Ron Frechette, interviewed by Gary Waters, Part 2

Ronald Paul Frechette

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Transcript of an Interview
with Ronald Paul Frechette
by
June 15, 1999
Jay, Maine

The following interview was conducted for the MAINE VIETNAM VETERANS ORAL HISTORY PROJECT. Tapes and transcripts of project interviews have been deposited at the Maine Folklife Center at the University of Maine at Orono, where they are available to the public in accordance with the Center's policies. Some restrictions may apply to the use of these interviews by researchers. The Maine Folklife Center should be consulted concerning fair-use guidelines.

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Monique Leamon of Casco, Maine, transcribed the recordings.

The MAINE VIETNAM VETERANS ORAL HISTORY PROJECT is supported by contributions from the Maine Humanities Council, the Maine Community Foundation, Neil Rolde of York, Maine, the Maine State Council of Vietnam Veterans of America, Inc., the University of Maine at Farmington and Bates College.
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Views and opinions expressed in these interviews do not reflect the views and opinions of the University of Maine System or its campuses.

Listener discretion is advised.
RF: Ron Frechette

Tape One, Side A:

INT: Today’s June the 15th, 1999, I’m talking with Ron Frechette in Jay, Maine. This is part of the MAINE VIETNAM VETERANS ORAL HISTORY PROJECT. Ron, I’d like you to start by stating your full name, and then if you would, to get into this, if you can describe for me what you were doing just prior to going into the military.

RF: My name is Ronald Paul Frechette, and I was living in [unintelligible word] Cape National Park in Kentucky, I was in the Job Corps. I wanted to go into the military, it’s, everybody, a lot of the guys I knew that were going in it, they were being patriotic in those days. In the Job Corps I was a medical tech, learning how to be a medical technician. Also, I needed to just do something and to prove to myself that I could be somebody. It was, it was a rough time in those days, being in the Job Corps, and the Marine Corps recruiter kept coming up there and so I took the first test and I [unintelligible word] I wasn’t passing. Then he came back two weeks later and he said you passed most of it, so I took it again. And I could have been on a two year delay program but I didn’t, I took just not even two weeks and I went in the Corps in the summer of, the end of the summer of 1967. And went in the Marine Corps in 1967, Parris Island, South Carolina. Boot camp was a little rough for me because I was uncoordinated and overweight, so I spent thirteen weeks in the, what they called the fat man’s platoon, but I had, I lost the weight that I needed and another platoon picked me up and I graduated from boot camp a week before Christmas of, Christmas of ‘67, yeah, Christmas of ‘67, yeah, then I went home for fourteen days. And I, everybody knew where they were going and there was only a small majority of the guys that I was with in my platoon that didn’t go to Nam. I knew I was going to Vietnam, there was no doubt about it. I knew it, I think every guy that I met at the, well, that I met in boot camp, they all knew just about where they were going. And there was, yeah, I knew it, I knew exactly where I was going but I didn’t know what I was going to do, how I was going to, you know, what to be prepared for [unintelligible word]. And boot camp lasted for me, well it’s regular eight weeks, because I stayed in there, I was thirteen, then I went to ITR and advanced infantry training, then I took my MOS, 1381 (unintelligible name). It was a li-, on that MOS you can be a 13-, 1381, and as a 1382, combat engineer. They compare, they make it where you can be both MOSs in case they need you. I learned to be a combat engineer as well as directing choppers and calling in for resupplies, and I did an, I, we practiced, I went to combat engineer school in (name of school) in Camp Lejeune, North Carolina, and did four weeks, that’s all they gave us,
four weeks, and it’s like a three month course and they crash them in like in four weeks on what you had to learn, and they didn’t tell us that you’d have to be a radio man and lay on your belly and probe for mines and, and go on, be shotgun for, and clear the roads for mines. They just kind of told you briefly in *[unintelligible word]*, and build houses, build bridges and blow them up, and how to use dynamite, demolition. I didn’t do any of that. But then when school was over with and everything, I came home for thirty days and the thirty days was a flight direct to California and then we had four weeks of jungle training there, but from what I can remember, staging, it was called staging battalion, it was two weeks of orientation of what you were going to do over there, then two weeks of jungle training, and since I wasn’t there at *[unintelligible word]*, they were teaching us also house to house combat *[unintelligible phrase]* and out in the field combat. I myself, to this day, felt that we weren’t trained well enough. We had to learn quick when I was over there. There was no time to, you had to learn quick, grow up, I mean the training that you got here in the States was very minimal until you got over there. It’s when you got over there the shit hit the fan, you had to learn quick, you had to get on the top of things I guess and really, whether your MOS was, you did your MOS or not, and in the Marine Corps they put you where they needed you the most and I did a little bit of everything. And, but I just, I don’t know.

**INT:** How did you feel the day you got the news that you were actually going? What was, what went through your mind?

**RF:** I was very gung ho about it. I couldn’t wait to go over there. I was just like all the other boots in boot camp, I mean the ones that were going, the majority of us, we couldn’t wait. I mean, it was like oh man, we’re going to go kill some Charlie, you know? Didn’t know what really, what killing really was, I mean, boot camp, they teach you how to kill, they teach you that sixth sense, a sense that you never knew you had.

**INT:** How did you feel about people that didn’t go, that tried to stay out, that...?

**RF:** I, they didn’t bother me too much until I came back home, until I came back from Vietnam. Before then I didn’t, being where I was, I didn’t see too much of what was going on because being in the Job Corps in the middle of a national park, sure you had television and newspapers, but you didn’t see a lot of the things that were going on. Because that was your world. I was more or less, when I, it hit me more or less when I, I mean, I came back, yeah. I didn’t feel
like I wanted to be a coward, I wanted to be very patriotic, and I saw guys in
the Job Corps going in the Army and Navy and what not. I just had to do it. I,
well, there were reasons, there were reasons for it, not just being patriotic,
there were other reasons.

INT: Could you elaborate on those reasons?

RF: Well, one of the reasons was, you know, I originally lived in Massachusetts and I
always was always beat on, kicked at, picked on, beat up when I was a kid, so
that was one of the reasons. And the other reason was was there was a good
friend of mine that I went to school with that I admire to this day, he went in a
year before me, and I admired him so much that I wanted to go in. He was, he
was, I looked up to him, even though I left home, but I still looked up to him,
even to this day I look up to him because I figured he was, that made me, that
made me, that was one of the [unintelligible phrase], I didn’t want anything to
happen to him. I guess we all changed when we come back from that hell hole.

INT: When you got your assignment, what was your rate when you got your
assignment? And could you tell me what unit specifically you were assigned
to?

RF: OK, I was on, well I finally made PFC and, okay, when I first got over there...

INT: And when was that specifically, tell me the date?

RF: OK, okay, September, okay we’re going into ‘68, so that was in March of ‘68.
Then I, I ended up going with 1st Shore Party, 1st Shore Party, 1st Marines,
and I got, I was a new guy and they had me, I was real gung ho and there were
some guys who were short timers and they were, and they, of course they liked
to, you know, give the new guys a hard time. Well they took me and another
guy one night on a night patrol, we weren’t even supposed to be out there, we
weren’t even there three days, and they volunteered us and the company
commander didn’t even know about it, and when he heard about it the next
morning he, oh, all hell broke loose because we didn’t even have an orientation
program. Oh, shit! And, well, we didn’t even get our rifles really until the
second day we were there. You get off the plane, no rifles, no nothing, we’re
looking at each other, and they sent us to these hooches to, we had to fix them
for these officers that were coming off the plane. Hey, where am I going, what
am I doing here? Where’s the outfit I’m going with? Oh, don’t worry about it,
truck will come pick you up, truck will come pick you up. Well, if I can
remember correctly, trucks didn’t come pick us up until, oh, late in the afternoon they finally picked us up. Well, God, we could have walked around the corner and been in our outfit. So, that’s when we got over there.

INT: You mentioned you flew, where did you fly from and where did you land?

RF: Flew out of, okay, we flew from California, hit Hawaii, and then Okinawa, then Nam.

INT: Where specifically in Vietnam?

RF: Da Nang.

INT: Da Nang?

RF: Da Nang, yeah, yeah. And I think when we got off the plane, well the humidity hit us right away. Then the other thing is is I think we were all scared because we heard all these stories about these guys getting shot at as soon as they got off the plane and guys getting, you know, one between the eyes and all this, and we were scared. We had no weapons, I mean, and we had to get a C-bag and everything. What’s going on here, we don’t have a weapon? I mean, I kind of looked at the guy next to me and he looked at me, I mean, there were I don’t know how many guys on that flight, coming off that plane, no weapon. Boy, that’s a scary feeling, man. I mean, no sidearm, no M-16 until you get to your unit. Well when do we get there? Well you come over here, you do this and do that and then we’ll get you to the [unintelligible word]. I’ll never forget that as long as I live. It wasn’t like WWII where those guys carried their own weapon everywhere they went. And WWI. I mean, whew, I mean we assumed that when we got off the plane we were going to get a weapon right away, I mean, but nobody told us that we were going to have to wait a couple of days.

INT: You mentioned the humidity, was there anything else that you noticed, was there, that you could describe?

RF: Well, along down the road, I mean, humidity, the smell of the country itself...

INT: What was, describe that smell for me if you could?
RF: Like a cesspool, like a cesspool. And then later on when I was there, and I can smell it today, I'll never forget that smell, it was death. And I don’t care if a person dies of old age, you can smell it, you know it, you know when somebody’s dying, I don’t care who it is. And I don’t care if they’re dying of old age or dying from a truck, you know, that smell. It’s a huge cesspool and I can, sometimes certain foods, certain, when somebody’s smoking a joint, and I never smoked any when I was there, but I know that smell and that (snaps fingers) brings on things that I don’t want to remember. Fuel, sometimes when somebody’s getting gasoline [unintelligible word] on the tarmac [unintelligible word].

