

TOM SHANER – ARMY JOURNALIST -- '70 –'71

Speaker 1: Wow. Well, the [inaudible 00:00:02] and graduated from the University of Maryland in 1969 and that summer, Nixon had put a hold on the draft as they converted to the birthday system. In September, that system was initiated. I went to my old fraternity, watched it, finally won the lottery. It's a way to say it so right away in 1970, I was drafted, went to Fort Dix in my basic. I kind of enjoyed it truthfully. It was fun and games and playing soldier and learning how to shoot a rifle so that was all fun and actually did pretty well there and they wanted me to go to OCS.

I remember '79, we're kind of anti-Vietnam as a country. I'm still pro-American so I'm going to do my duty but I wasn't going to add another six months onto my two-year draft so I wouldn't do that but the army did, I think, something unusual. They put me to the defense information school which is a journalist type of activity, did well there, got assigned to Fort Jackson, South Carolina, thought I was going to spend the next 18 months living in South Carolina with my then wife and working on producing the base paper.

I got very involved with the base and was coaching youth football. My ... I'll get backwards. My staff colonel came to me one day and said, "You'll go to a place with your wife. Would you come and chaperone the team club?" "Sure, I know a lot of these kids," so I went and did it and I don't know what snapped in me but I kept seeing all the NCOs and officers dropping off their kids and I went back and wrote a letter to the editor that basically said you can tell me what to do but you can't tell my wife what to do. I was the editor. I published it.

Nobody told me that my command colonel was the staff colonel for the team club. The next day, I was levied to Vietnam so anybody, be careful what you write. Fortunately, my staff colonel wrote ahead and I got assigned to the United States Army information office in Vietnam which is the overall information office to my skills. As I said, my journalism, PR background was the right place to be.

I was at Long Bin which was called the Hill. It was the air conditioned offices but something wrong with that for me. It just didn't resonate to what Vietnam should be. I was embarrassed honestly to know that fellow Americans were dying and I had the ability to stay in an air conditioned office so I put in to become the information infantry correspondent which meant that I could, anytime I wanted, go to any infantry unit that I wanted and I'd hump with them for a week, two weeks.

In the process, write story about the unit, at the same time, talk to the individuals like what's your name, where are you from, what's your mother's name, where did you go to high school having a basically what I call a donut news release. The first paragraph was name, rank, serial number basically and where you're from and then would tell a little story about the unit. Take a picture, send it on via paper. The guys loved it. I would go back to units and somebody would pull out of their wallet a story from their hometown paper. "I remember you. You did this for me."

There was some reward for me in that. At the same time, I was taking myself out of an air conditioned office and putting myself in the bush and we were in firefights and generally, if it got way too hot for me, I have the ability to get out. Now, still had to go to plane or helicopter to come down and pick us up and take us out but I got to see it all. I got to appreciate what the guys were like who had 365 days in the bush and how miserable that was.

Particularly in 1970, '71 when they didn't know why they were out there dying anymore. We're trying to get out of here. I don't want to be the last guy dead so there were some different feelings of wanting to win a war, frustrations when you could see the enemy right across the river and you couldn't shoot until you had permission. It just didn't make sense but because of that and again, my ability to go anywhere I wanted, PDY temporary duty was what it was called, I had a very unique experience in Vietnam.

I traveled from the Delta to the DMC. I traveled from Laos to the China Sea. I sunbathe on the China Sea. I had sweet breads and smoked cigars on the veranda of the Palace Hotel in the town called Dalat which was sort of an in country R&R. At the same time, come back the next week and gear up with my bandoliers and ML1, get a couple of grenades, get my M16 out, get on the helicopter inserted into an infantry unit and go hump with them. I wanted to go to some places that have been significant. The A Shau Valley was 101st. I wanted to be with them. I wanted to see what those guys were really like because I wanted to be with 173rd. They were known as killers. I wanted to see this.

Some days I go why do I want to see that but it was ... as I said, I had a special year. It changed me. It's still an American but it's hard for me to be the Fourth of July American that I was as a child. I saw just too much abuse. I saw Americans die for I'll never know why, just never know why so that's kind of how I got there some unique stories while I was there.

