

## Gene Feher

26 minutes-78 minutes

My name is Gene Feher and I was in the U.S. Army and I rose to the low rank of spec four which is an E4 specialist, and that was my rank.

Well it was like being a private or a sergeant or what I was- I was drafted before the lottery and right out of school and when you went into service he went right into training and then you were selected into what kind of advanced training you would go into beyond basic. And I had volunteered to be a combat engineer. And combat engineers in Vietnam, for the most part, they did many things, but one of the big specialties was demolition. We did a lot of blowing up things. So that's where I went to advance in Fort Leonard Wood Missouri. And I did my advanced training as a combat engineer which was 12 Alpha. And from that training I got my orders to go to Vietnam for one year.

When I went over as many fellows like myself when you went overseas. Once you got assigned to whatever unit they were going to send you to, it was kind of like you were that and then if they needed people to fill spots you were "volunteered for that". And if you met the criteria in their minds that's what you did. And I went over as a combat engineer and when you graduated from that you became a 12 bravo. 12 Alpha to 12 bravo. I went over as an E3 which is a private first class. When I was assigned to my unit which was a company, 65th combat engineers, after I was in the country for about five months they came to me and asked would you like to be a radio operator because the fellows who were doing that were going to come home. And I said sure. I was trained on that- you had to have a security clearance. I think I had a secret clearance for that so they had to do a background check of you at home so it took a few weeks. And after that I was told I could perform the duties because you dealt in codes and code books and things like that. I became a radio operator for the rest of my tour in Vietnam.

If I was back in Basecamp I would have shifts in the radio bunker which were usually 12 hour shift so you could go from 6 PM to 6 AM. And you would monitor all the communications within the support base or the base camp. If we were to have an account and attack, a ground attack, you would be one of the people along the CO or XO coordinating different things like support, could be things like that. You're out in the field on the patrol or going to an area then, at the request of your platoon leader, would either call in for an airstrike or if there were any casualties or any wounded or killed, we would call in for medevac, which were helicopters to medevac out the personnel. Your codebook which, if my memory serves me, changes every week or two, was carried in your pocket and it was a flip chart of numbers, just pages and pages of numbers across and down. They would tell you tomorrow we're going to use page 14, Line 7. You would go to 14, line 7, and then the secret was to drop two or three down from that, Just in case the enemy had a copy of your codebook. And that line could be translated into who is receiving it by grid coordinates on a map. He would say x-ray tango 3649, x-ray tango 5643 that would translate into the real numbers would have the actual numbers of the coordinates on a map, pinpoint location. So that cookbook changed once a week or twice a month but the codes and the page will change every day. So today was page 14 tomorrow could be page 7. You would get your orders every morning, "this is page number line number" to call in things on the radio. And then at the end of the day we filed reports there I was on the receiving end at the base camp I will get reports from the field of what was accomplished during the day, if I was out in the field I would report what our unit accomplish during the day. That would include everything like if we found weapons or food supplies that we blew up. He would report that. We found an enemy or anybody was killed or wounded or captured we would report that at the end of the day how many etc. etc. If we had anybody killed we had to report our own as well so they could keep

a list of casualties. You're all too young to know this, but at that time newspapers and television back here in the United States would report everyday casualties and that was one of the things that led to a lot of the ferment against the war, hearing about so many Americans being killed. And they would keep statistics of how many killed, how many wounded. All that information was pulled together from people like myself in little units, little pieces of information that got passed along and then funneled into a master report. And that's what we did mostly as a radio operator.

No, I think it was like everybody over there once you learned how to do things and handle equipment and the codes and how to do things you were very nervous. Like doing this you're nervous to do this for the first time. It was just like everything else. You're very nervous because you have a lot of responsibilities ahead, and you did have to do things in the margin for error was very small. But once you got used to it, it was like everything else it became second nature.

After I threw up, I think after the time I went and which was- my late draft notice was in late 1968. I kind of knew I was, because I was out of school and if you didn't have any student referrals you were eligible to be drafted. They were drafting every eligible person over the age of 18 to 25 and wasn't married they took. So as soon as I got the envelope I knew exactly what was in it. I still have a copy of my reduction notice and it says "dear Mr. Feher, Uncle Sam invites cordially to invites you on the following day". And it's pretty emotional because at that time if you were drafted you knew where you were going to go. It wasn't like "oh maybe I'll go to Germany or Alaska or something". You knew you were going to Vietnam. And I had a lot of friends who I knew and went to school with and had lived in my neighborhood that had been drafted and a few were killed over there and a few were wounded. So you knew that the same thing could possibly happen to you. It is a very emotional experience. It's the first time in your

life that reality really hits you. So it's kind of an overwhelming experience at first, but then, once you were in, you realize that there are thousands of guys just like you, feel exactly the way you do, all walks of life and from every state in the union. We all share the same fears and concerns.

