

## CHARLES WRIGHT USMC 'OPERATION BUFFALO' '66-'67

Charles: My name is Charles Wright C-H-A-R-L-E-S W-R-I-G-H-T and I started with the third marine division first battalion ninth marine bravo company

Speaker 2: When were you there?

Charles: I was there from 1966 to 1967 October, November 1967 is when I left, I went in, in June of 1966 and I service actually now south with first marine aircraft wing MAG13 marine air group 13 and that was in Chuli South Vietnam.

Speaker 2: How did you end up in that little forsaken place of the other side of the world?

Charles: Well I'm actually a native Washingtonian which I'm very proud to say and grow up in Washington DC and went to high school in Spingone in Northeast DC, and I came out of high school and went into the marine corp. Somehow I decided that I wanted to probably be like most young men have an adventure or experience the adventure that the military offers usually. I went home and told my dad that I was going into the marine corp and he said, "Son you don't want to go into the marine corp," and I said, "Yeah I want to go into the marine corp. He said no son you don't want to go into the marine corp." And so I was kind of stubborn about it and he just respected my choice. I ended up going into the marine corp. Actually I had gotten drafted and I decided after being drafted I wanted to be a marine, and so I don't know I had some fancy notion I guess in my mind that it was best to be a marine. If I was going to go travel and experience military life I wanted to do it as a marine. This was in 1966 and it was highly charged at that time.

They were I don't know I would have estimated upwards of 500000 military ground forces at that stage, and that's probably why my dad was telling me I didn't want to go into the marine corp. He figured that I was going to end up there but had never even thought about Vietnam, or couldn't even imagine going there. I was just looking for excitement in the marine corp.

Speaker 2: You signed up where did you do your basic?

Charles: We went to Parris Island South Carolina and from Parris Island we went to Camp Lejeune in North Carolina for advanced infantry training. So I had about 12

weeks, three months actually boot camp. One was basic boot camp which was 12 weeks and ... I'm sorry I think it was about 12 weeks whatever. Then from there we went to advanced infantry training in North Carolina and that must have lasted for another month four weeks or what have you. Yes we kind of knew right out of boot camp in fact they issue orders and if your orders said West Park, you pretty much knew that you were going to end up somewhere in Vietnam somewhere in the South Pacific. We knew out of boot camp that fresh out of boot camp we were going to South Vietnam, and so yes they did the four weeks that we were in North Carolina we did advanced infantry training, guerrilla warfare they didn't have any jungle there but it's the same scenario tactics and practices we practiced what you actually do in combat.

They introduced us to some North Carolina swamps and some areas that we had marked war games that we played. Well, we left I believe it was in June of 1966. Actually we went to California first we did some additional training out in California, and now in California they did have actually marked villages. They had training areas that were set up the same as they were in Vietnam they had simulated some village type scenario. We trained there and we additional guerrilla warfare training that type of thing, and from there we went Okinawa. So it took a little time to transition I guess it was about six months. I was after boot camp I had another three months involved in training so six months total training that I received from the marine corp before I actually arrived in Vietnam. I was asking myself the question what in the world did I get myself into. We landed at an airport I believe it was in Dong Ha I mean I'm sorry not Dong Ha it was further down south ...

Speaker 2: What was the name?

Charles: No it was around Dong Nain perhaps.

Speaker 2: [Inaudible 00:05:44] Bay.

Charles: I'm sorry yeah it was down around Chuli perhaps and so because that's where I was initially stationed when I got there. So we got there kind of late in the day and lights were out at night. It was just kind of awkward initially getting there but we did take some small arms fire and there were some incoming, it was not in my immediate area. That's where I was really beginning to question myself about what in the world I've I gotten myself into here. So it was just an awakening to what life was going to be like for me for the next 13 months.

Speaker 2: That there were people that were trying to kill you.

Charles: Exactly yes.

Speaker 2: How old were you at this point?

