Guard and was doing the weekly training and that kind of  
23 stuff. I don't know, as far as now that I'm a parent you see how they felt but they didn't  
24 really express too much at the time. I know when I got home from Vietnam on leave for  
25 thirty days and then I had to go back to Taiwan, they took me to Offutt Air Base and I  
26 caught just a hop to get out to California to get myself back to Taiwan and I know my  
27 mom said something about her baby boy or whatever was going to go halfway around the  
28 world all by himself and I could see where now that as a parent it was quite a traumatic  
29 thing, yes.

30 RV: Okay, well tell me about basic training, this is at Fort Leonard Wood?

1           VG: Fort Leonard Wood, yes. That was a shock of course. It wasn't quite as bad  
2 as I thought. I thought they were going to have us drop and give you twenty the minute  
3 you got off the bus but they treated us fairly well and the sergeants really didn't use bad  
4 language at us as bad as we thought they were going to. They had already been cautioned  
5 I guess and there was some training there. Let's see, got down there, we got the shots, we  
6 got our uniforms and stuff and they took us on a bus a couple days later to our new  
7 company and there we were with our boot laces hanging out, which we were immediately  
8 were told to stuff in and the sergeant had them bring a bunk out of the barracks to show  
9 us how to make a bed, making hospital corners on a bed was new to me, because I  
10 usually didn't even make my bed so that was something and of course I'd always heard  
11 the scare stories of being able to bounce a quarter off your bunk and mine never was  
12 really ever that taut. My boots were never shined as good as they thought they should be  
13 or as good as I wanted them to be. I even tried to pay another guy who was doing a pretty  
14 good job at it. He was kind of selling stuff out for other people but just to make them  
15 presentable. Being shorter too, I was 5'6 and when you stand in the platoon like that, the  
16 short ones don't seem to be quite as impressive military stylized as the taller ones do and  
17 the other problem with that was marching. You were supposed to take like a thirty inch  
18 step or whatever when you stepped out, well a shorter person has to make a longer step  
19 with their little legs, which makes their head go down, that causes them to bob, so in a  
20 platoon thing they would say, "Quit bobbing over there" and you couldn't help it, you  
21 had to stretch out as the taller guy next to you and so it was a little frustrating there.  
22 Another thing was, I was kind of about a 105-pound weakling when I went in, I think I  
23 gained around twenty-five, thirty pounds, just in basic. I remember being hungry all the  
24 time, you know I couldn't wait for the next meal and usually I was more of a, before that  
25 meals were just kind of something you had to do, you know I just was never that  
26 interested in food before that you know. If it was time to eat you ate. I also a very, very  
27 picky eater, I didn't eat vegetables, I didn't eat this, I didn't eat that. I remember the first  
28 day we were down there went into the chow hall and there was a big glass of tomato juice  
29 there. Now, as far as I knew I didn't like tomato juice, I was telling myself it's a new life.  
30 You've got to start over and I gulped down that, about half of it and I couldn't cut it.  
31 And it was like, take what you eat, eat what you take and it was like, oh gosh what do I

1 do with the rest of this now, I can't throw it away. But I never did learn to drink tomato  
2 juice that just wasn't in me. The next morning they had breakfast call or whatever, we all  
3 lined up to eat and then we learned right away, don't be one of the first twenty-five in  
4 line, because the first twenty-five in line get KP and get to ladle out the food for the  
5 others. See but you don't know that the first day, you know it on the second and third  
6 day, but on the first day you're unaware of that, you're going to get in there and get first.  
7 And I remember spooning out the scrambled eggs and the sergeant cook or whatever he  
8 looks at me and says, "You better slow down on those portions or you're going to have  
9 some pretty mean, angry people at the end of the line that don't get any" and "okay." I  
10 do remember getting like the shots, at the time, I don't know if they still do but they had  
11 the pneumatic air guns where they gave you so many shots in the one arm and so many  
12 other, both at the same time, you just went through a line and they had us in an old  
13 wooden barracks building and it was real hot. They had us belly to butt just squeezed in  
14 there and I was standing there watching these other people getting shots and suddenly I  
15 could feel my legs getting weak. I stepped out of line and I told somebody that I was  
16 going to feel like I was going to faint and I'd never fainted before in my life, but I knew  
17 something wasn't right. A guy took me outside and set me down, told me to put my head  
18 down, and about a minute later he comes back, "okay, get back in line," got back in line  
19 and I got my shots before I would have if I had stayed in the line.

20 RV: What kind of weapons training did you have?

21 VG: We had M-14s and those things were heavy things compared to the M-16s  
22 were got in Vietnam. Yes, they were heavy. I was a pretty good marksman, I didn't get  
23 to the top reward but I think that was because you had to change the magazines in  
24 between the firing of the actual when we did it for points and I had panicked and had  
25 expelled what I had before I realized I was empty and had to stick another one in, but yes  
26 that was, for me, I don't know. I really wasn't ever a hunter and the kick that came out of  
27 an M-14 was more than I wanted to have on my shoulder. We did the live fire thing  
28 where you did your low crawl, that type of thing. Basic was usually, it wasn't fun but it  
29 was usually pretty interesting. I never really hated it. I know my buddy was always  
30 saying, "I don't know if I'm ever going to get through this, I'm not going to get through  
31 this" and I'd always try to tell him, yes, we're going to make it. One thing they did do



1 down there is to the candy machine was off limits and they said that stuff's bad for you.  
2 It was until we were into our sixth week and then we could have it after six o'clock, after  
3 the late meal and I did find out that if you fill yourself up with junk food you feel terrible.  
4 The food that they were feeding was actually turned out to be pretty decent stuff after all.  
5 I do remember one Sunday though we had a liberty later on in the basic training and me  
6 and a buddy went over to one of the cafeterias or whatever they called it and we just  
7 loaded up with everything we could see. "Oh, let's have some pie, yes, some cake, yes"  
8 and just went back and gorged ourselves, compared to the food we were getting in the  
9 mess hall it was great stuff.

10 RV: What would you say was the hardest thing about basic training for you?

11 VG: PT, I was, as I said I was a weakling, I had no muscles in my arms and I had  
12 no muscles in my legs. When we went out to do the PT test, one of the things was we  
13 had to run a mile within I don't know, eight, nine minutes and I ran the first lap and then I  
14 had to walk the other three and then I puked. We had to do a ladder thing with, we had to  
15 go through a horizontal ladder every day to go to chow, just one time through it and I  
16 maxxed that right away, first time where I could do it. It was funny because you'd see  
17 these little farm boys hanging up there that could only do two or three rungs and they'd  
18 fall off so I thought I was pretty good. But it turned out in the PT test you had to do like  
19 a hundred of them, you had to go to the end, turn around and go back, go back, go back. I  
20 fell off that, I had trouble with the grenade throw. I couldn't throw a grenade far enough  
21 to hit the target so I was always afraid if I ever had to throw one I'd blow myself up and  
22 they even had us throwing rocks trying to build our arms up, as though that was going to  
23 do some good, the ones that had boloed the PT test. Let's see, there was like five  
24 different things and in fact I, yes I boloed the test the first time, I had to retake it. I don't  
25 know what I did the second time to do any better or if they kind of cheated on our scores  
26 a little bit but at least I made enough to go on anyway. I didn't have to get recycled in  
27 basic or anything.

28 RV: So the rocks helped you?

29 VG: No, I think they just helped us by giving us a little better score or something,  
30 I don't know.

31 RV: How much contact did you have with your family while you were there?

1 VG: Pretty good. When I left for the Army I kind of thought, well this is a new  
2 life and I didn't even take an address book along with me, I was just going to kind of start  
3 fresh and the next thing you know I was writing home to my folks saying, "Send me this  
4 person's address, send me this person's address because I want to get some mail." You  
5 know everybody else was getting mail; I wanted to get some too. I wasn't homesick but  
6 getting some word from home was neat. The letters my folks wrote, especially my mom,  
7 she would tell me stuff about the neighbors or church or this or that. But when I finally  
8 got a hold of some of the old friends back there they would tell me what was really going  
9 on and what the kids were doing and who was getting married and who was pregnant and  
10 who got arrested and that kind of stuff, that's the kind of stuff I was interested in you  
11 know, not the stuff maybe mom would send to me. She was doing her best and all but  
12 that was; she was sending mom stuff, not what I was wanting to know.

13 RV: Had any of your instructors been over in Southeast Asia?

14 VG: Oh, yes and one of them, a Sergeant Shaw was, people were always asking  
15 him different things and he was filling everybody with so much BS.

16 RV: Oh, really?

17 VG: Yes, I mean he was laying it on pretty thick and they were just standing there  
18 with eyes wide open.

19 RV: What would he tell you?

20 VG: I don't remember anything in particular but just, I just know, I knew, I  
21 realized that what he was telling them was going over their head and he was just doing it  
22 to be ornery, I don't think he was doing it to deceive them, that was his way of having a  
23 little fun, to amuse himself. I'm sure that, as being a basic training instructor was  
24 nothing he really wanted to be doing so. There was at least one of them that had been  
25 over there, yes.

26 RV: What did you know about the Vietnam War at this time?

27 VG: At that time, not much, no. In '65 all I knew is that the ASA had one big  
28 station at Phu Bai and it was pretty safe as far as being behind the lines if there were any  
29 lines. I was figuring that even if I was ASA and I was going to Vietnam, although at the  
30 time I didn't know that yet, I didn't figure we would be in any real danger, but otherwise  
31 we hadn't really heard much about it. They kept saying that the draftees were going to

1 Vietnam and then the other guys would say no, the guys that enlisted were going to  
2 Vietnam because they wanted to go. We being four year men and ASA were just kind of  
3 sitting back going, yes, well we're not going, we're non-combatant. It was kind of out of  
4 in my mind that we'll go through the training, but we're never going to use it because  
5 we're ASA. In fact we went through, one time we went off to the ASA Det right there at  
6 Fort Leonard Wood and they had us come in an after being yelled at and don't do this and  
7 stand here and all this, they sat down wanted to know if we wanted some pop, coffee and  
8 some doughnuts and we were, hey this is all right. These guys know how to treat  
9 somebody, well anybody does once you get out of basic. We just didn't realize that the  
10 whole Army was not like basic training for four years you know but that hadn't really  
11 occurred to us yet. We thought it was shouting and standing at attention and drop to give  
12 me twenty for the four years. So that was kind of neat we thought at that time we were  
13 kind of a special breed, that we were kind of set apart from everybody else.

14 RV: Now you knew you were going to ASA right after into advanced, right?

15 VG: Oh, yes yes. That was locked in, that was guaranteed, unless you bolloed out  
16 of the school and then you were going in the infantry, that was always hanging in your  
17 head and you're still going to go in for four years. You sign for four, you're in four and  
18 if you didn't, if you flunked out of the school you were going in the infantry and then  
19 you're going to go to Vietnam so you better study hard.

20 RV: Okay, tell me about advanced training.

21 VG: Let's see we went to, from Fort Leonard Wood we came home from basic  
22 and we'd never, even me and my buddy had never flown on a plane before. So we  
23 wanted to save some money and we took the bus from Nebraska to Massachusetts, like  
24 two and a half days of sitting on the backseat of a bus. When we got there, let's see, it  
25 was November 5, I know that and it was cold there.

26 RV: Is this still 1965?

27 VG: '65, yes, it was '65 and we were kind of wandering around. Luckily there  
28 was the two of us again together so having a buddy to run around with kind of helped  
29 things you know. Let's see, we got there, hung around just a couple of days and they sent  
30 us off to eventual barracks where we were going to be bunked for the next six to nine to  
31 twelve months. We wound up going to night school because they had so many people

1 there that they had to run a day and a night shift and we wound up in night school, which  
2 had its benefits too. They left us alone a lot as far as any kind of inspections and stuff like  
3 that. The case at Fort Devens was, the commander of the base there was Lieutenant  
4 Colonel Louis Millet who had led a bayonet charge in Korea. He was not in ASA and he  
5 had gotten the Congressional Medal of Honor also from doing that and so he had built  
6 this tactical training village there, Vietnam village and anybody going to Vietnam had to  
7 go through this village. So it was always the people like us that just got there who had to  
8 go out and be either aggressors or go out and maybe put some black pajamas on and a  
9 straw hat so that the officer's wives could take a little day tour of the place, I had to do  
10 that too. But otherwise we were sitting out there at midnight in snow, standing there in  
11 Vietnam trying to catch these guys coming through, who were actually being funneled by  
12 the concertina wire right into captivity. I mean they didn't have a whole lot of choice,  
13 they didn't realize that but. But he was a real gung ho, the colonel was what's good for  
14 the troops is good for him, he would take on any troop as far as any activity and  
15 swimming, running, jumping, shooting, anything and he would beat them. He was just  
16 that kind of guy. He would drive around his Jeeps with the doors off or the side panels  
17 off because if it's good for the troops, its good for him so I don't think he wanted to be  
18 there either but he was kind of an interesting guy to be running a, as an old career  
19 infantry soldier to be running a whole camp of guys who could care less about any drills  
20 and ceremony or fighting or anything else.

21 RV: Right. Tell me about the actually training that you received.

22 VG: Well, first off we went into Morse code training and also we had to do that  
23 on a typewriter. So I had taken typing in high school but that was two, four years before  
24 that so when they asked us if we knew had to type we said no and we learned real quick  
25 though. Anyway they gave everybody a book and said, "You've got two weeks to teach  
26 yourself how to type". So these people were taking a typing book just as we had done  
27 with an instructor and teaching themselves. Well we caught on within a day or so and  
28 knew how to type and then the day after that they started basic Morse training. They  
29 gave, they had, we'd listen to these tapes with headphones on and they would start  
30 teaching the tapes, di-da, alpha, and then you had to type it on the typewriter and I think I  
31 learned, I had fiddled with Morse code back in, when I was little my brother and I had

1 been in radios. We had listened to a lot of short wave radio stuff, we used to build little  
2 one, two tube radios and stuff like that so I was familiar with it and I'd gone to a little  
3 Morse code training with a boy scout troop, I wasn't in it but I kind of went along with  
4 them, so I was kind of interested in that type of thing. It sounded neat at this time, didn't  
5 realize the guys were taking code eight hours a day every day and that's when you  
6 realize, gee this isn't maybe quite so good after all. But anyway I learned the code from  
7 eight o'clock in the morning to noon, I had all twenty-six characters and I think the alpha,  
8 and the numbers down. And I think at about two, then as you did that then they started  
9 giving you these training tapes, five words a minute, six words a minute, seven, as you  
10 passed each one then that was good and if you got far enough ahead of the class then they  
11 gave you this ahead of the game button and you could take off a few hours and go to the  
12 PX and drink beer or whatever. I got so far ahead of the rest of the class that they  
13 advanced me two weeks and so they threw me in a class that was you know two weeks  
14 ahead so I'd be closer to where everybody else was. Later on, code is a strange thing,  
15 some people grasp it right away and as we got on up into fifteen and eighteen, we had to  
16 pass eighteen words. That was the goal, eighteen words a minute for graduation. We got  
17 somewhere around fourteen to sixteen, I hit it a roadblock, it was kind of like a  
18 marathoner hitting the wall, I just couldn't get past it. And then as people did not flunk  
19 out but stall like that, they would take groups of them over to a place they called the pit  
20 and that was a special learning room where you stood at attention during breaks. You sat  
21 in your chair and you learned till you got it and if you didn't get it after that then, I mean  
22 that was definitely scare tactics then you were going to, well either off to the infantry.  
23 Although usually it turned out if they did have the money invested in you in getting a  
24 security clearance you probably wound up still at an ASA Unit but as a cook or a clerk or  
25 a truck driver or something and since you were cleared better to have those people around  
26 somebody else. I got to about sixteen I think it was, couldn't get any further and then one  
27 night they walked in and called all these names off and they called us into the latrine  
28 which is, it was the old wooden barracks shed and they read off our names and they said  
29 you are all going to be diverted to O5-D class, which is radio direction finding instead of  
30 intercept. You're going to have another eighteen weeks of school or whatever and we're

1 going oh, okay. At the time I go, oh no and as it turned out that was my luckiest day of  
2 my life.

