COMPARISON OF NARRATIVES: AMERICAN VETERANS OF THE VIETNAM WAR AND OPERATION IRAQI FREEDOM

By Janal J. Emmer

At the heart of every person is a story, an account of a significant life event that is often hidden within the memory. When memories are written down, the past becomes a story, a style, a piece of literature. In this form, the personal narrative has two functions: a memory is information storage, communicating events across time and space; and second, memory recorded in a visual format allows people to examine it in a different way (Goff 59).

The personal narrative itself floats somewhere between nonfiction and fiction, and finds a home amid the short story, novel, and autobiography. However, it resists these genres because memoirs generally lack a plot, climax, and ending. According to Don Ringnalda, in Fighting and Writing the Vietnam War, it is sometimes difficult to distinguish between a memoir and a first-person novel because the lines separating fact, fiction, memory, and autobiography become blurred (Ringnalda 74).

The personal narrative also negotiates with the historical document. Memoirs have sometimes been considered neighbors of history, and historians and memoirists have also been grouped together from a literary perspective. The testimony provided in personal narratives enters the historical domain when it provides information about specific historical events, but poses problems for historians because the elements cannot meet the test of historical accuracy (Hynes 15; Goff 186).

According to Samuel Hynes in The Soldiers' Tale: Bearing Witness to Modern War, "Personal narratives are not history; they speak each with its own voice, as history does not, and they find their own shape, which are not the shapes of history. They are neither better nor worse, neither more nor less valuable than history; they are simply different" (Hynes 16). Personal narratives are restricted to a single perspective, biased, and full of emotion (Hynes 15). At the same time, personal narratives are vital to our understanding of the cultures and experiences of the past. They capture the expressions and nuances of language over time. Furthermore, each person's shared memories and language reflect aspects of media, society, and time, both during the event itself and when recalled days, months, or years later.

This thesis involves the collection of personal narratives from American veterans of two wars: Vietnam and Operation Iraqi Freedom. Through these narratives, it will be evident that media, society, and time are woven into the fabric of memories, and their resulting narratives. In addition, the narratives provide insight into how time affects the state of memory. These wars were chosen because the United States has received criticism over its involvement in both conflicts, and anti-war sentiment is reflected in society, media, and literature.

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by

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To my son, Cameron, you are my inspiration and motivation for completing this project. To my husband, Clayt, and to my parents, your support in so many ways has been a God-send. To my colleagues, friends, and family who served multiple functions as readers, editors, listeners, advisors, and other roles, I owe you more gratitude than can be repaid. To my interviewees, the time and consideration you gave for your interviews, along with fielding additional questions as my thesis progressed, were priceless. Without you, this paper would not have been possible.

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INTRODUCTION

"ANYONE WHO SAID THEY WEREN'T SCARED OVER THERE IS EITHER A FOOL OR A LIAR."

At the heart of every person is a story, an account of a significant life event that is often hidden within the memory. When memories are written down, the past becomes a story, a style, a piece of literature. In this form, the personal narrative has two functions: a memory is information storage, communicating events across time and space; and second, memory recorded in a visual format allows people to examine it in a different way (Goff 59).

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This thesis involves the collection of personal narratives from American veterans of two wars: Vietnam and Operation Iraqi Freedom. Through these narratives, it will be evident that media, society, and time are woven into the fabric of memories, and their resulting narratives. In addition, the narratives provide insight into how time affects the state of memory. These wars were chosen because the United States has received criticism over its involvement in both conflicts, and anti-war sentiment is reflected in society, media, and literature.

The Subjects

I utilized contacts from family, friends, and colleagues to identify veterans who were interested in helping with my project. I interviewed nine veterans in person. This research sample of veterans is not considered a scientifically valid group. While two currently reside out of state, all those contacted resided in the state if Wisconsin at the time of their enlistment or draft. All the veterans that I interviewed in person reside in the state of Wisconsin. All interviewees considered themselves members of the middle class at the time of their combat experience. A majority of the subjects grew up in rural communities.

I included three narratives from each war (six altogether), although I conducted more than six interviews and received additional information from other veterans. Due to space limitations of this thesis, I chose to include narratives that provide a vision of the war from different perspectives: support services provided on base; technical support in the field; and infantry/field experience. Narratives included in this thesis came from the following veterans:

Ernest (Vietnam, 1966-67). Ernest was drafted into the Marines on November 22, 1965, serving until November 21, 1967. He served in Vietnam from June 2, 1966 until June 11, 1967. His military occupational specialty was 0844, Field Artillery, Fire Controlman. Location: DaNang south to Chu Lai and north to the Demilitarized Zone (DMZ)[1]. Rank at discharge: Corporal.

Foxy (Vietnam, 1968-69). "Foxy" was drafted into the Army in March 1968, serving until April 1970. He served with the 146th Battalion in Vietnam from August 1968 until August 1969. His military occupational specialty was Infantry. Location: Chu Lai. Rank at discharge: Specialist 4.

Jack (Vietnam, 1969-70). Jack was drafted into the Army on August 14, 1968, serving until June 5, 1970. He served in Vietnam from September 1969 until June 1970. His military occupational specialty was radio. Location: Cu Chi. Rank: Sergeant.

Dan (Iraq, 2004-05, 2006-2007). Dan enlisted in the Army in April 2003. At the time of his interview, Dan had completed his first tour of duty, which lasted from March 2004 until March 2005. Dan returned to Iraq shortly after his interview for his second tour of duty, returning home in December 2007. His military occupational specialty is military police. Location: Baghdad, Iraq. Rank: Sergeant.

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[1] Smith explains that in 1954, the Geneva Agreement divided the Vietnam into two approximately equal parts. The line separating South Vietnam from North Vietnam is usually referred to as the 17th parallel because the line separating the two halves runs along the Song Ben Hai River, which is very close to the 17th parallel (H Smith et al. 9).

Tank (Kuwait, 2005-06). "Tank" enlisted in the Army National Guard in December 2000. At the time of the interview, he was at home, on leave. He served from November 2005, returning home in November 2006. His military occupational specialty was Field Artillery. Location: Kuwait. Rank: Staff Sergeant.

Wayne (Iraq, 2004-2005). Wayne enlisted in the Marines in April 1990. He served in Iraq from August 23, 2004 until February 25, 2005. His military occupational specialty was 1391 Bulk Fuel Specialist. Location: Tallil air base, near An Nasiriyah, Iraq. Rank: Staff Sergeant.

Literature Review

The idea for this thesis came from reading Witnesses to the Holocaust: An Oral History, edited by Rhoda G. Lewin. This book provides first-hand accounts of those who survived the Holocaust, whether in concentration camps or not, along with stories from American soldiers who liberated those in the concentration camps. The idea of preserving individual memoirs of those personally involved in war is intriguing, as they provide individual perspectives amid war strategies and political theories.

In order to get a handle on the literature about the Vietnam War and more recent conflicts in the Middle East, I read two war narratives: Tobias Wolff's In Pharaoh's Army: Memories of the Lost War, and Anthony Swofford's Jarhead: A Marine's Chronicle of the Gulf War and Other Battles. While reading these books, I also began to collect memoirs from veterans of Vietnam and Operation Iraqi Freedom, and write their war narratives. Through the books and interviews, my goals were to explore how narratives negotiate with memory, and determine ways in which outside elements such as media, society, and time are reflected in that negotiation.

Wolff provides an account of his tour in Vietnam, from boot camp and training as a paratrooper, to his assignment as an advisor to a Vietnamese battalion in Vietnam. While his experiences were unique, certain aspects coincide with the narratives I collected from Vietnam

veterans. These details ranged from talk of the fire direction center that provided artillery support, to discussion of the enemy and guerilla warfare. It provided a solid base of knowledge from a personal rather than strictly historical perspective.

Along the same lines, Swofford recalls his own personal journey from boot camp to his tour in a U.S. Marine Corps Surveillance and Target Acquisition/Scout-Sniper platoon during the (first) Gulf War. His story is unique, yet provides a bridge to the narratives I collected from veterans of Operation Iraqi Freedom. Although Operation Iraqi Freedom came years later, common themes exist regarding the heat, humidity, blowing wind, sand, and tumbleweed. He describes the enemy as abstract, because he has not seen any to that point. He also describes the general populace as potentially dangerous, because they could be hostile or working for the enemy. He had to be cautious and could not trust anyone. This idea is similar to both groups of veterans I talked to, who said the enemy could be anyone. They, too, had to constantly be on guard in case a seemingly innocent person had hostile intentions. Another interesting correlation was the idea of toeing the line when it came to questions of American involvement. Swofford, like the veterans I talked to, mentioned how they could not speak out against their own country, how they had no rights because they signed a contract.

One element that both books, as well as the veterans I interviewed, have in common is how they tell their war stories. Whether it is fiction, truth, or a mixture of both, they speak with conviction, determined to share what they experienced. Their stories resound with their will to survive, and are filled with various changing emotions and states of mind, including fear, loneliness, caution, camaraderie, sympathy, indifference, and more.

The most important research tool I found is The Soldiers' Tale: Bearing Witness to Modern War, by Samuel Hynes. He provides an analysis about how narratives from different wars change, why they change, and how media and other aspects of war have affected society. He also provides a lengthy discussion regarding the truth and reliability of soldiers' narratives compared to historical documents.

Hynes takes great care in placing war narratives within literature. He claims that it is a genre without a tradition to those who write them. However, it has a place among literature, at the same time similar to autobiography and history (Hynes 4-5). These narratives are similar to autobiography because the war narrative is the personal story of one person's account of a specific time in their life. Furthermore, war narratives are like history, because they unfold within a chronology of actual events. They are also shaped like history, dealing in real, linear time (Hynes 5-6).

Hynes also contrasts war narratives to autobiography and history to show they are not completely within the realm of these genres. While the events that soldiers tell correspond to actual world events, they are not concerned with a sense of place in terms of location, time, and the wider political landscape. In addition, soldiers remember the events different from other men who were there. They are concerned with what happened to them and how it felt, rather than why it happened or how it affected the rest of the war or the world (Hynes 11).

According to Hynes: "Memoirs are retrospective, filtered reality, what memory preserves. Remembering is like looking at the sun at sunset, through the earth's atmosphere; it's still the sun, but the light of midday has been turned to red. Time is like that, an atmosphere that alters what we see" (Hynes 23). While Hynes' book ends at the Vietnam War, its research elements can be applied to Operation Iraqi Freedom due to the similarities between that war and the Vietnam War, as well as research that is universal such as information Hynes provides regarding the reliance on and importance of memory.

Marita Sturken's book, Tangled Memories: The Vietnam War, The AIDS Epidemic, and the Politics of Remembering, also contributed to my research in very measurable ways. She provides an analysis of the interplay between remembering and forgetting. She also discusses the wavering boundaries between history and memory. She explores how history and memory is generated and preserved in various forms, from

memorials and film, to docudramas and literature, and how these forms change or affect memory. She claims that we do not need to ask whether a memory is true, "but rather what its telling reveals about how the past affects the present," (Sturken 2) as well as how the act of forgetting affects what is remembered and why.

An important element in Sturken's research is the effect of media and Hollywood movies on the soldier. She claims that Hollywood movies and docudramas affected soldiers' understanding and vision of war before they arrived in the combat zone. They were inundated with media messages of patriotism, good versus evil, and masculine valor and ability in combat. When soldiers returned home, Hollywood narratives and docudramas became the dominant representation of the U.S. experience of the war (Sturken 85-86).

Sturken claims that Hollywood movies and media coverage complicate and blur the lines of memory. For soldiers returning from combat, their stories do not match stories covered on TV and in newspapers, and are therefore rendered unbelievable. This further marginalizes soldiers. Also, images in films and news coverage distort events and create new memories for soldiers. Over time, veterans sometimes have difficulty distinguishing their memories from pop culture, and cannot tell where some of their memories have come from — their own experience, documentaries, photographs, or Hollywood movies.

In order to develop a list of questions and learn techniques to maintain objectivity during interviews, I consulted "Oral History as a Primary Resource in Educational Research," by Harriette McAdoo. In this article, McAdoo defines oral history as a "body of spoken narratives that are told by people about themselves and their environment. Narratives give an accurate view of how people view themselves at a given point in time" (McAdoo 415). She discusses the limitations of such research, namely the ability or inability to check its accuracy, which I mentioned previously in differentiating narratives

from historical documents. I also consulted "America in Vietnam: An Oral History Project," by Beatrice Spade. Although somewhat dated, this article presents strategies and challenges for an oral history project including Vietnam veterans. This article was extremely useful to me in developing a list of suggested questions and determining a strategy for my research process.

Methodology (Collection of Narratives)

Contacting Possible Interview Subjects

As stated previously, I utilized connections through friends, family, and acquaintances to obtain the names of possible interview subjects. I contacted each possible interview subject in person or via telephone or e-mail in order to explained my project, gauge their interest, and request their participation. I contacted three soldiers from Operation Iraqi Freedom, and all agreed to be interviewed. They were very open to the interview and did not express any hesitation in sharing memories of their combat experience.

I contacted a number of Vietnam veterans, and received mixed responses. I contacted a large group of veterans at a reunion. While all agreed to consider my project, most decided they did not want to participate. Two veterans sent information, one via written response and one via tape. Two other veterans agreed to be interviewed in person. I contacted additional veterans in order to obtain more in-person interviews, and found it relatively easy to find Vietnam veterans who were willing to be interviewed for my project.

One element absent in this thesis is the presence of women interviewees. In order to keep the research balanced for both wars, I chose to interview only men because American forces in Iraq include more women than in Vietnam and participate in roles

that were previous restricted to men. In 1970, women accounted for 1.4% of the armed forces and were confined to base jobs such as nurses and clerical work. Today, women comprise 15% of U.S. forces. They are restricted from only 10-20% of military positions, most in the infantry and special forces (Hillman, 156; Appy 137). Women do, however, remain concentrated in health care and administrative occupations (Hillman 156-7). While more than 61 American servicewomen were killed in Iraq by October 1, 2006, only eight American servicewomen were killed during the entire Vietnam War (Appy 137). Women have contributed greatly to both wars, whether on the front lines or behind the scenes. However, their inclusion in this thesis would open the text to new questions that cannot be tackled fairly in a research paper of this size.

I acknowledge the limitations of the research sample I have chosen. It would be impossible to include a completely representative sample of interviewees from either war in a research paper of this size, due to variations in gender, ethnicity/racial identification, economic background, combat experience, and current residence. However, my purpose is not to provide scientific data, but to share the stories of these veterans and to draw conclusions based on these stories and additional research.

Type of Collection Used

I interviewed nine veterans in person, utilizing a tape recorder. These interviews provided the most detailed answers and the most usable data. During interviews, I was able to ask additional questions based on answers provided, or request interviewees to expand on their answers when necessary.

I also provided tapes and a list of questions to approximately 10 veterans who requested to answer the questions on their own. I received four tapes/packages back. The information received from these veterans was incomplete. Since I did not interview these veterans in person, they tended to provide yes/no answers with few details. One person

sent a sheet of paper with yes/no answers and did not provide any details. When I had first met him in person to ask if he would help me with my project, I could tell from his body language that he was not interested in sharing his Vietnam experience. I knew from our conversation that he had been a "tunnel rat," and I believe his experiences in this role exposed him to things that he wanted to keep to himself. I received another document with vague answers to my interview questions. This person remained on base during the war, and I decided not to pursue with further questions at this time. Yet another soldier told me on his tape that he would not tell me what he had seen and done, because nobody would believe him. While the limited content received from these veterans did not result in written narratives, I was able to utilize the information they provided as research for my study. Some of the information I obtained this way was also helpful by prompting me to ask additional questions of other veterans during in-person interviews.

In order to write each veteran's narrative, I transcribed the tape, then organized similar information together, utilizing thematic grouping of accounts. Since I asked interviewees questions in a chronological format, the transcriptions followed that path. The fragmentary nature of these interviewees can be attributed, to a large degree, to the order in which I asked questions. In order to write the narratives, I considered a number of options. Initially, I chose to write completely chronological stories. However, forcing the information into this structure resulted in less than optimal narratives. Therefore, I re-wrote the narratives, this time connecting elements by opening with the most exciting, detailed information available, then transitioning to various aspects of each soldier's combat experience.

Defining the War Narrative

War narratives are first-person testimonies of experiences (Hynes 224). However, defining this genre in terms of what experiences are applicable is difficult. During the

Vietnam War, men were drafted. While some people might think that all men who were drafted were actually sent to Vietnam, this is not true. Some were in the field in Vietnam. Some spent a majority of their time on base or on a boat. Some were never sent to Vietnam.

A similar situation exists for Operation Iraqi Freedom. Some enlisted men are in the combat zone, either in the field or on base. Some are at military bases in other parts of the world. Some are in the U.S., training, providing support, and protecting the country while other soldiers are in the combat zone.

There also appears to be a misconception that all soldiers sent to war are in grave danger. There was a general consensus among my interviewees that a five-to-one ratio exists during war. That is, for every soldier in the field, five soldiers remain on base providing support services. These services include payroll, food preparation, vehicle maintenance, communications, medical aid, and other services. According to my interviewees, this five-to-one ratio equates to a smaller percentage of soldiers who are actually in grave danger.

With these ideas in mind, I decided to conduct all my interviews and decide later whether to distinguish combat from non-combat veterans. Ultimately, I defined a war narrative as a story from a soldier who was sent to the war zone during a specific conflict, whether they spent their time in the field or not. Only one interviewee did not fit this definition: I interviewed a veteran who knew that if he did not volunteer during the Vietnam War, he would be drafted; therefore, he volunteered on his own terms. He was able to plan for his absence and find people to operate his farm while he was away. He went to boot camp and spent his entire military time in the U.S.

I consider the rest of my interviewees combat soldiers. I interviewed a few men who were sent to Vietnam, but spent their tours on base with varying amounts of travel outside base. One soldier helped build bridges and other structures, including barracks

and landing areas, while another was a mechanic who kept equipment running. I also interviewed an officer who was in charge of communications and left base occasionally to set up outposts. One might consider soldiers in the services sector "safer" than those in the infantry. However, the enemy did try to overtake bases, and soldiers could recall events where mortars or rockets came in, or other dangerous events. One even recalled his attempts to keep landing areas open amid enemy attacks, because it was the only means they had to receive/send needed supplies, soldiers, and air support.

Soldiers who were not on base also served different roles. Some provided coordinates for artillery support and participated in different missions on occasion. Some were infantry, out in the field, hunting the enemy and being hunted by the enemy. Some performed tunnel rat work. Some carried radios. Some went out on reconnaissance. It is impossible to accurately determine the extent of danger each individual soldier faced.

The same held true for veterans of Operation Iraqi Freedom. One interviewee spent most of his time on base, making sure all vehicles were running, inspected, and had the proper maintenance. He went out on specific missions to work on bridges. Another spent his time patrolling streets as a member of the military police. Another spent his time on a base where all the ammunition was brought in. Although those who stayed on base did not see action in the field, they were certainly in danger while providing base security and other services.

I chose to include narratives that provide different perspectives of the war. Each narrative provides a piece to the war's puzzle, together providing a more complete picture of the war in question than news reports or historical documents have provided. According to Hynes, "The soldier's tale of Vietnam is all of the stories. We must not choose among them" (Hynes 222).

Information Soldiers Were Willing or Unwilling to Share

All the veterans were willing to be identified by their first name, although two chose to use nicknames they were called while serving. The interviewees did not seem concerned about their stories or information being recognized.

The interviewees were very open with their answers and the type of information they were willing to share. Even those who are still in the military were willing to provide their opinions about America's involvement in the war, as well as their opinions about war in general. Some of these opinions contradict information given to the general public by the government. One veteran of higher rank was more hesitant about these questions, citing the duty to "toe the line," but answered my questions with considerable candor.

Emotional connections affected what soldiers were willing to talk about, especially regarding the topic of killing. According to Hynes, there is an absence of personal killing in war narratives, because veterans seem to feel a reluctance regarding the act of killing and seem to hold back from confessing to the essential act that soldiers are required to perform during combat (Hynes 66). When the act of killing is included in narratives, it is positioned as part of the war's strategy (Hynes 189).

The responses I received from Vietnam veterans agree with Hynes' observations. They seemed to be emotionally connected to what they have done and seen. While one veteran was able to claim how many deaths he was credited with, and a couple veterans recalled the first person they shot, they generally did not talk about killing the enemy. Only one veteran talked about going into villages and killing those who were still alive. The veterans were more concerned with the death and loss of their friends rather than the loss of the enemy.

While Vietnam veterans would at least acknowledge killing the enemy in Vietnam, veterans I interviewed from Operation Iraqi Freedom seemed to almost completely distance themselves from the fact that they have or may have killed people. They talked about seeing people shot or blown up as if it was larger than life. But they could not, or would not, admit they had killed anybody.

One interesting piece of information that was not revealed occurred during my interview with Tank. He did not reveal the location of his base. His base received all the ammunition for the entire theatre, so it was important to keep that information confidential. He only gave a general north/south description. I did not ask for the location because this war is still in progress, and I wanted to avoid any security issues.

What Kind of Pictures Soldiers Paint

First and foremost, I must explain my goal in writing each soldier's narrative: to give a voice to the veterans' experiences in war, to let the "voices" tell their own stories. I did not enter my voice into the narratives because I did not want individual stories to be taken over by my author voice as explanatory and controlling. I also did not want to depersonalize the veteran for the sake of author-reader relationship.