Charles: I was 19 years old so I was 19 quite a young man.

Speaker 2: Quite a transition from the streets of Washington.

Charles: Exactly yes it was growing up in Washington was an easy life if you will compared to the military life but it was good, I appreciated the fact that being in the marine corp helped me to transition into my manhood so it as kind of a rite of passage I was proud of that experience. I was very patriotic at the time wanted to just be a part of history and what was going on, but I still wasn't thinking about fighting I was still thinking about excitement, adventure going to some exotic places and that kind of thing and Vietnam was quite exotic. Yes it did actually I spent most of my time in the Chuli down around Chuli South Vietnam, I'm serving with the first marine air wing and of course life was a little better there in fact it was a lot better than actually been out with the first battalion ninth marines.

I had to transition from MAG13 marine air group 13 to the first battalion ninth marines and that was a shroud awakening, because in Chuli we did have a place a designated place where we can go and sleep and there was an area where you can go and eat and you could take a shower. Even though we had some I guess you could say reasonable amenities while we were in Chuli, even though there were those moments when we received in coming mortifier and so forth.

Speaker 2: Were they barracks you slept in?

Charles: No they were not barracks they were tropical huts I guess you could ... was what we referred to them we called it a hooch actually so your hooch and usually a hooch would house about eight to 10 marines. There was ... it was all constructed out of two by fours plywood type and some screen nettings very basic living conditions. That was better than where I ended up actually when I got transferred so.

Speaker 2: What was the ... what was your reaction to the temperature?

Charles: Well it was quite difficult at one point because the monsoon season they have what they called a monsoon, where it never stops raining or if it does it's still very misty or drizzling and you would see ponds turn into lakes and streams turn into rivers because it just rains for days and days. It made it a little difficult to travel around and move around some areas because there so much rain and so that was took a little getting used to. There again I experienced monsoon season both in the south and the north and northern part of south Vietnam, in the south we at least had when we were in our rear area we at least had somewhere to go when I was up north you had nowhere to go you dug a hole and if raining lightning thunder for any other event that took place you were there, there was nowhere else to go. You could get up out of your hole and go dry off you actually spent time in your fox hole, with sometimes the mud and water up to your chest and you're sitting in it and there's just simply nowhere to go.

Job I had actually two different jobs one of them was providing security because the area that we were in had an ammo dump of course you had all the fighting aircrafts helicopters and all of the jet planes and all of that. They had ammo dump, prison camp, POW camp for the North Vietnamese and VC that were captured and they brought them to our location. We provide security for that airbase and so we were Rifle Company and we did a lot of patrolling and so forth and provided perimeter security for the air base. That was a nice job actually it wasn't a bad job, mostly [inaudible 00:12:20] exactly yes and they were well trained guerrilla fighters and been at the air base of course we often would witness up close the air strike because a lot of activity happened and took place in and around our air base.

Of course fortunately at that time we had the privilege of just simply providing security we didn't go out to the mountains and to those other surrounding areas, they had other marine units that were operating in those areas. Again initially we just more less provided security for the air base and it was kind of a staging area if you will and I learned that because later on that they came to our unit to draw the replacement and to set us out to other fighting units. I was down there probably about seven eight months close to eight months.

Speaker 2: Then you got the news that ...

Charles: We were going to ... we were going up north they didn't really tell us where we were going, in the military its hurry up and wait pack up we'll be leaving in the morning. We knew we had been assigned out to another unit and we just didn't know where it was until we actually got there, the true awakening was walking

into Camp JJ Carroll is where we went and they had I guess the biggest military artillery. They got the 175 hoister it and that's just a massive weapon and it just it's like an earthquake when that thing is fired, and so we went there and immediately they were firing into the north and it just kind of shook everything up and of course the guys that were used to it said hey don't worry about it you'll be able to distinguish the difference between incoming and outgoing. Of course I knew what incoming was but I had never been close up on a 175 hoister and it was just awakening to see that.

