

University of Central Florida
RICHS Program
Community Veterans History Project

Interviewee: Benjamin Louis Abramowitz

Interviewer: Andrew Orleman

Subject: Service in the Vietnam Era Military

Date: April 11, 2011

O: Alright, here we go. Alright, my name is Andrew Orleman, I will be interviewing Benjamin Abramowitz. Born, when were you born sir?

A: October 8, 1934

O: He served in the United States Army during the Vietnam War, both after and before. Today is April 11, 2012. We are in Melbourne Florida, and this is for the UCF Veterans History Project. Alright, um Mr. Abramowitz, when and where were you born?

A: I was born at Fort Monmouth, New Jersey and I was born at retreat. It was a military post. My father at that time when I was born was a Staff Sergeant and we lived on the post, and I was the first child born in that army hospital there.

O: Tell me a little bit about your childhood.

A: Well, like I said I was born in Ft. Monmouth. Life was pretty steady, my father had been at Ft. Monmouth since about 1928 or 1927. He was married in 1933, I was born in 34. So it was a pretty normal youth, I was an only child. It's interesting because I used to wander around the post and somebody used pick me up and leave me off at the guardhouse and my father used to pick me up coming home from work, but everything changed on December 7th because I was about, I guess I was

seven and I had been to the movie post which was down the street and walking distance, everybody walked everywhere. Nobody took me to the movie, I went with my friends and sat in the front row, but I remember coming back about 3 o'clock in the afternoon, I was all excited about that movie, whatever it was. We were listening to the radio, my parents were listening to the radio, and I was about to interrupt, they said listen to this and it was the president saying that Pearl Harbor had been bombed. Life really changed after that because my father became commissioned right after the first of the year, we had to move off the non-commissioned officer's row and move to Long Branch - New Jersey and I had been going to school in Red Bank - New Jersey and school bus. And then we moved eventually back on the post again, and I went back to Red Bank. In 1944 my father went overseas and we moved back to Long Branch - New Jersey which is about seven miles away from the post in my mother's home town and we bought a home there. We stayed there until 1946 when we went to Europe, and we spent two years in Europe while my father was commandant of the signal school. We came back in 1948, my mother died in 1949, so pretty much my father and I were together. I went to high school, and then I eventually went to Virginia Tech after I graduated from high school. An interesting note was that in Germany, we lived in Ansbach - Germany, and I went to a dependents military type school under the dependents school system. It was a one room school house, I was in 7th grade and I really didn't want to stay in that one room school house for two years so I went to the teacher, a woman named Frieda Schliester, and I asked if I could do the 7th and 8th grade at the same time and she agreed. I went home and announced it and my parents had no objection and then the next year I went into the 9th grade, went to Nuremberg and I had to stay in the dormitory there 'cause it was 30 miles away. I used to go on Sunday come back on Friday night and that kind of thing. So it was an interesting experience. So I ended up starting high school when I was, I graduated when I was 16 because of that. I went to college when I was 16

O: Did your father speak a lot about his service?

A: Oh yea, I mean from the time I was two years old I always wanted to be a soldier. We used to do a lot of things together. My father joined the army when he was 14 years old, and spent 35 years in the army. He joined on the street, New York, he was an immigrant kid. Only was...arrived in this country when he was 5 with his

siblings and his mother, his father was already here. His father was a union organizer, (he) was murdered four months after he got here. So everybody in the family had to hustle and he used to say he came home from dinner one night, I guess he was 14 years old, there were seven people and six chairs and he enlisted the next day. He spent the rest of his life in the army, he only had about a 3rd or 4th grade education but he ended up retired as a Lt. Colonel commandant of the Signal School. The post field house, he was an Olympic athlete, the post field house at Ft. Monmouth was named after him and dedicated to him. Also the signal center at Ft. Gordon has been named after him. So quite the accomplishment, really the American story. But I always, uh, he was a great soldier

O: So you would definitely say he encouraged you to join the military?

A: He didn't encourage me or discourage me, but he set an example for me and I always wanted to do that. That was my ambition when I wanted, I achieved it.

O: Alright, so you said you went to Virginia Tech for the ROTC program.

A: At that time it was a military college

O: Oh ok ok, what exactly did you do in this ROTC program?

