

Veteran Interview Transcript

1. I went to Vietnam in early September of '69 and came home August 15 1970. I was in the US army.

2. I didn't exactly volunteer although anyone over 18 would be expected to be drafted, I graduated from college May of '69. I decided that I wanted to try and become an officer. My degree in college was accounting. My scores for the air force and finance test weren't very high. You had to be a great student and I was a good student but not a great student. So I decided to pursue the army. Only 3 out of 150 students got to choose what area of the army they were working. So, technically I volunteered but if I'd known the whole story, I would've probably done something else.

3. No, my dad was not in combat or served in the Military, he stayed to take care of my mom who had a very bad case of asthma at that time. So he was able to avoid in the 1940's.

4. Vietnam is very different from America. Vietnam is a very poor country whereas most all of America is wealthy. France colonized the country in 1940- 50's. They have their own language known as Vietnamese. They also don't have much industry; they grow rice, and have rubber plantations/ rubber trees. So, the culture there is very different from America.

5. When I first got to Vietnam I was assigned to The First industry Division for 6 months. At a town called Ativan, which was 45 miles northwest of the capital of the country of South Vietnam Sagan, and I stayed there for about 6 months also. And in April of 1970, I was Paton Leader with the first division. And the other job I had was called a staff job which was pretty much an office type job.

6. I supported the war when I first got to Vietnam. I thought it was the right thing to do and the concept of the domino theory made sense. Vietnam fell, the rest of South East Asia would fall also to communism. However, as my time in Vietnam increased, I began to question if that was really true. When I came home I changed my mind, I did not support the war anymore and my participation in the war a big mistake.

7. the most memorable part of the war for me was coming home. Everyone there was usually there for about a year. When I first got to Vietnam I had been married for 2 years. My wife and I communicated through letters and cassette tapes. And as most soldiers, on the tapes I would often talk about how many days I had left. I went on R&R to meet her in Hawaii for 5 days in January of 1970. And before that I talked about how many days until R&R. It was probably my only favorite part about the war.

8. My first 6 months I was a baton Leader for baton of about 35 men. Looking for North Vietnamese soldiers and we had to kill them. The 30 minutes of breaks we got a day for eating and relaxing became known as the favorite times. I came to realize the things I took for granted at home became highlights.

9. The protests in the US while I was in Vietnam didn't typically affect me to much. In 69' there was a major protest in DC, and sometimes in my letters and tapes I talked about the protests and later looked back and read/ looked at them. But overall it didn't have a huge impact on me. My wife and both of our families did go to the support demonstration in Washington for supporting the war but I was still in Vietnam.

10. Yes I did get homesick because I wanted to be home. But there wasn't much time to think about it, because there wasn't anything you could do. Everyone there was stuck there for a year. Most but not all were married and that made it even harder.

0:05 "it was really hard to transition after being there I commented that the flight over to Vietnam from Honolulu it was during the nighttime part of the flight. All the time people were talking or doing something or they would have the overhead lights on reading something. On the way back it was a night flight also and I noticed no one at the lights on they were just sleeping and that was a big contrast I saw"

1:07 "after I came home from Vietnam I thought the war would be over for me. I was coming home I wasn't going back I would be getting out of the army in about six months so I thought the war was over but I came to realize it wasn't over I did many ways it out only just begun. After I had been home for short period of time one of my brothers he told me just in the last year when he here had a chance to talk to my wife he asked her how I was doing. She hesitated quite a bit and really all she had said was I had changed. You can't do something like that and not be changed. When I went back to work I had an accounting job and I Kind of just plugged along. I came to realize the way I handled things had changed I would get upset about things quickly and I didn't want to talk about it to anyone. My brother his name is Paul he's four years younger than me. He told me about a year ago that you would ask me questions about the war and I wouldn't tell him anything nothing at all. Big change for me was In Vietnam you were out in the jungle we were exposed to agent orange which was used to kill the jungle growth. Well after we came back started studying Agent Orange or were a number of diseases that were associated with it mostly cancer but one of the diseases they decided related to it was not determined till 2010 and it was heart disease. At the age of 44 I had a major heart attack and I didn't have any idea why because I never smoked I didn't take an illegal drugs or anything and I did everything I was supposed to do I watched my diet and cholesterol my family doctor said it shouldn't have happened to me. They did a catheterization which is where they go in take a look at the heart in the inside to see what's going on and when I talked to the cardiologist after he had done that he said that I didn't need a surgery because there wasn't enough built up to do a bypass. So I asked him so what has caused The heart attack and he said that if you knew the answer to that he would win the Nobel prize so in all likelihood agent Orange exposure was a factor in that was also likely factor in my succumbing to Prostate cancer in 2003. But the heart attack wasn't all of it I had various complications from the heart attack where my heart rhythm was erratic and chaotic. So the immediate outlook was that in 2 years I had a heart transplant. That was extremely difficult so the war impacted me in that regard as far as the heart transplant and prostate cancer and it caused problems in regard to depression and Pdst but it wasn't until 2011 that I started seeing a counselor about it which helped a great deal. I still see a counselor about once a month just to kind of talk about things so Vietnam had a huge impact looking back.