Then also when we reported to our command post they had piles of equipment and that were taken from marines that had been killed and wounded in action, that they were burning so that was a kind of a shroud awakening. You're really questioning my decision to be a marine at that point but you learn to do what you're told to do you there to serve and so you do what you're asked to do. JJ Carroll

Speaker 2: JJ Carroll.

Charles: Yes we actually the area that we ... I spent my last four five months was in the area called Levenex square that's up on the far most northern part at South Vietnam and the DMZ. We had Camp Lou Con Thien, Dong Ha and some other area it may have been Camp Carroll Camp JJ Carroll. That's where we conducted most of our operations where they called referred to at that time was search and destroy and so we walked in another shroud awakening was for me was they issued us five magazines. As soon as I got back to the area where my unit was they told me that I was going to be in trouble if that's all I had was five magazines. The thing is that I would run out of ammo so we were preparing to go out and at that time they were recovering bodies from July 2<sup>nd</sup> was probably one of the worst days at that marine corp. our unit had experienced.

Speaker 2: What say that date again and add the year and tell me the name of the operation?

Charles: It was July 2<sup>nd</sup> and it was operation buffalo.

Speaker 2: July, we're still talking about ...

Charles: 1967 July 2<sup>nd</sup> 1967 and so I had joined the first battalion ninth marines actually on July 4<sup>th</sup> so it was those two days that a lot of the ... we lost frankly all the guys

in the unit in bravo at least anyway. I think out of the 150 guys they were about 26 guys left ...

Speaker 2: Tell me about what was the nature of operation buffalo?

Charles: Well it was a search and destroy mission our primary assignment was to seek out the enemy and root them out and just destroy them.

Speaker 2: Did they run into a large group of ...?

Charles: Exactly yes they had first thought there as a smaller unit and they encountered some heavy fighting and so forth, and they later found out during the course of the day and the night that it was a much larger that they were dealing with the regiment size. It was more than one unit but they were 324 regiment North Vietnamese army in the ... as we referred to them. I was still not there at that moment in time at that point in time we were the replacement for those guys that had gotten killed and wounded in action. We joined them we joined the fight on July the fourth and we were ... it was a 10 day 12 it was a two week operation it lasted from July the second to about July the 14. We came in on July 4<sup>th</sup> and we were there for the medevacs evacuating and bring the dead bodies back from the battlefield and the equipment.

Speaker 2: What goes through a 19 year old head when you're carrying all these dead back and do you think you're going to be one of them?

Charles: Absolutely it was a very, very scary moment when I went through boot camp and advanced infantry training I carried this concept and this idea in my mind that a marine, a good marine is worth can take out 10 of anybodies army or whatever. When I got to Con Thien up around that area and to operation buffalo it changed my mind, they were very experienced they were very aggressive they were well trained and well equipped. They came to fight they did not run so it was it just changed the whole idea of taking out 10 men; it was about staying alive surviving that kind of mentality. I was scared to death I mean I really can't honestly tell you how I felt because it probably would not be appropriate on your TV, but suffice to say that we were very scared to death at that point in time.

If you're not sacred I don't know something is wrong we did respect them one reason is that they came to fight, and so they actually the unit first battalion ninth marines were also known as walking dead. That was not a name that they had given to themselves that was a name that they had inherited it was decreed

by Ho Chi Minh who was the North Vietnamese leader at that time. That he was going to wipe out the first battalion ninth marine and they had a terminology that they used Doi bo Chet meaning he walking dead. That assignment was given to General Gia and the unit that own of the units from the north was 324 regiment NVA who were partly involved in the loss of so many marines on July 2<sup>nd</sup>

Speaker 2: How did the North Vietnamese come to regard this group as the walking dead?