Well, sadly, my mom had died less than a year before I was drafted and my dad, who was a World War II veteran- it was very emotional to him because the only son. He was in Europe during World War II and he knew the realities of going into the service and what war was so it was a very difficult time for both myself and my dad. Especially having lost my mom less than a year earlier. So it was a very emotional departure when I left my father. So, it was tough.

I think what I expected was not to come home, I was resigned to the fact that I would probably not come home the way I left. And one of the most striking things that I remember is that I left out of Oakland California, Which was the big terminal out there where you left to go to Vietnam. And I remember after we were processed into departure, we went into this room that looked almost like a gymnasium with bleachers, wooden bleachers, And there were probably about 200 of us sitting in the bleachers, waiting for the airplane. And it was two or 3 o'clock in the morning and we were all sitting there and suddenly the outside doors of this gym room opened and all of these fellow GIs came in but you could tell they were wearing worn jungle fatigues, And these were all of the guys coming home. And they walked by us, and it struck me odd that, the 100 or 200 guys that walked by, not one of them looked up at us. No one made eye contact with us. And I couldn't figure out why. You'd think they would say "good luck "or something like that. Until I came home, and then I realized why. You almost look at it as bad karma. You don't want to look at somebody that might not ever come home. And looking at someone, making eye contact, was not a good thing to do. So I remember that. I remember the flight over, we went on a commercial airplane that the military contracted with commercial contractors, so you felt like

you were on a regular plane going on vacation, only it wasn't a vacation. On the way over we stopped in Japan to refuel and we were told in route that when we got to Japan we could get out of the plane stretch our legs, and maybe have a beer, but just not leave the terminal. You couldn't leave the terminal. We got to Japan, the plane shut down. And we sat there for a while and they finally came on the intercom and we found out that we would not be able to get out of the plane. And apparently there were student protests in Japan against the war. And they did not want us out of the terminal where there would be potential conflict. So we sat in a plane that was shut down with no air-conditioning with the door open or two doors open for two hours so it was a very unpleasant experience. And when we finally took off we flew from there to Benewah in Vietnam, South Vietnam. Benewah airport. And I do remember, because they rolled the stairway, and they open the door up and I walked down the stairway and I think the thing that really stuck in my mind was that it was like hitting a wall, the heat was so intense, the humidity, that you could cut it with a knife, you could swallow it and I thought "well, if I don't get shot over here, then I will die of the heat". Because it was just unbearable. It was so intensely hot, I remember that. And then I remember walking across the tarmac to the building. And I saw all of the caskets loaded into the planes to bring the bodies of the GIs home and that was very eerie and spooky to see. That was my first impression, which was not a good one.

My most memorable moments? Well, I think the good things were that the people that you served with were all great people and you got to meet and share your life with people who come from all different parts of the country, which I wasn't used to. So I met all kinds of different people. Everybody's backgrounds were different and it was interesting to meet people who came from places that you have never heard of in the US. And I think that was something that was very positive. I think the things that always struck me different was the simple fact that there

was a war. And you never really knew from day today what was going to happen to anybody. So I think you always lived in fear, stress, I became very superstitious. Every G.I. will tell you the same thing, that you have superstitions. You do things every day the same way. You have certain routines you do, because it's good luck. It's like good luck. And I had mine, I had a chaplain gave me a little cross and I had a St. Christopher medal and I wore it around my neck and I never took the chain off for the whole year. The heat over there was so intense that the metal would break, and I would tape it and keep it on my neck. And at the end of my tour I was one of the fellows that went to Cambodia at the end in the excursion into Cambodia and lost my medal with 25 days left to go home in a river. And I thought that was an omen that that was it, I was going to die. And it shook me up so badly that I remember sitting on the edge of the riverbank with a bunch of my friends coming over going "what's the matter?" And I said "I'm going to die ". I lost my metal in the river and I couldn't recover it. Obviously I didn't, but that's how superstitious you got. And little things like that in your mind kept you from being hurt.

Well, I think the biggest thing I learned from being in the military and being in a combat area was to be a lot more tolerant of things. I used to have a very short temper when I was young. If you looked at me the wrong way I would pick a fight with you. That changed me. Now I am very low-key, everybody always says "is Gene alive?" Put a mirror under his nose see if he's breathing. Siri call him, for the most part about things and very subdued. And I think it puts life in perspective for you because you realize how fragile it is. More so, when you're younger because we don't think that way when you we're young. When I was your age, and the age I went and I thought I was invincible. You know, nothing will ever happen to me, it will always happen to somebody else. And over there you realize that's not true. It can happen to you. And I think that is the reality that I have learned and I have kept with me my whole life until today.