A: What did we do? Well first of all it was a full time cadet corps, and I was from New Jersey, I was big so I took a lot of hazing and harassment but I used to tell upper classmen "I will still be here when you've flunked out." They really loved to hear that and most of them did flunk out. The program was a normal program, I took infantry ROTC. We got a contract when I was a Junior, which really was a commitment when you were a Junior, and it used to pay me 90 cents a day. There were no ROTC scholarships, none of that. Which was big money, if you get 29 dollars a month or 30 dollars a month it was very good. I also played football at Virginia Tech for 2 years, I was injured, but it was an experience, it was a good education. Like I said I was sixteen years old, and I went there and I didn't know one person, I didn't know one person. I remember we were looking at schools, my father and I, we took our trip down there to take a look at the place and my father said... Well people asked me why I went to Virginia Tech, well my father said it would be a good place for me [laughs].

O: How old were you when you graduated from Virginia Tech?

A: Twenty, I was commissioned when I was 20

O: And you went directly into the military after that?

A: I graduated June and reported to Ft. Benning on August 11, 1955. The infantry school.

O: The infantry school, what exactly did you learn at the infantry? What did they teach you?

A: Oh you just learned everything. You had patrolling, you have leadership, you learned all about weapons, you learned about the code of military justice. It covered everything that a Lieutenant is supposed to know before he goes and takes over his first rifle platoon in an academic sense, but you never really learn it until you do it just like anything else.

O: Alright, so you said. Where exactly did you go after Virginia Tech? Did you go to basic training?

A: No I went to officers basic course

O: The officers basic course, do you feel that prepared you for your time overseas?

A: Oh yea, because remember when I was at Virginia Tech my Junior year, my summer, I went to summer camp. ROTC summer camp and it was good training. It's much different now than it was then but it was good training and well done but then after I graduated from basic infantry officers course I went to the 3rd Infantry division which was right at Ft. Benning which is where the course, where the school was. I became a rifle platoon leader and I did that until I left in 1957

O: And where did you go in 1957?

A: Well actually in 1957, it's awful cold in Ft. Benning in the Winter and an airplane, an army aircraft, landed where we were and I saw that the pilot looked pretty clean and I knew that he had clean sheets so I put in for flight school. And my next assignment, I was selected and went to flight school and 1957 I graduated October.

O: What exactly did you learn in flight school?

A: You learned how to fly an airplane and I flew fixed wing. I went to Ft. uhh Camp Gary – Texas which was a civilian contract school and after about four months there, I soloed and did all that, and it was difficult for me, I'm not a natural. Then we went to Ft. Rucker – Alabama, worked on advanced training and that's where I got my wings. Funny story was I was flying one day and my instructor was on the ground with a couple other students, and I was uhh landed on a road, where I was supposed to land, but as I was rolling out I looked at the instructor and gave him one of these [gives the A-OK symbol] like it's a really great landing and I crashed into a tree, and he was livid. He had never scratched metal before, and he said, he was just livid, and I said that was a great wheel landing I made and he said the roll out was terrible. And the next day I took a prop ride past it and eventually I got my wings.

O: What kind of planes did you train with?

A: All my training was in the L-19, otherwise known as the O-1A, single engine observation aircraft.

O: And then, you said in 1957 you left for overseas?

A: No what happened was I, from flight school I went to the 1st infantry division at Ft. Riley – Kansas where I became Peter pilot. I was in the artillery flight and had been there for about six months, several months, and there wasn't a lot of aircraft flyable. We had a lot of maintenance difficulties, and I volunteered to be the maintenance officer. We had 50 aircraft, many different types, and I became the maintenance officer. I figured it couldn't get worse and it got better so I did that. Actually, anecdote, I got married at Ft. Riley but during the time between when I got engaged and got married the unit flew to Ft. Bragg and I was the maintenance officer. This is a little anecdotal story that tells you about the time a little bit, I had the service platoon which were all the mechanics and the fuel trucks and the fire trucks and all the crew chiefs really worked for me. The army had contracted a civilian airport to buy our gasoline and stuff and we were gonna be there for about four or five days. So I arrived and I made arrangements for my soldiers to sleep in a National Guard barracks, you know in the armory. But when I arrived I had one

African American soldier in the unit, Spec Five Ranson, and the airport operator had bought a lot of stuff to sell a lot of stuff. He came up to me told me all these things he had prepared for my soldiers, and then he saw Spec. Five Ranson walking across the ramp and he says "everybody came come in except him." At that particular point I said well I'm sorry but the, your place is off limits and I didn't buy a drop of gasoline from him, I shipped my trucks back to Ft. Bragg to get my fuel. And very fortunately my company commander Major Dutch Laneman supported me on that, but that was in 1958, that's before civil rights and a lot of this stuff, but that just gives you a tone to do that. There was a certain amount of risk in that but there's always the right thing to do.

C So was that widespread, segregation?

