# VETERANS HISTORY PROJECT

**Preserving Stories of Service for Future Generations**

**Interview with**

# William E. Marchetti

Conducted by Ms. Deb Barrett

August 3, 2011

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**This interview is being conducted on August 3, 2011 with Mr. Bill Marchetti at the Indian Prairie Library in Darien, Illinois. My name is Deb Barrett. Mr. Marchetti was born on September 28, 1950, in Chicago, Illinois. He is a diesel mechanic for the Chicago Transit Authority, and learned of the Veterans History Project through an article about this project in the Darien Patch on-line newspaper. Mr. Marchetti has kindly consented to be interviewed for this project. Here is his story.**

**Bill, where were you living just before you entered the service? What was your life like?**

Well, I was living with my father in Oak Park. My mother died when I was 16, so my sister, who was a newlywed, actually, moved into the house to take care of me and my dad. Then they had kids and blah, blah, blah – they had just started having kids. So I lived in the basement of my sister's house, actually. It was my father's house, but my sister bought it. So that's where I was living when I went into the service.

**And you were in high school at the time?**

Yes. I was 16.

**You were 16 years old. And was that your age when you went into the service?**

No. I lived there until I was 18. When I graduated from high school – I didn't do well in high school, but I graduated. I didn't have good grades for college, and I didn't have money to go to college, anyway. So I knew that I was going to get drafted. I was very close to getting drafted – I already saw this coming. So I decided instead of getting drafted I would enlist and get the job I wanted.

**So this was 1968?**

Yes. So, after September of 1968 or so I started thinking about what I was going to do with this. And I decided on the Army. I had talked to the Marines, but I didn't like their program – it's a long story in itself. Anyway, I didn't want to go into the Marine Corps. I actually told the recruiter – I swear this is a true story – I told him, "What do you guys know? You turned down Audy Murphy!" I didn't want to go into the Marines, so I enlisted in the Army to become a mechanic – a diesel mechanic. That's what I wanted to do. That was the trade I had chosen. I was always a tinkerer, anyway, so I signed up to become a diesel mechanic.

**How did your dad feel about your decision to join?**

He supported it, sure. My father was never overbearing like that or anything. I'm sure they were all worried about me. I was the baby of the family. I'm sure they were all worried. But I was in an awkward position. I wasn't a man, and I wasn't a boy. I had to go out on my own. I had no choice but to do that. My mother was gone and I was living under my sister's roof and I didn't want to be in the way. So I thought this was for the

best. And I wasn't really worried about that. So I enlisted and went to Fort Leonard-Wood for…[basic training].

After…[basic training] I went to a leadership school they had. I was a squad leader in AIT.

**Let's back up a little bit. Where were you inducted?**

At AFFEES in Chicago.

**You were inducted there and from there you went to Fort Leonard-Wood?**

Yes.

**What were your first impressions when you went through the induction?**

When we took the oath I was very proud of that. But when we went to basic it was a different story, because you got treated like an animal immediately.

**What happened when you went to basic? First of all, how did you get to Fort Leonard-Wood?**

By bus.

**Everybody?**

Yes. It's right outside of St. Louis. They just took us on the bus and we went there. The next thing you know they were yelling and screaming at us and throwing clothes at us.

**A lot of lines.**

Oh, yes. A lot of lines. 'Hurry up and wait.' That was typical.

**So you got all your stuff. What happened to all your civilian stuff?**

I don't remember. I think we shipped them home. I guess you could keep a couple of pieces, but I think they had to be stored during basic because they didn't want you to go AWOL on them. That stuff had to be put away.

But I remember having civilian clothes, like three-quarters of the way through basic. Like on a Sunday, we could do something on our own and everybody had civies on. Somewhere they were there.

**What were your living quarters like when you were in basic?**

I had good living quarters during basic training. They had new buildings that they had just built at Fort Leonard-Wood.

And the old buildings, like when you came in and you were getting ready to go into a company; they were old, old barracks. You had to have a fire watch and everything because they were wooden barracks from World War II. The first few nights were kind of iffy. Hardly anybody slept because you didn't know what was going on. There were locals who would sneak into the compound and try to mess with people. It was an awakening.

But once we got into basic training we had real nice billets that were three stories high and were made of brick. They were really very, very nice. There was no problem with that, but they kept you running 24/7 for six weeks.

**Were you in bunk beds? Was it the long dormitory-style type of arrangement? Did you have smaller rooms?**

We had four or six-man rooms. The accommodations were nice, very nice. You had your own lock-up area and stuff like that. But it was basic training so everything had to be just right and lined up correctly.

**So even your locker – everything had to be a certain way?**

Oh, sure. They were real sticklers for stuff like that. You know, the military program is to break you down so you think you're nothing. And then build you up to think you're something. That's what they do to you. And that's what they do to get you to do everything the same way as everybody else so you understand what a team does. It works. It's a terrific thing. I think it's a good thing. I didn't have a problem transitioning to that because I was a Boy Scout. So I liked camping and that, so I didn't have a problem with that.

**Was this your first time away from home by yourself?**

Yes, pretty much.

**Was there anyone you knew who was also there at the same time? Any friends from home?**

No. I didn't know anybody there. But you get close to people right away. I could tell you a story – I swear this is true.

A guy I was in basic training with – I was at a welcome-home parade at Navy Pier – I was standing behind this guy and I recognized him from the back.

**This was 1990?**

No, I think this was about 1986 or 1987. It was when they had the welcome-home parade. I'm standing in line – they just put everyone in line. And I'm standing behind this guy and look between his ears, and I went "Polok?" His name was Don Pollock and we called him "Polok." And he looked at me – they called me "Wop"

because I'm Italian. He turned around and said, "You recognized me from the back of my head?" I said I swear to God I knew it was you.

**So there was a lot of close bonding there.**

Yes. He was a good kid.

**What was a typical day like in your basic training?**

In basic training it was just running and running.

**What time did you get up?**

5:00 in the morning they'd roust you.

**Gently, probably.**

It was all banging and running. The drill sergeants – the Marine Corps had drill instructors – and don't call them drill instructors or you'll get your butt kicked!

But I remember the very first day we ran. Everybody was falling out. It was wintertime. It was very cold – it was Missouri in the winter. And Missouri had weird weather – it could get hot during the day and be freezing at night. Anyway, they'd fall out and we're all green. They'd start us running and guys are buckling over and falling. And I was running and running and told myself I wasn't going to fall…[out]. Then I thought I couldn't run any more, my side was killing me. I thought I was going to fall out, and just when I was going to another kid laid down on the grass and the DI ran right up to him and kicked him. I thought: I'm not doing that! And I ran and kept running. I learned that lesson. You didn't want to get beat up. It's a different army today than when we were in. They were not afraid to manhandle you.