3 RV: How so?

4 VG: Because I didn't like that job of just taking code eight hours a day, I have a  
5 very short span of attention I guess and it gets boring real quick. The O5-D class, the  
6 radio direction finding, they still required you to be able to read and send code but mostly  
7 it was to recognize code. When we actually went out in the field we had to be able to  
8 identify our targets. We didn't have to copy it though so we had to know we had the  
9 correct target by being able to read the code, but once we knew we had the right target  
10 then that's all we needed. The only problem with there was you had to be able to pass  
11 sixteen or eighteen with a pencil instead of a typewriter and if you ever try to write that  
12 fast in capital letters, you realize that's going pretty fast. Be able to write it down in  
13 capital letters and be able to read it back so that anybody else that picks it up can also  
14 read it. That was fun we, my class that I originally started with, they graduated and went  
15 off and we were still in the States, still going to school, biding our time, new job, learning  
16 all sorts of things, more new equipment. Since there were so many different sites around  
17 the world that all used different equipment they didn't delve into any of it specifically but  
18 they had to give you a familiarization with any of it. So we had a lot of familiarization  
19 classes where they say well, if you run into this, this is what happens, here don't expect to  
20 know it or remember it but when you get to it, you'll know what we're talking about. The  
21 other thing was, about Army class was compared to high school or college was if you  
22 have a class of twenty or thirty people they have to, for the class to advance they have to  
23 keep teaching it until every last person in the class understands it, so if you got it on the  
24 first time through, you know you're home free. They pretty much spoon fed it to you as  
25 far as what we had to know and after I got out of the Army I tried going to college and  
26 there was a guy standing on a stage talking to us who didn't even know if we were even  
27 there or not, you know let alone if we were learning anything where it was a whole  
28 different atmosphere. Where there they had to make sure everybody understood and  
29 when we got more into our advanced classes and into the security stuff. They kept, we  
30 had to keep a notebook and we'd write all our notes in a notebook, which I found out was  
31 a good learning tool for me, then at the end of the night, the end of the class all the

1 notebooks went into a safe. So there was no homework and that was for me, because I  
2 did not do any homework in high school which was one of my drawbacks. I did  
3 everything at school and if I didn't get at school it didn't get done. But I did find out the  
4 notebook procedure was very helpful as far as me retaining knowledge.

5 RV: Okay. How would you rate your overall training there?

6 VG: Oh, excellent, excellent, yes.

7 RV: Prepared you adequately for what you were going to do later on?

8 VG: Oh yes, yes. Well, yes because one of those things we did was we took out  
9 this old radio direction finder number one, it was a big box, tube operated. "We're going  
10 to go out for a familiarization of it, you'll never see it in the field." So we went out and  
11 they showed us how to work it, we went out one whole day just playing it and went off  
12 on kind of a hare and hound chase where we tried to find the hidden transmitter that was  
13 off at the woods and that was fun. We drive around in a Jeep and truck and stuff and that  
14 is the piece of equipment which I worked in Vietnam for the whole year.

15 RV: And they had told you you probably, you wouldn't see it.

16 VG: Right, never see it, no, it was obsolete, no, you'd never see it. What they  
17 were using was fixed base multi-antenna array fields but we got in on a little closer  
18 action, we were always within five to eight miles of the enemy. So we just had this little  
19 box with a rotating diamond-shaped antenna, which we tried to find the enemy with. In  
20 fact we wound up once we got to Vietnam training people coming over after us because  
21 they had quit teaching it and then the guys were looking at us like well, where's the scope  
22 at? There's no scope, you do it with your ears and so we wound up actually being  
23 instructors once we got to Vietnam.

24 RV: Okay. Did you know what your role would be once you finished your  
25 training?

26 VG: No, we were, I was still planning on going to some fixed base unit in  
27 Germany or States or Panama. In fact I put in for the Caribbean, why not put in a dream  
28 sheet and that was truly a dream sheet because later on our discovered that our orders  
29 were cut for Vietnam before we even filled out the dream sheet. We didn't know that at  
30 the time but in fact we avoided going through that tactical training course at  
31 Massachusetts because we knew we didn't like to go through it and so our orders we

1 actually went to Fort Wolters, Texas which was a stateside assignment technically  
2 although we knew within a month we were going to be shipping out but they didn't know  
3 that back at, well I guess they did but there was nothing they could do about it. At the  
4 time I still thought I was going to be at a land based, big base camp type of installation.  
5 It wasn't until oh maybe just before we got on the ship where they read off twenty names,  
6 there was going to be ten names on this one team and ten names on this other team and  
7 we would be running the PRD-1s over there and that's when I went oh, oh no.

8 RV: How did you feel when you found out?

9 VG: Well, a little more scared because we had no idea what we were going to be  
10 up against. You know it sounded a bit of an adventure as far as being back at base camp  
11 but we really didn't know what we were getting into. I guess, we just knew it was going  
12 to be a lot more of a tactical range equipment and we were going to be a lot closer to the  
13 front lines, if there were any then we thought we were going to be.

14 RV: Right. What did you know about the war at this point, is this in 1966?

15 VG: '66 now, yes about August '66. Things were heating up some then, but even  
16 then I still, it was still just something going on over there. You know people were getting  
17 killed but a lot of people were coming home that weren't. There wasn't really any anti-  
18 war sentiment yet, when I went home, I went home for about three weeks from Fort  
19 Wolters before we shipped over and people were asking where I was going. I was telling  
20 them and they were going oh, boy but there wasn't any anti-war at that time, it was still  
21 supporting the troops and all that. But as far as the war itself what was going on no, what  
22 we were getting I was getting out of *Life Magazine* or you know pictures like that but.

23 RV: Did you understand why the United States was even in Southeast Asia, were  
24 people talking about that?

25 VG: Yes, we had to go through an indoctrination movie the President Lyndon  
26 Johnson made just before we left Fort Devens and it was called *Why Vietnam* [with  
27 strong Texan accent], that's how it started out was with President Johnson saying that,  
28 Why Vietnam? [Again with accent], and then it told us about the whole history of  
29 Indochina. I guess and I don't really remember it other than President Johnson saying  
30 that and pronouncing Vietnam the way he did and that was supposedly them telling us  
31 why we were supposed to be there. The domino theory, that was pretty popular, we were



1 going to stop those dominos from falling, that's why we had to be there, that was the  
2 main thing was that the whole Southeast Asia was going to go if we didn't stop them  
3 there, the communists.

4 RV: Did you have any training about the South Vietnamese culture and what to  
5 expect?

6 VG: Nothing, nothing, nope. We landed in Qui Nonh on the troop ship, we  
7 walked up the beach with our rifles and we got on some blue Army busses. From there  
8 we got onto a C-130 transport, flew to Pleiku and then we got in some deuce and a halves,  
9 open deuce and a half trucks. We were standing up and as we were going down the road  
10 there was these people alongside the road, little kids, some of them waving at us and  
11 some of them flipping us the finger and I thought welcome to Vietnam.

12 RV: So you went over on a ship?

13 VG: Yes, yes.

14 RV: When did you arrive in country?

15 VG: August 22, 1966, eighteen days on the ship.

16 RV: Eighteen days?

17 VG: Yes.

18 RV: Wow.

19 VG: Yes and I had never been sick in the Army until the day before we got off. I  
20 got a bad case of the runs and it was the first I'd have to gone to sick call. The doctor,  
21 whoever I saw thought I probably had maybe eaten off of a soapy mess kit you know tray  
22 that hadn't gotten cleaned. I think now after some other traumatic things in my life had  
23 happened, it was probably nerves because a couple times the day before I was going to  
24 get on a plane and go somewhere or something, pretty much the same thing happened.  
25 I'm guessing at the time, even though I was telling myself I wasn't scared, I think  
26 probably inside I probably was. Because we had visions of climbing down the ropes off  
27 the ship into the landing craft and that type of thing and hitting the beach with our rifles  
28 and having to take the beach or whatever, a lot of stories go on. But yes I was, I think I  
29 was scared at the time, yes.

30 RV: What were your first impressions of Vietnam when you first got on the beach  
31 and got on those busses?

1 VG: Oh it was green, very green. First impressions, smell, when they were  
2 cooking things, they would cook with all sorts of fuels and had all sorts of aromas  
3 around. We went off to a, just the side of a hill which was on the wrong side of a  
4 perimeter. We were right, brand new troops in country and they put us basically outside  
5 the barbed wire. Some of the guys, poor guys had to stand guard the first night. We  
6 started filling sand bags, set up some tents, some twelve man tents and they told us if a  
7 machine gun or whatever went off up the hill to run towards the machine gun.

8 RV: And you're like yes, right.

9 VG: And get in this ditch right in front of it, Yes, I'm like you've got three  
10 hundred guys coming towards you, but that wasn't what they had said they were  
11 supposed to do. We all slept in our fatigues the first night, our rifles right by our side, our  
12 boots on and we were ready to move. That was scary, first night. You'd hear, you know  
13 they were firing artillery during the night and the helicopters were flying around and  
14 everything else and we were on the wrong side of the perimeter as far as security wise,  
15 we were on the outside of the barbed wire, so that was pretty scary the first night.

16 RV: What would you say was the overall morale of your unit and those guys  
17 there?

18 VG: Oh, it was excellent. Morale was great. The one neat thing too was when we  
19 got down to Fort Wolters they put our platoon, our whole platoon was made of guys that  
20 had the same MOS. So we all got to know the big boys and the guys that had been  
21 someplace else before and then we were asking them all sorts of questions of you know  
22 what's its really like. Are you here or there and another thing was and we were all in the  
23 same job plus we were all going to Vietnam, we were basically in the same boat. They  
24 didn't know what they were getting into either. So a lot of times when new guys go off  
25 to another duty station in Germany or someplace else, they really get harassed the new  
26 guys. Well we didn't get that; they treated us great, like brothers and looking out for  
27 each other. We had the same job and there was a camaraderie there just among us. In fact  
28 when we set up in Vietnam we had a tent of just the same guys with the same MOS, we  
29 were all there together you know. And we, first thing we did is started filling sandbags  
30 and you know one or two guys held it open while the other guys shoveled, that's when I  
31 started smoking again.

1           RV: Oh, really.

2           VG: Yes, it was the only, one of the reasons you could stop filling sandbags was  
3 for a smoke break and I smoked a little in high school you know that type of thing. I  
4 really wasn't a heavy smoker but I had quite, didn't smoke through basic, didn't smoke  
5 through advanced training, and tired of having to dump out the butt cans and stuff for  
6 other people kind of reinforced that this was a really ugly habit. I started just to, it was  
7 one more way of stop for a few minutes here and started smoking and I smoked all  
8 through Vietnam and on.

9           RV: Yes, you continued?

10          VG: Oh, yes I continued on through the rest of the Army until I got married and  
11 then even for about a year or so after I got married and then about the time we were going  
12 to have our first child I promised my wife that I would quit and promised myself too and  
13 I did. I'd tried quitting in Vietnam a number of times when we were out in the sticks we  
14 lived out with about three or four other military advisors, there was only like five, six  
15 Americans there, helicopter would come in on Sundays with a little PX shopper and  
16 you'd buy your carton or two of cigarettes. One week I didn't buy any figuring that  
17 would be a good way to quit smoking and the next thing I know I was breaking open  
18 these full cases of C rations so you could open up those little cartons of C-rations to get  
19 the little packs of four cigarettes out, so I knew I had a habit.

20          RV: Right, that's a pretty good sign. Okay, well tell me your first couple of days  
21 there, you're at Pleiku you're filling, you're outside the perimeter, you're filling  
22 sandbags, you're in.

23          VG: Yes, filling sandbags, we got maybe three feet or so of sandbags around the  
24 tent, I think the second or third day we got some cots. We didn't have our equipment, all  
25 our equipment stuff went on another ship to Italy so we had nothing, it got diverted  
26 somehow so we were looking for anything and everything and somehow or other we got  
27 a few vehicles and those guys would go out on scrounging runs and anything that wasn't  
28 tied down was ours. In fact they started setting up a little shower by finding some barrels  
29 and stuff to put up in there.

30          RV: Now was that a common thing, let me interrupt, I'm sorry, was that a  
31 common thing that you just kind, guys would go around and try to find what they could?

1           VG: Oh yes, yes and it was kind of a contest to see who could steal the most from  
2 each other, yes, without getting caught. Yes that was a very commonplace thing, just  
3 anything that wasn't nailed down, tied down or anything that you could barter that you  
4 had something, that you could barter something else, you know especially the supply  
5 sergeants or the cooks. If you had something that they wanted you could get all sorts of  
6 things. Later on we found out that when I was, the same place where I had the bad  
7 cigarette habit that if you bought two bottles of vodka for a \$1.15 a piece and took them  
8 up to Lai Khe which was a dry county, they could only have beer and you give a cook or  
9 somebody up there, or a supply sergeant this whiskey you could bring a deuce and half  
10 full of stuff back with you. Anything that they could you that they figured they could  
11 give you without being, that they didn't have to show proof of what they had or whatever,  
12 you know anything. You could come back with cases of C-rations and concertina wire  
13 and any kind of extra food or whatever that they thought they could give you. Yes, that  
14 was commonplace. The first night we slept on the ground, I think the second night or so  
15 we had cots and let's see, about the third day or so we all in turns went down to a shower  
16 point. That was a creek that had some pumps and they were pumping the water out of the  
17 creek into these shower heads and cold, ice cold water, but it was wet anyway so we were  
18 able to shower. It was the first shower we had after getting off the ship and right in that  
19 same water, downstream or upstream was some ladies beating clothes against the rocks  
20 that they were washing for someone or other. That was new as far as culture wise, that  
21 was kind of a culture shock to see something like that. I was actually only at Pleiku about  
22 three days or so before they said gather up your gear, you're going south and I was  
23 switched from the one team I thought I was on to another team. I had tried to get in line  
24 to get an allocation out of my paycheck but the line was always so long with the company  
25 clerk that I never got it done because I didn't want all that money paid to myself there, I  
26 wanted it taken out so I'd never see it but it didn't happen. Anyway so then we went  
27 south from there then, about three days or so.

28           RV: How did you go actually, by bus?

29           VG: We, no we, let's see we went by plane, let's see we went to the Pleiku airport  
30 and then we, you would stand around and try to catch a hop and we flew to Nha Trang  
31 and that was one of our battalion headquarters was at and that was a beautiful, looked like

1 a little French resort, palm trees, sand. The attitude I noticed of the people there, even  
2 they were ASA and all was completely different than ours because they'd been there six  
3 months. You'd be laying in your bunk in the middle of the night and someone would yell,  
4 "Attitude Check" and then some other guy in another tent would yell, "Umph, we want to  
5 leave" and that was, they'd been there too long already, it was too hot and they were tired  
6 and everything. But we hadn't, you know we weren't assigned to there or anything so we  
7 would go swimming in the ocean, which was kind of, really struck me as odd. As we'd  
8 be laying on the sand and helicopters with red crosses would be flying over us, you know  
9 it's kind of hard to visualize that a war was actually going on while we were sunning  
10 ourselves on this sandy beach. We went into downtown Nha Trang, which was a real  
11 dirty city and on top of a hotel there and sitting and drinking beer and still talking and  
12 wondering what was to become of us.