A Not in the military, not in the military because the army became desegregated, the services became desegregated in 1948 when Harry Truman signed that executive order, but it really didn't happen until the Korean War started. Because when they were dealing with replacements it's hard to deal with replacements and black soldiers go here, other people go here, and Puerto Ricans go here. So the Korean War really forced it move along, by that time we didn't have a problem. In the South though, off the post, there was segregation. Water fountains were separated, bathrooms were separated, as a matter of fact in this place where we set up, South Carolina, I had my people dig a latrine because I wouldn't use his facilities. Of course there were no women in the military at that particular time.

O: So, after all this, when eventually did you go overseas?

A: After Ft. Riley, I went to helicopter school at Ft. uhhh Camp Walters, that was just a qualification course, and then I went to Korea on ground duty. In other words, see my branch was infantry, I was also an aviator. Now aviation is a branch, at that time you'd spend three years flying an airplane or doing aviation stuff and then you'd go back to your basic branch. I went to Korea, I was with the 2nd Battle group 12th Cavalry. This is after the war on the demilitarized zone and I was originally executive officer of company A. Then I became the, we were supposed to have 60 officers in the battle group, we only had 28. So I had, I was engineer platoon leader, I was supply and maintenance platoon leader, I was the motor officer, I was the property book officer, I was the assistant S-4. So I did everything.

But I'll tell you a little anecdote, when I was company exec we had an inspector general inspection, which is a big deal and it was unannounced and all that and the company commander was a way, a guy named Oz Hart, and we were in the mess hall. I didn't have any, all the cooks were all infantrymen because we didn't have any school trained cooks. Incidentally about one third of the company were KATUSAs, Koreans that were in, who served with the American army so they were right in the company. Anyway my baker made some cherry pie that was great, I offered the IG [inspector general] a piece of cherry pie with some ice cream on it. I said "do you want some more?" and he [IG] said "are you sure all the soldiers got plenty" and I said "We've got plenty of pie" and so he had another piece. So we went out to the ranks to inspect the soldiers you know, the inspector general always finds you one zombie right, and so you went to them and he's asking questions, looking at rifles, asked this one soldier, he said "how'd you like the pie for lunch?" He [the soldier] said "I didn't get any." So the IG looked at me because I told him we had plenty of pie for everybody. We go on, so the IG leaves, and I get this guy and say "you say you didn't get any pie" and he says "well I don't like pie, I never eat pie." You can't go back to the IG and say well listen I gotta tell you [laughs] this kind of thing but it worked out alright but it was an embarrassing moment. You gotta be prepared for those things.

O: While you were in Korea, did you get a lot of time for yourself, or any time to yourself for that matter?

A: No, you were up on the DMZ, pretty well operational. I had a lot of things to do. One thing was that you know every night all the officers would eat together in the little officers club. We would show a movie, played some bridge, but also we would, one of the training for officers, junior officers especially, was they were given a topic to speak on. So every night we had another Lieutenant speaking about some subject, a lot of it was off the cuff. They'd say give me five minutes on the life of the spider in Russia, I mean some off the wall subject, you had to speak on it for five to ten minutes. The battle group commander used to have me do that, he was a Colonel.

O: So after Korea where did you end up going?

A: I went back to, I came back and went to Ft. Bragg - North Carolina and I spent two years in the 82nd Airborne division where I was a platoon leader and then I was a, then I became, I commanded the maintenance company in the aviation battalion. Then I became the battalion operations officer for the house board tests, which was a big test. This tested the whole idea of air mobility operations, were talking 1962. Then interesting enough we were on a big operation just before I left Ft. Bragg for the advanced course, we were out in the field and we were travelling very light and I was the operations officer and I knew where all the troops displacements and it was a big show the next day for a lot of dignitaries. We had one of these terrific rainstorms, I was in a little small tent and I was speaking to people, I was doing this and that. The phone rang and I picked up the phone and lightning went through the switchboard and blew me right out the side of the tent. I was laying there and everybody was trying to wake me up because I was the only one who knew where everything was. So anyway, but I woke up and I lived through that.

O: You said you had time in Germany at some point?

A: Oh yea I went from Ft. Bragg to the advanced course, a nine month course for captains and then I went to Germany with the 14th Armored Cavalry in Fulda, on the border between East and West Germany. And again I had command of the service platoon, the maintenance operation, but then I took over the regimental headquarters troop. From there I became the regimental logistics officer, then I became the executive officer, and then I commanded the provisional squadron which was the medical company, the ordinance company, the headquarters troop, the engineer company, the aviation company, and all that.

O: I guess we'll get to your service in Vietnam now.

A: That's where I went from Germany

O: Before shipping out, did you know anything about Vietnam?