I think when you read a lot of the history today, yeah, it was a popular war, but I think you read more than it was when I went over. Again everyone is different and I can only speak for myself, but I certainly wasn't pro war and nobody else was really pro war, But I think I felt an obligation, it was my country, I was a citizen, that I would serve my country. And that was about the end of it, I didn't really think about the war being good, bad, or indifferent. Once I was over there and once you were in the military you gave 110% like you do with anything else in your life. So I don't think I had a significant opinion about it either way, at that time.

I certainly was never in a city, or town. When I landed and Benewah which way is outside of Saigon, I never saw Saigon, I knew was in trouble because every time I was moved in that first week or two, my mode of transportation would diminish. So we went from a nice airplane, and I went into a netting in a Caribou, and then I went from that to a helicopter finally. So I was always in a place called TayNinh province which was West near the Cambodian border, probably 50 miles or 60 miles west of Saigon. When I first was there we lived in, what they used to call hooches, wooden little huts with a corrugated roof and then you would go out to fire support bases. A wheel with a hub. And the support bases were basically bunkers, and you would spend time out there. Then you would come back to the base camp. When I went to as a radio operator, when I came back to base camp, I had a hooch. So I had a little bunk and a hooch. And then one night we had a mortar attack and you learn over there, you can tell in coming and you could tell they used to call it walking a mortar. Enemy would walk a mortar and they would walk their rounds. And I woke up, sat on the edge of my cot, and I heard the mortar rounds walking and by the time I heard the third one I knew the next one was probably right on my head. So, as I fell to the ground, the round hit and blew half of my building away. So I had a lot of roof on top of me. Next thing I heard were some guys yelling "are you in there? Are you okay? ". I was, and

then when I looked up after the attack was over, probably where I was sitting on the edge of the bed behind me there was a piece of plywood there was a piece of shrapnel about that big embedded in the plywood. So I figured, had I sat on the bed, it would probably hit me about here, and certainly would have killed me. And I kept that piece of shrapnel my whole tour. That was another good luck charm. A little piece of twisted metal. From that day on, I never stayed in a hooch again, I went into a bunker. So it was fine, I think the biggest problem you had was the sanitary. Although you could take a shower, you didn't have the showers you have today. It was rainwater, it was portable water, and it was cold. You get every kind of thing over there. You get trench foot, I had ringworm, everything from not being able to stay clean.

I don't think so I think my necklace and everything was my real lucky charm. It was more you did things the same way, you know. Write down to I put my boots on the same way every day and you tie a knot the same way, silly stuff. But it's good luck. If I'm okay today I'll do exactly what I did yesterday and that will keep me going.

Favorite? I don't think I have any favorites, probably going home was my favorite story. I think one of the nicest things that occurs over there is, for me it was a little different because the circumstances of the war at the time, but the traditions over there. I was with the twenty-fifth infantry division, and that was the division I was in. And our traditions there(26 min mark) And I along with a lot of other guys pulled these guys into bunkers and we really did a lot of triage on them and one guy in particular it probably ended up saving his life, he was bleeding so profusely. So I think that I thought a sense of accomplishment from. That I made a difference in helping somebody, it was definitely in some need of it. Outside of that it's just that nobody wants to go to war, nobody wants to do all the dirty work.

I think today it almost sounds strange say, but if I how to do it over again, part of me would do it over again because I learned so much about myself over there and about life so much. I wouldn't want all the negatives of it, but the positives were is substantial.

Interviewer: could you go into more detail what you would change if you could do it again?

(34:50 minutes) Mr. Feher: "With things that I would change? I don't know that could change much, if there be a lot of things that I would change. I don't know if there's anything I would really change, I don't think I think that way, you know? It is what it is. It was what it was. What I have liked to gone to begin with? No. But that's without it I wish there wasn't a war, you know? That's about the only thing.

Interview: were you ever wounded in battle?

Mr. Feher: "I wasn't ever wounded, I certainly received my share of fire, no just scratches you know when I building falls down on you, you certainly get cut up. But no I was never wounded.

Interviewer: how many times would you say that you were on the battlefield rather than operating the radios?

Mr. Feher: "well the battlefield is everywhere over there it was very different, so I think a lot of the times I think you were out of what we call our main basecamp and you were in the support bases or on patrol, you know that's a good question I don't really think I know the answer to it, but you know maybe half

maybe less out of the Basecamp. In Cambodia was two months of being in the middle of nowhere. I'd probably guess about half.

Interviewer: Could you tell me the type and weapons you would have to carry around?