INT: So you were two days before you got your assignment and what was your first assignment, and what did you do specifically?

RF: Oh, okay, what I did, what we did is we waited a couple of days, they gave us an orientation, it took about two or three days, and so they finally sent us to where we were going. I ended up going to Hill 55.

INT: Whereabouts was Hill 55:

RF: Hill 55, whereabouts is Hill 55,...

INT: What major...?

RF: Well it’s, it’s a way, it’s a way from Da Nang, I have to look at a map, I can’t tell you from my head. I remember we had to get on trucks, you either have to go by truck-, by six by trucks or by chopper, you couldn’t hump it.

INT: Did you go by truck?

RF: Oh, I’m trying to remember. (Long pause.) I can’t remember.

INT: OK.

RF: I can’t remember, I can’t remember how we, I got there the first time. But I remember when I was at Hill 55 I was in a, I was a new guy, they didn’t want to send the new guys out so they [unintelligible word] with the CP, we were with, I don’t even remember the name of the outfit we were with, and, and we were there at Hill 55 at the CP and they kept, they kept the new guys back on the LZ, it was a huge LZ for the choppers going out into the bush, and Dodge
City, they had a place called Dodge City, I can remember that now, and it was full of gooks, Charlie was in there all the time, and they would send guys out there all the time. I just don’t, I don’t remember the unit, I don’t remember the unit.

INT: Was Dodge City a part of Hill 55?

RF: No, it was down in like a valley, it was a valley, it was lower. Hill 55 was like this and it was like there was Dodge City, it was like a valley. And they kept sending guys in there all the time. And then my first time I saw KIAs and WIAs coming in, killed in action and wounded in action, wrapped up in poncho liners and ponchos and body bags, and it was my first time. I pretended to be sick because I didn’t want to see it. And then there was a corporal there, he said, Ron, get out of here if you don’t, come back later. That’s the first time I’ve ever told anybody the truth. I just didn’t want to look at it, I just didn’t want to look at it. I wasn’t really sick. I mean, I couldn’t look at all those guys, I mean, I wanted to, I didn’t know what was going on. I don’t know, I wasn’t, I was new.

INT: Had you, had, in your wildest imagination, had you thought it would be like that, or...?

RF: No, I had no idea, I had no idea. I was, I would listen to everything, what the DIs would say and then the guys would say in the States, but I had no, no concept of what it was, what it really was going to be like. And what was I seeing here? What was I, what, I saw newspaper clippings and stuff, and stuff, but what is the real thing, I mean, the real thing? What is the real thing? How are you going to act, I didn’t know how I was going to act. Maybe I, I know I was scared, I was frightened, and of course eventually, being there, I got used to it. You don’t get used to death I don’t think, that’s something you don’t get used to. You see it all your life in one shape or form or matter.

INT: I want to take you back just a little bit to something you said, prior to getting to Hill 55, you said you had like a two or three day orientation. What did they tell you at this orientation? What was that all about?

RF: Well, it was more, well more or less to give you a rough idea of their language, their customs, shots, getting your weapon, a chaplain telling you about different things, and how we were ambassadors of the United States, we were there as a, supposedly as a peaceful unit, that’s a crock of shit anyway, but they
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told us about, about some of the customs, about some of the, how people lived and what not. But what, how they said it and what, how you found out is two different things. And a couple of Vietnamese words you’re going to hear, and some of it is French mixed up with Vietnamese because that was a French colony. And that was it. I mean, a couple of days of that, and then they would, you, here’s your stuff that you’re going to need and here’s where you’re going to go.

INT: What, can you remember any of the specific customs they told you about?

RF: Well, specific, some of the customs, there’s only one really I can remember is how they buried their people and their graveyards and how they got, in Germany they had swastikas all over, a swastika for them, it was some kind of a, it meant entirely different, it had something to do, they would put in on their, on their coffins of their people, and it had an entirely different meaning.

INT: Do you know what that meaning was?

RF: No, I can’t remember, I used, it was part of their religion. I was nothing to do, nothing, it had nothing bad, it was, it had, it was something to do about their religious, for the person that was in the coffin, it had something to do with them. I mean, I don’t know if their soul was going somewhere, most of them was, more, most of the Vietnamese that I met were in the Buddhist religion and, but, you know, but I never got into it really, I didn’t want to know their customs after a while, I didn’t want to know any of their customs.

INT: What words did they teach you?

RF: (Vietnamese words), boom-boom, (Vietnamese word).

INT: Can you remember what they meant?

RF: I can remember, well tiki dao (sounds like), I know that one real well, it means crazy or dumb-dumb. Boom-boom, that means if you want a piece of ass. That’s, I don’t know, see, those are just a couple. I mean, the only couple I can remember. I mean, they were trying, they were trying to make us learn the language, but a lot of guys didn’t want to learn it, and I was one of them. I was not interested in learning their language to save my soul. I knew, I knew one thing, though, certain words on certain signs that said mine field, I sure wasn’t stupid enough to walk in there, because I knew what that meant. I may not
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have known what it meant but I’ve seen, I saw it some other place and guys told me, and [unintelligible word], I know that much.

**INT:** So how long were you in the country when you got your first assignment? So you got to Hill 55 and you were still...

**RF:** OK, okay we were at Hill 5-, I was at Hill 55 for, oh, maybe not even two weeks. Then they sent me back to 1st Shore Party and back to the rear, and, across from Freedom Hill, 1st Shore Party, 1st Marines, they sent me back there. And they had plenty of bodies everywhere, and they had plenty of guys to fight. They were looking, I didn’t know what a float was, or a BLT, battalion landing team, I didn’t know what that was. I’m green in the Marine Corps, I’m only a PFC, what do I know? Well they needed volunteers. Should I volunteer or shouldn’t I? Oh, I’ll volunteer. Ha-ha. Well I ended up, we ended up going on a BLT, a battalion landing team, or a float, with 2/7. Six months on and off a ship doing operations off the coast of Vietnam. I’ll never do, I swear when that battalion, when that battalion landing team was over, I swore to God I would never volunteer for another thing again as long as I live. No way Jose, uh-uh. Oh, was that a stupid thing to do, because just before I volunteered there was a kid right next to me, he had the MOS I did, they transferred him to an infantry outfit, and he was happy to go there. I said, ah, jeez, I’m not going to see a lot of bush. Ha-ha-ha, that was...

**INT:** So what specifically were your responsibilities from this...?

**RF:** Oh wow, being a PFC I didn’t have too many responsibilities, I just did what I was told.

**INT:** And what, and what did they tell you to do?

**RF:** OK, well, when the float got started and everything I was in a squad with a bunch of other guys and mostly they taught us radio procedures and more directing on choppers, and we got in with a company, how to write down what they need like water, C-rats, and I’d call in for choppers for resupplies but also for KIAs, WIAs and if you, and you’re in the Marine Corps, you don’t leave anybody behind so, whether they’re dead or wounded, so you’d always call in for choppers and stuff like that. Each company had three guys, it was supposed to be a regular radio operator and two shore party guys, but it didn’t work out that way. The shore party guy, it would be three of us, one carrying a radio, the other two would take care of the unloading and loading the choppers in some
kind of orderly manner, even though we were, like maybe a corporal or a PFC or, the highest rank would be a sergeant. Higher than that, they would be with the CD or they’re in the rear with the gear, we’ll say. But I was with the CP, then I was, we were with battalion 2/7, and the name of the operation that we were on, I don’t even know the name of the guy, I mean, nobody knew, Allenbrook, nobody knew who Allenbrook was. He won a medal, well, do you know who he is, no, I don’t know who he is. Why’d they name this operation? I don’t know. So, but they named the operation after him, six months, and then you kept, and then when I got off the float, they had an Allenbrook Two. What the hell was Allenbrook Two? I mean, Jesus, what is this, who is this guy? Somebody important. I don’t know.

INT: Let me see if I have this straight now. You were on a ship, then they assigned you to the field to, how far inland did you go?

RF: Oh, quite a bit, quite a bit. The choppers would fly us in quite a bit. It would, depending on how far they could get a good LZ or what not, they flew us in quite a bit. I mean, the only, we only pulled one of these WWII things, right on the beach type landing, but other than that there was mostly flying in, really deep in, and if they, they would fly in a company and they would set up LZs and what not and, for the other companies to come in, and it was pretty deep. It would be like jungle, jungle area, clear off some jungle, a lot of debris. If the, we hit an island like type thing, they wouldn’t land us on the beach itself, it was pretty far inland and, but there weren’t like a lot of trees, I mean it was flat, but the chopper gate would come down, you’re still sixteen feet, twenty feet off the ground, so you’re jumping with your gear on, I mean it doesn’t matter, unless that chopper could get his wheels down, the belly of a chopper is just so, it’s so thin, I mean you could prick it with a needle.

INT: What kind of gear did you have when you went on the chopper, what did you carry?

RF: Oh, what did I carry? Well, I carried an M-16, M-16 ammo, grenades, E-tool, can-, between two to four canteens if not more, a poncho liner, lots of cigarettes, C-rats, oh brother, what, um, whatever we could, whatever we could get, you know, make use of, we carried.

INT: So you were involved, if I have this right, you were involved with the set up of the LZ?
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RF: Yeah, yeah.

INT: And then, did you come under fire when you [unintelligible word]? 