13 RV: What were your duties there?

14 VG: There, nothing. We were in transit, in transit. Then we went from Nha  
15 Trang to, let's see, from Nha Trang our baggage went on one plane and then we went on  
16 another and when we got to Nha Trang, our duffle bags and stuff were just sitting in a  
17 pile at the end of the runway. We had to go retrieve them but luckily they were there.  
18 We flew in I think a C-123 from Nha Trang to Saigon, the thing, I don't think it got about  
19 fifty feet off the ground the whole way, it was really scary. We sat in those jump seats  
20 along the side; there was some condensation, steam or smoke in and out of these pipes.  
21 Along the top roof of the plane we didn't know what it was and we were really close to  
22 the ground where anybody could have hit us with ground fire. So it was really hard to  
23 even see the scenery because we were going by it so fast, so we landed at Saigon and that  
24 was the group headquarters, that was, they'd been there awhile. They had wooden tent  
25 kits there but the mosquitoes was bad, it was just like a swamp area.

26 RV: Did you stay right there on the air base?

27 VG: Yes, right, we were, the group headquarters was right on the edge and we  
28 had mosquito nets over us and it wasn't enough. When I got up in the morning I wrote in  
29 my letters home to my folks. I ran my hand down my arm and it was just solid bumps all  
30 the way down both arms, it just completely all during the night. That was my first also  
31 experience of having a Mama-san come in and sweep the floor and I don't know if she

1 made the beds or not but you know it was time to get out of bed and get dressed and she  
2 wasn't leaving. So you got dressed whether she liked it or not and that was kind of  
3 unique. They didn't let us off the base there so we didn't get to get into Saigon or  
4 anything to see anything there. They did have an old tennis court that had weeds growing  
5 through it which we amused ourselves there and then they had a club there. This was  
6 Davis Station and this was named after James T. Davis, the first man killed in Vietnam.  
7 And they had a big picture of him that the Vietnamese obviously had painted, they had  
8 entertainment each night and a band playing or bring in some Filipino strippers or  
9 something or other. I don't know we never saw any of that but it was, that was their  
10 recreation in the evening. We were only there for a few more days, then we went to Long  
11 Binh. There, they didn't know we were coming, "Here's a tent, put it up yourself" and  
12 you'll have a place to stay, if you're in transit, there's the transit tent, so we put a tent up  
13 and stayed in that. Then we did get into Bien Hoa and Long Binh and that was an  
14 experience because I know the first time I went in with the guys, one of the guys said,  
15 "Well, let's eat this little roadside café". Here are these stories about the guys throwing  
16 the satchel charges in from the motorcycles or the bikes speeding by and as I said earlier I  
17 was not adventurous at eating food as far as vegetables or anything else unknown to me.  
18 I was more a fast food type of guy, hamburger, fries and a coke and so when they wanted  
19 to have noodles or something like that it was like oh, boy but I did manage to get  
20 something down. But I was scared because I didn't know what was going on or what was  
21 going to happen.

22 RV: So you were aware of your environment?

23 VG: Oh yes, then I was aware, yes. Then it was like this is kind of iffy and they  
24 were saying everything's okay but you didn't know. We went around to a few different  
25 bars and stuff and the girls there trying to sell the Saigon tea, which are a few dollars a  
26 shot everywhere, talk to you and stuff.

27 RV: What were your impressions of the civilians?

28 VG: Oh, they talk funny. At that time we still knew what was going on language  
29 wise. When we were in Saigon we did get over to Cholon, there was a big PX there and  
30 it was the Chinese section of Saigon and there we ran into a guy who was at the radio  
31 research also and he gave us our first two or three lessons in Vietnamese, one was dinky

1 dao, which mean I think crazy as a bird and di di mao meant get away or get away from  
2 me or whatever, that was something handy to learn. We didn't still yet know how to say  
3 hello or good-bye or thank you or anything like that. So mostly it was either hand signs  
4 or you hoped they understood more English than you understood Vietnamese, which was  
5 none at the time. They seemed friendly to us as far as you know being there and all and  
6 bringing our money and stuff along with us too of course. We went to Long Binh and oh  
7 we went in a little village, you could get the roadside café there and have some pop or  
8 beer and stuff too. You couldn't drink the water or anything so you were basically  
9 confined to drinking something out of can, either alcohol or pop, one or the other, or the  
10 local beer.

11 RV: Now were you guys heading towards some location that you knew of?

12 VG: We were heading somewhere but we didn't know where yet. When we got  
13 to Long Binh then we got our equipment, then they sent us off to a little, they split us up.  
14 Sent us two or three people at a time to different places to learn, to get familiar with the  
15 local code that we were going to be hearing. The targets and stuff and so they sent us off  
16 to a little det by the 173<sup>rd</sup> Airborne, they had a little radio research det there and we  
17 learned how they worked their rotas, their signal schedules and how they came up and  
18 went down and what to listen for and stuff. And at the time I thought oh boy, you know  
19 its been along time since school and I didn't think I was going to cut it but you know,  
20 going to have to, you know one way or another I guess you'd learn. They showed us the  
21 equipment, we got our crypto gear, the lieutenant there, we had a first lieutenant, his  
22 name escapes me right now but oh let's see. I can't think what it is, he showed us how all  
23 the stuff worked and he was the first lieutenant I can say that I actually liked. I mean he  
24 was the first one that treated us like human beings, like he was one of us and I wrote  
25 home to the folks that we really met a nice officer and stuff. We were getting ready to go  
26 for our first mission, we didn't know where we were going, there were stories flying that  
27 we were going to go out with the Australians. There were stories that we were going to  
28 go up to the DMZ, there was still a lot of talk but we knew, we knew we were something,  
29 that we were something special. One day this lieutenant was talking on a land line  
30 telephone to a general who was standing next to General Westmoreland and that was  
31 quite impressive and he was relaying, this is what these guys are going to be doing and

1 where they're going to go and don't be surprised if Westmoreland comes out and sees  
2 you sometimes. Oh wow, this is, we are something special but we didn't know what yet.

3 RV: Tell me about your equipment and exactly what you would be doing.

4 VG: Well we had a Jeep mounted radio direction finder and normally its set on a  
5 tripod, you put it up on a tripod and you had to find something to sit on, either the box it  
6 came in or a couple of gas cans and a plank across them or something. But ours was  
7 mounted in a Jeep and this was kind of a novel thing. They were trying out to see how  
8 they would work and so they took the back seat of the Jeep out and put this radio back  
9 there and then we were going to go out. Then we had a transceiver and then we had a  
10 backup receiver and then we had a crypto box so we could do all our voice  
11 communications, we could speak plain and then it was all encrypted so we didn't have to  
12 worry about anybody intercepting our transmissions or what we were doing or anything.  
13 And we practiced around with that and we were kidding around, saying all sorts of nasty  
14 stuff over the air to each other knowing nobody else could hear it and thought this is  
15 pretty neat. Then we knew we were going somewhere, we just didn't know where yet  
16 until we finally, then finally they sent us, we convoyed off to Cu Chi and that was our  
17 eventual base of operations for the entire year then. That's where we lived and when we  
18 got there, well "We didn't know you were coming, here's a tent" and we put our tent up  
19 between two other tents, the sandbags went around the other two tents, but I guess if  
20 something come down, it had to come down on one of the other tents because we didn't  
21 have any sandbags. But it was a transit tent, we lived in that, they left us alone.

22 RV: How many men were with you there then?

23 VG: Ten, there was ten people.

24 RV: Ten of you okay.

25 VG: There were ten on the team and we spent the whole year together. About  
26 halfway through two of them went back to base camp, they didn't like the life and all.  
27 Then eventually one of those guys was wounded in a mortar attack, so we got one more  
28 so there was thirteen of us total for the whole year, TDY the entire year. We were  
29 attached but we had no responsibilities to the company we were at, we didn't pull any  
30 company duties, anything like that and we hung together. We didn't really associate a  
31 whole lot with the guys in the company, we just hung out with each other, we went over



1 to the NCO club and stuff. Which I always thought was strange because the day we left  
2 and parted company we didn't exchange addresses or anything which came into play later  
3 on as far as trying to find these guys back again. I thought how could you spend the  
4 whole year together and not even know what their folk's name was or where they lived or  
5 where, anything like that. That's a whole another story that I can relate.

6 RV: Sure, sure. Tell me why Cu Chi, what did they tell you the reason about why  
7 that area?

8 VG: Well, Cu Chi was near the bottom of the iron triangle and that's where our  
9 area of operation turned out to be. Our target was, we had a couple of them actually and  
10 they operated in that area and basically what they wanted us to do was to track the  
11 movements of a couple of targets to make sure they were where they were at and that  
12 they were moving north or south, just to keep track. And we had our tents and wound up,  
13 we would stay in two or three man Dets. We lived with American advisors, we'd go out  
14 to oh, Trung Lap or Ben Cat and would, we'd just stay at their places so we weren't  
15 under them or anything we just, they gave us a place to sleep and a place to eat. We were  
16 responsible for bringing our own food and stuff or paying them or something. The first  
17 place we went to they loaded our Jeep and trailer into a Chinook and off we went, we  
18 landed in a little helipad, it was a kind of a clearing in a big tree line, they dropped us  
19 down, we pulled it out and the helicopter flew off and there we were, welcome to the  
20 world, the war.

21 RV: Wow, what kind of weapons did you have?

22 VG: We had, we had an M-60 machine gun which we weren't trained in, but the  
23 first thing we did was dig a hole, start putting the dirt in the sandbags so we had a place  
24 to hide or cover us. You know we had a place to get under and since we had a tree line  
25 all the way around us, it turned out that was a neat place to just shoot at us once in  
26 awhile, keep us honest you know.

27 RV: Now is this where you would stay the whole time?

28 VG: No, no we moved around a lot but the first time we went out, the three of us  
29 went to one place. We lived in an old French mansion which was bombed out, it had  
30 holes in the walls from artillery and mortars coming through it, but it had a solid roof  
31 over our head anyway and we lived with a few other advisors. We showed up with a

1 ham, a case of oranges, which they'd never seen before in country and a bunch of other  
2 things and they looked at us like where did you get this stuff? And we thought, oh, we  
3 got connections because they told us when we left, anything you want you ask for it and  
4 it didn't turn out that good later on but we, yes we went off with cases of C-rations and  
5 cases of pop and beer and traded it for anything else we could. But we lived, we just lived  
6 out there, we set up the machine gun and let's see, we had some live grenades. One of the  
7 other teams had an M-79 grenade launcher, also never used, fired or trained on.

8 RV: So you guys had really no idea how to use them?

9 VG: No. We tried them out later on but just for fun, the fact that it turned out or  
10 M-60 machine gun turned out to be a single shot machine gun. One time we were at  
11 another place and the Vietnamese wanted to know, the ARVNs wanted to know if they  
12 could take it out on a mission with them the next day because we weren't using it. And  
13 we said sure, so they took it out that evening to fire it and they fired it once and it stopped  
14 and it jammed. Well apparently somebody when they'd cleaned it back on base camp  
15 very early on had put something in the bolt together backwards and so you'd fire one shot  
16 and then you'd get your pocketknife out to pry the shell out of the, the casing out of the  
17 chamber so that wouldn't have done us much good. But we didn't know that at the time,  
18 we always had the security of this big powerful weapon there but yes.

19 RV: How long did you stay in this first clearing?

20 VG: First place, oh it was about a week or so and then I got pulled back to base  
21 camp. Ideally they were going to kind of keep us rotating around so we'd go one place,  
22 go back to base camp, go another place, so I was there about a week and then we went  
23 back to, I went back to base camp to learn the procedures there because that was a little  
24 different than being out in the field and then I went to, oh let's see. Ben Cat which was,  
25 that was nice, it was an Army, I think an Army Ranger training camp or something. They  
26 had flush toilets there. They had hot and cold running water and they had a little mess  
27 hall thing with maybe fifteen, twenty guys in it, where you ate off of china plates with  
28 silverware and the Mama-sans would cook the meals and stuff for us. They'd just bring a  
29 plate out and the food was already on it, you know the mashed potatoes and things, corn  
30 and some kind of meat dish or whatever. Every evening we had movies, they brought  
31 like five movies in and then they had a movie projector on a screen and then they would

1 show us movies and we'd always have to watch two of the movies twice in the evening,  
2 but we'd all sit around in black pajamas,

3 RV: Oh, really.

4 VG: That was the thing yes, that to be status quo you went in the village and had  
5 them measure you and I went in as soon as I found out that was what you wore and you  
6 go into the local villager and say I want same thing in this. Show him my shirt and same  
7 thing this, only pointing to something black and then they would look at you and giggle  
8 and laugh and you didn't know what he was talking about but, yes. But I'd often be  
9 sitting around at night that's the thing, in black pajamas.

10 RV: Now, why was that the thing to sit around in?

11 VG: Well, they were cool, just it was all I had on, I mean it was so hot and after  
12 you took your shower and stuff you'd just lounge around in some thongs and black  
13 pajamas and was what everybody had.

14 RV: Now wasn't that what the enemy also had?

15 VG: Yes, that's right, that's why I thought it was kind of unique to be having,  
16 have that on, it wouldn't have been too smart. But then see I was there at Christmas time,  
17 through Christmas, Christmas Day we actually set up yet for operations until about noon  
18 and they told us to knock off. A helicopter came out with our sergeant that was in charge  
19 of us along with oh, I think the captain of the base camp back at Cu Chi. They brought us  
20 some goodies or something and all that and wished us Merry Christmas and all. As the  
21 helicopter flew off, over our radio network, which we were the only ones on our network,  
22 well the helicopters had to get on it to be able to tell us to pop smoke to come in and the  
23 voice says, "This is Little Bear 625 wishing 55 Nervy Lance a very Merry Christmas."  
24 And I always remember that, this is Little Bear 625, in fact I finally found somebody  
25 from that unit, that was the Cu Chi helicopter unit and their call sign and insignia on their  
26 helicopters and stuff.

27 RV: Well, tell me what, when you said you were out in the field and you set you  
28 equipment up, how did you do that, and what would you do just listen for, and to make  
29 sure the targets were tracking as they were supposed to?

30 VG: Right. Everyday we'd go out and set our equipment up about eight or nine in  
31 the morning and we had to have it oriented north, we were supposed to have our north

1 stake to make sure it was aligned north so it really was calibrated. But a lot of times we  
2 would just calibrate to AFRS, a radio station because you could do basically the same  
3 thing. And then we would either back at base camp or if we had nothing better to do out  
4 in the field is sit there and turn the dial and listen for our targets. They, we didn't know  
5 when they were coming up but they would come up maybe once an hour or so for five,  
6 ten, fifteen minutes, just depending on how long they had to talk or whatever.