War narratives convey the diversity of the war experience. They each differ in tone and paint a unique picture of experience. Some convey a sense of cynicism and disillusionment, while others are very matter of fact or upbeat (Hynes 153). Some recurring themes in war narratives involve the strangeness of war — a strange world, strange rules of engagement, the strangeness of war's happenings, confusion of battle, and strangers waiting to kill. Death is another recurrent subject in war narratives (Hynes 19-21). Some Vietnam veterans' memories are centered on the indiscriminate killing of children and innocent civilians; others try to convey the idea that death and cruelty are commonplace in war (Hynes 191, 194). "A true war story is never moral. It does not

instruct, nor encourage virtue, nor suggest models of proper human behavior," (O'Brien 68).

One element absent from most war narratives is the glamorization of war and heroics. Generally, there is courage of endurance rather than heroic courage. The courage found in most narratives is not told as acts of killing but protective acts — recovering one's own wounded or dead, or covering fellow soldiers' withdrawal (Hynes 22, 214).

The veterans I interviewed included elements discussed by Hynes, as well as other elements. Jack painted a picture of a Vietnam officer who felt isolated. While there were plenty of soldiers around him on base, he had very few people he could talk to due to his position as an officer. He was a loner, and spoke matter-of-factly in everything he said, whether it was positive or negative. Ernest, on the other hand, focused on camaraderie. He believed that American soldiers in Vietnam looked out for each other. He felt he was safe, for the most part, with a glimmer of danger and death. His story is that of loss in terms of friends dying and in terms of innocence that must be thrown aside in order to survive. The overall vision of Foxy's story is of the sad state of affairs in Vietnam during the war, including the destruction of lives and land, and the loss of a culture. Since he saw the most in terms of death and destruction, his observations are more graphic and filled with a sense of loss for both sides during the war. He also thought about the lives that were ended, never to realize their possible potential. He talked about how there were a lot of intelligent people in Vietnam, many who were taken out of college, some of whom had planned to become dentist or doctors: "I always thought it was a double waste," he said. "They took intelligent guys from college. Did they make it back to finish their education? Some didn't, I'm sure. And maybe one of them would have discovered a cure for cancer, or a better way of doing something, or some kind of new technology. That was the hard part. What a waste of humanity."

For veterans of Operation Iraqi Freedom, different pictures emerged. Most described their combat duty as an enjoyable experience. Tank gave me the impression that his tour was very easy, and he had not experienced anything negative. Wayne also described an enjoyable tour of duty, but did mention some danger and destruction. His message of the negatives of war pertained to the poor children who had nothing and begged for whatever the soldiers could give them. Both Tank and Wayne spent a majority of their time on base. Dan, on the other hand, spent much of his time off base on patrols, and provided a danger-filled vision of hidden explosives and an enemy who would use any means necessary to hinder their efforts. He also painted a picture of the people: the sadness of those who begged for things, the cruelty of the people who celebrated when American vehicles were blown up, and the senselessness of those who did not cooperate in spite of receiving help from the soldiers. These soldiers' impressions of the enemy and the general population were not positive for the most part. While they have sympathy for the Iraqi children, they have little sympathy for the adults.

The groups of veterans from both conflicts had similar visions regarding two elements: the unseen, unrecognizable enemy, and the enemy's use of guerilla warfare, which coincides with documents that describe the enemy as impossible to identify, who rarely stood and fought, and who would fade away and return when it was to their advantage (C. Smith 319). According to Dan, soldiers' jobs were made more difficult because they did not always know who the enemy was; anybody could be the enemy — a little kid, a woman walking down the street. Women would strap bombs to their own bodies and make it look like they were pregnant. They would walk up to a crowd of military personnel and blow them up. "We were faced with the reality that we couldn't trust anybody," Dan said. "Part of this thought process came from training, and part from experience."

Both groups also talked about guerilla warfare as fear inducing. Dan talked about snipers who would shoot and run, or shoot and hide. They would plant grenades on the ground, hoping someone would pick them up and get their hand blown off. He said that they would also bury roadside bombs in the concrete, or casually place them in the open, lying on the side of the road: "It could be anything, look like anything, from an empty soda to a bundle of trash — anything," Dan said.

Foxy's description of warfare in Vietnam was similar. He described how the enemy would use a number of cruel tactics to kill or injure American soldiers. If they knew a troop frequently traveled down a certain pathway, they would string a wire across with a grenade. Then, when a soldier tripped the wire, the shrapnel would hit their leg or stomach. The enemy would also bend bamboo poles (with nails pounded in), way back with a cord that was hidden in the brush. When a soldier tripped it, it would spring back and hit him. According to Foxy, nine times out of 10, the soldier died. Another tactic was the use of punji pits built in the ground. If a leg fell through one, one's natural reaction would be to pull it back out. The pits held poles with carved hooks full of dung; the end would dig into the leg when it was pulled up. The poison would get in and cause blood poisoning, and the soldier would have to be flown to Japan for medical care. Foxy said, "We were very conscious of these traps, because we didn't want to die such a horrible death."

Evolution of the Word Enemy

During interviews (and resulting narratives), and well as my analysis, the term enemy is used loosely to describe those on the other side of combat. This term carries moral consequences, because it can at the same time describe defined and potential aggressors, while not members of a specific military group. For example, the word enemy could be used to describe groups equivalent to U.S. forces, such as the North Vietnamese

Army or the Iraqi armed forces. However, the term is also used to describe organized groups, such as the Viet Cong, as well as unorganized groups, such as insurgents and suicide bombers. It can also be used to describe women and children who are bribed or forced into the role of enemy, as well as sympathizers. During war, sometimes the lines become so blurred that soldiers, for example, have called all Vietnamese people the enemy, because they could not distinguish among the groups of people, whether civilians or otherwise. Use of the word enemy draws a line between people, and should not be used lightly.

The term's meaning has actually changed over time, as modes of warfare have evolved. In "The Psychohistory of Warfare: The Co-Evolution of Culture, Psyche and Enemy," Ofer Zur analyzes six types of war that showcase the evolution of war as well as the evolution of the term enemy.

The first type of war, called primitive/ritualistic warfare, emerged with civilization and consisted of an ambush or face-to-face battle. It was usually an annual or biannual ritual, and the enemy was symbolic. Different groups or tribes played their own role in the event, where they could alternately win or lose (Zur 128). The key difference between this type of warfare and modern warfare is that the enemy was designated as the other group because it was available, and the enemy was not perceived as evil or threatening (Zur 129).

The next type of warfare, the political war, evolved in the fourth millennium and continued with other types of warfare until the end of the eighteenth century. It was prompted by attempts to control additional populations and resources, and was marked by rows of soldiers who moved forward against an anonymous enemy that faced them in a similar manner. The enemy was perceived as the obstacle to the acquisition of material items, land, or power (Zur 129).

The heroic/aggrandizing war coexisted with the political/greedy war, but it differed because the participants were trained, professional soldiers. This type of war was a rite of passage as boys became men, and tested human ability, bravery, and endurance. The enemy was respected, and considered a worthy adversary. Neither side was forced to fight, but when it occurred, it was considered clean fighting between brave men (Zur 129-130). The enemy was a specific person, but he, along with his supporters, were not hated. These wars were more about prestige than violence and killing (Zur 130).

The Holy War followed. The enemy was considered the enemy of God. Killing the enemy forced the evil forces and power away, and provided a future for the believers. The enemy represented all that was evil: sinfulness, impurity, dirt, and ultimately death. This is the first type of warfare where the enemy represents evil. The role of the enemy was not ritualistic or metaphorical, but considered a "real threat that must be eliminated" (Zur 130).

In modern times, society has come to define warfare as terrorist or guerilla in nature. It is a defense against an invisible enemy. This type of warfare is hard to define and is waged against a new type of enemy that is a covert fighter. The enemy does not always wear a uniform or approach openly, instead using the cover of foliage or disguise, often mingling with the other side before striking. This type of enemy produces terror and hatred, because they can strike anytime, anywhere. They use improvised explosives that are difficult to detect. This type of warfare affects society's sense of well being and increases its sense of anxiety and insecurity (Zur 132). The Vietnam War and Operation Iraqi Freedom are perfect examples of this last type of warfare, both of which claim an unseen enemy that cannot always be defined or identified. While there are definitive "enemy" sides (North Vietnam, Iraq), there have been additional fighting groups and sympathizers that blur the definition of the term enemy.

Throughout this thesis, therefore, the term "enemy" is used by interviewees and myself to describe opposing forces that have been considered a threat to the goals of the U.S. The term "enemy" is used as an all-encompassing term, whether it is formal armed forces of the opposing participant, insurgents, sympathizers, or seemingly innocent women and children used by these groups to cause death and destruction.

What Voice the Stories Were Told in

A distinction regarding voice does not exist among veterans of either conflict. One soldier from each conflict consistently used second person. However, almost all interviewees slipped into second person at some point during their interviews. I believe it reflects conversational language used in America. We include second person to generalize something we are talking about, to soften something that might otherwise sound harsh, or to invite the audience into our experience or topic.

For my interviewees, the use of second person when talking about death and destruction served to generalize what happened instead of placing them in a position of blame. It was also a way to help soften or justify their actions. For example, consider the comment: "You do what you have to do." When hearing this, the audience might be less apt to negatively judge someone for something they have done. Most people can imagine themselves in a position of survival and relate to the soldiers' vulnerable positions.

I left as much conversational language as possible in each narrative to give readers a sense of that person. I did fix some grammatical issues in order to clarify what the interviewee was attempting to explain.

Narrative organization was also a challenge, in order to maintain the speaker's voice while offering some kind of logical flow of information. According to John Carlos Rowe in "Eye-Witness: Documentary Styles in the American Representations of Vietnam," different narrative organizational methods exist for war narratives. They might

be chronological, utilize thematic grouping of accounts, or employ clusters of images (Rowe 134).

While different methods of narrative organization exist, Hynes suggests that war narratives generally lack a meaningful continuity due to variants among soldiers. Combat action could occur anywhere at anytime, with no grand strategic intention to ground the narrative. Furthermore, they are not shaped by military events because many soldiers were not part of important documented battles (Hynes 206). There is also a lack of specific locations or dates given by soldiers. According to Hynes, "Their narratives are indifferent to the exact location of events in time (they rarely put dates to their actions) or in space (either they never knew exactly where they were or they have forgotten the names" (11).

The answers I received during interviews were somewhat vague in terms of time and place. The transcriptions became groupings of incidents, stories of small battles, ambushes, guerilla warfare, and contact with civilians, along with stories of nights in the field. Since I asked the questions in a chronological format, most answers followed that general organization. However, amid that chronology, most soldiers talked in a circular fashion. When I asked a question, they provided an answer, then slipped back to something they had talked about already, or moved on to a new topic. One interview occurred over the course of two sessions, so the second interview included a lot of the same information, but also carried additional details that had been left out in the first interview.

How Speakers Frame the Audience

Each Vietnam veteran I interviewed began by telling me how he was drafted. Although it didn't fit into their narrative, I felt that each veteran's unique story was important, so I included a paragraph at the beginning of each narrative, explaining how

they were drafted. The veterans from Operation Iraqi Freedom began their stories by telling me why they decided to enlist. Those stories are also unique; therefore, I framed the beginning of their narratives in a similar fashion as the Vietnam narratives.

There were no definite ways the interviewees framed their audience. Because I am a female, I believe they avoided using profanity. I only encountered one usage of "gook" as a derogatory term for Vietnamese people, and there was very limited use of profanity in their answers. Foxy did explain how he swore more during the war and after, how it had become part of his life. He talked about the use of "F- this and F- that." However, he did not use actual profanity during his interview or while explaining how his language had changed during and after the war.

This is somewhat uncommon in war narratives. During previous wars, profanity was missing from war narratives for two reasons: publishers did not allow it, and some writers purposely avoided using coarse language. However, for many Vietnam narratives, coarse, common speech is a necessary part of the story (Hynes 181). Tim O'Brien agrees. In The Things They Carried, he says that when men are sent to war, they come home talking dirty. He considers obscenity a mark of truth in war narratives (O'Brien 69). The term gook was one word used by soldiers, and is a derogatory term used for Asians, which carried over from the Korean War (Shulimson, Blasiol, Smith and Dawson 615).

The interviewees were also less descriptive when I asked about the use of prostitutes and other activities that may have occurred during the conflicts. Perhaps it was because they did not know firsthand about such matters. Only a couple veterans talked about it at all. Foxy explained about how a religious person talked to them about sex. He said that some men had sexual relationships, but that he himself had not. Dan talked about how approximately half the soldiers cheated if they had the opportunity. He said, "A lot of people that did cheat already had bad relationships going there, so being apart for a year did not really help."

This, again, is somewhat unusual for war narratives since Vietnam, which was actually the first war to include sex and prostitution in narratives (Hynes 187). Since my interviewees were very vague in their discussion of sex and prostitution, I chose to leave the information out of the narratives because it did not add value to the story due to the lack of detail. Only one of my interviewees was single while in combat, and he was the only one who reported having found a companion.

Veterans want to tell their stories for a variety of reasons. For some veterans, "the telling gives disordered experience order and therefore meaning; in the telling he finds the man he was and the war he fought, and how he was changed and why" (Hynes 284). For the listener, the story puts a face and voice to events in history (Hynes 284).

People were so caught up in protests and worrying about their loved ones during the Vietnam War that few took the time to find out what the veterans really experienced. Some veterans may have become introverts and never told their families specific things they saw or did. Some came home to families who made it a rule not to talk about the war. Therefore, some veterans want their stories told in order to explain what the Vietnam experience was.

Use of Figures of Speech and Metaphors

I was somewhat concerned after completing my interviews. I thought that most of the information, while interesting, lacked dramatic language and details. However, after reading Hynes' book for the second time, I found that my narratives are on track with what Hynes has found to be common among war narratives.

Hynes says veterans render things as they are. The style in which war is described remains flat and uninflected, emptied of abstractions. There is no plot, no climax, no happy ending. They report war in plain vocabulary, describing objects/actions in "unmetaphorical terms." War narratives work at a level below the big words. Soldiers do

not try to make their narratives literary or heroic in nature. They speak in their own voices, their own plain language. "They bear witness" (Hynes 30).

While most of the information I gathered during interviews was direct and undecorated, as Hynes describes, the veterans I talked to did use occasional figures of speech, along with occasional descriptive passages. Dan, for example talked about how he had seen some people get "lit up" when American soldiers set up a checkpoint near Baghdad in 2004. I added a small phrase to clarify that "lit up" means to shoot someone. He went on to talk about how he did not know if the people died, but how "half of the old guy's head was shot off."

Tank used very descriptive language to describe his arrival in Kuwait in 2005 ("When I first arrived, it smelled like garbage and a porta-potty"), as well as the American soldier compared to the enemy there, adding a bit of humor when talking about the American soldier and the enemy: "Everyone looks the same," he said. "They wear the same clothes. They don't have a sign that says, 'I'm the enemy.' That would be too easy. They blend in, and we stick out because we're white, and we have different haircuts, and we have clean-shaven faces. It's funny. You get a couple military people walking together, and all of a sudden, if you look at them, they're in step walking. The people over there, they're relaxed. So we stick out like a sore thumb."

Tank also likened his experience to that of a Western, and he used very interesting language when he described the terrain of Kuwait as a cross between an old Western movie and Indiana Jones[2]: "The terrain is all sand and prairie grass: flat, and really brown. It's like watching an old Western, where the tumbleweeds are rolling. Stuff like that is going on all the time."

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[2] According to The Internet Movie Database (IMDb), Indiana Jones and the Temple of Doom was set in India and released in 1984 (http://www.imdb.com/title/tt0087469/plotsummary).

Ernest, fighting near Da Nang in 1966, recalls that there was no time to know whom they were fighting: “We had one guy, I know, who ended up shooting a kid. The day before, a kid threw a grenade in a bunker and blew up two of the guys,” Ernest said. “Then they put this guy out there, and he was kinda jumpy anyway. The kid threw something, and before it got there he shot the kid. It happened to be a stone. But if it’s a grenade, once it’s in the hole with you, it’s a little late. I guess my theory on a lot of this was that when you’re at war, do unto others before they do unto you. It’s either you or him. And that was the mentality of the guys in Vietnam.”

During his interview, Foxy used the word “Charlie” to describe the enemy: “Charlie was all around us; there were no frontlines. We were on the defensive all the time, constantly watching 360 degrees. So we spent most of our time walking around, saying ‘Come on Charlie, here we are, come get us.’ When they came at us, we’d quickly get into our positions.”

Foxy also used the use “tunnel rat” for those soldiers who crawled into enemy underground tunnels to flush out the enemy and remove usable items. “As a skinny little runt only weighing 129 pounds, I volunteered as a tunnel rat for three months until my nerves got to me and I said I couldn’t do it anymore,” he said. “The enemy had an extensive network of tunnels, which they used as a primary means of moving. Inside the tunnels were ammunition storage, hospitals, kitchens, air raid shelters, and workshops. As tunnel rats, we had to squeeze through damp, tight spaces and craw along narrow passages only about 4-5 feet high, to search for the enemy, as well as ammunition/weapon caches and other items that the enemy could use against us. The job was extremely dangerous, because tunnel rats could encounter the enemy and deadly traps, as well as a host of animals from bats and rats to spiders to snakes.”

What to Leave in, What to Leave out

As a writer, I initially felt the need to include every last detail provided by interviewees. I felt as though I was robbing their story if I left anything out. However, as I edited the stories and considered the intent of their language, I realized that much of what they said was not necessarily meant for a larger audience, but rather to give me perspective of where they were, to put them (and me as audience) in context with the war they fought in.

I received a wide range of information during my interviews. In order to limit the length of this thesis, I needed to remove information that, although interesting, did not add significant value to the narrative. For instance, some soldiers gave me very detailed descriptions of their lives and families. I included only information needed to add clarity to their narrative.

I also removed basic training information. Most of my interviews were very chronological in format, because I asked questions chronologically. While the basic-training information was interesting, most of the information from the veterans was very similar. There were very few unique details that set any particular boot camp experience apart enough to open the narrative with it. It was impossible to weave basic training into narratives without beginning each story with essentially the same information. Instead of writing the veterans' homecoming stories into their narratives, this information found a home in Chapter 3, (Conclusion).

Another element that must be acknowledged is how details change over time. It is important to note that details change over time. In the narratives, I attempted to verify as many details as possible utilizing military resources. However, it would be impossible to verify specific details about daily life and smaller battles that were not documented as part of larger operations. In addition, whether the details are true or fiction, it is still a part

of that veteran's war story, because it is what they remember. "In any war story, but especially a true one, it's difficult to separate what happened from what seemed to happen. The angles of vision are skewed," (O'Brien 71). O'Brien states that when the story is told later, the story seems untrue, but represents the truth as it seemed to the person telling the story (O'Brien 71). I will discuss the aspects of time and truth at length in the conclusion.

CHAPTER TWO

NARRATIVES

"EVERY DAY IN VIETNAM WAS A CLOSE CALL."

At this point, my critical perspective is that each war narrative will be taken as truth as far as each veteran remembers it. The stories will not be able to be verified to a great degree, because they are very personal in nature. However, I will analyze each set of stories (Vietnam War vs. Operation Iraqi Freedom) in order to provide a cultural analysis comparing how media, society, and time are reflected in the memories veterans share.

The following narratives provide documentary evidence that gives a voice to the ordinary soldier. The participants represent a collective group of soldiers who have not had the opportunity to tell their stories in a permanent format. The narratives provide a reality for readers as to what soldiers really saw and did during the above-mentioned conflicts. Their narratives will help readers explore the culture and experience of war narratives, and understand that soldiers have experiences and memories that vary from historical documents. The narratives also capture veterans' feelings, expressions, and personal language, which is often muffled by history books, censored by media, or held within the confines of the memory.

Each soldier's war narrative is told separately. While there are similarities and differences, it is really the stories that set each soldier apart in some way. Whether it was a tour of duty in the jungle or desert, or spent on base, there are unique aspects and stories that come out of every soldier's experience that cannot be lumped together with any other story.

Vietnam War

Ernest (Vietnam, 1966-1967)

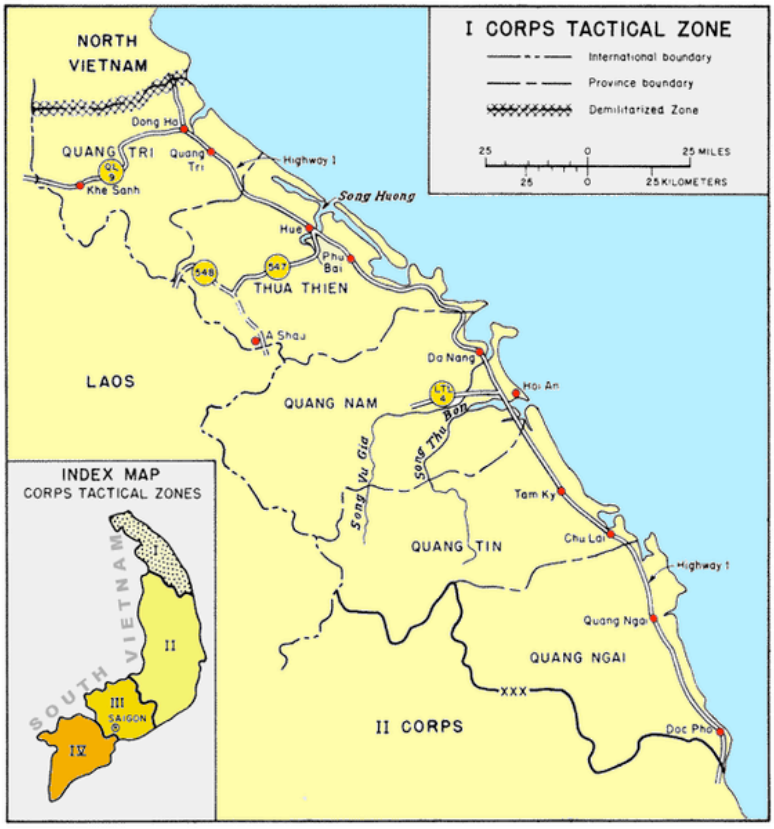

Fig. 1. Map of South Vietnam, chosen to show location of Ernest (DMZ to Chu Lai)
("South Vietnam." Map. August 30, 2008 <http://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/Category:Vietnam_War_maps>.)