RF: Well I, I only came under fire one time, but I knew some of my buddies that did. I came under fire one time, we were, we pulled an operation off the coast of Vietnam, it was a small island that they said that the NVA and the VC were using for R&R. Well, the intelligence that we were getting, it was so bad, I mean it was so piss poor. We got on that island, I mean there was only one or two gooks shooting at us and a whole mess of civilians, Vietnamese civilians and what not, and these guys that are shooting at us were in the crowd or in the trees and we were there on that island for two or three days, if not longer. And I was one of the last ones off that island because I had to make sure that everybody got off and my chopper was the last one, and I, there was this major, I don’t know what he, where he kept his brains, but gee, I mean, you’re not at the academy any more, sir, get on the chopper. I had to talk to the pilots and ask them how many men they could have, hold, because you had to compensate for the weight guys were carrying and their own weight, so sometimes there was other crap in the chopper itself, so there was like a phone on the side of the chopper so you opened a little door and you talk, and you do this, ten, five, or whatever, and the guy would say okay, so you’d get everybody in. I was, I was the last one in on that one operation, I was getting sniper fire, but I finally got in and got that major in and we were the last ones. It was, there were four companies on that island, the CP was the last, yeah, the CP was the last one to go on there, H&S Company was the last one to go on there. And don’t ask me why, I don’t know, but for some reason H&S Company was the last one to get off.

INT: What’s H&S?

RF: Headquarters and supply. But for some reason we were the last ones to go. I mean, we were supposed to be the first ones to go to keep in touch with everybody. This time it was ass backwards. But that’s typical military, I mean.

INT: So you’d go into these different places and set up the LZs...

RF: Yeah.

INT: ...and how long was a typical operation?
RF: Well it would vary, some operations would vary longer than others. I mean, Operation Allenbrook, it was silly, I mean, if you have an operation called Allenbrook, Operation Allenbrook like lasted six months. I mean, and then they had other operations like, wouldn’t last two months.

INT: So, what I mean specifically is like, okay, you got on the chopper and the float, and you went out and set up an LZ, how many days or weeks would you actually be out in the bush?

RF: It would vary. It would vary depending on the grunt companies and how much, how much Charlie is out there. And we would have to wipe, you know, they would have to wipe them out. I mean, we, it would vary. Some guys would stay out for weeks at a time and by the time they’d get back, I, I spent thirty days out, and by the time we got back, they couldn’t get us any water or anything like that, so when we got back aboard ship my, I had a big hole in my ass in my uniform, I mean general fatigues were all rotten, we had no water, hadn’t shaved, brushed our teeth for thirty days, I mean you looked like scum. And this ensign said to me, I don’t know why he picked on me, you can’t come aboard my ship looking like that. I said, I said, yeah, I can too. And brother, that started an uproar. I had to, a first sergeant came up to me as I was taking, throwing my gear down and trying to get a shower, he says you’ve got to go apologize to that ensign. I says, what? I said, you were there, you heard it. He says, yeah, but you’ve got to go apologize. Oh, Jesus. He says, I says what did we all look like?

INT: Did you go apologize?

RF: Yeah, I had to go apologize to the damn jerk. Some smart ensign that just got out of school and didn’t know his ass from his elbow. I mean, we’re Marines, I mean we’re in the bush for three days to thirty days, I mean if you, gee, I mean, you don’t look like you’re going to go to a fancy ball. I mean, Jesus, common sense. And it just so happens the other guys were going ahead of me, and, I’m going ahead of them, and I just went like that and he said, you’re not coming aboard my ship looking like that. Oh-h-h, why me? Didn’t need it.

INT: What, when you were out, what did you eat?

RF: Well, we, I had, we ate C-rations, the canned C-rations, and then when they came out with, they came out with a new hydrated, a new dehydrated stuff for the
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Force Recon, I got a hold of some of that stuff, that stuff wasn’t bad, but it blew you up, I mean, one meal would blow you up for three meals. And then the regular canned C-rations, we had more of that. Ham with limas, well I threw them to the gooks, ham and limas, nobody liked ham and limas, and we tried to cook that stuff up different ways, and, even to this day if I saw a can of, canned meatballs or cans of franks or eggs, Jesus.

INT: Well what...?

RF: When you start complaining, they got it rough.

INT: What were your sleeping conditions like, where did you sleep?

RF: Foxholes mostly, that poncho liner on top of you or under, poncho on the ground, poncho liner on top if you were lucky. Ninety nine percent of the time you weren’t, didn’t have a poncho liner. Poncho on the ground. If you were too tired and you didn’t make a hole and of course they got you after, they got after you to make a hole, but I, one time I didn’t even make a hole, I just crashed down with my rifle, I said screw it, I ain’t even going to dig a hole, and there were a couple of other guys that felt the same way. Yeah, you had an entrenching tool, the entrenching tools were back from World War, Korea and WWII. I mean, the Marine Corps, the Marine Corps gear, the 782 gear, a lot of it was from the Korean and WWII era. The Marine Corps has this, still to this day, has the smallest budget there is in all the armed forces, so they make do with what they got. And if they got anything new, it’s because the Army and the Navy and the Air Force don’t want it. So the Marine Corps has, the Marine Corps makes the best of it.

INT: What was the morale like in the division?

RF: Morale, Jesus, morale, what was the morale like. Depending I guess on the people you were with and where you are. I mean, if you were in the rear with the gear in a Remington Raider or an office [unintelligible phrase], hell, you got to see Mr. Bob Hope and all that shit, you know. I know some guys that never even saw a USO show. They’re morale was, give them a can of beer. My morale most of the time was, wasn’t the greatest. I know some guys, their morale wasn’t too good either.

INT: What, what, could you elaborate on what you mean by your morale wasn’t the greatest?
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RF: Through being, being with a CO who was an asshole and, I hate to say it but there was another war going on in Vietnam, blacks and whites were fighting each other just like in the States, a racial war, and I was, and we had a black gunnery sergeant I was going to kill. My morale was very, was very low. I mean, I had a couple of high moments, [unintelligible phrase] by high, a couple of good times. I went on a three day drunk.

INT: What’d you drink?

RF: Beer, whiskey, whatever we could get a hold of. We were supposed to go take some showers and we never went. We went to Freedom Hill with beer gardens, and we went to the CBs at (name), got more beer, we got whiskey, and we went on a three day drunk. We just couldn’t handle being at that, I don’t know if it was Hill 27 or at Hill 72, we couldn’t stand being there any more. It was like, we, there wasn’t, I mean, Charlie wasn’t there. And they kept saying Charlie was there, Charlie’s there. And not one round for a week, I mean nothing. The only thing we heard was rock apes. I mean, I got so, you got so pissed off and then you’re getting mad at each other, and then they said, well, you’re dirty enough, you got to go to First Tanks and take a shower. We get to First Tanks, there enlisted mens pub was open. Hey, we got on a drunk for three days and didn’t get off of it. We didn’t care if we were going to get shot at, killed or shot back.

INT: Would you explain what a rock ape is?

RF: Yeah, it’s a, a rock ape, an animal, it’s an ape and they harass each other by throwing rocks at each other at night. And what they do is, is, also Marines, it happened to them, I mean they were on guard duty in their hole and the apes would throw rocks and of course we thought it was Charlie trying to figure our position out, or you’d think it was a grenade, and the Marines weren’t going to fool around so they, we, they would throw back grenades and the grenades would come back. Well this time some Marines all together threw grenades and they all went off the next morning and had an investigation and they found some dead rock apes. It’s like, down towards the DMZ there were some Marines that killed a tiger, made Stars and Stripes front page.

End of Tape One, Side A
Tape One, Side B:

INT: ...talked just briefly about the other war in Vietnam.

RF: Yeah, there was another war.

INT: And you mentioned another war between the blacks and the whites, and you had mentioned at the time that your gunnery sergeant was a black man and you didn’t see eye to eye with him. Could you tell me why that was?

RF: He was a stupid asshole. I could use another word but I don’t think I, if somebody else listens to this tape [unintelligible phrase], he was a dumb sonofabitch. I don’t know how long he had been in the Corps, black, and one night the intelligence came in that we were going to get overrun at An Hoa helicopter base that we were at. Well I told him and the captain that I had, he was white, I said, if we get overrun, you’re both dead, I don’t care, I don’t care if I go to jail. We got in the hole, I put my piece, round in the chamber, piece on safe, my buddy looked at me and he said, Ronny, what are you doing? I says, Davis and Stevens, they’re dead if we get overrun tonight because nobody’s going to know where those rounds came from. I says, you know what they’ve been doing to us, and Davis doesn’t know his ass from his elbow, I don’t know how he made it in the Corps.

INT: What did, what did they do to you?

RF: Every damn dirty detail that came down the pike, for no reason at all, me and another kid. We burned shit, and I mean real shit from the shit houses, they put us on point, all kinds of that crap. To this day, if I ever see Davis or Stevens I don’t care, I’ll beat the shit out of them, I don’t care if I go to prison. I hate them. And my hate stays with me. I’m not the type of guy to forgive and forget, [unintelligible phrase] other guys that I have hate for.

INT: Was there a lot of this, this problem, the hatred?

RF: Oh yeah, oh yeah, yeah. After my, my float was over, after the battalion landing team was over, I was back in Da Nang waiting to go with a, be sent back out in the bush again, and somebody threw a grenade in this major’s hooch. I mean, there was a lot of it and racial tension was very high, very high.

INT: Do you know, do you have a handle on why that was, or...?
RF: I don’t know, I know some of it was a power thing, a lot of it was a power thing, and some of it, some of the blacks wanted to get, you know, oh, I didn’t care, but [unintelligible phrase] I mean some blacks, I’ll maybe say one percent of the blacks that I met, one percent, the Corps was their home and they had it, they would, they weren’t just picking on you, they would pick on their own kind too. But that’s one percent out of the whole majority, I mean, that was [unintelligible phrase]. But it was pretty bad, I mean, they, if they didn’t like you, they didn’t like you. I had one was going to shoot me in the back for no reason, [unintelligible phrase] and his M-16 jammed. I was going to the mess hall. I came back, he was still playing with his M-16, [unintelligible phrase] I knew how to unjam it, you hit the butt against the deck and it’ll unjam. Well, everybody came running to our hooch, everybody, and there was this black sergeant, I didn’t know him that well but, even though I didn’t know him, I says, hey, ask him, he’s the one that’s going to shoot me in the back for no reason. He says, and he asked him, and he asked him, he says, and I can’t remember his n-, the guy who was going to shoot me in the back, I remember his nickname, his name was Slim, the sergeant asked him, he said, were you going to shoot him in the back for no reason? Well, he told me to clean the hooch. Well that doesn’t give you a reason to shoot anybody in the back, he says, now I want you to come with me. He beat the living tar out of him. And then I told the sergeant, I says, sarge, I want to go back out in the bush tomorrow and I want him with me. I says, he’s dead, he’s mine, his ass is mine. He says, I can’t do that, he says, I know what you’re going to do. I’ll send you out in the bush, I’ll keep him here. Yeah. Because I was going to kill him. Even to this day, I, I have a lot of hate for, a lot of hate towards a lot of things over there. Blacks, officers, certain people.