Speaker 2: Tell me about when you're with 101st. I mean

...

Speaker 1: I'm not going to remember the specific details but I know we got in there and I'll share with you some of the photographs I took and there's one group. I call them the Dirty Dust and they really looked like they're killers. I mean they do and if you'd been in the bush for 300 days plus, humping a weapon and you're a killer. In terms of the enemy, you are anyhow. I respected those guys. I respected them highly. They didn't know much more than how to use their weapon.

If you had to go back, the diversity of who they were not only from color, race, religion, anything but from where they came, their educational levels, people think that the grunt, the infantrymen was somebody that couldn't make it anywhere else. Well, that wasn't necessarily true. There were college graduates that were infantrymen. It's what they wanted to be. Well, that's what the army decided they wanted them to be but we would land.

I'd come in the helicopter. First thing that would happen so often was there was a suspicious nature from the guys that I was coming down with. Who is this guy? Is he a CID on mark? They're going to test you. They're want to find out why are you really here and once you earned their respect and often, that would require maybe a firefight and the fact that you would fire weapons and do what you were supposed to do which was a point when I wasn't a journalist. I was an army sergeant so if a firefight was to happen, my first responsibility was my weapon, not my camera but after the battle or during while we were walking, I could use the camera so I had to hump the weapon.

Earning that respect would often lead to a better story because I got to feel what the men felt. Since the environment that they were in know that the dangers that they were in and hopefully be able to bring that back and transfer it to paper. It's how I do this. I never saw a man killed but I went back when somebody wasn't there. It was hard. It was hard. I'd go back and I'd say, "Hey, where's Ken? I remember Ken," and they just got this look and you just, "Oh, God."

Actually in my unit where I was used for the office, there was a ... the guy who was before me who as in country not distant, was killed. He was killed so I didn't see that but we got that back at the office. That was a shock to all of us. I think there were three of the information type people that were killed and there was a guy from Maryland who was a graduate I think a year before me at the University of Maryland, Paul Savinon who was working for Stars and Stripes. I might be wrong when I say but I think he was the only Stars and Stripes person killed in Vietnam so that felt.

Then when we did the Maryland memorial here, I was one of the fortunate ones that got to read names. It was stopped in the middle when I went to read the name and it was a high school friend. I didn't know that he had been killed and it was [Ronnie Hugospie 00:10:32]. I don't know too many people that went to Vietnam that don't feel something on occasion. We all know some of the guys who are still having a lot more difficulty than the others. Some I understand, some I still don't. I'm not sure about where that difficulty started, problems with society but a lot of it ... when you're put in the bush for 365 days, you're asked to kill people, you do what you're asked to do. You come home and the society shuns you. That's difficult. It was and I mean today, the programs like this and others we are seeing in Vietnam veterans better appreciate it. It took a long time.

Our argument when we want to build the Maryland Memorial had always separate the warrior from the war please, two different things. The warrior did what he was asked to do by his country. The fact that the country went into a war that you may want to question, okay but don't think that on the warrior. Yeah if you hadn't been there, you couldn't have the war but what is he going to do? Put himself to jail for your cause? It was a different year for me, had some good times, had some bad times.

Speaker 2: Did you have any personal ... you mean from the general part, it was when they found out who [they're serving 00:12:04]?

Speaker 1: Yes and no. I mean mostly it was sad I guess to have wanted to be a hero as a kid and to come home after having done this two years of army, one year in a war zone and basically nobody cared. I think that was more ... just no one cared. Hey, when I got home to ... because I hadn't told my then wife that I was coming home and I went to see her at her high school where she was a teacher when that young guy ... and her first feeling for me was, "Can you kind of get out of that uniform?" because the kids didn't want to see a soldier there and that was troubling.

Did I ever get spit on? No. Nobody ever did that but mostly it was just, okay. You pack. Move on and it's really how it was. You're in the jungle, on a plane. You're back. Move on. Forget all of that. That was troubling but I was able to do that fairly fast. I wasn't in that type of a hostile environment that I really did come out of the jungle. I came out of Vietnam. I spent time in the jungle but they didn't just pull me out of a war with a gun firing and say, "Okay, you're back in home." That didn't happen.