8:38 "we had one son, Michael. Who did not go into the service. I made it my business him to understand what war was like and what was involved and our impacts on one. So he knew all of that. From my point of view as far as I was concerned I was tricked by the U.S. Army becoming an infantry Lieutenant. So what that meant was that I was betrayed by The army and

my country which is even worse. So for instance One evening we got A phone call at home when Mike was about 17 years and answered the phone and the person on the other end asked to speak to Michael holler I asked who it was he said he was from a local Navy recruiting office so I use that opportunity to tell him my opinion on the recruiters, My opinion on the military, and what happened to me. I told him not to ever call my son again. Unfortunately he didn't because if he did I wouldn't know what would have happened. But it would not have been good.

10:58 "like I mentioned I was in bravo Company so in 2003 I learned about a reunion for people that worked for Bravo Company. I have gone to three or four of those reunions and we've located 11 guys that were in my Baton of 25 or 30 guys. So I've seen them at the reunions and I've talk to them there occasionally we've exchanged emails and that kind of thing. But not anything more than that.

12:04 "I've thought a lot about that and at one time I thought it be good to do that. But basically I don't think so now. If I went back I would want to see how it was when I was there. It has changed significantly in the past few years it's progressed a great deal I don't really know who will be a good experience for me or not. I've talked to some guys that were in my company's reunions that did go back and they said they found it to be a good experience but I don't know if it would for me. So it's unlikely that I will ever go back.

13:42 "afterI had come back my views about the war changed quite a bit. I was all for it. I didn't actually participate in anything. I thought it was a good thing. Some people say that it was against the soldiers and the troops in that it extended the war that it because more soldiers to die. I don't see that if anything it shortened the war because of all the demonstrations across the country and all the activities. I think it kind of just forced the country into basically getting out of the war. That's what Nixon did with the Vietnamization program. So really the war was pressed by the Republicans and the Democrats in the 60s as stopping communism but basically it was an internal Civil War between North and South Vietnam. If you go back and look at the history of Vietnam for a 1000 or 2000 years. They've been invaded by various countries over and over again and eventually in finally they regained their independence. They were gradually able to bite off the invaders. In the 40s and 50s France tried to colonize it but was not able to do so. There was an element of nationalism in all of Vietnam. The people really didn't understand or think about that it was their country and they wanted to keep their country and they did not want to separate it. One of my guys in my Baton. Dave bouton, I asked him to talk a little about the battle we had there on October 2, 1969. It was when our company of about 100 came upon going to secure South Vietnam from communism. In the 1960s 67 or 68 the security defense mac Lemaire went to Vietnam to do an analysis and when he came back he told President Johnson that the war was not winnable it could not be won. So all these kind of things make it worse that I was sent to war that could not be one I was sent to a war and I was lied to and deceived and it was just a really bad deal.

