

US Army Vietnam Rangers (1966-1967) OH 5443

Narrator: Tony Schoonover

Interviewer: Mary Flynn

Date: September 10, 2014, 11:00 A.M.

Location: Golden Nugget Hotel, Las Vegas

An oral history with Tony Schoonover, a Vietnam Veteran of the 173rd Airborne Long Range Reconnaissance Patrol (LRRP), born October 31, 1939. This interview was conducted for the U.S. Army Vietnam Rangers 1966-1967: Their Stories of Survival Oral History Project by California State University, Fullerton. The purpose of this interview is to gather information of the personal experience of LRRP's in Vietnam and as Vietnam veteran. The Long Range Reconnaissance Patrol of 1966-1968 consisted of 8 teams of 6 men who performed covert four-day missions in the heart of enemy territory. Considered the nucleus of the United States Army these men returned home unwelcome by the American public and widely unnoticed for their bravery. Specifically this interview deals with biographical information and early understanding of national pride, military history, service in Vietnam, and realities of war affecting him and his extended family. Earliest memories of national pride began with seeing his father and uncle serve in World War II and the Korean War and retire as Colonels. He discusses his father's Post-Traumatic Stress Syndrome and coping with alcoholism. Speaks about various jobs before serving in the Army; after high school he went to work for the Kentucky and Indiana railroad terminal as a Carmen Apprentice; there he learned how to repair boxcars and to weld. He enlisted in the Navy in 1958 and was stationed abroad the USS Toconic, a flagship for the 6th Navel fleet. He describes the four years of service as miserable, later going back to railroad work. Less than three years later he enlisted in the Army for six years for the expressed purpose of going to Vietnam. After completing paratrooper school in 1964 he was assigned to Headquarters Company 6th Special Forces at FT. Bragg, NC as a clerk. Dissatisfied, he changed is Military Occupational Specialty to the 173rd Airborne after learning about their specialty in jungle warfare. He arrived to Vietnam on May 10, 1966 and served with the LRRP's for 26 months and 3 days as Radio Team Operator (RTO), Team Leader (TL), and Assistant Team Leader. He speaks extensively on hearing about the LRRPs; the panel of officers and interview questions, LRRP training, first patrols, and then transitions into recounting three specific missions with Team No. 3. He comments briefly on Vietnamese culture, his encounter with Vietnamese female fighters and the 1800 bounty for a LRRP team. He speaks about war crimes and an investigation about an ambush and killing of two women. In 1968, after desiring to sign up for a third tour his commander officer tells him its time for him to return home; He left Vietnam on April 14, 1968, speaks of his feelings towards war and the effects it had on him mentally, talks about how warped he was, and his family thinking he was insane and not fit around to be around civilized people; sleeping with his gun as if he were in the jungle. His describes alcohol as his coping mechanism; crediting his wife for saving his wife. He recounts his struggle with PTSD. He discusses why he carries openly carries a firearm with him every

day in Florida. He speaks about his anger when people would call him baby killer or wouldn't befriend him because he was a soldier. Lastly, he gives insight to his feelings toward national pride today and advises he would like to give to future generations.

OH 5445

Narrator: Mike Potter

Interviewer: Mary Flynn

Date: September 9, 2014

Location: Golden Nugget Hotel, Las Vegas

Language: English

Ephemera: N/A

An oral history with Mike Potter, a Vietnam Veteran of the 173rd Airborne Long Range Reconnaissance Patrol (LRRP.) This interview was conducted for the U.S. Army Vietnam Rangers 1966-1967: Their Stories of Survival Oral History Project by California State University, Fullerton. The purpose of this interview is to gather information of the personal experience of LRRP's in Vietnam and as Vietnam veteran. The Long Range Reconnaissance Patrol of 1966-1968 consisted of 8 teams of 6 men who performed covert four-day missions in the heart of enemy territory. Considered the nucleus of the United States Army these men returned home unwelcome by the American public. Specifically this interview deals with biographical information and early understanding of national pride, pre-Vietnam, Vietnam combat, and post war. He remembers at age six welcoming home his father and uncle who both served in the South Pacific during World War 2. Describes the morale of the time; people cheering for his dad and other soldiers who were returning home; mentions how he had no concept of a bad or good war, no knowledge of how people feel about it. He joined the Marine Corps on July 29, 1957 and headed to Camp Pendleton, California for Boot Camp and Advance Infantry Training. The Marine Corps did not provide the schools he wanted to go to; wanted to go to jump school, ranger school, recon school. He spent almost five years going back and forth from Okinawa, Japan and Camp Pendleton. After a series of jobs and three years later he was at a dead end; knowing he excelled within the military he decided to enlist in service for Vietnam. He joined the Army on April 27th 1965 and spent time in Ft. Ord and then Ft. Benning for Basic Airborne School. He speaks in detail about jump school, the training expectation, the mental and physical stamina, and pride in earning paratrooper wings. Potter discusses his understanding of political views of Vietnam War. In August 1965, volunteered for the 173rd and was assigned to a Transportation Commanding Office, driving a tractor and trailer until he volunteered for the LRRP in April 1966. Recounts interview process and the lists examples of questioned asked. Discusses recon school; recounts his first mission and patrol, and the mission that wounded him in December 1966. He recalls working in recruiting office in San Jose; recounts being spit on, yelled at. He recalls massive antiwar protest on San Jose State University campus. He returned to Airborne status for Special Forces in 1969 in Cambodia and talks extensively about the military training of native Cambodians. He stays in South East Asia until 1971, completing four tours. He ends with a description of his return home and reentry into American life; speaks about military duty as a career which he believes spared him from American public shame.