INT: Why did you hate the officers?

RF: Well, especially Stevens, he was an asshole.

INT: What do you mean by asshole?

RF: Prick.

INT: Can you tell me why you felt that he was that way?

RF: I don’t know, I guess I was just his whipping boy, that’s the way I can explain it. He had to find a whipping boy and I was it.
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INT: How old were you at this time, Ronny?

RF: Oh, let’s see, I was nineteen.

INT: Nineteen.

RF: Nineteen and growing up faster and older so quick. I saw a guy who was forty years old die of a heart attack over there, out in the bush because of the heat. And to this day, that still bothers me. Forty years old. Heart attack. The heat killed him. And I’m fifty and I think of that, I think of that often. I say to myself, why didn’t you die home in your bed or something. He was a medic, I mean he was a Navy Corpsman, he wasn’t even supposed to be out there in the first place. He was married and he had kids, I mean, he didn’t belong out there.

INT: Did you have, did the hatred that you built up, did it just come from your experiences or is something else going on here?

RF: Well, it came from some of the experiences over there, and then when I came back to the States, [unintelligible phrase].

INT: How about disobedience towards officers and superiors?

RF: I did it once.

INT: Did you see a lot of it, or?

RF: I saw some, I saw some of it.

INT: What types of disobedience?

RF: Well, when I was in Da Nang I took this major’s dog and painted it red, then threw a grenade in his hooch. There were some officers that got killed. There was one officer, we had to call a chopper in because he was killing men, sending guys out in the mine field. He was an artillery officer, what the hell was he doing in a grunt outfit, second lieue.

INT: So, did the men, did someone shoot him or?
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RF: No, he was going to be called. We got on the horn and we’d call them and they, we’d say, he’s either going to get killed now or you come get him because we’re going to kill him, it doesn’t matter. They sent a chopper for him, he didn’t want to go but he eventually did get on the chopper and they flew him out of there. And nothing happened to him. He didn’t care about those guys that were getting mangled, he didn’t care about them, he didn’t care about the ones that were dying, he didn’t care about them.

INT: Did anybody refuse to go that he sent?

RF: No. But, the whole thing, after a while it was getting to be repetitious. There’s the sign, there’s a sign there. Then, then we meet up with him again, he gets, he’s in, he’s got his little artillery, finally got his, an artillery unit. Jesus. We were hoping there would be no shot rounds, Jesus this guy.

INT: Did you ever see chaplains or anything when you were in the field?

RF: No.

INT: Did they come around or?

RF: Yeah, well, there were, there was one in the field, on the, with 2/7, 2nd Marines. There was one that would come out in the field but, if, what I can remember about him, the only thing I can remember about him is I think he was out there just, just to get his name on a piece of paper saying that he was out there because he, I met another chaplain one time with the 26th Marines, and he was telling us that, what was going on and how things are, when the mail was coming, information that we, that we were looking for. There was no specific, with that one guy, no specific service. He was a good chaplain. And we had questions, he’d answer them for us. Didn’t matter if you were Jewish, Catholic, Protestant or atheist, it didn’t matter. But he’d always say, well, I got word that mail’s coming, or this guy’s coming back, he was in the hospital, or this guy’s in the hospital, things like that. He was pretty good. But the other one, I think he was just there just to make himself look good, you know. I remember, I remember, chaplains have a, have an aide or a driver, whatever you want to call them, and this kid hated doing it, he hated being with him. He had to dig this chaplain, well chaplains are officers, had to dig his hole plus his own hole, make sure the chaplain was nice and comfortable, had to make sure this and that, he was getting, he was hating it, and I could see it, he was
bitching every day, hear more and more bitching. He wanted out and he couldn’t get out. So. There were, there were a couple of [unintelligible word].

INT: Did you have services, or?

RF: Services were in the rear. There was a small chapel on 1st Marines, 1st Shore Party right across from Freedom Hill, we had a small chapel there. Aboard ship they had, they had those, there was a, like a little, they had a little chapel there. And you could see the chaplain any time you wanted, you didn’t have to go through chain of command. A lot of guys would see chaplains. Most of the time if you, lots of times if a chaplain would come up to you or came up to guys, it was bad news.

INT: What types of bad news?

RF: Bad news from home, or bad news about a buddy dying. But other than that it wasn’t, you know.

INT: You had mentioned, you did a little drinking, you said you didn’t use drugs but, while you were there. Could you tell me what you might have seen as far as drug use or drinking?

RF: Oh, I saw, I saw LSD, I saw pot, barbiturates.

INT: Was it readily available?

RF: Yup. Yup. Yup.

INT: Where did they get it?

RF: Oh, Christ they could get it anywhere. The kids were selling it to them. Pot was everywhere. Oh yeah. Oliver Stone made a movie about the Vietnam War; he over exaggerated it, but there were people there who smoked joints. And I was at, I can’t remember what pass I was at, it’s either Dai Loc or Hai Long pass, four guys are smoking on duty, and now that smell, you can smell, it’s like burning rats, you can smell it a mile at night time. Didn’t take long for Charlie to know where that weak link in the chain was, rocket hit that bunker, boom. I was in a small mess hall, I just grabbed a rifle and I, I’m, everybody hit the deck, rounds were going off, shit hit the fan, next morning was an investigation, they found the four guys, all these joints all over the place.
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Yeah. I was with, I was with one guy who smoked and took some other shit. I had to pull my four hours plus his four hours, sixteen hours on watch at night. Yeah. That sonofabitch, instead of going down, looking down at the perimeter, going to shoot anybody that comes to our hole, [unintelligible phrase] or guard, and I says, hey you stupid mother-, give me your weapon. No, no, no. I says, give me your weapon. It took me I don’t know how long, but I got his weapon, took the clip out, round out of the chamber, and then when we got back, I don’t know, that was a long night. Next morning I says, I’m laying down, you go do whatever you want to do but the next time you do it I’m blowing your head off, I’m not pulling it. You want to do it, do it during the day, I don’t care where you do it, do it in the shitter, I don’t give a shit, I’m not pulling it. [unintelligible phrase]. And I says, well bull shit, at least I, I drink but I don’t drink on guard duty, I don’t drink, hey, we may, I might drink and get drunk but I don’t do it when somebody else, or have duty, no way.

INT: How much did you drink, Ronny?

RF: When I was over there? I drank as much as I could and when I could. I carried a can of beer in my pack for thirty days and thirty nights, opened that sucker up. Man, I had more guys around me than like flies on shit. I mean, everybody wanted a sip of that beer. Hey, no, no, go away, I carried this.

INT: Your shore party assignment lasted six months you said, in the field?

RF: No, no, shore party lasted me the whole time I was there.

INT: Oh, okay, so you operated from the float from six months.

RF: Yeah.

INT: And what did you do after that?

RF: Well then they put me, after, I was at Freedom Hill for about not even a week, and I was getting restless and the chicken shit blouse, you know, I had a blouse, I had trousers and starch our [unintelligible word] and, hey, you’re in the middle of a war here, I mean what the hell’s going on? Polished boots, you know. I said, bullshit on this, and inspections every Sunday morning. Hey, get me outta here. So they sent me over to the 26th Marines.

INT: And where did you go with the 26th?
RF: Either to Dai Loc or Hai Von (means Hai Long?) Pass, one of those passes.

INT: Dai Loc?

RF: Dai Loc or Hai Von Pass.

INT: Hai...?

RF: Hai Von.

INT: Hai Von?

RF: Yeah.

INT: H-I-V...?

RF: Don’t ask me.

INT: OK, Hai Von, okay.

RF: Yeah, and when I got there out of a battalion of men there was about five companies, only, only had one company [unintelligible word], and it was spread very thin on the pass, very thin.

INT: You went from Five Company down to One Company?

RF: Yeah, they were, they were, they had, they were supposed to have, they told me it was going to be, well they bullshtted me, there was supposed to be like five companies and they were down to one company when I got there.

INT: Was that withdrawal or some losses, or?

RF: Losses and guys going back home and what not. Mostly losses.

INT: Did you see a lot of that?

RF: I didn’t see quite a lot, I, I was fortunate, but I saw my share, enough to make my stomach curl, enough to say, you know, you can watch, I can watch some of these movies on TV and say, well this is a crock of shit, you know. That didn’t
happen, that didn’t happen. Well maybe that happened. But, I didn’t see a lot compared to a lot of other guys. I was no John Wayne, believe me.

INT: When, when you were, how long were you in this part of your assignment in the passes?

RF: Well, twenty, well, I was with the 26th Marines I guess maybe a couple months. My time was running short, and I went down to get the mail, the truck can’t make, couldn’t make it up there, so you had to walk down the pass and there was another CP down there. So, I get the mail and whatever the, other things the guys wanted. I says, okay, I go down there and get the mail, I get on the truck, I get the mail, whatever else we needed, I jump off that damn truck and I break my ankle. And then that wasn’t so bad. Everybody gets mad but me. Sonofabitch. So I says, they got a chopper going down there? They check if any choppers, no, Ron. You gotta be shittin’ me. You’re going to drive me in a jeep all the way down to First Med. It’s over a hundred miles. Well, lovable me, so I got there, they put a walking cast on it, and then I end up right back to square one. First Shore Party, 1st Marines, right across from Freedom Hill. I’m in a, supposed to be in a cast for four weeks. I broke one, I broke one and then they put me in another one and I broke that one too. Then they gave up on it and they said, hey, this is costing us too much money. Well, what do you want me to do? You think I’m going to just lay there on a cot with my foot up, you gotta be kidding me. For four weeks? Bullshit on you.