South Vietnam has a hot and humid climate, with high humidity. The average temperature is 80°F. The annual rainfall is heavy, in some places upwards of 80 inches per year. The monsoon season, from September to May, greatly affects the temperature and rainfall (H. Smith et al. 10, 17). The total population of South Vietnam was roughly 16 million during the war (Clark 8).

By the beginning of 1966, total enemy strength in South Vietnam had reached over 226,000 (Shulimson 9). At the same time, U.S. troops numbered 185,000 (Shulimson 7). Despite the buildup of enemy main force units, the Viet Cong and guerilla substructure was cause for more concern, because its local infrastructure controlled much of the population, largely through terror (Shulimson 11).

On June 7, Operation Liberty began, its success marked by uprooting the enemy from its secure operating area and recovering 40 square miles from the Viet Cong (Shulimson 106). Operation Jay followed on June 25, which resulted in the killing of 475 enemy (Shulimson 156). Operation Hastings, which spanned most of July, was the largest and most violent operation to that point in the war. Enemy casualties were reported as 700 killed and 17 captured. The enemy was described as well trained, well equipped and aggressive, but could not match U.S. artillery and air command (Shulimson 176).

In September, South Vietnam held elections, taking its first steps toward representative government. An assembly was created to develop a new constitution for the country (Shulimson 220-221). In the fall, operations named Golden Fleece, called for U.S. forces to maintain security around rice paddies while the farmers harvested, to allow the farmers to keep their rice rather than allow the Viet Cong to collect their normal percentage of the crop (Shulimson 234).

The “Kit Carson scouts” were established by October. Kit Carson scouts were former Viet Cong who were used as scouts, interpreters, and intelligence agents. They served as part of the U.S. psychological warfare campaign that aimed to reduce efficiency of the Viet Cong, assist South Vietnamese government to establish control, and to obtain cooperation among villagers (Shulimson 246-247).

> I was among ninety-one men sent to the draft board in Milwaukee. They gave us a slip of paper, and they told us that if we had a choice of which branch we would want to

> join, we were to mark them down 1-2-3. I put Marines, Army, Coast Guard, Navy, and Air Force. Nine of us got Marines. I was 90% sure I would be sent to Vietnam. At the time I was drafted, we thought the people in Vietnam were being persecuted and mistreated by the communists. But the majority of the people didn't want us over there! So after we got over there, we asked, "What are we here for?"
>
> — Ernest

I had credit for over 500 kills in Vietnam. But that will never compare to or make up for the friends I lost.

A memory that has haunted me the most was of the time I held a friend of mine until he died. It was a horrible situation, and I can remember it like it was yesterday: A mortar had gone off and hit the radio antenna, then fell straight down. It hit the radio operator, and his body was gone from his waist down. It seemed like quite awhile, but it was probably only 2 to 3 minutes that he lived. I remember him saying to me, "My foot hurts. How bad is my foot?" I wanted to keep him as calm as possible, even though I was pretty shaken. So I told him, "It ain't bad. You might lose one of your toes, but it's not real bad." There was just nothing else that could be done. Right after it happened, it came to me in nightmares; I'd see him lying there in my arms. It took a long time, but I don't dream about it anymore.

Memories like this one remind me of how brutal it was in the field, when you've got about six eyes looking all around because you're so scared. And it was just routine to see our guys get shot or blown up. I was always scared that at any time I could be killed. Anyone who said they weren't scared over there is either a fool or a liar. But we got used to it and trusted that we were watching out for each other. And I guess one thing that

helped me was the idea that when your time is up, it's up. No matter where you're at, you're going. Luckily for me, I only went out on patrols twice, on volunteer operations.

My main job, as a fire controlman, was behind the scenes, providing support for 5-6 different units of infantry. It was considered a specialized job, and we always had to be on our game, because our men depended on us. Let me explain how everything worked: First, you have the eyes of the American troops, the forward observers. They would sit in trees, in little holes, or on top of a mountain, just watching to see if anything was going on[3]. The enemy didn't like them out there, so they were in quite a bit of danger at all times. We also had different artillery batteries in the field, each spaced so they could reach each other.

When the forward observers saw something going on, they would radio in. If a troop was being fired on and needed artillery support, the forward observers would call for a fire mission[4]. They each had a map with trees and other terrain on it, and numbers going along the top, bottom and sides. The forward observer would find the location on the map, which corresponded to an eight-digit number [using the numbers on the map*]; they would call in that number to us.

That's where I came in. We were at the headquarters in the center of the three artillery batteries, with all the main officers stationed there as well. The batteries were

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[3] Cosmas and Murray confirm that forward observers were responsible for scanning the area and call in fire missions (Cosmas and Murray 301).

* Throughout the narratives, I have included explanatory information for unfamiliar acronyms and technical terms within the text, such as the material here. Beyond that, any definitions, lengthy clarifications, or corroborating facts from historians are indicated through footnotes.

[4] Telfer, Rogers, and Fleming discuss how forward observers notified the fire direction center, where chart operators plotted the mission. To ensure accuracy of the data and information sent to the guns, both the battery and battalion fire control centers computed the fire missions (Telfer, Rogers, and Fleming 218).

spaced so they could provide support if we were overrun. They could also cover the distance between themselves and each of the other batteries.

The fire direction center itself was located in a bunker, dug into the ground with sand bags piled around, probably 10 feet thick. This was considered a stronghold where we couldn't get hurt if the enemy mortared or shot at us. In the center of the room, we had a big table with our own map. It resembled the maps that forward observers used, with numbers on the sides and across the top and bottom, but it was larger. There were 2- to 3-inch squares on the maps, along with pins that indicated the location of the artillery batteries.

The batteries could usually shoot anywhere from 5-15 miles away, so their location helped us determine which battery could best provide artillery support to a troop in trouble. If we needed more help, and two batteries could cover the area under attack, then more guns would fire.

It was intense. We were always on edge and ready, because we never knew when a fire mission would be called in. At least two radio operators were on duty at any given time, along with two of us who manned the maps. Usually when a forward observer or recon called in, they would say, "We have a situation, we have a fire mission." Right away, we would get on the phone, which connected to each battery. The guns were always ready, waiting for us to give them the range, deflection, and type of shell they were supposed to use.

The forward observer or recon read an 8-digit number to the radio operator, who then read the number back to them to make sure it was correct. As map operators, we would plot that 8-digit number on the map. The first four digits were up and down, and the other four were across the map. One guy was a primary map operator, which was usually my job. The second guy would check my calculations. We'd both plot it, then use a deflection square and figure the range and the deflection [how much the guns had to

move]. I'd read the range off, and if I was correct, he'd say, "Check." If we didn't have the same calculation, it would slow things down. Most of the time, as they read the coordinates, we could take the pin and put it down within 1/16th of an inch of where it was supposed to be.

The operations chief was in charge and decided if we should shoot or not. If the op chief gave permission to shoot, we'd call the coordinates down to the guys on the guns [the artillery batteries]. The guys on the guns would say "ready," and we'd say "fire." And the guns would fire one round. Then the forward observer or recon would say "raise 50," "drop 50," "left 50," or "right 50." That meant 50 meters further out, closer, left or right. We'd plot the location on the map again, mark it, and give the guns new data. They'd crank it on the guns and shoot another round, zeroing in on the target. We would repeat this until they were within 50 yards of the target. Then the forward observers would tell us to "drop 50" or "right another 50" along with "fire for effect." We'd have maybe six guns shoot, each shooting 10 rounds on that target.

Only 13 seconds elapsed from the time the forward observer finished with the eight-digit number until we were told that the gun's rounds were on the way. The process became so natural, we could practically do it in our sleep!

One time, around 10:30 a.m., recon called in, asking for support. They were pinned down and were being shot at. The op chief asked if they had taken any casualties, and they hadn't. The op chief said we couldn't give any support because artillery didn't have any extra ammunition. But we *did* have ammunition, and we could also shoot harassment and interdiction, which we commonly called "H&Is." "H&Is" were random shots, maybe every five minutes, every two minutes, just dropping in different areas[5]. We

[5] Carland confirms that harassment and interdiction fire were used against targets where the enemy could have been (Carland 359).

always knew where our troops were, and we knew where we were putting the shots, but they weren't in any set order. It might be half a mile, then maybe 2 miles the other way.

Anyway, we just sat there. Our hands were tied; we couldn't do anything until the op chief gave us the OK. A little while later, recon called back and asked for support again. One of his guys had gotten shot in the ankle, and he had a hole in his helmet. He obviously wasn't happy, and he was swearing, which we weren't supposed to do. The colonel came in and heard the guy, and told the op chief to go down to his tent and wait for him. Then he told us to get those guys out of that situation, to do whatever we had to do to get them out. Then he said, "And you be on your toes, because you're gonna have company this afternoon."

Around 4:30 in the afternoon, three guys walked into our bunker with their rifles loaded and the hammers off. If the op chief had been there, they would have shot him right there. Those guys were the recon we had saved. And that's what the colonel had meant when he said we were going to have company. The guys asked, "Where the hell is he?" We told them we didn't know where he was, that the colonel had taken him out. Then they thanked us. They weren't angry with us, because they knew we couldn't make the decision to give artillery support; that was for the op chief to decide. It was hard for all of us, when things like that happened. We were there to protect our guys, yet the op chief would make us wait until they were hurt to do anything. Sometimes by the time we could do them any good, it was too late!

After that particular incident, the colonel sent the op chief away, and we never saw him again. He either sent him to a different outfit or perhaps sent him back to the States. We never knew.

Of course there were times when our guys would have to run. And, as much as it hurts to tell this story, we did lose a unit over there — one that we dropped our own shells on. We could hear them shooting in the distance, and we weren't supposed to shoot

within 200 meters of our own troops, because there's a margin of error in artillery. They called for a fire mission and started at about 500 meters, and they kept saying "drop 50," "drop 100," until we were about 150 meters away from them. We told them we couldn't shoot any closer, but they said to "drop 50." We said, "You're too close!" We could hear them shooting and hollering; they were being overrun. They came back on the radio at one point, and said "Drop 100 and fire for effect. They ain't taking us alive." We did what they requested, and the radio went dead. We killed our own men. But it was either we do it, or they would have been captured and tortured. Even now, this many years later, I can hear their screams.

One of the things we had a problem with were rules of warfare that didn't make sense. For example, when we were out on operations in the field, we weren't supposed to have a shell in our gun. And we weren't supposed to shoot at anybody unless we were shot at; we were supposed to be darned sure that we were threatened before we shot[6]. Depending on where we were at, or if it was at night, we just shot. And most of our officers told us that even though we weren't supposed to shoot unless we were shot at, we were supposed to use our best judgment. If we felt that we, or someone else in our unit, were being threatened in any way, we should use force. We had one guy, I know, who ended up shooting a kid. The day before, a kid threw a grenade in a bunker and blew up two of the guys. Then they put this guy out there, and he was kinda jumpy anyway. The kid threw something, and before it got there he shot the kid. It happened to be a stone. But if it's a grenade, once it's in the hole with you, it's a little late. I guess my theory on a lot of this was that when you're at war, do unto others before they do unto you. It's either you or him. And that was the mentality of the guys in Vietnam.

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[6] Cosmas and Murray provide information regarding engagement, whereas soldiers were instructed to identify targets before opening fire. Soldiers were instructed to avoid civilian casualties, even to the extent of waiting for enemy to move away from civilians before shooting (Cosmas and Murray 348-349).

Our command didn't always agree with this theory. Our basic mission was to see if the enemy was in the area, hunt them down, and kill as many as we could or push them back to the DMZ. Infantry would make a sweep through the terrain and villages, clear out an area, and just keep moving.

Most of the villages looked like a slum with grass or mud houses. The people in the villages would wave and look for handouts, and we'd give little kids stuff. We were usually on a truck as we moved through, and we'd throw candy, cigarettes, or c-rations that we didn't eat. Sometimes when our infantry went through, the village appeared to be abandoned; however, as soon as the infantry went through, the villagers would shoot at us from the backside. So there had to be Viet Cong in those villages. Usually we didn't go back.

It didn't take long in the field for us to learn that everybody was the enemy — all Vietnamese people. The Viet Cong were ordinary people like you and me. They were farmers and storekeepers during the day, and they were fighters at night. We seldom saw young men or young women, from probably 18-30, as Viet Cong. They were usually old people or young kids, because young adults were soldiers and wore military uniforms. The North Vietnamese Army was very organized, and we came in contact with them a few times when we were out on operations.

The enemy would mostly strike at night, hit and run. They set mines, and they had tunnels. We found some underground strongholds, including villages with living quarters. When we found these places, we'd shoot napalm[7] in, and then send tunnel rats to check everything out. Sometimes if there was ammunition down there, it blew itself up. Otherwise, we blew it up. We also found training aides, which were artillery pieces made out of bamboo. The enemy used these aides to train their troops on artillery pieces we were using, so that if they overran our base, they knew how to fire our artillery pieces.

[7] Wright describes napalm as a jellied gasoline that would burn (Wright 46).

On one occasion, we had the enemy pinned down in the mountains and jets were shooting at them, along with our artillery batteries. A couple officers came down and surrendered, and said there were 10,000 troops up there, starving. The next day we packed up and moved out. We had ‘em, and left ‘em go. It wasn’t our decision. But we wondered, if we were trying to destroy the enemy and win the war, when we had them in a position where we could have killed them, stopped them, or disarmed them, why didn't we? It just didn’t make sense. And that was the same enemy who came back to fight another day, and probably killed some of our guys.

Foxy (Vietnam, 1968-1969)

Fig. 2. Map of Vietnam, chosen to show location of Foxy (Chu Lai) (Dunn 6).

Chu Lai is located in the Central Lowlands, which consist of a fertile, narrow, coastal strip along the eastern slopes of the Chaine Annamitique (H. Smith et al 10).

Peace negotiations began in 1968, but the U.S. did not pull out its last troops until 1973. By then, almost 58,000 Americans had died (Wright 49). The 1868 Combined Plan with the Vietnamese called for a three-pronged campaign: large-unit operations to keep the enemy off balance; destruction of enemy base areas; and expanded territorial security (Shulimson 15). American contingency planning included possible operations in Cambodia, Laos, and movement north of the DMZ (Shulimson 15).

By 1969, tactics were changing. North and South Vietnamese Communist leaders favored more frequent use of small unit operations in the form of ground attacks or attacks by fire against population centers, economic areas and allied bases (C. Smith 9). The 1969 Combined Campaign abandoned earlier concepts of a protective shield of containment, instead emphasizing area security and control, stressing the relentless attack against the enemy, and inflicting casualties on the enemy (C. Smith 9, 12).

A multitude of operations followed. February's Operation Dewey Canyon breached the border of Laos, which was technically a violation of Laotian neutrality, but approved in order to protect troops maneuvering along the border (C. Smith 44-45). All soldiers killed in Laos were officially reported as killed in South Vietnam for political reasons (C. Smith 47).

In March, discussions began for the phased withdrawal of troops, with timetables given for the transfer of the U.S. combat role to South Vietnamese forces (C. Smith 130). The withdrawal numbers would be based on the level of North Vietnamese infiltration and enemy activity, the ability of South Vietnam to fight its own war, and the progress at the Paris peace negotiations (C. Smith 132). In June 1969, President Richard Nixon gave the order to reduce American troop strength (C. Smith 137).

> I was in one of the largest draft calls in the history of the draft. There were 535,000 of us called during 1968. They were trying to get the guys who were in Vietnam from 1964-66 out, and get them replenished with new men. They took us to Milwaukee, into a big stadium-type room. We could sit wherever we wanted. I was sitting in the fourth row. A guy came in and said he wanted the group of guys in the first 3 rows to follow him. And we thought they were lucky and wouldn't have to go to Vietnam or into the service. Well, they took them into another room and swore them in as Marines. Then he came back and said the rest of us were Army, and we were sworn in right there.
>
> — "Foxy"

Every day in Vietnam was a close call. But one day in particular, I thought I was a goner. I worked with the first cavalry, which included armored vehicles like tanks and APCs [armored personnel carriers]. We had heard there was an influx of Viet Cong trying to take over a village in order to create a stronghold, and we were supposed to go over and check it out. Not far from the village there was a high embankment, full of trees. One tank went over, and the next one followed. As the vehicle that I was riding in started to climb the embankment, the tank ahead of us hit a pressure-sensitive mine and blew up. The enemy had used a black-label can, which was one of our low alcohol beer cans, as the detonator. They used 40 pounds of nitrostarch to set it off.

The noise was so loud, it blew one guy's eardrums, and he was instantly deaf. I was thrown on the side in the APC, right on top of a bed of ammo. That was when I thought I was going to die. At the time, I had a little puppy with me I had saved when the guys were going to put it on a spit and eat it. Lucky for me, I fell on him and he squealed;

that's how they knew somebody was still inside the APC. The front had been torn off, but the back was still there. There was a big handle they pulled down, and I fell out. I was covered from head to toe with white phosphorus[8]. When I looked around me, all the trees were gone, and the hole left by the explosion was enormous. If we had been on top of it, it would have killed us all.

The captain was so angry that he lined up two tanks along with ten APCs in the center, along with the infantry standing in the back. He gave the village a warning to give up any Viet Cong inside, and waited 10 minutes. Nobody came forward. So he fired the cannon, bombarded the village, and blew the hell out of it. Then we (infantry) went through and killed anyone who was still alive. That was probably the hardest thing we had to do; it was sad to see the women and children, some wounded from all the tanks that had blown everything to shreds. I remember one woman I walked up to, who was already dead; when I pushed her over, I noticed she was pregnant. But we had our orders, and that's what we had to do. If someone couldn't do it, they were told to stay in the back and the other guys had to do the killing. The cows, pigs, chickens, you name it, were slaughtered as well. After we were done, the tanks rolled over the houses that were left.

It might seem like we were aggressive, but we didn't always have the upper hand. In one battle in particular, we were ambushed, and that's when I lost most of my friends. There happened to be a landing zone area where we set up a campsite on occasion, because it was protected; guys were keeping watch from actual buildings at all times. In retrospect, the enemy set us up because they knew we traveled that route, and we shouldn't have gone that way again. We walked right into a horseshoe ambush. North Vietnamese soldiers closed off the back end and dumped everything on us: guns, rockets,

[8] Wright explains that phosphorus was a substance that burned when exposed to air (Wright 46).

white phosphorus rounds — any way to kill us. We were completely trapped. There were about 120 of them and about 68 of us.

Our captain got shot in the jaw and shoulder, but he was still alive and somehow able to get on the radio and call for help. American choppers came and dumped white phosphorus rounds in order to create a perimeter around us, with an opening for us to get through. And we ran like hell. The enemy kept firing, but they couldn't tell which direction we were running because of all the white smoke. Phosphorous was dangerous for everyone; if it hit you, it would burn into your clothes and then into your skin. Some of our guys got second- and third-degree burns.

Four guys ran the wrong way, and we thought they had been killed. Four days later, they met up with us. One of the guys was a lieutenant; he had a compass and two rounds left in his gun. The other three guys were just totally wiped out, exhausted. They had been hiding, and heard the enemy around them for three nights until the enemy finally left. Then they got their bearings and found their way to where we were.

Later, the enemy attacked the landing zone again, but we were ready and killed most of them.

Any kind of ambush or battle was dangerous, because the enemy could take soldiers captive. Fortunately, during my time in Vietnam, none of the men in my unit were captured. There were, however, times when we had to leave bodies behind, but we always went back to try and recover them. We had to be very careful, because the enemy was waiting for us and sometimes booby-trapped the bodies. We never went directly up to a body. Instead, we tied wire to an ankle, stood far back, and pulled. Sometimes there would be something under the body, like a bomb. Some bodies were mutilated, and most were missing pieces of clothing. The enemy would take their boots because ours were a lot better than what they had. They also wanted the belt buckles and belts, and would take

jewelry and glasses if there were any. They tried to use everything they found either for themselves or against us.

We put recovered bodies on a chopper, and they were taken to Da Nang. I had to go by chopper to Da Nang a few times to identify our guys. As we flew over, I could see the boxes stacked about 6 to 8 feet high, and 3-4 blocks long. Boxes waiting for us. Waiting for when bodies came in. Upon landing, I was taken to a designated area, and those in charge would slide the door open and ask if I knew the guy.

Then I was sent back to fight the enemy, who we called "Charlie." They were all around us; there were no frontlines[9]. And it was pretty clear that we had to look out for ourselves; we couldn't just trust that others were watching our back. During training, we were given the tools, the knowledge, and the know-how to protect ourselves. We had to be able to handle ourselves, or we'd be dead. We were on the defensive all the time, constantly watching 360 degrees. I remember thinking that if you didn't hear the sound of a rifle taking off, it means you got hit. If you heard the sound, you were OK.

Our coordinates were from Chu Lai to Da Nang. We were an infantry unit, so we were constantly on the move. Our goal was to show our bodies 24 hours a day to draw the enemy out and shoot them, so we spent most of our time walking around, saying "Come on Charlie, here we are, come get us." When they came at us, we'd quickly get into our positions. During a normal day, I carried an M-16. I would always play Rambo[10]. In the first battle I was in, I was so scared. It was nighttime. I had infrared on my scope, and I saw these figures approaching. And the captain said, "FIRE!" They were the Viet Cong, and they were going to attempt to take another village. There were probably 100 of them coming our way. I was so scared that I just sprayed the whole thing, and bodies

[9] Herring confirms that the Vietnam War did not have front lines (Herring 153-4).