**So you made the whole run?**

Yes. I made that run. But there were a lot others I suffered through. But that's okay. That's part of growing up, too.

**So you get up in the morning at 5:00. Did you eat before you exercised?**

No. You ran and did PT. Then you ate. Then either did more PT or you did training.

Marching was a big thing because you had to learn how to march. If you didn't know how to march you wouldn't be cohesive with each other. You had to learn how to march. That was a comedy of errors. They would get you marching and it would be like an accordion where everybody from the back was walking into the front guys until everybody learned to wait and take a step. It was comical, but guys got hurt – they'd bump heads. These accordions would get long. They'd be stretched out and you'd think it wouldn't happen. But we learned right away.

**And how many were in the accordion?**

There'd be 50 guys in a platoon. It was kind of dangerous.

Then they taught you how to force-march – walk fast – and we would run in formation, too. Once you learned how to walk in formation things got infinitely easier.

**What kind of classes did you have? What sort of things did they teach you?**

Well, in basic training it was basic infantry classes. Everybody's job #1 is infantry. That's your training. So we did map reading, compass skills. Those are things I kind of already knew because, like I say, I was in Boy Scouts. So we did that kind of stuff. There were a lot of things. We had to do rifle training. We had to learn how to clean a rifle. We used M14's when I went through training, but then we changed over. When I went to AIT we went to 16's. I don't know why. We weren't trained with the 16 to begin with, and I came to believe the M14 was a much better weapon.

**Was this the first time you used a gun?**

I had gone hunting. My mother's family was from Iowa and they were all farmers. We'd been going hunting and fishing. But I was never big into guns. I like guns now, but that's because I got older.

But the training was pretty good, I thought, actually.

**How long was your basic training?**

I think it was eight weeks, if I remember.

**Were you able to call home, write home, receive packages?**

Not at first. You could mail all the time, but you couldn't get packages until the third or fourth week. And it all depended if you were in good graces or not.

**You could write to them, too?**

Yes.

**So you had eight weeks of basic training. You were able to communicate with home after the first week or so.**

After the first few weeks. You could always write letters. They could never stop you from writing letters. But it's like a cult. They want to separate you from your family and keep you captive. They're brainwashing you, anyway. That's what the program was. There's no doubt about that.

**Did you have any free time?**

No. As I recall, not for the first month or so. We were busy every day, doing something every day, and we trained seven days a week. We didn't have days off until maybe the third or fourth week. Then we finally got a day they gave us – like a Sunday.

**And what did you do with that time?**

We ran to the phones! We called home.

**Did you go into town at all?**

No. They wouldn't let us off the base. When you're in basic training you're a maggot. That was what they were trying to instill in you. So you were grateful for just getting to call home.

**So when you completed your basic training, did they have any kind of ceremony or anything?**

Yes. They had a whole deal. I've got a picture.

**Was your family able to join you?**

Yes. Actually when I graduated from basic training my father and my older sister came there. Then we went to St. Louis. That's funny – the things you remember. A guy bought me dinner.

**A guy saw you in uniform?**

Yes. Just a guy in a restaurant. He bought me dinner. I thought that was kind of cool. People cared then.

**So when you finished your basic and graduated, did you get any leave time?**

No. Like I said, I got picked to be a squad leader for AIT, which is Advanced Individual Training. That's the next phase of basic – the next eight weeks. I went to this leadership school. That was at Fort Leonard-Wood. It was a two-week class. And it was all keeping your bunk straight and all of that – like an OCS [Officer Candidate School] type of thing. They made you wear a helmet and all this crazy stuff. I went through that and brushed it off, basically, because it was more military junk.

Anyway, when I went into AIT I was a squad leader. I had a squad of guys who came to me. I was the 'mother hen.' I had to go to the DI if anybody had a problem.

**The drill sergeant?**

Yes. That's all that was. I got a few stories from AIT that were pretty strange.

About the sixth or seventh week of AIT – we're learning to do mechanics now. Even though it's more like a school you're still doing PT and that kind of thing. It's just basically you're going to school. So you do have time on your own after hours. Anyway, it was a Sunday and we had to clean the orderly room. So they closed the orderly room at 4:00. Now, mind you, we weren't able to go drinking or anything like that, but the class ahead of us were off on Sunday. So they were in the orderly room – or the day room – and were playing pool and stuff. They had gone and had a couple of pops and they were feeling their oats because they were ready to graduate and we were a week behind. Anyway, I say to the other guys that I'm going to go tell them that the day room is closing, and that the guys should mosey over in about ten minutes to clean it up because that was our duty. They said okay – they were all good kids. So I went over there, walked in and just watching them play pool. They were all cocky and snotty about things. They didn't know me, being I'm a lower classman. One kid says to me, "What do you want?" I said the day room was going to close so it could be cleaned. He said, "Oh, yeah? Well, we're not leaving." So, I said, "Well, you're going to leave because we're going to close it." And as I said that, one of them threw a paper cup at me and it hit the wall. So I bent down to get it, and when I did, the guy swung the pool cue at me. But he didn't grow up in my neighborhood, this guy, because he swung it with the small end toward me instead of the big end. I caught it, and I flipped him right on the pool table and beat him with the stick. But the best part was, the whole squad walked in the door right when the guy swung the stick at me. So that held everybody else off. This was a big Indian guy. They called him, "Chief." I wound up beating this guy up. But he was big and didn't want to stop and he'd been drinking. Anyway, I hurt the guy. I didn't mean to, but I did. So right away the officer of the day was in asking what was going on. I said I was on duty and the guy tried to hit me with a pool cue and I defended myself. Well, the officer said I was in the right – I was on duty and they should have listened and obeyed the order. Well, I ran into the guy as we were going back to the orderly room but my guys were with me and he's alone because his guys had abandoned him. He wanted to know what I was going to say. I told him I wasn't going to say a thing, that it was his battle; he was the one who screwed up, not me. Anyway, the officer of the day got a chuckle out of it, but he knew that guy was going to get written up for something.

The next day I had to go and give blood. And while I was giving blood my drill sergeant and CO walked into the room. So my drill sergeant says, "Hey, Marchetti, you want to fight? You like to fight?" And the CO's standing with him and saying they could do something about that. I told him I didn't know what he meant. He said, "We might have an opening in Vietnam for you." I said I was supposed to go to Fort Knox for track school. Well, two weeks later I got orders for 'Nam. And when I complained about it and said I had enlisted for track school, they told me "Don't worry, you're going to get track school – OJT track school." On-the-job-training. So because I did my job too good I wound up getting sent to 'Nam over getting the schooling that I wanted. That left me a little bitter. When I first got to 'Nam I got a case of the jaws about it. I wouldn't have cared if I had to go to 'Nam. It's just that I had a contract and they didn't live up to it.