7 RV: What were you listening to, what did they sound like?

8 VG: Just a chirping, da-da-da-da, in fact I wrote home and it sounded, I told my  
9 folks it sounded like crickets chirping. The transmitters were of course hand cranked or  
10 pedal cranked or something so they varied in pitch, they also varied in amplitude and  
11 even frequency. The signal we had back at school when they tried to the stuff out was a  
12 pure clean signal and you could get a, what we had to do was turn the antenna until we  
13 got a nice fine, well where the signal faded out, that was a sharper point than trying to  
14 find the loudest part and so we were trying to find this. The lowest point in the signal and  
15 we had a wheel with all, a degree wheel on it which would then show us what direction it  
16 was coming from and then we would send that back to headquarters, back to the base  
17 camp and then there they had a map and they would plot our different line bearings, try to  
18 triangulate where he was at. After a few days or so you recognized that particular VC's  
19 "fist", they'd call it. You can tell who it was just by the way they sent, you didn't even  
20 have to hear the call signs or anything else, it was that's the guy and then we would go to  
21 work on them and try our best to try to get a bearing on them but it was so tough because  
22 the signal was fading up and down. You'd have to have one hand on the frequency knob  
23 just to try to keep them in tune, so we gave them an awful lot of bearings that we didn't  
24 know if they were any good or not, you know, we just, we really didn't know, it wasn't  
25 even a solid confidence, boy we got him but.

26 RV: What would they do with that information?

27 VG: They would then send that back to the, well through our base camp who  
28 would then relay it to the, I guess whoever wanted to hear about it at Cu Chi and/or back  
29 to our group headquarters. Then they would relay it to whoever wanted to know what  
30 that information was. Now that was a, when I mentioned before that officer, that first  
31 officer that I said I really liked, about a month after we were in the field we got notice

1 that he was killed in a Jeep. He was, actually our sergeant was only a staff sergeant and  
2 the brass back at Cu Chi didn't want to deal with a sergeant you know giving them  
3 intelligence reports, they wanted one of them, an officer and he was going to be assigned  
4 to our team but he never made it and that's when I wrote home to my folks, I said why do  
5 the good ones always get it? I was so disgusted and another captain of one our units had  
6 gotten killed too and that's when kind of reality was setting in that you know it is kind of  
7 dangerous over here, so.

8 RV: How did the captain of one of your units was killed?

9 VG: Not one that I knew, but a captain in the radio research, yes, he was.

10 RV: What happened?

11 VG: I think it was the same thing, Jeep ambush. They were going somewhere  
12 and?

13 RV: Just came out and got him?

14 VG: Yes, land mine and an ambush, yes, shot them up. That's what happened to  
15 the lieutenant, they had a land mine hit it and then they jumped out of the bushes and shot  
16 them.

17 RV: Right, now you were serve, you were working with the ARVN, is that  
18 correct?

19 VG: Yes, well no. We lived.

20 RV: You were separate from them?

21 VG: We were separate from them. We were living with the advisors who the  
22 advisors were in charge of the ARVNs. There would be like a company or they called it  
23 a battalion but it was really only about the size of a company and they were advisors to  
24 those and then we lived there with them. So that's when we got to learning a lot of  
25 Vietnamese and stuff, because we intermingled with the soldiers and the villagers and  
26 stuff like that. We went out and bought a book you know of English/Vietnamese  
27 translation and I made a real effort to try to learn the language and I can still count to ten  
28 in Vietnamese. Yes, it was interesting.

29 RV: What was your impression of the ARVN?

30 VG: Well, we always complained, didn't think that they were pulling their share,  
31 they didn't really want to fight. Another strange thing was cultural differences, that you

1 would see them go off their patrol with their rifle over their shoulder and holding hands  
2 with their buddy. That was kind of strange to us you know, I don't think it was any more  
3 than they were just good friends and that's what they did over there, but it just seemed  
4 kind of strange. But yes, we always thought they weren't really holding up their end of  
5 the bargain since it was their country and all. I think in the end though they probably took  
6 more casualties than we ever did, but people forget that.

7 RV: What was their morale like?

8 VG: Morale was good, real good. That was the difference in my job in Vietnam  
9 and the next tour I went to Taiwan, the job was interesting because it involved you and  
10 your safety and all was directly proportional to how, or could have an effect on, you paid  
11 attention to the job because it was important, when I got to Taiwan the job was a very  
12 boring job but the life was good so it was kind of just the exact opposite. But morale  
13 wise and everything yes, I think at the time we were there, it was pretty good yet. I heard  
14 reports of different things going on, even in our own units later on but when we were  
15 there yet I think it was pretty good. When we got to Cu Chi they had only been there like  
16 six to eight months themselves, the company so it's not like they'd been there forever  
17 either or year after year so I think we were all hanging together pretty good yet, yes.

18 RV: How about the morale of the ARVN troops?

19 VG: Hard to say. They were kind of it seemed like a rag tag bunch to us and you  
20 couldn't understand most of them so they would have their formations each day and go  
21 off to do whatever they did but we did make friends with a few of the lieutenants and a  
22 couple of corporals or whatever that could speak some English. I don't know, I think  
23 they were, they were kind of in it for life and so they had a little different attitude too then  
24 we did, I mean we were going home in so many more days with our countdown calendar,  
25 so.

26 RV: Did you have a countdown calendar?

27 VG: Only towards the last month or so and I don't remember what it was, but I  
28 know it sure made the days go longer. It wasn't a smart thing to do.

29 RV: Tell me about the American advisors.

30 VG: They were, we would have maybe a captain or a lieutenant and then we'd  
31 have a staff sergeant or an E-7 and then maybe that's have a radio operator, E-4 or so.

1 They were always good guys; we got along with them good. They really didn't know  
2 what we were doing exactly.

3 RV: Could you tell them?

4 VG: No, we couldn't tell them exactly what we were doing, they knew we were  
5 doing something with radios. A lot of times they kind of pretty much figured out by  
6 looking at our equipment what we were doing but we just had to be kind of  
7 noncommittal, we couldn't really tell them what we were doing. We had a few breaches  
8 of security a few times where. Well one time we had an artillery unit moved in next to  
9 one of ours and they were sure looking to shoot at something and we gave them some  
10 coordinates one day and they fired off and didn't do any good, our target was there the  
11 next day again. That was completely unofficial and off the record, you know just  
12 something we did. Another time I know there was, the advisor told us that there was a  
13 certain unit that was supposed to be so and so around and we kind of said, well actually  
14 they're closer than that and then they wanted to know why we knew and what we had,  
15 kind of hinting around to why we knew and the next thing we know they were on the  
16 radio back to the commander saying, "There are guys here say they're there here" and oh,  
17 no now what did we do, let out something classified or something.

18 RV: Did you ever have any problems with your equipment as far as its  
19 functionality?

20 VG: No, no it worked pretty good for what it was there for, yes and as far as  
21 advisors. At the one place we had no electricity, we had no running water, so all we had  
22 was flashlight bulbs strung into old commo batteries for our radio and for our lights, or  
23 we had lanterns, just oil lanterns and once it got dark, you know it got dark early and you  
24 weren't ready to go to sleep so you'd sit around, play cards or talk or drink or something  
25 or other so.

26 RV: What would you do for entertainment?

27 VG: Listen to the radio or read, used to remember listening to Chris Noel on the  
28 radio, you know sending out dedications to the guys and stuff. Read a lot of books. One  
29 time I went into the village and bought a little lantern, it was a little small, like an oil  
30 lamp, it had a little reflector on it that had some painting on it and all the Vietnamese  
31 thought it was pretty funny that I was buying that, and I don't know, it had some religious

1 connotation I guess, Buddhist or something or other, I don't know but I was using it for  
2 light.

3 RV: Do you remember the books you read?

4 VG: One of them I think that was when I read it was *In Cold Blood* and a lot of  
5 paperbacks that just junk novels. It was just something to read, nothing very mind  
6 stretching, you know just something to do to pass the time.

7 RV: Right, right. Any songs that bring you back to Vietnam, when you hear them  
8 today?

9 VG: Oh, let's see, Vietnam. *Got To Get out of This Place*, by the Animals. But  
10 yes there's a few of them, I can't think of them right off hand but yes there's certain ones  
11 that transport me back there and then in Taiwan. I went to Korea for a month right after  
12 they took the Pueblo and there was a song there that was played on as cover music over  
13 the operations building, *The Green Tambourine* and that one, every time I hear that song  
14 its immediately 1968 you know. Just boom and as far as songs when over there, I don't  
15 really have a lot of associations except I know we really loved that Let's Get me out of  
16 this Place and get me a ticket for an aero plane, that type of thing.

17 RV: Right. Did you keep up with the news back in the United States?

18 VG: Oh, yes we read *Stars and Stripes* whenever we could get it. If we, that was  
19 really, you know they had the baseball scores in it and football scores and being from  
20 Nebraska, Nebraska was just starting on its climb of football glory and all. That was my  
21 one claim to fame was when I would say I'm from Nebraska and they'd look at you like  
22 oh, they got a good football team, yes that was my claim to fame was I was from  
23 Nebraska. As far as the radio, I would listen to the *Armed Forces Radio Station* and you  
24 got what you could off of them. I think we kept up fairly well, yes.

25 RV: What about contact with home, did you write a lot of letters home?

26 VG: Oh, see we sat around all day long waiting for our target to come up so our  
27 job was dependent on when they worked, so we only worked when they worked and so  
28 we had a lot of time, yes, wrote a lot of letters, a lot of letters. That's about all I did  
29 during the day is just write letters out to people and hoping they'd write back.

30 RV: Right. How about any MARS calls?

31 VG: Nope, no MARS, no contact at all like that.



1           RV: Okay. Tell me about drug and alcohol use, what did you witness?

2           VG: No drugs. In the ASA at the time, no drugs, never thought of it, never heard  
3 anybody thinking it was a cool thing to do. Liquor was something else. We were always  
4 notorious alcoholic bunch. Back at Cu Chi we consumed so much liquor there, alcohol  
5 that one time the company commander went to the monthly commander's meeting and  
6 they presented him with a ribbon with a blue Alka-Seltzer, whatever on it because our  
7 NCO Club consumed more alcohol per capita than anybody else on the base. And out in  
8 the field too, we didn't drink on duty but you know with the availability of what there  
9 was to drink, you either drank pop or beer and so you drank as much as you could, at the  
10 time we were there the port or something had gotten blown up and we had to drink  
11 Korean beer and some old rusty cans of beer, Ballantine beer. Some of the stuff was  
12 skunky but we drank it anyway. If all else we'll drink the Ba-Mui-Ba, the thirty-three,  
13 which was terrible stuff but if you were thirsty, you drank it, forget about the aftertaste.  
14 It was bad stuff but we would drink it, yes. We would drink and get happy but I never  
15 really saw a lot of people get drunk and especially amongst our ten guys. When we did  
16 get together a few times it was the, you know you don't want to show, if you got drunk  
17 that was a sign of weakness and so you would drink until you either puked or fell over  
18 but you're not going to act like you're drunk. Because if you act like you're drunk then  
19 you can't hold your liquor, you may have been drunk but you're not going to show any  
20 signs if you can help it. So, but we had a good time anyway.

21           RV: It seems like you had a pretty good camaraderie with these ten guys.

22           VG: Oh, yes we did. Definitely we all pretty much got along. The two guys that  
23 went back halfway through, one of them we didn't, we didn't get along the best with him  
24 but otherwise the rest of them, yes we made friends and tolerated each other anyway.

25           RV: Right, right. Did you make it to USO shows?

26           VG: I didn't. There was one at Cu Chi one time that a couple of the guys I think  
27 got to but it was standing room only and they were so far back I don't know how close  
28 they even got to see or hear the entertainment. I think Bob Hope or somebody was there.  
29 One highlight though was in January or whatever I was out at this place, we lived in a  
30 sandbag bunker, that's what we lived in.

31           RV: At Cu Chi?

1 VG: No, this was at Tui Hoa, it was on highway 13, oh about ten miles or less  
2 south of Ben Cat where they had the flush toilets and all.

3 RV: This was just another two-week kind of rotation assignment?

4 VG: Yes, right. But this one I stayed there a few months because I had wanted to  
5 stay away from the flagpole as far as they could, they were starting to pull full field gear  
6 inspections and stuff back at the base camp and I was strictly non-military. Our uniform  
7 of the day was a pair of fatigue pants rolled up to your knees and a pair of shower shoes  
8 that was it. If base called us up and said somebody was coming to see us we had to run  
9 around, try to find our helmets and get dressed properly with our boots and stuff on.

10 RV: Were you working inside or outside?

11 VG: Oh, we were outside the whole time, we got a good tan. Yes, just basically  
12 shorts and shower shoes and that was it. And then if somebody was coming we had to  
13 find our flak jacket and all that stuff because you know we had to be strictly military at  
14 the time. But anyway what I was going to say is when I was there we heard that Robert  
15 Mitchum was coming into Ben Cat and see we were on Highway 13 which was also  
16 called Thunder Road, and he was in a movie called *Thunder Road* so I don't know if  
17 that's why he came to that particular spot. But a little while later this helicopter landed  
18 on our helipad and it went into the compound. Well we were outside the compound  
19 because we got to get as far away from the barbed wire and anything as we could. So we  
20 were on the, out beyond the perimeter and this helicopter landed and people got out and  
21 they went in and for awhile later they got back in the helicopter and the helicopter lifted  
22 off. Just as it flew over us the guy sitting on the seat by the window leaned over, pointed  
23 out his window or out of the side of the helicopter like he had a pistol in his hand, just his  
24 fingers, you know how you point your fingers, he pointed at me and pow, and then he  
25 waved at me. It was Robert Mitchum. Turned out, everybody back inside the perimeter  
26 there had had their picture taken with them. We missed out on it. I took a picture of the  
27 picture just to prove that he was there, but that was the only celebrity as far as I know of  
28 that we ever got in contact with.

29 RV: Okay. Did you take any R & Rs?

30 VG: No, I didn't. We didn't actually get any until about oh a month, a month and  
31 a half before we was getting ready to get out of there and I think everybody else pretty

1 much did. My next duty station I knew as going to be Taiwan and if I was going to go to  
2 R & R I was going to go to Taiwan and I thought why spend all my money for a week for  
3 what it would cost because you still had, it was still going to cost you money and stuff so  
4 I just didn't. And I would have went by myself I suppose anyway, other guys had kind of  
5 paired off and I just wasn't comfortable going off to come country by myself either.

6 RV: Right. Now when you moved around did they say you know make sure you  
7 go in pairs or anything like that, when you were out in the field?

8 VG: Oh, yes yes. Yes, don't get yourself out, exposed, if you go into the village,  
9 make sure you go in with somebody else, yes.

10 RV: Was that followed all the time?

11 VG: No, no. We had another experience was we were driving that road between  
12 where the sandbag bunker, no electricity, no nothing was to back up to Ben Cat and we  
13 started making these, not daily runs but maybe once a week we'd run this road by  
14 ourselves. We were carrying classified equipment, we only had like two rifles between  
15 us and a Jeep and one morning I was driving back and about halfway back we were  
16 going, it was just a dirt road and I slam on the brakes and here come, right in front of us  
17 was two guys standing in front of us with metal detectors, right behind them was a big  
18 tank.