[10] According to The Internet Movie Database (IMDb), Rambo: First Blood was released in 1982 (http://www.imdb.com/title/tt0083944).

were falling. I went through my ammo so fast that I burnt the weapon, and the barrel was pure white. They had to re-issue a new weapon. That's how scared I was.

The enemy harassed us as much as they could. For the most part, we fought the Viet Cong and the hardcore NVA [North Vietnamese Army]. They were there to fight. Shoot to kill. The Viet Cong was the trickiest group we fought. We had to be very cautious. During the day they were farmers and were friendly. At night they would become the Viet Cong. They would put on their black pajamas[11] and come after us since they knew where we were.

The enemy was crude and very patient, striking when it was to their advantage[12]. A lot of times their tactics didn't work because the American soldiers were stronger, with better techniques and weapons. But their guerilla warfare was particularly effective in killing or severely wounding our men. If they knew we traveled down a certain pathway a lot, they would string a wire across with a grenade. When a soldier tripped the wire, the shrapnel would hit their leg or stomach and put them out of commission[13]. The enemy would pound nails into bamboo poles, then pull the poles way back with a cord that was hidden in the brush. When a soldier would trip it, it would spring back and hit him. Nine times out of 10, they died. The enemy also built punji pits. If a leg fell through one, one's natural reaction would be to pull it back out. So inside the pits were poles with carved

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[11] Shulimson describes the sighting of armed enemy dressed in khaki or black pajamas, wearing helmets (Shulimson 132).

[12] Carland describes how the enemy usually controlled the tempo of the fighting, deciding when and where to fight, and when to withdraw (Carland 356).

[13] Cosmas and Murray discuss the "Boobytrap War," where the North Vietnamese and Viet Cong relied on boobytraps to inflict American casualties. They describe how the Viet Cong buried explosive devices or attached them to tree trunks and low-hanging branches in areas where soldiers were likely to travel. They preferred trails, dikes between rice paddies, and other places that might be used for defensive positions, landing zones and observation posts. They relied on trip wires hidden in brush and grass, as well as pressure-release devices (Cosmas and Murray 262-263).

hooks full of dung; the end would dig into the leg when it was pulled up. The poison would get in and cause blood poisoning, and the soldier would have to be flown to Japan to be checked over or to have their leg cut off. Infection was horrible over there. We were very conscious of these traps, because we didn't want to die such a horrible death.

Some of their tactics were particularly cruel. I flew in a lot of Huey helicopters. The helicopters would drop us [infantry] off and come back and pick up whoever was left. If we got into a battle, we just put our buddies into bags and the medevac choppers would come[14]. Unfortunately, when we'd put our wounded on the medevac, "Charlie" would sometimes see it, shoot a rocket up, and blow it out of the skyway. That was against the Geneva Convention, but of course they didn't know what that was.

As you can probably guess, we learned very quickly to shoot first and ask questions later. It was a dirty war. They didn't play by the rules, so why should we? Let's face it — it didn't make anybody a hero if they were killed because they played by the rules. It was survival of the fittest, and I was determined to be the fittest. I was going to make it.

The Geneva Convention's goal was to help keep both sides equal, so it determined rules we had to follow when dealing with the enemy. They established what could and couldn't be done, including the type of weapons that could and couldn't be used. They almost banned the M-16, because our bullets were more devastating than those of the enemy. The velocity of our bullets was faster, and once it hit, it would lodge in and explode again. The shrapnel could cause someone to lose a whole arm. But if

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[14] Carland explains that the helicopter was very useful in the war. As a troop carrier, it moved soldiers to and around the battlefield; as a re-supply vehicle, it brought ammunition, food and other supplies to troops; as a utility vehicle, it moved artillery units to appropriate locations at a quick pace; and as an ambulance, it evacuated the wounded rapidly (Carland 361).

someone was shot by the AK-47[15], the bullet would go in and stay there, but do nothing else. It would just be surgically removed. However, due to the type of guerilla warfare we were up against, and the things going on in Vietnam, they backed off and allowed us to use the M-16. The enemy wanted to get their hands on the M-16; so they got it through the black market, or killed our guys and took it off their bodies. They also wanted our grenade launchers. They didn't care too much about the machine guns, because they had some powerful machine guns given to them by the Russians.

We were given a list of rules before we arrived in Vietnam. I only remembered half of them, because I thought some of them were stupid and didn't protect us. One rule I do remember is that if we saw an enemy coming at us or running away, we had to yell "d ng l i"[16] which means STOP. If the person still kept coming or started firing at us, we were supposed to yell "d ng l i" again. If they still didn't stop, we were allowed to shoot.

Well, this rule was stupid. Most guys yelled "d ng l i" once, and if the enemy kept running or coming at them, they opened fire. They yelled the other "d ng l i" after the fact. We weren't stupid enough to go out there, stand up and show ourselves, and yell "d ng l i'" without protecting ourselves.

Some people would stop when we yelled "d ng l i" at them. Some would throw their weapon down and put their hands in the air. In any given month, we'd capture about 2-3 people. We tried to have an interpreter with us in most cases, because when we would catch someone, we'd either want to detain them or interrogate them. The interrogators were South Vietnamese soldiers working with us. Sometimes they got mad, and would

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[15] The AK-47 was the Russian-de weapon that the North Vietnamese soldiers carried. Clark describes the Russian-designed automatic rifle as the standard weapon of the Viet Cong (Clark 39). Wright explains that the Soviet Union and China were two major suppliers of arms to North Vietnam (Wright 44).

[16] According to the Vietnamese-English English-Vietnamese dictionary by Van Phan and Wilkinson, "d ng l i'" means "stop it!" (Van Phan and Wilkinson, 83).

say, “OK, get a helicopter ready.” They took the prisoner up in the helicopter, and all of a sudden we’d look up and see a body falling[17]. Well, they didn’t give the right answers, so the interrogators pushed them out the door. Either they were North Vietnamese sympathizers or Viet Cong.

When we came across a village, we’d have to check all the huts[18]. The people lived very meagerly, very poorly. Their huts consisted of small, dirt-floored leaning poles with thatched roofs[19]. Some villages had a little cement building of some kind. Most of the people were very ill, dying from tuberculosis. Tuberculosis was very prevalent over there. We gave them TB tablets, and maybe that would help the coughing for a week or two, but then if we wouldn’t go back in time, they’d get sick all over again. The average life expectancy for men was about 43[20].

The water buffalo was sacred, a religious type of animal, but also a play animal. Children would ride them, or the buffalo would pull a plow. These animals hated the American soldiers. A couple charged us, and would have killed us, but we killed them first. Then the whole family in the village would gather around the buffalo in a circle and pray for it. Whenever we killed a water buffalo, we had to pay the villagers $75, because it was such an important part of their livelihood.

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[17] According to Clark, prisoners were sometimes tortured and murdered in the field, while others were freed without question (Clark 118).

[18] Smith confirms the search of villages and huts for concealed weapons, food and equipment. The villagers were also “questioned and their identities checked against lists of known or suspected Viet Cong” (C. Smith 285).

[19] Smith explains that with the exception of a few masonry or frame houses, village homes are small, dirt-floored thatch structures (H. Smith et al. 137).

[20] Smith confirms that the life expectancy in 1965 was only 35, and that tuberculosis was frequent and the leading cause of illness and death (H. Smith et al. 122, 127).

Part of our strategy was to use the villagers to help us find the enemy. Some of them were very loyal; some wouldn't tell us anything and were loyal to the Viet Cong[21]. On occasion, we'd shove everyone into one area and question the villagers one by one. Some would confess and some would not. They may have been afraid that the enemy could be watching and retaliate if they told us anything. A lot of times when they did confess, the South Vietnamese would be very upset with them and beat them. They were angry that someone would even think of being on the enemy's side when they lived in South Vietnam. So a lot them learned not to say anything.

I remember when one of the interrogators was questioning a captive, who bolted from the chair. The South Vietnamese soldier aimed and shot him from the top of his feet to the top of his head. I don't know how many bullets he used, but the body kept running. We had to go get the body after it had ran into a tree and was dead. I didn't really care to see that.

One of the saddest things we experienced was when villagers used women and children against us. If we cornered the enemy in a village, they'd use women and children as shields. Or, a child would come up to us and say "chop chop," which meant "food." The soldiers would stand around them, and then realize they had a grenade. Sometimes the soldiers would get away, sometimes they wouldn't. Of course the child was killed. Using children to protect themselves was disgusting to us because naturally we weren't going to shoot them. And we didn't.

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[21] Smith describes the situation of villagers in response to the Viet Cong. He confirms that villagers' reactions to the Viet Cong fell under a few categories: willing support, fatalistic acquiescence, evasion or opportunistic noninvolvement. Those who supported or acquiesced to Viet Cong rule did so because of the threat to their life and property. Some also preferred their control to government control. For the majority, however, the standard behavior was opportunistic noninvolvement; they would switch sides or give outward gestures of support to either side if such action seemed necessary for survival (C. Smith 248-250).

Some of the South Vietnamese people did work with us, though. The young people joined the military because there was no future for them as farmers. I think they were very proud to be in the military[22]. Many joined the military to get three squares a day, clothes on their back, and a weapon. The South Vietnamese officers, who were supposed to be highly trained by Americans, were pretty good. But they had trouble with their soldiers, who didn't have proper training. So most of the time they ended up running away during battle. So here we had a man with a rank of a captain — a darn good man who knew what had to be done. But his own people weren't trained to follow his orders. It was a sad situation in that respect. We could have used the extra people to fight on our side, because American infantry platoons were always short men. Normally, a platoon had 110-130 people.

We'd wake up around 7 a.m. and stretch a little bit, then get our gear ready, making sure we had our flak jackets and helmets on, checking and cleaning our guns. I carried the radio, so I had to make sure the batteries and everything else were working.

Choppers would bring our c-rations every third day, about an hour after we were up. The supplies came in a box, and we had to build a bonfire and burn all the boxes. We never left anything behind, because the enemy could get it and use it against us in some way. Our rations included lima beans and ham, turkey, and beef. There was upside-down cake that was really good. The rations were compressed in cans. We had a little can opener, with a little square tab that had some kind of pouch. We'd tear that off, then take the tab underneath and light it. A little flame would come off of it and it would heat. However, when it got dark, we couldn't use the heating tools because the enemy could see it and then they would know our position.

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[22] Clark confirms that the motive for Vietnamese to enlist varied. Military service offered a certain amount of independence, prestige and adventure. Some also joined specific units in order to remain close to their villages in order to protect their families (Clark 42).

Before we left camp in the morning, we took the tin cans of food and shoved them into a sock[23], then tied it to the back of our gear. Then we'd get in walking formation and head out around 8 a.m. We had 2-3 point men who would watch for the enemy. A lot of times they were killed, and we'd have to send another group up. I was never a point man. I was a radioman for the lieutenant, so they left me alone.

We blazed our own trails most of the time. On occasion, we came upon the enemy and surprised them, then had a little battle[24]. Nine times out of 10, it was a small group and we overcame them. That's when we'd capture people. After about two hours of walking, we might stop for a 15-minute break and radio in to base to see if they had heard of any activity. We'd call in our coordinates and find out where the other groups of American soldiers were going. There were 120,000 of us tromping around on land. There were also groups patrolling in boats on water, because there were a lot of tributaries the enemy used to move supplies and weapons around.

We also came across a lot of wildlife in the field. In fact, a Bengal tiger followed us for two weeks. He came to our perimeter a lot, and we thought he was going to get one of us. So we would kill a whole lot of chickens and throw them out to him. And he never attacked us. There were also a lot of lizards, which we tried to avoid, but they were all over the place. The bigger ones didn't seem to bother us much because they were few and far between. One bit my friend in the back of his leg, and it bloated up and he got really sick. So they had to give him a shot because the poison went through him. So some lizards could be pretty vicious if they wanted to be.

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[23] Shulimson confirms that soldiers carried their weapon, ammunition, two canteens, a poncho and two socks stuffed with C-rations (Shulimson 191).

[24] C. Smith explains that the thick vegetation made it favorable for ambushes, for the concealment of troops and supplies, and for insurgency operations (C. Smith 2).

Another thing we tried to avoid were snakes, but it was impossible because there were dozens of species of snakes over there; we saw 12-15 different kinds. Most of the snakes were big and would kill rats and keep down the rodent population. If we saw rats we'd kill them immediately with the M16 because they carried so many diseases. We got cornered by some one time, but they were more afraid of us.

While I didn't enjoy the lizard and snakes very much, the birds were gorgeous and the butterflies were just magnificent. The flowers were beautiful, but wild. We couldn't just go up to them, because some of them were poisonous or had thorns, or protected themselves in other ways. I was amazed to see such beauty amid all the killing and destruction. They seemed to flourish in the heat and humidity, while we did not.

During the day, the temperatures were very extreme. It was usually around 102 degrees. We fought during the day and night, but most of my battles were during the later part of the day, around 3-4 p.m., when it wasn't as hot. At night the temperatures dropped down to about 90 degrees, and we were cold.

During the day, we didn't have to wear our shirt, but we wore our flak jacket, which was like a vest. So our arms were exposed. Sometimes we had to walk through elephant grass, which was 10 feet high and razor sharp. We didn't have machetes to cut the grass, and didn't want to make too much commotion because we didn't know what was on the other end. We did have a couple point people who were much farther ahead of us. And if they saw anything, they'd come back and tell us to get down. So after we made it through, we had to clean up because we were bleeding from the sharpness of the blades of grass. The medics would put ointment on it because we could get terrible infections very fast.

In addition to infection, drugs were a primary concern in the field. Soldiers used marijuana, cocaine, and opium[25]. I can honestly say I never did drugs because I wasn't a smoker to begin with. When we had a situation where guys were using drugs, we tried to set up camp in some kind of a strategic area where we'd be able to protect everyone. I was lucky, though, because only about 3-4 guys tried it. I was very happy that we had a bunch of sensible-type of people.

We usually set up camp around 4:30 p.m. At night we had perimeters. In the center would be our command and communications, with foxholes around that center. We had a trenching tool to dig the foxholes. It was a short handled thing, and a blade would come down like a shovel. There were three men at each foxhole. Two would sleep in a tent behind the foxhole, and one would stay up and watch for the enemy. The tent was made out of ponchos[26], which we snapped together to form a little tent, small and low to the ground. The tent was camouflaged, and it was dark, so we didn't really worry about somebody shooting at the tent. Nobody in my unit ever got shot at in our perimeters.

In the evening, someone would come around and tell us to be quiet because sound traveled and the enemy could be close by. So we were pretty darn quiet. It was pitch dark at night, but we could see shadows with the help of stars. We also had infrared scopes on our guns, so when we looked through them we saw green and then we could see any motion.

Those in charge would pick out a group of about four soldiers to go outside the perimeter in the dark, into some other area to watch for the enemy and forewarn the rest

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[25] Smith, along with Cosmas and Murray, confirm that drug abuse by American troops was widespread by 1969. Marijuana was sold at on the side of roads and peddled by civilians. The military estimated that half the men were involved with drugs (C. Smith 157; Cosmas and Murray 360).

[26] Shulimson confirms that pitched tents were actually ponchos used as tents because they were easier to carry than other types of shelter (Shulimson 176).

of us if there was activity out there. We called it reconnaissance. We really didn't want to do it, but we had to. There were enough guys to go around, so we only had to do it once in awhile. The reconnaissance group kept pretty close together and would all go back to camp together; otherwise, a soldier might have been caught out there, and nobody would know where he was and could accidentally shoot him. The group had coordinates and would relay information quietly through one of the radios. So those in command knew what was happening and where they were. I was on reconnaissance about three times during the year I was there. Of the three times I went out, I only saw the enemy once. But it was still spooky when it was pitch dark and we were stumbling around trying to be as quiet as we could. We didn't want to step on things that cracked or made noise, because it was pretty evident that the enemy was out there.

My jobs during the day weren't much safer than doing reconnaissance at night. When I carried the radio for Lt. Wallace, I stayed close to him in case he needed help. I was in more danger carrying the radio, because the enemy wanted to take out all of our communication. So they would look for the antenna to come up, and I'd pull it down.

In addition to carrying the radio, I volunteered as a tunnel rat for three months until my nerves got to me and I said I couldn't do it anymore. The enemy had an extensive network of tunnels, which they used as a primary means of moving. Inside the tunnels were ammunition storage, hospitals, kitchens, air raid shelters, and workshops. As tunnel rats, we crawled through the extensive network of tunnels underground to search for the enemy, as well as ammunition/weapon caches and other items that the enemy could use against us. The job was extremely dangerous, because tunnel rats could encounter the enemy and deadly traps, as well as a host of animals from bats and rats to spiders and snakes.

I volunteered to be a tunnel rat because I thought it would be interesting, and I was curious. Plus I was a skinny little runt, and I only weighed 129 pounds. I was small

enough to move around really quickly, squeeze through tight spaces, and crawl along narrow passages. I had a 45mm and two grenades, one to expand the opening. Once it settled down, I would go in and turn here or there, and hope nobody was behind me in the tunnel to stab me. Luckily, I never saw anyone in the tunnels. It was damp, mostly. It was quite ingenious how they carved all those tunnels and rooms out. It wasn't as high as a normal person. I would say no higher than 4-5 feet. So most of the time I was on all fours, crawling.

I found one big room underground with a cache of weapons, mostly AK-47s. They must have also used that room for their wounded as well, because we found bandages and blood, along with tables. We hauled all the ammo and stuff out so they couldn't use it. We didn't use the ammo because we didn't have AK-47s. But we could label things if we wanted something as a souvenir. We would collapse the tunnels we found by planting explosives and using detonators, so they couldn't use that area of the tunnels again. We destroyed as many as we could.

As a tunnel rat, I got extra pay: $25 more each month, and that was sent home. So I got $75 extra for those three months. I wasn't petrified while doing tunnel work, but I was scared because I didn't know who was going to come around from another corner. I felt I was doing an important job, and kept that in the back of my mind.

After I had been in the field for nine months, I was put in the rear to sort the mail that came for all the guys who were in my platoon. Then I'd get on a helicopter and take the mail to them. I also helped them write letters, then mail them back to the States.

Letters and packages were the mainstay of the American soldier, creating a tie between the U.S. and soldiers in Vietnam. It meant people cared about us. I got wonderful letters from my wife. I also wrote to her a lot. I don't know if someone in the rear thought it was funny, or if the enemy got my letters, but at one point my wife got a call from the Red Cross, and they told her that they were getting reports that I was hurt or

they didn't know where I was. Somebody had doctored up my letters and put blood and bandages in them. Some soldiers' wives would get a letter with a thumb or finger in there. The enemy would stoop to anything to create chaos.

My wife's letters motivated me and kept me going. I don't think my wife really knew that I was right in the thick of it, until I got home and told her, because I didn't write about it in letters to her. We didn't discuss events with other soldiers, either. To be honest, it was just accepted. Naturally we thought about it ourselves. There wasn't a camaraderie that we were going to help each other psychologically. Physically we did, but mentally, no. When something tragic happened to a fellow soldier, or we saw something, we might have looked at each other and our faces conveyed our emotion. We really didn't even have time to talk about things even if we wanted to, because we were constantly on the move.

To deal with the things I saw or was ordered to do, I thought of home, starting a life with my wife. I had a lot to live for because I knew she was waiting for me. And I knew darn well I wanted to come home to her. I think the primary goal of the guys there was to get home.

I wasn't so different from other guys. A lot of us believed that we were Americans, we were doing our bit, and boy when it was over we were going to try to forget it and go on with our lives. I was determined not to let it get me down.

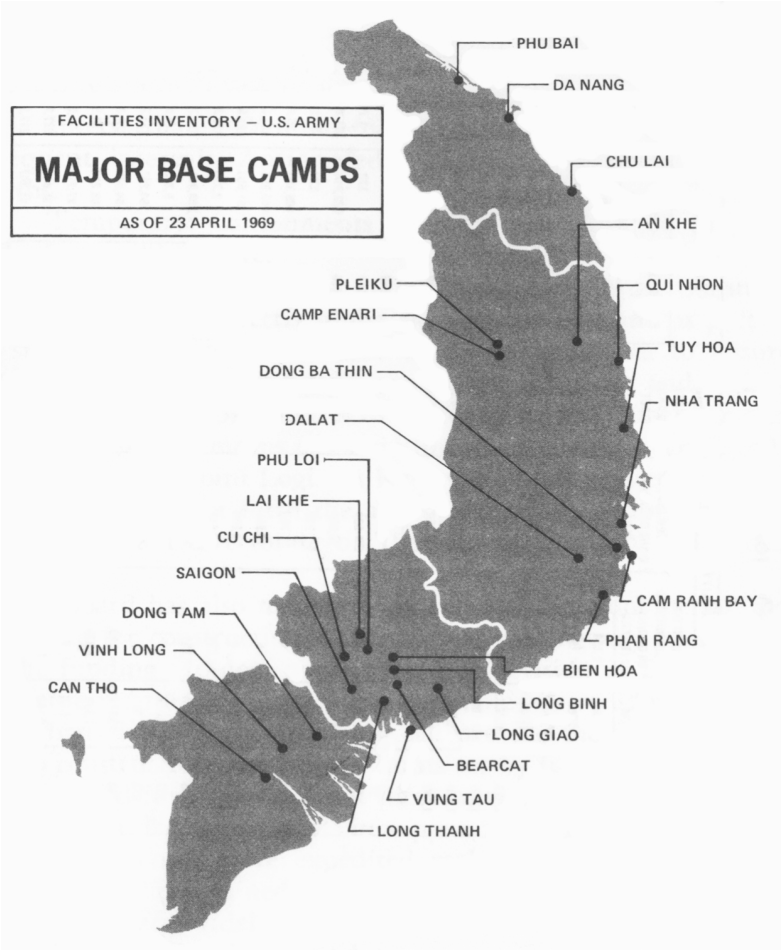

Fig. 3. Map of Vietnam, chosen to show location of Jack (Cu Chi) (Dunn 135).

