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Robert L. "Bob" Towle, interviewed by John J. Springer, Part 2

Robert L. Towle

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**Transcript of an Interview
with Robert Towle
by John J. Springer
July 7, 1999
Lewiston, 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.

Reference copies of the tapes and transcripts are also available in the library of the University of Maine at Farmington and in Special Collections in Ladd Library at Bates College, Lewiston, Maine.

Monique Leamon of Casco, Maine, transcribed the recordings.

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RT: Robert Towle

JS: John J. Springer

Tape One, Side A:

JS: This is an interview with Robert Towle for the MAINE VIETNAM VETERANS ORAL HISTORY PROJECT. I'm John Springer. The interview is taking place in Lewiston, Maine, on July 7th beginning at about quarter to eight at night. Hi. Maybe we could just start off before anything about Vietnam, tell me something about maybe growing up, your childhood, stuff like that if you would?

RT: Oh, I grew up here, right here in Auburn, typical rural family. One brother, four sisters, - four sisters?- yeah, four sisters, went through the public school system and nothing amazing in that part.

JS: Did, was there any positive or negative ideas about the military in your family?

RT: No, we, that, in the late '50s Vietnam wasn't even, you know, it was still kept away from the public, you know, it was something going on in the other countries overseas type stuff. It wasn't as it was later on in years when you had your news media there pounding it through your TV set every night, you know. You didn't even, you heard of an action going on or whatever, you know. At that period of time, matter of fact, Korean war was the biggest, biggest thing at that point.

JS: When you were growing up what was your opinion, or your household opinion, of the military and the government?

RT: My dad was distrustful of the government, you know. When he, when he went in, he was drafted, he hated every minute of it and other than that there was, you know, we weren't exposed to it in any way that I could think of.

JS: He was drafted for...?

RT: World War II.

JS: WWII. The, so regular upbringing, go to high school, graduate from high school?

RT: No I didn't, I went in the military.

JS: Tell me about, tell me about your decision to go into the military.

RT: Well, I was kind of incorrigible when I was a teenager, and the judge had a friendly talk with me and gave me a choice, so I decided that the military was the better of the two choices. What some of our favorite politicians said from Texas said, a minor juvenile indiscretions.

JS: So what were you thinking when you had to, when the judge told you you had to go in the military?

RT: Well I was given a choice of going to jail or going in the service, and I figured that would be less restrictive. If I'd only known, I probably would have opted the other way. I'm not one of those that went in and enjoyed it.

JS: So how did that, how did it wo-, what happened after he told you you had to enlist?

RT: I went in to basic training because everybody told me that I couldn't make it, I went through advanced training because everybody said that I wouldn't make it. I went through jump school for the same reason. And then I did about twenty months Stateside in the 82nd Airborne, and then from there I went to Germany, and from Germany to Vietnam. I went to Vietnam it was, when I was in Germany it was during the black unrest and the riots and it got to the point of where I figured if I was going to do a lot, bunch of fighting, I was going to have a gun in my hand, you know, it wasn't going to be just to try to get to the mess hall. You know, the racial tensions over there were really severe. Of course you're in an enclosed environment to boot so that, you know.

JS: And what branch of the military did you enlist in?

RT: I was in the Army.

JS: In the Army. So tell me about, a little about when you had to report for basic.

RT: Well that's the most frightening thing for somebody to have to go through, I mean, it 's just a total, complete shock. You walk in there an individual and within an hour and a half they render you down to just a total confusion, to a non person. It's unbelievable. You go to bed that night and you lay there and you wonder what in the hell is going on, what did I get myself into? And then the realization sinks in that it's not like working down at the local lumber mill,

when you get tired of it you say to hell with it, I ain't coming back. You're there, you're there for six years. It's the most frightening thing I, the only thing I can compare it to would be somebody that just got a jail sentence imposed on them, and then they have a chance of getting out on good behavior.

JS: Is that how you felt that first night?

RT: Oh yeah, I, you had people standing in your face and screaming at you and doing things that in normal life, that if somebody walked up to you and did that you'd either drop them or run. You know, and it was the most demoralizing experience I've ever had was going in basic training.

JS: What was daily life like?

RT: It was at the whim of whatever person happened to be in charge of you at that moment. Whether they were a nice person or a sadistic person, whatever it was you were at their mercy because you had no rights, no avenues of grievance, well, you know, technically you did, you know, if you've got a problem you go to the, now, let's see, how would they do that. You'd go to the squad leader and tell them that you have a problem and see if he'll deal with it. Now if it's the squad leader that you've got the problem with, there's your first problem. So then you go to the platoon leader. Now if he thinks it warrants it, he might take it to the company commander. It will never, very seldom ever go past that. Now you just, I just named the three drinking buddies at the local officers club. There's no, there was, you know, legally, technically, on paper there was a chain of command of grievance that you could follow, but when you have a ruling society that says in order for you to pose a grievance to somebody, you must first ask permission to speak, and only if he feels like granting it, then you're allowed to speak. You have no grievance, you have nowhere to go with your complaints. There's the all time, well, you've got a problem, go tell the chaplain. Nobody ever listened to the chaplain, so it, you know, it, I guess maybe it'll give you a moral or a, well I tried to do something feeling, but nothing ever resulted from it.

JS: So how did you get by day to day?

RT: You, like an alcoholic, you had to just go day by day, you had to make it to the next day. You know, somewhere out there there's a goal, in basic training it was graduating and getting out of there. Of course then you went from there right into another training group, but hopefully these people are going to be a

little mentally different. And as you get into your training and you get into the different higher levels, it does change, but it seems like the dredge of society is the ones that are running those first couple stages there, you know. And it's not, you don't have to obey this person because he has more intelligence than you, because he has more training than you, you have to obey him because he's been there longer than you. You know, it's the seniority thing that, you know, unlike the unions there's no way to bust it, you can't, you know. I tell you to do this, you're going to do it because I outrank you, and there's no well, how come, because you don't have the right to question why. You know, your standard answer that they drill into you is when they ask something it is a standard, no excuse sir, you're not even allowed to offer a defense. And at that point you become, you know, you become an unperson.

JS: When do you start to feel like an unperson?

RT: About the second day. About the second day.

JS: What did that make you realize?

RT: That I had a hard six years coming, real hard six years. You know, and the only other option would be to screw up so bad that you do, you know, you get a dishonorable discharge, you end up pulling some federal prison time, and, you know, you've got to weigh what you figure would be worse. And unlike, you know, the posh civilian jails we have out here, military prison is exactly what it is, it's a military prison with even worse sadistic suckers running that.

JS: The thought cross your mind, though?

RT: No, no.

JS: How did your family feel about you being in there?

RT: Well, I think they were relieved because, like I say, I was quite wild before that, and I was out of control on the street.

JS: So you made...?

RT: Like they say, juvenile indiscretions, yes.

JS: So tell me about getting out of basic. You made it I assume?

RT: Yeah, yeah, getting out of basic was, it was, it was a bitch, I mean all the way to the last, the last day even was a bitch. They had, somebody lost their weapon out in the woods, we had, there were big night problems, you know, maneuvers and stuff, and a rifle, out of three thousand rifles, one rifle come up missing. And for three days we were out there arm length combing like a fifty acre woods trying to find this one weapon, with the threat that nobody was going to graduate. We're going to make you do that eight weeks all over again. *[unintelligible word]*, oh no, that's the most unbelievable thought would be to have to go through all that training, all that crap all over again. It would have been easier second time around because you would have been in better physical shape, but the mental part would be unbelievable. You know, they always held that threat over, you do good here or you're going to the *[unintelligible word]* platoon, *[unintelligible word]* platoon has to repeat it all, everything. And that, everything in eight weeks consisted a lot. The other thing was, the other threat was if you screw up you're going to the dog farm, that was worse than anything. You're going to the dog farm. Now the dog farm was where they kept all the military sentry dogs. Now, obviously you're not going there as a handler. They hand you a broom and a dust pan, that's, your job would be to clean up for a thousand dogs, you know. That was even a worse thought than going to jail. But that's, you know, these are the type of threats they would hold over you, you know, and it's like, it's not that if you as an individual, you failed, you're going to do this. You as an individual, if you fail, I'm going to make all these guys do it, too. Now, these guys are going to be some upset with your butt. You know, it's that type of pressure that breaks you down, I think. You know, supposedly it builds your camaraderie and makes you work as a team and all, but it doesn't, it puts the ones that did it right against the ones that didn't do it right, for whatever reason, you know. We had a guy that could never run, he had a knee that was bad and after he'd run about a mile, a mile and a half, it would pop out of the joint. We literally carried that guy the last three miles of a run, just so that we didn't have a person drop, if you had somebody drop out everybody suffered, everybody paid. It could be anything from having you down on your hands and knees scrubbing the floors with your toothbrush, taking the layers of wax off and reapplying them three or four times, it could be having you go out and turn rocks over. Those rocks have had too much sun, turn them over. I'm serious. Take a little container, a little tobacco tin, pick a cigarette butt off the ground, put it in the tobacco tin, hand it to you, and tell you to go dig a six by six hole to bury that can. There ain't supposed to be no cigarette butts on my ground. You have to go out and get military entrenching tools about that long, you get

done digging a six by six trench with one of them, you've done some digging. Now about time you get about half way done digging that hole, some other jerk comes by and says, hey, what are you doing putting that dirt on my ground? Don't be putting that dirt on my ground, that's my ground over there. You dig another hole and put that dirt in it. And depending on how many jerks come by will be depending on how many holes you've dug that week. It had nothing to do with military training, teaching you to be an efficient soldier, improving your mind. It was, they did it because they could do it, and there was no control to stop them.