Speaker 2: Now, you were married at the time you're drafted.

Speaker 1: Yes, I guess.

Speaker 2: How was that ...

Speaker 1: We were all kids at that point in our lives and what are you going to do about it? Certainly, she wasn't thrilled. She did well. She went on with her life and taught. We kind of went different ways and as we grew, tried to bring it back together and actually stayed married for a long time, two beautiful children but in truth, we had never really been able to come back, never thought about it but I think now you will look back and go, yeah, you know what? That probably ... it definitely changed who I was. I'm sure it changed who she was. We're kids out of the '60s. We were going to make it work and we tried and we survived it a pretty long time.

Speaker 2: How old did you say you were when you were drafted?

Speaker 1: Just turned 21 so I'm a little older than a lot of the draftees who are 18, 19. I finished college. I had two Fs or an F2 but the minute that degree got put in my hand, that F2 changed to a 1A or an A1. I can't [get 00:14:52] back what it's called at the time but that fast. As I said, three months later, they said, "Yeah, we think you'd be a nice representative of the army."

Speaker 2: You left those ...

Speaker 1: First one was not quite a [inaudible 00:15:09]. It was with a group, an F troop. They would be in the rear and when there was something hot, they would load up, get out, find it, take care of it and probably come back in in the day. That was my first one then there was a firefight. I was with the 25th infantry. I remember that and I sat around for two days in the Dust Bowl waiting for something to happen, total boredom. It's all there was. The guys were bored and suddenly you're like, "Load them up. We're going out." You grab your Rocky, grab your weapons and you're on a chopper and you're heading out.

I remember the thrill for me was that they told me to sit with my feet hanging out the door of the chopper and that was ... I'm too naïve and stupid to know what's happening here so I'm flying along the jungles below me and as you come down, it's like, "Out," so we're out to hit, to do the things you've been talking in the infantry training and then the birds are gone and all of a sudden, it's quiet and that's an interesting concept too because really it's ... now, you're down and

as you're coming down, the gunners would also blast out the area so you got all this fire power going on. You're down. You get out quick. Chopper gets back up because it's an obvious target and when it's gone, it's just quiet and you're not sure.

The first time I was there, I wasn't sure what does this mean. Well, the enemy wasn't right there. Captain knows what's going on. Captain gets everybody lined up but off we go in the line walking into the jungle looking for the enemy and I'd say about two hours later, they found them and out of nowhere, I started hearing this pop-pop-pop-pop and which I'm down real quick and tried to find out what's going on and we start circling up and I had my weapon up and firing. I'm kind of like just firing. It's my first time but that was ... and the first time I went in with a total insertion to stay in for a week, it wasn't a hot LZ that we came in so I got in, met the guys. Again, I have to get the respect of them before I'm going to get anywhere.

They want to know, "Can I cover their body?" That's what they're looking for. Do I know what I'm doing? Am I going to be a problem to them because they don't need it and then if you walked for a day, you'd sleep at night just sleeping on the ground or however it's being done. I learned a lot about how the guys would heat their food, where they get the water. I hated malaria pills. I wouldn't drink the water out of the screens either. I didn't take my soft tablets the way I should have but again, I knew that I can get out if I need to.

It's a little different world for me but when I was just with the guys and there wasn't a battle of any kind, it was guys just being out on a camping excursion with a weapon but you're very close. You bond obviously. You bond. Your life is in the hands of these other people and they all have to count on each other so it was ... I think I found that very rewarding to be able to get that close to men who your life could be over tomorrow.

There were definitely ... I pulled night watch and there were times that I'd hit problems. You start going on the gun, this is my last day on Earth because you hear things and we maybe had a battle the day before or you'd gone into a village and the village was known to be a little bit on the VC side and you always knew when you went into a village, if it was bringing toward the enemy, when you came out, the enemy knew where you were so you'd go in there at night and then you knew at night, you'd often basically set up your camp but as soon as it got dark, you'd pick it up and move it so the enemy didn't necessarily know where you were. While we're moving, I learned that.