Cu Chi is located in the Mekong Delta, which occupies the southern two-fifths of South Vietnam. It has fertile alluvial plains, favored by heavy rainfall, which makes it an important rice-growing area (Smith 10).

Overall, 1969 marked a major change in U.S. policy for the Vietnam War. The Nixon administration sought to end U.S. involvement either through negotiations, or by turning the combat role over to the South Vietnamese. This decision promoted the beginning of Vietnamization in the summer of 1969, which was a plan to encourage the

South Vietnamese to take more responsibility for fighting the war, which would enable the United States to gradually withdraw all troops from Vietnam (C. Smith 319).

A cease-fire occurred September 8-11, in observance of Ho Chi Minh's death on September 3 (C. Smith 147). Following the cease-fire President Nixon announced the decision to reduce troop strength in Vietnam to 484,000 by December 15 (C. Smith 151).

The Campaign Plan for 1970 included destruction of the enemy's base areas, which included tunnels, caves and bunkers so that the enemy would be forced to leave base areas and expose themselves to firepower. The plan also stressed territorial security, the separation of Viet Cong and North Vietnamese from the civilian population (Cosmas and Murray 9).

In April 1970 a new theater of war was opened in Cambodia. This was in response to the collapse of Cambodia's position of neutrality (Cosmas and Murray 56). Nixon claimed, in an April speech, that raids in Cambodia would pave the way for troop withdrawals from Vietnam. At the time, peace negotiations at Paris remained deadlocked (Cosmas and Murray 58).

> I got my draft notice in the mail on August 14, 1968, and I was told to report the same day to the draft board. I didn't even have a chance to say goodbye to my parents. I called them and told them to take all my belongings, and I'd see them when I saw them. I reported to the draft board that day at 4 p.m. Subsequently, I was taken to Milwaukee for induction. At the induction center, everybody had to count off 1 to 3. My number was 1, and that was Army. Number 2 was Navy, and 3 was Marines.
>
> — Jack

I remember the time I found myself staring through the barrel of a .45. I walked into the supply room; the guy in charge there had been on drugs for a time and was sitting behind his desk. I was surprised to see him twirling a gun. He put a .38 slug in the barrel and pointed it at me. Before I could process what his intentions were, or react, he shot at me. Luckily he missed, and I escaped with gunpowder burns on my face. Some other soldiers heard the shot and called the MPs [military police], and they took him away in a straightjacket.

It was a rather frightening experience, to say the least, to have friendly fire against me on base. I think he was on drugs and didn't entirely know what was happening. But in the military, you don't report for duty like that. He was a young kid, 18 or 19 years old, and probably had a grudge against me because I was older [23] and in charge of the unit. He probably resented the fact that I was a straight-laced type of guy, and I made sure guys reporting to my unit were not on drugs.

This was a unique situation for me, and one of the scariest moments I experienced in Vietnam. For the most part, I felt safe among my comrades. I trusted my fellow soldiers, because we had to trust each other if we were to survive our tour over there.

My assignment in Vietnam was "safe," for the most part, although I didn't find out what I'd be doing until a couple weeks after I arrived in Vietnam. My Military Occupational Specialty [MOS] after graduating from radio school [in the U.S.] was O5 Bravo, but at the time I didn't know if I would be assigned to a position in communications or not.

In fact, I was in a holding company until I was assigned to the 25th Infantry Division at Cu Chi. As it turned out, I was a lot better off than a lot of guys because they put me in charge of secured communications for the entire division involved in battalions and companies. I could have been assigned to a company level and carried a radio on my back in the field.

Initially, my responsibility was to support and keep the radio communications network in our division going on a daily basis. Later I was promoted to Sergeant, in charge of 17 other guys.

My job was to make certain that our radio network was capable of handling all messages between various units from division down to battalion down to company, to make certain everybody who had secure radio systems could communicate. I was also responsible for changing our codes daily so everybody was able to communicate in a secure system the enemy couldn't access. Sometimes our communications manual was compromised or reported missing, and we had to readjust our system so we could have everybody properly communicate on a secure mode.

We worked 12 hours on, 12 hours off, in a relaxed atmosphere. Our daytime job was to monitor communication. In the evening, we had to make sure that all the radio systems were operating properly and change the frequency system. I went to Headquarters Company every day to change their radios so they would have communication the next day. Generals never changed their own radios.

Most of my time was spent inside the division headquarters. There were a few operations, however, where my duties were specifically to set up radio posts outside the division when dignitaries would come. When Defense Secretary Melvin Laird or four-star generals were in the area, we'd set up posts so that they could carry out inspections or visit villages outside the perimeter of the division.

When we went off base to set up outposts, we were equipped with the standard gear, including night goggles, a bayonet, a water bottle, a steel pot [helmet], and a flak jacket. We also carried an M16.

On two or three occasions when I was required to set up radio posts outside the division, we were fired upon. When we were shot at, we just kept on going. We didn't stop. We were on a mission to set up the radio post and move on to another place.

Fortunately, there were no roadblocks, although sometimes there were dead [Vietnamese] bodies on the road. That's just the way it was.

I participated in a several other operations off base as well, including a few important operations in Cambodia. At the time, President Nixon said we weren't in Cambodia[27]. But we *were* in Cambodia for a number of nights, searching for lost Marines and planes. It was an interesting situation. There were only two of us, and there were no lights on the plane. Our mission was to locate lost units. Unfortunately, while we thought we had the right signals and the right frequencies to contact these units, we were unable to make contact during these missions.

On missions off base, and during normal duties on base, I didn't have to use my gun very frequently. One job where I did need my gun was guard duty on the perimeter at night. The Viet Cong would occasionally approach the perimeter with the intention of attacking our communications network. It was part of their training, as well as ours, to knock out the enemy's communications network. Many times there would be shooting and incoming rounds.

There was limited contact with civilians, other than the Viet Cong approaching the perimeter. On a couple missions, we drove through cities when going to different outposts. With their outdated vehicles, these cities were like a throwback to the '40s or '50s — rather primitive conditions. The division also hired civilians in the daytime to clean each soldier's "hootch" [living quarters][28]. Also, they were employed at the PX

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[27] Herring confirms that over a period of 15 months, more than 100,000 tons of bombs were dropped on Cambodia, the actions kept secret from the American public and much of the government (Herring 221).

[28] Shulimson, Blasiol, Smith and Dawson confirm that a soldier's living area was called a "hootch." (Shulimson, Blasiol, Smith and Dawson 261).

[Post Exchange[29]] and to do other miscellaneous jobs on the base, even to the point of hauling out the garbage to dumps outside the division. So there was contact with men and women occasionally. We didn't always know if these people were the enemy or not.

There were two kinds of enemy in Vietnam: the regular North Vietnamese Army and the sympathizers with the North [Viet Cong]. The latter were friendly during the day, but at night they supported the North. This made it difficult to determine who the enemy was in the daytime.

I spent my free time writing letters, going to the PX, going to the library, making music tapes, and sleeping. That's about it. Sometimes they would have shows or movies. While I was in Vietnam, Bob Hope visited. It was short notice, around Christmas time, and he came to the division[30]. These were appreciated diversions for the soldiers.

I was able to keep in touch with family and friends while in Vietnam. As I mentioned, I spent some of my free time writing letters. While I received letters from my mother and sisters, the most important letters were those I received from a gal I met three days before I left for Vietnam. She later became my wife. We had met at her school in North Carolina in September of 1969, and we corresponded with letters almost every week. We weren't committed to each other at the time, but things progressed from there. We were married in July 1973, a good four years later. And here we are, a few decades later.

Reflecting on the war, I have to say that when I was drafted, I thought the war's purpose was to give the citizens in South Vietnam a chance to form a government — a democracy that would stop the spread of Communism in that part of the world. When I

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[29] Jack explains that the Post Exchange is a store on base that sells merchandise to military personnel.

[30] Shulimson, Blasiol, Smith, and Dawson show a picture of noted comedian Bob Hope, entertaining troops during the Christmas holidays (Shulimson, Blasiol, Smith, and Dawson 567).

left, and to this day, I still feel that democracy was the *last* thing on their minds. They were more concerned with feeding themselves and their families. They were more concerned about survival[31].

Operation Iraqi Freedom

Dan (Iraq, 2004-2005, 2006-2007)

Fig. 4. Map of Iraq, chosen to show location of Dan (Baghdad) ("Iraq." Map. August 30, 2008 <http://www.geology.com>.)

[31] According to Smith, nearly 80% of South Vietnamese were peasants, who showed little interest in political ideologies that had little or no relevance to their life. Their concerns were expressed in terms of land ownership, education, improved opportunities for their children, better houses, adequate water for rice paddies, availability of seeds and fertilizer, and peace (C. Smith 248-250).

Baghdad is the capital of Iraq. With a municipal population estimated at more than 5.6 million, it is the largest city in Iraq (Augustin and Kubena 82). It has a hot arid climate. In the summer, the average temperature is 94°F, but can easily surpass it. Rainfall is almost completely absent, averaging 6 inches per year, and dust storms are a normal occurrence (Augustin and Kubena 27, 66). Oil is one of the most important resources in Iraq, and the country is believed to have the world's second largest oil reserves (Augustin and Kubena 72).

The year 2004 (election year) proved to be an eventful year, marking some of the most notable events of the war to date. President Bush had just announced "Mission Accomplished" on May 2, 2003, the end of "major combat operations" (Rich 267-8); and Saddam Hussein was arrested in December 2003. The next phase of Operation Iraqi Freedom began, the campaign to pacify Iraq and begin its political transformation. This phase has also been called a counterinsurgency, and has come to dwarf all operations that preceded it, resulting in more American casualties than during the major combat operations (Donnelly 85).

The remainder of 2003 and 2004 was marked by widespread insurgencies. In March 2004, Iraqi insurgents in Falluja ambushed four Americans; they were burned and dragged through the street of Falluja, and two of the corpses were hung over a bridge crossing the Euphrates (Rich 119-120; Isikoff and Corn 356). April 2004 brought more high-profile news. It marked a month of over 130 American casualties, more than any other month since the invasion began. Two of the deaths were prevalent in the news: Michelle Witmer, of Wisconsin, was killed, spurring a debate whether her two sisters, also stationed in Iraq, should return to combat. Another American casualty was Pat Tillman, a member of the Arizona Cardinals football team, who turned down a high-dollar contract to join military efforts in Iraq with his brother (Rich 122-3). At the end of

April, media announced that Iraqi detainees were being sexually humiliated, taunted, and mistreated by American military guards at Abu Ghraib prison (Rich 125; Isikoff and Corn 356). In June, the U.S. turned over sovereignty in Iraq to the new prime minister Ayad Allawi (Rich 128).

> I joined the army because I couldn't find a job as a police officer while living in Colorado. I heard, about four or five times when applying for police jobs, 'We like your college degree and all, but we prefer people with military experience or previous law enforcement experience.' So, my lease ended after six months there, and I came back home and decided to join the army. Before I knew it, I was in Iraq, stationed at Baghdad International Airport.
>
> — Dan

A vivid memory I have of my time in Iraq is the day that my squad leader got hit by a VBIED [a vehicle-born improvised explosive device], which is like a roadside bomb inside a vehicle that somebody just drives up. It was sunny out, hot, and everybody was tired from hours and hours of patrol work. We were heading back toward our base camp, just observing traffic, and people were staying out of our way.

All of a sudden, we saw an orange and white Suburban driving real slow on the side of the road. It looked like he was going to get out of our way, so we started to go past him. My squad leader was in the first truck, I was in the second truck, and we had a third truck behind us. I remember watching in horror as the Suburban swerved right into my squad leader's truck. The next thing I knew, our vehicle was turned around, and everyone was looking around wondering what happened. My driver and team leader were just getting their wits about them, and they saw our squad leader's truck all blown up

with smoke coming out of it. So we quickly drove up to it, to do whatever we could to help.

My squad leader had forgotten to combat lock the doors. Thank God he forgot to do that, because when the explosion happened, it blew the door right off, and he crawled out that way. Otherwise, he might not have gotten out. He pulled one person out of the truck, and the third guy crawled out. My squad leader threw a grenade into the blown up truck to blow up anything that might be left — radios, weapons, whatever was in there. They got into our truck, and we started heading back toward base, looking for a place to land a medevac. They were pretty messed up by this time; one guy couldn't walk, and another guy should not have been walking but somehow was.

We drove maybe 10 miles down the road, did our 360-degree perimeter with two trucks, in order to create a "circle" of vehicles for security and safety. We pretty much took up the whole highway, with a truck in front and a truck in back; and we called in the medevac to come and get the injured guys. It seemed like we were waiting forever for the medevac to show up, when a unit of Bradleys [tanks] showed up. They just happened to be in the vicinity on patrol and heard we had gotten blown up, and knew where we were. So they met us there and started filling in the gaps of the 360. At that point we were pretty secure.

The medevac finally arrived and airlifted the guys out of there, and the Bradleys escorted us back to base. They were actually pulling our Humvee, because the tires were blown out.

The Iraqi people were jumping up and down in joy that our Humvee was messed up. I don't know if we were just in a bad part of Baghdad where they hated us, or if that was the sentiment of a lot of the people there, but they were cheering as we were going by.

This was all in a day's work as an MP [military police], which is my MOS [military occupational specialty]. My MP team was made up of a team leader, a driver, and a gunner in one Humvee. A team leader is always the guy in charge of the team, usually a sergeant. The driver is usually the next person in seniority.

I started out as a gunner, which is the most dangerous position on the team. My job was basically to watch out for the enemy. I had to make sure the weapon was always up, running, and clean. I had an M-249, which is a machine gun, and I had a grenade launcher. I was also cross-trained at being a driver and, eventually, a team leader. Sometimes we switched positions, because we couldn't expect anyone to drive for 12 hours straight.

As MPs, we were mounted, which means we were in trucks about 75% of the time. We were dressed in our regular uniform with a bulletproof vest and plates. We had long sleeves on top, and wore pants. The vest had pouches attached to hold magazines. We also wore a Kevlar helmet, eye protection, and gloves.

Our team's mission was to patrol the area like regular police officers patrol the streets in the U.S. We'd do basic patrols as well as patrol the hot spots around Baghdad. We usually didn't see anyone, at least not anyone who we could catch. But if we saw somebody, we'd try to detain them, take them in for questioning. We also looked for roadside bombs, especially in culverts and near bridges. When we found a bomb, we'd corner off the area and call the EOD [Explosive Ordnance Disposal]. They would come and clear it, usually by blowing it up in place.

Part of our job was to watch for other military vehicles that were broken down or blown up, and just to be out there, ready to help. I don't know if we saved anybody's life. I mean we could have saved someone's life because we were there helping them out.

When we stopped to help anyone, usually the driver and gunner stayed in the vehicle. The driver might dismount with the team leader, but usually it's just the team

leader who gets out. As a gunner, I never left the vehicle. They would park the truck so that we had 360-degree security, in order to see in all directions to watch for anyone who might be the enemy. We never came upon anybody who was being attacked, but we were attacked.

I actually got shot at the second day on the road, I believe it was April 8th or something like that. We had just gotten into Baghdad, and we went through about five ambushes in one day. We were taking fire all day long, and a sniper hit my gunner shield[32]. All I heard was "ting." And I thought, "Shit – somebody almost got me there." That was the only time I thought I was going to die.

Other than that, our Humvee was blown up a few times, one time really bad where it flattened all four tires plus damaged the undercarriage. I was the only one who ever got hit with anything. I got hit with shrapnel in the arm and face, and then in the arm again. It wasn't too painful. They took me to the medical center and removed as much of the shrapnel as they could find. Later on, more shrapnel came to the surface, and they removed that, too.

In addition to patrols, we also spent about 3 to 4 months escorting trucks full of food or supplies to the nearest base. We always had three Humvees with one in front, one in the middle, and one at the end of the convoy, all driven by soldiers. Our own people didn't drive the trucks we escorted; they were driven by Pakistanis or Syrians, mostly people from neighboring countries, but never Iraqi drivers. The trip would take about 4 hours each way, going about 50 mph. We traveled on highways most of the time, and at night, so the only people out on those roads with us were military, since martial law was in effect at that time.

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[32] According to Dan, the gunner shield is a steel shield right in front of the gunner where they have their weapon pointing through.

Our job while escorting convoys was to provide security. We were continually counting to make sure we didn't lose anybody, and we never left anybody behind. We communicated with the other Humvees through radios. If we were ambushed, we'd try to drive through it, since Humvees are pretty maneuverable and bulletproof. If we were shot at, the trucks we were escorting were usually shot at, too. The drivers of those supply trucks never turned on us, but they didn't feel sorry for us when we got blown up and stuff like that. They would just keep going, because their first instinct was to drive. The Humvee in the front of the convoy would stop them, though. In any case, they weren't dumb enough to go off by themselves for too long.

In addition to patrolling the streets and escorting supply trucks, we were also in charge of Iraqi police stations. The police treated us pretty well because with U.S. military comes U.S. money. They would beg us for everything. But they also resented us a little. Not because we were pulling rank, but because they didn't like us telling them what to do, like telling them they had to come to work every day. Sometimes they would blow us off a little bit; I mean not do what we told them to do. One time we had high-ranking people come in to check out an Iraqi police station. We went there the day before to make sure it was all cleaned up. The interpreter told them, "Hey, this has to really look good tomorrow because so-and-so is coming." When we went there the next day, everything was a mess. There were human feces all over the place. I think they were just trying to make it look like a bad police station in order to get more money out of the people who were coming.

During patrols and on missions, we had to observe the rules of warfare. The rules of warfare that we had over there at the time were pretty much agreeable. I mean, there are going to be cases where it's going to be gray.

When I first got there, they said that we could shoot certain people on sight. We knew who those people were because command put out a description, like wearing all

white with black armbands on their left arm or something like that. They wore that just like we wear our uniform, so we could identify them.

During my second or third month there, command changed the rules of engagement. They said that the enemy had to show hostile intent or perform a hostile act toward us before we could shoot. Hostile intent or acts included someone raising their weapon or pointing their weapon at us; maybe having a radio or something in their hand, making it look like they were about to detonate a roadside bomb.

As far as rules of engagement, they would stress that this person has to do this or that in order for us not to get in trouble. They stressed that over and over and over. Plus, when we were on patrols or escorts, we had headsets in order to communicate with each other. And we weren't making the decisions out there all by ourselves. I would say something like, "Hey, I see a dude right there. Do you see a weapon on him? I don't see anything right now." Or they would yell, "Hey, I see somebody left," or "I see somebody right." If someone showed hostile intent, our sergeant or team leader would say, "Yeah, go ahead and take a shot, or shoot at that person." So it was a team effort.

We never took any hostages. We shot at some people. I don't know if we killed people, because we didn't stop and check. But if we shot someone, we couldn't shoot them again to kill them. Another rule of warfare was that once we shot them, and they were no longer a threat, we had to help them. So after we neutralized them, if they were still alive, we brought medical aid to them, and had them airlifted to a medical facility.

We had some fear of crossing the line, but everybody in my squad would get their stories straight before we went back to base, to make sure that nobody said anything wrong. Everybody knew what to say.

Our jobs were made more difficult because we really didn't always know who the enemy was; anybody could be the enemy. It could be a little kid, it could be the woman

walking down the street, it could be anybody. So we didn't really trust anybody. Part of this thought-process came from training, part from experience.

The enemy also used guerilla warfare, like snipers, who would shoot and run or shoot and hide. They planted grenades on the ground, hoping someone would pick them up and get their hand blown off. They also buried roadside bombs in the concrete. Or they could have them just lying on the side of the road. It could be anything, look like anything, from an empty soda to a bundle of trash — anything. They're using everybody, including women and kids. Women would strap bombs to their bodies and make it look like they were pregnant. They would walk up to a crowd of military and blow them up.

We never had a woman or child come up to us with a bomb strapped to them, but one day when we were driving, a dude who had his car full of bombs drove into the lead truck and blew that truck to pieces. The soldiers miraculously got out. They were all sent back to Germany, though, with burns and shrapnel. But they all made a full recovery.

On another occasion, we set up a hasty checkpoint, and we shot at some people who wouldn't stop. We lit the car up, and it turned out that it was a farmer and his son or something like that. I don't know if they couldn't understand what we were saying or what, but they got lit up pretty bad. I don't know if they died, but half the old guy's head was shot off.

As far as civilians, the military kept telling us that 90% of the people loved us there, and 10% didn't. But in my experience with the people, I think it was the other way around — it's probably more like 20% liked us there and the other 80% really didn't.

The people, in general, liked what we could give them. They begged us for food and water. We threw candy to them or gave them food every once in a while when we were on patrol. We also went to schools. We went to schools and handed out stuff to kids, like soccer balls, paper and pens, and other school supplies. I guess the purpose was to try to get the people to like us. I felt a little bit sorry for the Iraqi people, but not much. I

don't feel any sorrier for them than I do for the people over in Africa starving, or in any other country that is down on its luck.

Tank (Kuwait, 2005-2006)

Fig. 5. Map of Kuwait, chosen to show location of Tank (specific location unidentified) ("Kuwait." Map. August 30, 2008 <http://www.geology.com>.)