Charles: Well I guess primary because first battalion ninth marines had on numerous occasion encountered or inflicted heavy casualties on some North Vietnamese units. They were kind of despised if you will by the North Vietnamese and they just felt that in order for themselves to be successful, they had to do what they could to destroy the ninth marines. I don't know if they were retaliating other than just simply in order to get further south they had to get past us, because the area that we operated in up around the Pine Tree province they had to get past the ninth marines I'll put it like that. Yes I do I can't say whether it was the first or not I don't remember sequentially or chronologically how things went, but you can distinguish the difference in the sound of a weapon all weapons don't sound the same.

I'm talking about a rifle gun, machine gun whatever it is it has a very distinct sound, so we were a place and we started taking incoming and I thought the squad that was up above us on a region had a ravine. They were set back a little bit further than we were and I thought maybe they were shooting at us by mistake. We were getting small arms fire and so I yelled up to the guys that were behind me I think it was valdes, I yelled up to valdes to stop shooting and he said that's not me. Needless to say that we knew we had some problems and actually what had happed is that the NVA had gotten inside of our perimeter and they got behind us. They were inside the perimeter shooting down on the reg where we were, and it was really challenging moment to say the least scary.

Speaker 2: Were you able to find those individuals who ...?

Charles: Yes they were ... they I'm not sure the exact number but yes they were taken care of I was there for the 10 day period after fro m July 4<sup>th</sup> to July 14.

Speaker 2: How rough did it get in that latter part of the operation?

Charles: Well it was difficult because we lost a lot of marines we lost not as many as the first day but everyday there were wounded or at least somebody that was killed in action. It was a really difficult time to ... period for the unit to go through.

Speaker 2: Did you get some additional magazines?

Charles: I had 30 magazines when I left to join the fight so yes I had a vest that was made for me that afternoon after arriving in camp, I had a vest made and the vest I carried magazines which on top of my flight jacket.

Speaker 2: Each magazine held 30 rounds?

Charles: No each magazine held 20 usually most combat marines would only load with 18, so as not to weaken the spring they used to have problems with the M16 and so you didn't want to weaken the spring. That spring would automatically put that around in the chamber so make it easy to chain around, some taped their magazines but that was a possibility causing it to weaken the magazine. I figured it was better to have a lot of magazines and so I carried about 30 magazines.

Speaker 2: What did 30 magazines weigh hanging on your body?

Charles: Well that was the better alternative than not having it, so you don't the weight ... you learned not to carry more than what you needed so you made sure you had plenty of ammo plenty of food and plenty of water. Everything else was additional weight wanted to bury but you made room and not only that they cross train in the marine corp. probably all branches of the service they cross train you, so that if you need to you can operate an machine gun you can operate any of the weapons. Most marines carry not only their own ammunition but they carry demolitions they carry rockets or they carry machine gun ammo, I have my 30 magazines plus whatever else my unit required me to take. That was just how it was and ...

Speaker 2: What was the environment like out there near the DMZ?

Charles: It was mostly mountain terrain was I was in Chuli I had a friend of mine Fred Brooks who served with the third battalion the seventh marines, and he came to see me he had gotten wounded and got medievac out and so he was recuperating. We happened to meet each other in Chuli we ran across each other in Chuli, and so we were standing out in the field one day and he pointed to the horizon and I told him I couldn't wait until I got out there until I joined

they were to join the fight. He said men you don't want to come out there because you're going to have to hump all of those mountains and he just pointed to the horizon and from one end of the horizon to the next there nothing but mountains.

When I was transferred up north that's exactly what we did so it was mountain area a lot of ... guess you ... I've heard it say Georgia Clay but I don't if they compare to Vietnam it was hard and red clay dirt.

Speaker 2: It was not ... the jungles were not on the side of those ...?

Charles: Yes the area was heavily densely vegetated areas throughout that whole region; of course they had sprayed Agent Orange and so forth to assist in reducing the forage. That was part of their tactic to expose the enemy but they were well camouflaged and I mean they could camouflage you could walk right up into their camp and not see them until you're actually standing inside. They were well camouflaged thick vegetation easy to hide and camouflaged one so ...