A: Oh yea, we had talked about it at the advanced course at Ft. Benning when I was there. I had read Street Without Joy by Bernard Fall which talks about Highway One and all the things going on there in Vietnam, so I knew about that. Of course it was all in the papers, not as much as maybe it should have been, it was in all the papers in everything. [inaudible] I left Germany in 1966, we were getting a draw

down. See usually you don't go from one overseas to another and I came back on a 30 day leave and shipped right out to Vietnam.

O: So what were your first impressions of Vietnam? Climate, weather...

A: Oh it's interesting because the army is never capable of doing anything in moderation. When we arrived we were required to wear class A's which was the green uniform. When I got off that airplane in Pleiku which was a mud hole and raining and I was going to the 1st cavalry division and it was just a mess. I'm thinking why would they every want to have us come in this kind of uniform, we should have been in fatigues or you know work uniform. But somebody came and picked me up at Pleiku and we flew to the 1st Cav. at An Khe and I became adjutant of the 11th aviation group for about 3 months. But I had to assign aviators, I was involved in a lot of operations like that because the 1st Cavalry division was the first air mobile division. So we had a lot of aircraft, a lot of aviators, maintenance; the whole thing was really a whole brand new concept and after three months I went down and joined the 1st Battalion 5th Cavalry as executive officer.

O: And what was your role as executive officer?

A: Executive officer, I sort of did anything that the battalion commander wanted me to do, of course, but normally I was, I figured out where I should be when I should be there. And I also supervised the staff work, and I also did go out on operations as well. So, it's not like you have a list of things you do. But I'll tell you another interesting little anecdote: because the division was so stretched out the battalion executive officers were also assistant inspector generals. Now you have a conflict there because as an inspector general you work for the division commander as a battalion executive officer you worked for the battalion commander. So I got a report from the IG, the division IG, to investigate some looting in the 1st of 5th Cavalry and he gave me a list, these watches were stolen from such and such village, this much money. Of course there was no rape, or murder, or any of that but this was just a looting thing; which was serious but it really tells you a thing about discipline in the command because you're not supposed to have that and that's a leadership issue. Some of that stuff comes up in Afghanistan, you read it in the papers and in Iraq. Anyway, I got all the company commanders and said this stuff has been stolen, uhh I want it here in four hours, I'm going to be out. In four

hours I came back and everything was there, the serial numbers on the watches everything. So I took it up to the, and I couldn't talk to my battalion commander about it because it was a different kind of investigation. So I took it all up to the inspector general, said the report is correct, here it is. I don't know who the perpetrators were but I think what we've done is make sure that somebody is watching and this will not happen again and fortunately nobody got injured or anything. Then I got, and then I went to the battalion commander, his name was Jim Map, he just died last November. Terrific battalion commander and I told him I said "Sir I had to do this investigation, this is the result, this is what I did" and he said "Well you had to do what you had to do". Enough of that, now he had ^{WON} ~~one~~ the distinguished service cross as a lieutenant in Korea, he was a fearless guy but he was really comfortable in his own skin. Somebody else might have handled that situation differently, could have been the end of my career. A week later I got a call from the division chief of staff, a guy named Casey who later died commanding the division, and he had been my brigade commander and he called me and he says "You know we sent that report to nine maneuver battalions," battalions that were out on operations, and he says "yours was the only battalion that said the report was correct" and he said to me "you can work for me anytime." Which was really nice.

O: Did you get a lot of time off duty in Vietnam? Obviously not a lot of time but any time?

A: I didn't have any off duty time.

O: So you didn't have any.

A: I didn't spend, even my second tour, I never went to Saigon, I never went to a.. I mean I never went... I was always 100% on duty.

O: So what were your first impressions of the local people, the Vietnamese people?

A: My 1st tour I didn't come much in contact with them. My second tour I was an advisor so I became very close to them. They're just like everybody else: they want food for their family, they want to raise their family, they want to see them educated, they like security, you know they are just like everybody else.

O: Umm did you get a lot...sorry...did you...hang on...alright I guess we'll just move on. What was your first contact^{with} the enemy? Do you recall?

A: Well are you talking about one on one?

O: Not one on one, what was your first experience fighting or in combat?

A: Well one incident was when the battalion had pulled out and gone on an operation and I had, we call it the battalion trains (the cooks, the bottle washers, everything) back at a landing zone. While they were out discovering nothing we were attacked that night and we didn't lose anybody, and we uh, but we inflicted quite a few ~~casualties~~ ^{casualties}. We had set up our perimeter and everything so that was an actual engagement, but the battalion was engaged all the time. I went out on an operation with Charlie company one time on a night raid, I did that and that kind of thing. When I was with the Vietnamese as an advisor I was actually more out than I was here because of the difference in duties. But if you waited long enough the Viet Cong or the VC would come to you, you didn't have to go to them.