OH 5446**Narrator:** Carl Vencill**Interviewer:** Mary Flynn**Date:** September 10, 2014,**Location:** Golden Nugget Hotel, Las Vegas

An oral history with Carl Vencill, a Vietnam veteran of the 173rd Airborne Long Range Reconnaissance Patrol (LRRP), born September 23, 1940. This interview was conducted for the U.S. Army Vietnam Rangers 1966-1967: Their Stories of Survival Oral History Project by California State University, Fullerton. The purpose of these interviews is to gather information on the personal experiences of the LRRPs before, during, and after the Vietnam War. The Long Range Reconnaissance Patrol of 1966-1967 consisted of eight teams of six men each who performed covert four-day missions in the heart of enemy territory. Considered the nucleus of the United States Army, these men returned home unwelcomed by the American public and widely unnoticed for their bravery. Specifically, this interview deals with biographical information, pre- and post-war understanding of national pride, family military history, service in Vietnam, and realities of war affecting the narrator. Vencill was commissioned in the US Army as a Second Lieutenant of Infantry in 1964, following graduation from college and completion of ROTC (Reserve Officers' Training Corps). Following his commissioning, he was assigned to Fort Benning, Georgia. He talks about his training and completing Airborne, Ranger, and Pathfinder schools. Shortly thereafter, he received his orders for Vietnam. In 1966, after six months "in-country" serving as a platoon leader in an infantry rifle company, Carl was assigned to the 173rd Long Range Reconnaissance Platoon (LRRP) as the Executive/Operations Officer. He speaks extensively on initially hearing about the LRRPs, the interview process, and attending Fifth Special Forces Group Project Delta: Long Range Recon School, which included two Americans and four indigenous, either Chinese Hmong or Cambodian. He goes into detail about the technique of patrolling. He recounts a once-classified operation in Southeast Asia training the Korean Special Forces. He also worked with the CIA on Project Unity during this time. He reflects on the guilt he felt when he left Southeast Asia, leaving his indigenous soldiers behind. Throughout the interview, he recounts his difference experiences returning to the United States in between tours. He reflects on the 1968 Detroit Riots, American media coverage, and his thoughts on Jane Fonda. He shares his struggle with Post-traumatic Stress Disorder and the VA's prescribed treatment. He also discusses various other war-related health problems, such as skin and prostate cancer as a result of biological agents used in the war. Lastly, he gives insight into his feelings toward national pride today and the advice he would like to give to future generations.

OH 5447**Narrator:** Sid Smith**Interviewer:** Mary Flynn**Date:** September 10, 2014.**Location:** Golden Nugget Hotel, Las Vegas

An oral history with Sydney Smith, a Vietnam veteran of the 173rd Airborne Long Range Reconnaissance Patrol (LRRP), born February 29, 1944. This interview was conducted for the U.S. Army Vietnam Rangers 1966-1967: Their Stories of Survival Oral History Project by California State University, Fullerton. The purpose of these interviews is to gather information on the personal experiences of the LRRPs before, during, and after the Vietnam War. The Long Range Reconnaissance Patrol of 1966-1967 consisted of eight teams of six men each who performed covert four-day missions in the heart of enemy territory. Considered the nucleus of the United States Army, these men returned home unwelcomed by the American public and widely unnoticed for their bravery. Specifically, this interview deals with biographical information, pre- and post-war understanding of national pride, family military history, service in Vietnam, and realities of war affecting the narrator, including his long struggle with Post-traumatic Stress Disorder. Smith's early understanding of national pride was shaped by being raised in a military family. He speaks extensively about his father's top secret military job and the highs and lows of being an Army brat. Enlisting in the Army at age 20, he headed to Fort Jackson, South Carolina, to attend basic training, and Fort Benning, Georgia, for Airborne school. He goes into detail about his training in jump school and how he connected with Special Forces in Fort Bragg, North Carolina, because of his high General Technician (GT) score and excellent topography skills. He arrived in Vietnam in the spring of 1966 and was assigned to the 173rd Airborne Brigade as a Radiotelephone Operator, working as a liaison between an office and artillery headquarters. He speaks extensively on initially hearing about the LRRPs, the panel of officers and the questions posed at his interview, going through LRRP training, his first patrols, and guerilla warfare tactics. He reflects on four specific missions, the weapons he carried with him, moments where he was compromised and extracted, debriefings, and when his political position on the war changed. He briefly comments on encounters with jungle creatures and animals, the Vietnamese culture and prostitution, and being poisoned by local enemies. He left Vietnam completely alone in April of 1967. He speaks about dealing with PTSD, his feelings of betrayal by friends and family, and the Washington Riots. He goes into great detail about his treatment for PTSD at the VA (Veterans Association). Lastly, he gives insight into his feelings towards national pride today and what advice he would like to give future generations.