Kuwait, with a population of more than 2 million, is located on the coast of the Persian Gulf, bordered by Saudi Arabia to the south and Iraq to the north and west (Willis 15, 19). The flat, sandy Arabian Desert covers most of the country (Willis 15). Kuwait does not have any natural lake or water reservoir (Willis 17). It has a warm tropical climate. Summer is extremely hot and dry with temperatures averaging 91°F, and easily crossing 112°F. Annual rainfall averages one to seven inches, and dust storms occur frequently (Willis 24). Kuwait has the Middle East's fourth largest oil reserves (Willis

16, 69). Nearly 80% of the workforce consists of non-Kuwaitis, mostly Third Country Nationals from India, Pakistan and Iran (Willis 80). In 1990, Kuwait was invaded and annexed by neighboring Iraq (Willis 52). The Iraqi occupation came to an end after the United States and a coalition of many nations fought the Persian Gulf War to remove the Iraqi forces from Kuwait (Willis 54-55).

Kuwait has become the home to several U.S. bases and forces have commonly been deployed to Iraq through this country (Willis 57; Donnelly 39). While Kuwait was not a site for actual combat, troops stationed there play crucial roles for troops in Iraq.

By October 2005, the number of American troops killed in Iraq had topped 2,000. By Spring 2006, Iraq was on the edge of civil war. Once Saddam Hussein had been captured, Iraqis were supposed to lead the way to a new Middle East. Instead, Iraq verged on complete chaos and civil war (Gardner and Young 1).

> Ever since I was a young kid, I wanted to be in the military. My dad always said I was too skinny to do it, so I just took it as a challenge after he passed away, and I enlisted in the Wisconsin National Guard. I chose the National Guard because I didn't want to do it every day. I just wanted to do it once in awhile.
>
> — Tank

When we first arrived, it stunk like garbage and a Porta-Potty. It was hot and really brown. Over there, it's all sand and prairie grass, like what you'd see in Indiana Jones or an old Western with the tumbleweed going across. I thought there would be camels all over, and big sand dunes. But it's not like that. It's just flat, and it stinks. And I couldn't believe how hot it was; I wanted to hop back on the plane.

In spite of this extreme heat, we have to wear our gear — a bulletproof vest with safety plates in the front and the back, and our ammo strapped on. We also carry a weapon. We can't roll up our sleeves, no matter how hot it is, and the sand and asphalt reflects the heat. We drink water to keep cool, and we put up nets to create shade.

My responsibilities aren't that exciting. I'm not really a war hero. We work four days on, and two days off, a 12-hour shift either from noon to midnight, or midnight to noon. Of course, this is always subject to change, because all heck could break loose and then we'd be out there for 24 hours.

My main responsibility is base security, searching and keeping tabs on every car or person that enters the base. We use towers around the perimeter to watch for any suspicious activity outside the base, and to watch for anyone who might attempt to enter without permission. Soldiers in gun trucks also patrol inside the base.

Our rule of engagement is very clear: Stop – Shout – Shoot. For example, imagine there is a car speeding toward the gate, refusing to slow down, and seemingly unable or unwilling to stop. If the guards feel the base is threatened, they would yell stop. If the potential intruder would continue to move toward the gate, the guards would shout at them to stop again. Then they would fire a warning shot in front of the road. If these measures didn't work, we'd start shooting the car, like the engine block, to try to stop the vehicle. We want to stop the vehicle, because if we shoot the driver or passengers, the vehicle could still continue on its path right into our gate. Our goal is to kill the motor of the vehicle, not the people.

Another responsibility I have is to provide security for ammunition shipments that arrive. In fact, all the ammunition that comes into the theater comes through our base. When the ships come in, we pull really tight security. Our base is right off the water, so the Navy is also there with us, along with the Coast Guard and Air Force. And once in a while we have the Marines.

The ammo usually comes in on big civilian ships, like a big freightliner-type of ship. It holds thousands of connexes, which are semi-trailers without wheels. When they arrive, that area runs 24 hours a day, loading the connexes onto trailers with wheels. Then they move the connexes of ammo to a different location where another group comes to load the ammo onto supply trucks, and then those trucks start heading off to wherever they have to take the ammo. Different units that are responsible for convoy security accompany them to their destination and back. When they go to Iraq, it's dangerous.

Those who do convoy security don't always know what they're transporting. I would say that nine out of 10 times they do. As far as the enemy knowing what is being transported, it depends on how many moles are inside the base, like the Third Country Nationals.

Third Country Nationals [TCNs] are blue-collar workers who come from India or Pakistan to work, and are hired to work on our base. They clean the streets, do maintenance, or perform other jobs. They're very poor. They don't ask for much, but if we offer them candy, they take it. If we offered them a winter coat or scarf, they wouldn't turn it away. The only thing they ask for is water, because it's so hot.

To help them out, we donate our old shoes. We put them into a box and then into the garbage. The Third Country Nationals grab the shoes, because sometimes they're wearing two different shoes — one might be really huge on them, and the other is really small — because they can't afford to buy shoes.

There have been cases where uniforms, shoes, or clothes come up missing in the laundry or showers. A person walks over there wearing their shoes, sandals in their hand. They pop on their sandals and take a shower, then come out and their shoes are gone. A couple of days later, they see a TCN wearing their shoes. There's not much we can do about it.

Third Country Nationals are everywhere, on and off base. I come into contact with them quite a bit. I haven't had very much contact with the actual civilian population, though. Kuwait is a really rich country because of the oil, so the actual Kuwaiti people don't need anything from us. And we really don't go off the base since we can't go into the city and there aren't bars there like in the U.S. because Kuwait is a dry country. I think there might be one bar, or maybe a couple bars, like at the American Embassy, but we're not allowed to go there.

I would say that most of the people are happy we're there. There's a strong love for America in Kuwait. There are more pictures of President George W. Bush in Kuwait than there are in the whole United States. And Kuwait is slightly smaller than the size of New Jersey[33]! With the issues in Lebanon, some of the people were upset and were kind of revolting, but it was mostly the younger crowd. In Kuwait a lot of the older people remember the Gulf War and how we came in there and helped them. The kids my age really don't remember that and are at a rebellious age

Kuwait is pretty safe, and although there is activity going on, you don't usually see it. Nothing really earth-shattering happens there. There are different theories as to why it's like this. Some people believe the Kuwait government pays off the insurgents so they don't attack Kuwait. Other people believe that most of the groups of insurgents live in Kuwait, and they don't want to attack Kuwait because they live there. So they attack other countries. I don't know if any these theories are true. They're just theories I've heard.

As far as the enemy in this war, it's an unseen enemy. And the enemy is inside and outside the wire. By this, I mean that inside the wire, everyone has the potential to become complacent. So your best friend sometimes is the enemy because he doesn't pull

[33] Willis confirms that Kuwait is slightly smaller than the size of New Jersey (Willis, 15).

his weight. And, say you live with a fellow soldier in the same building for awhile, you get on each other's nerves.

The enemy outside the base blends into the landscape, unlike American soldiers, who look out of place. We don't know who the enemy is. It's just like in Vietnam. Everyone looks the same. They wear the same clothes. They don't have a sign that says, "I'm the enemy." That would be too easy. They blend in, and we stick out because we're white, and we have different haircuts, and we have clean-shaven faces. It's funny. You get a couple military people walking together, and all of a sudden, if you look at them, they're in step walking. The people over there, they're relaxed. So we stick out like a sore thumb.

Aside from patrol duties, my time in Kuwait so far has been easy and laid back. For example, besides the "normal" activities of free time — like softball, volleyball, football, soccer and swimming — I also started a grill club. Once a week we grill out. We started with three people in the office, and now there are 20-30 people a week who show up. A week ahead of time, we have a signup list, and everyone pays $10 because that's what steaks average over there. Then we order however many steaks we need from the PX. We wait until midnight to grill the food, because it's cooler then. Along with the steaks, we make potatoes and corn. Then we just sit out on a picnic table, BS, drink our non-alcoholic beer[34] and have a good time. We usually stay out for about an hour playing cards or whatever.

Nothing really exciting has happened during my time there. The only thing that has happened on our base occurred we were playing softball during our free time one day, and our Colonel got pushed down and knocked out. Our medics came right away; they were probably excited for the action.

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[34] According to Tank, because Kuwait is a dry country, the soldiers could not have alcohol on base.

Technology has been a lifesaver, as far as keeping in touch with family. Our unit actually bought a satellite dish and hooked up to the Internet. It works half the time, but when we really want it to work, it doesn't.

During my free time, I usually go to the pool or catch up on some sleep. I also keep in contact with family every day, whether by e-mail or phone. There's a building with phones and we can use calling cards, but the lines are always so long that it's just easier to use my cell phone. I call my wife twice a day, sometimes. Being able to talk to my wife every day means the most to me. That kind of helps her, too. Then she knows that things are still okay. I call my mom once a month, sometimes once a week. I also keep in contact with my grandparents, uncles and friends. I don't discuss events or anything like that with family or friends back home. We're not really supposed to, because the phone lines aren't secure.

We usually don't go to other bases, but we're allowed to go on occasion. If we want to go to another base, we have to go to our First Sergeant and get a piece of paper with our name and other information. And then we have to get it OK'ed through him and where we are going. We also have to have to at least one other person go with us, and it has to be for business; we can't just go to another base to hang out.

We do go to other bases for special events. The bases have concerts, and they have comedians come in at night. The Charlie Daniels Band was there, for example. During holidays, they also have different people come in, such as comedians and celebrities. Bo Jackson came, as well as a couple people from the wrestling world, and the Dallas Cowboys cheerleaders.

One time, we were also allowed a four-day pass to go Qatar, just to get away, to break up the monotony. The atmosphere was pretty laid back. We went out to this little military base, and they had trips where we could go to a mall, go ice skating, or travel through the desert in big Jeep-type vehicles. We also had the opportunity to experience

the culture in the city shops that sell hats and stuff, called bazaars. A lot of the activities were free. If we wanted to go golfing, that was $50. And, if we wanted to buy a gift or food at the bazaars, we had to pay for that.

In addition to free time, we look forward to care packages from home. There are some things we're not supposed to receive, like alcohol, but I'm sure it happens. And we want to try to stay as healthy as possible, so we throw away things like HO-HOs, Twinkies and Pringles, partially because they're unhealthy, and because they get smashed up so bad in the mail. The one thing we eat right away is cheese. Whoever sends it just throws it in a box and it gets deformed due to the heat. So we just stick it in the fridge, let it cool, and eat it. Cheese is basically mold, so it doesn't matter.

I also get a lot of peanuts from my grandma, so I share them with other people or throw them away. For some reason, I get a lot of word find books; my mom sends me three every week, and it's just not something I spend my time doing.

All in all, my time in Kuwait has been alright. At times I'm glad I enlisted, and at times I'm not. It's just like any other job. When you're over there, you miss your family and wish you were back home. But then after you're done, you see what you accomplished, and you're glad you did it.

Fig. 6. Map of Iraq, chosen to show location of Wayne (Tallil Air Base, near An Nasiriyah)
("An Nazariya, Iraq." Map. Military Education Research Library Network, Department of Defense. August 30, 2008 <http://www.merln.ndu.edu>.)

Tallil air base is located near An Nasiriyah, a city in Iraq located on the Euphrates River about 225 miles southeast of Baghdad. Iraq's fourth most populated city, its estimated population in 2003 was 560,200, An Nasiriyah was a battleground for the initial invasion during Operation Iraqi Freedom. It was a key area for ground maneuvers due to its potential crossing point on the Euphrates, where the main highway running north from Kuwait diverts east and crosses the river in two places. Maintaining control of at least one bridge has been crucial for American forces, and the large airfield of Tallil plays a key role in defending the bridge and the city (Donnelly 54).

The end of 2004 brought some focus on the troops and claims that the government did not provide adequate supplies. Just before the U.S. election, 23 members of an Army Reserve unit disobeyed a direct order to deliver fuel from Tallil air base to Taji, north of Bagdad, because they believed their vehicles were in poor condition and did not have sufficient armor. Earlier, it had been reported that troops were using sandbags as vehicle armor (Rich 157). A secret Pentagon study in January 2006 revealed that as many as 80 percent of the marines who had been killed in Iraq from wounds to the upper body could have survived if they had had extra body armor. Furthermore, while this armor was available since 2003, the government had declined to supply it to troops despite requests from the field for additional protection (Rich 158).

> All through junior high and high school, I knew I was going to be in the military. I always wanted to serve my country.
>
> — Wayne

The enemy knew how to hit us where it hurt. On one occasion, we were in Baghdad to replace a bridge outside of town. We were working three rotating shifts to finish the job as soon as possible. One night I had an oddball shift, so my sleep pattern was completely out of whack. At the time, we were back on base at night, sleeping. Nothing seemed out of the ordinary. Then, all of a sudden we heard an explosion, and the building shook a little bit. We didn't think much of it, but listened. Then I rolled over and went back to sleep.

When we woke up later, we heard that the base had gotten mortared, rocketed during the night. On our way to eat breakfast, we found out we couldn't, because the chow hall was closed; it took a mortar. So we were stuck with an MRE [Meal, Ready to Eat] for breakfast. And then it turned out they also hit Disbursing [pay].

So we're thinking those bastards knew exactly what to do. They took out our pay and our food. We laughed about that. That was one of the more memorable days I had in Iraq.

I didn't really participate in other special operations, mostly just a couple bridge-replacement projects, but nothing special. During these missions, we had some civilian contact. Kids would stand by the fence where we were working, begging for food, candy and water. Usually when we were driving down the road, somebody would throw out a case of water or a case of MREs into the ditch. We didn't want the people to stand too close to us, or by the wire perimeter at the bridge site, because it would create a target for the insurgents to blow up. What better way to get publicity than to blow up a bunch of kids and some Marines!

For us, the enemy basically was anybody who was trying to blow us up. Southern Iraq wasn't so bad. Occasionally, some knucklehead would try something. They would shoot at the gate or maybe throw a couple mortars around. But they didn't stand a chance with the security around there. But when we were in Baghdad, it was different. It was just unreal around that city. We would drive around, see the looks on the people's faces, and we could tell some were happy to see us and some were just plain pissed. The Shi'ites and the Kurds, they were all happy we were there. But of course most of the Sunnis weren't. They were the controlling party and had the most to lose, so they were unhappy.

Other than that, we couldn't specifically identify the enemy. If they shot at us, we shot back. It's an enemy that's hard to define. They blend in. They hide. Luckily we didn't see the enemy using women and children, but we heard about it. I talked to some of the army units that were running convoy security and patrols, and they said they'd seen it. The enemy would use women and children like shields. They'd duck and hide behind them, or they'd bribe the kids with candy and stuff to throw rocks at soldiers.

Our rules of engagement depended on the area we were in, and who had control of that area. There were different rules on our base, as well. We couldn't have any ammunition in our weapons; the magazine had to be taken out. But as soon as we got outside the gate, we locked and loaded. The rules also differed for escort vehicles. If a vehicle was coming up too fast, we used a sign to signal them to stop. If they didn't, then we'd have to do warning shots. If they still didn't stop, it was a couple rounds in the engine. And if they were still coming, it was shoot to kill. It would escalate fast.

But generally, we just used common sense. We didn't point our guns; we didn't try to antagonize anybody. I never had to shoot at anybody. Some of our guys did take out vehicles, and they did shoot back a few times. Our rules of engagement stayed pretty consistent throughout our time in Iraq.

I would say that anything that I did see happen was deserved, and I didn't see anything that would be considered illegal. I saw a little bit, but not a lot. During my time over there, nobody got hurt due to enemy activity.

Safety, however, would fluctuate depending on the situation. When I was out driving through the streets of Baghdad at 3 a.m. trying to find where we were going, sitting as a passenger in a vehicle, I didn't feel so safe. But when I was on base, I felt safe. There's something about walls and barbed wired that just makes a person feel safer. A few times people tried to come onto base. Not to overtake it, but just a couple of knuckleheads who would try something. They'd take a few pot shots at us, lob some mortars or rockets. Just try to do something. They'd shoot and take off, or they were shot and killed. Taken care of. And we moved on.

I personally felt pretty safe, because I spent a majority of my time on base. I was stationed at Tallil air base, near An Nasiriyah. As Marines, we were on 6-month deployment, instead of the full year that other military divisions have.

Around the time we arrived things were building up. I couldn't complain about the living quarters. We had it pretty cushy compared to the initial invasion. Those guys had Spartan conditions; there was nothing there. Initially, our living quarters was a big tent, with air conditioning and a wooden floor. We slept on cots. Eventually, they tore down one little "tent city," and the soldiers would move into a trailer city that was put up. We called our trailer "living containers."

The containers were like little metal boxes that they popped up and outfitted with things that were needed, including a heater and air conditioner. They were small. For the average ranking marine or soldier, they broke it down to 2 rooms per trailer with two people per room. The higher the rank, the bigger the room they got, or they were by themselves. I lucked out and had a room to myself. Each room had its own door, its own lock. We had privacy.

We had a normal bed — it was a piece of junk, but it was better than a cot and better than sleeping on the ground. Each trailer had different things brought in by the residents. Some of those guys went all out. They had TVs, stereos and Playstations. These things weren't provided for us. We had to buy things from the PX if we wanted them.

The base I was on was gravy, as the saying goes. I couldn't believe the amenities that were there, and those they were adding. There was a large chow hall — good food, with an unbelievable amount and selection of everything. It was better than some of the restaurants in the States. There was a softball diamond, soccer field and flag football areas. The softball diamond and the lights blew my mind! And it was just for our base! It was a fairly secure base, but when a threat of an attack would come, we'd shut down all the leagues, anything that would require lights at night. But overall, the base was just unbelievable.

My main responsibility was the equipment, the accountability for each piece of gear, making sure it was up and running and that it would get to the appointed place at the appointed time. I worked with my counterpart in maintenance, who I called my "brother Darryl." He and I had offices across from each other, and we'd call "Hey brother Darryl, you got this thing running?" and all that. We had fun.

On a typical day, I woke up at 4:30 a.m., walked down to chow hall (a nice little ½ mile walk), ate breakfast and walked to work. I looked at the stuff the maintenance man left, to see what was running and what wasn't. Then I typed up my report, printed it out and took it up to the company office around 9 a.m. Then, if I didn't have a whole lot to do, I'd walk around and talk to the guys. I'd get in the sergeant's hair and he'd tell me to go back in the office, because they had it under control and didn't need me out there. Just some good fun. We had meetings every morning and afternoon. Our last meeting usually lasted until 1700 hours, and then we were done for the day.

During free time at night, I didn't do a heck of a lot. I worked out a little bit. Sometimes I'd go to somebody else's trailer and play video games like *Madden Football* or *Tiger Woods Golf*. That was a big thing. Everybody bought little memory cards for the Sony Playstation, loaded up their character and went around trailer-to-trailer playing each other in tournament games, just having a blast. Other than that, I spent my free time reading, listening to public radio, or watching football down at the MWR tent [Morale Welfare and Recreation]. I also played on the softball league. During games, we wore shorts and t-shirts, and in winter we wore sweatpants and sweatshirts. It was gravy on that base. I'm not going to lie about it. It was nothing like I expected.

We were our own worst enemy, actually. Getting hurt by softball, lifting weights, running. And I think somebody drove a Humvee into a crater. But we didn't have any actual combat casualties. We were very, very lucky. And I'm grateful for that.

Aside from sports and video games, a lot of us spent time keeping in touch with family and friends. We could also go to the MWR tent and sign up for 30 minutes of phone or Internet time. But we'd sign up and wait and wait and wait. One time I waited 6 hours for the phone. Around Christmas time, it was expected. I'm not going to complain. I had a phone. I was able to use the phone. We used calling cards, but it wasn't a big deal. We didn't use cell phones, or we'd go broke. I called home once a week on Sunday. That was a ritual. I also used the Internet a little bit to stay in touch with family. I didn't e-mail home very often — maybe a couple times a month — because it was a pain in the butt to try to get on one of the computers. I did have my own computer in my office, but the trailers weren't set up for the Internet.

While our e-mail and phone were great for communication, nothing beat getting letters and care packages from home. But, for some, those letters didn't bring good news. Some got "Dear John," or "Dear Jane" letters. Those pretty much all came in late September/October. By that time, we were over there a month or so, and all of a sudden soldiers started getting these letters from their girlfriends, wives and husbands. "See you. We're done." It happens.

That never happened to me. I had a wife and kids waiting for me, and getting artwork from the kids meant the most to me while I was there. I had all kinds of pictures on the wall. They also sent me a little Christmas tree, with little present boxes, and a little snow globe with their pictures in there. I had that set up in my room.

I also received care packages from my family, from VFW groups, from people I knew around home. Besides art from the kids, my favorite thing to receive in the mail was Christmas cookies. That was a big one for everyone. I also looked forward to the newspapers, to keep up with what was going on back home.

We made good use of our care packages. There was always something I could use or trade with somebody else who could use it. We also helped others. In one building, we

had these boxes on shelves where we put extra stuff that we couldn't use or didn't need. We'd put it in the boxes and everyone else could shop. When we had accumulated too much stuff, civil affairs groups took them out to the people in town and shared. It went over great. A lot of school supplies went out to the kids — pens, pencils, books, paper. Civil affairs said it was "good will, winning the hearts and minds of the Iraqi people." Most of the people are poor, with a little bit of a middle class and a few wealthy. But most of the people are dirt poor. We felt good helping people. That's what we were there for!

CHAPTER THREE
CONCLUSION

"IF ANYBODY BELIEVES THAT THE MAIN REASON WE'RE OVER THERE IS TO LIBERATE THE PEOPLE, I THINK THEY ARE SADLY MISTAKEN."

Media, society, and time are important in understanding war, and are reflected in the veterans' narratives. These elements merge, as well as negotiate, with memory to inform the war narrative. This conclusion will pull together the narratives I have written with research in order to demonstrate how war narratives weave elements of media, society, and time into the fabric of the story and hover between nonfiction and fiction, as well as between memoir and historical document.