**You think the fight had something to do with it?**

Yes. I swear to God I was only defending myself. But they didn't know how Chicagoans were.

**So how much time did you have when you found out you were going to Vietnam?**

I got probably a two-week leave.

**So you did get a leave.**

Yes. But it was only 15 days or something like that. Because I think because I had gone to that class I was on an odd cycle. So instead of getting 30 days I got only 15 or something like that. I forget how that worked.

**Were most of the guys in your platoon going there?**

No. They went all over the place. The guys went everywhere. I don't think I've ever seen anyone from AIT again.

But that was like the highlight of AIT!

**So, enlisting in the Army was one thing. But when your family found out you were going to Vietnam …**

I didn't know how they felt about that. I really didn't. I came home and kind of surprised them when I did. It was kind of like spur of the moment.

**You didn't tell them you were coming.**

No. I don't know why.

**How did you get home?**

I don't remember. I must have taken a bus. No, I had to fly because you would fly stand-by. I don't remember that particular trip. Other ones I remember flying home. I remember when I came home from 'Nam the second time I took a cab because I didn't want anyone to know I was coming home – because the first time the neighbors were all out there and everything and it freaked me out. It was nice. Don't get me wrong. They were supportive, but I didn't want to go through that again.

**So you took a bus or flew home.**

Yes. We're still talking about AIT.

**So 15 days, and then where did you have to go?**

I think I had to go to Fort Dix, New Jersey.

**And you flew there?**

Yes. You had to fly stand-by because it was cheaper. I think I had a voucher to fly, but you flew stand-by so you didn't bump anybody. It was just if there were openings.

**This was 1969?**

This was…[1969]; I think April or May. I started basic training with the first cycle of the year – I went there December 27 but didn't start basic until January 3 or something like that.

**Were you the only serviceman on that flight? Were there others in uniform on that flight?**

I'm [sure] there were. Because they would have come from Missouri or home.

**Any reaction from people?**

No. Actually, people were not like today – people are supportive today. And that's my mission in life right now – is to make sure these guys are welcomed home.

**Because 1968-1969, that was a rough time.**

It actually wasn't bad yet. When I actually came home from Vietnam, that was crummy. Not my neighbors – my neighbors were supportive.

**So you had to fly to Fort Dix. How were you prepared to go to Vietnam? What did they tell you? What did they give you?**

They gave us nothing. They sat us around and they gave us a book, 'this is your tour,' and had a five second blurb about what the 'rice bowl' was. All of Southeast Asia is a 'rice bowl' – that's how they feed the rest of…[Southeast Asia]. And Vietnam is a big feeder of Southeast Asia. It's all rice – the whole place is a rice paddy. Anyway, they gave you a little about the culture. But they gave us no training about speaking the language or anything like that. We didn't really get anything about what to expect when we got there. We weren't taught what the weather was going to be like. We were issued warm weather fatigues and stuff like that, so we figured it was going to be tropical. We didn't figure it was going to be $140^0$. But I was completely and utterly unprepared for what I ran into.

**Had you seen any of the news on TV about what was happening in Vietnam?**

Yes. I remember seeing Buddhist monks burning themselves. I saw that. But for the most part I had been in training for six months. So I hadn't had a lot of time.

**You had been cut off from seeing that.**

Yes. But I knew there was a war going on. I wasn't a fool. I knew what was going on. But I hadn't really given it a lot of thought. My thought was that I was going to be a track mechanic; I'm not going to be involved in that.

**You weren't going to be in combat.**

Yes. I had never actually planned on that. But things changed!

**So how long was your flight? Did you have to make connections?**

Yes. It was odd. I had to go back and forth four times, and every time I went a different way. It was always a commercial jet. There were stewardesses and all, but…[everybody else] were GI's. We knew we were going to Vietnam.

But one time, I flew out of Fort Dix and went to Ireland to Iceland, then from Iceland to Hawaii. I don't know how it worked. No, it was to Tokyo. Then from Tokyo to Vietnam.

One time I remember I went from Alaska to Hawaii on the same trip, and I couldn't for the life of me figure out how we did that. One time we flew off the west coast, one time we flew off the east coast. Or maybe it was back the other way; I don't remember. But it was the strangest thing. I always said I saw the whole world, but I was everywhere for 45 minutes. Because that's what you do when you travel.

**How did you pass the time on your trip to Vietnam, that first trip?**

I can't remember.

**Were you nervous?**

I wasn't nervous until I got there. And the only reason I was nervous when we got there was because the guys who greeted the plane played a game on us.

**What did they do?**

Well, they ran in with their guns drawn. And we didn't have weapons yet. They said they had taken rockets about two hours ago and were expecting to get hit again. They said when we got out of the plane we were going to have to run across the runway. And they're laying all this crap on us. And it's hot there. And I remember when they opened the door that heat hit you like somebody punched you in the face. And all of a sudden your mind wasn't working. And you had people telling you to find cover when you get out of the plane. And the next thing you know you're standing in the middle of the tarmac, and there's nothing going on. They think they're being funny because they've got too much time on their hands. If some of those guys ever did go to the field they would have felt a little differently about playing a game on newbies.

**So when you went to Vietnam the first time, where did you land?**

Tan Son Nhut Air Base I think it was, which is just outside of Saigon. A lot of people came in through Cam Ranh Bay, which was another place. I came in at Tan Son Nhut – why, I don't know. But probably because I was going to be stationed in the 'iron triangle,' and that's where that was.

**The 'iron triangle' was …**

The 'iron triangle' was the area around Saigon that was fortified. You've heard of the 'green zone' in Iraq. It's kind of like that, but the green zone is a base camp.

**And there were three …**

There were three major bases in the iron triangle on all three corners. But the rest of it was open jungle in between there. They were probably 15 to 30 miles apart around Saigon.

**Well, once you realized they had pulled this joke on you …**

We were pretty ticked-off, but there was nobody to yell at about it because they were gone.

**When you looked around, what was your impression of what you saw?**

It was just hot. It was just ungodly hot. And we were on a…[tarmac].

**A tarmac, which is hot.**

And then somebody said we could go eat. I remember that like it was yesterday. We were all in line because we had to eat something. But who wanted to eat, it was so hot! But we got in line and were along what they called a 'piss ditch,' and it was just garbage in this ditch. We got there and everybody was just heaving – it was so hot. We couldn't eat. It was horrible.

