Jack Cassidy
Dartmouth College Oral History Program
The Dartmouth Vietnam Project
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Transcribed by Dominic Repucci ‘20

REPUCCI: Alright, my name is Dominic Repucci. I am a senior History major here at Dartmouth College and I am here today on Baker Berry 406 [Dartmouth College Library, Hanover, NH] with a Mr. Jack Cassidy. I am interviewing today for the Dartmouth Vietnam Project and the date is 2/13/2020 [February 13, 2020]. Mr. Cassidy, would you mind stating and spelling your name just for the purpose of the archive?

CASSIDY: Sure. Jack Cassidy, C A S S I D Y.

REPUCCI: Perfect. Thank you for your participation in this interview Mr. Cassidy. And do you mind if I call you Mr. Cassidy or Jack?

CASSIDY: No, just call me Jack.

REPUCCI: All right, Jack.

CASSIDY: My father was Mr. [laughter].

REPUCCI: Perfect. Jack, when and where were you born?

CASSIDY: I was born June 18th, 1946 in New Haven, Connecticut.

REPUCCI: What was New Haven like back then? What was your early life like?

CASSIDY: Early life was, it was inner city. It was very ethnic, lots of Irish, lots of Polish, Italians, Jews, Blacks were all mingled in the same area. We all lived in the same, within two or three blocks. There was people who just came over from Poland and Europe, people who were again, all different ethnicities. And it was a great neighborhood. It was safe, it was fun. We played in the streets, we played football in the streets. We ran around in backyards and climbed fences and garages and got into trouble by breaking windows or--and, but it was a neighborhood where everybody knew you. If you got in trouble, the cops would bring you back to the house, knock on your father's door, tell him to take care of it. Nobody really got in a lot of trouble. And it was a great--we had a little gang on Legion Avenue, New Haven, which was not far from Yale.

And this Legion Avenue gang was sort of like a little gang. It was a neighborhood gang. It wasn't like a thug gang. It wasn't knives and guns, but it was a group of guys who got together and hung around. And once in

a while we'd have a fight and we'd have to go somewhere and we'd have a fight with another neighborhood. Nobody ended up hurt badly a couple of stitches or whatever. But it was part of feeling like you were part of a group. You felt like you were somebody in a group. And it was safe and it was a great upbringing. I played football in high school and I was pretty good. And that was sort of my calling card was playing football, and I went on to play football in college later on. But I love playing football, sports, and it was a great, New Haven was a good town to hang around.

REPUCCI: Perfect. Tell me a little bit about what your parents did.

CASSIDY: My Dad was--worked on the railroad. He was a signal maintainer, which meant he worked on signals up and down the New York, New Haven and Hartford [CT] Railroad, which is now defunct. And he had a good job for the--blue collar job and a nine to five or not nine to five. Eight hours a day. He'd leave at like five in the morning, come home at three in the afternoon. He would walk home from the railroad station, which is probably three miles. And he'd walk, he'd take the bus to work every day with a lunch and he'd walk home from the railroad. And my mom was a switchboard operator in the Jewish Community Center in New Haven. And I worked on the railroad for many years and I also worked at the Jewish Center as a lifeguard. So I always got jobs that had to do with, either my Dad got me a job on the railroad or my Mom got me a job at the Jewish Center as a lifeguard or working in the health club, and they were basically a working-class family.

REPUCCI: What were you interested in? Do you--I don't know if you remember this far back, but early life elementary school going into middle school.

CASSIDY: What was I interested in?

REPUCCI: Maybe classes, what you thought about wanting to do when you were older?

CASSIDY: I don't think I had any idea of what--I don't think I had any aspirations. I really was all about having fun--it was in the city and in New Haven, and in a neighborhood. It was just day to day having fun. You never even thought about--you barely thought about college and nobody really gave it no, most people didn't go to college. Nobody in my family had ever gone to college. Nobody in my neighborhood went to college. And, sort of my era was the first ones to start to think about it. And it was really only an afterthought when you were at or near the end of high school. I don't know that we--I probably thought I would work on the railroad like my Dad. It was not, I don't think I had any aspirations. I don't think I really wanted anything. I just thought things would come and I would do. A job would show up, I would go to work. And where I ended up, who knows? But

there was no fear. I always knew I would be taken care of. There was a job, there was a family, I had a nice family community. I always knew that I was safe, I didn't have to worry about things.

REPUCCI: I'm just providing a little bit more context here. Did you--do you remember hearing anything at all about Korea or interacting with veterans from World War II and the Korean War at all?

CASSIDY: Very little. A little bit of World War II cause I had an Uncle who was fought in World War II. My dad didn't go to World War II because he was on the railroad. So he was exempt. He had to stay home and have the trains running in order to move the war machinery around. And I didn't know anybody from Korea. I never spoke to anybody. Korea was really sort of a forgotten war to me. I never heard anything about it. I knew very little about World War II and knew nothing about the Korean War.

REPUCCI: And speaking of, and, maybe this will speak to that a little bit. Do you remember anything about the fear of Communism, right from your early life?

CASSIDY: Yeah. What I remembered was the fear that the Atomic Bomb was going to be dropped on us. But as a kid, we would have drills in school where they would blow a whistle and we would climb under the desks. Cause that's what you were supposed to do when the Atomic Bomb dropped. So that was like it was gonna make a big fucking deal, right? [laughter]. Okay, let's hide under the desk while we all get incinerated. But that's what we did.

And I remember being afraid of--and it was obviously--it was gonna be dropped by the Communists, by the Russians. And, it was--this was something that was very possible. And, this was--it was sort of a scary time between-it was around the time of the Missile Crisis in Cuba before [John F.] Kennedy's assassination, which was my senior year in high school. Around that time, and before that in elementary school, there was a fear of the big bomb going off. We would have these drills at least once a week. And sometimes I would be crying, I'd go home crying, afraid that we were all going to die, everybody was going to die, because we didn't know what the hell was gonna happen. It wasn't an ideology that I knew anything about. It wasn't Communism. We just knew that these were the bad guys and they had a bomb, but we didn't talk about, I think the thought of Communism and the political ideology was sort of above us in elementary school. And even in high school, we didn't talk very much about it.

REPUCCI: Speaking on major events a little bit, do you remember Sputnik at all, when that went up?

CASSIDY: Yeah, vaguely. Vaguely. I remember it. I sort of remember it being in the paper and sort of on the TV, a black and white TV, Walter Cronkite talking on the TV. We had really just gotten the TV. When I was young, we didn't have a TV, but we had just gotten one when I was maybe five or six years old. Yeah. And it was a big event and it was a feeling like we were behind, there was this fear that we were behind, cause Sputnik was the first venture and we were like, oh, we've got to really crank it up in order to keep up with the Soviet Union. And, there was this competition then. That was about all--and again, I didn't like to worry about stuff, so I would go outside and play stick ball and football and just do stuff that would keep your mind off of these sort of fearful things, which was what the Russians were gonna do, the Soviet Union was gonna do.

REPUCCI: So, moving forward, I guess we'll start talking about high school a little bit.

CASSIDY: Sure.

REPUCCI: What was that like for you? Maybe speak on, football and-maybe classes you took any interest now or still just?

CASSIDY: Yeah. High school was mainly a vehicle to chase women and to play football. I don't know that I had any really academic interests. I sort of did things to try to get a grade. It was all about grades, it was all about numbers, letters. And it was Hillhouse High School was where I went. We had a great basketball team. Our basketball team played Power Memorial, which was where Lou Alcindor [Lewis Alcindor Jr.] played, Kareem Abdul Jabbar. So we played Kareem Abdul Jabbar's team who was undefeated, and we lost by two points. So we had a great high school basketball team, and Floyd Little who went on to play for the Denver Broncos played, was in my high school. He was a couple years ahead of me, but he played football for Hillhouse. So we had--sports were really important.

But high school was a lot of fun. It was--again, it was an ethnic high school with lots of both Blacks and Whites, Italians, Jews, and Irish and a lot of ethnicities. We sort of had groups of ethnicities, but we really got along together well. And especially sports. In sports, it might be that the Blacks would stay by themselves in certain areas socially and the Whites and the Jews would be one and the Catholics. But when it came to sports, we all got together. We hung out together. We would go to the Black parties; the Black football players would come to our parties. And it was really a fun place where everybody felt, again, we felt safe. And that was a word I kept going back to when I think about it.

I didn’t fear anything. I didn't fear getting beaten up or jumped. And it was considered a rough high school. There were two inner city high schools in New Haven. One is Wilbur Cross, the other is Hillhouse. So it wasn't a

pansy school, so you had to be a little tough, you had to be able to take your knocks or give ‘em, but it still was a safe atmosphere. So my memory of high school was of really a good time.

I guess academically, I was sort of interested in math, if anything, math and history sort of would peak my interest. But it was really--it was all about grades. You had to have grades, cause you couldn't play football unless you had a certain grade. My parents wanted me to go to college so they were on my case about getting grades and of course, I wasn't going out on weekends unless I got decent grades. I couldn't work on the railroad if I didn't have decent grades. And so, it was really about getting a decent grade in order to move on. So that's sort of my memory of high school.

REPUCCI: I forgot to ask. What was the date you--or the month you started and year you started high school?

CASSIDY: High school? I was in Troop Junior High School and high school would have been at Hillhouse, would have been ‘61. Sixty-one. And it was probably in September ‘61.

REPUCCI: Perfect. I know there's a few more things I want to cover in your high school time. I know you spoke a little bit about this right at the beginning of the interview, but could you elaborate a little bit more on your--the group of guys you hung out with? Like you called it a gang, but it may be not.

CASSIDY: Yeah, it sort of was a little gang. Yeah, it was a great bunch of guys. Again--it was on Legion Avenue, which has now been all torn down for redevelopment. But it was in a, a park. It was a basketball park and there was a bar across the street, and some park benches, and we just--all the guys were at Hillhouse High School. A couple of guys went to a Notre Dame, which was a private high school. But mainly we just, we did stuff together. We played basketball; we played a lot of sports together. And then at night, we'd go out carousing.

That's where I started to drink. And booze was a big important part of our deal. We were under age, but we would go down Legion Avenue and we would get a couple of, there were--the other end of Legion Avenue was Black, and, there were a number of Blacks who were, for lack of a better word, they were winos, what we would consider a wino. They were alcoholics and they were sort of always around the liquor store and one of them would be in a wheelchair and we could always go up to him. We knew him, give him money and he would buy booze for us. He would buy a couple of beers for himself and he'd get a case of beer for us or a bottle of wine or whatever we wanted. So we drank, a lot, and alcohol was a big part of what we did. We would drink and then we'd go out and drive

around and look for trouble and go get hotdogs and chase the girls. And then we'd--if we didn't have anybody else to get in trouble with, we'd fight each other. But again, it was very--it was sort of innocuous. Again, it wasn't the knife and gun club. For some reason I don't remember anybody in this gang of people.

And we were drunk probably Friday, Saturday nights. Every Friday, Saturday night we were drunk. Not one person died in a car accident, not one of 'em. And there were car accidents, but I don't know whether we were driving slower. But nobody ever got killed. People smashed up their car and they got in trouble. It was, this group of guys were just a lot of fun to hang around. Like I said, we did a lot of stuff together, but alcohol was really a big deal. It was an important part of what we did. Everybody drank. Some of us drank more than others. And I was one of the heavier, I was known as one of the better drinkers. But we drank, we got drunk every Friday, Saturday night. That was our deal. If I wasn't playing--I wasn't drinking when I was playing football, but if I wasn't playing football, we were drinking Friday and Saturday nights.

REPUCCI: Could you speak a little bit more about your experience with football? Because I know you said you played in college later.

CASSIDY: Yeah, football was--I really enjoyed that. I enjoyed the competition. I enjoyed the--I really mostly I think I enjoyed the group dynamics of a group sport, rather than an individual sport like golf, let's say. But I enjoyed a team concept—and again, it was a great mix of people, Black, White, Irish, Italian, Jews. And that's how I got to know these people. That's how I got to know the ethnicities because I would be invited over to my Italian friend's house and his mother and father were from Italy. So we'd have a real--they didn't speak any English. So that's where I got Italian wine, and I got zitis and I got meatballs and then I'd go to the Blacks, I'd go to their house and we'd have chitlins and we'd have Southern cooking. And then--so we really got, I got to know about the ethnicities by getting close to these guys in high school. And football was just a great vehicle to, to just have good friends, and it was a way to get some stature in high school too, cause you were thought of as a jock and football player. People, they wanted you at the parties and all that sort of stuff.

So, yeah, I really enjoyed football and I went on to, I coached in college for one year. I coached offensive line at the University of New Haven and I loved that. That was the most fun. I probably would--if I didn't become a Physician's Assistant, I think I would have stayed and been a football coach, but I couldn't do both. I was in school in the PA program and I just couldn't. I couldn't coach and go to school, so I had to give it up. But I love football.

REPUCCI: What position did you play?

CASSIDY: Center. I was a center.

REPUCCI: So what did you think of President [John F.] Kennedy at this time?

CASSIDY: He was--I really, my memory of President Kennedy was just all wonderful. Well he was Irish Catholic, which put him to the head of the class in my family [laughter].

So, that was--being a Catholic and Irish, Boston, everybody loved him. We loved him. We loved his brother Bobby [Robert] Kennedy. His politics were Democratic, right up the alley of the working class. He was an aristocrat from Massachusetts and a family--but yet he seemed to bridge the gap with the poor and the working class. So everybody in the working class really liked President Kennedy. And it was really a sad day when he was assassinated, and when his brother was assassinated. They were really thought of highly in my neighborhood.

REPUCCI: Do you remember anything about the day he was assassinated?

CASSIDY: Oh yeah, very much so. I was in school, I remember being in class and they announced it over the loudspeaker in high school. And it was just, the people just cried. Where I would probably [inaudible]—yeah it was '61, I was a senior and the girls were just crying. Everybody was crying. These are high school kids crying that the President had been assassinated. I remember, the whole country was in mourning. Everybody felt it. And it wasn't long after that, that Bobby [Robert] Kennedy was assassinated. [Dr.] Martin Luther King [Jr.] was assassinated. This shit was happening like, every couple of months somebody was being assassinated. It was a time of turmoil where, I remember reading it, but I didn't feel it when it was going on. But in that era there was, in the year, in about two or three years, there was, each year, there was about 420 bombings a year.

So it was over a bombing a day in the United States. It was either Black Panthers, Underground, all of the different factions, all of the different Vietnam protests, the Black protest. But there was all of this turmoil in the country. Now these were bombings where they were blowing--everybody was against the draft, so they were blowing up a post office. They were, so they were setting a small bomb and they'd put a bomb in a mailbox and the box would blow up. But still, there was an explosion. There was a bombing every day for two years.

And we got used to it. We got used to it, and people today see things that happen and they become fearful of a bombing or violence. And then you sit back and you look back to the sixties and seventies and you go: shit, it

happened every day. They were from different factions. It was multiple groups that were responsible, but it was a fact of life that there was revolution. Revolution was in the air. It was either the Black revolution--there was the Antiwar revolution, there was the poor, Martin Luther King. There was the backlash of that, there were the race riots in Watts, LA was burning, Memphis was burning. It was a time of turmoil. It was a scary time.

REPUCCI: Would you mind speaking a little bit, I know you lived in a relative--a relatively integrated community.

CASSIDY: Mhm.

REPUCCI: Could you speak at all about race relations and maybe the civil rights movement in high school for you or?

CASSIDY: Yeah, it was sort of new to me. Being that I was in Northern kid, I didn't know anything about the South. I didn't know things were going on down South. I didn't know there was racial discrimination. It wasn't, I didn't see it where I lived. My father would use the N word, but it was sort of not--it was sort of like he would, he would call Italians names.

He would call them daygos, he would call Jews a kike. And he would, and the Irish were micks, we were drunken micks. That's who we were. That was our name. The name wasn't meant to be as detrimental and harsh as it's used now, but the words were still used. They were still harmful. And we knew that it wasn't a term of I love 'em. So, but, but yet the Blacks in our neighborhood would at times come over our house and visit, but my parents wanted a little bit of distance between the races. But for us, for me, the next generation, I saw no difference. They were my buddies. I would sneak around, we would go to their parties, they would come to ours, as I said.

They would date our girls, I would date a Black girl, but I couldn't do it in front of--my parents couldn't know about it. Nobody could see it, but I could meet her on the side. We could go to dances and we'd go out and do some parking and fooling around, but you had to do it on the quiet.

But I did have an experience when I went down South. When I got out of high school, I took a bus trip to Florida. And I took the bus from New Haven, Connecticut down to Fort Lauderdale [FL] by myself and I was going to, my grandmother lived down there. I was meeting a couple of buddies and I got through Georgia and I was on a bus and we were, I was sitting in the back with--it was four or five Blacks and I had a bottle of gin and we're laughing and talking. I had some orange soda. And we were

mixing up drinks in the back. We were having a great time. It was a 36-hour bus ride.

So, in the middle of Georgia at about three o'clock in the morning in the back roads, the bus stops and the bus driver comes back and says: you gotta sit up front. And I said: why? What do you mean I gotta sit up front? He said: you're sitting with the Blacks. The Blacks are in the back. You're up front. You either sit up in front, or you get off the bus right now. And I didn't know where the hell I was, it was dark out, I'm in this back road of Georgia, I don't know where I am, I'm 18 years old. I'd never been out of New Haven, Connecticut. And I looked in and I said: but these are the people that are having fun, the Whites up front are a bunch of stiffs. They're no fun at all. We're laughing and we're singing, we're having a great time back here. He said: you sit up with the White people or you get off my bus. And I was on a Trailways Bus or a Greyhound, it was a commercial bus and I had to sit up front. And that was the first time that I had been exposed to somebody who obviously believed in segregation—cause he did, cause I was sitting in the Black section.

And I went to--when I went to Florida, I went to a dog track and I was again having a good time and I was betting on the dogs and I was drinking beer, having a good time. And a guard called me over, and he said: you can't sit there. And I said: why? It's general admission. He said: no, that's the Black section. You got to go over in the White section. And I looked around, I didn't notice it because it's not the way I grew up. So I remembered that and I had to go sit over with the Whites, but I preferred to be with the Blacks because they were more fun. And so that was my exposure to race.

REPUCCI: Did you hear anything about Vietnam while you were in high school?

CASSIDY: Just the only thing I heard about was what I would see on TV and on the news, and it sort of looked exciting. War looked exciting. It made it look pretty--although it was one of the first wars where they allowed--reporters embedded with some of the companies that were the actual troops on the ground. So some of this footage that you--would come back was pretty--it was pretty shitty stuff they were doing. They were in the jungle, they were in firefights. But to a kid who grew up in New Haven and sort of like having a little fights once in a while, I thought that looked exciting, and to me that was the word I think. I felt like I wanted to be part of that a little bit.