JS: How does that make you feel as a person?

RT: Oh I wasn't, when I went into the military I actually went in wanting to be in the military, you know, to be a soldier, but I mean at one point when I was in Germany I quit. I stood in front of my commanding officer and said, I quit. Do with me what you damn well please, I quit, I ain't playing this stupid game no more. He said good, you're going to Vietnam, that was their solution. You want to quit? Fine, you go to Vietnam. I walked around for close to three months in Germany with a busted screen under my arm, and that's all I did. So I quit. The CO says, hey, you know, we can't just have you doing absolutely nothing, you know, at least look like you're doing something. I says, what are your suggestions, he says, he reached over and he grabbed the screen and he says, you carry that, and anybody asks you what you're doing, you're fixing screens. For three months. And if I didn't have that screen, they'd have court martialed me for disobeying his direct order, which was to carry that screen with me at all times. Had no bearings on military training, no bearings on making me a soldier.

JS: Did they teach you any military training in basics?

RT: Yeah, they do. They teach you hand to hand combat, they teach you how, the proper way of shooting a rifle, but as they're teaching you this hand to hand combat, they're telling you flat out, being honest with you, we're going to teach you just enough to probably get your ass hurt. You know, if you have an enemy, an opponent, standing in front of you, like the instructor, and he does what the instructor does and you counter move with the exact moves that you know that you're supposed to do, you could put him down. But, an assailant doesn't do that, you know? You know, you're standing in a sawdust pit with this guy arm length away and he's going to pretend to come at you with a knife. That's pretend. You know, this other guy, he's coming at you with a

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knife, he's slashing, he's cutting, he's not bringing his arm down so you can properly grab his wrist and his elbow and do a proper military maneuver. You know, they taught us some things that would work, will work, do work in certain situations, but those situations are far and few between. They would teach you how to take somebody down from behind. But it's very, very seldom you will find yourself behind an enemy. Usually when there's an enemy there, he's in front of you, and he's not within arm's reach for you to put a commando arm throw onto him, you know, it doesn't work that way. He's usually somewhere out there in the bushes and he's shot one shot at you, and that was their big thing is, you know, right now I could go out on this campus right here and fire a gun, one shot, and have everybody in this area here and not one person could tell you what direction that shot came from. Because the first shot gets your attention, the second shot you get a direction. Nine and a half months in Vietnam, I can honestly state I never directly saw an enemy soldier shoot at me, because you didn't see them. The exception being a full wave assault on a, you know, on a camp or something obviously, you know, but the average, when these guys are out there, they've been fighting this war for three hundred years, they know how to do that. They know, they knew that when GI Joe walked down the road and there was a can laying on the side of the road, his most natural impulse was to kick that can. So they're going to leave you a little surprise in that can when you kick it. You just blew your leg off, he's home in bed, wasn't nowhere near there. Most of their damage was done, was done by proxy, they were nowhere in the area when it was done. They'd set the booby traps and just be patient. They studied us. They're the most patient people in, Americans are the most impatient people in the world. They are patient. They have no place to go, you know. Twelve months, I'm going home, I've got a time limit. And the closer to my twelve months come, the more anxious I am, the more impatient I am. They had nowhere to go, and they sat back and they studied us, and they studied us, before they even made a move on us they studied us. They know what you're going to do before you know what you're going to do. They know you walk down this trail right here and if there's somebody up there and they take one shot at you, the first thing you're going to do is you're going to dive to the left. And when you dive to the left you're going to dive into elephant grass that's got Punji sticks in it, you're going to get impaled on those, or there's going to be a trip line there with a booby trap, or there might be tiger traps, tiger jaw holes in the ground. They don't care what you're going to do when that shot's fired, they want to know what you're going to do immediately after, and that's what they anticipate, and that's where most of their damage comes in. You take one guy with one shot, and mess up a whole squad, and having casualties

out of everybody in that squad. This guy fired one shot and he was gone before anybody even knew what direction it came from. But you know, one shot, you better, nobody knows where it come from, you better your ass down, better get behind something, better get under something. And that's where they set their little toys up. They just out thought us every step of the way. And like I said, they had no place to go.

JS: That was home.

RT: They didn't even have that. You know, their own government came in and shifted land and ownership around so much that nobody had anything that belonged to them. They might pick up this whole area right here and relocate everybody over here somewhere, and then give this to somebody else. You know, what a deal.

JS: So you got out of basic, what, did you find the gun?

RT: No, they never found the damn thing, they never found the gun.

JS: They let you graduate from basic?

RT: Well, my group graduated. Again, I didn't get to graduate. Technically on paper I graduated, I happened to have the bad luck of pulling KP duty that day. Guy's graduating basic training, the biggest thing in his life at this point, and instead of letting him be there at the ceremony, you've got him pulling KP. So technically I never, you know, I never attended my own graduation because I had to pull kitchen duty, that was my punishment. You know, somebody asked me a couple days before that, what's the matter Towle, do you think this is all a bunch of bullshit, and I made the mistake of saying yes, I do. Well, I'll show you bullshit. You know, KP consisted of, guaranteed it consisted of cleaning the grease pit, the most dreaded job in the world is the grease pit. Big hole in the ground, cement hole in the ground where all the waste water from the mess hall goes, and everything grease and lard goes into this hole and congeals, and your job is to go down there and dipper it all out and then clean it with the toothbrush. You might get grease pit duty for a week if they're really mad at you. Which had nothing to do with military training, improving somebody.

JS: Do you think your opinions about basic training were consistent with most of the other guys you were in there with?

RT: No, there were people there that, in all different economics, you know, social group, economic groups that to get three meals and a roof over your head was a major increase in living standards for them. We've had people in there that, oh, some of those that we'd get out of the Appalachians and all, they had nothing, virtually nothing. And then you had people that are just natural followers, that this is the best thing ever in the world for them. You had people there that were like me that had juvenile discretions that, once they got there and they didn't conform to the mold that was wanted, so the more you didn't conform, the worse it got for you. Now this was back prior to the American Civil Liberties Union saying you can't take that guy out behind the mess hall and beat the shit out of him because he didn't do what he was supposed to. We, they'd make us do like a, what they called a GI party, that's when you scrub everything with a toothbrush. Be in there, wax the floor three or four times with melted in floor wax, buffed in with a buffer and with hand rags, get done about four o'clock in the morning, finally get into the rack to go to sleep, and twenty minutes later some drunk sergeant comes staggering in from being out on the town, didn't get himself a piece and he's really snorting, walk right down the center aisle, of course in walking down through, he's going to scuff it up with his feet. Platoon sergeant comes in thirty seconds later, this floor don't look like it's ready, everybody up, do it all over again. Strip it down, scrub it down, re wax it. Now you're hitting six o'clock. Because when you're saying this you're talking sixty men doing this, you know, two decker building, thirty to a floor doing all this scrubbing and shit. Now come six o'clock is reveille, you better be in a crisp sharp new uniform, completely shaved, not a button out of place, and in that formation ready to start a new day. And you start a new day, you force yourself to do it, you don't have an option. The ridicule alone if you fall out, you know, there's cases where guys have committed suicide from shit like that, they just couldn't stand the pressure after all. Be ten pounds overweight, oh man, they'd be brutal on you, totally brutal. Demean you, call you every name there is, make you do extra exercises and shit, I mean brutal shit. The platoon is marching down the street, you got your rifle over your head, this fourteen pound rifle like this, doing a double time running around this formation of thirty men as they're going forward. We'll make you lose that weight one god damn way or another, we'll run it off your ass. You know, instead of going, wait a minute now, why is the guy overweight? Obviously it's not because of the military cooking because, you know, the military had a bad rep for their food, but it is, you know, as tasteless and awful as it is, on the majority it is nutritional, so it's not, you know. And you're, you're constantly moving at a double time, so it's not from inactivity. If this guy is still overweight, then maybe he has a glandular problem, you know, maybe he's

just naturally big boned. But that doesn't matter, because you don't fit the mold and if you don't fit the mold, you don't belong there. All's they got to do is make you quit.

JS: So, how did you feel on graduation day, even though you were pulling KP?

RT: I felt left out completely, you know, I felt left out of it.

JS: Were you happy though, seeing that you...?

RT: I was happy to leave that camp, that base. I was happy to get basic over, you know. I accomplished what I set out to do, which was to make it through basic. And then of course you're over anxious because you're going into a totally new field now, you're going into, jeez, this was just basic, now we're going into advanced infantry training. You mean it's worse than this? But it's like, you know, they say well you're going to AIT, advanced military training. Well it's not actually advanced infantry training, it's whatever your job description's going to be after that, you know, if you're going into computers or missiles or infantry or what have you. I wanted to go airborne. In order to go airborne you had to take the infantry training, advanced infantry training course to get into the airborne corps, to get into Special Forces, to get into LRRPs or what have you, you know, they're all military stepping stones.

JS: Why did you want to go airborne?

RT: What's that?

JS: Why did you want to go airborne?