3:45 " my office when I came back home in general Service is a ministration in Washington DC. my office building was a 10 minute walk away from the Vietnam Memorial were it was being built. so from time to time I walk over from where it was being constructed and I would basically watch the construction watch it go up so I was one of the few people besides the workers that actually got to see it being built and I really enjoyed it very much and when it was done. it was dedicated on November 1982 and there was a big ceremony and there was a parade down Constitution Avenue. My wife and I went to it and at that time My son was 10 1/2 years old so he was old enough to understand all about it and it was the first time I have ever gone. The memorial is very good I like the idea that it has all the names of the 1500 killed there that's very good. On that day I wore my army jacket and a first division patch on the side and a lady saw that patch and she came up to me and pointed to it she said her son was with the first division and he died there. I saw some of the names on the wall that day one of them was the Lieutenant Ray long. Ray was from Birmingham Alabama. Ray and I had gone through six months of Officer Candidate School together in the same company and in the platoon in the last few months of 1968 I got to know Ray pretty well we got to be pretty close and Friends. I arrived in Vietnam on September 1969. he came a couple months later and he signed my platoon the infantry platoon. The platoon had for Entergy companies there were companies ABC and D I do the sign to Company D Delta company and I was and Company B so we will be doing the same types of things as the Baton leaders. He was killed on November 28, 1969, he had only been in the company for a little less than a month. My company had about 90 guys and we had 10 of them that were killed and about 35 that were wounded. fortunately no one in my platoon was killed we did had two that were wounded. my worst day in Vietnam was only 17 days after I had joined the company it was on October 2, 1968 and I had been with the company just 2 1/2 weeks we went out to this particular area in the jungle by helicopter which is how we got around. The company commander told her that we had an active area so it was very likely that we will be seeing some activity and so we move through the jungle and we got to a firefight around noon. But they lasted most of the afternoon we had three men killed that day and 13 were wounded that was probably my first time in a real combat situation. I can't describe the level of fear it puts into you. I like to refer to it as a fear that so dramatic it's overwhelming that it something I never imagined existed it was just completely overpowering I wanted to somehow if I could become merged into the ground below me and be incased with the security of it. I couldn't do that and on top of everything else I was of the Baton leader i was the guy in charge of my men who this is where the lies the deception really came into play. Because of the lives of those two recruiters put me there I didn't want to be where I should have been people talk about Bravery and courage in combat but in some level and some degree you really don't have any choice. I wrote a poem about that afternoon it's called firefight and I said that they were brave soldiers for bravery that was thrust upon them as if whatever you do is because you have to do its not because of courage or bravery but because you have no choice because if you don't you're going to die and so are the guys all around you so do things you never thought you could do because you have to.

15:16 " after I have been with the company for three or four months each baton of 25 to 30 guys would operate pretty much on their own sometimes we would be going out by chopper and just our baton would be dropped off and each baton would be operating in its own. So we'd be out maybe for five or 10 days and the company commander would call and say were going to be picked up be headed back to base camp that afternoon he needed us to come to location a and

be picked up by chopper. So I got my map out and heard where he said he wanted me to go so we started going in that direction and we got close I decided to send out one of my squads. There are three squads in a baton and there were five or six men in each and I would tell the squad leader to go out to a certain direction. Instead of us wondering around trying to find this area I would have them go out and find it and then tell us where it was and then we will go we would know where to go. Well they went out and ended up getting lost they can figure out where we were so they can get back to where I was and on top of that the squad leader had a radio with him and his radio it went out so he didn't have communication so I had a squad of about five or six men in the jungle and didn't know where they were I couldn't talk to them which is a very bad. If they got in trouble and I would have heard gunshots and know which way to go but didn't want to do that that way so I talked to the company commander and I told him where we were. We were talking and he was talking to the people at headquarters who were in charge of the operations he told then where I was and he looked on the map and they told me I was going not only going the Wrong way but also min the wrong direction. I needed to go to the landing zone where we had to be picked up. I had been doing this for two or four months I have come to realize I was pretty good at reading a map and knowing where I was going in relation to where I was actually. I had a high confidence in what I was doing so I told the company commander I wasn't where I was supposed to be and not very high and I'm going in the wrong direction and that I was somewhere close to zero. So he went back-and-forth with the people at headquarters and I went back-and-forth with both of them saying I have to be at the right place we did this for about 20 to 30 minutes at this time finally my squad had returned and they were safe after about 20 minutes the people at headquarters said oh by the way we were wrong you were right. So that was kind of a tense moment but also a funny moment looking back after 40 years.it was a good outcome when it could've been a real problem