I think one of the most exciting moments of my life was when I went out with the 11th to the 15th which was an armored cav unit. There weren't a lot of tanks in Vietnam because of the soil and stuff was too ... then the armored cav and we go out and I'd never assumed they circle out at night like the covered wagons circle up and right at dusk basically, they have this thing called the Mad Minute. Everybody gets in the circle, all the weapons fire. You just think if anybody's out there you just cleared them out but I mean everything's firing for a minute and that's ... I mean it's exciting and then again, it's like, "Shhh, quiet." Then you're sleeping but that was an interesting moment in my life.

Speaker 2: How did you find the parallels of the jungle, how did you find that?

Speaker 1: Slogging through this ... it would depend on what area Vietnam you're in, is to exactly what type of elements you were facing. When the monsoons came, it was wet. No question about it and you're going to get wet and your feet are going to get wet and you'd have your ponchos on but your feet are going to get wet. Again, I'm only doing it for a week maybe so it's not the same. I'm not getting foot rot and other things bad. The heat, the humidity was hell. No question about that. I was down about 106. I wish I could pack 160 pounds but you just start off.

First you had, 70 pounds or so, on your back. You thought you were being smart. You put your poncho between you and your rucksack. Well, that just heated you so you're always wet, always dirty and you just tripped along. I mean that's the only way. You just knew you had to put one foot in front of the other. You had no choice so you just did it and I never ... I mean I'd always look and see the guy carrying the M16 which was a machine gun. He's got a whole lot more pounds than he's got to carry than I have to carry. He's got more ammo that he has to carry so I never felt inconvenienced. I just, as I said, one foot in front of the other and that's I think what most of them would do.

The worst probably is when I would get cold. As you got further to the North toward the DMC, it's cold. You don't remember which months were what but it was colder out there, a lot colder.

Speaker 2: Even though most of your writing was profiles of the individual ... send out in Stars and Stripes or [crosstalk 00:22:30]?

Speaker 1: Yeah. You had the story. I don't recall if I gave any of those to you or not but yeah, as I said, not just to the hometowners. First, I'd also have to do stories for the Army Reporter which was the magazine and God, I can't remember the

newspaper that we had on post but I'd have to do that. It might be the same story. It might be slight modification. If it was going, I'd send a lot of them out to Stars and Stripes and they would use it.

I do recall the first one I did with F troop. I had taken some pictures of the choppers coming down to pick us up but it was a little hot and they were coming to get us so I had taken a couple pictures and one of them was of a chopper coming down so it's a real good action shot and my colonel brought me in and just complimented me on the picture and I think that's what ... he even let me have my way if you will which most people can't say that about being in Vietnam. I got my way. I got to go my way meaning if I want to go somewhere I want and I could do it. I didn't have to go get approval. I just had to tell them I'm going to 101st. I'm going to the 1st. I'm going to the 173rd. I'm going to the 1115th and they'd say, "Good. What's your focus?" I'd say, "I just want to do a story on the armored cav. I want to do a story on what the 101st seen in the A Shau that day."

The first cavs I've just ... first cav was same thing of course that I've actually been a part of so I wanted to just touch the scoop and see who the men were and whether they fought differently in different zones and A Shau was up in the I guess that was two corps then I want to go down into the Delta and the Delta flew a little Piper Cub. I didn't fly it. I flew in the second seat of the Piper Cub. They were Scout planes. I learned how the Scout planes worked.

Talking about flying, an interesting one is they had two types of choppers or three. There more of that in Vietnam but the two were ... one's a Loach, the Light Observation Helicopter, a little bubble and another was a Cobra. It was a gunship and they call them Hundred Killers. The Loach would go along the jungle top kind of panning somewhere on the white tops so that the Cobra up here could see it. I need to say, "Okay, see where I am? I got a unit down there spot an enemy," and then this guy would come down and the rockets go [to get them 00:25:03]. I got to be in that Cobra one day in front seat, pilot seats and the back seat on the Cobra but the gunner is in the front seat. I was just doing it to learn but they got called in to a firefight.