RT: Because my oldest sister dated a guy that was in the airborne, and I thought they had the sharpest uniforms, and they were the only ones allowed to put their trousers in their boots, their military uni-, when they were wearing their Class As. The only ones allowed to put your military into your jump boots was the airborne, you know, it was a, different than the rest I guess. You know, and like I say, it was one of those things where everybody was saying oh, you'll never make it. And I was just determined that, screw them, I'm going to do it. I think that's probably the only thing that got me through it all was that people said I couldn't do it. And up until that point in my life I had a pretty low self esteem so that, you know, it was like, wow, I did it, I made it through basic dammit. And when I made it through AIT it was, yeah, there, I've done

all the hard stuff. Now they tell me it's supposed to get easier. They lied. But, you know, you had that thought that, you know, I did that. And pretty soon it was like, wow, I made it through advance infantry training, and I've even got a stripe on my uniform now. There, I ain't like those lowly recruits just coming in. And they do, they play you [*unintelligible word*] like a grade class, you know. And you fall right into it, you know, I'm a PFC so you've got to do what I say, you're only an E1. [*unintelligible phrase*], but it's not so, it's, if I got one day more in time in my service grade than you do, I outrank you and you got to do what I tell you, right, wrong or whatever. If I outrank you and I give you an order to do something and you don't do it, you've disobeyed a lawful order. If an officer tells you, you've disobeyed a direct order, which is a lot worse. You know, you're pulling federal jail time when you do that. But I learned that there had to be witnesses. If I could get, if you're Sgt. Joe and I'm Capt. Lewis and I don't like this jerk over here and I want to burn his ass, say Sgt. Joe, didn't you just see him give me the finger. I did sir. Write him up. Witnessed by this officer and this NCO. You just got fourteen extra duty, fourteen days loss of pay, fourteen days restriction because two people thought, you know, we can do this. You go, wait a minute. But I learned that what they would do is they, if they were going to screw with you they'd have their witness all preplanned and they'd have them somewhere in the area so they could overhear the conversation, so it would be like, Towle, go over there and fill those sand bags. Fuck you. What did you say to me? Right, sir, right away sir. Or they, Sgt. Jones, did you hear what he said to me? No sir, you have to say it again. You know, just, you just had to make sure that whenever you said anything, there wasn't another set of ears around because if there was you could guarantee they're taking your time, they're taking your money and they're taking your rank. My rank went up and down like a ladder at least three times from E1 to E3, E4, back down E3, E2, E1.

JS: Was it easy to get in that, the military mind set that they get you in of now I have a stripe on my uniform, now I've done this, now I've done that, is it easy to get into that mindset?

RT: Yeah, it is, it is, because each time you get a little more in grade and all, you get a little more status. It's like you go back to, you're just a junior, I'm a senior, go to the other end of the school, you know. You know better than him, you've been at school two years longer, but hey, you know. But if you get that class distinction in something that manner, you know, a junior, senior, sophomore type, then suddenly you got a situation where you actually have a possibility of life and death over somebody on your whim, and with very little

maneuvering and a couple of your drinking buddies, you can really screw somebody up bad. I remember a case in Germany where one sergeant was after this E4s wife, so he just kept putting the E4 on guard duty at night. No way he could go home and check his wife, you're on guard duty, you leave that you could be shot for leaving your guard duty, depending on the circumstances.

JS: Did you ever find out what happened?

RT: I don't know, I left that unit after a period of time, but everybody knew, you know. What do you do? Guy outranks you, you don't want him coming down on your ass, you're going to keep quiet, you're going to shut up and be glad as hell it's not you.

JS: So you were happy you graduated from basic.

RT: Oh yeah, I was happy for the accomplishment of graduating from basic. I was happy for graduating AIT, but I was proud as hell for graduating jump school, I mean, you know, that put me in the elite, cream of the crop type thing with the, you know, in that part. You know, I got benefits regular soldiers didn't have. I could wear a beret, I could wear my boots, *[unintelligible word]* in my, you know, anybody else that wasn't airborne, if they were wearing their dress greens they had to wear low quarters, regular low quarter shoes. We were allowed to wear our jump boots, that was our emblem. To the point of where, when I was in the 82nd Airborne, we'd go to Fairville, North Carolina which was the nearest town to the Army base, and there would be incidences where somebody would come from the base with their trousers in their boots, and they weren't airborne, and it was brutal, I mean they'd beat the hell out of him, they'd cut his dress pants down into shorts, they'd cut his boot down into low quarters and send him back with a hell of a whupping. You've got to earn the right to wear that, so it was that much of a status type thing. The MPs didn't mess with you as much, they didn't dare to. We had a general that was just totally crazy. What can you say about Westmoreland, I mean, he was a nut case. See I can say that now, when I was in the military they could have court martialed me for it. But he was, he was a nut case. One time he, they locked up these, the civilian police locked up these two guys in their, in the city jail. Westmoreland says, release them. They said, no, we're holding them on criminal charges. Westmoreland got in an Army tank with about three hundred Army guys behind him, soldiers behind him, and drove down and like General Patten type, right up to the city jail and was flat out, you open up that door and

let them out or we're going to open it up, plain and simple. And when we get done, we're going to shut this town off, it's going to be off limits permanently. If he did that the town would dry up, it was a military town. And when he threatened to put the whole town off limits they had no choice. But to pull a General Patten into town, with a Sheraton tank and threaten to do something like that, you go, man, this guy is, he's totally nuts or he just knows there's not a damn thing they can do about it. It's his Army base, for all practical purposes it's his civilians, they do as he wants, you know.

JS: Where were you stationed for basic?

RT: Basic? Fort Benning, basic, wait a minute, yeah, Fort Benning, Georgia.

JS: And so you were done there and, tell me about...

RT: Then I went to, I went from Fort Benning to Fort Dix, from Fort Dix, wow, it's been a long time, wait a minute here, I got to stop and think about this. Fort Benning, Fort Dix, yeah, then back to Fort Benning for my jump training, and then Fort Bragg with the 82nd Airborne. From Fort Bragg I went to the 509th Airborne in Germany, and then the 2nd of the 509th in Germany, and then to the 25th Infantry in Vietnam.

JS: Tell me about AIT?

RT: Oh, AIT was basically a rehash of basic training, you know, you're dealing with more on your weapons training and survival and that type of stuff. It was, you know, just a little advance on that. The airborne training though was something else. You went to the airborne training, from the time you got off that bus when you arrived there until the time you left there, you didn't stop running. You never went anywhere unless you were on a dead run. And you did so many push ups, I swear we pushed Georgia down to the panhandle of Florida and back. We did push ups, because everything at that point was geared to totally building your body muscle because when you jump out of a plane you want to have some good muscle to take up the shock when you land and all, but it was hard. You ran, we started out running a mile before breakfast, and within a week we were running three miles before each meal. You'd run your force run, and you'd go to the mess hall and they'd have like a jungle gym set up, they had parallel ladders, you had to go down and back with those, they had what they called run, dodge and jump, which was like wooden hurdles set up spaced apart and you had to run kind of serpentine through it

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and jump over a ditch and all of this crap, and you had to low crawl on your belly a hundred yards, then you had to run to the hand grenade pit and throw five dummy grenades through a tire, and you threw them until you got them all through the tire, so if you missed a couple you got a bunch of really upset guys behind you that are hungry and they have to wait until you do that because they still have to do it themselves, you know, in line. And then when you get all done and you get back into line to go in the mess hall, you run in place all the way up until your hand touches the metal tray to get your food, your...

End of Tape One, Side A

Tape One, Side B:

JS: So, how were you feeling at that point about the military?

RT: Oh, I was still into it at that point, you know, I was going to be the super soldier, I was starting to, you know, really get into it. The part of, you know, when you think, oh, he wants to be a soldier, he wants to go out and kill the enemy, that's not, the thought never even come in my mind as, you know, as wanting to do it. I wanted to be a soldier because it was something that people didn't look at you and say, oh, that's no good. It was like, I got a look of respect when I walked by with my uniform, in the beginning. But like I said, in the beginning, that was pre Laos and Cambodia and the big escalation when you had Nixon saying we have no ground troops there, we're going, Johnson was saying they're going to deescalate the war by bringing back ten thousand soldiers from Vietnam. And he did, he brought ten thousand soldiers back, and he landed them all right in Fort Dix, New Jersey, and he had the camera crews and all the press and everything there recording them coming off those planes. What he didn't have is he didn't have the cameras and the reporters in Prisideo, California and Fort Lewis, Washington, where they sent twenty thousand over to replace the ten thousand they brought back, which, those ten thousand they brought back were due to come back anyway because their twelve month tour was up. They just made a big media thing about it, saying hey, we're deescalating, we're bringing back ten thousand. Well, I was one of twenty thousand that went the other way. But, you know, the difference between when I was, first went in the Army and was going through basic training and AIT and jump school and when I came back from Vietnam, the attitude of the population to the soldier, it changed a hundred percent. You know, back when I was in the 82nd Airborne Division in '68, there was, well back when Martin Luther King got killed in April of '68, we were on the street in Washington, D.C. keeping order and people walked up and thanked you. When I came back from Vietnam and I got on the street, people were spitting at us, that was the type of complete change of, what would you say, prestige of the soldier or what have you, you know, the total difference in attitude of the population.

JS: So tell me about the rest of jump school.