I wanted to be part of it until I actually was part of it. But the thought of participating in combat and being in the jungle, was a little exciting when I was young and didn't know, cause I wasn't seeing anybody coming back. I didn't see anybody wounded. This was--I went over in '67—'68. So around '68, there were not that many--I wasn't seeing a lot of wounded coming

back home. So, it looked exciting to me. And when I was in the service, I saw other Corpsmen and other guys sort of going over, my friends were going over. I sort of thought that that's what I should do. I should step up and go. But it wasn't about--again, it wasn't about Communism. It wasn't about fighting for my country per se. It was because my buddies were going. They were going. My high school buddies, guys that I was in the service with when I was--a year before the year I was in the service before I went active, they were going. A lot of them had orders for going overseas. And [I] just thought that's what I should do. So that was my exposure to Vietnam.

REPUCCI: So I guess we're now at the tail end of high school.

CASSIDY: Right.

REPUCCI: When did you graduate and what were your plans upon graduation?

CASSIDY: I graduated in '64, and I planned to go to college. I was not going into the service. I had no thought about the military. I played football at Southern Connecticut and, unbeknownst to me, they expected you to study in college and I wasn't prepared for studying. I was prepared for drinking and chasing women, and I was pretty good at it.

So I flunked out first semester. I played football as a freshman, freshman team. I was doing great, I was starting, and I flunked out first semester. I was in Florida with a bunch of guys. That was my bus trip and I ended up meeting up with other guys from college and they all were getting their grades from their home. And I kept calling my mother and saying: hey, where's, what are my grades? Oh, they didn't come yet. They didn't come in. And I said: that's bullshit. All the other guys got their grades. Finally, my mother said: if I tell you, you promise you'll come back home? I said: yeah. She said: they don't want you back. You flunked out. I said: I'm not coming home. I'm going to stay out here for a couple of months [laughter].

So I flunked out. I stayed down in Florida for a couple of months. I went back, went to work on the railroad, and then that's when I joined the--I went to the University of New Haven, but that's when I joined the Navy Reserve, because I sort of missed the, I missed football, I missed the team. I missed having guys to play with. And the military is, guys to play with. You play with a lot of guys. You're all on a team. Same sort of stuff. So that's when I joined the Navy Reserves and went off to bootcamp. And somewhere in those first two--I went back to school at the University of New Haven. And then I realized I had to do a little studying. So I woke up a little bit.

And I did my, bootcamp and then I did Corps [Corpsman] School, which is to be a Corpsman, the medical training. I did that during the summer when I got a summer off from college, I would go away and do that for the summer. So by the time I was in my junior year of college, that's when they activated me and sent me on active duty, cause I was already a Corpsman. I had the designation of a Corpsman, and when the Corpsmen were all getting killed in Vietnam, they just pulled me out of college and said: time for you to go.

So, but college was, college was a lot of fun. I did the minimal amount of studying, but I partied a lot [laughter]. Sounds familiar? It's not much different than it is now. [Laughter].

REPUCCI: So were you thinking about, so you spent a few months in Florida—

CASSIDY: Yeah.

REPUCCI: Went back to school—

CASSIDY: Yeah.

REPUCCI: And then that's when you decided you were going to join the Naval Reserve.

CASSIDY: Right.

REPUCCI: Were you thinking about the draft at all at this time?

CASSIDY: No. No, there wasn't a draft. Vietnam really wasn't heating up. It wasn't like I was going to get drafted, right. I didn't think about the draft. I don't even know if the draft had started. I never got a draft card. So I had joined before draft cards even came out. I joined because a couple of guys in my neighborhood joined the Navy Reserves and they were in, and they were going to meetings once a week, Wednesday nights, and they would get to wear their uniform. The girls thought it looked hot, the uniform. And I said: what the hell? I'm not playing football now. I'd like to do something. So I joined, and I--it wasn't like I was avoiding the draft at all. And there wasn't no draft to my memory.

REPUCCI: Could you--elaborate a little bit about, more about like the service commitment you made? I know I read it in your email. It was like four years reserve commitment, two years active duty.

CASSIDY: Right, right. So it's a total of six years, Naval Reserve, and two years have to be active duty, four years are reserves. And then after that, you are, then your military obligation is done. While I was in college, and I was in

the Navy, they asked me, they said: why don't you join ROTC? So I could have begun, I could go to OCS [Officer Candidate School] school and become an officer and they said: but if you become an officer, you will never, you are never out. You always can be drawn back into the service. So even if you do your commitment and shit hits the fan and they need you, they'll just bring you back in.

And I didn't like that. I just, I wanted to do it and I wanted to get out. I said: I'll do this as a Lark. Really, I said: This'll be just fun. This will be six years of my life. I'll do uh—Corpsman, I'll never do this again. Medical stuff, hell, I'm about as far away from medicine as you can get. I was working on the railroad; I was baking Italian bread. I was hanging around with the guys. I wasn't gonna go into medicine. So I said: this will be just a, something, a new adventure in life. I'll go into medicine; I'll do the service and then I'll do something else with my life. So I didn't become an officer and I decided to do the reserve thing and it was--the first few years were reserve duty and then they pulled me out of college and that's when I went on active duty.

REPUCCI: So now I want to ask you a little bit more about what training's like. Do you remember when you left for basic training and where it was and?

CASSIDY: Yeah, I remember a little bit about it. I remember going during the summer, I don't remember when. It probably was in '66, '65, somewhere in there. And it was in Rhode Island--Misquamicut [Rhode Island], not Misquamicut, it was down near Newport, Rhode Island, but it was in Rhode Island. So it was basic training. And I don't remember much about it. It wasn't very difficult. It was sort of harassment and it was okay. It wasn't a big deal. And from there, I went to Corps [Hospital Corpsman] School, which was in Great Lakes, Illinois at the Naval Hospital in Great Lakes. And that I remember, because every other class going through Corps school was getting sent to what's called Field Medical School. So if you got sent to Field Medical School, that meant you were going to Vietnam and you were going to go with the Marine Corps, which I didn't know. When I became a Corpsman, I did not know that the Marine Corps has no medics. They have no doctors, no dentists and no priests. They're all from the Navy.

So I thought I would be a Corpsman, I'd be on a ship, I'd be over in the Mediterranean. I didn't think I was going to Vietnam. I thought I was going to go to Spain and Italy. I was gonna have a great time. And so every other [Hospital] Corps school class got sent first--the orders would say you're going to go to this spot via FMF Camp Lejeune [North Carolina], which meant you had to go through the Field Medical School. So my class that I was in--was all set to graduate and I had a dental infection. I had to get put back a month or not month, excuse me, a week. So I spent a week in the hospital with a dental infection, so they put me back to the next

class. My class just went off and it never had to go to Field Medical School. The class that I got put back got sent to Field Medical School. So that's where I went. And, which meant I was screwed. I was going to Vietnam [laughter]. So that was an eye opener for me.

REPUCCI: Could you speak a little bit more but more about Hospital Corps School at Great Lakes, Illinois? Like what, maybe day to day life. What are you learning? Did you struggle with anything?

CASSIDY: No, I really liked it. I guess the equivalent would be, it was a little bit like nursing, and it was a little bit like EMS [Emergency Medical Services]. So there were courses about first aid, which was more EMS stuff, not necessarily combat medicine, but first aid medicine. And there were classes about administering medications, IV drips, how to make a bed, how to change dressings, how to chart, how to use medical terminology. So I found it very interesting. I really liked it. I liked Corps School. I liked medicine. I was having a good time. I was doing well and I really liked it. It was a fun time. It was during the summer. It was in Chicago, outside of Chicago, so I got to spend some weekends in Chicago and it was on right on the Lake.

Great Lakes Naval Station is right on the Lake and it was a nice spot to be. They had beer machines on the beach. So I remember, a quarter, you could put a quarter in the beer machine and you got a cold can of beer for a quarter, which I still remember. So yeah, Corps School was fun. Field Medical School was when I went to Camp Lejeune. That wasn't quite as much fun. That was the next stop [laughter].

REPUCCI: That's what I was about to ask him about. Can you describe or just talk about your shift from Corps School to Field Medical School?

CASSIDY: Yeah, that was a dramatic shift. That was going from the Navy to the Marine Corps. So FMF school was Fleet Marine Forces, FMS [Field Medical School].

REPUCCI: Lights.

CASSIDY: Yea, lights. So, that was an introduction into the Marine Corps. So what they were doing is taking a Navy Medical Corpsman, like a medic and trying to let them--give them the terminology and giving ‘em all a--sort of a feel for what the Marines do. So part of what your training was Marine Corps basic training. Oh, you had weapons training, you had forced marches, you had amphibious landings, you were field stripping weapons. Now again, I joined the Navy, not the Marine Corps, but this is what you had to do. So they were sort of making you like a mini-Marine. And then the other classes were on combat medicine. So that had to do with, what

do you do with gunshots? What do you do with an open chest wound? What do you do with somebody who's got a leg blown off or an arm? How do you treat those? Because the Corpsman is the only guy that's out there. The Field Corpsman, if you are attached to a Marine Combat Company, you're the only guy. You're their medic, you're their medicine man.

If you're in a hospital or in a Battalion Aid Station, you have other backup. But if you're out there with a Marine Company, you're it, you're the Doc. That's why they call you Doc. So, it's there for you [pointing at plaque brought by narrator]. That's right. That's how I got the name Doc. Yeah. So, and today I'm known as Doc, all of the guys that were in my unit, it's Doc. So nobody knows me by my first name.

That's what Field Medical School was like. Part of it was learning, how to be a Marine or how to act like a Marine or pretend I was a Marine. And the other part was the medicine. So it was taxing, cause it was like going back to bootcamp again. It was lights on, were 4:00 AM, the gun--I had a gunny Sergeant, Sergeant Rock, who was a little short, a little Marine with a bull neck who came in every morning with his starch utilities on, starched cap. He looks squared away, clean shaven. That light went on, and he said: when you hear that click and that--between the time I click that and the light goes on, you've gotta be out of your rack standing at attention. And he had a Billy club and he would go by and whack in the leg or whack your feet as he walked by [inaudible] if you're still sleeping.

And he was a hard ass. But that was what they got you to do. They learn discipline. You learn, follow, do whatever they tell you to do. You did it. You did not question. If they say you're going to march through this jungle, you march, you don't say, well what about, can I get a different way around? So I had to learn discipline cause I was not very disciplined. So that's what I learned in, in Field Medical School. It was quite an eye opener for me. And there was drinking every night at the club. There was a little club that was there, right on Camp Lejeune. So you'd stay out drinking until three o'clock in the morning and then at five o'clock you were still drunk when the lights went on and you had to be in formation and then you'd run three miles, with a backpack on, it was about 40 pounds and you were in full utilities, it was during the summer and you're in South Carolina. So for a fat Navy guy, it was pretty tough for me. But I got through it [laughter].

REPUCCI: So what was your general opinion of the Marines at this time?

CASSIDY: That's a good question. I was sort of in awe. I sort of looked up to 'em. They were the elite combat fighting force that we had. They were the elite fighting force in the Second World War. They had a motto, and that's first

to fight. So, they were the first ones in, they would take a hill, they would take a village and then they'd give it to the Army to hold it. But they were known for being fighters and being disciplined. So I was a little bit in awe, a little afraid, of what it was going to be like. I was a little bit gung-ho too. I was a little starry-eyed, like: oh man, I'm gonna get to wear a Marine uniform, which I did, with Navy Insignias, but I still was dressed in a Marine Corps uniform. So I guess I was like a little kid, sorta like I'm going with the big boys now. And yeah, that sort of the way I felt about it.

REPUCCI: So what happens after you leave Camp Lejeune? What--

CASSIDY: Yeah, that was, that's an interesting part because when I left Camp Lejeune, I went to Newport Naval Hospital, for a year. So you leave Camp Lejeune, I dropped 15 pounds, I'm in shape, I'm running every day. I'm ready to go, like I'm ready to go over and fight a war. So what does the Navy do? As a Navy Reservist, they send me to Newport Naval Hospital for a year, or eight months. Now I'm in Newport, Rhode Island, and, I'm working in the Hospital on sick officer's quarters where I'm just doing an eight-hour shift. The rest of the time I'm drinking beer, I'm running around with all the nurses. I'm having a great time partying. I'm on the beach in Newport for the Newport Jazz Festival. I'm gaining weight. I don't do anything physical, zero physical, nothing. The most I do is to walk up a flight of stairs.

So for eight months I get fat, and drunk, and then all of a sudden I get orders to go to Vietnam. So when I get orders to go to Vietnam, I'm like, holy shit. Okay, you got a week off. Now you've got to catch a flight to go over to Vietnam. I was not in any kind of shape to go out and run a patrol, to be in, 120, 110 degree weather to, climb up mountains with a pack on my back. I was just out of shape, overweight, out of shape. So that was a mistake the military made. But most Navy Corpsman went from Corps Field Medical School right into the Marines. But I went from Field Medical School to a Naval Hospital where I just hung out and had a job. It was a regular job. It was fun. It was a nice job. I worked eight hours and then I went back to my barracks and went out with the guys into Newport, went to the movies, shot some pool, went to the bars, had a good time and then show up for your next shift. But there was nothing to do with the Marines, nothing to do with getting in shape. So it was not a good thing when I arrived in Vietnam.

REPUCCI: I have two questions related to that. First. What was it like being called on to active duty? And that was that before you were on your Hospital Rotation?

CASSIDY: Yeah. So you mean being called? When I was activated for--I was in college when I got called to active duty. Yeah, that was a shock. I wasn't

ready to go. I was, I, in fact, I said: how can you, you can't take me out of college. I'm in college. You can't take me out. They said oh, yes we can. You signed up as a Navy Reservist, you are already a Corpsman and we need Corpsmen, we can take you anytime we want. So it was a shock for me to be going on active duty and I knew that eventually I was going to Vietnam. Even though the beginning of that trip--that my first part of my active duty was a Naval Hospital. I knew that I was eventually going to Vietnam and at that point I was having a good time in college and I didn't really want to go to Vietnam.

I was like, I'd rather not [laughter], but I didn't have a choice. So that was what they said. So what happened was that I did the Field Medical School right after I did Corps School and then I went back to college and then they activated me, so I was two years in college. When they activated me, I went to Newport Naval Hospital. So that was the year I did in Newport. And then I went over to Vietnam for a year. So it was a shock, a shock for me, a shock for my family. I was living at home and I was having a great time and then the bubble burst. Off I went.

REPUCCI: So apart from spending eight months in Newport, do you feel training was adequate? Training prepared you for what you were going to experience in Vietnam?

CASSIDY: Yeah. I didn't think the training was as good as it could have been and the gap between training and the actual combat was totally incorrect. It was inappropriate, it was terrible. So they trained me about combat and how to be a Medic, Corpsman. Then they said, okay, now you're going to wait two years and then we're going to have you go and be involved in combat. For those two years, I'm not doing anything, medically, so I forgot all that shit. I just forgot it. I'm not doing it. What you want to do is you want to be trained and get right into it. You want to be trained and go right into combat. You don't want to be trained and say, all right, go to college. And now we're going to tell you to go, now we're going to pluck you, and within two weeks we're going to drop you in the jungle. And now you're going to be a Corpsman with the Marines. Okay, here's your weapon, here's your Unit One, here's your medical stuff. Go on patrol.

So that was not a good way of doing it. But the training itself I think was good. I think it was adequate. It wasn't exceptional. There were a lot of stuff that for me, for what I did, which was out in the bush, I was with the Marine Corps grunts, which are a regular Platoon. So, there probably should have been more training. And since then I've talked to Marines now. When we go to our reunions, sometimes we get together with active duty Marines who come back from the Iraq War or come back from Afghanistan. And I've talked to their Corpsman that are with them. And the training now is totally different. And all of the changes were made after us,

after Vietnam. What they learned from Vietnam, they've now applied and now they're, these guys are trained like your paramedics, like the guys on helicopters. They're trained to really do a lot of stuff that we weren't trained to do, but we did the best we could.

REPUCCI: So you're at the end of your rotation in Newport?

CASSIDY: Yeah.

REPUCCI: Can you describe the process of getting orders to head over to Vietnam?

CASSIDY: Yeah, I guess it was, I was getting close to--you really have to have a year left in active duty in order for you to go to the war zone, to go over. So I was getting close to the year left and I didn't receive any orders. I was thinking--maybe they forgot about me [laughter] maybe I'm going to skate by. And I got the orders and it was a little scary. It was sort of, the guys knew--we all, we'd watch TV every night in the barracks and we'd see, and this was when the war was, was cooking. This was '68. It was, there was a lot of shit going on and guys were getting killed. There was, two or three—hundred a day. 50, 60, a hundred Corpsmen were getting killed.

And, it was pretty real. It was hitting home. So when I got the orders, it was a little eye-opener, like this is the real deal. I thought I may die, I may not make it back. So, I was a little afraid. And then I went back home for maybe a week and that was that victory lap you take when you're going overseas and you're going to war and all of your neighborhood and your friends in the bars all know you're going. So the girls all want to spend time with you. Everybody's buying you beers and drinks. So it's like a victory lap, but all of a sudden there comes a time when you got to get on the plane and fly away. So it was scary and I was afraid.

But it was also, the, that victory lap was sort of fun [laughter]. You got a lot of backslapping and a lot of go get 'em and we hope you come back, and that sort of makes you feel good.

REPUCCI: How'd your parents feel about you being given the orders to-

CASSIDY: Yeah.

REPUCCI: Ship out?

CASSIDY: You got great questions. Did you write all of these up? Are these, yeah?

REPUCCI: I spent a little time.

CASSIDY: Yeah, you did. They're really good questions.

REPUCCI: Thank you.

CASSIDY: They're really good questions. They are things that I haven't thought about in a long time, but I have in the 45 years I've thought about all of these questions at some point. So they're really, they're good questions.

They were afraid, they were very afraid. My dad wrote me every day that I was in Vietnam.

He'd get up at five o'clock in the morning or four o'clock, and he'd sit down with the dog and having his breakfast, and he would write me a handwritten note and mail a, a little note every day. And it wouldn't say anything. It would just say oh, how you doing? I'm going to work in the railroad. Shorty's doing good. That was our dog. I'm having breakfast, just bullshit. And, but I got a letter every day, and my Mother was really, was really very much, or they were, they were both afraid. They knew what was going on. They knew people were dying and, they were afraid. But, never, there were never any tears when I left. They were pretty much--you just, just toughen up and, we'll be here, you'll make it home, and we'll be here waiting for you when you get back.