As we're coming in, the pilot's telling me about how to operate this mini-gun. It's not simple point and aim. I mean this thing is on a ball and he says, "Go ahead. You think you got an aim, fire." So I fire and then all I see is creatures going this way but I don't have it down yet. As we're coming in, he starts to tell me, "Make sure you don't hit the banana tree. That's our guys." Now, I'm petrified because I don't know exactly what I'm doing but pulled the trigger a couple of times.

That's a unique one so I got some opportunities to learn Aerometals and Aerometals would come by a number of insertions that you would get. I think the grunts needed 25 insertions but I was actually in a battle in a Cobra which is not too many army sergeants are going to say that.

Speaker 2: You wrote about that.

Speaker 1: Yes. There was an army ship that was in Vietnam, an army ship yet it was a helicopter repair ship and another specialty story I wanted to go do and I wrote about that. A lot of the pictures that I took showed helicopters in this boat and that's what, ship kind of boat and then I had stories on ... I'm sure many people knew there were a lot of drug issues in Vietnam. Marijuana was like everywhere but they went to pretty hard stuff in Vietnam, a lot of heroin issues so I wrote stories about the detox centers and how guys got there, wrote stories about girls of Vietnam and what that all meant, how guys got there.

Speaker 2: Can you say you actually ... did you go to a whore house and you basically interviewed like the ladies as well as the guys?

Speaker 1: [Crosstalk 00:27:09] I'll go see them. That's all I could say. You got to talk to them. It was interesting but the whore houses if you will were better than these independent women. There was some sense of security here and health, not even knowing that venereal diseases of today but back then, you get a little much better chance of not having a venereal disease in a known house of prostitution if you will but yeah, I had the duty of trying to keep one of my friends out of that and that was a hard duty. That was the hardest thing I did.

Speaker 2: I presume they had madams or was that the mama-san?

Speaker 1: Some would be, you have to do your negotiation with a mama-san. I remember when we go to the place called Dabans. When I did my story on with Dabans hotel and went in and met mama-san. Mama-san, she told me, she said, "You sit there. I'll buy you a Ba Muoi Ba." Ba Muoi Ba was a 33. It's one of these Ba Muoi Ba, it's the beer that they have and a [inaudible 00:28:18] what bottle he put it in. I'll tell you that but it wasn't the best beer but they give you Ba Muoi Ba and I've watched the guys come and go, watch the girls how they do their thing and then the guy will go pay the mama-san and then back upstairs.

Speaker 2: Did that story caused any sensation on base?

Speaker 1: No.

Speaker 2: That they're ... what did you do? Did you take a picture, too?

Speaker 1: No.

Speaker 2: No? I mean no pictures, I guess none.

Speaker 1: No, no, no. The girls ...

Speaker 2: These were all obviously off base, in the towns near ...

Speaker 1: Yeah. It was an illegal activity and all around was illegal so if you had been found in the house of prostitution by the MPs who are candid to turn their back on you but if they had wanted to, they could bust you. We're not saying this is something the army said go do and relieve yourself, not at all. You had to know the right places to go. If you went to wrong places, you could get a lot of trouble.

Speaker 2: You mentioned the drug usage was ...

Speaker 1: The detox was there. I mean it was ... they tried to detox the guys before they'd come home and the classic 30-day monkey on your back, that was it. Maybe you do 30 days on this thing and then they'll put you back out so I don't know if that's serious. I think it was just hoping, "Look, if we get you off of this, you'll stay off of it." Now we know that it doesn't work that easily. They would also try to ... I mean they would shakedowns meaning they come into your homes where you live, try to see if people had drugs. They didn't want you to be on it in the first place so let's go there. The military definitely frowned on it but it was everywhere.