I will show that war narratives, while they cannot be completely verified for accuracy, play an important role in our understanding of and historical perspective of war. War narratives reflect society's role in the creation of war culture for civilians, as well as for soldiers both in the field and upon returning. They also reflect changing times and attitudes toward war. War narratives also reveal the evolution of media, whether the medium is grounded in reporting from the trenches, news coverage or commentary in the U.S., Hollywood movies, or docudramas. They also expose the passage of time from the standpoint of perspective, the ability or inability of memory to remain static through time, and the reliance on memory for accurate details of historical events.

Media

The depiction and coverage of war by various types of media have far-reaching effects for soldiers, veterans, and society in general. The ways in which media affect

veterans and are reflected in their narratives are endless, but Hollywood war movies along with news coverage (television, radio, newspapers) have had the most impact.

For soldiers going to war, Hollywood movies and docudramas altered their understanding and vision of war before they arrived in the combat zone. In fact, according to Marita Sturken, in Tangled Memories: The Vietnam War, The AIDS Epidemic, and the Politics of Remembering, the first films to influence the representation of war were Hollywood films of WWII, depicting a sense of patriotism, good versus evil, and masculine valor and ability in combat. These films essentially determined how the generation of soldiers who fought in Vietnam imagined warfare: "A dominant theme in Vietnam War films and literature is how soldiers and correspondents went off to Vietnam with images of WWII movies in their heads" (Sturken 94).

Soldiers had seen so much glamorization of war in movies, that the reality they faced began to merge with Hollywood reality, and their actions mirrored the movies. When a television crew was filming in Vietnam, some soldiers unconsciously took on the combat soldier hero role and acted as if they were making a movie (Hynes 202). In the minds of Vietnam soldiers, "Hollywood-reality was reality, that life in a media-glutted culture made it impossible for them to see what they did, except as movies" (Hynes 203). For some soldiers, their memories and resulting narratives became a mix of Hollywood drama and real experience. Over time, the lines between real-life experience and movies become more difficult to define.

When soldiers returned home, they continued to be inundated by Hollywood movies. Those movies became society's definition of war. Instead of historical documents, contemporary Hollywood movies played the primary role in telling the story of the war. Although they are less complete and accurate than historical texts, they have had greater impact because they are able to reach mass audiences and younger people who have less knowledge of the war (Sturken 85-86). Popular films, such as Platoon,

Rambo, and MIA, have come to represent the "authentic" story of the Vietnam War (Sturken 86).

As Hollywood depiction of war creates a distorted picture of what the actual experience was, people view these movies and judge soldiers based on the horrors they see on the screen, accentuating the death and destruction caused by American soldiers during war. This increases war protests as well as increases the marginalization of returning soldiers. It no longer matters if any or all soldiers participated in such acts; the movies imply they did, so members of society believe the movies as truth. Soldiers, on the other hand, view these movies and are personally affected by the misrepresentations. If their experience does not match the glamorization of the movie, they might change their story to add drama that did not actually exist. Or, they might avoid talking about their experience altogether because they cannot live up to Hollywood's depiction of masculine prowess and heroics.

News coverage is also responsible for the creation of the war story, both in positive and negative ways. During the Vietnam War (and subsequent conflicts), journalists were free to observe, photograph, and film as they wished. Their coverage made Americans witnesses to war's terror as it happened. Thus, before war narratives appeared, journalists in the field were society's only voiced witnesses. Their stories told the world what war was like (Hynes 199).

As a result, war has been fought on the battlefield as well as on TV and in newspapers. People do not need to wait for correspondence from soldiers to find out what is happening. The news puts it at the forefront, in news broadcasts and feature articles on the front pages of newspapers. Society has been given a front-row seat to the goings-on of war and allowed to form individual interpretations of events. In this way media plays an important role — it provides information that society uses to determine if it will support the war effort and its soldiers.

Media coverage has also had negative effects for both the general population and soldiers. One problem resides in interpretation. News coverage does not leave all viewers with similar or singular interpretations (Sturken 24). During the Vietnam War, for example, body counts (sometimes inflated) were reported on the evening news as evidence of America's success (Hynes 189). This impact is still debated. Some claim that newspaper coverage sensitized the public to the war's horrors, while others believe that the coverage reduced the death and destruction to common occurrences that lost their sense of importance amid other current events (Sturken 89).

A second problem is that, in many instances, media emphasize the most exciting aspects of the story, which dilute the true account. Perhaps in order to increase ratings or readership, media sometimes misrepresent the war effort or choose to report the worst event on a given day, which dramatizes war rather than depicting it accurately. This has far-reaching consequences. Society cannot remain objective if it does not receive accurate information about the current situation during war. People need to both acknowledge what is reported as well as take an ever-diligent role in filtering misrepresentations and drama to find truth.

A third problem with media coverage is that soldiers' accounts can be rendered unreliable or untrue if they do not match what is presented on TV and in newspapers. Society might not believe the veterans' stories, which only serve to marginalize first-hand accounts of events. Along similar lines, media images also have the capacity to create, interfere with, and trouble the memory. Media images tell a story. However, they are merely a static element amid an entire event. While an image may fix on an event temporarily, the meaning of that image is constantly subject to contextual shifts. Memories are similar in that they do not remain static through time; instead, they are constantly reshaped (Sturken 20-21). Over time, images can distort the event and create new memories. The power of these images can result in the deterioration of memory to

the extent that some veterans cannot distinguish whether their memories are remembered from their experience, or whether they have come from movies, docudramas, or war photographs (Sturken 6, 20). In some cases these images might help a soldier's memories emerge, while for others, it actually creates the memory, resulting in remembered events that are not part of the veteran's experience (Sturken 22).

A final problem with media coverage is the damage it inflicts upon soldiers in the combat zone. During war, media coverage is first circulated in the states, then circulated within the combat zone in newspapers and television newscasts (Hynes 218). For the soldier, Hynes claims, this creates a sense of guilt in killing. Furthermore, since many reports are not accurate and taken out of context, it does not match what the soldiers have experienced or are experiencing. This results in a lack of a single coherent meaning for the soldiers.

As I've stated, Hollywood movies and media coverage have had far-reaching effects on soldiers, both in the way they pictured war before they fought, and how they interpreted the war after they returned home. The veterans I interviewed, however, seem to be less affected by media elements than the research suggests.

Two interviewees talked about movies in regard to the terrain in which they fought, and how they fought. Foxy provided a number of comparisons to Hollywood movies. In the beginning of his interview, he compared his Vietnam experience to a Vietnam War movie, although he could not remember the name of the movie. He also talked about one of the camps he stayed at, where the buildings were wood- and tent-like. He said they reminded him of the television show M*A*S*H. He also contrasted the Vietnam War to WWI and WWII. He said that during Vietnam, there were no front lines, no distinct enemy to face off with, as had been the case during previous wars. He compared and contrasted the soldiers of both wars, some traits of which have been portrayed very heavily in Hollywood movies about WWI and WWII: "Years back in

WWI and WWII, they were foot-pounders, brawny, strong guys, rough and tough," he said. "During the Vietnam War, you had to use your noggin, because it was guerilla warfare, and you were watching 360 degrees around you."

Foxy also compared his use of a gun during Vietnam to the Hollywood movie Rambo. He talked about how he would "play Rambo." "In the first battle I was in, I was so scared that I just sprayed the whole thing, and bodies were falling," he said. "I went through my ammo so fast that I burnt the weapon, and the barrel was pure white. They had to re-issue a new weapon. That's how scared I was." While the first Rambo movie was released in 1982, after the Vietnam War ended, it became Foxy's icon for his combat battle experience.

Another mention of Hollywood movies came from Tank, who compared the terrain he saw in Kuwait to that of an old Western or Indiana Jones movie (1984). He talked about how the terrain was a cross between an old Western movie and an Indiana Jones movie, and described the land as all sand and prairie grass, with tumbleweeds rolling across.

While Hollywood movies play a small role in my interviewees' vision of war, news coverage seems to have affected them more. While most interviewees mentioned TV and newspaper newscasts to some degree, Tank and Dan seemed to be most affected or concerned about the coverage they have seen about the war they were involved in. Tank talked about how he did not agree with news coverage, because it tends to concentrate on the negative aspects of war, and fails to mention the positive. He said, "you don't hear about the girl who got blown up from an IED (improvised explosive device); that her face is all deformed, her arm is missing, and we flew her to the United States and gave her plastic surgery so that she can live a normal life and won't be deformed. You don't hear that stuff in the news, but that stuff happens all the time."

Dan had similar sentiments about media coverage. According to him, the media chooses to focus on the worst thing that happens in the war zone on a given day. He said that while those events do occur, it gives society a misconception that everybody who goes over to the combat zone is in harm's way, which is untrue.

Society

Soldiers from both wars have received varying support from fellow Americans. While Vietnam soldiers received support from family and friends, there was generally little societal support for the soldiers and what the U.S. was trying to accomplish in Vietnam. This resulted in anti-war sentiments, riots, and mass demonstrations, which ultimately funneled down to returning soldiers. Returning soldiers also received varying degrees of support from the government for such ailments as post-traumatic stress syndrome and illnesses caused by Agent Orange.

While Operation Iraqi Freedom has stirred anti-war sentiment, there has been more support for returning soldiers as reflected in parades, discounts at restaurants and other establishments, outward sympathy for families who have lost a soldier, and programs to help soldiers recover and re-assimilate into society.

One connection between the two wars is that in both cases, a disproportionately working-class military was sent to the war zone, while these sacrifices were not made by the more privileged sectors of society. Despite the draft versus all-volunteer force, both systems put most of the burden of war on people with fewer choices and opportunities than their wealthier peers (Appy 137). When interviewing Vietnam veterans, all three mentioned that the middle class was drafted. They said that most draftees were members of rural farming families, rather than those who enjoyed upper class status. Another similarity is that, compared to previous wars, soldiers from these two conflicts have been

considered “short-timers,” spending 365 days “in-country,” then being sent home (Hynes 184).

Some of the differences between the wars include the age, marital status and gender of soldiers from these two wars. I have already discussed the higher percentage of female soldiers in Operation Iraqi Freedom in Chapter One (Introduction). Aside from that, the average age of an American soldier in Iraq is 27, compared to 20 for American soldiers in Vietnam, and more are married (probably related to the age factor). The higher age of soldiers in Operation Iraqi Freedom has resulted from the use of the National Guard and reserves, compared with very few reserve forces activated for combat duty overseas during Vietnam (Appy 137).

These factors aside, a more important difference exists: soldiers from Operation Iraqi Freedom arrive and leave the combat zone as units, as opposed to soldiers who were sent to Vietnam alone. They might have been part of a group of solders sent to Vietnam, but once they arrived, soldiers were dispatched to various units as individuals, assigned to a combat unit where each soldier found himself a stranger among strangers (Hynes 184). Once their tour was over, the soldiers returned as individuals rather than as a member of a unit. Often, there were no transportation or support services awaiting them. According to Hynes and Sturken, many veterans remember how they were greeted by strangers at the airport, many staring at them in anger. The soldiers were ignored or mocked, spat on, and called “baby killers” (Sturken 66; Hynes 180).

Returning soldiers felt betrayed, both by war protestors of their own generation who had not gone to Vietnam, and by the government that seemed to forget about them once they returned. While many soldiers from Operation Iraqi Freedom came home to parades and celebrations, and were showered with government and community services and support, Vietnam veterans’ arrival home was not publicly celebrated, and they were expected to put their war experience behind them and quietly assimilate back into society

(Sturken 66). For those who were unable to return to normal activities, this inability increased their marginalization. They were labeled misfits and stereotyped as potentially dangerous men (Sturken 66).

For soldiers who met with a positive return to their daily activities, sharing stories of their war experiences might be easier because they have at least been able to come to terms with their experience, and they have found or been given a place in society. For those who did not have an easy return, their stories might be lacking in any area where they feel judged or stereotyped. They might also be completely unable to mentally negotiate with their memories, which then remain in the recesses of their minds. When society does not support its troops, or welcome them home, there is a sense of shame in what the soldiers have done, and the healing that comes from sharing memories is absent.

The existence of different homecomings reflects changing times and attitudes toward war. Society plays a key role in supporting and encouraging veterans to share their stories. America has not healed from the Vietnam War. Today, with Operation Iraqi Freedom still going strong, American society needs to figure out how to heal from the previous war in order to heal and help new veterans returning home to heal from what they have endured.

Each soldier I interviewed formed a vision of what would happen when they arrived home. They expected warm greetings, respect, and support from fellow Americans, and resources available to them from the government. For some, this dream became reality. For others, the experience was much different.

Returning from combat duty is an experience that all my interviewees share except for Tank, who was interviewed during leave a few months before his tour ended. Aside from Tank, the veterans' stories have both similarities and differences, pertaining to how they returned, reactions by fellow Americans, government resources available to

them upon their return, how they were affected by their combat experience, and how they feel about war in general as well as the specific war in which they fought.

How They Returned

A distinct difference exists between veterans of the Vietnam War and Operation Iraqi Freedom. During the Vietnam War, soldiers were deployed individually to Vietnam. While they may have arrived in Vietnam along with other soldiers, they were assigned to different units. After they served their time, they arrived home alone. Of course they may have traveled with soldiers returning home from other units, but the ultimate difference is that they did not arrive in or leave Vietnam as a unit.

Jack's tour ended sooner than expected, because the government was downsizing in 1970 and things were scaling back. His arrival home alone matched his feelings of isolation while serving in Vietnam: "I didn't keep in touch with fellow soldiers. Basically, a lot of us in Vietnam were loners, I guess. We didn't form a lot of bonds." Ernest experienced a similar return, describing how units did not leave the combat zone together. He said that people came and went randomly, a couple soldiers joining or leaving a unit every other month.

Soldiers during Operation Iraqi Freedom, on the other hand, left for Iraq/Kuwait and other areas in the combat zone with their unit intact. They trained together before being deployed, and arrived together. After they served their time, those who had made it through left for home together. Dan's unit was sent to Germany. When he arrived in the U.S., he flew into Minneapolis. "The plane ride back was pretty bad," he said. "I'm not even sure what kind of plane we came back on. It must have been some kind of government passenger jet. It looked like a normal plane except, I guess, worn down and old. There wasn't a parade or anything upon our return."

According to Wayne, leaving the combat zone together helped the soldiers emotionally. While Vietnam soldiers formed bonds with men in their unit, and then left those friends behind, the same did not happen for those leaving the Middle East: “All of us went home at the same time, so we didn’t really feel like we were leaving anyone behind,” he said.

Reactions by Fellow Americans

The reaction by fellow Americans when soldiers returned home varied for those I interviewed. Vietnam veterans vividly recall the lack of celebration as well as how poorly they were treated. It did not resemble any vision they had about their return. According to Jack, while some people were spat at or vilified when they returned, he was treated with respect. However, there was no celebration.

Ernest recalled how relieved he was to be home, but how disappointed he was with the reaction of some of the people when they got off the plane. “There were people waiting for troops to come in, but our homecoming was a different experience altogether from what we expected,” he said. “There were protesters; the ones who didn’t want to go to Vietnam themselves, who accused us of being baby killers and killing innocent people. People spit and threw stuff, and mocked us. We felt like we had done something wrong.”

Ernest went on to say that when he returned to his home state, things were better. People treated them well and welcomed them home. He said, “Not all the people were against us. Some understood that we were just doing what we were told. We were young.”

For soldiers returning from Operation Iraqi Freedom, homecoming was more of a positive experience. Dan recalls everyone waiting as they arrived. He said that people were very welcoming and continually asking if he was alright, buying him things because they were glad for his safe return. Wayne, who arrived home via Maine, had a similar

experience. He described how a group of veterans are always there when they find out a plane is coming in with returning soldiers, whether it is daytime or 3 a.m., to provide a warm welcome to deserving soldiers.

Tank, however, did not receive exactly the same welcome. When he came home on leave, his family and friends were supportive, but he met with some negative reaction by others upon his return. “One guy spit on me at the airport in Atlanta,” he said. “I was just like, ‘Have a nice day,’ and kept on walking.”

Government Resources Available

Government resources varied for both groups of soldiers I interviewed, including the programs offered and the extent to which the government was willing to step in and help. One huge difference between the groups is the amount of compensation they received during combat duty. Ernest described his $300 weekly salary as better than a factory worker in the U.S., who was making maybe $200 a week for 40 hours. Vietnam veterans did not mentioned special pay for any circumstances, except for Foxy, who mentioned the extra $25 per month for volunteering to be a tunnel rat work.

Wayne’s experience was very different. Although one must acknowledge inflation over time, soldiers overseas in Operation Iraqi Freedom receive money based on circumstances, including rank, years in service, existence of dependents, housing allowance/rent (which varied according to the cost of living in their home states): “In my rank, E6, with a wife, kids, a house, I was pushing over five grand a month,” he said. “It basically broke down into overseas pay, hazardous duty pay, and pay for wife/dependents. Those with dependents also received $250 separation pay each month. That money was supposed to pay for things that we would be doing if we were at home, such as mowing the lawn, pulling weeds. Entitlements all add up, and it’s all tax-free.”

An interesting similarity was discovered when interviewing Vietnam veterans. Oddly, although experiences differed regarding the extent of government assistance and programs available, most recalled that the government improved their dental status. Jack and Foxy mentioned that they were given the opportunity to go back to school with some financial aid. Foxy recalled that the government helped him return to work and provided educational assistance, but the help ended there: "The government handled it very poorly," he said. "When we came back, they put us in a great big hall, and told us that they preferred we not talk about the war, that we not say certain things to misconstrue the war as political. They brainwashed soldiers. They wanted to sweep it under the rug. They wanted us to carry on with our lives."

Foxy recalls how he was on his own as far as health services. "They didn't have money at the time. I do have health benefits now, but my wife cannot get any benefits," he said. "The government did not offer me anything else that I'm aware of. I applied to get a house loan, but I was turned down."

Ernest, on the other hand, said he was given an offer of $10,000 and another stripe if he would sign up for another six years. He declined. "When I look back, I'm certain they would have sent me back to Vietnam at least once or twice had I signed on for six more years," he said. Instead, Ernest decided to go back to his old job, which he had been told was guaranteed. He had to fight to get his job back, then worked two days and was laid off. He signed up for unemployment and talked to the Veteran's Administration, which asked him if he wanted his job back. He decided to look elsewhere for a job.

For those returning from the Middle East, government help seems plentiful, although some interviewees seemed unsure of exactly what benefits they were entitled to. According to Dan, all soldiers returning from this conflict enter some type of reintegration program to make sure they are mentally and physically stable. Since Dan's ultimate goal is to become a police officer, he is knowledgeable regarding his educational

benefits. He has it all mapped out. “When I finish my next tour and complete my contract with the military, I probably won’t go back to school right away, maybe down the road,” he said. “I have around $40,000 worth of funding through the GI bill. So if I need to go back to school, I’ve got that. I think I have something like 18 years to spend it. I can use it to pay for a police academy or law-enforcement training. In the meantime, I will try to get into some more Army schools before my time is up. I’ve already been through the SRT school, which is like a SWAT kind of school.”

Comparing all my interviewees, Wayne seemed to be offered the most in regard to government help. “When I returned, people were falling all over themselves trying to help,” he said. “The VA was right there asking how they could help. At every turn, there was help. Even at the reserve unit, they gave us a briefing of all the programs that were available to us.”

How Soldiers Were Affected by Their Combat Experience

Soldiers returning from combat had very different reactions to what they have endured. Some wanted peace and quiet. Some had flashbacks. Some were eager to re-enter the combat zone. For those returning from Vietnam, different types of flashbacks were common. There was also a common theme of wanting to move on to a better life.

Jack, for example, chose to isolate himself, wanting to be alone. He did not want to search out companionship, preferring a quiet transition: “I have fewer memories now than initially,” he said. “When I came back, I tried not to think about my past. Instead, I tried to think of tomorrow as a better day. But even today, when there is a helicopter in the area, it produces a flashback to those sounds and actions of the military, because there were so many helicopters in the area at the time.”

For Ernest, there existed a tendency to avoid having people stand behind him. Sleep was also an issue for Ernest. For many veterans, sleep brings flashbacks to combat.

Although he didn't experience night sweats, sleep did not come easily. "I didn't sleep well for a long time," he said. "For probably 5-10 years, my wife couldn't walk up to me and shake me to wake me up, because I almost killed her once."

Of all my interviewees, Foxy had seen the most and participated in the most battles. But he said he did not experience any flashbacks. A noticeable change for Foxy was his very nature. Prior to Vietnam, he was a quiet person and avoided swearing. But Vietnam changed him, and some of the changes presented issues when returning home. While he does not recall having any flashbacks or nightmares, he had reactions to noises. "If a car would backfire, I was down on the ground thinking the enemy was approaching or rounds were being fired," he said. "This happened for probably 2-3 years after I was back in the states." He also points out that while he was previously a very quite person, he was more outspoken about his viewpoints upon returning. He describes how he felt upon returning: "I was kind of floating through the air when I got home. There was so much I had to do to re-establish myself. I hadn't seen my wife for a year, and we had to see if the love was still there. Luckily, my wife was very devoted to me. Our faith and our love for one another held out, and we've been together now for 38 years. But that first year back was a struggle. My attitudes and values changed. I felt like I had to get to know everything again. And she didn't know how to help me. I felt kind of alone."

Soldiers from Operation Iraqi Freedom mention flashbacks, but seem to have changed in different ways. A similarity among my interviewees is a strong pride in America, even if they do not agree with reasons for the war they fought in. They also seem to be more confident and have a different perspective regarding life events. Dan, for example, believes he has become more outgoing, more relaxed.