O: Did you have an experience with any of the traps or booby traps or mines or anything?

A: Oh yea yea, well...you really have to be careful. I'll tell you another incident. When I arrived at the 1st ^{of the} and 5th Calvary it was in December. I landed on the helicopter and it was another battalion commander, it wasn't Jim Map, he took over later. The first thing he told me, he had interviewed me for the job and accepted me but I didn't know it, and he said to me "I want you to go and relieve Captain such and such from C company." At that time the battalion was in like a stand down, it was either the Tet or a break period or something. C company was on the South China Sea and they had been on operations for four or five months. I landed there, oh I said "why are we gonna relieve this guy?" and he said "because two of his men drowned," you know swimming. And I'm thinking first of all he's the battalion commander he ought to relieve 'em, you don't send me to do that. That's the way it was. So I get on the helicopter, get up there, and the company commander reports to me and I said "what happened?" He told me, what happened he set up security, he had lifeguards, and these guys just went out there got sucked in by and over tow and were gone. I didn't relieve him, I came back, remember I

had been in that unit for 24 hours. I got off the helicopter, the battalion commander came up to me and he says "where's captain such and such?" and I said "I didn't relieve him." He says "you didn't relieve him? I told you to relieve him." I said "hear me out" and I told him, you know, what he had done and he said "well he didn't ask for my permission for those men to swim." I said "the company commander has been out in the bush for three months, four months straight. Leading ambushes, patrols, search and destroy missions, and making all these decisions. Let's say he asked you if his men could swim, and you said yes. Is the brigade commander going to call you and say these men died I'm going to relieve you because you didn't ask my permission?" I mean this guy has been leading people in combat. Why would you uh, I mean it doesn't make sense. Well anyway he didn't relieve him, and the captain went on to win a silver star later and worked for me a couple times after Vietnam.

O: What would you say your defining moment of your first tour in Vietnam would be? If you had to pick one moment.

A: What's that?

O: The defining moment, what would you most remember or recall?

A: I think the defining moment was when we were attacked that night at a place called LZ English and we beat off the enemy, because like a say the soldiers were not riflemen back then they had all different kinds of specialties but they did their job and we were able to coordinate and we were ready for them. And I called up the battalion commander who was way out in the Chu Pong Mountains or some place and I said, "while you were out romancing and finding nobody, they found us."

O: And were you fighting the NVA or the Viet Cong?

A: Both.

O: Would it be easy to tell the difference?

A: Not really.

O: They didn't operate differently?

- A: You know it was hard to define, the intelligence people could tell you the difference, but when you're being shot at it doesn't make a difference.
- O: Yea it doesn't matter who is shooting. So after your first tour what did you end up doing?
- A: I went to the Command and General Staff College at Fort Leavenworth.
- O: What exactly did you learn?
- A: It was a nine month course, it was for Majors, and it was a great course. Again it was part of the military training, you studied everything: counter insurgency you cover, geopolitics, you covered division tactics, it covered ethics and leadership, all kinds – logistics, everything. There was a thousand officers, and when I was there it was the largest class: 1,400 officers were in the course.
- O: Do you feel like you were adequately prepared by this for your second tour in Vietnam?
- A: Oh yea but I didn't go directly there, I went to the Pentagon after that and I was Chief of International Standardization.
- O: What exactly does that entail?
- A: Well it's funny, because I went there as an action officer and they always say as a major, I was a major at the time, I got promoted to Lieutenant Colonel soon after. They always say you're like a paperboy if you're a major, that's not so in the Pentagon. I was an action officer in this international standardization office which we were the people that developed and had the army implemented all our international agreements as far as whether it be casualty tags that NATO people can read and we can read, how to call for artillery fire had to be standardized between the NATO countries and us. Ammunition, I mean you can't have 42 logistic trains delivering ammunition. We agreed that we would use ammunition of a certain caliber so that it would fit, so I was involved in all those agreements and that stuff. The office was very small, about 7 people, and it was in a...a guy who ran the department if you will, the area, was a 3 star general – a guy named Ace Collins. He had all these directorates who were all major generals and then me, I