Finally they put us into some bunks somewhere and waited for someone to come around and get us to go do something.

**What were your living accommodations like there, then?**

They were okay. As I recall they were fairly clean. Tan Son Nhut and Long Binh were such large base camps. They were pretty much stateside-like. They had streets that had names and things like that. You never saw that out in the small base camps. Anyway, as I recall they moved us from there – as they were getting us ready to go to wherever we were going to be – they put us on a bus. I remember that. It was nighttime. They drove us through Saigon – the outskirts of Saigon, which I didn't know were the

outskirts of Saigon at the time. I came to find that out a year later when I was in that same area just in a jeep – I remembered I'd gone down those streets.

But they had us in buses with cages on the side. Because, again, we didn't have any weapons and they were moving us. So to keep them from fragging us as we were going through the town they had us in these caged buses. You'd be driving through and wondering just what you had gotten yourself into.

**Was it quiet? Could you hear gunfire?**

No. It was like a bustling town. Saigon's a big town. It's not a small place. Like I say, though, this was the outskirts. You saw little outposts up on hills – like little pillboxes – and you'd think it was interesting that there was a town but they had weapons sitting up there. You'd wonder: Did they get shot at up there? What goes on? It makes you wonder. Like I say, I was a new guy then and didn't know what to expect. And having them play that game on us at first I was thinking this was a bunch of crap.

**So you were 19 then?**

Yes. I think you had to be 19 to go to Vietnam. If you were 18 I don't think they would have sent you, but I could be wrong about that.

**So you were at this base for how long?**

That was maybe three or four days.

**And from there where were you sent?**

Then they sent me to Blackhorse base camp, which is the opposite way from Bear Cat – the opposite side of the triangle. And they put me with the 11th Armored Cav. And my job was to be a track mechanic. Now, I didn't know anything about tracks or diesels.

**You didn't get the schooling.**

I didn't get the schooling. Right. So it was on-the-job training.

Anyway, they put us in this base camp. It was not a really, really small base camp. There were probably 400 people at Blackhorse. And I really actually liked Blackhorse. Because we were pretty much left alone. We didn't have to play Army. But we had to pull a lot, a lot of duty because we were non-combat soldiers. When you're non-combat that means you pick up the slack for what the grunts have to do. So that meant you had to pull – well, we had to pull our own KP anyway. So that was one duty. But I only had to do that for a short time because I was already a PFC. The E2's had to do that. But everybody made PFC going into 'Nam. But I had made PFC out of basic training because of the schooling – not seniority, just rank. Anyway, I only had to do it for a short time.

But then they had 'charge of quarters.' There would be an officer of the day and a CQ, and there would be a runner. So you'd be the runner or the CQ – whatever post they

needed filled. And you'd have to work. Like, you'd work through the night and bring messages back and forth to people and stuff like that.

There were all kinds of things you'd have to do as a CQ. It was amazing the kind of crap you'd have to do. We did that the entire time I was in the Army. You always had CQ duties.

We also had to pull guard duty every third day. This was besides doing our job, which was staging tracks. Anyway, everybody rotated the duties. So you'd pull guard duty every third day, and every-other guard duty you'd have to pull tower guard. Guard duty was the overnight guard shift, like a 12-hour shift. But the tower guard was a 24-hour shift. And you had to work in four-hour increments. You sat up in a tower.

**One of those towers you had always seen and wondered about?**

Yes. But the way the berm was set up there would always be five or six bunkers, then a tower; five or six bunkers, then a tower. And the 'commo' would go from the tower to the bunkers so they'd know everybody was awake, more or less. So you'd have to call in if it was your watch and say, 'This is bunker 872,' or whatever it was, and 'We have a negative sit-rep at this time,' which is a negative situation report. But if you had movement or saw fire, or if you had anything unusual. And you could have mongooses running over you – it was the jungle and a lot of weird things were out there. So you'd call in and tell them, 'I've got movement out here.' And somebody would come and look at things with you.

If you took fire you could return fire. But that seldom ever happened because the VC wouldn't want to challenge us because we were well-armed. They would try to breach our wire a lot of times. And if they did we had these 55-gallon drums out there called 'Foo Gas.' Most of the times they had holes in them already. But if they didn't and you hit one of them they would explode and light up the whole area. If somebody was out there you would see them. Because everything was already defoliated – they had used Agent Orange; it was common practice. The berm was burnt down. You could see. And there was barbed wire – about eight or ten strings – before that. And before you'd go in for guard duty you'd go out and check your wiring for claymores and everything. You had fortifications.

**Claymore mines?**

Yes. And when you'd hear people tell you the VC would turn them around on you, they would do that. You'd always have to go check. That's why it was written right on there – 'Toward Enemy.' You'd put them down that way.

**Did you ever, while you were on duty there, see anything or have any of these experiences.**

A few times. Actually, there were more times when we were closer to having friendly fire incidents than having actual fire fights. We had so much fire power – we had a lot of fire power – and it was easy to make mistakes.

We had a second lieutenant call in one night to order a mortar strike, and he called it in on one of our own bunkers. And we wound up going out and digging the guys out of the bunker by hand. Thank God everybody was okay. It hit right before the bunker and buried the bunker in this red sand – red clay. And we were all freaked out – there were forty of us digging through this dirt. And when we came up with the guys they were all okay – just covered with dirt. That was one of those instances where you thought, 'You dumb ass – you're too green and don't know what you're doing; you've got to look at the maps.'

Anyway, stuff like that did happen.

But most of the time we didn't have too many incidents because they didn't really want to challenge us. We had really good defenses. They liked to mortar us – we took a lot of mortars – some rockets. We were right outside of a town called Xuan Loc. And in Xuan Loc there was an orphanage that nuns ran. And I remember the VC actually lobbing mortars on that because they didn't like the Christians. They killed kids!

From an American point of view, we looked at that and thought, 'These guys are animals! They're killing their own people. Orphans already; they didn't have enough bad stuff happen to them?'

**So it made you more determined.**

Absolutely. Absolutely.

**So you were doing this tower duty and working on the trucks and stuff. How long did you do that type of thing?**

I did that for about four months.

Then they decided to move us. They convoyed out of Blackhorse and we went to Bear Cat, which is where I joined the 240th. But the reason they moved us they were turning Blackhorse over to the 'ARVN's' – the Army of the Republic of Vietnam. So we turned that over to them.

The night we got to Bear Cat, we stood on the berm at Bear Cat and watched them mortar Blackhorse. And we counted 66 rounds that the VC put in there just to show that they were a force to be reckoned with. I don't think that would have happened if we had been there because we would have blown the hell out of them. But they wanted to prove a point.