INT: So, did you break the cast yourself?

RF: Yeah, the first, yeah, I broke the cast twice myself. The first time was just being worn out, you know. It’s got that little rubber stub, you know, and I was just hopping along...

INT: So did this...

RF: The second time I got drunk and I smashed it.

INT: Did you have, did you have to go back in the bush after the ankle...?

RF: No, no, no. I don’t know how you want to, I don’t know how anybody’s going to take this, well, I wasn’t, I was sick and tired of being there I guess, and I don’t know what it was, the cast was on my leg and, and they had me on light duty finally, filling sandbags and bullshit, but I still wasn’t getting along with
anybody. I got drunk one night, real, real goddamn drunk, [unintelligible word] drunk. They, a friend of mine found me and brought me back to my hooch and I remember I was out of my mind. They had everybody in that hooch including a chaplain and a few other people. On one side they, I remember was tr-, slapping the shit out of me. Next morning I had a head and nobody spoke to me, then they told me to go down to sick bay. I said, nah, and I guess that was the beginning of losing it I guess.

INT: You went to sick bay?

RF: Yeah, yeah, next morning. They talked to me a little bit and then they sent me to a psychiatrist at First Med. And the psychiatrist, you know, in those days, I mean it’s like any war I guess, the first thing [unintelligible phrase] they think you want out, and I didn’t want out. (Whispering - unintelligible phrase) I didn’t know what I wanted I guess. I think maybe I just saw too much and did too much shit, I don’t know. This is the first time I talk about it. I haven’t told anybody else. None of the therapists or psychologists or anybody.

INT: So you kind of lost, you just, kind of just lost it?

RF: I lost it, and then got the cast off, got my boot on, it wasn’t even two days later, a strange, strange sergeant came in the outfit for a short [unintelligible word]. He was from the 3rd Marines from up north, towards from the DMZ actually, and I says, hey, do you know a buddy of mine, Joe (name). He says, yeah, got burnt. I says, what do you mean he got burnt? Napalm. Sonofabitch. Didn’t take me long. I climbed up that tower, can remember, I can remember every day because I hated myself for it. I [unintelligible word] back on the boat and I started firing into this ville and I didn’t care, I just didn’t give a shit. I knew exactly what I was doing, I knew exactly what I was doing.

INT: What did you shoot into?

RF: A ville, a village. I didn’t care, I didn’t give a shit. Going on a second can of ammo and four guys pulled me off. I just let them pull me off, I didn’t struggle. I was losing it.

INT: What did they do to you for that?

RF: Well, they sent me to sick bay, gave me a shot, then they, they said, well, we’re going to send you to a doctor again. Navy doctor. Oh, you, you don’t want to,
you want to stay in the Marine Corps? Yeah. You want to stay in Vietnam? Yeah. Well, they put down the opposite. Gunnery sergeant told me, and old gunnery sergeant told me, when I came back from First Med after seeing this psych, he says, oh you got nothing to worry about, they’ll keep you in, they’ll keep you in. Not fit for military service. Didn’t know.

INT: And so they sent you home?

RF: Yeah, I was in a mental ward for three months in Newport Naval Hospital.

INT: Where?

RF: Newport Naval Hospital.

INT: Newport, Virginia?

RF: No, Newport Naval Hospital, Newport, Rhode Island.

INT: Newport, Rhode Island, okay. Prior to coming home, like did you stay in touch with your family and friends at home?

RF: Yeah, that was a, my family didn’t want much to do with me. My father wrote me once, we never, we never were close to begin with, but the old man wrote me one time. I wasn’t getting, I guess I wasn’t getting the support I needed, I guess, I don’t know what happened, [unintelligible phrase]. So I started writing to pen pals, just get, I needed mail, I needed, I needed another world, I needed, I needed some other people, I needed a distraction of some kind, something from somebody. I mean, I wrote to women in Europe, young ladies in Europe, young ladies all over the United States, I didn’t care whether, who they were or what they were, came from, I didn’t give a shit. There were some pretty nice gals there, and I still got some pictures of them.

INT: Great. So did you get a lot of mail then? Once you started the pen pals?

RF: Yeah, yeah, yeah, yeah, yeah.

INT: But, but as far as family and friends at home, you didn’t get a lot of support there?

RF: No, no.
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**INT:** Were they opposed to the war?  

**RF:** I don’t know. I don’t know. My dad never mentioned, talked about it too much because, you know, he was a WWII guy. But he was, he came out and told me he was proud of me, but I knew, I knew that he, I knew that, I don’t know if he was proud of me, but I, he never loved me but, and I never loved him, but I know when I did come out of boot camp, when I came home a second time, I knew he respected me. He gave me my first beer when I came out of boot camp, that’s how it all started, but, he knew that I was growing up, he knew that I’d made something of myself. But we don’t know, nobody knows what happens in the future, we can’t, you can’t look beyond, we can only see what’s going to happen in now, you know, or the maybe.  

**INT:** The shooting incident that got you sent home, can you tell me where that was exactly?  

**RF:** Yeah, Da Nang.  

**INT:** In Da Nang?  

**RF:** Yeah, yeah.  

**INT:** And you were in a tower?  

**RF:** Yeah, yeah we had the M60s in each tower, half a mile apart, about a mile apart, and we had a phone in each one of them and you phone to the guard house and you would get relieved every, four on and four off.  

**INT:** So you were outside of Da Nang proper then?  

**RF:** No, we were in Da Nang but we had a perimeter on, where 1st Shore Party was, we had a large perimeter and a lot of barbed wire, and then there was a village, a graveyard, then a ville, and we called the ville Dogpatch, and right, right at the perimeter. Every once in a while we’d get sniper fire, and what they did too was, is they, mi-, lousy intelligence again, they said that they put mines in the graveyard that was there, and the civilian, gook civilians said they weren’t going to go in there. The gooks were very superstitious, Vietnamese are very superstitious. No, no mine detectors or nothing, they wanted us to throw, I said, you gotta be kidding. Well, we’re down on our knees with bayonets and
some K bars and probing for mines. It can be a hundred and twenty in that shade, but I’ll tell you it was a lot hotter than that. The last time I did that was [unintelligible word] engineer school, and so I, there was a, I guess there was five or, between five or ten of us going through this cemetery and we had this second lieuie with us and he wasn’t going to get down on his knees to save his soul, so he was behind us, and we’re halfway through the graveyard and he said, oh the hell with this, this dirt doesn’t even look like it, none of it’s been dug up for nobody knows how long. Well we all knew that from the beginning. And he says, well let’s all go back. So he went, we all went back and he reported everything’s fine in the cemetery, everything’s okay. The, they had, it was all right with us. He’s taking, he’s going to take the blame, not us. That was a stupid prick.

INT: So, after the incident in the tower, then you saw the doctor and he ordered that you would go home.

RF: No, well yeah. I went, they sent me back to the States at the ho-, you know, hospital.

INT: Yeah, you flew, flew out of Da Nang?

RF: Yeah, we flew out of, this is how they did it. We flew out of Da Nang, from Da Nang to Japan, from Japan to Alaska. And then when we got to Alaska, you got everybody off this C-31 or C-30, whatever it was, guys in stretchers, wounded, I only had jungle fatigues, guys with nothing on practically, pajamas. We had to run from the plane to the bus, get on this little bus, and the bus gets to this Quonset hut, and there’s this Red Cross worker there looking at us as if, you know, we’re shivering, we’re freezing, and she’s talking about her nice warm coat. Hey, lady. And then they refueled the plane and then when they got to the States, we hit bad weather in March, it was March...

INT: What year was that?

RF: It’s, I was over there in ‘68, ‘69, March of ‘69.

INT: March of ‘69, then you came, that’s when you hit the States.

RF: Yeah, so shit, the weather was so bad, there was a snow storm, sleet and rain. So they made an emergency landing at Bedford Air Force Base in Massachusetts. Now, my parents lived in Salem so I called them. They had ambulances from
all over to pick us up, instead of bringing them in at Chelsea, which would
have been closer for the [unintelligible word], they ambulanced to Newport
Naval Hospital, they had guys going to Philly, Newport, Massachusetts and I
don’t, Lord knows where else, I forgot. And that was one hell of a trip, oh yeah.

INT: And how long did they keep you in Newport?

RF: I was there three months.

INT: Three months. And then you were discharged?

RF: Yeah.

INT: And what type of discharge did they give you, Ronny?

RF: An honorable discharge.

INT: Honorable.

RF: Yeah, yeah.

INT: Did you get any, receive any medals while you were in Nam?

RF: Well, just the regular, you know, medals that went to all the other guys, naturally
defense and two Vietnamese ribbons and a star. I still don’t know what the star
means, you know, I don’t know it’s, somebody said it means the number of
operations you were on, I don’t know.

INT: What did they tell you when they discharged you?

RF: Well, they said, they told me that I’d be going out. I said, yeah? I says, what do I
do? I mean, I don’t have a job, I don’t have a place to go, I says, what’ll I do?
The doctor looked at me and got the paper and looked at me again, he says,
that’s your problem. I says, that’s my problem. Well, I said, I star-, I drank
[unintelligible phrase], I didn’t give a shit. Looked for fights and what not, I
didn’t care.
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INT: So they didn’t offer you any guidance as to where you could go, or for more help or, did they say you were, I hate to use this word, but did they say you were cured, or?