But my dad was really, he was not somebody who ever, I don't remember him, maybe he said I love you a couple of times in my life, but that's it. It wasn't like--we weren't a hugging group [laughter]. My mom was a little more, but my dad was pretty much--and he just, that's just his style. You go to work and come home and he was a provider, but he did the best he could, but there wasn't a lot of emotion.

But every day I got a letter and he would send me a little cigar box once a week with plastic baby bottles full of whiskey. So, he'd put in the baby bottles and then he'd stuff [inaudible] with popcorn so that they wouldn't break or anything. And I would get this cigar box with two baby bottles full of whiskey maybe once a week or once a month for mail call. And sometimes I'd get it out in the bush when we were out in some operation on a hill and they dropped some mail and all of a sudden, I got whiskey [laughter]. And he sent me a little cans of Vienna sausage to have. And he was always sending me little things, to know that he cared, that he was thinking about me. That meant a lot to me while I was over there.

REPUCCI: So what, do you remember, exactly when you flew to Vietnam and can maybe speak a little bit about your trip, if you remember?

CASSIDY: I don't remember. I don't remember leaving the United States. I remember my brother driving me to the airport. I don't remember what airport, it was probably a little airport in New Haven, but I was hungover and, I had been out partying real hard the night before, so I was starry-eyed. I was hung

over. He drove me to the airport, dropped me off with my sea bag and off I went. And I remember landing.

All I remember is coming into Vietnam. I remember landing in Da Nang and feeling very nervous that they weren't handing out weapons on the airport. We're in a commercial plane. I'm in a Pan Am with stewardesses and pilots, and all military, but we're landing in Da Nang, Vietnam, and I'm thinking they're going to be shooting out the window, how come we don't have weapons? I'm going to be leaving the airplane without a weapon.

Well, it was like any other airport, they had a terminal. There was nothing going on. But I didn't know that. I didn't know it was a regular airport. So we landed and, it was sort of nervous. I didn't know what to expect. And then we ended up, I think we had, we might've had a week of climatization, which was, they got you used to the really hot weather, cause it was around a hundred, or above a hundred every day. And, so they'd let you sort of hang around in a Battalion Medical Area where you did small jobs for about three or four days to get used to the heat. And then you were assigned, to a unit and--that procedure I remember very well cause we were in line, all Corpsmen, all Navy Corpsmen.

And they said, okay, you've got to tell us, you can request something if you want to. So the guy's there and I said: I don't know what the hell to request. I don't know what Marine units there are. And the guy said, request the air wing, cause if you get in the air wing, it's nice duty. They have PX, they have a beer hall, they got hot food. So the guy in front of me said air wing. And the guy went down the list: oh, yup, no problem. They need somebody on the air wing, you go report to here, blah, blah, blah, blah. I went in, what do you want? I said air wing. Uhhp, the air wing's all full, but they need Corpsmen for Kilo Company, Third Battalion, First Marines. They're on the Laotian border. There's going to be a helicopter here tomorrow morning to pick you up, cause they're in combat out in the--

I want to go to air wing. No, no, no. You're not going air wing, you're going out on the Carmac, sit there. So, I spent a day sitting on my sea bag. Actually, it wasn't even a sea bag, I was going to combat, so I didn't have any sea bag. I was ready to go out to combat. So I sat there and a helicopter landed the next day I think, and picked me up and drove me--flew me and supplies out on the Laotian border, which was where my Company of Marines were in combat, they were out on the hill. And when we came in and were landing the pilot, I was in a chopper, I remember they said: feel free to return fire when we land. I said what? What do you mean return fire?

I had a .45, that's all I had. And the other guys here, there was a machine gunner in the window and we were getting some sniper fire, and the machine gunner's barking out a .50 caliber and he's dropping me off to start my tour. I'm like shitting my pants is what I'm doing, like, this is the real deal. So that was the way I started and I'm like a new kid, I'm walking and start: oh, where do I go? Just get up there and go up the hill and--that's where the Marines are, go up that, there you go up. There you go. You'll figure it out. Go ahead. See you later [laughter].

REPUCCI: Do you remember the attitude of how the guys were feeling or around you at Da Nang at the time, before, right before you--?

CASSIDY: Before I left? Yeah.

REPUCCI: [Continuing question] were assigned to the 3/1?

CASSIDY: I don't know, I guess, I don't remember. I think everybody was pretty nonchalant and pretty--because it really was a very, it was like a big airport, and it was a big military complex. You felt pretty safe. Occasionally they might get rockets coming in and an explosion, but you were pretty safe. They--you could, there wasn't, you weren't going to get overrun, you weren't, you didn't even think you were going to get killed. So people were, I think sort of nonchalant about things.

` It was--there were like two different wars. There was the war where you're actually fighting. And then there was the war where people were in the area with—man, they're having the fucking time of their life. They're eating hot food. They got hookers, they got women, they got booze, they got drugs. They're rocking and rolling, and I'm out here seeing war. I'm out here in the jungle eatin' C-Rats, trying to survive day to day. We're in the same war. We're both in Vietnam, but there was this area, it's in the rear. They, oh--we'd say back in the rear with a cold beer. That's where it was. And in the rear you were safe. So the feeling back in Da Nang in the airport was sort of safe. It was sort of an easy place to be. It wasn't that big a deal. You were away from home, but they had a PX, they had cold beer, they had food, they had--you could go and buy shaving cream and a razor and a radio and you could buy all that shit. Cigarettes, you could get all the essentials [laughter].

So it was pretty easy until I got in that helicopter, and then the world changed [laughter].

REPUCCI: Do you remember, just for the purpose of dates, do you remember around what month that was?

CASSIDY: I don't. It probably was, I don't remember. I'm gonna, I[t] probably was, it was really the first month that I was in Vietnam, and I don't remember, I was going to look just to see, I had my discharge papers, but I think it was in July or August of '68. And that's when I got there. And I immediately went out to the bush. It was a week or two of, maybe a week at the most of messing around. And then I was out in the field.

REPUCCI: Do you want to take a quick break and we can just pause for a second and come back?

CASSIDY: Sure. That sounds fine. Does that work for you?

REPUCCI: Yeah, absolutely.

CASSIDY: Great. Great. Sure.

[BREAK]

REPUCCI: Alright. We are back with the Dartmouth Vietnam Project interview with Mr. Jack Cassidy. It is 2/13/2020 [February 13, 2020]. I am Dominic Repucci and we're back in Baker-Berry Room 406 [Dartmouth College Library, Hanover, NH]. So, I think a good place for us to start is--we kind of ended with you July/August, 1968 being assigned, and flying on a helicopter out to Kilo Company of the 3/1.

Can you speak a little bit more on what it was like right when you got there?

CASSIDY: Yeah, they were on a hill in an area called An Hoa [Vietnam]. No, that wasn't An Hoa. That was, that's right, that wasn't An Hoa. Thuong Duc [Vietnam]. That's the name of the village in Vietnam, it was called Thuong Duc. And that was the name of the river that ran across it. And we were on, right on the Laotian border and we're on a hill, that was sort of nothing on top of the hill, it was pretty much bald. And we had dug trenches around so that there was foxholes and a trench around the top of the hill, and there were some sandbag bunkers. And then there were a couple of small tents that were just a couple of ponchos that were strung together to just shade it and get you out of the rain. And that was the base of operations.

And then we would go off on daytime ambushes and, and recon missions to go up into the mountains. It was right near the Ho Chi Minh Trail. So we could see mountains that were way, way up. They were way above us and what's called triple canopy, which means there were three different layers of growth. So that once you went into the jungle, once you went into the hills, you never saw the sunlight again, even though the sun was out, it

was dark, totally dark, and you--and we would just run patrols up these hills during the day, if you, if that was your day to run a patrol. So, they might send one platoon out one day and then another platoon the other day and one platoon to rest and the other platoon would do security around the hill.

So that's sort of what our time was like there, was going on patrols. But it was real jungle. It was really thick jungle. They had Rock Apes, which were small apes that were probably about three foot, three and a half feet tall, and they would swing on vines and we would be climbing up these mountains through the jungle along--there'd be a waterfall and it'd be climbing over and all of a sudden you'd hear something and if you heard any noise, you're trying to be quiet. If you heard any noise, you were, you're, the Marines were lock and loaded, they were ready to blow somebody away. And these apes would come swingin' through the jungle on the vines, screeching and you wouldn't know whether it was the enemy attacking you or [inaudible], you're just ready to blow them away, and it's a Rock Ape, come running out.

So they were weird and they often, they got shot a couple of times because then nobody knew whether it was a person or a Rock Ape. It was really jungle. And we didn't have too much combat. I get that we probably made contact with the enemy once while I was with 'em, where we got ambushed and one guy was shot and wounded, and we had to get him out of there. But it was rugged terrain, that was the hard part about that. We had to carry his body way down the hill. He wasn't killed, but we had to bring him down on a litter because there was no helicopters. You couldn't get 'em in.

You were on the side of a mountain. It was triple canopy. They didn't know where you were. We had Marines have to climb up and cut with a machete, cut away branches all the way up to the top, so that you could shoot a flare up out of the triple canopy, so that the helicopter, the Medevac who's up there somewhere, you could hear him, could see where you are and he could drop down a hoist and try to take the Medevac out of the jungle. But there was no way to know. It was just impenetrable. You couldn't, you couldn't see or get into it. So it was very rugged. It was hard duty. And I remember I was out of shape and I remember having seven canteens and I would drink all seven canteens within the first two hours of the hike.

And we'd be humping for the whole day. We'd go there at sunrise, we wouldn't come out of the jungle until night, or sometimes we'd spend the night in the jungle. But the Marines would carry two canteens and that's all the water they needed. But I was not in shape, so I would drink seven canteens in about an hour and then I'd be dehydrated and I'd stop and I'd

say I can't fucking go on. I can't do it. And they'd go come on Doc, you gotta. We can't leave you. And so they'd share their canteen with me, they'd share their water. They'd keep me going. I was really in bad shape and, it was really rugged for the first couple of weeks.

But after a couple of weeks, I got in shape and then I started to feel a little bit--then I started to get a little cocky. I don't need all the water. I take two canteens. I'd hump with the Marines, I'd sort of push them a little bit. Come on, let's go, Doc can make it up this hill, let's go. So, but I dragged--I really was hurting the first couple of weeks, they had to drag my ass everywhere. And the guys that I still see once in awhile always remind me of those first couple of weeks. I was 230 pounds, out of shape. Again, I hadn't done any walking and no running and we were climbing all day long with a pack, up, hand over, we were on all fours climbing through the jungle and I was just exhausted. Heat--just, I couldn't go any further many times, but they wouldn't let you stay there, so.

REPUCCI: Could you speak a little about--I know you carried seven canteens. What kind of other things did you carry with you?

CASSIDY: You carried--I carried my medical pack, which was called a Unit One. So, that had a lot of surgical that had: battle dressings, a lot of surgical instruments for suturing and snaps for tying off of vessels that were hemorrhaging, tourniquets. I'd have a couple of cans of plasma, which was like IV fluid. Morphine, had a lot of morphine, Syrettes. I carried my .45. Later on, I carried an M-16 when I got a little bit grungy, I acted more like a Marine. Once you got seasoned, you got to be there for a few months, you started to get a little cocky and grungy. I carried an M-16 because I figured, I felt like if it came to a firefight, I was going to shoot too, I wasn't gonna just be a Corpsman.

When I started out, I was just a Corpsman. I wasn't going to fire any weapons cause that's not what I was trained to do. They didn't get me there to fight. They got me to patch people up. So that's what I should concentrate on. And that's what I did. But, later on I started to get a little cocky. But that's basically all you--en we went on these kinds of an ambush, we wouldn't even wear a flak jacket because it was so hot, and we would be in the jungle. So we all--we didn't wear a helmet, we wore a soft hat. We just had fatigues on, just like a shirt. Because we had to go light. It was so hot. And it made for easier moving.

But if something happened, you didn't have any protection. If the grenade went off, the shrapnel, you were in trouble. With a flak jacket, your chest was protected, your helmet, your head was. So, but that's mainly what I had, was just the Unit One, Canteens. If we were going to be out, we might carry a pack, one C Ration, each meal would come in a box. So if

you were going to be out for a day, your pack might have one or two C Rations, enough for like a lunch or something at supper time. You'd be able to eat something. There wasn't meals, it was just, you'd stop and say okay, we got, this looks like a good spot. We got 20 minutes. Let's eat. It wasn't like you're eating lunch or dinner. It was food. It was all the same thing. It didn't matter what it was. So you'd bring some food along and that was it. Yeah, that was pretty much all you carried.

REPUCCI: And so you were with Kilo Company--

CASSIDY: Yeah.

REPUCCI: And it must be broken down a little bit more than that, right? Like you might've been assigned to a particular platoon or?

CASSIDY: Yeah. Yes, you're right. Kilo company had three platoons. Did it have three platoons? Yeah it had three platoons and I was with one platoon. They would have two Corpsmen for each platoon at full strength. If you lost somebody, then you were down to one Corpsman. If another Corpsman got killed or wounded, maybe there'd be one Corpsman to share between two platoons. But everything was in flux. As you lost Marines and as you got new Marines, things would move around. So there were times when there was two of us and there were times where there would only be myself for two platoons. So I would go out on--I remember times where I'd go out on an ambush at night, spend all night, come walking back in and the daytime patrol was going out and I would just walk, I would just go out with them on a daytime patrol.

I wouldn't sleep because they had nobody. And I knew they were going to hit some shit, so they needed to have a Corpsman, cause the Marines didn't know shit about patching each other up. They do now, but they didn't then. They were, they had no training in first aid. So, if they got shot, and somebody got wounded, if the Corpsman wasn't there, they were going to bleed to death. So, they liked it when the Corpsman was there, they wanted the Doc. They protected their Corpsmen, a lot. They looked out for me, they'd carry my Unit One, they'd carry my water, they'd push me up the hill. They made sure that I was safe at all times. They would take a round before I would take a round, they really protected their Corpsmen.

It mainly was one platoon that I was with. That's who I spent most of my time with. So I got to know those guys pretty well. But again, it was a lot of flux because people would either rotate out, meaning their time in Vietnam was up and they'd be going home and somebody else--or if they got wounded and hit, then they were out too. So it's not like it is now. It was--people did not stay with the same unit and the unit moved in and out as a

unit. The unit would stay there for five years and people would move in and out, but the unit would stay. And that's not the way it's run now. So, Afghanistan and Iraq, those wars are done where you go in as a group and you go out as a group and that's a better way to do it because there's more cohesion.

You get--we're together, we're a fighting team. We were going in together and we're getting the hell out of here together. But in Vietnam it wasn't that way. You were just a group of people and Kilo Company stayed there for five years or eight years and people would just come in and out, Commanding Officers would rotate, troops would come in and out, Corpsmen would come in and out. So that wasn't the best way to do it. They had more cohesion when you come in and out all together. So I was with one platoon basically. Yeah.

REPUCCI: What'd you think of the guys you were with? The enlisted—sorry to interrupt, the enlisted guys?

CASSIDY: Yeah, they were an interesting, they were a great bunch of guys. They were from everywhere. It was my first exposure to a lot of these people. I had never been exposed. People mainly from the South. Lot of Southern boys are in the Marine Corps. And I'd never been exposed to Southern people, and they were different. They were different than Northern boys. Most of, a lot of them were racist. A lot of them were, they were, some Texas guys and from Mississippi and Alabama and a lot of those guys were racist. They got along with the Blacks, but they didn't like ‘em. They got along with the Native Americans, but they didn't like ‘em. And sometimes they told them they didn't like them, and sometimes the Blacks told them they didn't like them. And the Native Americans told them [inaudible]. So we all got along well in combat. There were times when there wasn't combat, which was a lot of the time, when people's backgrounds would get in the way.

And there was a lot of that. We had a couple of racist guys, a couple Sergeants who were from Texas and another guy from down South, down in Mississippi. And they weren't the nicest guys. They were nice for me. They always were great for me, to the Corpsmen, but to each other, it was a different. I wasn't used to racism. I didn't grow up with it. I didn't know it. And some of the Blacks were inner city Blacks. They were hardcore dudes. They were tough dudes from Chicago, New York, inner city. So they weren't fucking around, they’d shoot ‘em. And there were people dying because they, if they say the wrong thing, they weren't gonna wake up in the next day.

They were in combat—they--shit happens. Somebody’s killed, who knows who shot him. So there was that stuff that could, that could happen. It

never happened, but it was potential for that to happen. So people had to sort of watch out how far they'd push things with each other. But there was this undertone in the rear of racism. Never with me because I was special. I was the Corpsman. I was different. I was treated like a different guy. I was the Navy guy, I was a Corpsman, so it was like they would confide in me because I was like, wasn't one of them. I wasn't a Marine, I was different. So, yeah, they were good guys.

But the Southern boys were hard for me to get close to because it was just a different. It was a hunting, fishing background, bayous, people brought up in the bayous, brought up, killing rabbits and eatin' rabbits. Shit in New Haven, we didn't kill rabbits and eat rabbits, we went there to grocery store. Then these people, there's some of these guys, most of the food they got, they hunted and fished for. They didn't go to grocery stores, they grew up in the South. So it was different for me. But again, it was an experience. It was people I would've never met otherwise. So, in retrospect it was a chance for me to meet another group of people I would've never known.

REPUCCI: What did you—and speaking on kind of this, like race relations during the time

CASSIDY: Mhm.

REPUCCI: We--we've talked a little bit about what we mentioned once, the assassination of Dr. Martin Luther King.

CASSIDY: Mhm.

REPUCCI: What was, and that might've been a little bit before you left, but what was that like? What was the sentiment around there?

CASSIDY: Well, when it happened, let's see, he was killed in, it was right around when I left. I don't remember whether I was over in Nam at the time, but I don't think I was. I think I was still in the States because I remember the fear of an all-out race war. The fear was race war, not a riot, a war. It was going to be Blacks against Whites, fighting everywhere. And that was the fear. Not just Memphis, it was going to be Washington, DC, New York, major cities. And that was the biggest fear. And that's what I remember. Like, oh shit. Oh my God, look, what did this guy do? There's, it's going to be a powder keg. All of this stuff was leading up to it, and then this, it was all of the stuff that was going on in Memphis, the burning, the blowing up the church, the kids who were killed, the protesters who were murdered. There was the dogs that were let loose on the marchers down South.