was in this thing as a Major. My boss left, was leaving, full colonel who had more time as a colonel than I had in the army. We knew he was leaving, and I went into his office and said "you know if you're leaving I can probably take your job" and he said "no you don't have enough experience and this and that." [inaudible] About four days later I got a call from General Collins, he called me up to his office he says "I'm gonna give you the international standardization office" and it was a colonel's billet. I said "yes sir" and he said "now you can...." Now you gotta remember this is during Vietnam, and international standardization not a priority issue, but he says "if you ever need me for anything you call me." And I said "Sir you got a lot of people blocking for you" and he called in his deputy who was a major general and his chief of staff and said "if Abramowitz wants to talk to me, let him see me." See he taught me a vital lesson, he knew if I wanted to talk to him I didn't want to talk about the weather. I know he's a busy guy, so if I wanted to talk to him or it was an important issue to me. It might not be important to him, but it was important to me. And he could probably, he would deal with it or information or whatever. So that was an important lesson. As a result I became, and then I went, then he said "let your boss know I'm giving you the job." I said "sir I asked about this job a few days ago and he said I wasn't ready, so maybe its best if you called him" because maybe he'd think I was doing a cabal here, conspiracy. But anyway I took over that office and I did it for a year and a half, every time...we'd have meetings at the highest level I was always there, he always gave me the opportunity to speak first on any issue. So it was a great learning experience, and I did that for a year and a half. I was an action officer for a year, and then the army was nice enough to let me go to George Washington and get an MBA. I spent a year doing that.

- O: So obviously you had other things going, what drove you to take on a second tour in Vietnam?
- A: Well first of all I got a call, my assignments officer was a guy named Schwarzkopf, have you heard the name?
- O: Yea, the uhh, Norman. Norman Schwarzkopf?
- A: Yea, Norman. Stormin Norman. I had gone to the advance course with him and he was a Lieutenant Colonel, he was my assignments officer. And I called him and I

said "Norman, they got this deal where I can go for this MBA, and I can do it in a year and you'll let me go to do that." And he says "we'll let you go, but you just volunteered for a second tour in Vietnam."

O: Ohh I see

A: And I said Ok, and my orders said that. Don't tell my wife. Anyway we went to, and that's the first time you know it was a matter of fact I said "do you need any paperwork?" He said, "No just let me know that General Collins said it's ok." And General Collins said it was ok. But I didn't have any paperwork and I went and then after I finished my MBA, I did it in a year, it wasn't a problem. And then I shipped out as an advisor to the 8th ARVN regiment.

O: So, uhh, what year did you start your second tour?

A: 1971-72. It was the tail end here. There was the Easter offensive, and I was involved in that.

O: Did you feel that there was a difference in American involvement between your first and second tours?

A: Oh there's no question about it, when I got there the second time we were getting out of the picture. As a matter of fact my advisor team was about 15 people, but there was no American forces. There was the, 1st Cavalry had a brigade in town, Jim Hamlet commanded that. But there was very little and people were trying to get less engaged not more engaged so I was more or less out there and I got to the point where I had all my advisors, my regimental advisors, I got them reassigned to different places because here was no reason to expose a lot of people if you couldn't even do anything. In the sense of you couldn't call for gunships, you couldn't even call for your own medevac so I left it with me and one major so I had somebody to talk to. You didn't need fourteen people to wave the American flag, one person could do that.

O: How did you get over the language differences between you and the men you were advising?

- A: I learned a little Vietnamese and they gave me an interpreter. My uhh counterpart, regimental commander, could speak some English. So we got along alright, we could all understand the tactical map.
- O: What was your regiment's role in the conflict at that point?
- A: Well we were uhh, when the Easter offensive started my regiment was supposed to go in to a place called Loc Ninh right on the Cambodian border. About five days before the Easter offensive started. At the last minute our orders were changed and we were in a Michelin plantation. Actually the 9th regiment went there and I knew the advisor, they lost every advisor, was killed or captured. They lost the whole regiment, I mean just by the luck of the draw that was me. When the Easter offensive started we were being shelled and mortared where we were and the commander, 3rd regions assistant commander, was flying over and he asks me, he says: "what's going on down there?" I said, "well were being mortared and shelled and I gave him the coordinates." And he said "I can't see it from here." Now he's at 10,000 feet or wherever he was and I said "well let me put it this way, as my mother would say this is no place for a nice Jewish boy." And he shut off his radio and kept on going. [laughter]
- O: According to your bio-datasheet it says you were wounded in action?
- A: No it doesn't say that.
- O: Well maybe that's...well alright.
- A: I do have uhh, Agent Orange got to me and I have some affliction from that but I was not wounded in action.
- O: Alright well also it says you were given the Bronze Star for valor.
- A: That was at the incident at the LZ at uhh when we were attacked at LZ English back in 1967.
- O: Like with your first, what would you say was your defining moment of the second tour in Vietnam was?