The truckers probably had more guys on heroin because it was so easy to get on the road. They have these all like what we think of as a fruit stand on our country. They have these little stands that had soda and some other stuff that were really, I mean stands but under it, there might be some illegal substances. The guys get it. Scoring marijuana in Vietnam was nothing. I mean that was consigned. You get in all kinds of shapes and I remember they come in what looked like a pack of cigarettes and they were rolled but they weren't what we think of as the rolled ends of these types of cigarettes. Some were laced with opioms. Some were laced with heroin. Again, it wasn't used ... and this changed

and it really makes a big difference in time because the one you talked about drugs in Vietnam.

I don't think the guys in the early part of Vietnam were aware of ... and is introduced to a number of drugs that they were as they got later and particularly when you're disgruntled that you're there ... we talked a little bit at one point about that the African American that was drafted was a different type of draftee because the government had used that cleared streets if you will. This is after some of the riots. Get them off the streets. Give them a job so they're very disgruntled about being there. That may have led to just more, of course you know, nobody cares about me and this is not one thing. This is everybody getting there.

I do recall on my first day in Vietnam, there was a joint stuck in my face. "Who are you? Are you one of us?" I'm kind of like, "I haven't been there yet. I ..." "You went to [inaudible 00:32:22]?" "I haven't been there yet." So that, that's how I came out the other end and I'm certainly not a Bill Clinton [he said 00:32:29] getting in here. It was there.

Often when I would land, "Do you want insertion?" That was one of the ways that I'd be tested. Particularly the group was known to have familiarity with drugs in the field like we all remember the C company thing the guys go and build these M16. I think for the most part, drugs was not in the field for the most part. It just was crazy to do that but get to the rear and be able to take a break.

Speaker 2: You mentioned ...

Speaker 1: I have to show you. I don't think I showed you. There's a magazine, my final, final story. I said, okay, I'm in 11 months. I got one to go. I'm slowing down. We're not going out in the bush anymore. I have a short time, all those things, I'm not doing it so I got to do a story on a beautiful woman who was a ... she worked on base. She was a civilian working on base with some sort of government agency and I just got to do a story on her and take some pictures of her and took her to a pool and she's a beautiful woman.

You'd have to read my story to understand the story itself, perfect story but you take those seven paragraphs and you take the first letter of each paragraph and it gave you my message that started with an F and ended with a U and it was to

the army. It was to come out after I left the country. It came out before I left the country. I was one panic person because there was three people who knew and it's like, "Oh, God. They're going to tell somebody else."

By the time I got to the hooch on the first day, all of the guys in the information office were looking at this going, "You didn't," and I'm just, "Oh, my God. Oh, my God. Oh, my God. Colonel's going to see it. Colonel's going to see it," but I got out of the country. It's how the people look at that and go, "You really did that." I'll show it to you.

Speaker 2: Speaking of a beautiful woman, you worked with Miss America and what's she doing over there? Was it US solely and et cetera? How did that all work out?

Speaker 1: I could say it was US and I don't really recall but I think at that period of time, Miss America ... like Bob Hope would do their annual tour. Phyllis George was the Miss America of that year and her troop might have been seven or eight other on the state winners that came with her, came in and I got assigned as an enlisted man, myself and an officer to be her chaperones from the PR standpoint, information office standpoint, take her to the field to different units. We never went into the bush-bush. We'd come back to a landing zone or a base camp and they'd go in and they'd do a little entertainment so that was interesting.

Here are these girls. There's actually like a year later, I had called the Miss America pageant office just to say something and was talking about having had this opportunity and they said, "Well, we used a couple of pictures of yours. Send them to me because ..." They did. The one I remember, the one they liked was Miss American girls, they all have on these high top vinyl leg boots and they're standing. It's just a picture of the feet. They're standing with a grunt who's just come out of the mud covered with mud and I got that picture but took that and a couple of other ones of the women dancing with the men, having a good ... trying to get some spirit back to them and let them know that they care too.

Speaker 2: By the way, we got the girl to ...

Speaker 1: That girl was Miss Alabama that you thought was

Phyllis.

Speaker 2: You still have some shots of Phyllis?

Speaker 1: I don't think so. I got everybody else but her and I don't recall why whether she went on a different direction. Well, I can't remember whether they split the troops and went two different ways or whether she went on a different helicopter. That's probably she went with the Lieutenant and I got the second runner-ups so it's okay. They were all beautiful women and they were nice people.