Some of the ARVN's were good soldiers. ARVN marines were good soldiers, Montegnard's were good soldiers, ARVN Special Forces were good soldiers. But the normal ARVN troop was a farm kid that got pressed into duty and didn't want to be there. They were a little lax in discipline, I thought. And as I learned later, I really got to distrust them. Because when we went to the field with them we would have to literally throw them out of the aircraft when we came into an LZ. They wouldn't get out. And if you're sitting there hovering you're just a target. So I never played around. I would literally take them and throw them out of the aircraft. I never had to do that with any other soldiers we had to deal with. Thai's – I supported Thai's, I supported tons and tons of American units. Never, ever would we have to go through anything with an American unit. ROK's – Koreans; Filipino's, Australians – with nobody else did we have to do

that. But with ARVN's we always, always had to do that. Not with ARVN marines or Special Forces – they were better. But the regular ARVN grunts …

**The conscripts – the ones who were pressed into service …**

Yes. They were just regular GI's, but they weren't very good soldiers. They just weren't.

**So this is when you were at Bear Cat?**

Yes.

**And your job there was what?**

I was still a track mechanic. But we supported the 25th Infantry, and I think the 9th Infantry there. The 11th Cav had gone on to Cambodia. Then we had a stand-down because of the Cambodian push. So we worked, I think it was like five or six days, getting stuff ready to go into Cambodia. Nobody slept. We worked our tails off. We got all this stuff down there and we actually got an Army Commendation Medal for it. But we put all that together and they had the first Cambodian campaign. I didn't have to go to Cambodia, but I did all that staging.

About that time they started sending me to the field to get tracks and stuff out of the field. And that was not a good job. Most of the time we couldn't get them out of the rice paddies. These guys would drive these things into dikes and they'd be stuck in there. So we'd go out there and try to get them out.

I remember one time we had a sky hook come in – a big Sikorsky that looks like a bumblebee; it's gigantic; big, big tires. And they came down for an APC. It was an APC that was stuck in mud. They grabbed it with a winch and broke the mud seal in the water. And I started the thing up and was trying to run it up the side of the dike. And I got it to the top of the dike and it slid right back down into the water again! And I tried to get it out again and they picked up the helicopter and nudged me. And I got it up and it slid down again! Finally I said, 'We're going to drown here!' And believe it or not, they sent us there without weapons. They said we were mechanics and what did we need a weapon for – they wanted us to get the track out. So we're trying to get the track out. It was utterly ridiculous.

And we had 10-ton wreckers that had cables. And we'd try to put the cables on and drag them out with those. We had cables break3. We lost an infantryman one day because a cable snapped, went over the truck and hit him across the back of the neck and killed him. So I said that wasn't working.

A lot of times when we couldn't get them out we'd just implode them with magnesium.

**Just to destroy them.**

Yes. We'd just blow them up. It was just senseless. We couldn't get them back.

**Did you lose a lot of them?**

Oh, we lost a lot of them. You know, Vietnam is all rice paddies. And there's a monsoon season. When it's monsoon season it's relentless. It rains everyday at the same time. You know that it's coming. And it's harsh. You know it's going to happen – you're not going to get the thing out of there. So why waste time on it. In the meantime they could be mortaring you and you don't even know where those are coming from. It was ridiculous. You'd think, 'Why am I playing this game.'

I got tired of that immediately. Luckily I didn't have to do it all the time, but every time I had to go do that I just really didn't want to go to the field.

Anyway, because we had dealt with that Sikorsky that one time, we talked to the pilots and they said, "You guys ought to fly." And I thought, 'Why.' But I also thought it would be kind of cool to fly. And we were right across the street from the flight line – the one I have a picture of; that flight line. So I was talking to another warrant officer over there and he said if I wanted to fly he'd give me a set of Nomex. He said all I needed to do was get the okay from my CO.

**A set of what?**

A set of Nomex – a flight uniform. They're fireproof.

So I had to put tape over his name and rank. I looked like a new guy even though I'd been in country five months. So I went and flew one day. And they put me in the command ship. I didn't know this was how they broke everybody in. Anyway, I flew as a door gunner on the command ship, which meant I was on the right side in the gun well. But it was a command ship, so what it did was circled the AO – the area of operation – and called all the shots on what was going to happen. So when they were going to insert troops they'd call the slicks in. The slicks would bring the troops in. They'd do a combat assault and you got to watch the combat assault and everybody blew everything up. So they'd land and insert the troops. Then you'd fly around in a circle. You knew that the troops were down there. And you'd call in air strikes if they wanted them. The gun ships were always around. And the gun ships were cover to our own aircraft and the troops. So if they needed air power you went there and covered that. And I thought this was pretty cool that I'm up there watching the war. And I'm listening to the radio and know everything that's going on. I thought this was really cool. So I was sold on this, never thinking that I'm going to be one of the guys …

**You wouldn't be listening, you'd be doing that.**

Yes.

Anyway. But you always got the radio, and with the radio everyone heard what was going on. What was really nice was you got your own inner communication in your own aircraft, and you had the outside communication. And the guys inside would have to change a channel to talk to the outside, which we barely ever did. But if we were shot down and needed SOS we knew where to go.

So I flew that one time and said this was the greatest thing in the world and I get to shoot back. I really thought that. So I said I was going to do that.

So I put in the transfer. But what I had to do was to extend my tour. I had already been there five months and had seven months left to serve. So I got to go home. I went home for thirty days and then I came back as a door gunner. I didn't have to pull any more duties. I thought it was much better duty in that I didn't have to pull any duties.

**So you went home for thirty days and then came back to this new job.**

Right – but to the 240th assault helicopter company.

**Was this winter, summer?**

It would have been September. September is probably just getting into the hot season, I would think.

**So you came home. I bet it felt a whole lot cooler at home.**

Yes.

**You said you had thirty days. Did you relax? How were people responding to you back home?**

Nobody knew. Nobody really knew. I didn't try to explain nothing to anybody. I was a true believer in the war. Because, like I told you, when I saw them bomb women and children … We get a bad rap about that all the time – Mi Lai and that kind of thing – but the truth is most of us were very, very well disciplined. And we did not do things like that. There were several incidents of friendly fire both ways, but that wasn't necessarily on purpose.

If I could say something as far as Mi Lai goes: My whole take on Mi Lai – and I wasn't a 'ground-pounder' but I dealt with a lot of them. And I medevac'd a lot of them. And when the VC would take prisoners they were big into maiming, cutting off body parts, putting them up on display for their buddies to find – especially when they're going into a new village. So these guys were already PO'd when they got into the village. So anything that set them off were reason enough.