OH 5448

Narrator: Reed Cundiff

Interviewer: Mary Flynn

Date: September 9, 2014, 12:00 P.M.

Location: Golden Nugget Hotel, Las Vegas

An oral history with Reed Cundiff, He was Born August 9, 1940 in Honolulu, HI. He was a draftee and Vietnam Veteran of the 173rd Airborne Long Range Reconnaissance Patrol (LRRP.) This interview was conducted for the U.S. Army Vietnam Rangers 1966-1967: Their Stories of Survival Oral History Project by California State University, Fullerton. The purpose of this interview is to gather information of the personal experience of LRRP's in Vietnam and as Vietnam veteran. The Long Range Reconnaissance Patrol of 1966-1968 consisted of 8 teams of

6 men who performed covert four-day missions in the heart of enemy territory. Considered the nucleus of the United States Army these men returned home unwelcome by the American public. Specifically this interview deals with biographical information and early understanding of national pride, pre-Vietnam, Vietnam combat, and post war experience. He attended University of New Mexico and graduated in 1963 with majors in physics and mathematics. Immediately following he received his Masters in Physics at New Mexico State. He spent the Summer of 1963 working for the Peace Corps Training Center, later offered a job at Peace Corps training camps in Puerto Rico. After four months he received a draft notice and completed basic training at Ft. Polk, Louisiana. Looking for adventure, he eventually volunteered for Vietnam and went over with a Battalion, 4/503rd as a clerk. After learning about Long Range Patrol, he voluntarily went before a board and was accepted, later becoming a team leader. He speaks extensively on hearing about LRRPs; the panel of officers and interview questions—even the killing of children-- LRRP training, first patrols, and then transitions into recounting specific missions with his team. He speaks about performing recon at the Cambodia border, references my father on this patrol, being ambushed for five days. His tour of combat ended on April 2, 1967. He ends briefly about PTSD and how the draft should be reinstated.

OH 5116

Narrator: Michael Flynn

Interviewer: Mary Flynn

Date: November 27, 2014

Location: Santa Cruz, California

An oral history with Michael Flynn, a Vietnam veteran of the 173rd Airborne Long Range Reconnaissance Patrol (LRRP), born March 27, 1948. This interview was conducted for the U.S. Army Vietnam Rangers 1966-1967: Their Stories of Survival Oral History Project by California State University, Fullerton. The purpose of these interviews is to gather information on the personal experiences of the LRRPs before, during, and after the Vietnam War. The Long Range Reconnaissance Patrol of 1966-1967 consisted of eight teams of six men each who performed covert four-day missions in the heart of enemy territory. Considered the nucleus of the United States Army, these men returned home unwelcomed by the American public and widely unnoticed for their bravery. Specifically, this interview deals with biographical information, pre- and post-war understanding of national pride, family military history, service in Vietnam, and the realities of war affecting the narrator. Flynn's earliest memories of national pride began with his mother and father, who both served in the United States Army. He discusses his childhood extensively: his parents' broken wartime marriage, the election and assassination of President Kennedy, watching Lee Harvey Oswald's assassination on TV, living in fear of nuclear war, and the Cuban Missile Crisis. Flynn saw joining the U.S. Army as a way to leave his broken family life, and enlisted at the age of sixteen. Following the completion of his basic training at Fort Ord, California, Michael attended paratrooper school in Fort Benning, Georgia. He speaks in detail about his training there. Unable to ship off immediately to Vietnam because of his age, he was stationed at Fort Bragg, North Carolina, as a clerk in the 82nd Airborne Division, where he

saw soldiers coming home and shipping out again. Flynn discusses his political views of the Vietnam War, or lack thereof, at the time. After turning eighteen during the spring of 1966, he arrived in Vietnam and was reassigned to the 173rd Airborne Brigade 1/1 Charlie as an infantry motor man in the E Troop 17th Cavalry in Bien Hoa. Dissatisfied with the unsafe conditions for soldiers, many of whom died in these conditions, he joined the LRRPs, who were more highly trained and executed relatively safer missions. He has no recollection of the initial interview with the panel, but speaks in detail about how controlled each mission was. He recounts missions and ambushes, deaths of both fellow LRRPs and enemy soldiers, how his view of the war changed, and leaving Vietnam. He speaks about race issues, in particular regarding black soldiers. He discusses reentry into civilian life and the struggle to find peace with both his experience in the war and his childhood. He ends with his reflections on the war and gives insight into his feelings toward national pride today.