RT: Jump school was very physically trying. You ran everywhere, you trained intensely because when you finally jumped out of that plane, you had to have your body in top physical shape. If you didn't you'd, your legs would telescope up into each other or you'd blow your back out or, you know, what

have you. But by the time you were ready to make your first jump, you were completely and totally and physically prepared for it. Maybe not necessarily mentally, but you were totally and completely physically capable of doing what was required. Mentally, I'd say that was one of the scariest times of my life was the first time I jumped out of a plane, it was unbelievable. And it was also the biggest rush I ever had in my life. We used to joke and say it's the biggest thrill you can get in your life with your pants on. It's unbelievable. And when you're jumping out of that plane it's not, you know, you're not in the military mode of, military soldier mode of I'm going to jump out here and do my job and kill the enemy, because that wasn't even on your mind, you know, you're taking jump training, you're in Fort Benning, Georgia or Fort Dix, New Jersey, or Fort Bragg, North Carolina somewhere out in the drop zone, in the military drop zone, you know, there's no, you know, you're big worry at that point is, man, I hope them damn trucks made it there because if they didn't we've got to hump off this damn drop zone carrying this pack. You know, that was your big worry was, are we going to have to hump it back to the base or are they going to actually give us rides this time, you know. But the accomplishment of, the pride when you lined you up, when you made your fifth qualifying jump, and at this point in your, in your career, you probably had personal contact with lieutenants, captains, major, maybe a light colonel you might encounter in your travel. You know, light colonel and above would be battalion or division headquarters which isn't even in your block, you know, that's not your neighborhood. But suddenly here's this full bird colonel with his big eagles on his shoulders coming around, he's going to pin that on you, he's going to put it, unlike this crap they showed on TV where they put them, boom, boom, that didn't happen, you know, not in the groups I was in. I can't imagine just standing there and letting somebody do that but, you know, they got films of it taking place in Special Forces. But that was the biggest thrill of my life, I think, was when they pinned those wings on me. You know, I did something that nobody else that I ever knew, other than Johnny White that dated my sister, had the gonads to do. Not even my so-called my big brother who, anything I could do he could do better routine. And it was just, you know, I had to do it to show them I could do it. But to be able to walk around wearing that, that special hat [*unintelligible phrase*], that gave you a hell of a moral ego boost.

JS: So what did you do after that?

RT: After jump school I went to the 82nd Airborne and that was just a routine, you pulled, you know, whatever duties they had and you made your jump a month

and just about routine until, like I mentioned, 1968 when King was killed they took us all to Washington, D.C. to do riot control. That was scary. They had us walking the streets with M14 rifles with three rounds of ammunition each in our ammo pouch. Not in the guns, in the ammo pouch. Now, the only way you could take those bullets out of your ammo pouch, put them into the clip for the gun and then put that in the gun and lock and load, was, somebody had the first call, the lieutenant who had to call the captain who had to call the major to get permission, to pass the word back down around to lock and load. Now scenario being, you got eight guys walking down the street in a patrol, three buildings away somebody on a roof has got a rifle and they shot at you. Now you've got to get down behind cars and grab the radio and call in and sit there, while this guy's shooting at you, waiting for permission to lock and load. Of course by the time that comes, you know, this guy ran out of ammo, he's gone. There ain't a cop in sight because they're all busy on their roadblocks and shit. It was futile, it really was, you know. Basically we were walking around with a hundred and eighty dollar clubs. You know, what's a gun without a bullet in it, it's a club. Yeah, that was, you saw civil war dissolved during that period. We had cops out there that were so drunk I'm surprised they could even walk, never mind drive cruisers, working around town and all. A car would come down towards a roadblock, if it didn't slow down quick enough they'd just open fire on them, blow them away, hey, it's after 8: 30 curfew, they shouldn't be out here anyway. It was like, well wait a minute, how do you know this isn't some guy that just picked his wife up the hospital and bringing her home or something. Doesn't matter, it's curfew, federal law curfew, you stay off the street. But the worst part of it is, once it's been declared federal law, then the rules go out of the, get thrown away, you know, there's no more rules. When in any other time could you see a man come out of a store and shoot him dead? Because you suspect, not that you know, you suspect he's a looter. Well, it's after 8: 30, after curfew, he's coming out of the store, he must be a looter, boom. And get away with it. That's when you go, damn. And this was going on in our capitol.

JS: What did you think about that as a soldier?

RT: Well I had the mental attitude then of, you guys ain't kicking our ass, it ain't going to happen, you know, we're the 82nd Airborne Division, it ain't going to happen. You know, we had this bit of pride that, well, of course it helped that we had guns and we had night sticks and bayonets and so on, but you know, it had become a thing of pride, you know. They stuck me, one night they put me in the, one of the state liquor stores, because when you have martial law, they

declare martial law, then all sales of alcohol stop, so then, you know, you've got a whole city full of alcoholics that want their booze, you know, they, and they're not nice people when they want their booze. This liquor store I was at, they left me to guard, somebody backed up to it and hooked a chain around the steel gratings on the big picture windows there, just yarded them right out so there was nothing but a big open hole there. And I was standing in front of the store and this guy came up, about three o'clock in the afternoon, and he says, you're going to have to kill me. I said, well what do you mean I'm going to have to kill you, why is that? He says because I'm coming back tonight and I'm going in that store. And so, you know, do us both a favor, you know, not tonight, you know, they got me here until midnight, you know. He says, well, you're going to have to kill me. And I kind of passed it up because, you know, I had all these different comments about, you know, you white trash, what are you doing here and all this, you know, we were right dead in the black section of town. And about ten o'clock that night, the same guy, I see him coming down the street and when he crossed the street he brought his hands out from behind him, he had a big machete in his hand. He says, I told you, and he come at me swinging it. I says, we ain't got time to make no phone calls, you know, this guy's coming at me with a machete, I lock and load it and I dropped it. Over a frigging bottle of booze. But if I hadn't had done that, I could have got time in Leavenworth because a liquor store is a piece of federal property. But it wasn't a conscious thing, at that time though it wasn't a thing of, well, I'm going to protect this store, you ain't coming in here, this is government property. At this point it was, here's this crazy dude swinging a machete and he's going to hack me up, you know, there was, it was a sole surviving thing, it wasn't a God, country and duty bull. It was like, wow, this guy's coming at me and he means business.

JS: How did it feel after you shot him?

RT: Well, that's not a question you ask somebody, you know, it's...

JS: It's tough?

RT: You go through a lot of shit, a lot of shit. You go through guilt, you go through anger, you know, I went through a whole period of time, well why the hell did he make me do that, and then why did the government make me do that, why did I even do it, why didn't I just let him go do it, or, I mean shit, I could have gave him a bottle, you know. But they have it installed in your mind so solid that you have to do your job that you don't even consciously

think of not doing it. An example would be, you know, kind of move back a little, in basic training we have one aspect of our training that's what they call the night infiltration course. Now this is a nightmare, this is, you picture in your mind a battle scene, machine gun fire going over your heads, explosions everywhere, big bright flares going off, barbed wire, people crawling under the barbed wire through mud, over logs, this is an infiltration course at night. And they got this guy, these guys at the other end of this course and they're firing over your head, thirty one inches, exactly thirty one inches which, you figure the thickness of your body, well that's an easy call, unless as you're crawling along, suddenly here's a log this big that you got to crawl over, you got to snake your way over this sucker, and while you're doing that you've got these big round pits around you that have TNT in them and they're full of water and they're blowing up, because they blow up, you know, friggging hundred gallons of water up in the air, down on top of you and they call that the dry run. During the day you do a dry run, in the daylight, and then you have to do it again at night, you know, it simulates night combat. But as we were going through this infiltration course, some smartass suddenly yelled, 'ten hut, and without even thinking the guy beside me stood up, just out of natural reflex. I mean, if you're, if you're, if we're sitting right here right now talking in the service, this door opens and a lieutenant comes in, you're immediately, as soon as you see him, you're going to yell 'ten hut and we're both going to jump to attention, (*snaps fingers*) just like that, that's required. No matter what you're doing, you could be sitting on the toilet taking a crap. If somebody yells attention, you jump to attention. Somebody yelled attention, this man stood right up in front of that machine gun, cut him in half. But it wasn't even a conscious thought, it was just constant drumming training. They get you to the point of where they, they teach you to respond without thinking, because you don't want to be telling this guy, kick that machine nest. Fuck you, man, I ain't going over there, are you nuts, that guy's shooting at us. You want this guy to hit that machine gun nest. You know, his hesitation could get you all killed, in an actual combat situation. But it's not necessary to do that, you know, in normal training. You know, it's the bullshit, you know, if the bullshit wasn't there I'd have stayed in the military and loved every minute of it. I got to see Europe, I got to jump out of planes, I got to ride in boats that I never would have had a chance to ride in. If they did away with the bullshit, if they made it like a nine to five job. But you can't when you, you know, when you have a military rule, you know, it's like a, almost like a monarchy or a dictatorship because you can't, you know, your peace of mind is whatever my whim is or whoever else outranks you, and not because of your knowledge, simply because you've been there longer, or they've been there longer.

JS: So what was after Washington?

RT: After Washington I went to Germany. That was wild, Germany was wild. It was a total culture shock. It was my first actual, other than the riots which was, you know, there wasn't a racial thing there in the riots, [*unintelligible word*], this kind of sounds funny but, you know, the military presence there was not a racial thing. You know, the whole thing was racial but, you know, whether we were white, black or whatever, we were the military force. I just totally lost my train of thought.

JS: Germany being wild.