Speaker 2: How much territory did operation buffalo was it a series villages that you were going through and search and destroy or was it ...?

Charles: No they were very few villages occasionally you would encounter a village in the area where we were, mostly it was just mountains and jungles d you were looking for ... you can tell when the enemy was there because they built bunkers and underground places. They also as we were well trained after boot camp and all with the model villages in California they had what he called pongee stakes and bubby traps. They had what they called zones of fire so when you get into that zone they would open up on you and you would run and jump or duck or try to take cover in an area where they had bubby traps. It was just difficult to ... scary to say the least but they also teach you to suck it up but that and overcome. Learn your enemy, learn his techniques learn his way of fighting and you just seek them out. But they did not run they avoided us on occasions but they did not run they came to fight, they had a decree and that decree was to wipe out the ninth marine.

Well I think it was a combination of all of those things actually there was a political side to it, but I think that those guys that came to fight the North Vietnamese were people that felt that they were defending their country. They probably did view us as the invaders and since they had some success with the French in expelling them, they perhaps thought that they could do the same with

us. They came to fight often times I thought that we were fighting to protect ourselves from communist, and you did have that attitude you did have that feeling. I did view them as the enemy they were not only my enemy but they were enemy of our country, and so you carried that mind set I don't know you can survive if you don't.

You see them as the enemy and I'm sure they just viewed us the same way in my particular case let's just say by the grace of God that I was fortunate, however there were others who just in the moment of a fire fight or in a time of action or whatever. Naturally you're going to seek cover and they would strategically place their bubby traps, and so they knew once we got into a zone of fire how we would likely respond. They studied us as well as studying them they knew our weapons and even dressed in a marine corp. outfits, they had the same equipment where they got it I don't know. We were up around Con Thien and I don't remember who the person was but they called the marines to come over and asked what they were doing over there and told them to get over here. They turned around and start firing and they were fitted in this dress marine corp. they had out helmets on uniforms where they were getting them I don't know.

They were very crafty and that's why we ... there were some measure of respect but they feared us as well, and probably more so. There many close calls it was just a kind of regular occurrence particularly when we were inside the perimeter of Con Thien we took incoming every day. You may have not had small arms fire everyday you had rockets 140 pound rockets and more that were been fired in to our base camp. That was and everyday for morning for breakfast lunch and dinner the marine corp. put to work everything that they had the tanks the artillery all of them just fired back into North Vietnam or the surrounding areas. It was just a daily ritual there were times when we received hundreds of rounds in a given day. Not at one time but just throughout the day and throughout the night, so you just kind of adapt to it you know what's going to happen and we had a certain lace a point that we would go to in event of incoming fire or small arms fire.

Take up our fighting positions so I remember one day we had a marine we called him Latch he was the big string guy, he and I were sharing a banker together and so whenever we took incoming he and I would make our way back to our banker. Latch would always come down on top of me and so there was one time one day during the course of the month of October the last my last time 30 days there. When he got to the banker before I did and then there was another time when for whatever reason neither one of us decided to go to our banker because it

was a little bit too far away from where we were positioned. It was fortunate for us that we didn't because as soon as we got there our banker had taken a direct hit. We celebrated the fact that we were not we didn't go there he went to somebody else's fighting hole and I went to somebody else's fighting hole, so I mean that might not seem comical but to us it was something to celebrate to laugh about to talk about to make a joke about damn luck.

I would say a lot of the training had a lot to do with it because they did prepare us not saying that I don't know if it's really possible to prepare somebody totally, but we were well trained we had various tactics and things that we were expected to do at any given situation. By the grace of God I'm here today probably my main motivation was to speak on behalf of those who have long past and there's nobody to represent them or to speak of their existence and their bravery and their sacrifice. They were people who loved their country and who sacrificed and made the ultimate sacrifice, I guess at this point in time in history or in point in time many of them probably not even thought about. No one knows anything about these guys but they were terrific bunch of guys.