While these soldiers have not experienced flashbacks, they are not without some ill effects of the war. For Dan, sounds affect him as they affect the Vietnam veterans I interviewed: "Since returning, anytime I hear anything resembling a gunshot, I am always

looking," he said. "I don't hit the floor, but just kind of look around. There is a lot of stuff I will never forget, but nothing that haunts me." Aside from this, Dan is glad he enlisted and claims to have not had negative experiences in Iraq. In fact, he said that he did not want to leave, because he had such a good time there.

Wayne, on the other hand, had to reacquaint himself with his wife and children (including a new baby), and a new house. While glad to be home, Wayne recalls the difficulty in adjusting to normal family life: "When I first came back, I was a little short-tempered, and I'd get frustrated right away. I learned to take a walk, count to 10, and come back." However, he says that his experience has made him appreciate things more. He describes how he would be driving down the road in Iraq, see a black hole in the road, and knew that an IED (improvised explosive device) went off and somebody had a very bad day. Then, he compares that experience to a drive after returning home, when a windshield wiper broke in the rainstorm. "I got mad, then I started thinking about that black hole on the pavement, and thought, 'This isn't that bad," he said. "My day right now may seem bad, but to compare it to whoever was near that hole or involved in that event, their day was a lot worse.'"

Time

The Vietnam War is over, while Operation Iraqi Freedom continues. Veterans of the Vietnam War have had decades to either bury their memories or try to remember and keep their memories alive, while the memories for veterans of Operation Iraqi Freedom are very fresh. Two important topics emerge form this statement: how the passing of time affects a person from the standpoint of maturity and age; and how the passing of time affects a person in terms of memory.

According to Ringnalda, all reality is mediated by how, where, and when we look at it (104). The time lapse since the Vietnam War has given Vietnam veterans a larger

perspective regarding war, partially because they have had years to reflect, and partially because the perspective of an 18-year-old sent to war will differ from that of a 60-year-old reflecting on the events he/she experienced, seen through the filter of the past 40 years. Over time, these veterans have also observed the impacts of war in various aspects of society, including how it has changed them as a person.

Soldiers who have returned from Operation Iraqi Freedom do not have the element of time passage to allow for this larger perspective. While they are generally not as young as most men drafted during Vietnam, they have not been able to merge the passage of time with their experience. They are too close in time proximity to their war experience to critique it the same way that Vietnam veterans can critique the war they fought in.

Therefore, narratives from Operation Iraqi Freedom might lack the same level of analysis compared to narratives from Vietnam veterans, since Vietnam veterans have had more time to replay events and memories and analyze how they felt about the things they experienced, both then and now.

As Hynes said, “War narratives by their nature are retrospective. To perceive the changes that war has made in a man requires the passage of time and the establishment of distance from the remembered self” (4). I believe the very passage of time related to age and maturity is critical to the genre of war narratives, and will be evident in the narratives I have written. For the veterans I interviewed, opinions regarding U.S. involvement in Operation Iraqi Freedom differ from reasons given by the United States government for its involvement (Iraqi’s alleged possession of weapons of mass destruction, human rights abuses, and the desire to spread democracy). I also asked my interviewees what they thought about the war they fought in as well as other wars, I was inundated with opinions and insight. They also talked about how they felt about serving their country, most mentioning that they feel patriotic and glad that they served.

Jack, for instance, said that he couldn't think of anything that he disagreed with entirely about the Vietnam War. He said that the mission was simply to kill rather than be killed, and does not have any reservations about what he did while serving. "Overall, I think all conflicts are unique, and the experience I had in service is that a soldier is committed to honor and duty," he said. "I did the best I could under the circumstances. If I had not served, I might feel different about military operations today. But I have military experience, so I really believe that there is some kind of commitment by individuals for either public service or service in the military. It says that you are part of this country. You are part of the effort to protect and defend this nation at any cost."

Ernest shares Jack's opinion about serving our country. He has a deep sense of patriotism, believing that people should take a role in protecting America. "I think it's bad to have a war, but if there has to be some fighting, don't let the other guy do it," he said. "Step up. That's what is keeping our country free."

Foxy, on the other hand, did not take much of a political stance during his interview. He saw so much destruction during the war, that it seemed futile to him: "Personally, I don't think [Vietnam] proved anything," he said. "I don't think any war we've had, since the beginning of history, has proven a single thing. All it has done is give power to people and changed the power of people. War is pretty useless in my book."

These veterans have had decades to reflect on their service as well as future wars and those who have served the country. For these veterans, it no longer matters very much why America was involved in Vietnam. They are more concerned with the loss of friends, and the loss of what could have been. The soldiers note that their life paths were changed by the interruption of war. They express regret at what could have been. While Jack and Foxy were able to return home and finish their degrees, they either did not pursue a job within that area of study or finish their degree in the area of study they

wanted. Jack, for example, finished his degree. However, he decided not to continue in that field and instead, worked for an insurance agency. Foxy notes that, while the bank he worked for before the draft gave him his job back "because they had to give it back to me, it was the law," he did not follow through on his life's desire to be a teacher. "I'm kind of sad about that," he said. "I wanted to become a teacher; I think I would have been a great teacher."

For veterans of Operation Iraqi Freedom, continuing and ever-present questions about perceptions of the war occupy their remembrance of their service. Each soldier has an opinion about the role that they played in greater global events. Although most exhibit a strong sense of pride for their work, some are cynical about what they accomplished and demonstrate a mistrust of the government and the media. "I feel privileged to be a part of history, I guess, even though it's not great history," Dan said. "Serving has given me insight into what war is all about." At the same time, Dan also points out that the constant reminder to the troops that their purpose was to "liberate" the Iraqi people was quickly shown to be a lie. "If anybody around here believes that the main reason we're actually over there is to help liberate the people, I think they are sadly mistaken," he said. "Before I went, I thought the war was about oil. Just get in there and have the U.S. start pumping cheap oil. I still think it's pretty much about that. I'm surprised we haven't started pumping oil out of there."

While Dan believes the war is about oil, Wayne does not. He believes the war right now is just beginning, and will expand beyond our imagination. However, he admits that he must be careful in his answer, because he is expected to toe the line, as a current member of the military: "According to military rite, we have to toe the line," he said. "Basically we don't have an opinion, even though we do. I believe we had a good reason to go in (weapons of mass destruction). Yeah, he had them. My guess is, they're sitting in Syria right now." Wayne disagrees with common themes in society right now that the

war is about oil. Instead, he believes that the government is setting the stage, building future bases of operation: “I think we should have gone into Iran instead, because they were a bigger threat than Iraq,” he said. “But I’m sure they’re next on the list. I think down the line somebody in the Pentagon is thinking China. If you look on a map, Iraq is located right there in the middle, next to Iran, next to Syria, and a hop, skip, and a jump away from China.”

Tank believes the war is more about oil than anything else. Furthermore, he does not believe all the hype in the media about liberating people. According to Tank, the U.S. is not in Iraq to liberate the people. He thinks it has more to do with politics and oil. He also thinks the war is about revenge for the World Trade Center tragedy, and the U.S. as a superpower: “It’s also about America the ‘Big Brother’ to everybody,” he said. “We always think we’re the ‘world cop,’ so we have to go help out. What I do agree with is positive influence. We need to influence the children over there, show them that we’re not bad, that we’re good. Then, when they’re at that age to make decisions and take leadership roles over there, they will make decisions that result in a more peaceful country. If this happens, our efforts have not been in vain. If it doesn’t, then we’re just wasting our time.”

Intersect of Memory and Narrative

In addition to the perspective that comes with the passing of time, another related element is how time affects a person in terms of memory. There is a huge disconnect between memoirs and history, simply because war narratives and the memories they expose cannot hold up to the accuracy tests of a historical document. However, that does not in any way dismiss them as a legitimate form of literature or part of history. To put it simply, “because war exists in history, personal narratives of war must add to our historical knowledge” (Hynes 285).

In this section, I will expand the time element in order to explore the topic of memory. I will shed light on how soldiers remember and how their war narratives are structured around those memories. I also believe it will provide an important bridge between biographical texts and fiction, because they contain fact and fiction that cannot be verified. “In a true war story nothing is ever absolutely true,” (O’Brien 82). However, O’Brien states that absolute truth in occurrence is irrelevant: “A thing may happen and be a total lie; another thing may not happen and be truer than the truth,” (O’Brien 83). Therefore, the presence of fiction in a personal narrative does not necessarily taint the work, just as facts are used in fiction to ground the work. This is also key to determining how narratives negotiate between time and memory. It is a complex area of research, because veterans have memories of myths or elements that they believe to be true, while other veterans will dispute the same information.

Memory involves the capacity to preserve as well as forget certain information from the past. According to Sturken, “Memory is a narrative rather than a replica of an experience that can be retrieved and relived. The original experiences of memory are irretrievable; we can only ‘know’ them through memory remains — images, objects, texts, stories” (Sturken 7, 9).

According to Sigmund Freud, the memories of all experiences are stored in the unconscious, although one cannot automatically access all of one’s memories (Sturken 3). War narratives, then, depend on the ability of veterans to reach into the recesses of the mind, retrieve any fragments of memory they have preserved, and piece them together. In order to do this, the veteran asks of their war experience: What happened? What was it like? How did it feel? They answer these questions by way of telling a story, and so discover their own meaning of war.

There are challenges to accessing memories, however. Memories can be an obstacle to the truth, because it selects certain aspects of the past and alters them. People

cannot remember exactly how a specific event actually happened, but how they thought they experienced it, based on the particular details of that event their memory preserves (Hynes 23-24). Another problem is that during war, there can be a failure of observation while in the field and a confined vision of soldiers as witnesses. A soldier can only see an event occurring within the context of their role in the war. They do not see the larger picture, or what is happening a small distance away. Therefore, memory does not piece together the larger context of an event. In addition, during the chaos of combat, soldiers cannot observe every minute detail as the story unfolds. They are left with a rough outline, completed by any details they can fill in (Sturken 7). It is difficult, over time, to separate what happened from what seemed to happen. However, the memory represents truth as it seemed to the person who is telling the story. It places the memory in a peculiar position of truth versus fiction, where one cannot necessarily determine what elements to believe. “In many cases a true war story cannot be believed. Often the crazy stuff is true and the normal stuff isn’t, because the normal stuff is necessary to make you believe the truly incredible craziness,” (O’Brien 71).

Another problem with memory is that after the event, a direct correlation exists between time and memory. The more time that passes between the actual event and the soldier telling or writing about the event, the more memory fades and loses details. This is not confined to war narratives alone; it is inherent in the retrieval of all memories. However, “circumstances of war intensify distortions and increase the difficulty of putting events into words” (Hynes 24-25). Absolute memory and truth, then, is compromised by the very nature of time, with soldiers telling their own relative truth of the event as they remember experiencing it.

This leads to the question of whether a veteran’s story can be verified. Memory’s relationship to original experiences is difficult if not impossible to verify (Hynes 14). However, even if an aspect of a narrative is incorrect, it is a necessary part of their story,

according to Hynes (217). “Soldiers will not remember as other men who were there will. The tale is an imperfect version of everything that happened, but is the closest we will get to the reality of what men did. It can be resolved if we think of war experience as being the sum of witnesses, the collective tale that soldiers tell” (Hynes 25).

For the Vietnam veterans I interviewed, the reliance on memory over time has led to some conflicting stories, as well as some myths that have become fact within their minds over time. They also had trouble remembering the names of friends they fought with, and some places they fought during the war. For example, one veteran remembered having to pay for postage when sending letters back home, while the rest claim that it was free. Another conflict appeared when talking about a specific battle. One veteran claimed to have been in Vietnam during battle, and talked in detail about his involvement. However, sources give a date for the battle (Herring, 183), which do not coincide with the veteran’s tour of duty. I believe the battle he described DID exist, but he could not remember the actual name of the battle, and over time, the lines of battles merged, and he came to believe that the battles were the same.

For veterans of Operation Iraqi Freedom, I did not find any conflicting stories, aside from opinions regarding why America is involved in the war. Since their experiences are in the more recent past, they may be able to remember specific events more clearly. Furthermore, published texts are not yet plentiful enough to either support or contradict details of their narratives. The one element they have trouble remembering are names and spellings of places they went during combat. They were, however, able to pronounce the names so that I could find the locations on current maps.

Constructed Truth

A related aspect of memory that must be mentioned is constructed truth. According to David Thelan, in “Memory and American History,” people construct

memories in response to changing circumstances. They fix their listeners in mind as they decide which elements to recollect, how to organize and interpret those elements and how to make the memory public. He claims that memory is constructed, not reproduced (Thelan 1119).

One example of constructed truth is toeing the line. Some soldiers leave out details of an experience during war because the government expects soldiers to tow the military/government line. They are expected to express the government's reasons for war or military operations without questioning them or forming their own opinions. If they do have their own opinion regarding war, they are expected to keep it to themselves.

They might also claim that rules of engagement are always used, while in the field those rules sometimes are thrown aside when soldiers are trying to survive. As one of my interviewees told me, nobody is going to call somebody a hero because they were shot to death in an effort to observe the rules of engagement.

Another area of constructed truth relates to theories or myths that can sometimes become fact within the memory when distanced by time. Soldiers begin to remember certain details from war, even though it is untrue. These distortions may have come from rumors they remember hearing, but can no longer separate them from reality. They might have seen or heard information in movies, from other veterans, or from the general population, and it begins to re-mold their memories. In these examples, memory does not belong in the past, and is not a projection of the present. Rather, it is a collaboration between present consciousness and the experience of the past (Boyarin 22).

Sturken agrees that memory is fluid and changing. It does not mean the past is insignificant. However, it is difficult to determine the degree to which memories resemble original experiences and which memories stray from that truth (Sturken 7). While war narratives are not historical documents, they can be called "the recoverable past of war" (Hynes 25). The Vietnam experience, for example, suggests an alternative to

official documents, media reports and histories. Subjective accounts, such as war narratives, compete with other modes of interpreting the war (Rowe 127).

One element of constructed truth involves a myth that Vietnam veterans were either told by superiors during the war, or heard from fellow soldiers. It is the idea that there was an island where soldiers were sent to if they had "black syphilis." Most of the soldiers I asked remembered having been told about it, but do not know if the island exists. I have been unable to find any reliable information about "black syphilis," but one online source claimed the island and story was invented and promoted by the military to "terrify their young troops, lessen the fraternization with local women and ultimately lower the rate of VD (venereal disease) among the men" (Friedman, www.psywarrior.com/PSYOPVD.html).

The effort to control disease correlates to information in the Medical Department, United States Army Internal Medicine in Vietnam, Volume II: General Medicine and Infectious Diseases. This source claims that high rates of venereal disease occurred as substantial troop concentrations occurred in 1963. The overall average incident was 261.9 per 1,000 a year during the period for 1963-1970 (Ognibene and Barrett 233). However, the rate of syphilis was actually not considered a significant medial problem. Data available spanning the 10 years of the Vietnam conflict show that an overall incidence rate of approximately 3 cases of syphilis per 1,000 each year. During the last 3 years of U.S. involvement (1970-1972), the hospital admission rate for syphilis was only .2 per 1,000 (Ognibene and Barrett 252).

Regardless of the myth, soldiers had a lot to say about "black syphilis." Foxy said that a lot of soldiers got syphilis. However, if they got black syphilis, they would die because it was the worst syphilis a person could get. He said that men who had it were sent away to die, but their families were told that they died in the heat of battle. He suggested that the place they were sent was a small island in the South China Sea. "I

think they used to call it Johnson Island because of President Johnson," he said. "It was a safe place where they could die with some dignity."

Although Ernest did not know where the island was, he said they officers would read letters occasionally about people (real or fictional), who had gotten "black syphilis." These men were given a choice, Ernest said, they could write home and tell their parents or wife what they had, and that they would never be allowed to come home; or the government would list them as missing in action. Ernest said, "I don't know where they went, really. Did they leave them there? Did they kill them? Usually if you get 'black syph' you don't live very long."

While the disease "black syphilis" and the mysterious island appear to be a myth, veterans were convinced it was true. This may have been the government's goal: to convince soldiers of terrible diseases in order to reduce the use of prostitutes and the spread of common venereal diseases.

In conclusion, the veterans I interviewed were very honest in their answers, to the recollection of their combat experiences. Media, society, and time are reflected in their narratives, which stand as a testament to their respective wars. Soldiers' narratives are important to many disciplines, including literature, history, sociology, and psychology. What one remembers and tells of the past forms the basis of our current knowledge as we go forth and create new memories and literature in the present.

APPENDIX A

University of Wisconsin Oshkosh Consent Document

University of Wisconsin Oshkosh
Consent Document

Comparison of Narratives: American Veterans
of the Vietnam War and Operation Iraqi Freedom

Janal Emmer, a graduate student of the University of Wisconsin Oshkosh is collecting oral histories of American veterans of the Vietnam War and American soldiers of Operation Iraqi Freedom. The oral histories will become part of a creative work as well as a cultural study comparing how the nature of combat, time, location, media, and culture affect how veterans/soldiers give oral histories/narratives. The project will provide others with an understanding of what veterans/soldiers have endured.

As part of this study, I would like to interview you. To do this, I will be present to ask questions, take notes, and record the interview. I will work with you do determine a mutually agreeable time and location for the interview. You may have a friend or family member present.

Participation in this project may not benefit you directly. It is reasonable to assume that the nature of the subject will present emotional issues for you, and could result in post traumatic stress reactions. If you feel uncomfortable about the subject matter at any point, please do not feel obligated to participate. You may discontinue the interview at any point for any reason.

The information I gather through the interview will take approximately one hour, and will be recorded in an anonymous way (tape recorded). Any information used in this project will be treated confidentially. Information that identifies you as an individual will not be released, without your consent, to anyone for purposes that are not directly related to this research study. In the resulting written work, you will be referred to by your first name or pseudonym, whichever you prefer.

Your participation in the project is completely voluntary. You do not have to participate. If you wish to withdraw from the project at any time, you may do so without penalty. The information collected from you up to that point will be destroyed if you so desire.

Once the project is completed I will be glad to provide a copy of your interview for your review. I will also be glad to provide the results of the cultural study. In the meantime, if you have any questions, please ask/contact me:

Janal Emmer
N343 County Rd N
Appleton, WI 54915
920-687-2061

If you have any complaints about your treatment as a participant in this study, please call or write:
Chair, Institutional Review Board
For Protection of Human Participants
C/O Grants Office
UW Oshkosh
Oshkosh, WI 54901
920-424-1415
(Although the chairperson may ask for your name, all complaints are kept in confidence.)
(Continued on side two)

You will be given a copy of this statement, which serves to acknowledge the fact that you have been informed about the project and that you have agreed to participate. You will also be given a list of possible counseling services available, should the need or desire arise.

I have received an explanation of the study and agree to participate. I understand that my participation in this study is strictly voluntary. I understand I will not receive any monetary or other compensation for my interview in the event my interview is published in a creative work. I verify that statements I provide in the interview are true.

_____ _____
Name Date
I give permission to Janal Emmer to record my interview on audio tape.

_____ _____
Name Date
I give permission to (check one):
_____Use my first name as identification
_____Use the following pseudonym as identification: _____
Name: _____
Address: _____
Where were you raised? _____
Phone: _____
Branch of Service: _____
Dates of Service: _____
Dates in Vietnam/Iraq: _____
Rank at induction: _____
Present rank or rank at discharge: _____
Rank while in Vietnam/Iraq (ex. Private first class, army): _____
Present Status (discharged, active reserve, inactive reserve, active):
_____
Military occupational specialty: _____
Unit(s) served in Vietnam/Iraq: _____
Unit(s) location in Vietnam/Iraq: _____

This research project has been approved by the University of Wisconsin Oshkosh IRB for Protection of Human Participants, valid until May 2007.

APPENDIX B

Questionnaire/List of Questions to Aid in Dialogue

Questionnaire/List of Questions to Aid in Dialogue

I have a list of questions to aid in providing your oral history. These questions will not all be posed. They are merely an aid to help you tell me about your time during active duty. If you feel uncomfortable answering any of these questions, please feel free to discuss that with me so that we can exclude the question or come up with a more comfortable way of accessing similar information. Please be as detailed as possible.

1. Where and why did you enter the service (draft, volunteer)?
2. Were you/Are you glad you enlisted or were drafted?
3. What type of training did you receive in general and for active duty/war?
4. Looking back, do you think your training was adequate for what you faced?
5. When and where did you serve? Did you visit or serve in other countries?
6. What did you think about the enemy?
7. What did you think the war was about before you went and now?
8. What were your first impressions when you arrived?
9. What were some of your responsibilities?
10. Did you have "free" time? If so, how did you spend it?
11. Did you participate in any special operations? Please describe.
12. Did you handle or use any special devices or weapons?
13. Did you have contact with civilians?
14. Who did you received letters from/write to?
15. What meant the most to you while you were there?
16. Did you discuss events with friends or other soldiers while serving or after?
17. What did you carry on your person during missions?
18. What were you told regarding how to act or how to determine actions to take?
19. What were some of the "rules of warfare" that you agreed with/didn't agree with?
20. Tell me about a typical day during combat.
21. Giving as much detail as possible, tell me about a specific day or event.
22. How did you feel, regarding safety?
23. What did you see happen while serving?
24. What memories haunt you still, if any?
25. Who did you leave behind, at home while you were serving/when you returned?
26. How did you feel when returning home?
27. What types of aid or resources were available to you when you returned?
28. How difficult was it or has it been to return to "normal" everyday activities?
29. What was the general reaction of those around you when you returned?
30. What kind of support did you receive from family and friends?
31. Have you kept in contact with fellow soldiers you served with?
32. How do you feel today, compared to before or during service, about the conflict you served in, and other similar conflicts?
33. Do you feel your time in active duty has altered your opinions of war? How so?
34. Do you feel that the war has changed you as a person in any ways?

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