RF: No, they didn’t tell me I was cured, they didn’t even tell me what I was, if I was a psychopath or whatever the hell I was, I mean, hey. My dad is the one that fr-, he ask-, he’s the one that asked me about six months after I was out, you go to the VA? I says, what’s the VA? He looked at me and, the VA, the Veterans Administration. What’s that? Well, he had to sit down and talk to me a little bit. And he knew I was screwed up, so he helped me get my disability. It started at ten percent. I didn’t know squat where I’d go. In the state of Massachusetts there was like many, well not many states, but a few states that gave you a two hundred dollar bonus for being in a, some, some guys call it other things, and I call it token, token of death more or less. Two hundred dollars, I mean Jesus, is, that’s all I’m worth? I mean, where’s a job, where’s this, where’s schooling and where’s all this other stuff? And they claimed that they had all these other things. I think a lot of the Nam vets when I came back, they didn’t give a shit about Joe Shit the rag man or about this or that, they didn’t know how to take care of us, they didn’t know anything about PTSD, they didn’t know what to do with us. I ended up in more VA hospitals than I can count on my hands. I attempted suicide twelve times...

INT: What kind of time period are we talking here, after you...?

RF: What, going in different hospitals?

INT: Yeah.

RF: Oh, Jesus, I don’t know, two years, three years, a year in there.

INT: How long was it until you were truly diagnosed?

RF: I didn’t even know I was diagnosed until I, I was going to the VA clinic in Boston and they said I was paranoid schizophrenic. I didn’t even know what that meant, it was a five hundred dollar word, I didn’t know what that meant.

INT: What, how many years did that take to get that diagnosis?

RF: I don’t even know to tell you the truth, because that was the first time I heard that diagnosis. I didn’t even know a di-, I mean, they never told me before. Hey,
all I know was is they told me I was crazy, so I said, I believed them. And then it took me years to find out. I didn’t know about PTSD until I came here to Maine over ten years ago. Post traumatic stress disorder, what the hell is post traumatic stress disorder?

INT: So how did, how did you find out about the VA benefits other than your father?

RF: That’s the only way I found out. My dad. And then from there I found out about different other, you know, where the office was and stuff like that. My dad was the one that, he...

INT: Did you discuss your Vietnam experience with anybody?

RF: No, well, kind of but not really the way I wanted to. Talked about it with other Nam vets in the past, since I’ve been back. Nam vets can understand me more. But I feel like, I’ve always felt that I’ve been sitting on a fence. Some guys can accept me and some guys can’t. I feel like that kid that got slapped by Patton, that’s how I feel. I went bananas, I went berserk, and you’re not supposed to go, you know. In the Marine Corps there’s no such thing as going bananas.

INT: It’s that tradition of toughness.

RF: Yeah, toughness and physical, and mentally you’re supposed to be sharp at all times, there’s no such thing as falling apart. You’re supposed to be on the ready. Even to this day I find it difficult to talk to certain people about it. It hurts me because they don’t know it but they have PTSD themselves, and I, I know that they got it pretty bad, so, and they won’t admit it. And I know some guys that, who are worse off than me and they don’t dare admit it, that they do have PTSD. And I, I don’t hear from them any more and I feel bad.

INT: Do, do you take a lot of medications to control your emotions, and...?

RF: Yeah, I got a regular drug store up here. But I know some guys that get plastic boxes from the post office full of meds. And, I got a regular drug store.

INT: Can you, can you tell another veteran, a Vietnam veteran when you see him, just by looking at him?

RF: What, if he has PTSD?
INT: No, just if he’s a vet. Can you, can you spot vets, like if you’re out and about?

RF: Yeah, yeah, pretty much.

INT: And, and what is it about...?

RF: It’s how they act. And they have certain habits like I have. And...

INT: Can you describe maybe some of the habits?

RF: The way they walk, the way they talk. Sometimes a couple of words like [unintelligible word] and [unintelligible word] and stuff like, Vietnamese words will come out, and stuff like that. Or they’ll say, do you smell something? And, yeah. I, and they’re like me, they can hear a chopper from miles, miles. I heard a chopper the other day and I said to Samantha, my wife, there’s a chopper out there. She couldn’t see it. I says, there it is, right there, and it was coming closer. I says, I know a lot of guys can do the same thing.
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Tape Two, Side A:  

INT: Ron, if you could, you explained to me about your VA experiences, hospital experiences and so on and so forth after Vietnam, I want you to take me now into, into your private life if you will. Any relationships that you may have formed, or did you get married, and so on?  

RF: OK, I got married, okay, I got married in ‘72 I think, first marriage. That lasted three years and I had twin boys from her. The boys love me, I love my boys. They went to college, they got what they wanted. I got married a second time to a beautiful, beautiful woman. If you would have met her you wouldn’t have believed how beautiful she was, she was a saint, but she was, she was dying of a disease. (Emotional, tearful voice). I was married to her eighteen years. She knew and she was right there with me all the time. Every time I had to go to a VA hospital or a VA clinic, she was there with me. Even here in Maine. She was always there, very supportive, very understanding. I could talk about Nam or I could talk about anything and she’d be right there. Well, I’ll say maybe a year ago, [unintelligible word], she had blown her brains out with my 30/30. Because the disease she had was killing her from the inside out, and she didn’t want to be a burden any more. I didn’t know this was going to happen. She had taken my rifle off the rifle rack and she got two in and one in the ceiling. That started a lot of shit all over again. I mean we had eighteen years of beautiful, cheerful life. She saw me in my worst, she saw me at my best, she’d see my flashbacks, she saw me, seen my nightmares, and, when we found each other it was something else. I was working for myself, I was living with my mother who was a real bitch with me, even to this day. My mother was a bitch with me from the time I came out of the Marine Corps, even to this day. My mother does not understand about, anything about the military. She can only understand WWII, and what my uncles did. My uncles went straight to work. Well, Vietnam was a little different. A lot of guys like me didn’t go straight to work. She wanted money, all the time for room and board, room and board, money, money, money. Well, but I couldn’t use, I couldn’t use the washer, the dryer, I couldn’t take a shower in the house, all I had was a fold cot in the damn house. Load of shit. Couldn’t eat there.  

INT: You, your first wife, you mentioned you were married three years?  

RF: Yeah.  

INT: What brought an end to that?
RF: She brought the end because she couldn’t believe there was something wrong with me from the Vietnam War. I kept going to a VA hospital in New York, back and forth all the time. Then the doctors told her there was something wrong with me, and she couldn’t accept it. Yeah, and she, and we had, I had twin boys, I was working two jobs trying to keep ends meeting. She couldn’t understand. And I am, you know, there’s only a, you know, she just, you know, when I went out in the morning to have a cig-, you know, I used to try to go out with the guys or something and she couldn’t understand that. But,…

INT: Did you talk to her about Vietnam?

RF: Yeah, she didn’t want to hear it.

INT: Didn’t understand it?

RF: Didn’t understand it, didn’t want to hear it. She didn’t want to hear about the Marine Corps. Well, the Marine Corps really, even though I had a lot of, I had a lot, I had some problems, that was my home, my high school, my college. And to this day it’s, I’ll brag about the Corps because that is me, that was the biggest part of my life. I mean, there are some things, you can’t blame the Marine Corps, you can’t blame the Marine Corps in general, you can blame the pe-, some of the people, the people who run it, you can’t blame the Corps. And that’s where a lot of guys make their mistake, and I don’t make that mistake. But anyway, my ex wife, the first one, didn’t, didn’t like it because I, I talked about the Corps a lot, that’s all I knew, and she wanted me to go to school and do this and do that. Well I found a job there collecting garbage, in New York, it was pay-, it was going to pay me twelve, thirteen dollars an hour. She didn’t like, she thought that was, Jesus, that would have brought in a lot of money in the house. Not her.

INT: So you were living in New York at this time?

RF: Yeah, yeah.

INT: And…

RF: I had drifted from Massachusetts to New York.

INT: So you got a divorce. Did she file for the divorce?
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RF: Yeah, what started off as a separation, the bitch, so I says okay, I called up a friend of mine who was in the Corps with me, lived in Virginia. So I said to him, I says, well, hey, you got room for me at your place? He says yeah, yeah. Talked to his wife, okay, okay. And I says, I just need a separation, maybe a couple of months and things will get back on our, thing will get back on their feet again. Well, it wasn’t even two weeks, I was a little drunk that night, more than a little, got a phone call in the middle of the night from my ex-wife. I want a divorce. Now that sobered me up mighty quick. What? Say this again, I thought we were just going to have a separation and if things worked out maybe move here to Virginia, blah, blah. No, I want a divorce. You want the divorce, you pay for it, because I ain’t got a dime and you know it. That shut her up. Well it wasn’t long, it didn’t take long that I got a summons or whatever you want to call it for a divorce. So I had to go to New York and I told her attorney, I says I ain’t getting an attorney, I, it took all my money to get here. Well, well, you can’t, you know, we have to get you an attorney. I says, hey, I can speak for myself here. Blah, blah, blah, blah. So they finally had to get me an attorney. So they got me an attorney, I told this guy, I says hey look, number one I’m just doing dishes in Virginia, and number two, I get a small VA check coming in, that’s it. Now, if you want me here for the trial, fine, you send me the check and I’ll come down here. I had to borrow to come down here to sign these papers. I had to sign papers that I was no good, that I was a bastard, that I went out with other women and all this other shit, which wasn’t true, so she could get the divorce.

INT: So you did this just, just to get the divorce.

RF: I don’t know, it’s kind of, I don’t know, I don’t know, I didn’t want the divorce but she wanted it so her attorney had all this shit, all these lies typed up so she could have the divorce. Well, I says, now this is going to be with me the rest of my life, isn’t it? Not unless somebody sees it.

INT: What was the arrangement for the children?

RF: That she was going to have custody. In the state of New York at the time, didn’t matter if your wife was a slut or a whore or whatever. The husband, you get, you don’t get shit, they, they take everything away from him, which they do.