RT: No, being racial? Or, Washington not being racial. Yeah, once I hit Germany though, then it was the German population's anti military, U.S. military. It really hit me hard. It was like, wow, these people really do hate us. You know, it was like, you had to constantly be on your guard in anything and everything you did with the local population. That I didn't like, because you had the Communist fear going around, you know, everything [*unintelligible word*], got to watch what you say, got to watch who you speak to, and don't give out any information, the old Loose lips sink ships@ type thing. And being right in Europe, you know, it's an actual actuality. You know, this girl will chum up to you, next thing you know your ass is being blackmailed, for whatever, you know. They had a lot of military bases there that were top secret that, well they'd do anything to get bits of information. My, one of my jobs when I was there, it was a, I had a (*unfamiliar term - sounds like Crypt 01*) clearance, which was, I had access to all the codes that were being used at that time through the radios. When I was on duty I had to wear a stupid thing around my neck, looked like a dunce thing, like a, and it was a big, oh, probably ten page booklet, hard cover booklet that you opened up and it has, okay this is this date so they're using these words for this code which means this. But that was a big thing, it was like, you can't ever tell anybody you have a Crypto clearance, because that alone would get your ass kidnaped. So you had to constantly, you had to be on your guard for that, you had to be on your guard against the CID, which was the Military Criminal Investigation Division. People around here think they have problems with personal rights with the cops, don't have a clue what it's like to be under the rule of the military cops, because you have absolutely no rights. If I want to charge you with something, I can charge you with something, have you thrown in jail, and unless you can prove, unless you can prove that I'm wrong, that's where you stay. So, and it

was always, they were always slipping CID agents into the different groups, you know, bring them in as a new person, supposedly a new person, and, Christ they'd, we had one guy lived with us in our barracks for almost six months, we didn't have a clue. And then one night we were having a big party and the door got busted in and he was the first one through with a .45 with the other MPs behind him. It's like, wow, unbelievable. We partied with this guy, we did everything with this guy, didn't have a clue he was CID agent. And at that point your trust for people drops completely, you know, you don't know who you can trust. I mean I don't even know if I, there's some things that I could tell you that took place in Vietnam that I won't tell you, that I can't tell you because they're still, there's no statutory limitations on the law for some of these things. You know, and I could be of suspicious mind, and at one time I would have been, it was like, well who is this guy, what kind of shit's he trying to get on me. And then I say, wait a minute, Bob, you contacted him, he didn't contact you here, come on now. You know, it's like, but if you had of contacted, let's say you'd gone to the VA and said, hey, I'd like a list of some 'Nam vets, I'd like to interview them, see if I can, and then you called me up I just, I wouldn't have even talked with you, said no, ain't no way. If I open my mouth the wrong way I could probably put my ass in jail for the rest of my life, or some other people, of shit that happened over there that you can't talk about. You know, I could give you generalized things. I wouldn't possibly give you any details, I couldn't. Because like I say, there's a lot of things there's no statutory limitations to. You know, I'm so surprised now that Lt. Callie is as far as they went with the war crimes. Because that was, you know people go, wow, the My Lai massacre took place and all of that happened? That was everyday shit. And the only reason that made the press is because somebody talked to the press. It didn't make the press because it was something that was out of the ordinary and suddenly happened, we went on Zippo raids all the time, Zippo raids being go burn down this village so that, there used to be a joke that went around, it was like how can you tell if the guy's a Vietcong or not? And the joke used to be that there was this guy, this new soldier, asked a sergeant that, he says how can you tell if he's a Vietcong. And the sergeant says, it's easy, if you're out in the jungle or out on the trail and you see somebody coming towards you, you yell Ho Chi Minh is a son-of-a-bitch. And if he starts shooting at you, he's a Vietcong. That's about the only way to tell. About a month later this sergeant sees that same soldier in the field hospital, he's all busted up, full body cast. He says, soldier what happened? He says, well sarge, I took your advice. I was out there and down the road come this Vietnamese man and I stepped out and said Ho Chi Minh's a son-of-a-bitch, and he looked at me and said, well so's LBJ. And while we were

shaking hands a fucking tank ran over us. But basically, you know, there's, the only way you could tell if that guy was an enemy or not was if he shot at you. If you drove by this rice paddy and there's thirty people out in their rice paddy bent over planting rice, the only way if you know there's Vietcong out there is one of them might reach down in that water and come up with AK-47 and start shooting at you. Or maybe he'll just let you go on your way. You don't know. You know, how could you go down on Knox Street if I told you there's a Jamaican on Knox Street, you got to go get him. Now, I can't give you his name, but he'll be wearing maybe black pants and an orange tank top T-shirt, and you get down on Knox Street and they're all wearing that. You go, well, which one is it? There's no way, no way to possibly tell who the enemy was unless they actively did something against you. Now on the other hand, if you were to do something, you know, that's, quite obviously you would not fit in with that group, you know, it would be like me trying to go down to Harlem and I'm going to chase this guy through Harlem to catch him. No, you're going to run about two blocks and that's going to be it, you know, this guy's gone, he's melted, he's, so then you go up and you say, okay, well I'm going to ask this person. Hey, which way did he go? Now, this guy's not going to tell you anything because if he does his sister may get blown away, his mother, his house could blow up. So he's not going to say a word to you, you're just the American now, this guy's here forever, you're going home, the old rotation thing. That was the hardest part for me over there was not knowing who the enemy was. So unless you learn to suspect everybody, you cannot trust anybody at all. It's just getting recently now that I can walk around Vietnamese, just to be physically present where they are because the ones that are here are the age group that was there, and you couldn't trust them, you didn't know.

JS: So is that what led to Zippos?

RT: No, no. A lot of times we would have, you know, you have, you have a village, you think of a village which you're actually talking sometimes, with a village you may be talking three or four cardboard huts, maybe the size of this room, made out of cardboard that we used to pack around our pallet cases that come in on the ships. We'd throw it in the dump, they'd go get them and make walls for their buildings. They used that, they used thatching and, you know, tree branches and leaves and stuff. And it would take about an hour to build a village, you know, to throw one together. You know, you got four poles, a ridge pole and cardboard tied on to them, you know, that's a, that's a village. And they'd set up these villages, the VC would set up these mock villages,

make it look like a village, and that's where they'd operate out of, that'd be their safe haven. But every once in a while, you know, we'd get intelligence saying, you know, this is coming from there or this is there and we'd go down to that village. Usually we would have to get hostile fire from the village, and when that happened the commander would go down and say, hey, one more round and that's it, you won't be here no more, plain and simple. Don't be shooting at us no more. The next night we get snipers. You know, whether you did it or you know who did it, you're out of here now, you know. You've got about thirty seconds before these buildings start burning, because you're out of here, we can't have you this close to the base. I watched, see, in Vietnam we had NATO forces there, you know, you think that, you know, it was just the United States was there fighting. They weren't. We had the Australians, the Thais, we had South Koreans, we had Filipinos, all these different countries that are part of the NATO forces had soldiers in Vietnam. We had this Korean detachment that was there that had this, the perimeter security of our base camp, and for about a week they kept getting snipers at night from the village. The Korean commander told them, he said no more, don't even, not one, I don't care where it comes from, I don't want one more bullet coming at this camp. That night the gate guard was shot at. I bet it wasn't thirty seconds later that sky just opened up and this guy had ordered, he had forty three, 42 mortar tubes and he opened fire with mortar rounds on top of that village and it was like, in seconds there was nothing left. You know, we at least went down and said, hey, look, you know, get out of here, we're burning, it's Zippo time, and give them a chance to run. Normally, on a majority. There were times when they would offer resistance, you know, this guy's going to burn your damn house down, of course you're going to resist. But on the whole we would usually burn a village when we found evidence of the VC activity, you know. We didn't find any VC, we found activity, we found supplies, you're out of here. You're aiding and abetting the enemy, you're out of here. You know, not taking into account that these VC probably came in here and took all the, all the men out of the village and forcibly recruited them into their army under the threat of wiping out their whole families, you know. We didn't deal with that aspect of it, that wasn't our problem. Our problem was, there's a village, we're being shot at. We didn't care why, we didn't care who. You know, I'm only here twelve months, you bastard, you're not going to get me. I'm going to do anything I can to make sure you don't. And if it meant destroying this village, *[unintelligible word]*, they're just gooks, that was the attitude, you know. It got to where the military would dehumanize the enemy to the point of where to shoot a Vietnamese, a Vietcong, back then would have taken no more out of me emotionally than to

shoot a water buffalo, well no, maybe shooting a water buffalo would have upset me more because the damn thing didn't have anything to do with it. But, you know, it wasn't a matter of right and wrong, Mom's apple pie, or any of that crap. The thing was, the government sent me over there, and I've got to do whatever I can to get back, no matter what the means are, what it entails, I'm going to do what I can to get on that freedom bird and come home. You know, a lot of it was, it was senseless, totally senseless, the losses we encountered in human life. We'd take a whole bunch of guys and we'd attack a mountain top and lose multiple men attacking this mountain top. And then persevering enough, we would eventually take this mountain top. Give an example: what's the little mountain over here, Davis Mountain. Good example, just about the right height a lot of times. And we're going to go over there and we're going to kick ass and we're going to lose lives and we're going to surround this Davis Mountain and we're going to take it, we're going to take control of it. We're going to go up there, we're going to stay there three days, and then we're going to leave. Now next week, we're going to go over and take that mountain again because they're back over there shooting at us, and we're going to lose a lot more lives when we take this mountain, then we're going to leave. And next week we're going back because they're shooting at us. You know, that type of, go in and send out a massive amount of fire power to take control of this area, and as soon as you got control of it, pack up and pull out. You say, well what the hell was the purpose of it? There was none.

JS: How does that make you feel as a soldier?

RT: Oh, that me, that made me really angry, you know. It was, it made me damn near psychotic, you know, I got to the point of where it's like, what are you going to do to me now? You sent my ass to Vietnam, what are you going to do now, send me home if I don't cooperate? So, I quit again. But it's like, technically and legally at that point an officer could have drawn his gun out and shot me in the head for refusing a direct order in a combat situation.

JS: What did you refuse to do?

RT: I refused to go out and play soldier any more. I says, I'm not going out there, I'm not doing it, that's bullshit. Give me something to do in a base camp, I'll do it gladly, I ain't going out there and doing this no more. I just got tired of it.

JS: What was it like being out there?