Mr. Feher: initially everyone's issued an M-16, Which is a semi automaticcartridgeand that's what you were trained in, in your stateside training, basic and advanced training. When I got over there I had an M-16 and I had that for I don't know, four months and I didn't like it because when I learned you have to clean it, you had to keep it clean all the time, use diesel fuel to clean all the parts because the humidity over what I found is anytime you use the weapon, it would jam a lot. I don't like it it would be jammed, even with the cartridge in there it would jam. So I had asked what other weapons we had the company because Company has a certain amount of weapons. So somebody said, "how about a shotgun?" And I said "yeah! Give me a shotgun! ". So, I had a shotgun for a while. And I gave that up in about less than a month and a half. And then I went to an end 79 grenade launcher. It looked like a sought off shotgun, with a big tube, and you where the different types of rounds. Different types of explosive it's right up to smoke, you could pop smoke with it, and I had a race side, and I actually got pretty good at it where I could you know shoot at a target 75 yards away because it's an ark you're not shooting like a weapon, like a mortar. With the site you could aim and your elevation and I got pretty good with it so that's what I had for the rest my Tour is an M 79 grenade launcher.

Interviewer: did you ever have any bad run ins with any of the enemies?

Mr. Feher: "yeah! I mean, sure, we got into a number of firefights, they called them. We had a few ground attacks where our enemy came in to the wire, Infiltrated, threw explosives in, and stuff like that. So sure, yes."

Interviewer: can you describe the feeling you had when you were giving your first weapon?

Mr. Feher: "I don't know if I had any feeling about it, I realized it was something that would help me I looked at it as a positive in a negative situation, As something that could save my life. They used to tell you in training, that you should sleep with your weapon, That is your best friend. And it kind it is in that respect that is something that if you have to use it it could save your life. So I didn't think behind that in terms of good bad or anything, it was part of my equipment and it was something that would help me. That's how I looked at it. "

Interviewer: do you believe the war has change your every day life?

Mr. Feher: "Oh, yeah sure, like I said before I think it made me be more thoughtful about things I think anyone who has experience wore that puts the rest your life in perspective. My saying is I don't have tolerance for stupidity, and what I mean by stupidity is pettiness. When I find people that are petty, I don't want to be around them. Because I don't have time for it, it's a let's get down to the nuts and bolts of things and ABC. So I think that's what it did for me, is to really get me to realize that what is important in life and what isn't. And and certainly that kind of behavior I guess if want to call it, my tolerance for it is that much.

Interviewer: do you think you could describe what your typical day was like?

Mr. Feher: "It really varied, it depended on if I was in base camp or had to watch because you were up all night and then you went to sleep at 7 o'clock in the morning. If you were out it and it was more traditional hours, if you were on patrol in they go up into the evening. It's kind of hard to describe, because every day could be a little bit different, but I don't know that it was much, it's more difficult for me to describe a typical day. It depends on what you were tasked with. "

Interviewer: when you first went into the war are you obligated to take any tests?

Mr. Feher: "Oh I think they tested the heck out of us, I mean basic training they tested aptitude, both physical and mental test and advanced training I think they did the same thing and before I went in the service I worked going to school I worked part-time at a little airport as an align man, so it was really taxi in the small little sesna planes and for the oil on them and washing them and tying them down, So I had the opportunity as the flight instructors there said "Gene, do you want to take flying lessons? "And I said "sure, I'd love to try and do that." And I did for I guess a couple of months. So, I had just ready to solo and then that's when my mom passed away so that whole world is over, but I did take it of flying lessons so that when I was tested obviously I must've done well on the aptitude for flying but I was approached when I finish my advanced training in Missouri, as a combat engineer weather is like to go as warrant officer School and I said, "what's that?" And the said, "well, you become a warrant officer and it's Eaglin of a second lieutenant and you'll be stateside for two years down Alabama learning how to fly a helicopter " and I said, "really, well, if I'm only going to be two years, I am only drafted for two years. I might be interested in that." Then I found out you have to reassign for two more years so I said no thank you sign aptitude to see if you're flying but I chose not to do that I didn't want to go to officers candidate school

which I had an opportunity to do and become a officer I just serve my two years and I'll go home. And that was pretty much you did a lot of testing and I don't know what else they would've used it for but certainly that was one of the things that they approached me on.

Interviewer: did you ever receive any awards and metals for your service?

Mr. Feher: "yeah I have a couple of metals, I have an Army commendation Metal, I have a bronze star, I have service medals in my unit has a presidential unit citation so I think that's it."

Interviewer: how difficult were the test that you took?

Mr. Feher: well, I don't remember I think it was because I was just out of school so tests for you people texting is easy because you're used to taking, and says he's taking them so they didn't bother me at all. I think at five or seven or eight years removed from school I probably would've been right by them and driven me nuts but if you are used to that so I don't think it bothered me at all it was just a lot of them and you felt like you were constantly taking a test in training somewhat."