19 RV: Two Vietnamese guys?

20 VG: No, it was American. Behind the tank was a whole convoy, we were going  
21 the other direction all by ourselves and we just kind of looked at each other and smiled  
22 and said, "Well, it's all clear behind us." Well, a couple weeks later we were doing the  
23 same thing again, we'd go up there at night and then we'd beat it back in the morning  
24 before we had to come up on the air. And we had our showers and our good food and we  
25 got about halfway there and the Jeep started sputtering and sputtering and it died on us.  
26 We were just outside of a little, kind of, what do they call it, a VC village. It was just a  
27 few huts and stuff but that was supposedly still wasn't pacified area yet and there we sat,  
28 the Jeep wouldn't start. We tried the radio, there was no radio, there was no battery, you  
29 turned the key on the Jeep or the on/off switch, nothing there, no starter, nothing and  
30 there we sat. Oh, boy now I'm dead and these kids come running out from the village  
31 looking at us, what's going on? I thought well my buddy and I, well what are we going

1 to do, well let's try pushing it. Well the thing was already going pretty fast before it  
2 stopped, but that was the only option. We couldn't call back to base camp, nobody knew  
3 we were out there, nobody knew we weren't coming yet because they didn't know us at  
4 the other end, that we were out there and we tired to push the Jeep and these little kids  
5 coming out there and they started pushing it with us and the thing started up. Got us to  
6 within about a half a mile or less of where we were trying to get to, and then it did it  
7 again. That time we could see where we were getting to, the other guy got out, I stayed  
8 with the Jeep and he told me when I met him a few years back, he says he remembers  
9 walking down the road, turning around seeing me sitting in this Jeep out there in the  
10 middle of nowhere and going, that just doesn't look right. But he went in, got a  
11 Vietnamese Jeep and we pushed it into the village then. And we pushed the thing up and  
12 down the road and it would never start again, we had to have a mechanic come out and  
13 get the thing going again. That was kind of my brush with death at the time, when I was  
14 over there and it still has me haunting once in a while when I think about what could have  
15 happened. Maybe a month or so after that, it was an evening and a couple of Americans  
16 were, had just gone past our post there, we were just living in a triangular shaped berm,  
17 little fortress there and they had gone past there and they were just about to the point  
18 where they'd stopped second time and the VC jumped out, stopped them, took their  
19 weapons away from them and shot them right there. Then the villagers come out to see  
20 what was going on, and the VC just blended in with them and off they went. I called back  
21 to headquarters, back to our base camp and told sarge, I said, "We're not going out on the  
22 road again, they want us to go anywhere, you're going to come with a helicopter and get  
23 us". Because that was really the way we were supposed to do it. We were, we'd have  
24 been in really hot water if we'd gotten caught out there because we had classified  
25 equipment, classified code sheets. That would have compromised the code across the  
26 whole country. I was an E-4 with about twenty thousand dollars worth of stuff and all  
27 this crypto stuff, if nothing else had happened to us we'd have been in bad water as it  
28 was.

29           RV: How did you deal with the thought that you were in a war zone and dealing  
30 with the idea of death?

1 VG: Most of the time we didn't think about it. If we were like out there and  
2 maybe somebody would start taking pot shots at you, you could hear firing off and maybe  
3 you'd hear a snap or whizzing around you was kind of a thing with the three of us, the  
4 two of us that was there that you would look at the other guy and see if he was more  
5 scared. As you'd be ducking down and you'd be smiling and then see who was ducking  
6 lower and it was the kind of the macho thing as of well I'm not scared, you know are you  
7 scared, so it was kind of a common, I don't know, it was a, I'm not sure how to say it but  
8 you didn't want to show fear.

9 RV: You didn't want to lose face.

10 VG: Yes, right, yes. One time I really did get scared and that was when we were  
11 at this place where we lived in the bunker and it was raining just terrible during the  
12 monsoon season and all of a sudden there was this loud bang, real loud bang and boom-  
13 boom-boom, these mines are going off in the minefield. I thought, oh my gosh, what a  
14 perfect time to attack, in the middle of a storm like this and my heart was racing and I  
15 was getting my helmet and I was finding my rifle and I was trying to remember what they  
16 was talking about back in basic about squeezing off the rounds you know and all this  
17 stuff and then we were waiting for something else to happen and nothing happened, and  
18 nothing happened. Then the rain kind of cleared up and then Vietnamese were running  
19 around chattering and what happened was lightning had hit the antenna on one of these  
20 tall bamboo poles and then it had gone across the ground and set off the mines. We  
21 weren't even under attack, it was the lightning that had gone off but that was my first  
22 thought of oh, boy here they come, this is really it and it turned out after all it wasn't it.

23 RV: Now was that your kind of experience with combat or was it snipers or?

24 VG: Well, snipers, once in a while they'd start throwing some mortars around us,  
25 not really close, but just enough for, you know keeps you on your toes and kind of  
26 wondering how close are they and what's going on.

27 RV: What would you do?

28 VG: Wherever we went we always dug a hole and we'd get down in a hole, sit  
29 and wait, see what happens and usually nothing was going on much.

30 RV: Were you ever wounded?

1 VG: Nope, not me. Just one member of our team was wounded. He was at Trung  
2 Lap which was another Vietnamese Ranger training camp and they had had a mortar  
3 attack in the evening and then when Medevac helicopters came in to get the wounded, he  
4 was helping carry the wounded out and that's when they just hit them again and he got  
5 wounded in the back and got to go home a little earlier than he was planning on and then  
6 one other guy that I knew back at base camp when I was there. He had some money in a  
7 safe at this other outpost someplace and they had an old French mansion there which they  
8 had managed to make a swimming pool there, they had lined this one room with plastic  
9 or whatever and they had a helicopter blade for a diving board and I had a couple days off  
10 and he was trying to talk me into going up there with him and go swimming. It sounded  
11 pretty good but I didn't go. Well, that night he went up there they got mortared and he got  
12 hit in the hand and in the eye and he went to the hospital there and got to come back with  
13 us. I remember him writing home to his folks, his handwriting was so bad because he was  
14 writing with his left hand because he hurt his right hand playing basketball because he  
15 didn't want to worry his folks as far as getting hurt and all. I always thought, you know if  
16 I'd have went with him I'd have been probably sleeping in the bunker or in the cot right  
17 next to where his was which was right about where the round came down, because he had  
18 the tail fins and I got a picture of him holding the tail fins of the mortar that got him.

19 VG: Wow. Yes, just kind of one of those what if things that could happen.

20 RV: Did you ever have any experience with the Medevac dustoff teams?

21 VG: No, I remember seeing them come in because sometimes the ARVN would  
22 get wounded and they would come in and go off but the only thing I do remember is  
23 being in security and all as we were, the advisors had their own little code pads that they  
24 would send messages to and send off like that's the vivate, "Abel Baker number of U.S.  
25 wounded" or whatever or of ARVN wounded. Well then the helicopter comes flying in  
26 and says how many guys got down, and the guys says two, and they go, well there went  
27 the code for that day. Because that was also some of our concern as we also kept track,  
28 or not us but the ASA and all as far as trying to keep our own friendly communications  
29 secure, that it wasn't given away or compromised or whatever.

30 RV: Did you ever work with troops from Australia, New Zealand, South Koreans,  
31 anything?

1 VG: No, nope, no. They were talking about it but never did, no.

2 RV: Never did go out with them. Okay. You were traveling a lot from being out  
3 in the field, coming back to the rear, back in the field, back to the base camp, did you  
4 sense any tensions between those who stayed out in the field and those who stayed in the  
5 rear?

6 VG: No, not really. They would always, you would be kind of admired when you  
7 came in all muddy and caked and your rifle slung over your shoulder and they'd ask you  
8 where you'd been and what you'd seen and all that stuff because some guys never got  
9 out. You were looked kind of well upon and you always put on the airs that you were the  
10 old combat GI but as far as any animosity, no it was, no.

11 RV: How about any tension between those who were drafted and those who were  
12 enlisted guys?

13 VG: Anybody I was around was pretty much enlisted. The whole company other  
14 than the motor pool or something like that, but no, no I think we were kind of all in it  
15 together. It kind of took away a lot of that.

16 RV: Any instance or discussion of fragging?

17 VG: Nope, never occurred to anybody I don't think at the time, not when we were  
18 there yet.

19 RV: Okay, okay. Did your experience in Vietnam affect your religious views at  
20 all?

21 VG: I think it probably made them stronger, I don't, well I never got to church the  
22 whole year I was there but I had daily devotions booklet that was sent from home and a  
23 cross necklace and silent prayer daily you know myself but no. I think its, its, I don't  
24 know other than that road experience where I thought I was dead and I thought I was  
25 dead and I thought I was given a new life that day, that's always kind of been in the back  
26 of my mind that it could have been over there and for a lot of guys it was and so that's  
27 always dwelt in the back of my mind, yes.

28 RV: Did you ever encounter any wild animals, unusual wildlife when you were  
29 out in the field?

30 VG: No, other than rats. We had rats right there on that one compound we were  
31 at and we would set traps at night for the mice that was there too and I remember laying

1 there in bed on the cot and you hear this snap and then you ope, got another one. I've  
2 heard of snakes, I heard of things like that, but personally I never saw one and I think just  
3 where we were at, just situations came up that no, we never dealt with any.

4 RV: How about relationships with the men you served, were there any race issues  
5 or anything like that?

6 VG: No, we got along pretty good. The guy that was my best friend in the Army  
7 was black, he was from Louisiana. We teasingly called him Cajun because he was from  
8 Baton Rouge. I don't think it really ever really surfaced, not personally, not on our team.  
9 What I did notice though was people would give lip service that they would say that  
10 they're not prejudiced or anything like this but if you got around, sitting around with a  
11 bunch of white guys they still were derogatory towards the blacks even though they  
12 claimed they weren't in their presence, but there was still prejudice there, yes.

13 RV: Okay, how did you react to that, did that bother you?

14 VG: Yes it did. Being from Fremont and all, it was all white community, that was  
15 my first experience getting in the Army and then meeting other cultures and the blacks  
16 and whatever else. Yes, but I can learn right away real fast that they're the same as us,  
17 just a little different color skin is all. The guy I was at on my first assignment, I remember  
18 him being out in the sun one day and he was looking at his arm and he was trying to tell  
19 me he had his sunburn or something. I didn't know whether he was teasing me or  
20 whether they really do and I never did get around to ever asking him because I was afraid  
21 to, I think I was going to offend him or whatever. We wound up actually going to Taiwan  
22 together and then we went to Korea together for a month when they took the Pueblo and  
23 then back to Taiwan again. So I spent pretty much three years with that guy and I was  
24 actually going to name my first born son after him but I had two daughters instead.

25 RV: Okay. Is there a humorous incident in Vietnam that stands out to you?

26 VG: Humorous, I can't think of humorous really other than my going away party,  
27 I don't know if that was humorous or not though.

28 RV: Tell me about it.

29 VG: Well, I didn't realize it was going to be going on. The night before we left, I  
30 had went off to the showers and had showered and I was laying on, by that time we had  
31 some wooden barracks, or wooden tent kits there and laying on my bunk there. I think



1 there may have even been a little black and white TV in there, I was reading a book or  
2 something and laying in there and a bunch of guys come in and pick me up by my arms,  
3 my legs, and carry me off to the NCO Club, proceeded to dunk me in a fifty gallon full of  
4 ice water, ice and all sorts of beer and whatever else was in it. So we were all baptized  
5 and then it got worse from there. There was, I don't know how many cases of beer that  
6 had been bought for the occasion and there was probably an inch of beer on the floor  
7 because more of it was being poured on each other than was being drunk although quite a  
8 bit had been consumed too. In fact it got down to where they were ready to go off and get  
9 the first sergeant who was a real mean guy. I mean, and I think they got him too, I don't  
10 remember but I'm pretty sure they went and got him and he was, you know he had no  
11 choice in the situation like that, it was kind of a mutiny type of thing. That was a good  
12 time, I always remember, I went and got my camera to document this thing and I've got  
13 the different pictures of guys as they're soaked and pouring beer on each other and stuff.  
14 So I'm trying to think of anything else that was really funny, I don't know. It really  
15 wasn't a fun time.

16 RV: Right, right. I understand. What about the leadership in Vietnam, how would  
17 you rate that, going from your immediate supervisors to up at the top?

18 VG: Well, we were again on our own and so we pretty much stayed clear of  
19 everybody. We had a sergeant who was an E-6, we affectionately called Uncle Russ, he  
20 was basically one of us, he would have been an EM just like we had been. So he knew  
21 we were trying to pull something he was already onto us because he had probably done  
22 the same thing himself. In fact he'd been busted himself and gotten back up into the ranks  
23 as far as the, back up to E-6. As far the officers, the ones we met with mostly were out in  
24 the field and those guys were real good, levelheaded guys. Except, let's see when we  
25 were at Phu Hoa Dong we met a captain who was in charge of that unit and then we went  
26 to Ben Cat, the reason I went to Ben Cat was because one of my other teammates had  
27 managed to hit a Vietnamese girl with a Jeep and the girl's father had threatened bodily  
28 harm or kill him or something and so they sent me out there. Well at the time I was  
29 hoping that all U.S. didn't look the same to each other like the Vietnamese did to us but  
30 when I got there the captain, a captain at Ben Cat then wanted to know why I was coming  
31 and I kind of told him well, they wanted us to rotate back because this other guy was kind

1 of under duress and just not good being there and the captain just laughed and he says.  
2 “Oh, heck, he says I shot a lady such and such a time, they were sitting at a café” and just  
3 having and he fired off his weapon and accidentally killed some lady you know and just  
4 thought that was kind of strange. What’s strange a lot more is because this first captain  
5 from the first duty station, one time we were monitoring their net as far as their  
6 operations and stuff and we heard him on the air and he was pleading with his higher-ups  
7 back at the base camp or wherever was in charge of him. Apparently friendly fire had  
8 killed this lady’s husband and he was sobbing because they had told him that she was  
9 going to get, I don’t know a few dollars or whatever for that happening and he was  
10 saying, “you mean I’m supposed to tell her that these few dollars is going to replace her  
11 husband” and I thought this is a whole another attitude there as far as toward the people.  
12 This guy was definitely a caring guy, where the other guy was you know kind of a, I  
13 don’t know, just didn’t think too much of him.

14 RV: What about overall military leadership in Vietnam?

15 VG: Otherwise what I ran into was pretty competent.

16 RV: Okay. What was the bravest action that you saw, if anything comes to mind?

17 VG: Bravest. That’s a tough one, I can’t think of anything in particular other than  
18 my, and I didn’t see it but of what my buddy did of carrying the stretchers out to the  
19 helicopters amongst incoming fire, but as far as seeing it, no I can’t think of anything in  
20 mind.

21 RV: Now you listened to the enemy every day, that was your job, how would you  
22 describe the enemy?

23 VG: We didn’t really ever see them, all we ever heard was what they were doing  
24 you know. We knew they were out there and we knew they were very close but as far as  
25 actually contact with them. One time the Vietnamese went out on patrol and killed a few  
26 of them and they drug them back to the village and they laid them in one corner of the  
27 village and my buddy said, “Hey, come on we’ve got to go out and see these dead VC”  
28 and I’m like why, “Oh, bring your camera.” So we went out there and there was the two  
29 dead VC laying there and all they had on was a pair of black pajama pants, nothing else  
30 and they had bullet holes in them and they were laying there and I wasn't really that used  
31 to seeing dead people anyway. They had a Vietnamese soldier standing there and then

1 the village people were standing around looking at them and as we left what they  
2 explained to me is that they put them out there to see if any of the villagers were showing  
3 signs of remorse, that they would recognize these guys and they'd know that these  
4 villagers were also VC. At nighttime we knew they were fairly close, just across the way  
5 from us they would see campfires and stuff going off in the jungle and they'd be firing  
6 artillery at them and stuff like that, but otherwise it never really ran into them. We knew  
7 they were around. We knew, the village that was right outside of where we lived was  
8 basically a Vietcong village. At nighttime they closed up the gate to our compound and  
9 then it was our land and their land. In fact the day we left, that night, during the night  
10 they had encircled that village and they went through everybody and checked for their ID  
11 cards or whatever and as we were getting on a helicopter that morning, there was fifty,  
12 one hundred people sitting there squatting down to the ground of people who couldn't  
13 document why they were there, or who they were there or anything. And every time we  
14 would go someplace else, to Lai Khe or somewhere to a bar and we'd tell them where we  
15 were stationed there was, "Oh, beaucoup VC" you know, they were really fearing for us,  
16 that we weren't in a very good spot there.