RT: You can't, you can't describe it. You, you, you, you know, you know, do you describe a night of you're sitting on a, out in the woods, you've got leeches coming out of the trees landing on you and it's raining and it's damp and it's cold and you think, well Vietnam jungle, no, Vietnam jungle cold at night, you know, it gets brutal weatherwise. You know, you could have a forty degree temperature drop from mid noon to mid night, and if your body's not built that way, you know, I imagine the Vietnamese, they do it all the time so they're used to it, but the American body's not used to that. They flew me, when I went to Vietnam, they flew me out of Fort Lewis, Washington, and for about six hours they had us sitting on the runway waiting to board our planes, in the middle of a blizzard, in jungle fatigues, in jungle clothes. I mean we had guys that were suffering hypothermia so bad they had to hospitalize them. Stuck us on a plane, and in less than sixteen, eighteen hours later, they open up this plane door and you walk out into a hundred and thirty degrees humidity, and it just, it just totally shocked my thermal system so bad that now I don't have much regulation of it. If it gets cold, just a little cold, I freeze, I mean I'll get uncontrollable chills, my body won't stop, you almost think I'm going into convulsions. If it gets a little too hot, you'll think I'm having a heart attack, the water will just pour right out of me. It just snapped my system around so hard that, you know, to this day I've never recovered from it.

JS: So what was your, what was your daily life like in Vietnam?

RT: In Vietnam daily life, well I was, I drove a resupply truck a lot for transportation, so it was, it varied quite a bit. What they do is they, you'd go to the motor pool in the morning, they'd hand you a driver manifest and say, okay, this is the load you got and you're taking it to this point. At that point it usually involved finding out which convoy is going that way, getting tied up with a convoy and going to wherever they happened to go. And then once you get there, they unload you, and then you got to figure out a convoy going back to your base camp. So it's, you know, a lot of driving through hostile area with no protection. I had one time, I was driving along and suddenly my two and a half ton truck, the rear end of it just lifted up off the ground, like that, almost stood on its nose and slammed back down with a hell of an explosion. And what we did over there as, there was a lot of mines planted, so we'd sand bag the bottoms of the trucks, the floor boards of the trucks and under the seats, you put two layers of sand bags, which was really the pits because then you're driving with your feet up here, the steering wheel, because it's, you know, all these sand bags are there. But that's the only thing, and it would keep the transmission from blowing up through your body if you hit a mine. They

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figured that day that I drove over one of the, one of our spent five hundred pound bombs that we dropped that they recovered and planted in the road. And they waited until my truck was directly over it, and then they remote controlled a radio controlled detonator. They also figured that they must have taken out about half the explosive to make smaller mines and bombs, because my truck was still a truck, you know. If it had been the actual four or five hundred pound bomb, there'd have been nothing there but a big hole. That's where the uncertainty always comes in, it's like, you, you actually develop a fatalistic attitude. It's like, at that point I realized if you're going to die, there ain't a damn thing you can do about it or to prevent it. If they're going to get you, they're going to get you. That was the example right there. Now, about three weeks later, a friend of mine that was supposed to ride shotgun with me, what they'd do is they'd send out, any truck that went out had a driver and a guy riding shotgun. This guy normally rode shotgun with me, he partied hard the night before, really hung over and it's like, oh, hey Bob, can you make this run on your own. I says, well, yeah, you know, there was, where I was going there was people there that could unload my truck, I wouldn't have to do it. I was the last truck in the convey, to tie into the convoy, and as we were going through a banana plantation had one shot was fired at us, one sniper shot at us. It came through the back of my truck, through the headboard, and out the windshield. And if the guy had been sitting there where he's supposed to be, it would have got him square in the back of his head. And you go, wow, there's absolutely no defense. If you're going to get it, there's, and that's when you say well screw it, there's no use worrying about it at this point. There ain't nothing you can do about it, and you develop a fatalistic attitude,
[unintelligible word]...

End of Tape One, Side B

Tape Two, Side A:

JS: And so I take it you didn't spend your whole time driving the truck? You were, well you mentioned you were in, out in combat, too.

RT: Well yeah, that was, you know, whenever you're out anywhere you're in combat, you know, didn't matter, once you left that base camp you were in combat situations. It's just a matter of when they shot at you. You might go a month and not get shot at, or you might get shot at every twenty minutes, you know, it just depends on what was going on at that time. The idea of you, you know, it's two o'clock in the morning, you're laying on this mound of dirt and there's concertina wire around you, you know, razor wire and all this shit, and you're just waiting, you're pulling night guard duty, and you're looking out across your field of fire and there's a thousand grave crosses, grave markers out there, and then they're telling you, yeah, during the Tet of '68 offensive they came across here in waves of three and four thousand. And you've got this whole horror show of what could happen, that did happen right where you're standing, and it could happen ten minutes from now, two minutes from now. Or it never happens. And then actually after a period of time as the weeks and the months go by and nothing happens, then you start wanting it to happen, you know, the anxiety and the uncertainty. And, you know, the hardest thing for me, well not for me, I should say the hardest thing for a lot of people would be do I have the ability to pull the trigger when the time comes, you know. First time I shot somebody was that guy in Washington, D.C., and it wasn't even a consciable [*sic*] thought of do I have the, it was like, oh shit, he's got a big knife and panic like hell trying to jam those bullets into your gun.

JS: That the way you felt in Vietnam, too?

RT: In Vietnam it was, I'm going to do the damndest I can to keep them from getting me, and it don't matter what it is. You know, there's no such a thing as fighting fair.

JS: Did it seem different than what happened with the guy in Washington?

RT: Well yeah, because by then my anger was there. You know, I wasn't mad at this guy in Washington, I was scared. But, into Vietnam you see so much shit that goes on and when you start losing friends to combat you start getting angry, really, really angry. Which helps when you go and do these atrocities

because, you know, it's not, it's hard to, it's hard to put into words. It would be, I'm not burning this village because I'm an asshole and I want to kill you. You bastards, you killed Johnny, and you're going to make them pay. You know, it's none of this heroic Mom's apple pie shit, it's not, it's the immediate mental thing that's going on at the time, and usually it's, see that's one of the reasons that they, when you go to Vietnam they tell you, they'd say you don't make friends, you don't form attachments, which is against, totally against human nature. So you try not to make attachments but it's going to happen anyway, and when it does happen you lose because you're going to lose that person. Whether you get shot, and I've lost my friend because he's been shot, I've lost my friend because he went home, his time was up, it doesn't matter why he's not there anymore, you've lost this person, he's gone out of your life. There's somebody you, you, you've learned to depend on, your life and his both depend on you working together as a team, you've developed a bond in there, and then he's gone. And that hurts, that hurts, hurts really bad, and that's one of the reasons a lot of Vietnam vets when they came back couldn't form relationships, you know. I went many years when I didn't understand post traumatic stress that I couldn't form relationships. Jeez, I think I'm getting attached, I'm getting to like you, I'm going to piss you off. That way you're going to get mad and you're going to leave and it ain't going to hurt so bad. You, you see what I mean? So I would much rather my wife leave me pissed off than to leave me hurt. It doesn't, you know, to the rational thinking that doesn't make much sense but, you know, to somebody who's lost, continually loses like that, it becomes a mental block. So that anytime anybody would start to get close to you, you'd act like an asshole to them so that they didn't get, take that one step closer because you knew, once they're gone it's going to hurt. Now it doesn't matter mentally in your head that he left because he died or he left because his time was up or he transferred to another unit, he's gone, he's yanked out, he, she, it, whatever, is gone. So you build up a mental block about making attachments. And without counseling, which lots of Vietnam vets didn't get, they never break out of that block. You know, I went probably twenty five years with post traumatic stress without even knowing that it had a name, I just thought I was one crazy son-of-a-bitch because I had all these worms in my head going on, and you had to be crazy to be thinking that way, to have those thought processes.

JS: Like what?

RT: Drive down the road and have flashbacks, go to see a fireworks display and flash back to an ammo dump blowing up. It happened to me, it was so f-, it

was so bad, right here in Lewiston. They had the fireworks at the race track one year, they had a rocket come up, come back down, shot around, landed amongst the display and set the whole display off all at once. When that happened the pyrotechnic that was there started to run across the horizon, you know, our view, with his jacket on fire, and it was an exact photocopy of an ammo dump I watched blow up in Vietnam. I mean, it was so picture perfect. The only difference was, when this guy ran across my vision this way with his jacket on fire and fell down, he was able to roll and put the fire out. In the actual scenario with the, the ammo dump blowing up, the man who ran across, fell down, layed there crying in pain, and we couldn't do jack squat because an ammo dump was blowing up and there was shit flying everywhere. And we had to sit there for more than an hour listening to this man die. And it was like, it was so real, I mean that was, when that happened I ended up in Togus, it was just like you took a film, a movie shot when that took place. But these things that would key you off, and it was like, you know, I've to be nuts to be thinking this shit. Or if I'd walk into a, into a supermarket and somebody would drop something, I'd hit the floor. And then suddenly it's like, you realize wow I'm laying on the floor, the supermarket's full and here's all these people going ha-ha-ha, and it, it really tears you up, you know, they don't understand, you're just coming out of this flashback and you've got assholes laughing at you. It's, I don't know, it's hard to put into words. But anything could key you off, and then you sit back and you just go, wow, I've got to be nuts to be thinking like this. You know, how can I sit there and be so angry at myself, at the world, you know, is everybody else like that? You know, you had no con-, see they, we grew up in the John Wayne era, the John Wayne, known as the John Wayne syndrome. You don't cry, you don't hit women, and you kiss your horse goodbye. So when I came back from Vietnam, when I got home it was like everybody was saying to me, don't dwell on it, get on with your life, you're home now. And we didn't deal with it. They didn't understand why I was having these thoughts and why this shit was happening to me, why I couldn't sleep at night, why I'd break out in cold sweats when I'd see a bus load of kids coming towards me. Mainly, I saw a bus load of kids come towards a group of guys and the bus just totally disintegrated and killed a whole bunch of people. To this day if a bus load of kids comes towards me, I tense right up. I mean, I know mentally in my head, Bob Towle, 1999, that bus ain't going to blow up with a satchel charge, but at that exact moment, you know, when I catch that flash, it's there. But for years the VA wouldn't even recognize PTSD, so there was no treatment, there was no counseling, there was no anything, and you had all these guys that were by themselves going, wow, I've got to be frigging nuts, I've got to be crazy to have these thought patterns

