

Oral History Program

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Brigham Young University - Hawaii
Oral History Program

Anonymous

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BRIGHAM YOUNG UNIVERSITY-HAWAII
ORAL HISTORY PROGRAM
Behavioral and Social Sciences Division
Laie, Hawaii 96762

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Anonymous

INTRODUCTION

This is a personal account from America's early war years in Vietnam. The narrator, a native of Laie, Hawaii, was a member of the Marine Corps Able Company and assigned to combat duty in 1961. He proceeded official American troops by four years. The nature of this history is honest and graphic, but lends itself to the inner thinking of a man who did his best for his country and others. The narrator has, however, asked to remain anonymous.

Brett Garrett
Student

NOTE

This interview was conducted by a student as part of a class assignment. In most cases the student selected the topic and narrator and also did most of the transcribing, auditing, and editing. The final typing was done by a student secretary from the Division of Behavioral and Social Sciences.

Because we tried to get the transcripts into the hands of the participating students and narrators as quickly as possible there may be errors that otherwise would not be permitted. We usually try to clarify statements that may be confusing: in these interviews, however, unclear statements may possibly be found. Our apologies for presenting a less-than-perfect transcript, but this does enable us to get interviews that might otherwise be lost.

Kenneth W. Baldrige, Director
Oral History Program, BYU-Hawaii

Laie, Hawaii
28th Jan 1985

N. We landed at Kompong Som in March 1961. We landed there exactly 7.20 am in the morning. We had orders to get on the beach and get into our platoons and companies. That day we landed we had about 5,000 troops. We did not dig in right away. We landed there and came to pick up our bags. They issued us our bullet proof vests and our ammo, our rounds. They issued us 120 rounds a person. Then they put us in our platoons - our squads. Then they got all the squad sergeants together that was in charge of the rifle team. We had a short meeting with our commanding officer which is the captain and our executive officer which is the lieutenant. They gave us instructions as to what we were going to do. Our main purpose over there was to get an airfield that we needed. The name of the place was Danang. We didn't know how far it was, how big it was and how well fortified it was by the enemies. All they said was that it was going to take some doing. What they did was they put us on trucks from the boat. On the trucks they took us to a town in North Vietnam. From there we went up oh, maybe about twenty miles inland. Then we got off the trucks and marched another fifteen miles. Then that's when we got to Danang.

When we got to Danang -- we got there almost in the evening time, almost about 1700 hours, military time. From there we were about three miles away from Danang; we could see the airfield. The enemy was already opening fire on us. They were pouring mortar on us, 16 mortars, not the heavy ones, 16 mortars. So, they weren't too bad; they were really off target on us so we didn't worry too much about it. So we dug in that night then we had another special meeting, so we all got together with our executive commanding officers and we discussed how we were going to do it tomorrow morning.

Charlie Company went first -- I was Able Company -- they went first. Able Company was the backup force; we were the backup force. You know, we were about, oh, no more than five minutes behind the other guys, and when Charlie Company went first, they got hit very bad.

B.G. How did you move in?

N. We couldn't go all one time. We had maybe about 150 men at a time and then another 150 men would move up. O.K. now we're talking about maybe five or six platoons. Charlie Company, like I said, Charlie Company went first. They got hit very bad, then they radioed us, they radioed my operator man and said they were pinned down right now and can't go any further, very heavy firing going on. So we advanced our position where it was; we advanced behind Charlie Company; then we found out how bad it was. It was really heavy with enemies over there, with Charlies over there. So, what we did, we split up. We called for air firefall and then the navy came in and kind of helped us out. They dropped Napalm to soften up the place and from there we advanced another 100 yards or so. We advanced ahead of Charlie Company because Charlie Company got hit very bad, alot of casualties.

B.G. What were the Vietnamese shooting with?

N. The shooting was mostly small arms fire, yeah, rifle and automatic weapons. They had some snipers, too, and we wasn't too concerned about it. The men that they had there was about on around maybe, about 500 or 400 men out in the field guarding the whole airbase. But, when the airstrike came in, they got quite a bit of enemy. But it took us, to take over the airfield, it took us almost about six weeks - a month and a half because we had to get all the enemy out of there; they really dug in and we had a lot of casualties every day. Then we finally took over Danang in March or April, May we took over, the second week of May. Then we went inside and made sure that all the enemies was out. We called for the demolition team to go inside and check for mines and booby traps. Then they went and checked; they had quite a few booby traps. Then the navy came in and started taking up the airfield, straightening them out. Then from there they shipped us out, we got on the trucks and we went on to where the heavy fighting was. That's the last I seen Danang. I spent all my time fighting in Hanoi, the jungles out there. That's where it was run by the Commies, in Hanoi. That's where they needed us up there.!!