17 RV: But you had that sense that you weren't, right?

18 VG: Yes, we knew all along that we weren't really, really safe place but you  
19 couldn't dwell on it. You know you just knew it, you just disregarded, always aware that  
20 something could go on. One time there was, I happened to look out and I saw two guys  
21 oh maybe a half mile away running across a rice paddy and one of the Vietnamese said  
22 "VC, VC" and by that time by the time I would got my rifle out and if I'd have been able  
23 to hit anything anyway. So I wasn't, that was some Vietnamese or somebody too, they  
24 didn't have anything on that would have identified to me that those were the enemy or  
25 not.

26 RV: Did you ever have to fire your weapon?

27 VG: No, not at anyone. One time when they brought us M-16s out, one day they  
28 just said get your M-14s ready, we're bringing in new weapons and they just handed us a  
29 new one and they gave us these Mattel guns, that's what we called them. When I went to  
30 another place they had a rifle range out there and I fired off one clip and that was the only  
31 bullets I fired in Vietnam,

1           RV: Was that your training on the M-16 as well?

2           VG: Yes, that was it. In fact when I got to Taiwan and then we had carbines there  
3 and then as we were there after a year, they brought, everybody got M-16s. They had a  
4 class on how to break them down and we're going like, oh we didn't know that came  
5 apart, all the bolts and everything. We didn't know and we tried to clean it as best we  
6 could with what knowledge we could, all there was a barrel and the little flap door on the  
7 side that had a little spring on it and that was about it as far as taking anything apart, if  
8 you didn't fire it, that was kind of the good thing out of it though. So we never had to  
9 worry about guns jamming or anything else because we didn't use them.

10          RV: Did you ever track any of the enemy in Laos or Cambodia?

11          VG: I didn't, no. I know our counterparts did but I never did, no.

12          RV: How would you rate the strengths and weaknesses of the Vietcong and  
13 NVA?

14          VG: Well we didn't think they were very well equipped or very smart intelligent  
15 wise compared to us as far as the, like us tracking them. Now I found out that they were  
16 a lot more sophisticated in their signal intelligence than we realized. They had the  
17 fortitude and it was their country and they had more fight in them than the ARVNs did I  
18 think as far as the willingness and I admired I guess if you'd call it that for the guts that  
19 they, what they put up with. We were in near the Cu Chi and the tunnels and all that stuff  
20 and that's just been so, I read books and stuff about that and that's really been awesome  
21 to read what they did go through and persevere through.

22          RV: Did you ever come across any of that the tunnel network, any of that while  
23 you were at Cu Chi?

24          VG: No, nope.

25          RV: Were you all aware of it?

26          VG: We were aware of it, yes because some of it happened before we got there,  
27 the VC had popped up out of nowhere but no we never actually saw any holes or  
28 anything like that ourselves, no.

29          RV: Did your unit ever engage in any kind of civic action while you were there?

30          VG: Oh, civic. Like helping an orphanage put a.

31          RV: Yes, exactly.

1 VG: Well, one of the other guys in my team, they were helping put a roof on an  
2 orphanage or something where they were at. As far as where we were at, no I don't think  
3 so, not really, no. I was helping the local economy, buying things. When we were at Ben  
4 Cat the little kids would come out and sit around us, which really was a security  
5 violation. But we would sit there and they would teach us English and we would teach  
6 them, they would teach us Vietnamese, we would teach them English. The kids would,  
7 we would send them into the village and give them some piasters and tell them to go buy  
8 us some pop. So one kid would bring the bottle of pop, another kid had the glass, another  
9 kid had the bag of ice, they all wanted a little tip you know. So we would pay them all,  
10 and it was a nickel and a dime and a quarter, we'd just give them a little day's pay and  
11 pretty soon it got me quite an entourage if I had to go into town to get our food for us.  
12 They'd come back and then we'd sit there and drink it all. Some of the, a lot of the kids  
13 were nice but one of the guys I was with, he had a watch stolen that he had just gotten  
14 and come in a package and one of the little girls had slipped up the leg up her shorts and  
15 ran off with it. One of the other kids had told us what she had done, but couldn't prove it  
16 and all that. Well right at Christmastime they had a little Christmas gathering for the  
17 soldiers there and their families and stuff, one of the advisors got in a Santa suit and got  
18 in one of those little Bell bubble helicopters and flew over and was throwing candy out.  
19 And he landed and he was talking to the kids and there was a big crowd of people around  
20 there and some of the kids that we knew came up and said, "Mama wants to talk to you."  
21 "What for" so she came up there and she's talking in Vietnamese and they were  
22 translating and they said, "Well she wants to thank you" and I said, "Well, thank me for  
23 what?" "She wants to thank you for all the money you've been giving us," And I said,  
24 "Oh, well no big deal," you know it was just pocket change. She had been sending the  
25 kids to school with the money that we'd been giving them and that was something, this  
26 was my pocket change. They had a local school there, but you had to pay to go I guess.  
27 There was one schoolmarm there, a young gal but I guess you only went if you paid as  
28 you went along or whatever. That was kind of a, put me back. When you realize how  
29 much money I was frittering away on beer and everything else and here they were getting  
30 their education on nickels and dimes that I have.

1           RV: What kind of impression did the Vietnamese civilians leave on you when you  
2 left?

3           VG: When I left.

4           RV: Or when you think about them now, what do you, what do you see in your  
5 mind's eye and how do you feel?

6           VG: They're bound to look funny again. You know that's one thing is when you  
7 went over there these people look funny, especially like the girls but then you start  
8 noticing one looks less funny than another one, you know and one's prettier than another  
9 one. But as far as people now if you run into one in a store and you'll hear them talking  
10 and I know they're Vietnamese and I always want to turn around and talk to one yet I  
11 never do. The older ones you know were over there, the younger ones probably just  
12 children of people that were there as time's gone on now, and then you don't know if  
13 they're really Vietnamese or Laotian or whatever, or Cambodian or something too.  
14 Because they all sound like they're talking the same but I've always wanted to try to get  
15 in touch with some people, in fact I'd still like to get in touch with those kids that we  
16 gave this money too that we were such good friends with back at Ben Cat. They've got to  
17 be grown up now and some of them are probably still living in the same area, still  
18 farming their rice paddies and I know if they saw pictures of us they'd know who we  
19 were. I've tried with different people that have gone over and stuff to try to get to that  
20 area and so far I haven't had any luck yet.

21           RV: Now would you ever want to go back to Vietnam?

22           VG: Myself, no. Be interesting to see but from what I've heard from everybody  
23 else that had gone back. No but I guess most of its been bulldozed over and built up and  
24 Cu Chi I guess is completely gone and the one place I would like to go back to though  
25 yes is to Ben Cat just for a, just for a day to look around. I'd like to look around at that  
26 place where we lived in the bunker just to see what's there now, although its probably  
27 just been leveled to a rice paddy and there's probably no trace of it all anyway. So,  
28 otherwise no. Again I'm not adventurous food wise and unless they got a McDonald's or  
29 something there I, it, no. It's fun to read about other's adventures but me do it myself,  
30 I'm not much for flying any more and that kind of thing either.

31           RV: Why don't we take a break?

1 VG: Okay.

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The Vietnam Archive  
Oral History Project  
Interview with Vern Greunke  
Conducted by Richard Verrone  
April 1, 2003, April 14, 2003  
Transcribed by Jennifer McIntyre

1           Richard Verrone: This is Richard Verrone and I'm continuing my oral history  
2 interview with Mr. Vern Greunke. Today is April 14, 2003 at about 2:33 PM Central  
3 Standard Time. I am in Lubbock, Texas in the Special Collections Library interview  
4 room and Mr. Greunke is in Cedar Bluffs, Nebraska. Sir, let's pick up where we left off.  
5 You were concluding your tour and talking about some general issues, did you know  
6 exactly when you were leaving country or did you?

7           Vern Greunke: Oh, yes because it was a year tour and they were pretty close as  
8 far as counting down the days so we had a pretty close definite date as far as when we  
9 were leaving and we went back to our home company at Pleiku and within about a day or  
10 two. I was going to Taiwan next and so it was going to called what was called an inter-  
11 theater transfer, they weren't going to pay my way home and back, so it was up to me to  
12 get back to the United States and back.

13           RV: Did you do that?

14           VG: Yes, I did. We, a number of us who were in the same situation, either going  
15 to Taiwan or Japan or another Asian port or whatever. We all went down to Cam Ranh  
16 Bay, we managed to catch a flight to Cam Ranh Bay and that is where an out processing  
17 place was, where most of the GIs went home from, there or from Saigon. Only since we  
18 had no orders sending us there we were trying to catch a hop, that was the tough part  
19 because the planes were pretty well booked full. And they sent us over to the  
20 replacement center and then we proved to them, no we weren't supposed to be there, they  
21 were going to send us through the normal channels, we said no, we're trying to catch a



1 hop. So they said well planes leave here all day and night and if there's a spot we'll try  
2 to get you on. Well first they thought we all wanted to go together, the twenty of us, or  
3 twelve or however many there was, and we convinced them no, if you can find a seat,  
4 fine. I think one or two guys did find a seat and so we sat in the depot when they said,  
5 you have to stay right near here, if we call out your name you've got twenty minutes to  
6 report to the desk or we're scratching your name. So there we sat, two and half days,  
7 sleeping on the benches and there wasn't even a snack bar. We were eating candy out of  
8 the candy machine, we were afraid to leave the airport to go look for food at a, some sort  
9 of a snack bar on the base or something. We had to have our class As on because you  
10 could only fly in a plane if you had your class As on, so there we were sleeping in our  
11 class As, waiting to go. After two and half days they finally called us together and said a  
12 Medevac plane was flying out from there to Anchorage and then to Dulles Air Base,  
13 which was near the hospital Walter Reed or whatever in Washington DC. I had already  
14 bought a ticket there, hoping to speed my trip home from San Francisco to Omaha. I  
15 already had that in my pocket, so anyway after this two and half days they said there was  
16 a flight available and it was a Medevac flight. We got on it and it was one of these cargo  
17 type planes where there was some seats in the back and they were facing backwards, I'm  
18 not sure what kind of plane that was, but then the rest of the plane was filled up with  
19 these racks of liters of whatever with all the wounded guys on it and their IVs and nurses  
20 and stuff around them. We were happy to get on that and we flew to Japan first and then  
21 we flew to Alaska. A few of the guys that were trying to get to California decided they'd  
22 try their luck with getting home from there, figured maybe flights would go across from  
23 Alaska back to the States and then we flew on from Alaska, that was our first, well I  
24 guess we touched down at Japan. Then we touched down and got off the plane just to get  
25 one the runway in Alaska, Anchorage and then we flew to Dulles. I think we were in the  
26 air, I don't something like fourteen hours and about every two or three hours they'd come  
27 around with this little box lunch, hand it to you with a couple of sandwiches, there  
28 weren't any really stewardesses or anything on the plane, there was some type of a  
29 personnel on there though and you know you hadn't done anything to work anything off,  
30 so it was like, oh it's time to eat again. And I know I made a number of trips to the  
31 bathroom just to get up and stretch my legs even if I didn't have to go, just to move

1 because I was sit so long a time. But yes we landed in Dulles Air Base and then we  
2 caught a bus or something to whatever the civilian terminal was there. There I went up to  
3 the gate and said I had a ticket from San Francisco to Omaha, could I exchange it. And  
4 the gal says, “Well, there’s a plane right now on the runway, if we could hold it for you  
5 heading for Chicago” and they said they would tell them to hold it and I ran towards the  
6 gate not even knowing where I was going and as I got on the ramp, this was still where  
7 you had to walk up the step things and I got on the plane and they shut the door and off  
8 we went. I was sitting between two gentlemen in the, I guess it was coach class, in my  
9 class As, not having, sleeping in my uniform for two days and I’m going, oh boy, I hope I  
10 don’t stink too bad. They were both in their business suits and looking at me but I think.  
11 I don’t know if it was the nice thing about it or not was I didn’t come through California.  
12 I heard so many horror stories about the GIs coming back from Vietnam and I was kind  
13 of coming from the other direction. So I don’t know if they even realized I was coming  
14 from Vietnam because I was traveling east to west instead of west to east.

15 RV: So you had no problems.

16 VG: No, I didn’t, I didn’t run into anybody, that type of thing.

17 RV: How did it feel leaving Vietnam when you flew out of there?

18 VG: It was a great relief you know. One thing I thought of like as we landed  
19 finally in the States, there was not hooting and hollering or cheering because we had all  
20 these wounded on and we were just sitting there thankful that we weren’t in the same  
21 shape they are. We were thankful we came back in one piece and whole and with no  
22 injuries and all so it was a very quiet somber mood when we landed because they were  
23 pulling these guys off you know with all sorts of, whatever happened to them you know  
24 and so. But it was, I guess one thing that struck me was in Cam Ranh Bay and that was  
25 that as I got there the first day and I told myself the next time I wake up, I’ll be sleeping  
26 in my own bed and that was kind of in my head. And as it turned out I think that was  
27 partly responsible for some nightmares I had later on. After I got out of the service, I was  
28 having these nightmares where I would be sleepwalking and waking up and I was trapped  
29 in the Army, trapped in Vietnam, couldn’t get out of Vietnam. When I finally resolved it  
30 the nightmare went away but I used to sleep walk and my wife would wake me up and

1 what are you doing and I was try to make up some excuse of what I was where I was at,  
2 but it was the same reoccurring thing, over and over.

3 RV: How long did that last?

4 VG: Oh, it was a couple of years I guess after I got out.

5 RV: Did you ever have that diagnosed or did you ever see anybody about it?

6 VG: No, no I didn't. I just kind of figured it out on my own and I guess I thought  
7 I'd figured it out on my own and once I did that they stopped. See the other part of it was  
8 when I got out of the Army a couple years later we went through Fort Lewis and  
9 normally they'd take a whole batch through, you know twenty, thirty guys all through  
10 this processing. Well there was only three guys that were with me, two guys, there was  
11 three of us total, we were coming from Taiwan. And we went here and we went there and  
12 we turned this in and we had these records checked and all this and finally we handed in  
13 our ID cards to a window and the guy paid us whatever we had coming yet and we kind  
14 of looked at each other like, I guess we're out of the Army and off we went to the airport  
15 but no one ever said "you're out" you know. Normally they'd take the guys after that, if  
16 there was a bunch of them they'd take them over to a building somewhere and they had  
17 this seminar or whatever on VA Benefits and stuff and it was kind of maybe more of a  
18 finality to it. But we just kind of looked at each other and we still had our uniforms on  
19 and of course we had to wear them to be able to catch a hop home you know or a standby  
20 or whatever, but it was just like, and no one ever said "you're out." They told us we were  
21 in, but no one ever said, "You are now officially out." We just kind of, and I think that  
22 tied together the thing in Vietnam of not being able to get out of there, that was all mixed  
23 into that dream.

24 RV: In that dream were you in Vietnam trying to get out of the Army or were you  
25 in the Army trying to get out of the Army somewhere else in the United States?