**Sort of like the perfect storm.**

Exactly. But they did that – the VC did that on purpose to put them in that frame of mind. And probably they knew that this village was more friendly than they [the VC] would like it to be, but not as friendly as they [the US soldiers] would like it to be. So they let those people be the guinea pigs. That's the horrible thing about war. Everybody hides their guns in churches. Everything is always not what it seems. I don't blame some guys for some of the things they did. I'm not condoning it, but I can understand it. But especially if I had found my friend decapitated and hanging like John the Baptist, I wouldn't have thought twice about killing someone. Let's face it. That's human nature.

Anyway, we're lucky we didn't run into that often.

**So you were home for a month and it was time to go back.**

Yes. So I went back, flew back again. That was the time I think we went through Alaska and Hawaii – I still cannot figure that one out. And I remember standing in Hawaii for about 45 minutes and thinking it would be really nice to stay there. But I had to go.

Anyway, I went and reported in to the company I transferred to – the 240th Assault Helicopter Company. The reason why I picked that company was that it was a very, very professional type outfit. They had been there for quite a while. And they had been in a huge action. I don't know if you've ever heard of Roy Benavidez. He won the Congressional Medal of Honor. But he had to fight to get it. He saved 8 to 12 guys lives, and our unit lost three pilots and two crew members in that action where he got the Medal of Honor. This was a year before this. But they had instilled in that company that they were there to do the job, and whatever it took to get it done, they did it. And there's even a website. It's called *The Flightline of the 240th* AHC. And there's a long beginning in it from this Bill Cowan who was a marine lieutenant at the time who became a major. Actually, he's on Fox TV. He's a consultant on Fox TV. And he'll be at our reunion this year, too.

But he wrote a long narrative about why he liked to deal with the Greyhounds and Mad Dogs.

**The Greyhounds and Mad Dogs being …**

The Greyhounds was our flight crew, our slick crew. We were Greyhounds and had two flights – white flight and blue flight. And the Mad Dogs were the gun ships. And we had four different flights of gunships.

**And where did the name 'slicks' come from?**

From just being slick getting in and out of areas. I'll tell you a good slick story if you want to hear it.

Anyway, I went back to the 240th. That's where I wanted to be. We did some tremendous things, very exciting and good work. And we always felt like we came through when they needed us. I don't like to count numbers, but we averaged a company of NVA in a month of hard-kills. So we didn't play around with them. We went after them. And it wasn't uncommon for our gunships to be right on the treetops right where we defended an area. And we would go right down into the trees and blast it out with them.

**And the North Vietnamese Army would be beneath you.**

And VC. It depended on who was where.

So we were pretty well known. And the VC were afraid of us. So we had that always in the back of our minds – they knew we were going to be the guys who were coming. Companies would vie for us to support them. There were some companies – and I don't know why it was; you'd think they'd have the same training – but they

wouldn't go under 1,000 feet when they were firing rockets. They'd stay way up in the air, and because of that – there's air turbulence and stuff – they'd miss a lot of shots. And it was not uncommon for our gunships to go into a gun roll and fire the rockets, come up and the helicopter would be covered with mud because they were that close when they fired the rockets. We were very proud of ourselves that we did what they wanted us to do.

So that's why I went to the 240th.

**How long did you do that type of work?**

Thirteen months I flew with them. I flew until December of 1970. I went home three days before Christmas.

**Was that the end of your tour?**

Yes. And I actually was going to re-enlist and go to flight school, because there was a pilot I became very close with who had done that. He had been a crew chief. His name was Bob Frasch. He was a really, really good guy. I connected with him. But he got killed. And the way he got killed made me lose faith, because what happened was he got shot down. He was a crew chief. He should have known better. But he ran out the door of the aircraft and the rotor blade cut the top of his head off. The other guys – and I talked to the pilot who was on that mission. He told me the aircraft crashed and they all went to the front of the aircraft, about 100 yards in front of the aircraft. And he was standing there with the gunner and crew chief wondering where was Frasch. He said, "I swear I didn't see him get out of the aircraft, but I thought he got out." Finally when the gun ships were circling so the VC booked, they went back over there and there he was at the side of the aircraft. Having been a crew chief and going back, I looked up to him. And when I realized, I mean he was under fire and under duress, and he died that way, I thought: You know, that's exactly what would happen to me.

So I rethought that, really hard. I really did want to go learn how to fly. I thought I was close enough now that I could go home. I was going to go home

**How long were you in Vietnam altogether?**

A year-and-a-half.

**During that time – and that was a high stress situation you were in – what did you do to relieve stress?**

We went out and chased girls. We had stress relief. I told my wife this story.

Every week I would treat myself to a steam bath. They had steam baths. And I told you about the red clay.

**A steam bath when it was already so hot there?**

Yes. But the steam baths were nice. So you'd go sit in the sauna and it would blast all that red clay out of you. Then you'd shower and the girls would give you a rubdown and you'd get a happy ending. I was nineteen and I wasn't averse to this. But my wife always tells me I was such a pig. But I was a kid and I could have died any time.

**So besides the steam baths, what else did you do for entertainment?**

We drank a lot. We had parties. When Bob Frasch got killed we had a huge party because nobody wanted to feel bad about it. Because we wanted to honor his memory. I remember I got so drunk that night I couldn't even function. I guess I made a fool of myself that night.

But the next morning I had to fly and I was hung over. And everybody on the radio was on my case. But I probably took Frasch's death harder than most guys. So I let go.

They had a band. And the band came in the base camp. And they had this little Lambretta truck. I remember I was sitting on top of this truck. And we were rocking it. And when that truck left – we broke all the springs because we had just rocked it and rocked it.

**So you left Vietnam and came home. Were you still 19 or were you 20 by this time?**

I was 20 by then. I turned 20 in September.

**What was your rank when you came home?**

I was an E5. That's an interesting story in itself. That's how I became a crew chief. Because I was an E4. I was a door gunner – I started out as a door gunner. Then, one day the CO walks up to me and said, "Hey, Marchetti. You can't fly anymore." I asked why. He said, "Because your E5 orders came through. Congratulations! You're an E5." So I said, "Well, what does that mean?" He said, "You're my newest crew chief." And that was it.

**That's how you became a crew chief.**

Yes. They gave me my own aircraft. See, gunners rotated from ship to ship. The crew chief had his own aircraft and always flew on that aircraft. That way you took care of that aircraft. And the pilots knew that, too. They had their druthers about who to fly with, too.