B.G. Did you work closely with the French?

N. When we got there they told us that we was going to work with some foreign troops. And, when we got there, they assigned two South Vietnamese marines with us to be our interpreters. We coulndn't understand the language, that's why. So I had two that was assigned to me in my rifle squad. And they was with me all the time. Not all the time; they was with me, oh, say, maybe about five months, and then they had to go to another outfit and we were assigned two more.

B.G. How did the South Vietnamese fight at that time, and were they fairly dedicated?

N. The South Vietnamese were very dedicated at that time; they was very dedicated. They really was happy to fight along side of us, knowing that the marines had really established a name for themselves. At first, they wasn't too sure of how we was gonna fight. But after fighting along side of us for quite a few months, then they was really relaxed to see that hey, we was there to fight too. It took a long time to get trust in us.

But the French, I only seen the French, I think once or twice. That's all I seen them. I wasn't really in tact with them at that time. When we got there it was already a mess when we got there. And I wasn't too sure how long we was gonna be there. In fact, when we left Vietnam they told us not to make any plans to be coming ~~home~~ home early; we might be there longer. We were supposed to be there only about thirteen months. But they kept us there more than thirteen months. Some of them stayed thirteen months, some of them stayed

over two years. I stayed over two years. We was too much involved. I loved the people there; I have helped many people there. I was really sad to see the children who had been drawn to war; it's not a pretty sight. It's an ugly sight for an eight or nine year old boy to carry a rifle. He don't even know what the rifle is all about. He could get his head blown off. That's the kind of sight that we're not happy about - a small boy like that defend his country. Many times you think of your own family at home and what would happen if this would happen to America and how people would react to the same situation that's happening in Vietnam now. All these kind of things would cross our mind. It's not comfortable for us. All I could say is that we got there, we got a job to do, and we did it to the best we know how. But, I love the people. We came so close to the people. They appreciated us when we got there.

Some parts of Vietnam, they don't appreciate us. You know, people just spit on you when you come in the town, they spit on you. This happened to Quypuh. It's a small little outpost. It's about twenty-six miles northeast of Hanoi. It's in the jungles; it's in the mountains. Those people didn't appreciate us being there. And, like I said, they spit on us, they tell us to get out of the country. That's what made our feelings hurt. We was there to defend their country, not to kill them. But I guess they was so brainwashed by the Commies. See the commies got there before us and they already talked to these people and told them not to help the American troops. So we got there to help them and to evacuate them down. But they was already run by the Commies; they didn't want to leave there. It's the same people that was getting killed by the Commies. They wouldn't listen to us. So the next day we went back and the same village was wiped out, and the same people that we talked to got killed. They didn't listen to us.

Like I said, two days later, one day later when you go back and talk to them they was all dead - men, women and children. They was all wiped out. These are the kind of things when you look at them it really turns your stomach. It makes you sick inside to see all these kinds of people die like this. But anyway, I enjoyed being in the country to help them out; I love the people. I no mind going back there to help them again. The government won't send us. I love the people. I loved the children. We brought back a lot of children to the towns from the small villages we went to evacuate. Small children small babies with no parents, so we brought them back to Red Cross. I don't know how many, but hundreds and hundreds of children. They were mostly orphaned children, very sick. And I love the children, because like I say, when I look at them it reminds me of my two sons at home.

At times I wish I could have brought some of the children back home with me. But we couldn't. I love those children. I would sacrifice my life to save those children. I hope that some day the country can really defend themselves. The way I look at it right now, they have been run by Commies. I left there November 1963. I came back to

Cambodia in December, almost Christmas of '63. We spent Christmas in Cambodia. They gave us a Christmas dinner before we came. It's the first dinner we had in two years. We never had eaten a good meal since we'd been there. All I ate was what we found on the land, what we could come up with. Mostly rice and fish and what we could find in villages, chicken. Whatever we could find we'd shoot them. Sometimes we don't eat food for five days. You can't go on fighting like that. They was afraid to feed us. They were afraid that the Commies would find out they were feeding American troops and come in and shoot them and kill them. So they was afraid to feed us. We had to go in there and take it away from the village people. It sounds mean, but it wasn't mean. We had to survive to get our strength back so we could continue fighting. They didn't understand us. I loved the people there. Sometimes you can talk to them -- they didn't understand you - but you could communicate in sign language. That way they could understand what you was trying to tell them. That we were there on a peace mission to protect them and their country.

B.G. What did the Vietcong fight like?