26 VG: I think I was in Vietnam but I couldn't get out of the Army. It was a mixed  
27 up dream, it didn't make sense but once I figured out the different pieces to it, it  
28 disappeared after that. Yes, that was, that was always kind of spooky because I'd wake up  
29 and my wife would wake me up and I'd be standing someplace in the house and she'd  
30 say "What are you doing" and I'd say "Oh, I was going to go to the bathroom". I'd be on  
31 the wrong end of the house and I couldn't explain it to myself but it was the same dream

1 every time, over and over. Another little kind of a funny thing that happened is as we got  
2 from, let's see we went from Pleiku down to Cam Ranh, sitting in the terminal there, and  
3 I guess we were in, let's see Nha Trang, no we were at the Pleiku airport trying to get to  
4 Cam Ranh on a hop and I looked over and here was my SDI from basic training.

5 RV: Really?

6 VG: Sitting there, yes, Sergeant Matos, a little short Puerto Rican guy, someone  
7 you'd never forget and I sat there probably ten feet from him and didn't walk over and  
8 say hello to him.

9 RV: Why not?

10 VG: Well, I was always pretty bashful anyway, you know and pretty quiet and  
11 also there was always this, nobody liked their SDI. You know it was kind of a ahha  
12 against him but nowadays I always just wish I just went over and shook his hand and say  
13 hi. I know he wouldn't have remembered me, but just one of those things you wish you  
14 had done that you didn't do. I just thought it was strange, I was about ready to say, "Hey  
15 guys, we're safe now, my SDI is here," you know but I didn't I just thought it in my head  
16 but I didn't say anything.

17 RV: Was he coming in country or was he leaving also?

18 VG: I don't know. He was just sitting there waiting for a plane to go somewhere  
19 too so, and he'd been there once before. I'm sure he was there before my basic training  
20 in '65 and here he was back there again in '67 I guess, probably an E-7. I just thought it  
21 was kind of strange that just to run into somebody like that.

22 RV: Did you talk to any of the wounded on the flight back; did you guys converse  
23 at all?

24 VG: No, we didn't. We all sat back in our seats and that's something too I always  
25 thought, well gee could we have gotten up and walked around and asked anybody is there  
26 was anybody from around our area that maybe wanted to have a message relayed, but I  
27 got thinking they were going to be home in the States shortly too, but no there was, it was  
28 a pretty quiet atmosphere. We just sat and they were there and we were here and that was  
29 about it.

30 RV: Now, you were home for how many days, thirty days?

1 VG: Well, yes supposed to have thirty day leave. Well, since it had took me two  
2 and half days to get out of Vietnam I figured I'm staying home for thirty days and then  
3 I'm going back, that's what I got coming right. So I had to catch a hop back to Taiwan  
4 then, so I flew from Offutt Air base in Omaha to March Air Force Base in California,  
5 then I wanted to get to Taiwan so they said, "Well, you've got to fly out of Norton" or  
6 vice versa, I'm not sure which is which. I rode on a bus through San Bernardino with my  
7 Class As and my duffel bag, on a city bus and again no one said a word to me. They  
8 didn't say good job or didn't spit on me or nothing, they just pretty much ignored me  
9 which was fine. So I sat in the air base there over night trying to catch a hop up to Seattle  
10 Tacoma and as luck would have it they had a plane going up there, a large 707, 727  
11 something like that. I went out and got on the thing, I was the only passenger on it. All  
12 they had in the cargo thing was a big jet engine strapped in there, so I was just sitting on  
13 this little jump seat and one of the, the enlisted member of the flight crew he looks at me  
14 and says, "Oh, come on up with us". So they took me up in the cockpit, sat me down in  
15 somebody's seat, I'm not sure who was supposed to be sitting there, because there was a  
16 pilot, copilot, a navigator and then there was this other you know enlisted guy and then I  
17 sat in the seat and they put the headphones on me. I got to ride up front all the way to  
18 Seattle. We flew during the night and we flew over some forest fires that were going on  
19 at the time checked those out and they also I could listen to all the radio communication  
20 and ground control would tell them if there would be some F-14s or something were  
21 approaching us from such and such an angle and the pilot says, "Okay, they should be  
22 here in about five seconds, four, three, two, one there they go." And then as we landed it  
23 was really awesome because you could see the airstrip, the runway from the front of the  
24 plane, not from the side like you normally at night you want the lights and everything.  
25 Well then they said they were going to go on to Taiwan or Japan I guess and then I think  
26 maybe Vietnam, "Oh great" I said and they said, "Well, just stay on with us" "Okay  
27 fine." But I had to get off the plane and I went into the terminal and they were looking at  
28 my orders and stuff and lady says, "You can't fly on military plane, you're AWOL." Uh-  
29 oh. So then I had to go into Fort Lewis and get some new orders cut and then I had to buy  
30 a half fare regular commercial ticket to get back to Taiwan and they were going to take it  
31 out of my pay over six months or whatever. So I wound up paying for half fare to get

1 back to Taiwan. At the time money was still, you know money was money but it was no  
2 big deal to me and when I got to Taiwan nobody cared when I was going to get there, if I  
3 was there a day or week late, they knew I was coming but nothing would have happened  
4 about it.

5 RV: How was it being back home in the United States for that brief period of  
6 time?

7 VG: Oh, it was kind of strange. Everybody was gone, all my friends were gone.  
8 You know they just weren't around or they were working or they were married or not  
9 around home. Well, yes, definitely, that's kind of a part of life I don't really remember a  
10 whole lot of other than being back in my own bed again and my own room and that kind  
11 of thing but I still had another two years of enlistment to go yet so it was still hanging  
12 over me as far as something like that.

13 RV: So tell me about what you did in Taiwan.

14 VG: There we did land based operations, pretty much the same thing as far as  
15 radio direction finding. Whenever I could we had a little, we worked out in a little hut  
16 that was a cement block building about oh, fifteen, twenty feet square and it took two  
17 operators there. Although one operator could pretty much cover the position as far as  
18 what we had to do and one guy could sleep while the other guy worked so you could get  
19 a lot of sleeping done while you were working which left you more time to go downtown  
20 to go drinking and stuff.

21 RV: Now who were you listening for?

22 VG: We were listening to the obvious targets, which would be the right off the  
23 coast of Taiwan, which would be Mainland China. Since those targets were static  
24 compared to the targets in Vietnam which were always mobile you could pretty much  
25 done it in your sleep with your eyes closed and get the results they expected because  
26 nothing moved.

27 RV: What kind of targets did you listen to?

28 VG: Just Chinese Army units, I guess, you know never told us, it was just Morse  
29 code, they would tell us what target was up and we would tell them from where we were  
30 at which direction they were and that's about all we did. It was very boring as far as the

1 tour, the afterlife was great and the tour and the mission was pretty boring, there was  
2 nothing to it.

3 RV: Where were you stationed in Taiwan?

4 VG: Up on a hill called Shu Lin Kou, it was an air station, it had Air Force, Army,  
5 and Navy all in a small base that was up in the mountains. It was near Taipei, near the  
6 capitol. It was maybe a twenty minute bus ride down a hill up and back and it was  
7 through hairpin turns but it was close to the night life of Taiwan which never slept, it was  
8 open twenty-four hours a day. The bars were open twenty-four hours so you could go  
9 down there at midnight and you know spend the time during the evening or night because  
10 we worked three shifts, you know rotating shifts so we were always working or off.

11 RV: Is there any more you can say about what you did there exactly as far as?

12 VG: Not really, no it was.

13 RV: It was all classified?

14 VG: Yes, it was all classified and I don't know a whole lot, just can't say, I think  
15 in fact that mission yet is still a little sensitive as far as.

16 RV: Right. We still have some ongoing hostility slightly with China.

17 VG: Yes, and I think, I don't know. There's some problem with the local  
18 governments yet as far as acknowledging the fact that we were or weren't at the time too.

19 RV: Okay, did you live on base somewhere?

20 VG: Yes, they had actual barrack there that were concrete just like a dormitory,  
21 two, three men in a room and a common bathroom but that was the best life as far as any  
22 Army life I had. We had houseboys that took care of everything for us, pretty much we  
23 just got up, put our clothes on and they did the boots, the laundry, the beds, everything  
24 for a couple bucks a month.

25 RV: What did you think of the Taiwanese compared to the Vietnamese?

26 VG: Well, it was a whole different atmosphere there and I took the time to learn  
27 some Chinese, learned how to write a little bit, that's pretty much what I did mostly in  
28 my off time was just go downtown to the bars. All the bartenders there were girls so you  
29 could sit and have conversations and they weren't out to hustle you or to get you out of  
30 the building or anything, they were just there to serve drinks. They did have bars there

1 too where guys coming over from R & R would stop in but we just stopped at the local  
2 wineries and passed the time there.

3 RV: Did you keep up with what was happening in Vietnam?

4 VG: Oh yes, we still I think probably *Stars and Stripes* was probably the biggest  
5 thing yet as far as that, yes and the radio. It was always how many killed this day and  
6 how many enemy were killed and this and that but as far as any operations or anything it  
7 was hard to really follow that kind of stuff.

8 RV: What did you think of the ongoing war effort?

9 VG: Well at the time I still thought it was the right thing to do. I changed my  
10 mind a little bit about that since, but it's easy to look back and see how I turned out. But  
11 at the time yes, I thought it was still a noble effort on our part.

12 RV: Now, you stayed there in Taiwan for one year?

13 VG: About two years, yes.

14 RV: Two years, okay so you finished your?

15 VG: My whole, my Army enlistment there, yes. In fact by extending a few  
16 months I got five months out of my, by returning to the States five months or less you got  
17 out, so I got off of my enlistment five months early.

18 RV: Okay, and so when you got out; well you did the same job the whole time?

19 VG: Yes.

20 RV: And when you got out you went back home?

21 VG: Yes.

22 RV: What was it like, now that you're out of the Army, going back home, was  
23 your attitude different, did you have different feelings when you came back home?

24 VG: No, I think I was still pretty much how I felt all along, yes I don't think much  
25 had changed there any, no.

26 RV: What was your transition back to civilian life like?

27 VG: Oh, I took it easy, I had like three months or ninety days to claim my job  
28 back, so I took the whole ninety days. I had a little money built up, not a whole lot. I  
29 bought an old car, an old Volkswagen, so I had transportation. But didn't do a whole lot,  
30 I just hung around the house and my other buddy that I'd went in the Army with, he was  
31 still in because he didn't get the five month early out, in fact he was in Vietnam at the



1 time, so that was my closest friend there. There wasn't a lot of them to go around and  
2 buddy up with any more and it was just pretty much just sitting back and taking it easy  
3 and trying to figure out what I was going to do with the rest of my life. I was having  
4 plans to try to go back to school which I did try. I went to University of Nebraska at  
5 Omaha for a semester and realized I wasn't college material and I went for a night class  
6 for another semester there in another subject, in drafting and there was too much other  
7 things going on and I just couldn't get into the studying routine. I was within a couple of  
8 weeks or whatever of the end of the semester and the teacher called my mom up and said  
9 that if I wanted to do some extra work and stuff or whatever, she would help me make  
10 sure I got a passing grade in the course because she wouldn't want to see me have to go  
11 to Vietnam and my mom just laughed and said, "Oh, he's already been there." That was  
12 kind of fun because when I went there I remember going to like the orientation classes  
13 and you'd have all these high school kids or just out of high school sitting next to you and  
14 you tell them that you were going to Vietnam, or that you'd already been to Vietnam and  
15 they were in class to keep from going to Vietnam. That was the only reason they were in  
16 college a lot of them, just to stay in school so they would be called up because at the time  
17 the school deferment still held.

18 RV: Did you discuss your Vietnam experiences a lot with anyone?

19 VG: No, not really, just my folks. The last time I talked to you, you asked about  
20 what my folks thought about me being over there. Well I had a chance to ask my mom  
21 about that. She's in a care center now and she says well, they were always worried about  
22 me but she said after I got home and told them what really happened, she realized that  
23 what I put in my letters that I was actually in a lot more danger than I'd ever mentioned  
24 home in my letters, which you kind of sugar coat everything and not try to make them  
25 worry or anything.

26 RV: So they were normally worried parents?

27 VG: Oh, yes just normally ones.

28 RV: Besides your parents, did anyone ask you about Vietnam?

29 VG: I remember one time a guy at the body shop, he was a World War II or a  
30 Korean veteran and he made some remark to me about he wasn't so sure. His son had  
31 just joined the Army or was drafted and he said he really wasn't sure if we should be over

1 there or not, and he said something to the fact, well you weren't, knowing that I'd been  
2 over there, he said, "Well, you weren't on the front lines were you?" And I was kind of  
3 like you know there weren't any lines over there. You know it wasn't the same type of a  
4 war as what you experienced. He kind of expressed, being a veteran himself and he was  
5 kind of really doubting whether we should have been there or not and I just stuck up for  
6 what I thought, we should be but otherwise no most people didn't confront me about it.

7 RV: So you still thought that, at this point, I guess this is what 1970, '71?

8 VG: Yes, '69, '70, yes.

9 RV: You still thought the United States was, should be there?

10 VG: Oh, yes, yes.

11 RV: Did you keep up with the war?

12 VG: Oh, yes well you know read about it, whatever was in the front page of the  
13 paper, whatever.

14 RV: What did you think of the anti-war movement?

15 VG: I didn't like them; I mean I was against them. I remember at the college  
16 going around and they would have these tables set up for the SDS, Students for a  
17 Democratic Society or something. But I never ever hassled with them and they never  
18 hassled me and I didn't, I just kept quiet about the whole thing. I didn't really speak up  
19 much as far as anybody raising the issue or not.

20 RV: Why not?

21 VG: You just wanted to put it behind you and forget about the whole thing, that  
22 was pretty much it. For years I didn't say a whole lot about it.

23 RV: Did you tell your employers or did you keep it quiet from them as well?

24 VG: Yes, didn't talk about it. They knew I had been there but that was all, there  
25 wasn't much discussion about that at all. Just want to put it behind me. Took my  
26 uniforms off and in fact a few years ago I found my Army greens and I tried to put my  
27 jacket on, it missed about four inches from being able to button and I reached into one  
28 pocket and my dog tags was in one pocket and my ticket stub or the receipt or whatever  
29 from my airfare was in the other pocket.

30 RV: Really?

1 VG: That's where they were and that's where I was when I took them off. That  
2 was pretty much just put it behind me. I burned some of my old fatigues and stuff  
3 because I knew I was never going to wear them again and I still have an aversion against  
4 khaki.

5 RV: What did you think when the United States withdrew from South Vietnam in  
6 1973, finally?

7 VG: Well, you could pretty much, we pretty much knew that was the end because  
8 we knew the ARVN soldiers weren't going to be able to shoulder the brunt of it as far as,  
9 they just, and I don't know why, just it was their country and it just seemed like we  
10 always wished they fought a little harder than they did but.

11 RV: So you didn't have a lot of faith in this Vietnamization policy, turning the  
12 war over to them?

13 VG: No, no.

14 RV: Was it based on what you had witnessed or what you had heard or?

15 VG: I think on what we had witnessed. We, they, they just, well just didn't have  
16 the will or the desire or something there, but I don't know. As far as the soldiers, you  
17 know they were kind of drafted and they were in it for life, so they weren't getting out  
18 and the people that we met in the countryside, I don't think they had a wish one way or  
19 the other. They weren't communists or they weren't anything, they were just farmers,  
20 they were just rice farmers. The government back in Saigon or whatever, it didn't really  
21 matter to them, they just wanted to make enough to make a living and get some food in  
22 their stomach and that was about all. But as far as the soldiers no, they, and being in it  
23 for life, I mean that was basically what it was until the war was over there was no, you  
24 know you were going to get out in a year or whatever. They were in it for the long haul  
25 so I could see where they would have a little different attitude and morale than we had to.  
26 We knew we were getting out, once we got there, we knew we had eleven months and  
27 twenty-nine days to go yet and we were going home and the thing would be behind us too  
28 where they were in it for good.