- A: The defining moment was my counterpart and I, it had to be about in March 1972, we were flying in a command and control ship, Huey, and we saw what amounted to be at least a battalion of NVA in the open. I had never seen a battalion of NVA in the open, and we had assigned to us, attached to us, a Vietnamese air force, because they had all the helicopters, gunship company. They were Hueys with rockets and stuff like that, and they were attached to us, and we called for them to lift off and attack this bunch of people. Anyway the response was “were having lunch.” About 20 minutes later we call back and they said “we’ll come if you give us a generator and so many pounds of rice and this kind of thing” and I looked at my counterpart and said “the war is over my friend.”
- O: Yea, so after this do you feel like the South Vietnamese were really prepared to continue the fight without American assistance?
- A: No, no and you know I want to tell you something, it was discouraging too. It was, when a Vietnamese regiment or regimental commander had a responsibility not only for the regiment but all those families and stuff that were with them. There was corruption, no doubt about it, not in all places but the Vietnamese soldier was a good soldier. I mean again with leadership you’ll do what you want, but it just got, you didn’t know who was who.
- O: When you say corruption, what do you mean by it?
- A: Well it was, people had to give part of their pay up to their superior. You know the idea of corruption is, if you’re a village chief in Vietnam and you get a bunch of cement ok, to build a school. So you take 10% of the cement and you build your mother a floor in her house. Well they wouldn’t consider that corrupt because instead of the school lasting 90 years it will last 85 years and your being a good son-in-law. You know but if you stole 50% of it and the school collapsed the next day then you’d be corrupt. I mean it’s a whole different, it’s endemic in that kind of culture and in some ways endemic in our own culture. If you even look at what’s going on in China today, about the objections to the corruption and doing deals and that kind of thing. It’s a cultural thing, but basically I think what they had going for ‘em was a civil war.

O: That we were involved in. Alright, so after your second tour and you were returning home, how were you received by the average person?

A: Well I want to tell you something, first of all when I came home; I stayed in country an extra ten days because I was surrounded. But I got back to the, I came back to what is known, the ~~core~~^{corps} headquarters. I got on the scale and I weighed like 175 pounds, and I was sick. I found out later I had tropical sprue, I didn't know it then because the only medic I had was a Vietnamese medic and he [inaudible] or something. It was interesting I went to a dinner that night that the ~~core~~^{corps} commander had where they gave me a decoration, but I was really, it was really like surreal because I had just come from a place that was miserable, hot, you know not a very nice place to be. I got back there and there was all silver and white table cloths and people making jokes and it reminded me of the movie *Paths of Glory* a little bit because when the French were in their chateau, you know the ~~core~~^{corps} commander and everything. There were no dancing girls at this place, and meanwhile there were people in the trenches and it was like it was two different worlds. When I got back, I did not, I never ran into a lot of the stuff they talk about. Nobody spit on me, even when I was at George Washington University getting my MBA, which was 1970 right, I was working with a steady group just like you work with. I'm sure these guys were not in favor of the Vietnam War, but I never got anything like that. I just did not see it, I was never insulted, you know maybe I was just oblivious to it. But you know it's interesting, if you go by, you see a lot of people say their homeless veterans. First of all there's more people, if as many people were in Special Forces in Vietnam as claimed they were, the country would have gone out of sight and sunk. A lot of people make up and embellish that, sometimes I'll see a homeless guy, a homeless veteran, and I'll ask him what unit he was in and he doesn't know. Everybody knows what unit they were in.

O: So you stayed in the military through 1983, what did you do after, what was your job?

A: After I left the military?

O: Well no, after you got back from Vietnam, sorry.

A: Ohh I went to Lehigh University where I was professor of military science for a year. And then I went on the faculty of Ft. Leavenworth, the command and general staff college for five years. And then I went back to Ft. Riley where I ran the ROTC program in Southwestern United States. Also, during that time I was responsible for the ROTC program in historically Black colleges as well. A contribution I think I made that is probably still standing, I had all the institutions in Louisiana/Arkansas/Alabama/Mississippi and actually in historically Black colleges there was really no interaction, people from those schools would come to the summer camps, they'd never worked with Caucasian people in many cases. What I did I started a program during the school year, when they were getting ready for summer camp, we would bring them all together on a couple field training exercises and mix everybody up so they'd get used to working with each other. This is a very different, in many respects, a very different society. We're talking about late 70's early 80's, you know the high schools weren't integrated in Midland Texas until 1982.

O: Did you get a lot of resistance from people when you were doing this?