Speaker 2: How many names do you know on the wall?

Charles: I know quite a few names on the wall one of the things that has been really troubling for me is, to have one close friend of mine Jimmy Lee who for whatever reason he was from Georgia his name is not on the wall and I have not been able to locate. He was killed fourth Hill 470 and a long with some other guys but he was a close friend, and so I'm kind of on a quest to find somebody from our unit or somebody that might remember him so that we can get his name on the wall. I've searched the name all of the names on the wall and his name is not there, no James no Jimmy Lee from Georgia are there.

Speaker 2: Could he be on the MIA list?

Charles: No he's not in MIA he's still in action I was there and the reason I know that's what happened to him, is because when we were there we were part of the same squad and it just so happened that they the area of that date set up in they did not dig in deep enough. They suffered as a result of it and I moved to another area and was able to dig s fighting hole ...

Speaker 2: How deep is big enough deep enough?

Charles: Probably enough so that you can emerge a whole body in it.

Speaker 2: Six feet?

Charles: No, not standing sitting you curved out a space and you curved out a sitting position, and underneath that you curved out a position where if you got a grenade in your fighting hole that it would fall down and reflect away from you. You had certain techniques that you used in digging a hole and you had to be able to get down and emerge a whole body in the hole if you're been shot at, so that your body would be totally under the ground.

Speaker 2: Its monsoon season what do you do in that hole?

Charles: Same thing you would do if the sun was shining, you get in it and you just stay in it and you just find a way to keep your weapon clean and your ammo ready, but everything else ...

Speaker 2: Was the jungle a lot of issue?

Charles: Yes it was jungle raw, malaria were some common ailment that ... and what they call jungle crouch, one reason is because you didn't take a bath there was no place to wash. You followed the training that they gave you and you used your helmet whenever you could, or if you were fortunate enough to cross the river or stream then you could take care of your personal hygiene then get rid of the leeches after that's done. Because most places that you were ... in the areas that you entered into they were had leeches a lot of leeches, so we had kind of like take turns burning the leeches off each other. Yes I did and everyday you're praying and hoping that you make it out in the meantime you had to do what was asked of you just go do your job. That's the mindset that ...

Speaker 2: How do you get enough sleep in a situation like that?

Charles: Well sleeping is always has been a problem even to this day as a result of that you somewhat become hardwired I guess if you will, you sleep a couple of hours and you watch a couple of hours. There's never a time when you just laid down and go to sleep there is no such thing or such place you're always in a hole somewhere, so you just learn to do it you learn the sleep standing against the tree with your back against the tree. Your back against your buddy sometimes standing up just you kind of close one eye and try to keep the other one open, that's just how it is and so you ... but you're young and at that time in a person's life your body has the ability to endure more punishment. It's just I don't know I don't know how to explain that one it was tough.

Speaker 2: Was the exciting, exotic place that you were looking for when you were eager to experience do the things?

Charles: No it was not at all, it was not even exotic to me it was exotic but it wasn't the kind of excitement that I was looking for, no I was looking an island with coconuts and palm trees and ... it wasn't like that.

Speaker 2: How long were you in the north?

Charles: We were in the north I guess about five months all together I was at north for about five months, and I was glad to leave.

Speaker 2: Did you have a short time calendar?

Charles: Yes I did in fact I spent my last actually the rule was in combat with most combat units were ... was to relieve you from duty when you reached your last days in the field. I was down to my last eight and they were sending my unit out on a night ambush, and so I went to my platoon commander and he was new here recently joined the unit himself. I explained to him that I had been in country 386 days and nights and that it was time for me to go back the rear, and so he said well let me check on that and I'll get back to you and let you know what's happening. He did he saw me later that day we were still at Con Thien as a matter of fact, and he saw me that day later on and he just called me he said hey Wright you better get in your fight hole and stay all night and so I knew what that meant.