A: Started-0:00

Soldiers, and he commented that the enemy was fighting for their country, to save their country. The Americans there were fighting to stay alive. So that was, that was the big difference. I don't think, I don't think it would have been possible to actually win the war, because of the type of war it was. Memoirs it is booked General Westbourne said that he would probably need about 2 million men, to actually quote "win the war", it would take a very long time. The most ever had there was 542,000 that was just a couple months before I went over. So the likely hood that the moms and dads and the brothers and sisters in the United States would have ever gone for something like 1 or 2 million, people there, soldiers there was just ridiculous every one blew it on Vietnam. Eisenhower blew it, with his domino theory, the theory was wrong. Lindy Johnson blew it because he picked up where Kennedy left off and escalated the war. Kennedy sent 15,000 advisors, Johnson sent 540,000 soldiers. Even Nixon wasn't any better, he decided to get out because he didn't have any other choice. Probably a lot of people don't realize that the Paris Peace accords defiled the agreement, the peace agreement allowed for 150,000 north Vietnamese soldiers remain in south Vietnam so I knew from the get go that is wasn't going to work that we weren't going to be able to secure South Vietnam from communism in the 1960s 67 and 68, security of defense Maximo went to Vietnam for, to do an analysis and when he came back in effect he told President Johnson that the war was not winnable, that it couldn't be won. So all these kinds of things make it all he

worse, I was sent to a war that couldn't be won, I was sent to a war I was lied about and deceived and it was a bad deal, really bad deal.

A: Ended-3:35

Q: Have you ever been to the Vietnam memorial in D.C.

A: Started-3:45

My office when I came back home I was working a general series administration in Washington D.C. and the building, my office building was only a couple, only a ten minute walk from where the Vietnam memorial was being built so from time to time during lunch time I'd walk over to where it was being constructed and I was basically watched the construction, watch it go up. So I was one of the few people other than the workers that were actually able to see it being built and I enjoyed very much seeing that done and it was, it was dedicated to a member of 1982 there was a, there was a big ceremony, there was a parade down constitution avenue. So my wife and I went to it and at the time my son was a, let's see he was, he had just, he was 10 1/2 years old, so he was old enough to understand all about it and that was the first time I went to it. The memorials were very good, I liked the idea that it has the names of the, of the 58,000 killed while there, that's very good. On that day I wore my, it was November so it was cool, so I wore my army jacket that had a first division patch on the side and a lady saw that patch and she came up to me and pointed to it she said her son was with the first division and he died there. I saw some of the names on the wall that day, one of them was Lieutenant Ray Long (at 7:17 Tori's head comes in frame but was during a break.), Ray was from Birmingham, Alabama. Ray and I went through 6 months of officer candidate school together in the same company and the same platoon I was in the last 6 months of 1968 so I got to know Ray pretty well and got to be pretty good friends. I arrived in Vietnam in September of '69, he came a couple months later and he was assigned to my battalion, my infantry battalion, the battalion had 4 infantry companies, there were companies A, B, C, and D and he was assigned to company yeah, company D, Delta company, and I was in company B. So we'd be doing the same types of things as being platoon leader with a platoon and he was killed November 28th 1969, he had only been in the company about a little less than a month, and he was killed. My company had about 90 guys in it, we had 10 of them killed and about 35 wounded. Fortunately no one in my platoon was killed, although I did have two wounded. My worst day in Vietnam was only 17 days after I joined the company. It was on October 2nd 1969, and I had been with the company but 2 1/2 weeks we went out to this particular area in the jungle by helicopter which is how we got around there by helicopter and the company commander had told us it was an active areas it was likely we would see some activity and so we moved on through the jungle and we got into a firefight around noon that day we lasted most of the afternoon, we had 3 men killed that day. And 13 were wounded. That was my, that was really my first time in a real combat situation I can't describe the level of fear that puts into you, I refer to it as, it's a fear that's so intense and so dramatic and so overwhelming that it's something I never imagined even existing, it was just completely overpowering I wanted to somehow become

merged with the ground below me and be incased by the security of it, that's what I wanted, but couldn't do that. On top of everything else was a platoon leader so I was the guy in charge of my men so, you see this is where the lies and the deception really came into play because of the lies of those two recruiters put me there, put me where I didn't really want to be, where I shouldn't have been. People talk about bravery and courage in combat but at some level, at some degree you really don't have any choice. I wrote a poem about that afternoon it's called "Firefight" and in it I said that, that there were soldiers that were brave soldiers, for bravery was thrust upon them it's as if whatever you do is because you have to do it not because there's any courage or bravery but because they had no other choice, because if you don't you're going to die and so are the guys all around you (at 14:30 a bell goes off, but it was during a break). So you do things that you wrote never do because you have to.

A: End-14:40