Interview: can you tell us what your first assignment was when you were in the war as a radio operator?

Mr. Feher: "well I think that the first things I did was I stayed in Basecamp into the shifts because that's when you learn how to use the equipment how to take reports, the information, and also understanding the

better how to read grid coordinates, from the standpoint of using the the codebook. A couple weeks even maybe longer was just Basecamp learning, so that was my first assignment, with the radio.

Interviewer: do you still keep in touch with anyone from the war?

Mr. Feher: "I got the names of a few guys I saw one fella who was, I was from New York when I went in, (implying he was also from New York), and I saw him when I came home, he had come home before me. But I really haven't, you know, a lot of guys stay in touch and outside of the story I told you about with Dennis even those 12 years ago we spoke and we never spoke again. Anyways different I had one other so that I wish I could reach is he still alive that got serious he wanted over there and the last I heard from him because he was medevaced out of the country and went to Japan which is a big hospital before he went stateside for treating severely wounded people and the last I heard from him was he sent me, I was still in Vietnam and I got this little letter with the Red Cross stationary and it was dirty and scribbled in pencil to me, it was for this fella, and he was writing me telling me he was in Japan and he got hit in the neck with scrap metal and had paralysis I think on his left side and he was a lefty so I couldn't write so he is writing with his right hand and it was like a child pencil, but I knew you was okay and he indicated in his letter, and this was about a month after he was gone, that he was starting to get feeling back in his left side. And I know he was from from Indiana, evansville, Indiana. And I never could find him, I looked for him all these years and you know unless he's gone but that's one so that I wish I could get reconnected with because he was a good friend. And that was it, it was a long time ago.

Interviewer: can you tell us one of the one of the most anxious moments you've had?

Mr. Feher: "no, I don't want to. I just want to go into it."

Interviewer: when you got home or the reactions around you in your community?

Mr. Feher: "again, I was for me you're in a town on Long Island and eastern Long Island which was fairly not Royal but it wasn't a heavily populated area I think everyone in the town there are just so many guys like me that would be in on that so, Within that community it was okay.

I remember when I came home because again you fly back to Oakland, and you're given pay to bring you back to wherever you originated from so it was New York and nobody's spat on me or nobody call me baby killer anything like that the thing that I remember most was because that's the first time I had a full dress uniform, because when you came home and your jungle fatigue and when you were due process in Oakland you literally walked in on an assembly-line of clothing and you literally took a shower and shaved and you stray from your socks and underwear and you worked your way up and each station measured you for Pants and then your belts and then your shirt and your coat and they were selling all your patches and badges and whatever and then you left. You got paid and you walked out the front door and you were on your own. And I remember us there at San Francisco airport to come home and if they went to Kennedy airport and the one thing I remember at the time is that no one would talk to me, you know you here you see people in uniform you say hi or whatever just to be nice but no one talk to me, no one said anything bad to me but no one would knowledge me I thought visible when I got on the airplane in the airplane wasn't filled to capacity, but it was pretty full. And there were two seats and I have the window seat and no one would sit next to me and everyone was even more crowded, but no one sat next to me. I remember the stewardess on the flight kept coming over, she was very sweet and she kept coming over saying would you like something to eat? Would you like something to drink? And I said "no thank you." And she kept coming back to is concerned about me and I just wanted to come home. And I quickly

realized no one outside of her would talk to me. I think for most Vietnam vets that was one of the things that was very common, some people had worse experiences than that.

I learned you never talked about being in Vietnam or even in the military after you got home. And I remember because about a month after I got out of the service, I went on Job interviews in New York, in Manhattan. I walked, had my one suit, my one pair of good shoes, and I had about four or five interviews for big companies at the time, and at some point during the interview, they'd ask about your background, about your school and everything and then they said 'you have a two year gap here, where were you?' and I said 'I was in the military.' 'Where were you?' 'Vietnam'. And pretty much, the interview was over. They wouldn't hire you, they would not hire a Vietnam vet. It was a bad thing in their mind and I finally went to the third or fourth interview that day, it was a good sized company again and I met with the woman who was in charge of human resources and by that time I'm thinking, 'oh, here comes the question, where were you for the last two years' and I told her. And she asked it and I told her and she said, 'that's great, we go out of our way to hire vets and especially Vietnam.' And that's where I got my first job. And I'll never forget that, to this day. This is a company that went out of their way to hire people like us. [When] It sounds crazy today, because you wouldn't see that today for a veteran, but the world was like that. The war was so unpopular, and sadly people took it out on the soldiers instead of the government or whomever. We were the ones that took the brunt of the negativism, sadly. So, that I remember."