There was all these bad things that are going on. But when Martin Luther King was killed, it was like, oh boy, we're fucked. This is going to be a war. And that's what I thought. And the only reason there wasn't a war, I remember Bobby Kennedy. Bobby Kennedy went out and spoke. He went down to Memphis and he spoke to all of, cause, he, cause Martin Luther King was there to lead the protest for the garbage collectors. That's what he was doing in Memphis. There was going to be a big march and there was thousands of garbage collectors and thousands of people who are coming into Memphis for this big march. And there was going to be a real all out riot. And Bobby Kennedy flew in and spoke to 'em, and he spoke on television and that really--I think quieted, there was, there was riots in Watts [Los Angeles, CA], there were riots in New York.

There were whole areas that were burning, whole sections of the city were just on fire. You couldn't go in areas. If you drove in there, you might get killed. I remember a guy getting pulled out of a truck and, maybe it was in Watts, who was beaten to death with a fire extinguisher. It was all out war, and that's what we thought was gonna happen. But the riots, some of the riots happened, but it wasn't all out war. And, things quieted down, I think. And I think Bobby Kennedy had a lot to do with that. The Blacks really respected him, the Black community, not just Blacks, but the NAACP, and they really, he was a champion for the Blacks.

REPUCCI: One more question before we get back into your experience in Vietnam.

CASSIDY: Sure.

REPUCCI: What was it like when, when Bobby Kennedy was killed then?

CASSIDY: Yeah. It was the same sorta, it was just another assassination. Where was it going to end? I think it was a feeling of what next? What, what's next to go? His brother, him, Martin Luther King all within a short period of time. I don't think, there wasn't a lot of potential for violence when Bobby Kennedy was killed. But I think it was a feeling like the country's in trouble. We're in trouble from a moral standpoint. And I think it was, when Martin Luther King was killed, it was a fear of war. We're going to be at war with each other. And when Bobby Kennedy was killed, it was more just a feeling like there's just no more moral fiber. It's out of control.

And, as bad as politically things get now, sometimes older folks like myself can say, I remember when shit was worse. I'm not a big fan of our President [Donald J. Trump] and I can say I remember when there was a lot of bad stuff going on. And we got through it. So there was hope, you just persevere, keep going, put one foot in front of the other, don't give up, that's what these guys said. That was their mantra. We keep going. We

keep moving forward, Martin Luther, we keep going, don't worry about it. Suck it up, let's go. And that, that was important.

REPUCCI: How did you feel that Johnson was handling all of this?

CASSIDY: I don't remember. I don't think I remembered. It was--there wasn't much talked about back then, they didn't have a lot of reporters who knew the inside scoop. There wasn't social media, reporters pretty much wrote what they were told. You pretty much accepted what people said as fact. So if Johnson came on and when he was either talking about the war or about the assassinations, I never thought badly of him because he would sound okay. I didn't know about some of the undertones and things going. I didn't know about the history. Sort of the history comes later. It seems to me, not being, not a history person, but it seems like stuff comes out later--they say we're not going to know what things are like for another 15, 20 years.

We're not going to know what really happened now for 15 or 20 years. And that seems to be true, that's when the stuff came out. But what I remember was, every, the sort of little that I remember about him was that, I just believed what he said and he was trying to be a calming influence. So I didn't have any reason to doubt him, cause there wasn't a lot of people who were--people wouldn't talk about John Kennedy having affairs. Everybody knew he was having sex with Marilyn Monroe and all these other broads in Cuba and he was banging all these--he was having a great time. Nobody would write it. Nobody ever heard about it. Nobody heard. It was in the open, but the deal was that if you were a reporter and you were following him, you didn't write that stuff.

You knew it, but you didn't write it. And there was just, it was unspoken, and nobody ever wrote it. Nobody talked about it. You didn't know about it for years later. So it's not like today. Today they stubbed their toe and it's on social media, it's on everything. And people, we seem to know it a lot quicker. But all of this stuff was--we didn't know what these politicians were thinking, in private and that--then we hear what they--little tapes or things come up like this is what he said and nobody knew any of this stuff when we were listening.

REPUCCI: So back to your Platoon.

CASSIDY: Yeah.

REPUCCI: Do you remember any very specific incidents of racial tension?

CASSIDY: Yes. Yeah, I remember, on that hill up at Thuong Duc [Vietnam], they would do what's called fan firing. Like every once in a while, they'd just go

out and they'd fan fire. So they'd have the Marines go out, because they hadn't used their weapons and it's been raining and they'd go out. Okay. You guys go out and fan fire. So you'd just go out and fire some rounds. And the one that we had--anybody who was an Indian, Native American was called Chief. That's what they were, Chief. You were Chief Alpha, Chief Bravo, Chief Charlie. If there was three Indians, one was Chief Alpha, Bravo, Charlie. So there was a Sergeant [Bob] Lowery who was from Texas, and Chief was drunk. One of the Chiefs, he was a Blooper man, he was a grenade launcher. He had what looked like a little shotgun, but it was wide.

It would fire a blooper, fire a grenade. And he was out fan firing, and the Sergeant went up, he was an enlisted, he was like a Corporal, and he went up and said: hey Chief, you're drunk. And Bob, he was giving 'em shit. And Chief said: Sergeant Lowery, no, you don't be fucking with me. And Lowery got right into his face and said: You, you scum, you red skin, you don't have the balls to shoot me, you ni--Indian, you don't. And he was right in his face about it: red skin, Indian. [Motions over mouth to demonstrate Sergeant Lowery's sound effects]. And I remember I was sitting over where we had a little couple of tent canopies together and I was heating up some tea, coffee or something, and somebody came runnin' over and said: Doc, you better get over there cause Chief's gonna kill Sergeant Lowery, he's going to kill him.

And I remember walking up and there was the Chief with the blooper right-- pointed right at his chest. And Lowery's telling him: you don't have the balls to pull that trigger. And I looked and I said: don't call me because he pulls that trigger, ain't nothing I'm going to do, cause he's going to die. And he didn't, I thought he was going to kill him, and he didn't. He put the gun down and he put down his blooper. Lowery was a racist. And my Commanding Officer called him on it. My Platoon Commander was a Lieutenant, a Lieutenant Olsen. And he was from New York City and he called out guys when they were racist. And when they got back to the States and he was stationed together with Lowery, like in Camp Lejeune or something, he laced into him and court-martialed him for being a racist.

So, that stuff happened. There were stuff with the Blacks and the Whites that were touch and go at times, or they'd start using words and you'd sort of have to separate them. Cause these guys all got live ammunition. These are throwing insults at people with automatic weapons and grenades and sometimes alcohol. They tried to keep alcohol away from 'em. They'd let him have beer once in a while, but they didn't get any booze, unless you were a Sergeant or above. So if you mixed alcohol in with it, you had a real problem.

It wasn't terrible. And again, in combat, there was less of it. Whenever the shit hit the fan, everybody stuck together. We were all looking out for each other. Sergeant Lowery would help the Chief and would help a Black man in combat.

But once they got into the rear, the Southern boys would get together, the Black inner-city boys would get together. And that was, again, that was the soul brother time, that was soul time. They would have the soul brother--we all--this was all new brother [demonstrating handshakes, fist bumps]: hey bro, this shit, that was Black shit. White people wouldn't talk like that. But they did. The Black dudes would get together, they'd call them SPLIB dudes in the Marines. You were a SPLIB dude. SPLIB meant you were Black. And they would get together and they'd be saying: them fucking white boys, man, we've got to get that Sergeant Lowery. We got to get to them Southern boys. And there was this tension. But again, when you were out in the field and you're in a patrol or you're in combat, there was none of that.

It was like once you were in trouble, that all melted away. It was only the rear that got that.

REPUCCI: You briefly mentioned your Lieutenant.

CASSIDY: Yep.

REPUCCI: What did you think of like the lower level officers who were with you?

CASSIDY: I thought the lower level officers were great. Yeah, they were really good. They were very, they were oriented. They were, the infantryman was their responsibility. They took it personally that they were trying to get us home alive. That was their job. They were trying to get the enemy. But you know what? If it came to killing the enemy or having you get killed, fuck it, we don't need to kill him, let's just get you home. That's what Sergeant Olsen, I mean, Lieutenant Olsen felt. And I've seen him since then and he said: I felt my job was to get you guys home.

And they were great. Once they got above that Lieutenant level, once they got to Company Commander, the Commander of Kilo Company and above--a lot of that was driven by a desire to get numbers and to get kills, and to get a lot of recognition for your unit by taking a hill or being in a lot of combat or getting confirmed kills. They'd ask us to get body counts. They'd say, okay, we got hit and we just got an ambush. Go out and count the bodies. Fuck you. We're not, fuck you, we're not going out there. They know where we are. We just fucking had a firefight here. The Gooks know where we are. We've got to get the hell out of here. They're outnumbered to us. And they'd say no, go count 'em. Go count bodies.

Oh yeah, we're going to count bodies. Right. Okay. What number you want to hear? 10, 20? Pick a number, you pick a number today. We didn't give a shit, but that was--the upper echelon wanted the numbers and wanted recognition when the Platoon Commanders, which were Lieutenants, were all about the men, they were, they would never eat until we ate. The enlisted man ate first, the Lieutenants ate second. I remember in Thuong Duc, they flew in hot food and there was a tank on top. So one tank on the hill, and they brought in hot--and the tanks were separate from us. So they were a separate unit. So they would bring in, they flew a helicopter, brought in hot food for the tank guys and for the officers. So they passed the word around through the trenches.

Lieutenant Olsen, you can go get hot chow. We got hot food for the officers. He said: what about my men? Do you have a hot food for the men? No no, we don't have hot for the men. We just have, the officers going to have hot food. He said: I'm not eating. My men get hot food? I'll eat. If they don't, until they eat, I don't eat. He didn't go up and eat. He said: give it to somebody else. I don't give a shit what you do with it. That's the way they ran. That's the way they rolled, which is--that's cool That's what you want for a Commanding Officer. And your Commanding Officer, he was like our Commanding Officer, he was in charge of our Platoon--the big guy was--they often were not--their motives.

Not always. And I don't think, I think that's an--I don't want to overgeneralize. The Commanding Officer of Kilo before I got there was a wonderful guy and did some really great things and saved a lot of lives and he runs our reunions all the time. My Commanding Officer that I was there, was a jerk, and he sent the Marines back after we left this hill. We were here for about maybe four or five months on that hill, running patrols. And we didn't get hit a lot, just sporadically. We would get in some firefights, but we knew the enemy was all around us and these mountains. We were above the river down below, but these mountains were--we knew it was their territory. But what they were doing was they knew right where we were and they were judging by rounds how far--they'd send in mortars and they could adjust.

They were just waitin'. Well, we left there and we gave that hill to the South Vietnamese Army [ARVN]. So they came in and took over the hill. We went back to battalion area. We landed in battalion area after being five months out there in the hill. And our Commanding Officer said: I just got a call saying that we left the place like a shit house. There's shit all over the hill. And the ARVN Commanding Officer said that we got to come back. I gotta send back a squad to clean up the shit that we left on the hill. So a squad of Marines and a Corpsman got back on the helicopter, flew back out to the Laotian, to this hill, on the Laotian border, landed, guys got out and they started policing up the hill and they got killed.

They got whacked. The mortars came through. They blew up the helicopter. They killed the Corpsman. They killed five or six guys. One guy lost both of his legs. They said: as soon as the first rocket hit, the first mortar hit, every round was right on the hill. They knew right where everybody was. And this, the Commanding Officer should have never sent those guys back. He should've said fuck you. Clean it up yourself. My Marines were there to fight. Now you clean it up. We've been there for five months. I'm not going back. That's what he should've said. And he didn't. And to this day, he feels bad about it. I see him once in a while and he's a drunk today and he's a drunk because he probably can't get over that; sending those Marines back.

They died, and they died because of him. That was a bad call, but it was a bad call that cost somebody their life, a bunch of guys. So, yeah, some of those guys were good and some were shitty, but when you were shitty, people lost their lives, so.

REPUCCI: Do you remember the first time that you really experienced combat?

CASSIDY: Yeah, I guess, well that's sort of hard. I don't remember. I guess the first real combat was not until An Hoa [Vietnam], which was where I where I was when--that was towards the end of my time out in the bush, out in the field, because what they did, Corpsmen usually spent, if we were there for a year, we might spend eight or nine months or 10 months in the bush and then the last two months we would back--we'd be-- they'd bring us back to a battalion aid station. And that was again, inside of a walled perimeter, protected. And we would run in, went back in battalion aid, you would do sick call and the Marines would come in for different stuff, but it was pretty easy duty. Once in a while rockets would come in and maybe somebody would be sniper fire. But it wasn't like being out in the bush.

But An Hoa was a difficult area where we had a lot of combat and that was probably the first time. This area in Thuong Duc was very scary and hard terrain to walk. But there was only maybe two or three times that we had a short burst of interacting with the enemy, and then they disappeared. They went in the jungle, they'd open fire, throw a grenade and [mimics explosion noise]. Things would happen quick, it'd be yelling [mimics men yelling in combat], and that was it. And then they were gone.

But in An Hoa they were there, every day you would have contact with the enemy and you were getting sniper fire, and they were popping up in holes. And a lot of booby traps and that was a lot of--An Hoa was a lot of booby traps. The whole place was booby trapped. We were not supposed to. I remember we were leaving, they had stationed us in a Battalion area and we were going to be going out to—An Hoa had a large airport, so it was a big town, it's not a town, it was a big staging area for the Marines.

So artillery would go in there, and big large aircraft would land there. So they were--we were told that we were going to be doing security perimeter for the airport for a month or two.

So the helicopters are going to pick us up, Kilo Company. We're going to go out and we were getting on the helicopters and our Commanding Officer for Third Battalion, First Marines was there shaking our hands getting on the helicopter. And I said: wait a minute. I said to my buddy: what the hell is this guy? Big honcho's here, shaking our hands to go take care of an air field? Something's not right. Well, we landed in An Hoa and they said: uhp, orders are changed. We're not going to go do perimeter on the airbase. We're going to go out in the bush. So we're going up into the mountains and we're going to go along the road and we're going to try to patrol the whole valley of An Hoa.

And there was a lot of Marines in An Hoa. The road was used to come in and out. An Hoa was a major thoroughfare to bring resupplies in. So there were periodic bridges. Maybe there'd be two or three miles, then a bridge, two or three miles, then another bridge. The Marines would hold the bridge, they'd have bunkers, machine guns, but everything else between this bridge and that bridge, that was Indian country. It was theirs; it was wild. So at nighttime--pretty good during the day, but at nighttime it was, they were everywhere. A they had booby traps everywhere. That was where we lost a lot of guys. And that was the first time where at nighttime I would get a guy who, we had had an explosion, somebody tripped a booby trap and he lost his legs. And we're on a rice patty, and it's dark, there's nothing, and then you'd hear an explosion and you'd hear the word come down: Corpsman up, Corpsman up, Doc, we need you up here.

And it's like, and then they say: watch your step. It's all fucking booby trapped. And it's pitch black and you're trying to walk on this little patty dike. And I remember getting to a point where a couple Marines were there and he said: Doc, hold it up and you can't. Everybody's trying to be quiet. They would take toilet paper and they'd found a trip wire. They laid shit paper, white shit paper over the trip wire so that I could see it, and said: watch the shit paper. So if I look closely, I could see the white and it's take one foot over and step it over the trip wire. And I'd have to, then I had to take care of a casualty in the dark with no light who had both of his legs blown off. And I had to start an IV in the dark.

I had no light. I was able to tourniquet him and I saved him, which was, I was very proud of. I saved the guy and I went on to see him afterwards. I saw him in, both in Philadelphia Naval Hospital and I saw him in Tennessee. He got married, he had a couple of kids and he's one that named his kids after me. And he was really a good guy. And he was 17 years old when he joined the Marine Corps. He lied about his age to go in

the Marines and fight. And when he lost both of his legs and I saw him in Philadelphia Naval Hospital, his whole body was this big [demonstrating length of body on table, maybe 2.5-3 feet]. It was like a large loaf of bread, that's how big he was. His legs were blown off right at his pelvis.

And he was a little guy, a little Southern guy, red hair and just--but tough as fucking nails, tough as a bastard. But he, but looking at him in bed, it looked like a loaf of bread. I remember going in and seeing--there was nothing left of him. He was just all blown apart. But he survived. He did. So that was, An Hoa, was my combat. That was my time of really a lot of guys got hit. I had a bunch of them. We had an explosion of a, somebody tripped a mortar up in the trees and two of my buddies were killed and one of them lost his leg. And again, when they yell: Corpsman up, you got to go. And when the explosion goes, everybody goes down, every hunkers down. And sometimes there's some snipers cause they know if you tripped it, if there's an explosion over by that tree, if there's, the enemy is around, they'd hear the explosion, they start putting rounds in around the tree cause they know you tripped it, there's other Marines there, so you have to get there.

So I have to try to get there from here to there, but I know it's all booby trapped. So I remember just saying: what the fuck? You just get up and run. You run, you got to go. So you just get up and say: well, I hope if I trip something, I'm running fast enough that if it's a, just a grenade, I concerned about running it a little bit. I'll just get some shrapnel, but I won't get killed. I don't want to die. But if I get hit, it's not a big deal. But it was stuff like that almost every day. Every day there was casualties and Medevacs and yeah, so it was pretty, it was a rugged time. But I think these were the guys that I became the closest with, were from that area in An Hoa.

And I still know today, I have good friends that are still in touch with and guys that I patched up, I saved their life and I don't say that. They always say: oh Doc saved my life. Yeah yeah, well they saved my life every day. If they weren't there I would've been dead. So I just did what I know what I'm supposed to do. And it entailed sometimes saving somebody's life. But that's where I learned that I could save somebody's life, and I'm not that smart. I'm not a doctor. I'm not an MD. I never went to medical school, and here I was saving somebody's life, and it felt pretty god damn good. Like I was the man. I went back to Newton, Philadelphia Naval Hospital and I got out and I had seven Marines who were all lost their legs or arms.

They were all guys I took care of. And when I walked up the gangway to go see 'em in the ward, they were all in line singing the Marine Corps hymn, saluting me, walking up. Tears were running down my face. I said: wow, what a feeling that is. It's a great feeling. That's what had me go into

medicine. That was my career. It was medicine. But I wouldn't have got that feeling without the service, I wouldn't have got it anywhere else. I got this feeling like holy shit, I can make a difference. So it was an exciting time and it was a scary time.

I remember leaving. That's where I got out of the bush was in An Hoa. We were still on this operation. And I had lost one of my Corpsman, my buddy who was with me. The same area, somebody got hit with a, with a--the same big explosion. Two guys were killed. I was taking care of a couple of other guys. There was another, somebody tripped, another booby trap and the other Corpsman went over to Tex, and he got wounded. He was, everybody knew him. Every--Tex was a really great guy, was funny, he was a Corporal, he was enlisted. But the Corpsman went over, got him, put him over his shoulder, and was running back with him over his shoulder to get to the helicopter. He tripped the booby trap and both of them got killed. So I lost Tex and I lost the Corpsman, who was a buddy and now I'm the only Corpsman out there. So it was like I was all alone and I was doing it all. So I'm now getting my relief. I'm ready to get out of the bush.