INT: So did you keep in touch with your boys?
RF: Oh, yeah, yeah. I could only see them once a year. But I kept in touch with them. Yeah, yeah, they don’t hold nothing against me. I talk about Nam and I talk about the Corps with them, and they don’t mind it at all. One’s doing research for the United States Army for their history, he’s a civilian. The other one manages a big toy store in New York. They both went to two good colleges. I gotta say one thing, my ex-wife, she did bring them up really good and, but other than that, I mean. I went to my son’s graduation last year and, when he got his masters...

INT: Where at, what college?

RF: George Washington University.

INT: Nice.

RF: And my ex-wife was there. If eyes could kill, that’s, but I bit my tongue, kept quiet, didn’t say shit.

INT: You mentioned you drank pretty heavy. How long did your drinking continue?

RF: Well, I was married to my second wife, I wasn’t drinking heavy but I was drinking, you know, in spurts. But then they started giving me all these meds, when I got here in Maine. I looked at Mary and I says, Mary, I can’t drink this, not if I’m taking this stuff. And we looked it up and talked to the doctors. No, don’t you take anything. OK. So I’ve been off the sauce for over ten years.

INT: What disease was it that your wife had, your second wife?

RF: She had a, you know, she was born with a bone disease. And in those days, she died at the age of fifty five, in those days, you know, they didn’t have what they have today to define, well as she got older her bones were deteriorating faster and faster. And when we got here to Maine we thought things were going to be better because the doctor said that she needed rest, and I needed to get away too, from Massachusetts, so, but.

INT: Your second wife understood your problems with your, with your flashbacks, your Vietnam experience, so that marriage was really a good marriage, really a good marriage.

RF: Oh, yeah, oh yeah.
INT: Eighteen years?

RF: Eighteen years, good.

INT: And then, so you’re married again now?

RF: Yeah, I’m married again, this is my third time. Samantha is a little younger than me, but Samantha doesn’t know, she tries to psych things and she has no idea of how to take me. And it’s going to take her a long time to figure me out.

INT: Is it working?

RF: Kind of. But it’s going to take a long time. She thinks she knows, but she doesn’t really. She’s in the medical field and it’s, medical people for me I think they’re the worst people you can marry. I mean, they want to diagnose everything and have everything down, but it doesn’t work that way.

INT: So why did you come to Maine?

RF: I came to Maine over ten years ago with my wife Mary because we needed, I needed to get out of the city itself, period, I couldn’t handle it any more, and I, and then she needed rest, not the congestion and all that other shit. And like a lot of Nam vets I needed to get into the woods. And I found a, we found a nice place in Starks, but I wanted to get one even further into the boonies, but she didn’t want to go too far into the boonies. And then we thought it over, shit, how’s an ambulance going to get in there in case something does happen.

INT: You said you wanted to get into the woods. Could you elaborate on that for me? Tell me why you wanted to get into the woods?

RF: I don’t like people. I do not like people, I don’t like to talk to people, I mind my own business. If I want anything, I’ll ask. I don’t want any, I don’t want to hear [unintelligible word] toilet, I don’t want to hear some mother yelling and screaming at her kids, I don’t want to hear a car back firing, I don’t want to hear no traffic, I don’t want to hear nothing. I just want to have peace and quiet.

INT: Do those noises, like cars back firing...?
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RF: Oh-h-h-h.

INT: People screaming?

RF: Oh, yes, oh yes, oh yes.

INT: What do you feel like when you, like say if a car went down the street and back fired, what, how, what would you...?

RF: I’m halfway down on the deck. Or I’m looking around where they come from.

INT: Did, has your present wife experienced that yet with you?

RF: Yeah, just a little. Her and I went out for a walk, the dog and I went out for a walk. The bitch across the street has two dogs, a Rottweiler and a Pitbull, they came at us. It’s been a long time since I carried a weapon. Now I’m carrying a weapon again. I...

INT: Is that safe?

RF: I feel safe and secure, yes. I didn’t do it for a long time. I did it when Mary and I got married, when I first moved up here, I carried a weapon. Then I stopped because I knew the people, I knew my environment, see. Once I know my environment I’m okay. But this environment I don’t like. And that attack that day, that was it, I don’t like people. I don’t like them to know my business, I don’t want to know their business. If you want to get drunk, do it away from me, I don’t want you near me. I don’t want you starting a fight with me, which has already been happening here.

INT: I see that you have a for sale sign on your front yard. Are you looking to go back into the woods more or less?

RF: Well, I want to but Sam doesn’t want to. She wants to live kind of like, not on a street like this, we can’t handle this, we need [unintelligible phrase] because of the hours that she works. I would like to live in a less congested area, a house maybe a half a mile that way, a half a mile that way.

INT: Outside of Jay?

RF: Yeah. Well, we’re trying to look for something in Lewiston.
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INT: Lewiston?

RF: Yeah, or Lisbon Falls, someplace closer to her job. So, yeah. I don’t mind a street if it’s nothing but elderly people, because I’m, I don’t know, I’m fifty so that makes me elderly, I think anyway. And those kind of people tend to mind their own business, and that’s the way, they’re quiet. I don’t want a street with a bunch of kids, I don’t want drunks, I don’t want, I got this, [unintelligible word] drunks on this street that drive me insane. I have to carry a weapon with me. I don’t like it.

INT: What kind of weapon do you carry?

RF: I carry, right now I carry this. Air Force-Navy survival knife. I would carry my Marine Corps K-bar, but it’s too big. And I have carried that, I have carried that. And it’s against the law to carry a pistol, I would carry a pistol if I had to. I know how to use it. I don’t care, I may be old, I might not be that fast, but somebody’s going to get something somewhere. But I want to be left alone, I don’t want to be bothered. So, that’s the way I look at it. And I can fi-, if I can find a reason not to carry it, I will not carry it. The last walk in the evening with her, I take it off my belt. I don’t need it any more. But when I’m outside my perimeter, I mean I got, got to have something.

INT: You feel safer with it.

RF: Safer, yeah.

INT: Do you think that moving out away from people and all will help you feel better?

RF: Yeah, yeah, yeah.

INT: You’ll feel safer?

RF: Safer, yeah, I can do what I want, I can do what I want. If I want to [unintelligible phrase] fine, you know. There I can do whatever I want, you know, it’s like I did in Starks, I mean, I could do whatever I want and people would, you know, come by occasionally.

INT: You said you still have the house in Starks?
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RF: Yeah.

INT: Is that place for sale too?

RF: Yeah, yeah, it’s an old Victorian.

INT: But you don’t, you don’t like that area any more, or?

RF: Well it’s, Sam doesn’t like it. And Sam wouldn’t go in that house for all the tea in China because my wife committed suicide there, Mary committed suicide in that house and Sam wouldn’t, been there a couple times, but she doesn’t, gets very nervous and I can understand that. But [unintelligible phrase].

INT: Do, has the death of your second wife affected you a lot?

RF: Yeah. It brought back a lot of shit.

INT: Are you worse now?

RF: Not un-, I think I’m not worse. It’s brought, I can cope a lot better now than I could right after [unintelligible phrase]. That brought back a mu-, some murder, a friend of mine got murdered when I was, right before I went in the Corps, brought back a lot of other stuff, so it’s just kind of, you know, now it’s just slowly going back, the tide is coming in and going out, and now it’s sort of going out and I can see a fresh water coming in, you know, more or less.

INT: Good. Well it’s been a lot of years since Vietnam, forty, how has your vision of Vietnam changed over the years?

RF: Well, how it’s changed over the years, I think the country, I think we shouldn’t have anything to do with the country, number one, number two I think we should look a lot better for the MIAs that are still missing, and number three, we don’t owe that country zippo. And, let China handle it. It’s a Communist country, let Red China handle it, you know. Jesus, just leave them alone. Just get what we owe the two thousand five hundred guys that are still missing, get the rest of the results out of there, and screw that country. I don’t care if they sink in the bottom of the ocean now at this point, I don’t know.

INT: What do you think of the people of Vietnam themselves?
RF: Whew, oh boy, that’s a tough question. That’s a toughie. I think the majority of those people, how do I feel about the majority of them, how do I feel, I think, I don’t feel bad, I don’t feel glad, I just feel like they just, leave them alone. Let them have their own, even, they can say what they want and have all their own propaganda still about the United States, but hey, that’s it, go with, go your way, I’ll go my way. I mean, the hell with them. I mean, we did damage, they did damage, so hey, that’s it. They want to live like they lived two thousand years ago? Hey, go ahead, live that way, I mean I don’t give a shit. You want to shit in the middle of the road, go ahead, that’s your, you know, that’s the way you live, I mean, I don’t care. I don’t care. It’s a Communist country to begin with, so, hey.

INT: This might sound foolish to ask, but I’m going to ask you anyway. Would you do it again?

RF: Would I go back there and do it again? Well, I think if I had to do it again, the only way I’d ever go back there and do it again is to get the MIAs and POWs out. I don’t think I would, for a full blown war, no, I wouldn’t go over there again. But I can not make that trip to that country like a lot of Nam vets have, I couldn’t do that, no. But for a war, I would, I mean to fight a war to get the MIAs and POWs, yeah. But for a full blown war, no. There’s nothing worse than be stuck in there, I mean, who wants it, I mean, they can have it.

INT: What do you want from the future?

RF: What do I want from the future is peace of mind. If I could only get peace of mind, but that’ll never happen. I’m trying to find peace of mind, don’t you think I ought to try and find ways of having peace of mind? I would want some peace of mind, a little bit of, well I’ve got happiness, I can’t say I don’t. Peace of mind and get rid of a lot of hatred I think.

INT: Do you think the VA is helping you to achieve this?

RF: No, no. The VA can take their, and that budget, and they can stick it up their ass. The VA is not helping any more, it ain’t helping us any more.