Interviewer: Do you belong in any veterans' groups, today?

"Yeah! And again, I have been out of the military for forty-five years now. I came home in 1970, from Vietnam, and I never joined anything. Never. Until I moved here last year. And I was very active, not only working but I was also an EMT, in Connecticut, where I lived for twenty years. So I was very busy

being both an EMT and my job. When I came down to Maryland, I looked into it, but it didn't make sense for me; for licensing and everything else. So I was looking, what can I do to do something voluntary. So my wife had said to me, 'Why don't you look into the VFW in Easton.' So I did. And I met this group of guys [gesturing behind himself] and a whole bunch of group of guys. And joined the VFW and then subsequently joined the VVA, the Vietnam Veterans' Association. And really enjoy it, because I met really a bunch of great people and a lot of people that have (share) common experiences that you have. And not that we sit around and tell war stories and things like that all day; but it's just a nice group of guys a good comradery and certainly of the same age group, you know with minor variations. So we just enjoy it, it's a very social thing. And we also do a lot of charity work, so I'm always active in 'we need somebody to do this,' or 'fundraising for that.' [So] and I enjoy that, it's very satisfying to me. Down here I have become active with veterans groups, yes."

Interviewer: Has your point of view, regarding the United States involvement in the war, changed over the years?

Mr. Feher: "Well again, hindsight for everybody is wonderfully 20/20. If we knew everything about the past that we do today, it would change half the world's history. We probably should have never been there, but at the time you didn't know that. You know communism at the time was considered in the world a big plague. We had just gone through the Cuban Missile Crisis in the early 60's under Kennedy; where communism was putting missiles in Cuba and we lived as young people. When I was your age, in high school, we lived in fear of nuclear war. It was a dread, we had fall-out shelters, so when the Cuban Missile Crisis occurred, I think that was '62 everyone was so frightened. And I don't mean just us, our parents. We thought nuclear war was imminent and it almost was. So this fear of communism and cold war that you hear about was starting back again today with Russia to some extent. That was a very big

thing in the world and especially in this country, so communism was an absolute dirty word. XXXXX the North Vietnamese were communist, the Chinese were communist, the Chinese were big suppliers and allies of the North Vietnamese; so you thought that this would be something that would help the world. And it probably didn't. Didn't make much of a difference then today than we thought it did, but at the time we thought it did."

Interviewer: Do you believe that you left any legacy behind in the War?

Mr. Feher: "No, I don't think I left a legacy. I think the one legacy that I left was with my own children. I have two grown children, they're in their thirties, I have a grandson and about to have a second grandchild early next year. And I think that when my own children, just recently, it has only been in the last year or two that they knew I was in Vietnam. But I never talked about it really, and my daughter and my son they're both married they live in different parts of the country and over the last few years they started to ask me more about it. And I think my children are very proud of me; that I served and I served honorably. So I think that's a nice legacy that they have of their father and that will be passed on to my grandchildren as well. So I think that's the legacy that I like."

Interview: Can you describe everything that you were feeling on your way home?

Mr. Feher: "Blind euphoria. I think the best thing was when we finally got on that airplane that everyone referred to as the freedom bird. The flight home to what we referred to as the World, 'When are you going back to the World,' because you were in another world there. Anytime anyone talked about going home, you didn't say you were going home you said you were going back to the World. And you got on the

freedom bird and I remember when we left, we left at night and we fly from Vietnam to Anchorage, Alaska. And we did the same thing, we refueled in Anchorage and then we flew down to Travis Airforce Base which was near Sacramento California. And we landed around three in the morning something like that. And I remember that feeling when I came down that stairwell from the plane to the tarmac, I kissed the tarmac. I kissed the ground, it was home. It was a great feeling.”

Interviewer: At any point did you feel like you were a hero?

Mr. Feher: “No, I don’t think so. No.”

Interviewer: Do you have any advice for anyone thinking of joining any type of military?

Mr. Feher: “Well I mean, I never made the military a career for myself, I served my two years and moved on. But I think today the military is a great career. I know a lot of both men and women that have made it a career, and I think it’s a great career. And it’s not, everybody always thinks ‘War, War, War, War, War.’ It’s not about war it’s about, skills you can learn, and I think the interaction again, it can happen in college too, but you meet people from all backgrounds, all walks of life, different philosophies and everything and I thinks that’s great, to do that. I think that very important, as you grow to learn. So I think the military certainly can provided that in a very quick sense, because you’re immersed in it. But, I think it’s a great career, if it were forty-five years ago and my life would have been different I would have entertained it now. Certainly, I don’t know it I would have done it, but I would have certainly entertained it, I think it’s fantastic.”