So new Marines were being brought in. Actually, we had Marines who were, when we were in the rear before we went out to An Hoa, they were smoking dope, in the rear. We were in this battalion tank area. We were just doing security, but at nighttime the guys were smoking dope. So they found a bunch of them--they all, the MPs came in and made a big deal out of it. So they court-martialed maybe 12 or 15 Marines. So they told them they had to do what's called Bad Time. So they had six months in the Brig in Vietnam. Bad Time means that that six months you spend in the Brig doesn't count for your time in Vietnam. You've got to do a year. So that's Bad Time. So you've got to do another six months when you get out.

So they were in the Brig when we went to An Hoa and we lost so many Marines out in An Hoa that they told the guys in the Brig, your sentence has been commuted. You're all done. You're all set. You're released, you can get out. You're going back. You're goin' to An Hoa. And they said: no, no, we want to spend the rest of the time, we want to do our sentence. You gave us six months. We want to stay here in prison. Cause they knew we were getting our ass kicked. But they flew him out. They landed and the new Corpsman was there and we were getting--we were having some sniper fire and I was down laying down and somebody—a helicopter landed. They said: we got some new Marines. We got resupplies, Marines comin in, great! And somebody says: Doc, your relief is here. It's coming. You're going to the rear, you're getting out, time to go home.

I go: fuck, this is great, man! And here's this skinny little kid with big eyes like this [motions to demonstrate size of eyes]. Like uhhhh, and he doesn't

know where he is [laughter], and he's got his little unit one is .45 and he's looking around and I'm going: get down, get down on the ground. He gets down and crawls over to me and I remember the Sergeant saying to me: well Doc, you're going to spend a couple of days with him, showing him the ropes, right? About patrols, blah, blah, blah. I said: fuck you! I'm getting outta here. Here's all my morphine syringes. Here's my shit. I'm going. He said: well, how are you going to get out? The helicopter took off. He said: how you gonna get outta here?

I said: I'm going to walk back to the road and I'm going to wait till the tank comes by and I'm going to jump on a tank and I'm going to go back, get a ride in. And we're getting sniper—it's their territory. So it was a little risky, but I knew where the enemy was out here. The road was back here like the street [motioning to street outside window]. I was gonna get back to the street. And I went back to the street and I remember sticking out my thumb on the road in An Hoa, and tanks are coming down. A tank stops: so what the hell are you doing? Doc, what are you doing out here? Cause they knew I was a Corpsman, they could tell. I said: Well, I just got my relief. They said: you're fucking nuts. What if we didn't pick you up here? You'd die tonight. You'll never be around tomorrow morning. I said: I know. I figured somebody'd come by.

They said: get on the tank, we'll give you a ride. I jumped on a tank. They drove me five miles into the--I got on the helicopter, flew all the way back. So that's how I got out of the bush. But it was an exciting time, and getting out with this new Corpsman coming in, who didn't know anything. And, I just, I wasn't gonna spend any time. I said: I'm sorry. I guess I should spend a couple of days with you, but I can't, I gotta get out of here. I did my time, I survived. I don't know if I'll survive another day. Here's all my shit. See ya later [laughter]. And I gave him my morphine Syrettes and let 'em go [laughter].

REPUCCI: So what'd you think? What did you think of the new guys overall, the new Marines coming in while you were--this like cycle process?

CASSIDY: Yeah it was very strange. That's an interesting question because the new guys were usually point man for patrols. Point man is the guy that's walking--walking point is very dangerous [demonstrating that point is at the very front of the patrol with hands]. And that's the first guy up there. So, often that was the new guy. That was your job. So if you just got there, your first week, they'd say you're walking point and they would come in and they'd sort of--they'd be very, they're afraid. They'd look it. They'd look healthy. First of all, we didn't look healthy. We were washed out. We had the stare. People who were there in Nam for a while had this far away glaze in their eye. It was like the walking dead. They just had this stare

that you could tell they just emaciated and they just had this look. And these young guys didn't, they looked puffy, they looked strong.

And when the new guy would come in, they'd often want to talk to you, like: where are you from man? Where, where are you from? And: I'm from New Haven or blah blah blah, and I remember 'em, they'd come up to me and they'd say: hey, Doc, so where are you from? And I'd go: look, I don't want to know anything about you. I got pictures of my wife and my girlfriend. I said: I don't want to look at 'em, talk to me in about a month, if you're around. I got so tired of having people die, that I didn't want to be friends with anybody new because I didn't want to go through it. I said: go talk to your other new buddy, but don't talk to me, cause I don't have enough emotion left to deal with it.

And I'd be with my buddies, but the new guys, I didn't wanna have them around until they got around a week or two. And then I knew they were okay. They were going to make it. Some of these guys would be there a day, two days, five days, they'd get hit. They'd make a mistake or they'd get hit. I felt bad about it, later, that I didn't put more of me out there, wasn't more friendly. But you really get emotionally, you get wiped out after a couple of months, five, six months, turnover. So, the turnover was difficult. You just didn't want to make friends with new guys cause you didn't know how long they were going to make it.

So, yeah, that was the bad part about it. It was difficult. And at the end I was the veteran. At the end, I was more of a Marine than the Marines were. I could call in airstrikes. I could read maps better than the Marines. I could hump better than they could, most of 'em. I was like a Marine. I knew the shit. I learned it, and I was good at it, so I became sort of grungy. That term grungy means you're a seasoned veteran. And, I sorta liked that, but that took a while for me to get there [laughter]. But when I got there, it was fun.

I would call in airstrikes. I'd have squad leaders who'd be on a--and say--We're getting hit in this village. What are we on? They'd look at the maps, and say: Doc, come here, tell me, what are the coordinates? I got jets are coming in to hit, give me the coordinates. And I'd look at the map and I could see where we were. I could give them the coordinates, I could talk to the pilots, tell them where to drop the Napalm and drop the bombs. And they said: Who's calling in the airstrike? Doc. Doc? What the hell is Doc doing calling in the airstrike? Everybody laughed and they said: okay, fine. Who gives a shit? As long as it gets done. So yeah. The turnover was sometimes disheartening at the end of my tour.

REPUCCI: You mentioned—bringing back up a booby traps a little bit while you were in An Hoa, what were they typically like?

CASSIDY: Well, they were all different ones. There were some that were grenades and as simple as a hand grenade in a can with a pin pulled out and you'd, all you do is trip a wire and the grenade would come out, the spoon would fly and three seconds it would explode. There were very few that I saw that were bungee sticks and poisonous sticks and traps like a bear trap. They talked about those and other guys had talked about them, but I didn't see them. Mostly they were explosives. A lot of them were mines that were put just under the earth. And a lot of them were unexploded ordinance that we had. So, we were dropping so many bombs up North. They were carpet bombing North Vietnam. They would find--anything that wasn't exploded they would use.

So they would take, they would take a 500 pound bomb, take it apart and make all of these small little land mines and then send them down the Ho Chi Minh Trail, give them to people, have them dig a hole, put it down right there. And cause they know Americans are lazy, they will always walk the path of least resistance. If I have jungle here and jungle here and this is clear, that's where we're walking [motioning jungle on either side of a road]. But as we get to be a veteran, we're there a little while, we go, we ain't walkin' there, we're walking through the shit over here, cause I know we're not going to get killed over here. But they know that we're lazy. We will take the easy path. So that's where they put 'em. And then they put booby traps in. They would take a round and put it up in a tree and then put a trip wire down and. There was a lot of, mainly the ones I came around were a lot of explosives both on the ground and we had--one of my squad leaders who I'm very good friends with now still, who lost his legs over there in An Hoa, before he got hit, he was our blooper man.

And we had a Buffalo, we were getting hit with booby traps all the time. So we had sent six or eight guys had already been sent back and wounded, some dead. And the Lieutenant called him up, said: Manny, get up here. He said: see that Water Buffalo's out in the rice patty? There's a kid that's out there. He's fucking putting in booby traps. And we could see him, he would take the Water Buffalo and he'd go through the rice patty and he'd get down, be down. You could see him screwing around. He'd get back up on the Water Buffalo and go a little further and go back down. And we knew that's what he was doing, was setting booby traps along the--cause these patty dikes, that's where we walked. We didn't walk in the middle of the rice patty. And of course they knew where the booby traps were, they wouldn't walk on this one. It's like a little road, they knew where to go.

And he said: put a blooper out there and scare him, will ya? Put 'em near that Water Buffalo. Bob looked at him, he said: okay, and looked around and they could judge and he was a good blooper man. He could judge, poof [sound effect] and the blooper landed right on it, on the Water Buffalo's ass and blew this kid right off the fucking Water Buffalo. I'm sure

he killed him, and he probably killed the Water Buffalo too. And I remember Manny and turned to him and said: is that close enough Lieutenant? He said: That's just where I wanted you to put it. And I didn't feel bad at all. To this day, that was a kid who, who died from what we did.

But he was killing my troops. It had to be done. And I don't have any sympathy. That's what war is. And we see it all the time today. It's the same shit these guys are going through in Iraq and Afghanistan. The Marines are doing the same shit we did. Goin door to door and then if they kill a civilian, everybody's going to say: why did you? Well wait a minute, I know he's a kid, but he's setting booby traps. We see movies that we see this depicted in. They have to make a decision. Do I pull this trigger? Is that a round that he has, is that a booby trap that's behind his back? Is he going to explode it and kill all of my men?

These are hard decisions. And I always felt badly about that. Now I feel badly about it, but I don't lose any sleep over it because I would do it again the same way. I had nothing to do with it. I just was an observer. But I sort of, when it happened, I sort of said: great, good, fuck him. Fuck him. I care more about you guys. I don't care about that kid. Sorry he got killed but he shouldn't have been settin booby traps because that's--if you're going to play the game, you're going, you may die, cause we're dying, you may die. That's what war is. It's bad shit. So that was one of those unfortunate incidents that, sort of, that's war. That's war in a nutshell, and booby traps in a nutshell.

That's kids. Kids were setting them, mainly. I never saw 'em. That was the only one I saw somebody doing it. But a lot of the work was being done by kids. The Viet Cong would come into a village and say: this is what we want you to do and if you don't do it, we're going to kill you and we're going to kill your mother. We're going to kill your sister. So you go out and do this if you want your family to be alive. So they went out and they did it, they didn't have any choice.

REPUCCI: What did you think of the civilians you ran into at this time?

CASSIDY: In the villages, I liked the civilians. I liked the civilians when I knew they were either on our side or were neutral. There were some places where I didn't know, you didn't know who was who, and that was hard. You walked through a village, you'd see people and I didn't know 'em. They'd look at you, you'd look at them. I don't know whether they were going to pull a weapon out or whether they were--as soon as you walk through the word was spread. 15 Marines, one Corpsman, machine gun, two bloopers, heading around to hit this way. And then the enemy knows right where you are. So I didn't know who a civilian was. There was a couple of times where we would go to a village and set up an ambush at nighttime and I

got to know the people in that village and I would usually set up in the same house area in the front of this guy's house.

It was a little shack. It wasn't a house, it wasn't a real house like you think. It was just, it was a little couple corrugated--a little piece of metal, like metal roofing for, for a wall. It was just a hooch, it was a little hooch. But I got to know those people. I would occasionally have dinner. They would have something hot. They would serve it for me and I would occasionally take care of their kids. Kid had a fever, had an earache, I would look at 'em and I had antibiotics. They didn't have any antibiotics. So I'd give the kid antibiotics and, and they would have me take a look at their grandmother, and they took care of me. They were nice and those people were wonderful. I trusted them. I didn't think I was going to get murdered in the middle of the night.

But there wasn't a lot of that. You don't have that chance, there wasn't a lot of opportunities to go back and see the same people. Mostly it was walking through. You're always moving. Marines move. They don't stay still. The Marines are not made to take a hill and hold it. They're to take a hill and then take another hill. Let somebody else hold it, let the Army come in and hold it. The Marines are built to move quickly, assault quickly, take a hill and keep going. So we often were like, moving all the time.

REPUCCI: I have a quick question about--so sometimes you hear about weapons being not trustworthy and jamming. Was that prevalent with your Platoon?

CASSIDY: No. We didn't. From what I remember, these guys kept their weapons really clean, and every chance they had they would clean their weapon. And I don't remember weapons misfiring or jamming. I'm sure it happened. And again, I wouldn't know a lot of it because that's not what--I didn't fire 'em. I would occasionally, like I said, I carried an M-16 once in a while. I probably fired it two or three times. But the Marines would know more and I don't remember hearing it. I don't remember guys yelling and screaming about it. And you would have heard it a lot if the weapon was jamming. So I think the Marines are, the Marines above all are very disciplined. They know their weapon is their--it's--they're taught from bootcamp that this is more important than your wife, this is your woman, this is who you sleep with. This is who's, this is your woman--right here. And that woman? You gotta take care of her.

So they every chance they can, in the jungle they're taking it apart. They could take that M-16 apart with their eyes closed. The thing they'd carry with them was a cleaning kit. They may have one canteen, they may not bring ammo or they may not bring food, but they're going to bring a cleaning kit. So they kept that weapon--as long as you kept that weapon

clean, they worked pretty well. And they are disciplined. They're a disciplined group.

REPUCCI: You mentioned you used to call in airstrikes.

CASSIDY: Yeah.

REPUCCI: Doc called in an airstrike on occasion.

CASSIDY: Yeah, yeah.

REPUCCI: Did you know much about the use of like Napalm and?

CASSIDY: No, none of it. Didn't know anything about it. I saw it in action, but I didn't know anything about it. I never trained in it. They never talked about it. I never learned in Field Medical School. I just learned on the job. I learned what it was. I didn't know what 500-pound bombs were, 250-pound bombs. I didn't know what a battleship--if I called in artillery from the battleship, I didn't know what that meant. But, I learned. And there were times that you would call in for artillery and they would say: okay, we have, and they must have somebody with a master chart, with knowing what's available.

At any given time, there may be a battleship that's sitting off of the coast of Da Nang that's doing a fire mission. They're firing for some, in support of another operation. Well now those guns aren't being used. Or they could say: We got 105s that are, we got these big guns off the--we'll use those! Oh, okay. Oh, I don't know. But I don't know what their kill radius is. I don't know if we're going to get killed if that shell lands in that village. Cause I don't know. I don't know. I don't know anything about the rounds. And we called in rounds that came in from these ships and you could hear 'em whistle over the head and everybody's going: holy shit. And when we hit the ground, we were in a hole. And when that thing went off, there was shrapnel coming all over the place, all over us.

And we were 100, 200 yards from the village that we were hitting, and we were still getting shrapnel. But I didn't know anything about this stuff. I didn't know anything about Napalm. But I learned, once I saw what Napalm was, and it didn't make any difference to me. It was just, it was stuff. It was: whatever I have to do. What do you got? That's what happened: what do you got? We got some jets that are coming in with Napalm. Good. We got, jets that got 150-pound bombs. Good. Whatever you got, drop it so we can get the hell outta here. Cause if we don't move along, if we can't get through this village and get back before the sun goes down, we're dead. We're never going to get back. Cause once they get you in the dark, you're dead. They're going to get you. So you have to get

to a certain spot. You have to get out of an area. For us, when we were on patrols, it was a matter of getting to an area that's safe, relatively safe. Everything was--there were times where nowhere was safe, but you were dead meat if you were left out at night in An Hoa especially. They were running the area. So.

REPUCCI: Did you run into any use, or hear about use of Agent Orange or anything?

CASSIDY: Yeah, there was Agent Orange used at the first area I went to, which was An Hoa [meant Thuong Duc], that first hill. They used Agent Orange up all up along the Ho Chi Minh Trail. So they were using it up on the tops of the mountains. It was around, it was being used where I was. So I was exposed to Agent Orange.

REPUCCI: You mentioned a while ago, this is a little bit, shifted gears. You mentioned a while ago about how you left your first position in the bush that you were at, and then the ARVN came in after.

CASSIDY: Right.

REPUCCI: What did you think of those guys?

CASSIDY: We didn't trust ‘em. They weren't trustworthy. Occasionally, they were okay fighters when they had a fight. They really didn't seem to have a vested interest in, in the battle. If the going got tough, they were gone. Sometimes we'd set up perimeters at night, and we'd have one half of the circle and the ARVN would have the other half of the circle, cause we're setting up a 360 to protect our backs. And we’d get up in the morning and the word be passed down: the ARVN are gone. You got nobody behind you. Fuckers would come in the middle of the night, we're all dead. They’d just walk right up behind us and choose where we're sitting. They just get up, move in the middle of the night and never told anybody. So they were not reliable.

Now there were units that were very good in fighting. They were like either the ARVN Marines or Rangers. There were certain categories, I don't remember ‘em, but they were pretty good fighters. But in general, the ARVN were not very well equipped. They were not very motivated. If the enemy was there, they pretty much set down their weapons, put their hands up. If the North Vietnamese--see, there was the Viet Cong and then there was the NVA. So we fought both Viet Cong and NVA. The NVA were mainly up North along the DMZ. The Viet Cong were mainly down South. If the ARVN got up against the NVA, which was the North Vietnamese Army, most of them would just set down their guns and say: we don't want to fight. So I didn't really trust ‘em.

We also, we fought with ROK Marines, which were the Korean Marines, cause Koreans were there, and we fought with Australian Marines who fought in Vietnam. They were great. The Koreans were really good. They were tough dudes. You could count on the Korean Marines. They were like our Marines. They would not leave you. If they had your back, they had your back. They were militarily sound and so were the Australians. They were really trustworthy. That was the key. The ARVNs were not trustworthy.

REPUCCI: How'd you feel about the aptitude of the Viet Cong and then the NVA, separately, were they good fighting forces or?

CASSIDY: Yeah, I think the, I think the NVA were a pretty good fighting force. They were tough. The Viet Cong were sometimes ill-equipped. The Viet Cong wouldn't want to slug it out with ya. They didn't want to go toe to toe with the Marines. The North Vietnamese, the NVA would try to go toe to toe with you. They would slug it out. They would go and they would fight until they died. The Viet Cong would fight a little bit. If it got tough, they'd run away. Because that's what they were built for, hit and run. Just the little quick attack and get everybody to hunker down. They'd make your life miserable. That's what they wanted to do. Fuck with you. That's what they wanted to do.