The aircraft I wound up getting was #813. Well, obviously nobody wanted #13, so I wound up with #13. But I made it lucky for me. I liked that aircraft. It was old but it did well. Then, after, we turned that aircraft over to the ARVN's and I got a brand new one – a '69 model UH1H. It was … [69-15682] were the numbers. I still have the tag – I've had the tag for years. My aircraft commander – Felix Bates was his name – that's who was the aircraft commander of my two aircraft. I didn't always fly with that guy,

but he was assigned to the aircraft, and you were assigned to that aircraft. And he always laughs: "You stole my pin off that aircraft." I did it. I did it.

**Did you have to earn points to get home or was it just time?**

It was time.

**When it was time to go home and you were told you were going home, were you relieved?**

Oh, yeah. Actually, the morning that I found out I was going home, Captain Toops came up to me and asked me to fly because we were short-handed. We were always short-handed. It didn't matter. If your aircraft was down for maintenance, you were flying gunner for somebody else. You never, ever had a day down. There was never enough people. And he came up to me, and I was going home in three days. He said, "I really need you. I'm a guy short." And I told him, "Dai Uy," that's Vietnamese for captain, "Dai Uy, I'm going home." He just looked at me and said okay. He didn't press me about it. But I lived with a lot of guilt for that because a month after I left he got shot down and this other guy, Bill Seaborn, got killed in that crash. But Captain Toops wound up with numerous, numerous broken bones. He was hurt big-time. And Felix, my aircraft commander – I didn't know this for years and years and years, mind you, it was 20 years ago I found out that happened. But I found out a month to the day that I went home. I always wondered if that would have changed time. You think differently.

But I was done. I was pretty well wrung out by then.

**You were an old man at 20.**

Yes. Then I went to Germany for a year.

**So you didn't go home?**

No, I did go home on leave.

**How long?**

I had a month's leave. Then I had to go to Germany.

**To finish out your …**

Yes. I had eleven months left to serve. I wound up serving nine because I got an early-out to go to school.

**What were you doing in Germany?**

In Germany they didn't know what to do with me. They did not know what to do with me. I became a problem child, actually. That year – that nine months I spent in Europe – was probably the best thing that could have happened to me, though, because I really unwound. And that time helped me put a lot of things in perspective. I really did not want to play army anymore. I was kind of my own kind of guy. I was an E5 – an NCO – so they had to treat me like I was somebody. But I wasn't anybody. I wasn't anything.

They tried to make me an assistant motor sergeant. And I couldn't get along with the motor sergeant. I couldn't get along with the guy. He was trying to be something he wasn't and I didn't want any part of that. I had already been through a war and I didn't want to do that anymore.

Anyway, in Europe I just played the bad boy.

**You sowed some wild oats.**

Yes. This is a true story. I'm not going to make anything up. I just told this to the VFW guys at the convention, and we were laughing.

We're in the field – where the Battle of the Bulge took place. They told us, "Hey, spread out. You've got to be 5 meters apart." We looked at this second lieutenant and told him to 'get screwed.' He came up yelling at us, and we thought what can he do to us. We'd already been to 'Nam. We told him to get away from us. And they got mad at us. We were supposed to respect his authority, but we didn't care.

So we had a drill and they told us we were going to be the insurgents. So me and these two other guys were going to be insurgents and I said, "This is going to be fun." Because I'm going to enjoy this.

So I'm sitting back and watching while they're setting up their perimeter. And I'm looking at all this and they're telling me this is where the perimeter is. Well, I go the other way because I wasn't going to do it their way. So I walked down the side of the trucks and stood in between these two trucks and I listened to a guy come up and challenge the other guy. You know, "What's the password?" I hear the password. I walked into the compound. The guy challenges me, I give him the password. He says okay and I go walking through. I hid by another tree, listened to the password. I go up to the next section and do the same thing. And here's the general's tent. I walked into the general's tent and go, "Bang. You're dead!" They go, "What!" I said, "I'm an insurgent. You're dead." So they took me and actually beat me up a little bit. But they were mad. What the heck.

So they threw me back in the woods. I did it two more times and I enjoyed it so much. The third time when I hit the doorway some captain put a .45 to my head and had me around the neck. I said, "Okay, you got me now."

It was so ironic: Are you kidding me? You thought I'm not going to beat you at your own game? I know how it works.

**So nine months you're in Germany.**

Yes. And it was the best nine months that I could have spent. Because I sowed my wild oats. I had a good time. I traveled Europe. I drank a bunch of wine. I partied. And when I came home I was pretty well adjusted.

**And when you came home – you said you left two months early …**

Three months.

**You left three months early.**

Yes. To go to school.

**And where were you going to go to school?**

I went to Triton.

**For …**

For diesel mechanics.

**For what you had been doing!**

Yes. Believe it or not.

**Where were you discharged?**

I think I was discharged from Fort Dix, because that was the last place I would have been.

**What do you remember about coming home that last time?**

Well, I just remembered that people were very cold to us. They blamed the soldier, not the politicians for that war. And that was a mistake. What's his name – Walter Cronkite – standing at the end of the … [Da Nang] runway saying this war was unwinnable. I mean, I saw that myself on TV. And I thought: What war is this guy watching! Because the one I was in we were kicking butt and taking names. We were not afraid of them.

I never, ever thought we would lose that war. Seriously, I didn't. Because we were fighting for a reason … . I won't deny their regime was corrupt; the Diem regime was a joke. And then, Thieu, he was an idiot. But that wasn't the point of the 'experiment' or whatever you're going to call it.

The thing was that there were poor people who were caught in the middle of that who just wanted a normal life. And the VC wouldn't let them have that.

I know a pilot who's got a business in Vietnam and in America. He travels – six months a year he'll be there and then he'll be here. And he tells me that those people are the best capitalists he ever dealt with. He doesn't go to North Vietnam. But he says none

of them call Ho Chi Minh city, Ho Chi Minh city. They all call it Saigon. South Vietnam is way more modern than North Vietnam. Maybe it's gotten better lately. I don't know.

It seems to me we really missed a huge opportunity to go some good overall. We should have finished the job. Even their general – Giap I think his name was – he wrote a letter that said they were ready to capitulate, if only Nixon kept bombing for a day or two more. Then we would have had a positive end to it and people would have felt better about it.

But who were we listening to? We were listening to a bunch of dopers who were saying, "Make love, not war."

But, seriously, that's not the way the world works. I'm not saying war is right. The veteran will be the first guy to tell you we don't want war because we've got to go fight those wars.

**So you came home. You went to school for diesel mechanics. Did you do that on the GI Bill?**

Yes. I used my GI Bill. I should have gone and got a bachelor's degree – I only got an associate's. But I got married in the meantime and then we wanted to have kids. I bought a house. We were ready.

I've had a good life. I'm not complaining about my life a bit.