Interviewer: Are there any skills you learned back then that you still use today?

Mr. Feher: "I don't think there's mechanical skills that I learned. I think most of them are personal skills. As I said before, it's just how it changed you personally. How you look at things, how you deal with any situation in life going forward. I think those are the things I learned. The skills, Mechanical ones, I don't think I learned anything mechanically, that I use today."

Interviewer: Lastly, is there anything that I didn't ask that you would like to add?

Mr. Feher: "I don't think so, I think you were pretty thorough. I would like to show you one or two things more, just so you have them. Like I showed you my 'Short-timer Stick,'

When you're over there instead of just wearing a helmet, you wear a bush hat. And I think this was, this was my last bush hat. And I decorated it over there, this was the bandana I use to put around it and tie it. And that's dirt from Vietnam [referencing the dirt on the anterior of the hat] sweat and dirt from the last time I was there. So I think I went through around four or five of these things. But they call this a bush het and I happen to have the last one that I had.

We all had dog tags, these are my original dog tags. And what we would do with these, a lot of guys would wear them around our neck but I wore them in my boots. I put one in each boot, right around the lacing around your boot, so if you got blown up they would find your boots and they would know who you were, if that's all that's left of you, so you had your Dog Tags.

This when I was short, the guys in my unit made this jacket for me. And this is camouflage, parachute camouflage material. And they made me a coat. I can't fit in it anymore, but it goes the American flag and the Vietnamese flag and a big dragon emblem on the back. And the back says, [When I'll go to Heaven because I've served my time in Hell. TayNinh, Viet-Nam. '69-70]. When I'll go to Heaven because I've spent my time in Hell. And that's where I served, TayNinh. And that's a map of Vietnam. And that's the year I was there, '69 to '70. So that was given to me by my buddy's before I went home as a gift. I never really wore it anywhere, but it's a memento that I've kept for all these years and I thought I'd show it to you guys and share it. {Repeating for clarity} And like I said TayNinh is the providence that I served. Which was War zone C. And it was called the iron triangle, the parrots' beak if you hear things like that. A lot of the area that I was in was the rubber plantations, Ninshalon tire and things like that so where the rubber trees grew and we had one giant mountain near us which was Newie Ba Den. Which was the black virgin and it was a mountain that just stood out by itself in the middle of the jungle, and we owned the top of the mountain and at the very top we had a radio communications tower and to get on and off you had to be helicoptered and we owned the ground around it and the Vietnamese owned the mountain, because it was made out of granite and it was honey-combed with tunnels, they had cities in there, they had everything in there, they had hospitals, training. And once, I think twice while I was there, the generals decided they were going to attack the mountain. We never took the mountain and one time, during one of these I was probably about, I want to say about nine miles away from the mountain and B 52 strike was called on the mountain. And a B 52 is a high altitude bomber that we had. And they still use them today from ever the '50s, I think. Well, if you have ever been around a B52 strike, it is the most frightening thing you will ever hear or experience in your life. And like I said, I was about eight or nine miles away the mountain when the bombs started to hit the mountain and ground beneath me shook so bad that it began to lift me slightly lift me off the ground. And we had always heard the enemy during the B52 strikes were frightened and the problem with that, with this mountain was, no matter how many bombs they dropped, it was made out of granite so it would just chip. So you would kill a couple of enemy and

the other 5000 would go back into the mountain until the thing was over. But I do remember that, that was quite a remarkable experience being around a B52 strike.”

Interviewer: When you were talking about the radio operator, did you ever have to carry a radio around with you?

Mr. Feher: “Yeah, what you carried was, if you were out in the field they called it a PRC 25 and if you ever see the pictures on TV or whatever, it’s a whip antenna and it’s like a backpack. So you carry that on your back and your hand-held mic that came off of it and you could talk into it. That was part of your equipment. I think it weighed about twenty-five pounds, maybe thirty? Maybe less? I forget. But when you’re young and strong, in good shape, you can carry this stuff all day. And along with your other equipment.”

Interviewer: Was it ever difficult to carry all that weight on your back?

Mr. Feher: “No, you get used to it. And again, if I had to do it again today, it’d probably kill me, but back then I was twenty-one, twenty-two years old and certainly all the training you get from the military, you’re in top physical condition. So, you could carry weights, ammunition, everything else. You just sweat a lot. I went there weighing two hundred and five pounds, and when I came home, I was one hundred and seventy pounds. And that’s just from the weather, you dehydrate, you lose tons of weight. And back then they used to give the military salt tablets, foolishly. Now they’ve learned that it did the exact opposite. It dehydrates you. But back then you took salt and heat, they thought it was going to help

you. So you took a lot of salt tablets so that worsened you and you'd just dehydrate and you'd have to drink fluids constantly."