They'd fuck with you enough so that you'd get discouraged and pissed off. But it worked. If week after week, if every day you sat down at the end of a long patrol and you wanted to just have a little something to eat, the sun's just getting ready to set, you're sending out--your guys are setting up for the--to set perimeter watches at night and all of a sudden some pecker head opens up with a couple of rounds and just keeps you pinned down until the sun goes down and it's dark, now you can't eat? You're pissed off. You're pissed off. I just want to eat, I want to have something to eat and this pecker head is driving me nuts. And that's what the Viet Cong did. They were like a little gnat, kept sticking to you. So yeah, that's the way I felt about 'em. I didn't have any strong feelings. But the North, the NVA were pretty military. They were pretty tough.

REPUCCI: Jumping back to the previous question about--you mentioned the ROK Marines and then the Australian Marines. Any specific examples of those guys really being good forces?

CASSIDY: No. I don't remember. I just of remember that you could always count on them. We would often, not often, but occasionally we were on a patrol with them or an operation with them. So an operation would be a bigger unit. If you went on an operation like this operation, this one, I forget the name of it [motioning to plaque he brought with him]. There was, Arizona territory, I think that was the name of the operation. Sometimes they would be--our

Kilo company, it might be the whole Third Battalion. Our whole battalion would go, that would be like six Companies of Marines, plus some ROK Marines plus--so it'd depend on the size of the operation. So most of the time when we'd interact with any of these other groups, either--whether they were ROK or Australian, it was when it was a big operation. We were on a big, a big thing, whatever it was. And it might be whatever--a one, a three- or four-week operation, you'd go to an area and you're going to sweep the area. We're going to clean out this whole valley. So everybody hits it and everybody goes through the valley. But you could count on 'em whenever they were on. But I don't remember specific times that we were together, but I just remembered you can count on 'em.

REPUCCI: Do you remember any of the big operations you were on?

CASSIDY: Not very, the big operations, we weren't on a lot, but I sorta remember a couple of them. It just was a--I don't remember 'em being any different. Yeah, you just slugged day to day. It was just a slow, slug of existence. You're just living from one day to the next. And things didn't change that much. The territory would change. You were either in the area of combat or you weren't. So all the operation was, was usually a big operation just meant you were in an area of combat for an extended period of time, where if you were a small unit, like just Kilo Company was sent out here, this area, and we had this big area, we were running it and we would be in, be out in the bush a little bit, but we'd be back in the rear too. Rear is not like a big town. It would just be relatively, we wouldn't have to be, we could take off our flak jackets, we could sit down and have a cup of coffee. So I don't remember a lot about the bigger operations that I was on. We didn't go on a lot of them. Just the way it works sometimes.

REPUCCI: Do you remember? I'm kind of diving backwards a little bit even more.

CASSIDY:

REPUCCI: So what's going through your mind when you hear Corpsman up?

CASSIDY: Corpsman up, it's adrenaline. It's an automatic, it's like clicking in. Nothing goes through your mind just except just, you click into action. It's sort of like the same thing that an EMT or Paramedic does at the scene of a crash. There, it's just like you're sitting there playing cards in the fire station and somebody says: we've got a bad accident on the interstate. It's go time, it's your, it's my time to go. And that's really about all that would run through my head. The longer I was there, the better I got at it. I took a lot of precautions. I would sometimes, if it was a bad area, I might have 'em try to—I'd sometimes ask them to, I'd say: bring him here. I'm not going. I'm not gonna. Cause if I, if I'm gone, they got nobody.

So sometimes they would drag the wounded here, meaning, it wouldn't be a long ways, but it might be 10, 15 yards. But if I get up, I'm dead, I might get hit. So, I got better at controlling my emotions and my thought process as I was more seasoned. And that's again, why having one unit fight and stay until you're done makes sense. Because when you bring in new people and other people just go home, those new people are there, don't have any of that experience. They have just a high rate of getting wounded. You get good at war by being in war. People who fight wars all the time, countries that live in war are good at it. The Vietnamese were good at it. They'd been fighting the French for a long time. The Viet Cong were good. They'd live that way, they could live, they were perfectly fine fighting a war for five, six, seven years. They didn't give a shit. A way of life. They were good. That Corpsman up was often just an adrenaline. I just knew it was time for me to go into action and do my thing.

REPUCCI: And you're—most often it's, you're seeing a lot of booby traps--

CASSIDY: Yeah, that was most of what I did. Cause I saw—

REPUCCI: Small arms fire?

CASSIDY: Small arms fire. But mainly most of the injuries I had were booby traps. And we get a lot of normal stuff too. We got guys with jock itch or you got jungle rot. And these were disabling things. Trench foot, anything that takes a Marine off of the line is just as good as a bullet, really. So, if somebody ends up with trench foot and he's out for four months because his toes are rotten, he's out of combat. They've just won, that's one less Marine they gotta worry about, that the enemy does. So a lot of my job was, at times was going around during monsoon season. Everybody was wet and their feet were wet. It was like the Lieutenant would say: Doc, we're not doing anything today. Go out and check all the guys feet. Fucking check them, and if those assholes aren't changing their socks, let me know who it is and I'll fucking dock his pay.

It was serious business. Because any of those injuries, it kept people out of combat, malaria. I had probably six or seven guys that came down with malaria while they were out in the bush. 104 fever, shaking chills. They had to get Medevac'd. They were gone, never came back. They were flown to the Philippines or flown back to the States. That's a guy gone. The object of the exercise is to keep as many men and as many guns for as long as possible. That's what my job is. So I got to keep them at their guns. So sometimes it's a war injury, but other times it's jock itch [laughter].

A fungus in your crotch and you think you're nuts are going to fall off [laughter]. It's bleeding. I had it. I got out of the bush cause I had jock itch

so bad. It took like three weeks, I think I was three weeks in the rear and every day I had--in the rear, I would have to walk around with nothing on, just to get the sun at my crotch to dry it out. But I was bleeding. I had blood going down my legs that it was so raw from that fungus, jungle rot, and you didn't have anything to treat it with. So there was a lot of different stuff. But mainly, the war injuries were mainly, I think I did more booby traps, amputations. I did a lot of--a lot of people lost their limbs, I actually saw a lot of guys with amputations. So that was mainly what I did.

REPUCCI: So once you treat these guys, say either they're brought back to you, you treat them, what's--you spoke briefly in the beginning on what the Medevac process was like.

CASSIDY: Mhm.

REPUCCI: Would you mind running me through that?

CASSIDY: No, it mainly, once you got somebody stabilized and you needed to get them out, you would call in a Medevac. And almost always, it was always a helicopter. So I would call in a helicopter. I'd tell him who I, what I had, what injuries I have, how many men I had wounded. And then they would let me know whether they could get somebody in. They'd tell you the timeframe. So sometimes they could get in. Sometimes they'd say: the area's too hot. We can't go in. We don't have any helicopters; we don't have any Medevacs. It might be an hour, it might be a half hour, sometimes it was like 15 minutes. So I would call in the Medevac and they would show up and we would just load them into the helicopters and off they'd go. Sometimes helicopters--that was a dangerous job doing Medevacs, cause they drew fire.

They were like a freaking, they were like a moth to a flame. As soon as that helicopter landed, it would circle and come down. And just as soon as it would touch down, you'd start getting sniper fire and machine gun fire and, and you'd have to get them on quick, you'd have to load the guys on quick. And you wanted to load their gear on cause if you threw a, you put a guy in the helicopter and he's got a pack, a machine gun, 200 rounds of ammo, who's gonna carry that shit? That's another 150 pound. 50 pounds. 75 pounds. Two guys, that's 150 pounds with two guys. Somebody's going to carry it. So you try, you got to get the shit on the helicopter. A lot of times helicopter guys didn't want it cause they had other guys to pick up.

No, we're not going to take their gear. Fuck you. Throw it in there. We'd throw it in there. They're trying, they're trying to take off: here take this too. You're throwing stuff in the helicopter cause you, cause you're out in the bush. You had to, it was either that or you leave it for the enemy, and they're going to take it. So yeah, they were really good. They were great.

Usually there wasn't a lot of medical expertise on board. They were mainly just transport people, but they were great. They would come down, they would land. I don't remember a time when they wouldn't come pick up an injured person because of bad weather. They would come in, in shitty weather and risk their lives, all of that. They were great. They were amazing. Yeah.

REPUCCI: Did you ever hear, so I assume you, you've kind of spoke to a lot of these guys when you arrived back in the States.

CASSIDY: Mhm.

REPUCCI: They knew it was, they knew you.

CASSIDY: Yeah.

REPUCCI: That was really good to see them again.

CASSIDY: Yep.

REPUCCI: Did you hear about them like immediately after they were Medevac'd or in the coming weeks or?

CASSIDY: It depends on the individual. Some of them I would know actually. Some of them would be Medevac'd to a hospital. There was a hospital in Da Nang which had all First Marine Division. So almost all of these guys would end up at the hospital and then some would get sent off to a ship, like--they had big hospital ships off of the coast or they'd fly back to the States. A couple of times I got back to the hospitals. I actually, when we got through with an operation and let's say I had five or six guys that got wounded, we'd be back in the rear or somewhere where--okay, you get a week where we're just going to take it easy, guys are drinking beer and we're shining and cleaning our weapons. I would get a ride into the hospital and I'd see 'em in the hospital so I could check with 'em and I'd see 'em there, check on 'em, say hello to 'em. When I got discharged, I saw 'em, a bunch of them at the Philadelphia Naval Hospital, so guys from the East Coast would all get sent to Philly. And so I saw a bunch of them there and then I stayed in touch with a few after that. Yeah. So I saw a few of them along the way.

REPUCCI: Do you have any particular, I know I'm jumping around in Vietnam a little bit for you. Do you have any particular occasions where a firefight was very intense? Do you remember anything very serious?

CASSIDY: Well, probably this stuff in An Hoa was. I don't remember anything where we felt we were outnumbered and we were going to be overrun. My unit

had, before I had joined the unit, they had an episode of that, when they were up North. So some of the guys that I was with had been through that. So I had heard about this big firefight that they were in, where they had been ambushed and they were ambushed by the NVA, and they had to fight their way out of it and. But I was not involved with that and I had no incidence that I remember where it was a prolonged firefight. Usually, it was sporadic, machine gun, we'd fire some rounds, they'd fire some rounds and then we hit 'em with an airstrike or we'd move [inaudible].

It never felt like I was going to be overrun, and being overrun was something that happened to people. Those little bridges? They all got overrun, in An Hoa. All of those bridges during the Tet Offensive were overrun so that these, these guys got the, where the enemy breached the walls, were inside the compound shooting everybody inside, and these guys were laying on the ground, shooting up as they jumped over their foxholes. I never went through any of that. But so being overrun was a big fear. You're always afraid of being overrun and overrun was, all you're doing is shooting at both of--you're shooting everybody around you, anything that moves. But that never happened to us. I was pretty lucky actually, considering what could have been happening.

REPUCCI: You briefly mentioned Tet. What was--what were you hearing about the Tet offensive?

CASSIDY: Well, I heard, I had gotten there just after Tet of '68 and that was the bad one. So I had known that Tet of '68 was a bitch and that was around the time that my unit was up North and got into this big firefight with the, with the North Vietnamese Army.

They had a Battalion attack the one Company of Marines. So they went through hell. Hell broke all through Vietnam. There was fighting everywhere. So I just knew that Tet was going to be a bad time. So my Tet, which was Tet of '69 was not nearly as wild as Tet of '68. So there was probably more combat. It was more that there was problems everywhere. There wasn't any safe zones during Tet. Tet was like, you had everything shrunk down. No matter where you were, you were looking at the people who were every, anybody who was Vietnamese, you thought they could be a Viet Cong. Cause that's where they came from. They came from within during Tet.

They were people who were bringing in your laundry or bringing you supplies or, they were the enemy during Tet. So, Tet of '69 was probably more dangerous, but it wasn't like '68 and I had gotten there just after '68. And I had heard about it and I heard that it was ass kicking. There was a lot of, a lot of shit going on. That's sort of the way people talk: we got into the shit, and you never said: well what does that mean? It means we got

in the shit. It means, they were killing us, we were killing them, and then we got out of the shit [laughter].

So it's called Euphoric Recall. Euphoric Recall is trying not to--you don't focus on the bad and you don't remember. I never do. I, I'm one that has Euphoric Recall and I don't remember a lot of the real bad shit because in my mind I've sort of blocked that out with--maybe that night there was a bad, maybe there was a lot of bad shit that happened, but that night we ended up in a whorehouse. I remember the whorehouse. I even remember the broad that I was with. I remember getting drunk that night. So I remember the good times. There was good times. There were times that we laughed, that we got drunk, that we had fun. That we actually had, we actually laughed at each other and had a good time. I end up remembering those good times and I often don't remember the bad shit as much and that probably was something that I continued on when I got back home and I was really heavily into the booze my first two years back.

And I had a lot of that, where I just blocked out all the bad shit. I didn't remember any of the bad shit. All I remembered was the good times, the fun, R and R, going to Singapore, having two women taking care of me for a week, that's what I remembered. I didn't remember all the bad shit. But that's the way I coped with stuff.

REPUCCI: Would you speak on R and R in Singapore a little bit?

CASSIDY: Oh, that was great. That was a lot of fun. R and R in Singapore was just great. I had a week, it was around Christmas. I was holding out to go to Australia, cause everybody wanted to go to Australia because they had round eyes. So round eyes were Whites, Anglo-Saxon, and all the other R and R spots had slant eyes.

So other, whether it was Singapore or Vietnam or other places, they were Asians. So everybody wanted to be back with a person who looked like our girlfriends at home. So we wanted to be in Australia, but you couldn't get to Australia. You had to have a lot of time in country, so you had to have been there for 10 months or so before you could get there. Well it was Christmas and I needed to get out, I didn't want to be around for Christmas. So they said: well, we got a week in uh Singapore. I said: well, I'm going. So I went to Singapore for a week and God, I had the best time. I remember going through, I went into the hotel, it was a military hotel, and you went into a big, like a hall and the Mama-san was outside with a table and she'd say: okay, they're all the girls are in there and you could pick whatever girl you want.

Well I said: well, how much is it? She said it was $150 a week. And you walk in, all the girls were lined up, all the young girls are all laughing and

waving. Hi Joe, GI, hey Joe, hey Joe. They're all having a great time, and you'd pick whoever you wanted. And I picked two of them. I had two women. I came back out, I gave Mama $300. Mama-san looked at me, she said: Oh, you got two, you not gonna--you can't handle two. I said: Don't worry, I'll take care of two Mam. Three days later I brought back one because I couldn't handle—she said: I told you you couldn't take care of two. And it was fun, but they had a great time. We went to a hotel. It's amazing to say this in this day and age, but these were hookers and they were very happy to take care of, they seemed to be very happy.

They'd iron the clothes, we take them out drinking, to the club. Therewas a club inside the hotel, so the bar was there, the music was being played. We had a swimming pool. I went to one of their homes in town, in Singapore, and, she said: I'm going to bring you. We're going to have dinner with my mother and father. She was a hooker. And she said: but don't talk to anybody when you get out of the cab because the people don't like you. They all know that I'm a hooker and you're a GI. They know the relationship so they don't like you, so just don't talk to them and we'll go up to my mom's house. And I did. And they all looked at you like you were scum. Oh, I didn't give a shit. I went upstairs, I had dinner with her mother and father and went back with ‘em. And basically, it was just having a great time of drinking and eating great food.

And, I went to an opium den, so that was super, that was the best high in the world. They had and opium den in Singapore, and I took a cab. And I said: bring me to the opium den. The cabby brought me there. There was a little hash pipe. One of the, with a bunch of, I don't know what they call them, the little--well, they got, they're like, there's a big, there's a big pipe, like a water pipe, but they have a, everybody has their own.

REPUCCI: Oh, it’s a hookah.

CASSIDY: Yeah, that's it. So it’s a hookah. That’s it, it’s a hookah, right. So they're all sitting around, these guys are all sitting around, there’s a chunk of, of opium in the middle of burning. And it's, and I sit down and they're all speaking a different language. I don't know. I'm in Singapore, and I paid my money, I don't even remember how much. And they're all very--they're having a great, they're socializing. They’re having a little tug and then they talk and they're laughing, having a good time. And this thing is just smoldering. And I grabbed a hold of it and took a suck on it like it was a joint, and they're giggling, like looking at me like: uh oh, no, no, no, you’re-- [laughter]. And I said: oh, sure, I can handle it. I'm a tough guy.

Well, I'll tell you what, I spent the whole night--I got into the cab and had the cabby driving drive me around Singapore all night long and I looked at the lights and I had the time of my life. I just had that rock music playin. I

just looked at the lights. I was so stoned, I couldn't, I was like just hallucinating. Spent the whole night, I got back to the hotel at like eight o'clock in the morning. I think it cost me $100 for the whole, for the cab ride. And I had a great time. I said: I can see why people smoke opium, because it was wonderful. I never did it again, but I have to tell you that it was the nicest high I've ever had in my life. I was happy. I was carefree. I didn't think about Vietnam. And it was great. But all these old guys were sitting around this Opium Den and it was really cool, I had a great time.

And then we went back, I went back to the airport to fly back and we were in the airport and I didn't spend all my money. I went there with a lot of money. I might of had four or 500 or 600 dollars. You can't spend anything in Vietnam, so I had plenty of dough. So I had 600 bucks and I maybe had $200 left. I was with a Marine and he said: Doc, you got any money left? I said: yeah. I said: I don't want to go back. He said: I don't want to go back either. So I said: why don't we jump over this fence? Cause we were in the airport in Singapore, half of the airport was civilian, the other half was military. But if I jumped over this little fence over here in the terminal, I'd be on the civilian side.

So he said: let's go over the wall. We'll go into Singapore. We got a couple of hundred bucks a piece. We know where to go. We'll see how long we can, we can hang out Singapore. I said: alright, good. So we went over the wall, he and I went over the wall. We went out the front door of the airport and there were two MPs standing right by the airport and they go: ah, stop right there. Every time there's a couple of guys that try this [laughter]. They walked us back around and I said: Aw, no. It's like tears were in my eyes. The plane was still waiting on the tarmac. They didn't take off. The guy said: okay, I tell you what, the MP said: I'll buy you two guys a drink at the bar and then I'll walk you on the plane. We said: okay.

So he bought us a drink. We walked down there. When we landed to go to R and R, the officer, I don't even know who he was, stood up in the front of the plane. He said: I'm going to pass around a basket. I want you to put all your pot, all your marijuana, any chemicals, any dope, I want it in the bag, now, because they're liable to search you when you get off of this plane. You put it in here and nobody will ever know and I'm going to throw it away. He said: you can get anything you want Singapore, so you don't have to bring anything in. Just put it in here, nothin' said, and nobody knows nothing. And guys are puttin' crap in there [laughter]. And they got rid of that bag. He just folded up the bag, I don't know what he did with it.