N. They just was crazy. The Vietcong was hepped up. Like I said, they gave their life willingly. Their life to them didn't mean a thing. They could die for what they believed in. It's a different thing than what we die for. We believe in peace in the world. That's why we go and fight. The Commies thinks a different way. They wasn't too concerned with their life. Like us, we cherish our life. We can see that when we go out and fight against them, we can see how they react. They just keep on coming and we just keep on shooting them, like ants. They would do human-wave assaults many times, especially at night. That's when they would attack us because they're pumped up already. They would take some kind of intoxicating drink and they would have a dance, something like they were Indians. They dance, sing, and all the sudden you look up and they come like a human wave coming down. We just cut them down with automatic weapons. Next morning you get up you find the field all filled with bodies laying on top of each other.

It makes you cry. Why are we there? To kill people. We can't do nothing. It's either our life or their life. We have to defend our life or we'll end up like they do. There are certain things we gotta do. It's not one time we come across that; many times we come across that. We're talking about hundreds and hundreds. It gets you scared, believe me. Sometimes you're fighting with your heart in your throat when you face those kinds of attacks. It's not a good thing. You can be fighting for three-four hours continuously. You just keep on fighting. Your eyes get tired, your body, your mind. You don't know what you're thinking about. You're not busy killing, you're busy trying to keep yourself alive. So many things we go through. And, like I say, we lost a lot of lives, many lives. Many are wounded, many are missing in action, men who don't come home.

B.G. What do you know about the M.I.A.?

N. There are men out there who are still being held. I wouldn't say too many, but there are a few out there. They've been brain-washed so much by the Commies that they have turned Commies themselves. You feel pity for them. Those are the weak ones. If I was one of them, I'd rather shoot myself than to be what they are. How can they live a happy life? These are the things that we gotta prepare ourselves for. Many times I tell myself that nobody's gonna take me; I'm gonna shoot myself, and I'll do it. But it's a very heavy decision we carry. Many of them took dope just to be brave. I took dope. I was very heavy on dope because I was afraid. I needed myself to be pumped up, to make myself brave so I can survive. Any man goes over there, we're living from day to day. We don't know what's gonna happen tomorrow or tonight. That's how fast our life can go. So we were preparing ourselves to die. I wasn't happy taking those things. But then, it was the only way I could prepare myself.

Talking about operations. You see, my primary job was to go out in front of the enemy. I was in the outfit that you call reconnaissance. We was in special forces. We were trained to go out and look for the Commies. We studied in the morning. Our job started from 12:00 or 11:00. Come about 5:00 or 6:00 in the morning we go out and we find the Commies; we find their observation posts; we mark it on the map; then we come back with the information, give it to the company officer, which is a captain or a major. We let him know what area they're at. Everything on the map is marked by numbers. All the hills are marked by numbers, because, the reason for that is that the American troops could not pronounce the names good, so, everytime we go out we have a conference with the officer and us. They always tell us to mark the hills by numbers. That's what we do and when we come back we just give them the information. That's when the navy or airforce goes out and attacks the observation point. That's what we did for two years. It wasn't a good job. Nobody liked the job. It was a very risky job.

B.G. What was it like on patrol?

N. We didn't like the jungle patrol. We are facing all kinds of poisonous snakes, cobras, spiders, blackwidow spiders, tarantualas, you name it. They had another snake in Vietnam, I guess you heard of them. They have the black mamba and the green mamba. The green mamba is in Vietnam. If you ever get bit by that, in less than one minute you're dead. So we were warned about those kind of snakes. They're beautiful kinds of snakes. I never came across any. What the thing does, it freezes your blood and all your tissue comes falling apart. These are the kinds of things we face up there. That's why I say, going on a night reconnaissance is very risky. I didn't like the job, but I had to do it. Who else was gonna do it? I got wounded twice.

We were trying to sneak around and not get caught. We come across a camp and they see us and then we have to fight. They either destroy us or we destroy them. But most of the time we destroy them. You gotta catch them by surprise. We surround the camp, by the time they got out we wiped them all out. I set up all my machine guns and by

the time they knew what was happening we just was on the top of them and we destroyed the base. It wasn't a good job, but it was a job we had to do. I didn't like killing at all.

At that time I was nineteen years old and I was already considered a professional killing machine. I was glad when they told us to go home. I was to the point where I was cracking up already. You see things over there that you don't like to see. How people kill people, women, children. Many of us cried. When you come home people don't appreciate what you did. They call you killers, baby killers. They was writing stories about it in the newspapers. My parents wasn't happy because I had two other brothers that were in Vietnam. It was an ugly war.

I seen many bad things in Vietnam, things that a person does not want to see for the rest of his life. I have seen the kind of things that would turn a person's stomach inside out, especially for a young man like me who had never seen these kinds of things happen to people and the way it was done.