I knew that I would be going home in the morning or that I would be leaving Con Thien and I would be headed back state side, and so the next morning I did I was at the crack of dawn bright and early I was ready to go. I was ready to leave and I remembered the look on a lot of the guys' faces they were happy for me but they were very sad that it was not them. When I looked at them I was also happy for myself and I was glad that it was me that was going to be going home, although I wished that the fight things had ended for them as well. Of course that didn't come until 1975 but at that point in time November 1967 is when I came off of Con Thien and I was a happy marine. I came home alive with no visible scars but there were a lot of issues of course at that time you had a lot of marines who were suffering from PTSD that had not been recognized at that ... it didn't come until a later time.

I think around 1980s that they started recognizing this as a problem and I think I'm not sure I can't account exactly, I do have actually a command chronology report with me today. There was one month where the total amount of artillery and mortars that were fired in excess of 1400 so that kind of gives you some idea of the activity that was taking place in around that area. It was used up on the South China sea so you would often times see the all branches the military actually you see the air force the navy the marine corp. flying into North Vietnam and you saw them coming out. Often times you will see the missiles that were fired then as well and many of them as they were trying to make it back to their home base, would drop down over off the South China sea to try to lose the heat seeking missiles. On some occasions they were successful and there were occasions when they were not, so you would just see it particularly at night you would see the devastation from there.

Yeah we saw quite a few that went down we know the South China sea, so it was ... they ... we used air force I mean air support extensively and there was even occasions in October where what they call friendly fire, where they dropped ordines inside our perimeter and at the Con Thien. The enemy was very crafty and every clever in that they would try to dig in as close as they could to our position thinking that they could avoid the air strikes, and so they were in close it was up close and personal. Pardon me?

Speaker 2: How close?

Charles: Honestly speaking I can't give you a distance but I would say probably the length of a football field, if not closer it's somewhere in that proximity they would try to ... they were up close and personal yes.

Speaker 2: How wide was it at DMZ?

Charles: I'm not exactly sure how ...

Speaker 2: Was it three miles wide or ...?

Charles: It may have been I think that's the report that I ... number that I've heard it was three miles wide yes.

Speaker 2: When you got out of there I guess you went down to ... where did you catch the flight home out of [inaudible 00:50:21] or Dong Nain?

Charles: I didn't actually I think it was Dong Ha I left somewhere down around Dong Ha is where I left Pine Tree province and I don't remember ... I have in fact to tell you the truth I have my flight ... I have my report I have that information with me but I don't remember I have to go back and read it.

Speaker 2: When you got back into the States do you remember where you landed?

Charles: Yes, we had a stopover in Hawaii and we landed in California in LA okay, and the concern that we had coming back was that our flight lasted unusually long. We were in flight for about 13 hours and the problem was it was it should have been like around nine hour flight or 10 hour flight. The problem was that it was so foggy that we were unable to land so we flew up to San Francisco we flew down south we were back and forth until we were finally able to land. That was kind of a challenging moment as well I'm thinking in my mind that well you made it back, but now there's no place for you to land. They did actual volunteers to go to the airport they were ... I think President Nixon was in office at the time, and they wanted people to meet some of the returning marines and other various branches of services I would imagine to go to the airport.

Well my strategy was I managed to get through the airport without any issues or problems, and my strategy was not to wear a uniform or to have anything that would ... the only mark of identification was my duffle bag. If you see a guy with the duffle bag US stamped on it that they're obviously military, so I did have a duffle bag as I recall that was the only thing that I had coming back. I did not wear my uniform it was not a proud moment, not because I wasn't proud of who I was and the service that we had given. It was the political environment that existed and they warned us that you could be confronted at the airport people were throwing eggs, tomatoes blood whatever and they referred to us as baby killers and that kind of thing. Fortunately I did not experience that but I was prepared psychologically they did tell us that or at least the word was, I don't remember anybody telling me that. The word was in the corp. in our units that there were problems at home and how to avoid them going back, I surprised everybody I didn't tell anybody that I was coming or exactly when I was going to arrive.