And when we came through, of course they had the Singapore military or police were checking us a little bit and making sure we weren't bringing any stuff. It was funny.

REPUCCI: So how was it to go back after, after being on R and R?

CASSIDY: Oh yeah, it was hard. I was reluctant, it didn't want to go back. I spent a little time--it was hard for me to get back to my unit. I spent a few days in another area, near the airport for a couple of days. I was late coming back from my R and R, I was supposed to be back on such and such a day. I didn't get back for two or three days later, cause I didn't want to go back.

I was enjoying, cold beer, a hamburger, I was enjoying that life that you have in the rear. And then when I got back, normally that's a court-martial. Normally you get in a lot of trouble, cause you were supposed to be back. You were supposed to be back at five o'clock on this day. You're back, you're not back at six, you're back at five and I was three days late and I said: what are you going to do? I said: you want to put me in the Brig? Go ahead. I don't give a shit. At that point I didn't care. We used to use a saying, you said: what are you going to do? Shave my head and send me to Vietnam? The fuck I'm here! Hell doesn't get any worse than this. And you got me. So they just said: okay Doc, you're fine. Don't worry about it. Just go back out with your unit. So they sent me back and I was three days AWOL and they didn't even say a word. They said: ohp, you're forgiven. Go, go back up, quick. You don't say anything, we won't say anything. Just go [laughter].

REPUCCI: Do you remember any guys drug use in the bush?

CASSIDY: No, that's another great thing. We never, we would smoke. I never smoked any marijuana ever in my life, until I was in Vietnam. And the only time I smoked a little dope was back in the rear where we were, we were around this area called First Tanks, which was very, it was a secure area outside of Da Nang. And I hallucinated the first time that I smoked Vietnamese grass, the marijuana in Vietnam was really strong. And I loved it because I hallucinated. The first two times, I just fell asleep. I couldn't stay awake. And then the third time the guys all said: Doc, you've got to stay awake in order to enjoy getting high So they kept me awake and I was like back home in the neighborhood.

I saw my old buddies, I saw my buddies, my friends from Legion Avenue in New Haven. I'm talking to ‘em. And there's nobody there, I'm hallucinating. I'm having a great time. And I said: this shit is really good, I had a great time. But it stayed right there. It only stayed in the rear. And that time we went to An Hoa, when we landed there and we thought we were going to protect the airport, we had a couple of joints, myself and my buddy and we had brought ‘em with us, cause you could buy a 10 pack of rolled cigarettes, marijuana cigarettes. They were a dollar for 10 joints. Two puffs would knock down your ass. And we got there and we looked

around and they said: Instead of going to the airport, we were going out to the bush.

And we were on top of a hill, and we looked around and I looked at him and I said: this isn't good, I said, this is going to be trouble. And I remember taking the joints and just throwing 'em down and said: I'm getting rid of any--we can't have any dope out here. So no, there was never any, I don't remember anybody smoking pot, and that's all I ever saw was marijuana, when we were anywhere near combat. Back in the rear, it was around, and you could buy it anywhere. You could buy it along the road and the streets. You'd just stop at a little village and say: you got any pot? And they'd have all rolled cigarettes but never in the combat zone or never out in the bush. And, but that was the first time I was ever around marijuana. I'd never seen it before. Didn't know anything about it.

REPUCCI: Changing topics a little bit, back to more of being, what being a Corpsman was like, do you have any, and if you don't want to comment on this, that's alright. Do you have any particular casualties that you remember?

CASSIDY: Yeah, I remember all of the guys who, I remember all the amputations and all the, I remember almost all the trauma. I remember all those guys pretty much. There's a few that I don't remember, but I remember most of the guys who had their legs blown off. We had lost a lot of guys who had legs blown off. It was mostly in An Hoa. And I remember all of the guys in An Hoa, so, cause most of them, I got to see later. And I never got to anybody that I took care of that ever died. Everyone that I got to survived. So many of them, one of the guys overdosed at home and died. He was one of the guys who named these kids after me.

He had problems with depression and pain and he just ended up taking too many pain pills and too much moonshine and died. But I remember 'em all. I remember all the casualties, all the wounds. And I don't remember the dead guys very much. I tend to, that's again, I sort of blocked that out. I put a number of people in body bags and I don't remember those. The body bags were, you're dead, you're in the body bag, you zipper it up. It's just a brown bag. But those are the ones. I don't remember those. I managed to shut those out.

REPUCCI: You mentioned a few times kind of what it's like being out overnight--

CASSIDY: Mhm.

REPUCCI: Kind of how bad that was. Could you speak on how you felt doing it and maybe?

CASSIDY: Yeah. The nighttime was a pretty anxious time, and being out in the bush at night, night, ambushes were particularly scary. Yeah. And I think scary is just, it's ultimate quiet, you can't light, you can't smoke. We all smoked back then, couldn't smoke. You couldn't light a light, you couldn't talk, you had to whisper, you had to wake people up to change. Somebody was on night watch. So if you're on an ambush, sometimes guys would sleep. So if there were three of us, two would be sleeping, one would be awake. So we'd, three of us would be together here [motioning a triangle, men are sleeping with their backs to one another]. So if I was awake and I heard something coming, I'd hit you, you'd wake up, you wouldn't say a word, you'd just get ready. Something was coming.

So if you were asleep--and you didn't sleep very well, you certainly didn't snore. And you were hoping that the other guy didn't fall asleep. And so the darkness was scary. It was scary because things could get really close to you, before you knew what was going on. It could be a Rock Ape in the jungle. It could be the enemy. And you never knew what depth there was. I remember a time where there was a, I was on a night ambush and they, the enemy walked in, and it was a North Vietnamese walked in front of me. I had never told anybody this except for the guy who I was with. And they were in NVA uniform, they were North Vietnamese. They had AK-47s and the first two went by, we had Claymore mines, we're ready to hit the Claymores.

Do you know what a Claymore is?

REPUCCI: [Nods yes].

CASSIDY: Yeah, so they were facing out, across, and yeah--so they could, they'd explode out there and just kill zone anywhere within the Claymore. So many yards across. But as they were going by and I was on watch, the couple of Marines were—there was only like six of us there, on the ambush. And as they went by, I saw the next guy with a machine gun. Well, I know what kind of a unit carries a machine gun. So if you got five guys around an ambush, they're all carrying AK-47s. But if someone's carrying a .50 caliber machine gun, that's a big unit. That's a bunch of people moving. And then I saw somebody with a mortar tube carrying a mortar tube on their shoulder. There probably was a hundred NVA. And I didn't spring the ambush.

I kept quiet, cause we would have all died. They would have killed us. And we would have killed a lot of them, but we would have all died. And I remember my buddy Manny was next to me and I sort of touched him and he looked and I told him and I said: that's fuckin, I said, that's NVA. That's at least a company of NVA. We're dead. He said: fuck it. Just sit right here. So we let them all go by and then we called in an airstrike later

because we knew where the direction we were going. So an airstrike hit ‘em. I don't know how many they hit, but by the code of military, we should have attacked. We should have killed ‘em. We would have killed a lot of them. So six Marines could have killed 50 enemy, but they were going to kill us, we were all gonna die. Everybody in that--we would have all been dead. All the guys that I still see now, I wouldn't see ‘em anymore.

So I feel bad about not springing that, but in the big picture, those guys are maybe still alive that we didn't kill, my Marines are still alive and the fucking world went on. It didn't make a God damn bit of difference. Who the fuck cared? Nobody cared, so maybe it wasn't so bad, so, but that, that night was--to watch ‘em keep walking by and walking by and walking by us like: uh oh, this isn't just a few guys out on a gentle walk out at night with their AK-47s. This is a large unit of NVA that are moving at nighttime. And that's why you're out there. You're supposed to, that's what you're supposed to do is take them on. But we were going to die, so I didn't [laughter]. Probably a good move. I wouldn't be here [laughter].

REPUCCI: Do you remember hearing anything about the transition between, and this is back on the subject of officers, the transition between Westmoreland and Abrams?

CASSIDY: No.

REPUCCI: That's, I guess that's, yeah.

CASSIDY: Yeah, and no. No, we never heard anything. I don't remember hearing anything about it. Again, I sort of remembered, I really didn't hear much about Westmoreland until I got back home a little bit. And then there was the, a lot of the stuff about his insistence on body counts, elevated numbers, fictitious numbers of killed, to build up the war. He was all about building up the war to Johnson and insisting that his men be giving large--he wanted to hear a lot of body counts. But I didn't hear, when I was in Vietnam, I heard nothing. I didn't hear anything about anything really. You'd hear the Armed Forces Radio, and that's the only news you'd get once in a while, and nobody had a radio.

So in the rear you might be able to hear a radio. But other than that, you didn't, you didn't know anything. You're just doing your one day at a time. What are we going to do today? Whatever. What patrol are we on? Where are we going? So many clicks to this village. So many clicks over here. You're going to night ambush here and we're going to be here for a week. And we're going to be at--so your life was really broken down to a little small, a little small period of time.

REPUCCI: Well I was going to ask you next--I'm making a note to myself to remind me to ask you about the transition to the rear. Cause you said, you mentioned earlier--

CASSIDY: Yeah.

REPUCCI: So as a Corpsman, you're spending eight, 10 months--

CASSIDY: Yeah.

REPUCCI: In the bush, and then you have some time in the rear.

CASSIDY: Right.

REPUCCI: How was that contrast?

CASSIDY: Yeah, that was a big difference. Cause you leave the bush, a seasoned Marine, combat-ready, about as good as you're gonna get. And then you go back to the rear and in the rear it's a little like the military--it's a little like the military at home. It's formations, you're supposed to wear clean uniforms. You're supposed to say yes sir, no sir, salute. Formalities, military formalities, which is what the military is full of. But the bush, is not full of any of that, you don't do that shit. In the bush, you don't ever call an officer by his name, you don't salute anybody. As soon as that--you don't wear any, any insignias. Enemy sees who the officer is, he's dead. So all of that shit is out, is thrown out the window. It's survival in the bush.

And now you go back to the rear and they want you to act like a normal person. So it was a little weird. I wasn't good at it. I got in trouble. And I ended up having the burn shitters, which is burned in—they, they used to have, they had outhouses. It's for bathrooms. For a shitter, you had cut a 55 gallon drum in half. So the 55 gallon drum was set underneath and there was a hole, and that's where you sat on to shit, or piss. And every day they had to be burned. So they were full of diesel fuel and all that. And you'd have to pull the 55 gallon drum out, half of it, cut in half, and light it on fire and stir the shit, so it would burn. That was my job after I got out.

That's how bad I was. I was not a good camper. I didn't play well with others when I was in the rear. I got drunk a lot. And I never, I didn't want to stand in formation, because it didn't mean anything. My thing was I'm out there saving lives. I'm out there in combat. What the fuck are you talking about? You want me to stand here with a uniform on? You want me to salute you? Get outta here! This is bullshit. We're either gonna fight or we're going to get, or let's go get drunk. Let's do one or the other. Let's either fight or go get drunk. Let's do one. I'm good at both, but I don't, I'm

not good at in the middle. I'd forgotten how to be military, so I got in trouble, so I had to burn shitters.

So my Marines would come by, they'd be going on a patrol or something and they'd walk by and go: oh, hey, there's Doc. Hey! I was stirring the shitters, I'd have that big paddle and I'd be stirring this thing. Oh God, it was disgusting job. I was in the rear, I was going and I'd wave to 'em. I'd go: I'm going home. I'm going home. And just before I left, so I was there maybe a month or two, and the day that I was supposed to leave the Battalion Area, then you get in a Jeep. There were two of us going out with that. We would drive to Da Nang and then catch a flight out of Da Nang. You'd spend maybe a day at China Beach, you'd spend a day at a barracks or something.

Well, the area which was China Beach, there was a staging area. They had like a bunch of huts where you'd stay overnight, so it'd just be a cot. But you were waiting to get on a plane and go home. An ammo dump exploded. There was some big politicians were coming in like Congressmen or Senators. So they were advised that they should clean up the area around the airport, the garbage and all that. So they lit a fire in the dump, and the dump caught on fire and the wind blew it over this barrier, and it set off the ammo dump. The ammo dump was huge. It had all the bombs were stored in there. It was huge, and it exploded for like two days. For two days, we were way way out of Da Nang and we could hear and see at night, you could see this explosion going on.

We thought that all, the whole Da Nang was being blown up. It blew down a lot of houses, blew down a lot of Da Nang, but we were supposed to leave the next day after this was finally put out, so we've got these Jeeps and we slept on the beach. So they said: We have, everything's down, everything's been blown apart, because of trying to burn the grass to make it look good for a couple of Congressman. So we slept on the beach and, with our sea bag and then got on the plane and headed home. That was it.

REPUCCI: One more question before we start going back to the U.S.

CASSIDY: Yeah.

REPUCCI: How was morale of the guys who are around you, like your buddies during--while you were humping through the bush?

CASSIDY: I think it was, the morale was great. Yeah. I think it was amazing how positive these guys would stay and focus. They were Marines, they had a job. I think that's what separates the Marine Corps from other branches of service. They are focused on their mission and that's what's most

important. So they were great. Their morale was great. And there were times when everybody wanted to be home. Everybody talked about being their girlfriend. Everybody wanted to be home eating a hotdog or hamburger, or we all talked about our favorite restaurant or we wanted a cold beer. But in general, the morale I thought, was amazing. People were not, there were no desertions. There was nobody leaving. Nobody was going off to the villages and not coming back. And that happened.

There were people who, there were times they were in when I was there, they swept Dog Patch. Dog Patch was outside of the airstrip of Da Nang. And Dog Patch was like a bunch of shit, shanties, like a shanty town. And in that was all these little alleyways and these old shanties and raw sewage running down through it and in these shanties where a lot of military who had basically defected and had left and deserted, and they were living there. And while we were there, the MPs came in and they swept all of shantytown, and they probably got 15 or 20 guys. None of those were Marines. The Marines didn't. This were other branches of the service. And these were guys who would rather be living there for five years until they can get out, but they were not going to go back to combat. So, but that didn't happen with the Marine Corps. They weren't bailing out. So the morale was great. I thought.

REPUCCI: More major events. Were you in Vietnam when Apollo 11 was up?

CASSIDY: I don't remember.

REPUCCI: I guess what I'm getting to is like, what kind of news did you guys get from back home while you were?

CASSIDY: Very little. Like I said, there'd just be a radio. You might hear Armed Forces Radio and that was about it. So you really got only major events. And a lot of it didn't mean a lot. When you're in a war and you're in a combat area, it's pretty much, unless a whole town burns down, you pretty much focused on what you're doing. So yeah. I don't remember anything going on in the States. You didn't get any, no, it was never, we never saw television and I'd hear a little bit of Armed Forces Radio and that was it. Never saw a newspaper.

REPUCCI: Did you have any access to like music, pop culture?

CASSIDY: Yeah, we'd hear, yeah, music we'd have. Probably had cassette, we probably had cassette tapes. Yeah. We, I remember Cream, In A Gadda Da Vida, Hendrix, it was a lot of that. A lot of that shit that was--that went along with the pot smokin'. That that was the stuff that you if you are back in the rear and a bunker, and you're getting high and you're drinking beer, you wanted to listen to Cream and Jimi Hendrix, it was a whole new

experience. It was like, this is nothing we ever did before. The music was new, the high was new, and here you were in combat. Like: wow, man, doesn't get any better than this. It's wild.

It's like watching a firefight high. You never, if you've never seen a firefight--I'd see firefights across a river, .50 caliber machine guns with tracers. It was New Year's Eve and I was watching this firefight and I'm just looking and saying: Woah. This is fucking wild. This is so cool. Look at this [mimics sounds of weapons]. It's just wild. It looks like Disney world. It looks like 4th of July. Pow! Big explosions. Napalm coming in, flames going up in the air and you're on the other side of the river. You're watching it, you're just watching. It's like, you're just watching. As long as it doesn't--it may come to you, but hopefully it doesn't. But it's over there. It's on the other side of the river. It's like being on, looking at the Connecticut river and being on one side and looking down the river and that's where the firefight is. But you're up river and it's not hitting you, so you're okay. You're just gonna groove out unless somebody says: okay, go help them. Oh fuck. Now I got to go help him? So that's sort of the way the world was.

REPUCCI: Do you wanna take another break or?

CASSIDY: No, no, I think I'm good.

REPUCCI: Oh, good. Sounds good. So the ammo dumps exploded and you sleep out on the beach. What's it like when you're physically leaving? You're at Da Nang. You're about to leave.

CASSIDY: Yeah, we used to say: you're going back to the world. So, that's the best feeling in the world. There is no better feeling. It just is. You're going back to the world. All of those things you thought about and dreamt about. You're going to get it all. So yeah, it's just this pure joy. Getting on that plane and flying. I forgot where we flew over, I think we flew over Alaska. It was a weird, we took a weird trip all the way over Alaska and I just, well I remember taking off and leaving just as we got up. Of course everybody is feeling like: God, don't let me get hit by a rocket or something. You know while I'm leaving. Because you hear shit like that would happen too. Guy is leavin, he's on the way to the airport to get out after a year in Vietnam, he gets killed.

That shit happens and we just, everybody burst out in applause and yelling and just, the whole plane was just hooting and hollering. And they were Army guys, Navy guys, Marines, all. It wasn't all guys from my unit. It was nobody from my unit. I was the only one leaving. So it was just pure joy and just, couldn't wait to just, you just know that you're coming back to the world. It was great.

REPUCCI: How was it right when you got back?

CASSIDY: That was pretty weird. Yeah, it was all weird. [Pause]. When I went back to Treasure Island, California, which is off San Francisco, we landed there and then I had to spend a couple of weeks there or a week. And I was a Brig Chaser, which meant that my job was to go out and pick up guys who were being sentenced to the Brig. There was a Brig on Treasure Island. So when I had what's called duty, they would send me out. So I had a week to kill. So they said: okay, yeah, you're going to be a Brig--they put an MP thing on me, and I'd go out and get a guy at the gate this day that I was a Brig Chaser and I got—I'm in the Jeep with them, driving it back. I got a .45, loaded with ammunition.

I'm in San Francisco and I pick up the guy who was a, he was a Navy. He ran away from bootcamp in the Navy. Shaved head, little kid. He was young, 18 years old, and I'm in my twenties. And I was a little older than the other guys, so I was probably 22, 23 and the kid is crying and he said: oh, what am I, they're going to kill me. They're going to kick the shit out of me. I'm going to the Brig. He was supposed to go to the Brig. I said: nah, no. I don't know anything about the Brig. I'd just gotten there. I'd just came back from Vietnam two days ago. I don't give a shit about anything. Show me where the beer is, show me where I can get a hamburger. So I told the guy, I said: don't worry about it. It's nothing.