A: No, people knew it was the right thing. It was a big exercise to get it done and I had people to help me but it was an area like. Not 100% of the cases, but African Americans not many of them swim. I had a concerted course in getting people to learn how to swim, because you know that's one of the criteria you have to do and we did that.

O: Do you continue to stay in touch with many of the people you served with?

A: Oh a few, yea. In fact I'm going, I've been invited to go to a C company, that's the company commander he's now passed. I've been invited to go to the reunion in New Orleans the 11th of June

O: Exciting

A: I'm the oldest man standing

O: Now that you've had a lot of time, how do you feel about popular representation of the war in Vietnam like movies? Do you feel like they do it Justice?

A: Well first of all I walked out of Platoon. The reason I walked out of there was because they took every bad apple, every bad thing, and stuck it into one platoon. We did a lot of good things there, My Lai was an aberration and they didn't teach that in the cover up, they didn't teach that at the infantry school. You always have people taking the easy, what they would think is the easy way out. Sometimes you've got to bite the bullet. You know when people ask me about the Vietnam War I say "it seemed like a good at the time" you know. Even McNamara, in his before he died, in his book he gave a big mea culpa. People, you know, did they die in vain? Did they not die in vain? Well you can look at it this way, Vietnam is still a communist country. I've been there since, I took my grandson and my son went. And uh it's, you don't see people walking with weapons on the street, they are doing business. You know the end result was, there wasn't a domino effect, they sell stuff all over the world, they are just trying to survive.

O: You said you went back, how were you received?

A: Oh with no animus, as a matter of fact, the tour guide, my son was stationed in Korea at the time and his son went with us (our grandson who's now in the army, graduated from West Point, he's at Ft. Bliss). He um, the woman guide as we left looked at me and called me close and said "I appreciate what you tried to do." The country looks to be viable, open, certainly they have museums that depict Americans not in a very good way with Agent Orange and that stuff, that kind of thing. But it's like, while I was at Ft. Riley my last tour, we were able to commission three of my sons: we have the oldest Dave who graduated from the Air Force academy and went into the army, just retired from the army after 31 years last week. Commanded everything up to a brigade, he was the inspector general forces command. My middle son Sid graduated from Tulsa University ROTC served, was called up for Desert Storm, he was also drafted by the NFL and played in the NFL for four years. My youngest son Alan is graduated from Kansas State and served 8 years in the reserve, left as a captain, that's what Sid did. Went to the peace core, did a lot of different stuff. He now runs the Guardian ad Litem program in Florida. David the oldest runs the department of Children and Families for the Northeast region in Jacksonville and Sid has his own business in Atlanta.

O: I think I already...

- A: We have another grandson Alex who just enlisted and he's a combat medic in the 82nd Airborne.
- O: So obviously you have a military family.
- A: Four generations!
- O: I feel like I know the answer to this, would you sign up for the military again? Do it all over?
- A: Oh I'd do it all again, it was a great life. A Lieutenant in the army has more authority and is able to use more initiative than the vice president of AT&T. I mean the forty people who are working for him or whatever; he has a lot of latitude. I mean he's trained and not everybody makes great choices and that kind of thing but it was a great, every day was different. I enjoyed going to work every day. Now some days were better than others but just like at everything.
- O: Alright for the end here, do you have any further comments or concerns? What would you say to someone looking to study the Vietnam War?
- A: First of all it's a myth that all these people that left Vietnam, you know served in Vietnam, came out with some kind of mental defect and were homeless and everything. The majority of the people, a big majority of the people, successful; they went to the GI bill, got educated, they went on with their lives, not a problem. A small minority get tagged for that. Another thing that people have a misrepresentation of, we had a half a million people in Vietnam I think at our highest, we have 100,000 in Afghanistan. Out of the 100,000 people in Afghanistan, well let me give you an example: in a rifle company in Vietnam if you have 100 men operational doing rifle company infantry stuff that's a lot. So using those kinds of figures, this is just anecdotal but it's true, most of the people aren't engaged with the enemy. I mean there might be a mortar round that drops on your place every three months or three days or whatever but it's not like that infantry platoon at that little fire base out on some hill top and has to go out every day and go into a village and knock down doors and do all that kind of thing. There's very few people who do that, most people don't.
- O: Alright, well I've got to thank you for giving your time and your words

A: Any time

O: I appreciate it

A: I've got to give one more piece of credit, to Irene, we've been married 54 years and she raised our three boys when I was away most of the time [laughs]

O: The real hero.

A: That's right

O: Alright thank you very much

A: Well thank you very much, I hope we got a good take, how long was it for?

END OF INTERVIEW