**Did you make any close friendships while you were in the service that you still maintain, or maintained for a while after?**

Oh, sure. We're going to have a reunion. I'm in touch with all those guys. We've got a Facebook thing going on now. And we have a lot of laughs. There's a lot of inside jokes. That guy in the picture that's mooning me? He's my best friend. He wasn't then!

**I know you belong to the VFW.**

And the American Legion, too. I just joined the American Legion a month ago, because another guy who was in the VFW asked me to do it. So I did it.

**How do your military experiences affect the way you think about war, about the military, about government?**

I never want to see anybody go to war unprepared. We have a volunteer Army now. So we should know these are not guys who are being pressed into it. That doesn't mean we shouldn't … be there for them and support them when they come home. Because they need that more than ever, especially now.

Our military, in my opinion, is way too small. We have guys going on four and five deployments who are National Guardsmen.

But that's nothing new. My DI's in basic training were all National Guardsmen who messed up and got activated. I don't know if you know how it worked back then. If

you were in the National Guard and you didn't make your meetings or got in trouble or whatever, you got activated. That's how they got activated. They were screw-up's. Then, all of a sudden, they're training guys. They wound up going to 'Nam, and then after 'Nam they had to serve the rest of their six-year commitment. So maybe they had three years gone already and they served a year in 'Nam, they had two years to serve yet. They had to serve it active. So these guys were stuck doing that. And when I found that out, I said, "You're a National Guardsman!" I didn't realize they did that. That's when I finally realized these guys were human. That was the seventh or eighth week of basic and they lightened up a little bit.

But that's the same thing. They got activated.

And these guys today, they're citizen soldiers. They're really not prepared for it. I work with quite a few of them. For what they've been through they're in good shape. This one kid, George, that I work with, he got blown up by an IED. I can see where that would weigh on you. I just think it's wrong. I don't think they need to be pressed into service so many times.

I remember my own experience and I think that was a piece of cake compared to what they're going through.

**How did your experiences affect your life – your personal life? Was it good? Was it bad?**

I think I'm a pretty regimented guy. My wife tells me I'm too straight, she tells me. I'm very proud of what I did in the service. I don't feel any shame for anything I did. My ultimate motivation was my own survival and the survival of my buddies. I did not want to have losing a guy on my conscience. If it cost me my life, I would have given my life. I really would have. I'm not just saying that. Because they would have done it for me. And they did – some of them did. I'm grateful for that.

Anyway, I have no problem with having served my country. I think that's one of the simplest things you can do as far as that goes.

What I think I gained from that? I'm a little selfless in that I don't want to say 'no' to people when they want help. Because I have kids I volunteered for baseball and did all that stuff. The reason I did all that was because it was a payback. But the nicest thing about being a volunteer is that you run into a kid years later who will remember you and thank you. That's the best paycheck of all.

**Is there anything else you'd like to share? Anything else we haven't covered that you'd like to add before we finish this interview?**

Most of the things I covered in the VFW interview. I'm just very proud of our unit. The 240th Assault Helicopter Company was a very, very professional unit. We did a lot of things that other people didn't do.

I mentioned to you that we did operations with CIA that other units didn't do. We did … [LRRP Long Range Recon Patrols], which were long-range patrols. We'd take Special Forces to the field and we would insert them. Their jobs were not to engage, but to gather intelligence. But when they would get into trouble we'd have to go get them. And we did that several times. I just did what was asked of me.

But the one story I wanted to tell you was that we had to get a … [LRRP] patrol and it was first light. They were in trouble, so they were radioing for help. So we go to get them. And this pilot – Joe Long was his name. He's on Facebook now. He retired the last commissioned Huey. He got to be the last guy to fly it. Anyway, he was a terrific pilot; nerves of steel.

He took us to get this … [LRRP] patrol. And when we got to the area where we had to pick them up – they had these beams, and they do that themselves; they've got their own riggers and stuff, their guys. So when we get there to drop the ropes we weren't near them and had to walk to them. We had to go under the canopy of the jungle. So we flew into this canopy. You don't know what it's going to be – if it's going to be three stories; triple canopy. So we get in there and he says: I've got to turn the aircraft around because otherwise I'm not going to get out. So he says, "You guys have to clear me." So we're looking around, and it's pitch black. But we're seeing tracers shooting back and forth all over the place. The VC used green tracers. We had red tracers. So I'm seeing green and red tracers, and I'm thinking: Wow! There's a big fire fight beneath us here. I don't know whether I should be shooting, but I wasn't going to be shooting willy-nilly. I needed something to shoot at. So I wasn't firing – we were pretty well disciplined that way.

Anyway, we're under canopy and he wants to turn the aircraft around. I'm flying gunner this day, for what reason I don't know. Anyway, the crew chief said we were clear to turn. And I'm looking out the back along the fuselage and seeing something dark. I said, "Don't move! Don't move!" It was a tree – the fuselage was touching a tree. So he said, "Okay boys, tell me something to do." And he's holding the aircraft perfectly steady. So we figured out what we were going to do, and all this is going on around us. I said, "We've got to pick her up." So we guided him up and around that thing, lowered the aircraft down around it, turned and got facing the right way, dropped the ropes, those guys got on – we tugged them up until we got them up off the ground – and in the meantime they're in the middle of a firefight. They were gutsy! We got them out, we pull them up out of the jungle, we get to the hole and get out of there. We're flying with them dangling and we're trying to find a place to put them down, and he goes, "Hey you guys, you did a great job back there." And I was speechless, because he's thanking us. It was amazing. I'll tell you the truth. We were right on top of that whole fire fight. And I'll guarantee you, this will show you what the jungle is. Because I don't believe the VC even knew we were there. That's how we were able to yank them out of there.

Two of the guys were wounded, but they were Special Forces – they're a little wacky. And this kind of thing happened every time we pulled a … [LRRP] patrol out. Every time. They would say, "Let's go get a deer." So we'd go brush a deer out and pop him and bring a deer back to their base camp.

**For celebration.**

Yes. And we'd cook the deer up. It would be a couple of days later because we'd have to clean the deer. But they always wanted to get a deer or pig. They wanted to go hunting. Even with wounded, they still wanted to go get a deer.

It was amazing.

Anyway, that was the caliber of pilot we dealt with. They were terrific. I just mentioned that to him on the internet the other night. He couldn't remember the guys in back were on some mission. And I wrote, "It doesn't matter what the mission was, Mr. Long. Anybody would have flown with you." And I reminded him of that particular thing. He didn't even answer me back. I could tell I took him by surprise by saying that. He was a terrific guy. Unbelievable.

**Is there anything else you'd like to add?**

No. Thank you, though.

**Thank you for sharing your story.**