Interviewer: Do you have any more information (comments) on how you felt during the war?

Mr. Feher: "I think the whole time you're there, you just think about getting home. And I think that was my focus...each day you become very superstitious. Your routines, I mean I never, I tried to do everything the same down to tying your shoe laces. You just got very superstitious. And I don't know if I mentioned this, but I had a... when I went in when I went over a Chaplin came over to me and he had a little cheap cross to wear. And I had a Saint Christopher medal and I wore that on my neck. And the humidity over there is so bad everything rotted from the heat and the chain, the medal chain, broke many time and I would tape it. And one time when we were in Cambodia, and I had probably a month to go before I went home, and we were a loud to go out to the river and I think they let about 20 of us go at a time.... Half the Platoon would stay on the shores to keep guard and the other half would go swimming. Because that was the first bath I could take in over a month. So it was skinny dip time. So, I jumped in, it was my turn, I jumped into the river and the river was formed pretty heavily and it was pretty muddy, but it was pretty delightful to be in the water. And I was in the water and I felt the current was strong and it pulled the chain and I saw the metal come off my neck go into the water and I went to grab it and I missed it and I lost it. And I immediately got up on shore and I sat there and must have been pale as a ghost, because everyone came up to me and asked what's the matter? And I said, "I'm a dead man, I'm going to die." I thought that, that was an omen, losing that medal and that cross, that that was a sign from God that my number was up, that I was gonna be killed. Obviously I wasn't. But that's how superstitious you got. So your routines, your superstitions, everybody had their own little superstitions. So mine was that,

mostly. And then you just have your routines, you know, you didn't want to change anything. Because, it worked yesterday, so hopefully it'll work today."

Interviewer: Did you ever have any times when you could contact your family at all with letters or anything?

Mr. Feher: "Yeah, well I mean the only communication that we had the mail, didn't have any other way. And mail was so slow, I mean you could write a letter today, and your family could not get it for two weeks. And a vice versa. But yes letters were constant and care packages, we used to call them, because you really didn't get much outside of your sea rations. And you trade them, everything was a barter system. Like you trade what you got, you know, you got cans and like some of it was like franks and beans, you like that? Then imagine a can of ham and eggs, it was pretty gross. So there was a lot of, and you would trade off and get cigarettes in there. And when I was in the service, I never smoked in school because I was an athlete, but when I went in to Vietnam, all that stress you start smoking. So in the sea rations you would get 5 cigarettes ... so you trade those you know, menthols for this you .... 5 cigarettes to buy food. If you didn't smoke you could trade you cigarettes to get that can of peaches, you know, like that. So food was a big thing, so if you got a care package from home, you'd get things like, still have them today, Chef Boyardee ravioli, spagettios, and that was like gourmet food to us, so you get that you would have to hide it from all your friends because they would try to steal it from you. And a can of Campbell's soup or something. So it was all canned goods pretty much. But that was the mail you got."

Interviewer: Do you have anything to tell students and even adults that don't necessarily understand the aspects of the war and what it was about?

Mr. Feher: "Well I think the biggest thing is whether you agree with any position with any war, at any time, whether it's Vietnam or Today. And I think it is less today, I don't think it exists today or if it does it's in the minority, it don't take your feelings especially the bad feelings out on the person doing the job, it's their job. And especially today, where you don't have a draft, people enlist and that is their job and for most of them it is their career. So they could join it at peace time and war breaks out and you don't have the choice of saying, no I don't want to do this, it's your job. So I think for anybody, today, I think it's wrong you to take it out on those people. If you have anger go to the voting booth and vote how you feel. And I think that was the thing from my generation that hurt the most. At that time the American public took their frustration about the war out us. And I think a lot of those people today, in hindsight, realize that they did a big no-no to do that. But it was done and you can't take it back, so to speak. And that's something younger people should appreciate. I appreciate it today where if I have that hat on and I wear it to any kind of public, I don't walk around with this hat on, but I wear it to a veterans' event or event where a veteran needs to go. Now what I appreciate the most is somebody coming up to me and it could be, I've had little children come up to me and say, 'my dad or my granddad served and such, thank you for your service.' And I can't tell you what that means to me and I know all the guys that I came here with today and other fellas it means the world to us, you don't know how good a feeling that is to have somebody thank you for something that no one thanked you for forty-five, fifty years ago. So, that is a very powerful statement to make to somebody. So, when you see a veteran, doesn't matter who it is, and you thank them, you'll never understand how fulfilling that is to hear from our end. It's like a breath of fresh air. You could say a million other things, but if you say that, and you mean it when you say it, it's worth a million dollars to us. It really is."