Speaker 2: Did you see Bob Hope? Was he over there when the [crosstalk 00:37:14] ...

Speaker 1: I never saw Bob Hope. I think he came while I was there but I never saw him. Maybe because I was getting close to getting out but I believe he came every year usually around Christmas.

Speaker 2: You did mention that this was just primarily the local papers that ran ...

Speaker 1: There was a lot of pickup. I mean we sent it out. Did I really keep a scrap book of it? No. I mean I kept some things but most of it was used in the military publications because it was really written for the men about the men. The hometowners, they got picked up everywhere. I mean they really did and they were doing good. They really were stories of the war. They were just stories of the war seen from my point of view but with your name and it is what you were doing every day in that country. Then it would talk, this is Ken Danes, a machine gunner with 101st serving in the A Shau Valley, a graduate of Baltimore City College and then it would talk about the A Shau is hot and humid and every day, the guys ... never gets back to Ken but it just talks about what we did for a week. They would get picked up. Did they ever get spread on the AP? I don't think so.

Speaker 2: Obviously, you never did all this of anybody that you have done the story quite?

Speaker 1: No. What I had to watch though was ... I mean we're dealing with the army so it's not like I did the story and that's filed and then out it goes. I got to get it cleared upstairs. I got to make sure that anything that I wrote is not going to have any sort of intelligence information and I can't imagine what it would have been but let's just say that I made a statement like they're leaving the A Shau and headed to Nha Trang, well that would have told the enemy that they're headed in Nha Trang so it would take three to four weeks to get my stuff out.

The very last thing I had to do before I start to now send these all and this is the old days of individual stories and you'll lick the stamp. This isn't the electronic days. I had then go call back to the unit and run through the names and make sure that there hadn't been any KIAs. Every now and then, there would be one. Sometimes it would resonate with me who that was but other times, it would and that's where you just go, "Crap, really good guy." That's all you could do and then you go to the next one. "Okay, he's alive. He's alive." Then you put your stories out.

Every now and then, you'd get the local paper would contact the office one last time before it would publish because nobody wants to publish a story of a guy who's just been ...

Speaker 2: Sure.

Speaker 1: The old bits were hidden in different [crosstalk 00:40:10]

Speaker 2: Sure. I guess what surprised me when I had and we're following that, troops over there are hiding and they're always sending letters. Who the hell brings them?

Speaker 1: Even when it was in Vietnam because I don't think they were doing that by the time I was ...

Speaker 2: I was surprised when he told me this and later, his mother got ... it was later on, they got a whole badge. She got a ...

Speaker 1: I know they did that a lot. I don't know. I never thought about it with mine because I was pretty ... this is what I did today and I pretty much wrote a letter a day except when I was in the field but even when I was in the field, my letter would be, "This is where I'm going." I'd always be telling my wife particularly and my mother second to her, my mother got a letter every week. My wife got one almost every day but, "This is where I'm going. This is a little bit about the unit."

Sometimes, I actually would lie. I mean to tell the truth, I have to lie because I didn't want her to be afraid. I didn't want her to worry that I was putting myself in that type of position so then when I come back and I'd tell her a little more about where I really was and what it was really like but it is interesting when you're so far apart, the differences in interpretations of things.

The one that always got me when I got home from there is within our hooch, we had a mama-san was I mean think of it as a maid if you want. It is a woman who would come in and for a couple piaster which was their equivalent of their currency would make your bed. This is in the rear part now, wash your clothes, sweep up your little are. They'd fill other odds and ends and so she's a young kid. She's 14 years old when [inaudible 00:42:04] and I took a bunch of pictures of her enjoying. They are all neat things with the pictures. I've always sent them all because they were good photography. That's where I am. Here's this woman at home whose husband is now over here in this foreign country and sending her pictures of this pretty Oriental woman.