29 RV: Do you think the United States achieved peace with honor as what Kissinger  
30 and Nixon had said?

31 VG: No, not really.

1 RV: Did you think at the time we had or is this your view today?

2 VG: No, I was sad when it happened really.

3 RV: You're talking about April '75 when the whole country fell?

4 VG: Yes, that was very sad to me. That whole effort, all the lives that were lost  
5 of the Americans, not even the Vietnamese but just the Americans that were lost in a  
6 cause that they thought was right and the government pulled out on is basically is how I  
7 felt then and do now.

8 RV: Do you think the media covered the war fairly?

9 VG: I think so, yes, as good as they could from afar, yes. It was a different time  
10 then. I know, I remember, I'm not sure exactly when it happened but I know somewhere  
11 when the war was just getting going and maybe around the time I was there that they had  
12 a live crew there that was showing a battle going on. I remember some people seeing  
13 their son on TV and then a minute or so later they saw him got killed and that was kind of  
14 the end of live TV. I don't remember exactly when it happened, but I remember hearing  
15 about it. You know talk and the embedded reporters nowadays, we had the capability  
16 then and it probably took place but then they decided that wasn't such a good idea to be  
17 showing the American people live and in person.

18 RV: Did you try to avoid watching the television or did you just kind of take it in  
19 stride?

20 VG: Oh, in stride. I always wanted to see if something would show up from the  
21 area where you were at, that was always, but there were so many different places and  
22 things going on that it was always pretty likely that they weren't. But you never knew  
23 there might be something that show up that you might recognize or something yes.

24 RV: Well, looking back today on your service in Vietnam, you know all these  
25 years later, how do you feel about your service?

26 VG: I'm proud of it. It was a duty you had to do, if the draft hadn't come along I  
27 wouldn't have enlisted, I would have just let it go. I was not one to run out and say yes,  
28 I'm going to join the effort but as far as what I did and all, yes. I had no problems with  
29 that, yes.

30 RV: Is there anything that you would change about your experience in Vietnam?

31 VG: Vietnam, no I don't think so, no.

1           RV: Okay. Is there anything that stands out in your mind that was particularly  
2 significant that you learned while you were there?

3           VG: Well, the poverty and all. I always thought that would stay with me for my  
4 life is what I saw and what people got by with and how much did you do without if you  
5 really had to. And in fact for awhile there we were even living pretty close to their level  
6 as far as not having much there to eat, no electricity, no water, nothing. I always thought  
7 that would stay with me and at time I remember it but other times it's long gone, it's a  
8 world away.

9           RV: How much do you think the war affected your life?

10          VG: Oh, I don't know. To say affected it, it's hard to say, somewhat I guess, I  
11 don't know how you'd put a value on that.

12          RV: How about for the United States government, do you think our country  
13 learned lessons from its experience in Southeast Asia?

14          VG: Oh some, but some of those get forgotten pretty fast.

15          RV: Such as what?

16          VG: Well you know, like in this Iraq now you know I thought, boy this is going to  
17 be a, not easy war but I mean there's no jungle over there, it's all sand, you know you can  
18 see the enemy for miles away. We just go in here and take this city, we'll take this city  
19 and the next thing you know these snipers were popping up on these convoys and I'm  
20 going, oh no, did they account for that? You know the fact that, because that's what hurt  
21 us so bad over there, you couldn't get the enemy in big enough groups for the time to  
22 make a battle worthwhile. They would snipe at you here and there and then they would  
23 blend back into the jungle and I thought oh, man if they can do that over there this might  
24 be a lot longer war than we was figuring on and that was where I thought maybe they had  
25 misjudged in the early days of the war here now, did they learn something from the last  
26 one that we had.

27          RV: What do you think about Vietnam today?

28          VG: I'm hoping they're living in peace and tranquility even with a government  
29 we many not necessarily agree with, but I hope that the people themselves are just living  
30 fulfilled lives?

1           VG: It was a beautiful country. I was wondering what it looked like you know  
2 after the war because it was so lush and green and had beautiful sunsets every night, it  
3 was like a show that was put on. Guys would be standing out there with their tripods and  
4 their cameras as the clouds would roll in and they'd be turning orange and reds and  
5 yellows and it was just beautiful.

6           RV: Do you read books on Vietnam; have you picked up and read any about that?

7           VG: Oh, yes I've got a small collection and I've, if I see something that's around  
8 the area I was at, I'll buy it or read it or whatever, yes. I've got a number of history books  
9 that have mostly pictures, because I want them to have lots of pictures in them because I  
10 always try to find something maybe I can recognize or something. But yes like *The*  
11 *Tunnels of Cu Chi*, I bought that one right away and passed that on to somebody else and  
12 there were a number of other ones I owned and the titles of them too. But there's like a  
13 history of Vietnam from a certain year to a certain year and they have the major battles  
14 and stuff in there and just makes things of the operations. You try to find the spot you  
15 know about where we were at and see what it says in there. Yes, I've got a number of  
16 those, yes.

17          RV: How about Vietnam movies?

18          VG: I haven't had much for those. Of the few I've seen filming them in California  
19 it didn't look like Vietnam or the people didn't look like Vietnamese they looked more  
20 like Hawaiians or something. I did see *Apocalypse Now* and I looked at that and it got  
21 over and I thought what in the world was that about because I could not relate to that at  
22 all. *Platoon* I didn't see. The one I want to go see, which I haven't seen yet and that's *We*  
23 *Were Young*.

24          RV: *We Were Soldiers*.

25          VG: Those, yes that one. I know there was a book but I haven't the read the book  
26 yet either but yes that one I'd like to see sometime.

27          RV: Do you try to avoid the movies or you just haven't gotten around to seeing  
28 them?

29          VG: Oh what I've seen, they weren't realistic, at least to my experiences, now  
30 maybe they were to somebody else but they were just so cornball. I tired to watch *Bo*  
31 *Bridges*, *The Iron Triangle* and I got into it halfway, bought the tape but I just. I mean

1 we were right there in that area and the scenery didn't look right and the way they were  
2 talking about things, going on didn't look right, it just didn't jive at all with reality. They  
3 just don't feel to me or something as far as other ones, I don't know, of course I think  
4 *Born on the Fourth of July*, I haven't seen that one either, Tom Cruise or something was  
5 in one.

6 RV: Why do you think they get it so wrong?

7 VG: Oh, it just doesn't match up with what I experienced and just the whole, I  
8 don't know, it just doesn't jive, that's all I can say. It just doesn't fit with my memory  
9 and what I experienced.

10 RV: Tell me what you would tell the younger generation today about the Vietnam  
11 War, to them its ancient history, it happened way back and they have little knowledge of  
12 that war, what would you tell them about it?

13 VG: We went over there with good intentions. We thought we were fighting for  
14 democracy and up until years ago now, I kind of changed my mind somewhat on that but.

15 RV: Tell me about that, what changed in your mind?

16 VG: Well, there's always been this thing now here about the Tonkin Gulf incident  
17 that maybe we pulled ourselves into the war as the incidents have been reported to us  
18 now may not be as true as we thought. So it was almost as though we tried to get into the  
19 war. As far as stopping the fall of communism, well we've seen what happened there as  
20 far as, it didn't all fall over like the dominos, like they predicted it was going to be and  
21 that was why they told us we were going, was we were going to draw a line in the sand or  
22 the jungle and say this is where it stops. That didn't really come about to be that way. So  
23 as far as that, it was an adventure, something I wouldn't trade for a million dollars and  
24 wouldn't go through it again for a million dollars but as far as a young man that was  
25 going off to see another part of the world. There was some adventure there, and there  
26 was some danger there, so as far as anything else I would tell children, I don't know. I  
27 have two daughters and they don't seem to be too interested in it and yet my older  
28 daughter is a teacher and she had taken this videotape that I had made of my slides and  
29 showed them to the kids and they asked her a lot of questions and they seem to be  
30 interested in it. One more generation behind, maybe its the grandkids that will want to  
31 know about it, but my own kids don't care one way or another.

1           RV: Do you keep in touch with anyone from your Vietnam days?

2           VG: Oh, yes that's a whole another story in itself.

3           RV: Tell me briefly what.

4           VG: Well, okay about maybe ten years after I got out of Vietnam I thought gee, I  
5 wonder if I can find some of these guys back because we were there a year together.  
6 Thirteen of us and we didn't even exchange addresses or anything when we left, we just  
7 said, bye, see you, that was it, see you again someday maybe. Well about ten years after  
8 that I, gosh I'd like to find this one guy and I remembered he lived in Ohio and I did  
9 some searching and I looked at the phone book and I found him and I called him up and  
10 "Hey, hey what you doing now?" And I said "This is long distance, I said I'll tell you  
11 what, I'll send you a tape." You know this used to be back when you'd make these little  
12 reel to reel tapes and I was going to make him up a tape, well I never got around to it and  
13 years went by and nothing happened and then finally. Well then I noticed one time the  
14 local library had a lot of phone books that they had brought, old phone books and I, well  
15 I'll see if I could find some of those names. Well they were, some of them were common  
16 names so I didn't know where they were at, so I looked a little bit, couldn't find much of  
17 anything, tried to find my old sergeant, couldn't find him, so then anyway when my mom  
18 went into the care center I had to dispose of all the property in the house. Underneath  
19 their bed was a shoebox of all the letters I sent home from the Army including Vietnam  
20 and I pulled that box and I think I read all the Vietnam ones in about a night or so. But in  
21 those letters was some orders and then the orders had first names, last names, middle  
22 initials, RA numbers, with RA numbers you could figure out about where they were  
23 from. Well I had a computer at the time but I didn't have a CD-ROM drive yet. So when  
24 I got enough money that I was justified to put a CD-ROM drive in the first CD-ROM I  
25 bought was a phonebook CD-ROM and I started plugging names in and I found eight of  
26 the guys in two days. I would call them up and I would say, "This is Vern" and there's  
27 this long pause, you know like oh, yes and we started talking and in two days and I was  
28 just having a blast. You know I even, I called up my sergeant in Massachusetts, I found  
29 him and left a message on a machine and I could tell by the voice on the machine that I  
30 had the right guy. He called up and I was having a blast. Well then about six o'clock on  
31 Sunday night I called up one of them and I got this lady and she says, "Well who is this?"



1 and I told her and she said, “Well how would you know him?” and I said, “Well, I was in  
2 Vietnam with him.” And she says, “Well he died six weeks ago.” You know it was such  
3 a high for two days I was just walking around on clouds. I got that six weeks, if I could  
4 have got that CD-ROM a little sooner or something, well he died of cancer, throat cancer  
5 and stomach problems and they attributed it to Agent Orange but I don’t know. It had the  
6 same symptoms and stuff. But he went through a long, he had lost his larynx, he had  
7 been without that for a long time and then had stomach cancer and stuff too but anyway  
8 that was in 1995. So I managed to get four of us together in July of ’95 at Fire Base Indy,  
9 out in Indiana. Then the next year I got six of us together in Akron, Ohio and ever since  
10 then I have met with at least one or two members of the team since then. In the process  
11 we got this, when we first got together we got this free email where you could get the 800  
12 numbers and stuff, you know when email was first coming out and we started emailing  
13 each other back and forth because we were burning up the phone lines pretty bad before  
14 that. Well I start a database up, first it had just our team members on it, then I added the  
15 company roster that went over on the ship with us and then I got in touch with a couple of  
16 guys that were on the ASA on the internet and one of them says, “Gee, you know it  
17 would be nice if we had a database of ASA guys”. So I raised my hand for the second  
18 time and right now I have a database of 25,000 plus ASAers worldwide and I am the kind  
19 of default ASA locator database for anybody at the ASA. I get emails everyday of people  
20 still registering and they just keep coming and keep coming. Once they’ve registered  
21 then I give them the password to the database and they can look up their friends and  
22 they’ll call me back or whatever and say, “Hey, I found so and so after thirty years” “oh,  
23 that’s great, you know.” That’s a neat feeling.

24 RV: You’ve been quite a facilitator.

25 VG: Oh, yes, yes. And then they started a national ASA association, I am charter  
26 member number twenty-five. Yes, like I’ve said around here, nobody knows who I am  
27 but there’s twenty-five thousand people on the internet who know who I am. If you just  
28 mention my name, they’ll know who I am. I spend hours at night now plugging in names  
29 and keeping the database up and so a lot of this stuff is other people have forgotten about,  
30 I keep getting reminded about it daily as people ask me different things about it.

31 RV: That’s a tremendous service you provide.

1 VG: Oh, yes, yes. It is but it's fun and it's, when I hear the thank yous it's  
2 rewarding and so. I took all my slides that I had and a guy in Germany that was on my  
3 team, he scanned them all in, put them on a CD-ROM. Then I sell that CD-ROM on E-  
4 bay for a little bit more than it cost me to make it and then I made a video presentation  
5 using PowerPoint. I put some of the old songs behind it and I put that on a videotape and  
6 then I converted that to DVD. So I've got a product out there that I also sell to other  
7 Vietnam veterans everybody so far that ever had gotten in has had praise for it. We were  
8 all in different places but we all saw pretty much the same thing. They're all grateful  
9 because a lot of them didn't have a chance to have a camera or anything when they were  
10 over there and I did.

11 RV: Have you ever been to the Wall in Washington?

12 VG: Yes, I was there in '90, oh let's see '93, '94, somewhere in there. I went out  
13 to Delaware to my niece's wedding and so we got down there, yes that was. I went there  
14 by myself that was quite an experience, yes.

15 RV: Can you tell me about it?

16 VG: Oh. At the time I didn't know of all the ASAer guys that were on the Wall at  
17 the time, I wish I had known at the time. But I did have a friend back home that we used  
18 to run around with, I say that we shared the *American Graffiti* experience of the movie,  
19 hanging out at the drive-in and going out of town with our cars to see who had the fastest  
20 car and stuff and he was one of those. He had gone to college for a year and then  
21 dropped and went in the Army. He was the guy from my hometown that got killed and I  
22 did make a rubbing of his name and well, a number of rubbings and brought them home.  
23 Yes, it was pretty immense. What I wished at the time when I was there was that they had  
24 some benches there that you could have just sat on because they had the walkway there.  
25 Everybody kind of just keeps moving and I just wished at the time you could have just sat  
26 there, because it's so immense and these are all the guys that didn't come home. You  
27 didn't know how many of them you ran into, you don't know how many of them were on  
28 the ship that we went over with that were in the infantry that you know they were. We  
29 were just riding our way over there but they were polishing their weapons and cleaning  
30 them and firing them off the fantail of the ship and stuff and you always wondered how  
31 many of those guys that you rubbed shoulders with didn't come back, how many are on

1 the Wall. And I've gone to the Moving Walls; the different ones that come around to the  
2 different towns, whenever they've been around I've tried to go see them too.

3 RV: Same kind of experience?

4 VG: Yes, pretty much. It's not quit as immense because you know they're only  
5 half size but its still a, yes, its still hard to take, yes.

6 RV: Well, sir is there anything else that you'd like to add to our conversations  
7 we've had.

8 VG: Not that I can think of right now.

9 RV: Okay, all right. Well, we'll go ahead and end the interview with Mr. Vern  
10 Greunke, thank you very much sir.