What I'm talking about is the executioning, the way people killed them. They were killed by their own people, people that was brain-washed by other countries. These are the kinds of things that will be in our minds for the rest of our lives. These are the kinds of things that hurt in us inside. Let me explain to you how people were mutilated, murdered, and killed.

I have come across a lot of women, men, children that were executed in a horrible way. Pregnant women that were killed. They were tied down on streets, hands and feet. They were bayoneted to death, beheaded, and they were cut open and the child was taken out from the stomach and even the child was killed too. Children two, and three, eight and nine were beheaded. They were hacked to pieces, thrown into the street. Old men were beheaded. I know for sure that God is not happy with what has happened in that country. It made men like me go sick in the mind, go crazy. Before I went to Vietnam I was a good LDS boy. I honored my church work and I honored my priesthood. But as a young boy that went to war to defend my country I had to find something to make brave and that was to take bad medicine. The bad medicine I'm talking about was to turn to dope. Yes, I took dope. I had to, to make me forget the things I was looking at every day. To make me brave and to understand that I was living from day to day. I did not know for sure when my life was going to be coming to an end. This is why I turned to those kinds of things. What I meant by dope is that I took the heavy stuff. I took the needle, I took the pills, I had turned to opium. You name it, I took it. I had been taking for two years. It was an ugly sight and it was bad to put these things in my body. But, I couldn't help it because of things I had seen every day. I love the people over there, and they loved me. They knew why I was there for, to defend their country, to keep it free from Commies. I know now what Commies can do to people. What a bad person can do to people. I'm glad that I had an opportunity to witness these kinds of things. Now that I have grown

up, it still hurts me to think of these things. It will never get away from my mind as long as I live.

Let me share another thing with you, a special thing. I did not have a true testimony in my life, but now I have a true testimony. I know that God lives and that He loves all of us, especially when we do things wrong. Twice I almost lost my life with him, but twice he has saved me. At the time I didn't know why that he had saved me. The second time I got hit badly and I wanted to go. I told him to take my life because I was hurt so bad, but he had saved me. He had a mission for me to fulfill in my life. He brought me home to my country and brought me home to my town, which is here in Laie. He had turned me from bad to good. I'm glad to be home, I'm glad to be a new man. My life has changed now. It took sometime to make me whole again, to kick the bad habit of putting these bad things in my body. The reason I'm sharing these things with you is to let all you good people to know that you can change your life even if you do something wrong. God will always love you like He did with me. I love people, no matter who they are. I'm tired of hurting people. I'm glad he brought me home and there's a mission for me to fulfill. But I'll always go on to love people and make them understand how special they are in our lives. We're not here to hurt people, like I see sometimes. I hope and pray that some of these people will understand how important another human being is. I know it's hard for you to try and understand what it is I'm trying to say. Some days I hope you will not come across this kind of experience that I witnessed. Like I say, it's an ugly sight to see people, young children die in your arms. At that time I was just a young boy. It was hard for me to take these kinds of things. But, now that I have grown up, I appreciate what I can do for other people. I appreciate my life, that God has spared my life.

I hope I'm giving you this experience that you will stop and think how important everyone is upon this earth. We all have a mission to fulfill and we must do it the best way we know how. I think that the number one thing that we lack is loving each other. Sometimes I still get sick and tired of hearing this kind of killing going on. I know there is a reason for people getting killed. I thank God for bringing me home among good friends. At times it bothered me to think about these kind of things. Yes, I grant you, I do have some flash backs. But, this is where good people come in to help us out in our lives. Sometimes you can get very lonesome when you start when you start thinking about what has happened, about you, about your live, about a country like that.

We are so lucky today to do what we want, to go as we please, go anywhere we please, but we do take things for granted. We don't appreciate things we do. We're always complaining about life, about this and that. We must stop complaining about these kinds of things and appreciate the things we have, more freedom, more democracy. This is what the communist countries don't have. You can't go to church over there, you can't do as you please. If you go to church they shoot you. If you carry a bible in your hand they shoot you. We are

so fortunate, so lucky to be in America, a country of freedom. These are the things that we appreciate in life. I'm glad to be among good people, to be among good young men who go to this college here. Men that have helped me in my life who took time to sit down and talk to me. These are very special people and I know God loves them. I just pray that the things I'm sharing with you now, you'll understand some day how important it is. I don't know for sure how long I'm gonna live. I grant you that I'm suffering with pains right now. I've been suffering pain for the last twenty years, but God is always there to help me out, to comfort me in my pains. These are the prices we have to pay for freedom. I pray that some day we'll understand how important we are to our country.