going through my mind. And then one day somebody approached me and said, hey Bob, we want to start a peer counseling group with 'Nam vets. I said, well what the hell is that, you know, I'm a high school dropout, what the hell do I know about counseling shit? He says, no, you just sit down, you talk with these guys and you, you have discussions and discuss what's bothering you and, well, what the hell good's that going to do? But I gave in and I went and I joined a couple of these rap groups, and it was like, wow, you mean I'm not the only one like this, there's actually people out there that are going through this? But at that point in time the military and the VA wasn't even recognizing it as a problem. You know, it was *[unintelligible word]*, get your, pull your damn boots up by the straps and get on with your life, you know, don't be a sissy, don't be a cry baby. But then you got to sit down and, and, you know, it was the frustrations and shit that took place that you didn't, you, when I was there I was angry, I'd send a frigging gun in to be repaired and it would come back with the same broken firing pin, and we're going out on a mission without a machine gun. You know, you don't do that shit, you know, and you send the machine gun back, it comes back again with the same part broken. You know, you think that's a minute thing but that isn't, that, you know, that's something that could save all of your asses, and they don't even have the courtesy of, all's they had to do was take out that broken firing pin and put another one in and ship it back to me, no problem, they got a hundred of them. But some lazy bastard sat there at the armory, switched tags, and sent it right back out again because he didn't want to be bothered. And that pissed me off so bad. And there was, somebody else was sitting there, a guy that hadn't, that had been to three of rap groups and never opened his mouth at any point, and he just broke down, he says, yeah, that pissed me off too much, too. He said that same fucking thing happened to me many times. And we got to talking back and forth and I got to realizing that, yeah, this shit did happen, it ain't all in my mind, you know, all these years have gone by and it isn't something I dreamt up or something I thought about. And I'm not the only one thinking that way. That was the biggest thing was to realize that I'm not the only one going through this. And it wasn't any help of the VA that got me treatment. There were two psychologists in Togus that just seemed to understand, you know. One was married to a 'Nam vet that had PTSD, and one was a guy that just genuinely seemed to want to understand. It wasn't a, well this is a clinical thing and we're going to do an experiment here and see what's going on, you know. Now the VAs way of handling these problems were to give you Thorazine, Valiums, Atavans, drug you out, and as long as you took these pills and medication, they could stick you in a rocking chair in the day room and you sit there and rock all day and come meal time they'd lead you into the

mess hall. Problem solved. That's been taken care of. But it was like, no, let's be dealing with the problem, let's not be covering, you've covered it up now for years, let's deal with the problem. Why am I having these problems, why am I having these thought patterns going through my head? And they didn't want to deal with it. It got to the point of where we had to cause a Congressional investigation at Togus, they had a complete shake up up there, the director resigned, the assistant director got transferred to New York, they had to open up a Vietnam PTSD unit to deal with these specifically. We didn't even, they would take Vietnam veterans with these problems that they had and stick them with WWII veterans and WWI veterans that had nothing in common. Not only had nothing in common, but these WWI and WWII veterans were putting them all down. I fought in the big one, WWI, you know. They wouldn't recognize them, your American Legions and all of these, none of them would recognize the Vietnam vet, so that it was like we were stuck out there with absolutely no avenue or any recourse to deal with our problems. The difference between Vietnam and WWI veterans was when WWI veterans came back from Europe, they came back on troop ships, thirty to forty five days in the belly of a ship with their buddies being able to talk and work through these things. One day I was walking through the jungle on a patrol, five men out of eight were killed in an ambush. Twelve hours later I was standing on a street corner in San Francisco going, wow. Owing the government forty nine dollars because they let me out a day earlier than they should have. Without a ticket home, without a plane ride home, without a penny in my pocket, standing on a street corner in San Francisco, wow. It was such a rush, you couldn't imagine. Car backfire, you hit the ground. You know, suddenly you got this group of people over here screaming at you or spitting at you, calling you baby killers. To my knowledge I never shot a child in Vietnam, to my knowledge. But, that was what you came home to. So that once you came home, you had all these problems and all, nowhere to go with them, and not even daring to admit you were a Vietnam vet because of the ridicule that would come from it.

JS: How did you feel about the protestors?

RT: I really didn't encounter the protestors that much, you know. I went in from '67 and the protesting didn't start until about '69, '70 really hard, so by the time all that was going on I was already in Europe and that put me out of that, because you only hear over there what they want you to hear, you know, the government would control the media the same as, but it was like, you know, I got really angry when my dad would talk to me on the phone and say, yeah,

they, Walter Cronkite said today that there was fourteen Americans killed and twenty seven enemy killed. That's today? Yeah. We had more than that killed in our own damn unit, where the hell are they coming up with these figures, we had more than fourteen killed in just our company for that operation. You're telling me nobody else in Vietnam got killed? You know, that was the crap that they were getting versus what we were getting, and, which is actuality. The reason that the My Lai massacre came to light was there was some soldiers that said, screw this, we're going to let the people know exactly what's going on over here. And that's when, when they, we had a commander that, the best commander I've ever served under, was relieved of duty because he took a reporter in his chopper with him. Totally blew his whole military career because he took a freelance reporter up in his chopper. Because there's shit there they didn't want you to know about. You know, you hear about the shit [*unintelligible word*], the things that happened over there, you know, it's like, I've seen human bodies wrapped with det cord, detonation cord, make like a French saddle on them like you're going to rappel with ropes, and put a charger on there, and then you string them up in a row, and as they're standing there with this shit on them, you walk over to a banana tree and you wrap one of those about three times around a banana tree, step back and blow it, and that banana tree go poof. And then they realize, wow, this shit's wrapped around their bodies like that? If one guy moves ahead too fast or back too slow or stops, they're all going to blow up. Instant detonation. But it happened. And in that particular situation, that is a great way to make sure you don't have enemy that try to run. They see what that stuff's going to do as soon as it dets. You know, there are incidences where you take three enemy soldiers up in a helicopter, you start asking them questions, they didn't answer the questions you reach over, grab one, throw him out. Ask some more questions, they don't answer, you grab the next one and throw him out. Guarantee you, the third one's going to talk his ass off. But these poor bastards, you just chucked them out of a plane at a hundred and fifty feet. Ah, they're just gooks. You become, they become a nonperson, you know.

JS: So when you said, I'm not doing this any more, what did he say to you?

RT: Not very much. I mean, what do you say to a guy standing there with hand grenades and an M16 rifle that doesn't re-, that refuses to do anything? You're under arrest? How crazy is this guy at this point? He's got to be somewhat crazy to even say he's not going to do anything. See, my dad told me when I was a little kid, it's not what you're capable of doing, it's not what you can do, it's what they think you're capable of doing, which makes a big impression on

what you can and can't do. It's like, hey, what are you going to do? Going to send me home? You know, you threatened to send me to Vietnam if I didn't cooperate, well, I'm still not going to cooperate. What are you going to do now, send me home? He said, no, we'll send you out on patrols. So when you get out there and you start humping the boonies, have you walk point, worst place to walk is walk point. Guaranteed, if you're not the first one shot, you'll be the second one shot. But that was the way they controlled you. You do what we say, or you go on a long range patrol here.

JS: So that's what you had to do?

RT: Oh yeah, you, you don't have an option. Like I say, in a combat zone, if you refuse you can actually be shot for refusing an order in a combat situation. And whether there's fighting going on you at all, if you're in a combat zone, it's considered a combat situation.

JS: So were you counting the days while you were there?

RT: Oh yeah, we had, everybody had what they called their short timer stick. We had a round, well, usually it would be a broom handle and you had it notched, it had twelve notches in it, and every month you'd cut a notch off, you cut a chunk off. Hence the name, a short timer stick is somebody with just a couple notches on the stick, you know, you'd carry it like a swagger stick. You had that, you had a, oh, a picture of a naked lady done in squares and then each square has a number in it and you color a day each day, you know, all different kinds, short timer calendars type stuff. Now everybody knew how long they were going to be there maximum. What they didn't know was their minimum stay. You know, I, I got a medical discharge, I was there nine and a half months. The normal tour was twelve months. After twelve months you had to voluntarily sign up for more time there to be kept there.

JS: So why, why did you get the discharge?

RT: I got a medical discharge. I caught some shrapnel that didn't like my body.

JS: So did you get to, did you have to go to the hospital over there?

RT: Yup.

JS: And you came home after that?

RT: Yup.

JS: What was it like when you knew you were going to get to come home?

RT: The longest week you ever lived through, because you didn't know if you were going to make it. You know, they used psychological warfare over there, guys getting ready to get on the plane to go home, what we called the freedom bird, got to the top step, a sniper got him. The man was no longer a threat to anybody, he was going home, but a sniper shot him in the back of the head. But, every man after that, the anxiety of getting on that plane and getting that plane off that runway was so tremendous you can't imagine. Because you know, that poor bastard, he was almost through the door and he still didn't make it. You know, you pray that plane makes it off the ground, you look out the windows and, and as the plane is taking off you see green tracer rounds coming after you. And then you even have your doubts at that point that, yeah, well with my luck this fucking thing ain't going to make it across the ocean, it's going to crash before I get, I know it's going to crash. No, it made it, well it's going to crash when it lands.