I was just very glad to come home so I did wear my uniform home now from ... my ... from Camp Lejeune or wherever I came in at I think it was Camp Lejeune I did wear my uniform home. I was dressed at that point in time and I just called a cab home from the airport and just pulled up in front of the door and got out and went inside. Just surprised everybody that and everybody was happy the

family very glad that I made it home, remember when I departed to go out to California my whole family met with me and went with me down to the training station. They were all crying and [inaudible 00:54:54] and I'm like hey guys I'm just like I'm on this adventure why is everybody ... I mean this is an exciting time I still had not thought about Vietnam. They were even more happier when I returned home so they were glad to see me.

Speaker 2: Did your mother do anything interesting as far as keeping tabs on you?

Charles: Yes in fact I was very impressed with my mum she was a person that ... who enjoyed reading and what not in history and politics, so she was always up on things. When I got back she had a map that she had taped up on the wall or fixed up on the wall however it was over her bed and she called me to show me that, all of the places that where I was running from where I was calling she had pin pointed me on the map. That made me feel quite proud that she had kept up with my whereabouts, well I have a greater appreciation because I understand better what actually took place at that time in my life. I had no clue other than we were sent to a place to fight and then to perform our duty, it wasn't the excitement d adventure that I was looking for actually. There was a level of patriotism that you're serving your country and you're fighting for freedom and all those kinds of things.

We were very patriotic and I'm thinking and that has to change, but I understand the history and the politics behind it now much greater than I did at the time that I was there. I was there and I had no clue why we were there.

Speaker 2: Did it dismay you when the country indeed was taken over by the North Japanese communist?

Charles: It was very painful it was extremely painful and a great sense of loss to see them pushing those helicopters over the side and so you thought about those who had sacrificed who had given it all and that war was very winnable. They had ground rules that were not seamlessly sensible to us, those that were in the field like at times we were told that you could not fire unless first been fired upon. There were times when they said if we fired we better had a dead body; you couldn't just indiscriminately just go around shooting up a place. There had to be a legitimate reason for firing and fighting or whatever, so ...

Speaker 2: Would you do it again?

Charles: Absolutely not I'm going to be honest with you no I would not want experience that hell again no, and I know that some who did and who went back for a second and third tours or at least the second tour. I have one guy we had tank units assigned we were a full accomplished made of armaments full array of armaments, so we had a tank unit and ever tank that was assigned to or unit had a hole in it. I remember I don't remember the guy's name now but I remember one guy who was spinning his head doing a third tour, and when we were at Con Thien it was his third tour duty. I asked him what was his motivation and he said he was saving money so I guess with all of the combat and everything that he was getting and not having anywhere to spend it that was his motivation. It could have been something else but that's at least what he told me, and also had a sergeant who was assigned to out unit and he himself only had five months left in the marine corp.

I didn't want to take a chance on going back so I did my time I volunteered for the draft and I went home by the grace of God I'm here today.

Speaker 2: Charles we want to thank you for sharing your story and we want to thank you for what you did as well.

Charles: Thank you.

Speaker 2: Thanks for coming up here participating in this and we'll see if we can make a program that's fitting for the honor of you men and women that went over there, and to educate some of our younger folks about what happened there almost 50 years ago.

Charles: Yes it would be nice for people to know what happened and what the sacrifice that were made, and not the sound corny but many of the people that I recall that I met more truly what I call patriotic. In that they were willing to make the sacrifice for this country and they did, so I would like to see our new upcoming generations carry that mindset and commitment to this country as did the previous generations I guess every generation is different. They were very patriotic men I didn't see too many women but mostly at that time we were men, but again I thank you for inviting me for having me to come and hopefully I was able to share something that you find useful.

Speaker 2: Great Charles, thank you very much.

Charles: Okay alright.