INT: Is there anything you could do to, you think you could do to change that?
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RF: The only way we could do it, and I talked to somebody on the phone about that the other day, it would be a million man veteran’s march on Washington. If you can have a million man black march, a million man Christian march, and a million women march, I can’t see why we can’t do that, and you park your ass right on the White House lawn, that would be the only way, and Congress and the stupid president we have change the rules, that would be the only way. That’s my idea.

INT: Well, we’re coming to the end of the interview here, Ron. Is there anything else that you would like to add, anything that you’d like to say?

RF: We listed things I never thought I was going to say. There were times I wanted to commit suicide when I was over there, there were times that I wanted, just wanted to die when I was over there.

INT: Can you say why?

RF: Yeah, to die, take my life away, because there were guys there that I’d known that should have came back. To commit suicide so I wouldn’t have to f-, so I wouldn’t have to face all the shit that I had to face. It’s not an easy world for Nam guys, it’s not at all. And I think, my opinion, not too many Nam vets can get over what is locked up inside of them, and I don’t care what they say, some of them are a lot of bullshit. Just to talk about it with other Nam vets, sit down, have conversations even if they talk about the weather, what they’re talking is something in common. They claim they’re brothers. Well if they’re, a bro-, if you’re a brother, you stick together, you know. This phoniness is bullshit.

INT: Do you get together with any other vets?

RF: No, no, I wish I did, I wish I could. [unintelligible phrase] sit down maybe once or twice a month [unintelligible word], or take, have their wives to talk to. Well, my wife, that’s what I would love.

INT: Have you taken part with any of the organizations, veterans organizations?

RF: No, it can be a bunch of bullshit. I can not sit on a bar stool and cry in my beer, and try to, a lot of these guys try to make themselves look good so they have a good resume when they go to heaven or something. I don’t give a shit if there’s a heaven or hell, who the hell cares? I mean, there’s always a vet that needs something, whether it’s support, food, understanding, love, invite him to
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your home and show him, and have your wife talk to his wife, try to get that real connection, if that’s what you need. I think that’s very important. I think, I think Nam vets should get together and their wives should get together and try to really focus on what, on what, how they’re feeling, what’s going on, what they can do, and they don’t have to, they don’t have to talk about the war. Just talk about anything. Because it’s not just the war’s a problem, I think it’s other stuff. If you can talk about the weather, your job, that new house you’re building, things slowly, everything else comes out. It’s one big package. I think a lot of guys carry a lot of luggage with them no matter where they go and I’ll be glad, to me, no matter where I go, I wear a hat that says I’m a Vietnam vet and, boy, I’ll tell you, in a lot of faces I get more respect in some places than do others. But, I don’t care, but I know what I am.

INT: You feel good about that?

RF: Being a Vietnam vet, yes. Yes. Even though I have my problems, even though I have my headaches, I feel that, I feel that I come from the college of hard knocks. I told a college kid one time, I went to a party years ago, and they asked me what college I went to. I said, I went to USMC. And he scratched his head a minute, then he left and he came back, he says, I never heard of that college USMC. I said, United States Marine Corps. Oh-h-h. It just blew his mind. [unintelligible phrase]. And people can’t understand. I’m, I just, only had an eighth grade education but I can, I can talk about good literature, I can talk about history, I can talk about all kinds of other things, but I don’t have to just talk about Nam. I can, and it surprises people, and they ask me, Ron, where’d you go to school? I never went to school, I learned myself, I know how to read, I know how to write. Well if you know how to do those basic things, you can do anything you want. It surprises people. My wife [unintelligible phrase], she took her GED just to go to a technical college, just to get one thing. I don’t believe in the GED. I believe, hey, not just to get one thing, you got to learn the whole [unintelligible phrase].

INT: Do you think the perspective of the American people has changed towards the Vietnam vet at all?

RF: Some, not all. Some are phonies, yeah, some are phonies. Some yes. But...

INT: When you say phonies, can you elaborate on that?
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RF: Yeah, they say well, welcome home and all this, and this and that. Well, you can welcome me home, but where were you when I really needed you? Where were you when there was a guy next to me who really needed you? Where were you, you know, twenty years ago. Now that I’m home, I need you now. I don’t need this welcome home. And then there’s that little old lady sitting in the chair and saying, thank you, welcome home. Two words that I’ve always looked for. Thank you. I never even got them from my psychiatrist from the VA. All the psychologists and all the psychiatrists and all the doctors, medical doctors there, even chaplains, not a one of them ever said thank you. But I did get it from some stranger and, saying you were in Vietnam, well I want to thank you. And that means more to me than getting it from somebody who doesn’t mean it.

INT: Anything else you want to add?

RF: No. But I got some homemade brownies for you to take home.

INT: I want to, I do want to thank you for what you’ve shared with us today.

RF: Well, you’re welcome, you’re welcome.

INT: And if, if we need to follow up on anything I’ll get back in touch with you.

RF: Yeah, please do, I mean, and if you ever want to come down this way for a cup of coffee, please do, we love company.

INT: All righty, we certainly shall. OK, where’s the stop, there it is.

End of Interview
Frechette

With tears in his eyes, Robert Frechette admitted, “There was no such thing as post traumatic stress syndrome.”

Both Frechette and his wife, Samantha, a certified nurse’s aide who has worked with Vietnam vets, agree that coming back was hard. Even today, anything can trigger flashbacks. The smell of rice, or a bird flying, loud sounds, and nightmares can transport veterans back to the bush.

It took Frechette a very long time before he could even go to a Chinese restaurant. He still cannot tolerate crowds and prefers to work for himself or at jobs requiring only one-to-one interaction. His nightmares once resided in his wife’s bedroom.

Still, Frechette finds his solace with his wife of 15 years, in walking the puppy, Bullet, and in his hobby of baking from scratch. He continues to struggle, but he is not a part of a freshly made brownie.

Though he has packed away his military documents and photographs as he and his wife anticipate a move to Pennsylvania to be nearer family, he reflected on Vietnam and the importance of remembering the war as part of American history.

“Particularly for young adults, it is important that the Vietnam war be presented along with all the other wars and battles that have formed this nation. I hope my flag out until December 7 because that was the day of the bombing of Pearl Harbor. It was a terrible, terrible day in the history of our nation, but it was not the first time our country was attacked.”

We must remember. We cannot forget.

Honor a loved one. To place an “In memory of” or “In honor of” advertisement in next year’s Veterans Day Salute feature section, call Marie Gagne at 689-2579.
Ronald Frechette: Remembering Vietnam

By Donna Bascaroa

Following his time at Camp Lejeune, Frechette flew to California and Camp Pendleton, where he received training for flying helicopters. His first M554 military contingent, a special unit, was 1091 Shore Party.

"And it wasn’t easy. We, a three-man team, exchanged the troops with whatever they needed. We fed the rear for all the supplies and directed the troops in the delivery of ammunition, water, rations. Sometimes we served as the radio man. If it was a ‘hot’ landing zone (where fighting was taking place), they wouldn’t drop supplies, but would come back at a later time.

From California, his group flew to Hawaii and then on to Okinawa. "We waited and waited and waited," said Frechette. "None of us knew where we were going. Finally, on Christmas Eve we were on the surface of the ocean in the South West Pacific."

"In the beginning, there was four," he recalled, when asked how he felt going to war as a young man. "After six months, sometimes less, you didn’t care whether you lived or died. People died,馒头 things. Frechette recounted the time a chopper came in with supplies and he allowed it to land on his head. "I got in trouble for that. I could have been electrocuted." The day Frechette learned that his buddy from boot camp was killed in a Napaíl attack was a turning point for him. "What had left was taken out of me," he admitted. "I coped with everything through a lot of adrenaline and drinking, though never when I was on guard duty. Drugs and marijuana were a real problem over there. Guys used them to forget what was going on."

He continued, "In Vietnam, I was not like other wars. There were no trenches, no front lines. The V.C. hole in holes and would pop up everywhere. They had tunnels, while medical units underground. You never knew what might be a ‘booby’ trap. Civilians were used as infiltrators and spies. ‘Charlie’ was everywhere. They had been fighting in that country for years before we got there. They were very smart."

Frechette said that through his first M554 was 1091 Shore Party and his second was Combat Engineer. His training took a back seat to the needs of the war. "Oh, is it true all Marines are in and today, was first and always an officer. However, you learned to do the job."

Frechette confirmed he participated in 23 operations on three different carrier groups: the USS Truxtun, the USS Valley Forge, and the USS Moutain. Over 200 ships, he participated in Operation Allen Brook L, named after a then-deceased Marine.

The specifics of certain operations are still not available to the public as the government has not released the information. Although his son works as a historian for the U.S. Army, Frechette has had a difficult time gathering information about the time he served in Vietnam.

"Whether he ever killed anyone, Frechette doesn’t know. ‘Someone shot at you and you shot back.’ He stated matter-of-factly. ‘There was a lot of realtation fighting. They did this to us, so we did it back to them. Sometimes we would be caught in a ‘no fire zone’ where there were civilians and the V.C. could fire at us, but we could not fire at them. ‘To this day, he simply cannot relay stories of the war and all that happened."

Frechette kept a diary during his time in Vietnam. At one point, before being sent home, he spent time in the Newport Naval Hospital in Rhode Island. While there, he had pages of his diary mysteriously disappear, neatly cut away from his journal. His personal account of his experience in Vietnam was gone. Frechette was lucky for those people who participated in secure missions without documentation or ‘blackout operations’ because without documentation, it is as though these operations never occurred. Soldiers cannot possess that involvement in such operations. Today, making them, in some cases, unable to access military benefits.

The hardest part about coming home from Vietnam was the lack of support from family, neighborhoods, and communities. Frechette saw no effort made by the community to try to understand what he and other veterans had experienced in Vietnam. "That, according to Frechette, is why some men never transitioned back successfully. "When we come back, we have to come back as a man."

Thank You Veterans

Oxford

"A Special thanks to all who have served and continue to serve our country, we are forever grateful."

"Don’t Worry, Call Murray"

Murray & Martin

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