JS: So what do you think when you finally land down?

RT: Well that was in itself a real demeaning experience because when they landed us, they brought us out of the plane in through the back of the airport so we weren't even exposed to the civilians. They didn't want the civilians seeing us coming back, you know. So it was like you're being snuck back into your country type thing. It was really demeaning. You know, between that and once you went out through the main gate into where the people actually were, they didn't tell you, hey, there's a bunch of god damn protestors out there. There's your paper work, there's your things, you head out that way. Well how the hell do I get back to Maine? Well, with your severance pay. They didn't give me severance pay, they said they paid me until the 30th of September and I got out the 29th, they're telling me I owe them forty nine dollars for overpayment of one day, and since I owe them money they, I'm not eligible for severance pay, I'm not eligible for travel pay. So I was standing there on a street in San Francisco with a duffel bag with my clothes in it, in an Army uniform, and not a god damn place to go, going, well what the hell do I do now?

JS: So what did you do?

RT: Well, I went back and I just sat there for three days in the airport trying to get a military flight back across country, and eventually I managed to get a seat and flew back. I landed in Washington, and I was there probably two days, and all this time I don't have a penny in my pocket, and after two days of sitting there, some officer in the Air Force came by and saw me sitting there, he evidently had gone through earlier and saw me sitting there, and he asked me what I was doing, I said I'm trying to get back to Maine. He says, well come with me, and he took me out on his private jet and he says, my pilot's got to get some air time in, we're going to fly up over Canada and on the way back we'll drop you off in Augusta, Maine, and that's how I got home. He says, hell, I saw you sitting here yesterday morning and you're still sitting here. I'm trying to get home. That was my thank you for a job well done.

JS: The, a couple questions about some stuff earlier. When you said you weren't going to do any more in Germany, what did you have to do then? Is that when you carried the screen around?

RT: Yeah, well they had what they called the RNU unit, which is repair and utilize, a maintenance squad, and they had four guys assigned to that and that's all they did was building maintenance. Of course, you're talking you know a couple hundred buildings. So the screen thing it was like, you got a couple hundred buildings with all the same windows, all the same screens, so there's no way of knowing if this is today's screen or last week's screen, you know, there's so many screens you could, if you did them every day twenty four hours a day you'd never get them all repaired. So it was like, we may not be able to work you hard, but, and we can't work you long, but make it look like you're doing something. And then they just bid their time until my orders came and then ship me out.

JS: What did you think when you got your orders for Vietnam?

RT: Well, I thought I had it over on them, I said all right you dumb jerks, I'm going to get me thirty days leave, because before you go to Vietnam you get a thirty day leave. So I took my thirty day leave and, see, they'd already sent my brother over there, he'd been there a month before I got my orders to go over, which is where the movie Saving Private Ryan, the Halburton, the Sullivan Act come in? I had it all planned, I figured well, when it gets time for me to go over there I'm going to say, hey, screw you, my brother's over there, you can't send me. So I did my thirty day leave and they shipped me out to, I had to

report to Fort Lewis, Washington to be shipped out and that's when I told them, I says well, you can't send me over there, my brother Dick's there. They said, okay, well we'll put you in a holding company here. So they moved all my shit to another barracks and then they came back a couple days later and says well, we're going to send you back to your losing unit, and it was like, no, I ain't going back to Germany. I mean the race riots there were going hard, I wasn't going to get involved in it. What do I got to do to go Vietnam? They said, well you have to sign this waiver before we can send you over there, so I signed their paperwork and got sent to Vietnam while my brother was there. Now once I got to Vietnam they had the standard questions of, does anybody have a relative in Vietnam currently, and I said well yeah, my brother is. And then they said, well, do you want to be stationed with him or away from him? I says, well, easy choice, stationed to put me with him. So my brother and I did our tour in Vietnam together, in the same unit.

JS: How was that?

RT: Well, I got over, I really got over good. My brother was the proverbial red neck MP. And all the other red neck head busting MPs were his buddies, and it was like, their attitude was well, don't bother him, he's Towle's' kid brother. So I had kind of an immunity off that side. And then the MPs that were all cool and were decent people, their attitude was, don't mess with him, he ain't nothing like his asshole brother. So I had, you know, I had it from both sides there, I got away with a lot. And I'll tell you some things off the record later maybe. I don't think it needs to go on there.

JS: The, so did you get to see your family when you came home?

RT: Yeah, yeah, it was a, not a very good situation. My mother had gotten really fanatically Jehovah Witness religious so the whole time I was in Vietnam I never received correspondence from home other than those *Watchtowers* that they send out. You know, it's a, Jehovah Witness religion is they don't believe you should be in the military or any of that, because I was a sinner and evil one. I says, Ma, if I refuse to do any of this I could go to federal prison. Then do it. No, I'm not going that way. But if my brother hadn't been there, that would have been an awful long, lonely tour.

JS: Anything else you want to talk about?

RT: Oh I could go on for hours but I don't know if it...

JS: Well when you look, when you look back at Vietnam now, what do you think?

RT: I think it was a total waste of time and lives. We didn't accomplish a thing. The people are in exactly the same position as what they would have been in if we hadn't got involved at all. It was none of our business to be involved there, no more than being involved in Kosovo is right now. That was an internal conflict going on, it had nothing to do with our security. The only thing it had to do with is Good Year Rubber and your other industries. We had rubber plantations over there that they tried to protect, and it didn't matter which government was in control, they still would have had to sell their rubber. You know, and then you got, you know, the big thing of, you know, this government and country was built on war and it cannot survive without war, you know, economically we cannot survive without some type of war going on. We went into a depression when we got out of Vietnam, bad. All your industries that were there, your oil companies, your auto makers, your clothing makers, your food suppliers, all of that money, that was big, big bucks, big money. And that's the only thing we had, the only thing we were protecting was that interest. Now you had two governments, two government fractions that wanted to control their own government their own way, they had a civil internal strife, and we got in the middle of it. It would be the same thing as if suddenly Red China sent troops to Watts because they were rioting and people were getting killed. Wouldn't that have gone off big? But basically that's what we did there, that's what we're doing in Kosovo, all of that. They have an internal civil strife that we don't have any personal right at all getting involved in, which further makes Vietnam a total complete waste. They never learned a thing, because they're doing exactly the same thing again. So you got hundreds of lives that were lost for nothing, absolutely nothing. The only thing I can see that Vietnam did, it was a stepping block for military commanders, in order to get this medal and in order to get that promotion, you had to have this many hours of combat duty, and that's what it all boiled down to, it's all medals, medals and promotions. When they had that, that was it, Falkland Islands there, we did that little invasion, they issued out more medals than people that actually took place in that whole operation. You know, it makes the Purple Heart and the Bronze Star worth dog turd now, because they passed out these things so readily. They gave medals of merit to people that never even left the United States because they did a good job logistically, doing troop movements. I say, no, that's not what a medal of merit or Bronze Star or any of that is for. That's supposed to be above and beyond anything. They made them useless, they made them worthless. And my brother came

home and I look at his uniform hanging there when I get home, he's got a Bronze Star on it. I said, where the hell did that come from? Well they gave that to me before I left. No they didn't, I was there. He said, well they did, they gave it to me just before I left. I said, no, that's bullshit. The military being the way they are with pomp and circumstance and all, if they was going to issue a soldier a Bronze Star for any meritorious duty that he might have done, and they knew he had an immediate relative in that area, they'd have done the whole press thing of brother presents medal to brother. It didn't happen. He came out with a set of orders that says he earned a Bronze Star. I don't see where and how he possibly could have earned a Bronze Star, he was an MP on a base camp. And that was it. He did nothing else. He was an MP on a base camp. He did nothing that would possibly warrant getting a Bronze Star, that I could see. And like I say, the way the military is, they have played it right to the hilt, they'd a had the *Stars and Stripes* newspaper there, all of it. Brother presents brother with Bronze Star. And it never happened. But that's another story.

JS: I don't know if you want to keep going, or...?

RT: Well, are you going to set up any more of these or is this the only one?

End of Interview

ROBERT L. TOWLE SR.

1950 - 2007

TOGUS — Robert L. "Bob" Towle Sr., 57, of Auburn, passed away Sunday, Aug. 26, at the Veterans Administration Hospital, succumbing to cancer caused by exposure to Agent Orange while stationed in Vietnam.

He was born in Auburn on April 18, 1950, the son of Clive and Phyllis (Danforth) Towle.

Bob proudly served his country in the U.S. Army. Upon returning home he worked as a self-employed roofing and siding contractor.

He was a past member of the PAC, Androscoggin Red Cross, Vietnam Combat Veterans and Buckfield Rescue.

He always enjoyed helping others and his community, woodworking, black powder hunting, fishing and dancing to the oldies.

He recently married his companion of 25 years and is survived by his wife, Ann of

Auburn; his children, Vaughn Towle of Lewiston, Stan Towle of Saco, Robert Towle Jr. of Lewiston, Jay Towle, currently of Iraq, and his wife, Paula, of Washington, D.C., Kevin Towle, and wife, Amber Sargent, of Greene, Bryan Frank of Auburn, Kristina Rowe, and her companion, Christian Ducharme, of Auburn; stepmoth-



er, Esther Towle of Auburn; brother, Richard Towle, and wife, Debbie, of Albion; sisters, Nancy Armstrong, and husband, Walter, of Norridgewock, Elizabeth Caton, and husband, Peter, of Owls Head, Donna Doyon, and husband, Larry, of Minot, Rhonda Stratton, and husband, Ronald of Mount Vernon; six grandchildren; and numerous nieces and nephews.

He was predeceased by his parents.

Sun Journal

Central and Western Maine News

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