Well, okay, two different mindsets going on there. I don't know about it till I get home and then I'm told that that hurt her. It wasn't intended. I guess that's the greatest thing men say all the time to their women. It wasn't intended so it is what it is again but I was pretty ... I've got most of my letters. My ex gave me all my letters that I sent back to her because my dad has been a prolific writer.

He was actually ... he wrote for Esquire and others before he passed away and my mom had saved all his letters from World War II and it always been my goal to take those two piles of letters and combine them. Maybe when I get to retirement, it will finally get done, maybe. I do have the letters.

Speaker 2: You said one other thing I found kind of ...

Speaker 1: There was a difference in the element of pride is to patch the war on your shoulder meaning 101st, the 1st cav, 173rd. The 101st was 101st. It's Screaming Eagles and they always were and always will be. That was just beaten into their heads. First cav, there was pride with the first cav. That you would see different in each one but the men themselves, I think you could have taken that physical body and move it to the other unit with the other units training with them and then they [inaudible 00:44:06] that one.

The 173rd was probably the loosest. They had this use. They had a lot of drugs in their thing. They were called killers. They were a little scary to be around, might have been just the unit that I was with. That was the one ... I mean that guy, I was off of that chopper and there was a joint in my face because they really thought I was a CID, people who were after them. I remember we didn't take ... I wasn't moving half an hour. I wiggled. All of a sudden, the world started smelling

horrible. "Oh, God. What is that?" It was a body that had been left. They had a [man's 00:44:50] body that have been left to rest. That's where they were and that didn't bother them at all. It bothered me but those guys were just hard. That particular group of guys was hard.

It also depend on the officers and then you start seeing breakdowns in authority down in '70, '71 because again, you're asking me to put my life on the line but you're telling me I'm wasting my life because of what's going on and we're trying to get out of here. Nobody cares about me. They're spitting on you at home so you started to see breakdowns in authority. You also would see a young second lieutenant coming in gung ho.

The first thing you learned, at least I learned is start talking to the sergeants. They are the people who are going to keep you alive. You got to be [inaudible 00:45:48] and think you're going to get yourself still in the bar by being a hero, they are the guys who are going to make you live or die and we see that just second lieutenant go, "Charge." Where are you going?

It was in the end, we really started to see a breakdown in authority and I think some of that moved into society as well. The good or bad that the world of authority that I grew up in is not the world that we're in today. Is it good or bad? I'm not to argue that because I knew that this was the chain of command.

Speaker 2: This illusion that your ...

Speaker 1: I wouldn't have been allowed to write it. Did I see it? No. Do I know it's a place? Absolutely. It's just easy to drop grenade off of you. It was used, a number of those reigned if the second lieutenant just was a little bit too old or somebody who got [discharged 00:46:48] because you know what, you didn't cover my butt in that battle. You went hiding. Don't need you out at here, can't trust you. Did it happen? Yeah. To what degree? I don't think it was that much but I wouldn't have been allowed to write that story.

In the end, I'm a propagandist for the army. I didn't have to drop it. We put it ... I got to write stories that in my heart, I felt that I'm not doing this for the army. I'm doing this for the guy. He's out here and that's how I was able to justify what I did. I never was there to win a war. I was there to try to honor this warrior.

Speaker 2: As you look back on this chapter of your life ...

Speaker 1: Changed man. How? I don't know, just obviously seeing that, being put in a place like that's going to change you. I'm proud when I did. I think every Vietnam veteran should be no matter what. Remember separate the war and the warrior. The government has issues but I'm glad. Probably a lot of people can't make that statement. I'm glad I went. I saw a lot. I had a unique experience. I survived. I have trauma, I did, to go out and see our men. It's difficult. It's almost 50 years but on the end, there's still the fact that friends are not here today.

I don't mean to be anything to anybody. I just had a different year than most people had. I'm glad I didn't have to be in the bush for 365 days. I've done it but I had to and I'd probably hate if I had to do it but what are you going to do? No, I'm proud that I did what I did. If called upon, I'd do it again. I'd just like to know we really have a purpose.

Speaker 2: Thank you for what you did.

Speaker 1: Thank you. I had to do it.

Speaker 2: Yeah, great.