He said: really? It's going to be alright? I said: look, you're going to be fine. I said: Look, if you want to, if you want to run away again. I really don't give a shit. I just came back from Vietnam. I don't care. I'll stop the Jeep. You can go run. I don't give a shit. But he said: No, no, I'll go ahead and do it. And I pulled into the Brig. I walked in, there were two Marine Corps Sergeants; one Black, one White. They probably six three. They looked like a Marine poster. Probably six three, 210, muscle, bull necks, fuckin' like.

There's, it's called a red line Brig. So there's a red line. So we walked in and I had my prisoner and I walked up to the table right over there and the two Marines were behind me and they knew I was a Corpsman, they could tell. And they knew I was back from Vietnam. There's a way they could tell.

So they say: Doc, well you're just back from down South. That means Vietnam. I said: yeah. He said: where's your prisoner? I say: Here's my prisoner right here. This shmuck right here, this guy [laughter]. And they look and they go: that's your prisoner? I said: yeah. He walked over there fucking red line. I go: I don't know anything about a red line. The guy jumped over the table and hit him in the face, broke his nose, blood's fallin' all over his face, knocks down, he's bleeding. He's crying. That

Marine's over to me, sayin': You scumbag. You don't ever, don't you ever cross that red line. You never cross that red line until you're authorized to cross the red line in this Brig. I didn't know that. I felt terrible at this.

I should have told him that, but I didn't know what it was. They hauled him off. They'd bring him to the Brig, and this Brig was surrounded by Constantine wire, machine gun towers on all sides. And they--I would be out there as an MP when they would be telling these prisoners: feel free to try to escape. These are all guys just back from Vietnam. They're all nuts. They're all Marines, sharp shooters. They can't wait to kill you. They'd like to shoot somebody. They haven't shot anybody in weeks. They really would love to have you try to escape. Feel free to try to escape. It was a nasty place to be for these guys. And that was my week coming back. I was getting drunk in the NCO club and then maybe two or three times a week I'd have to be a Brig chaser.

So it was crazy. It was like a crazy town. It was like crazy people. In a Brig. And I was getting ready to go home and I remember that, we'd have a little class about you're all going to be back in civilian life now. We've got to try to reacquaint you. This is not going to be Vietnam. You're going back to civilians and they don't particularly like you, because you're a Vietnam veteran. And I remember 'em saying, more of you guys are going to die in the first six months that you're home, than died in Vietnam, from drugs, alcohol and car crashes. And they're probably right. A lot of guys died, first six, eight months from trauma, bad shit happenin', fights, car crashes. Cause everybody was crazy when they got home.

But I got through that couple of weeks and I remember coming back, I was going back home. I took a cab over the Golden Gate Bridge, stopped the Cab over the middle of the Golden Gate Bridge, and threw my sea bag into the ocean with all my clothes. And said: I'm fucking outta here. I'm done. Let my hair grow. And I was getting on a flight to go back. I remember going by the Fillmore West. The Fillmore's that famous rock place. The Allman Brothers were playing at the Fillmore West. There was the Allman Brothers up on the, on the billboard at the Fillmore. And that's when I get out.

But it was a big transition. To come out of Vietnam and come back into civilian life where people were normal. You were supposed to care about things that I didn't care about. I just didn't, if it wasn't life and death, then I didn't care about it. So if you said: oh you have to fill out this form. Fuck you. I'm not filling it out. Well, you've got to fill it out. You got to pay taxes. I'm not paying 'em. I'm not doing anything. I'm not going to do anything I don't want to do because I had been to combat. If it's not that, then it's not important. Don't tell me that it's important that I pay my parking tickets. Don't tell me I'm supposed to drive the speed limit. Don't tell me I can't

drink a beer while I'm driving my car. Don't tell me that. Do you know what I just did for the last year?

And you guys got it made, you're wearing a uniform, you're eating, you're going home and having sex with your wife every night, you're going out to dinner. I just came back from the bush. That was my attitude. So it was a hard transition. I rock and rolled for quite a while [laughter]. I was pretty wild.

REPUCCI: What do you, what'd you get up to?

CASSIDY: Yeah, What do you mean? Sorta what trouble?

REPUCCI: Sure.

CASSIDY: I was just in a lot of rebellion. Let my hair grow. My beard was long. I was rooming with another buddy who was over in Nam same time I was, he wasn't with me, but we were together.

Oh God. We were just, we were drunk all the time, stoned all the time. We were running women in and out of the house as fast as we could. We were rocking and rolling. We were having a lot of fun, but we were slowly killing ourselves. And it was funny. And we had other Vietnam vets who were living with us and the house. Never did any of us ever talk about Vietnam. We'd have four or five guys who all served in combat, all over there. And we'd spend years together, never talked about Vietnam. I'd never know what unit they were with. And you think that'd be a common bond. Okay. So who were you with? It's like, we'd never talk.

We just didn't talk about it, but we all knew what we'd been through, so we kept going. So it was a tough couple of years to get reacclimented to behaving, doing things the way the man wanted you to do them. But that was hard for me. I was pretty rebellious and I don't think, I was probably not more rebellious than a lot of other guys who were in combat. If you weren't in combat, you went to Vietnam and you weren't in combat, I think it's a lot easier transition. Because like I said, when you were back in the rear, you were acting like a normal person. You were responsible, you had responsibilities, you had to do things. But when you were in the bush, there was no responsibilities. In the bush, it was survival.

So when you come back from survival and now you want me to play your game, this is the way we thought. You want us to play your game? Well we're not going to play your game. We've seen the devil. We know who the devil is. We've been there and we've been to hell. Don't tell me how bad it's going to be, cause I already been there, and I made it through. So that's that attitude that you have to get over and a lot of people didn't and

they died. There were a number of people, guys that were in my unit who died when they got back. Car crashes, another guy got in a bar fight. An Indian--one of the Chiefs was killed out in Arizona in a bar fight and trauma. Trauma post-Vietnam.

REPUCCI: And so you're totally out of the Navy at this point?

CASSIDY: Yeah.

REPUCCI: No more.

CASSIDY: Discharge.

REPUCCI: Okay.

CASSIDY: No more reserves. Yeah. Did I have to do? Oh no, I did have a, I think I might've had another year of Navy Reserves to do. So I did. When I got back, I went back to college and finished up my last two years at college and then I was in the reserves for another year. So I, and then I went to meetings like once a--I think it was once a week and one weekend a month or something like that. I forget. Like once a week I think I had a meeting, or once a month there was a meeting. So I did that and I finished up my last two years of school and slowly I became more responsible. But it was a slow transition for two years. The first year was nothing. First year was, there was nothing. There was a just keep rocking and rolling. The GI bill, I had money. It was paying for my education. I was living with a bunch of other Vietnam veterans. We were running the roost [laughter].

REPUCCI: Are you back in New Haven at this point?

CASSIDY: Yeah. Back in New Haven, yep.

REPUCCI: I know you said your dad wrote you every single day.

CASSIDY: Yeah.

REPUCCI: How are your parents, with you coming home?

CASSIDY: Yeah, that's a good one. That was, I probably was home for a week or two living at home. Maybe a week or two, and I was gettin' drunk every night, coming home drunk every night, three or four in the morning. Whatever or not coming home because I'm somewhere partying. And my father is going to work every day at three or four o'clock in the morning and I'm just driving in the driveway when he's going to work and I'm not working. I got the GI Bill, I'm just back from the war and it was maybe a week or two, he woke me up and he said: son, you've been home for two weeks. I said:

yeah. He said: you and I are living in this house and I don't think the two of us can live in the same house because I can't be drivin'—I can't be going to work and seeing you driving in the driveway, being out all night drinking. And I've been here longer than you, so I think you need to find a place to stay.

I said: No problem dad. That was it. And I packed my bags and I ended up getting an apartment. So he basically asked me to leave after being home a couple of weeks and he was right. I wasn't respecting anything. I was never home for dinner. I'd say I'd come home and I'd be at some bar and I wouldn't show up. So I was totally irresponsible. But it was a good relationship, it's just that my dad said: time for you to leave, and then I moved out of the house.

REPUCCI: How was the public opinion of veterans from Vietnam at this point?

CASSIDY: I remember it as being a pretty anti veteran and pretty much against the war. Lots of protest going on. And I don't remember how much I let that affect me. I don't remember a lot of it directly affecting me cause I let my hair grow, so I sort of became one of those, if not protester, I had a little hippie look. It was hippies back then. It's what everybody, if you had long hair, that's what they called you. So I let my hair grow and my red beard was growing, so I pretty much fit in. I guess I didn't let the protests, I sort of stayed out of it. I said: I'm home, let them do what they want to do. I never ended up protesting against the war or I didn't try to protest for the war.

I just took care of my business, which was going back to school and partying. I was drinking and chasing women, having a good time [laughter]. And that's what I, I had a lot of times. I felt like I had to make up a lot of time from being over there. So, yeah, I didn't, I don't think I let it bother me very much.

REPUCCI: So where were you at? Where were you at school right when you got back? You finished your last two years at the University of New Haven?

CASSIDY: Right. Yeah.

REPUCCI: Okay.

CASSIDY: So I had finished the last two years at University of New Haven and then, then I got into the PA program at Yale. That's when I graduated. My roommate, my buddy was living with me. We were both gonna go to Australia. That was at that time, that was probably '70. Australia was paying for Americans with a degree to go to Australia cause they needed

professionals to be school teachers and they would pay for your flight over, and a return flight if you stayed five years in Australia.

So I applied to Yale, didn't hear whether I was going to get in, my roommate and I had gotten visas to go to Australia, so we were going to go to Australia. It was right near the end of that promotion period. So in fact they didn't have any more jobs, but they were still flying a few of us over. And I got into the PA program and my roommate went to Australia. And I was goin' with him and I said: man. I wanted to go to Australia.

It sounded great. I had to give it up, but I knew if I didn't go to the PA program, I would never get in again, and that was a chance of a lifetime. So I went. And he went over to Australia, never got a job, stayed drunk for about three months, ran out of money and got caught robbing somebody of money at some party and they put them on a plane and shipped him back to the United States, because he'd said: I'd never found any work. There was nothing to do. And he just drank while he was over there. So, I was lucky I didn't make that trip. That would've been my story.

REPUCCI: So how did you decide on, can you speak a little bit more about deciding to go to Physicians Assistant school at Yale?

CASSIDY: Yeah, that was purely haphazard. I went to the School for Hospital Administration because I was not, I had no Pre-Med. I was a business major, so I had never taken any Pre-Med. I'd taken a couple of science courses and I went to interview at the Hospital Administration School, and the guy said: it sounds like you really are more interested in clinical medicine. You enjoyed what you did in Vietnam. That whole idea of saving people's lives was, I was still addicted to that adrenaline. And I said: yeah, but there's no place for me. I'm not going to go to Medical School. I can't start Pre-Med now. I don't have the brains to do it. Plus I don't have the time. And he said: well, there's a new program for PAs, for guys in the military, just for you guys. They just opened one up here at Yale, down the hall. He said: I'll walk you down. He walked me down the hallway and I talked to somebody about it, put it in an application and got an interview and got in. I was really lucky. It was like, the timing was perfect and I was very lucky to get in. I would not get in today. So, it was great. It worked out. Fortuitous [laughter].

REPUCCI: So how long was Physician's Assistant School?

CASSIDY: It was 24 months straight through. So you do, well, yeah, there was no summer off, so we went 24 months, didactic and rotations. So, two years later I graduated and came up to Vermont and I started my practice. So that was 40, almost 50 years ago that I did it. And I've been doing that ever since. And moved around a little bit, but mainly it's been up in

Vermont, and I was a New Haven kid who never got out of New Haven. And I came up to my rotation in Vermont and hated it, hated Vermont, hated living in a small rural town in Ludlow [VT], near Okemo mountain. Okemo was just a little mountain and nothing much going on. And I called my administrator, said: get me outta here. I want to be back in New Haven.

He said: no, you gotta stay there, you gotta work at the clinic. And it was real rural medicine. I made house calls. I went out on snowmobiles, saw patients in the woods who had camps and were living. They were living in rural Vermont. And I hated it. And I got back to New Haven and the traffic, and the people, and the city and I said: ugh, I hate New Haven. I hate the city. Get me back the Vermont, get me back to that clinic in, out in the woods. And so that's what I did and I came back to work up here.

REPUCCI: So you've spoken about--kind of alcohol being a big part of your life.

CASSIDY: Yep.

REPUCCI: Would you say that's directly a part of your service and or?

CASSIDY: No, I was an alcoholic before I joined the service. I always loved booze. I was a partier when I got in the service. I think it accelerated, the service, accelerated it. And after Vietnam, I drank away a lot of memories that I didn't want to remember. So, I pretty much stayed drunk for a couple of years. So yeah, it accelerated it, but it wasn't, there were some people who didn't drink much at all until they were in the service. I wasn't one of those. I was drinking heavy back in high school. I always liked drinking. I always liked partying. I was the biggest drinker and the biggest partier. So, until I couldn't do it anymore.

REPUCCI: Did it stay with you through, PA school? Or--

CASSIDY: Yeah, I drank, well, I wouldn't drink Monday through Friday. I'd be able to, I wouldn't drink at all when I was in the PA school and then I would drink on the weekends, but I'd be studying all week. But I'd really get after it on Fridays, Saturdays, Sundays, and go out and party, football games, all that. That's what I did. Hung over, start drinking in the morning. Bloody Mary's. Yeah. So, I was able to hold it together pretty well and I didn't even at work when I started working, I wasn't somebody who showed up to work drunk, but as soon as I got out of work, if I wasn't on call, I was in the bar. And that was the most important thing.

And I didn't know when to say stop. It was not predictable. I was not a predictable drinker. In the end it's a progressive disease, alcoholism. So, as it progresses, you get to the point where you can no longer pick and

choose when you're going to get sober, and when you're not going to drink. Cause you might have two drinks. Today for me, I would have two drinks and I would say: okay, that's all I'm going to have right now. And other days when I had something important, like taking my kids somewhere, doing something, I would have to and say: oh I really want more. And then I'd have four, and then I'd have eight, then I'd have 12 and: oh shit, I didn't pick up the kids at school. Fuck it, I'm going to sit here and drink. So I couldn't predict when I was going to get drunk. So, I had a problem with alcohol and I quit. I've been sober 18 years. So, I haven't had one drink in 18 years, but I had a lot before that [laughter].

REPUCCI: And moving back to that's very, that's awesome.

CASSIDY: Yeah, yeah. Thanks.

REPUCCI: Moving back to--did guys you know suffer from--you mentioned there's a lot of trauma.

CASSIDY: Right.

REPUCCI: Like, but what about the mental side of that?

CASSIDY: You mean like PTSD stuff?

REPUCCI: Yeah.

CASSIDY: I'm sure there's a lot of PTSD. I'm sure a lot of the guys in my unit have it. I've got problems with PTSD. I never knew it. I never recognized it. It wasn't diagnosed and I didn't through the VA until probably five years ago. So I lived with a lot of this stuff, and just lived with it. And I think a lot of people have it, and have symptoms to a greater extent or lesser extent. I think it's there and all of us who were in combat, I think everybody who was in combat has a little bit of it. It's a matter of how much it affects you. But it affected me later in my life, when I was having hallucinations, not hallucinations, I'd have a lot of bad dreams, always on guard.

I was very angry. I wasn't a nice person to be around, very irritable. I've been through two divorces, divorced twice. I've had my share of getting knocked down, and a lot of it had to do with drinking and a lot of that had to do with making all those--all of that shit that I went through go away. Cause alcohol works. It works really well for PTSD. Works great when you're drunk. The problem is the rest of the world doesn't get around. You may feel great, but you don't fit in anywhere else. You feel like: oh, I'm happy, I'm drunk and I'm not thinking about Vietnam, I'm not thinking about anything.

The problem is you're also not showing up for dinner. You're also not a good husband. You're not a good father, you're not a good employee. So, for me, I think the PTSD, and for my friends, it's a similar situation. The alcohol usually is a part of it. And, the PTSD symptoms were there before, but we didn't pay much attention to it until the diagnosis came around. It was only diagnosed, I don't know, not that that long ago, PTSD was. And it was diagnosed right here in White River Junction [VT], was the first place that really recognized it as a disease, so. I think there's a lot of it around.

REPUCCI: Overall positive interaction with the VA?

CASSIDY: Yes. Yeah. I've only become a patient at the VA probably 10 years now. And, I was, cause I was in medicine and I had great health insurance and great people. And I've been with the VA for 10 years. I think the VA is great. The VA's are--it's a matter of which one you go to, and we have a good one. White River Junction is a good VA. So I'm not sure everyone's the same, but I can only speak about the one that I deal with and they do a great job. And, I like it. I like the healthcare I get there.

REPUCCI: You've mentioned a few times about how you've, kept in contact with guys from your unit.

CASSIDY: Right.

REPUCCI: Would you speak on that a little bit? Like maybe when that started and like--

CASSIDY: Yeah.

REPUCCI: Frequency?

CASSIDY: Yeah. Well I became friends with one of the guys who got hit lost his legs. I saw him in Philadelphia Naval Hospital with all the other guys, but I stayed close with one of the guys cause he lived in Albany, New York. So we have been friends ever since Vietnam. So I'm the godfather of one of his kids. He's the godfather of one of my kids. And we've, we had a life together. He's been divorced once, I've been divorced twice and, we've been through similar problems with booze and drugs and partying and, but we're still good buddies and he's still my best friend. He's now disabled to the point where he can't get out of bed and he's got COPD and all of his shrapnel and his wounds have caught up with him cause he's 70.

But he's got a great attitude and he's hilarious and he's a great guy and, so--and I see a few of the other guys at reunions. So, I really kept in touch with three or four people ever since Vietnam, episodically. But Bob, the one friend I've had the whole time, and we played golf together back in the

day and he was a double amputee and he was a great golfer. He was a real athlete in college and in high school. And then when he lost his legs, the only sport he could play was golf, and he got good at it. So, yeah, I, I've stayed in touch with, and we still do with reunions, so. It's important. It was an important part of my life. That's where I, and that's when I stopped drinking, was at my first reunion.

I had gotten sober and I got a call saying we were going to have a reunion. And I wasn't gonna go because I said: I can't go if I'm not drinking. These are Marines. We drink, that's what we do. We drink, we smoke cigars and tell stories. And, my Sergeant who was sober for a little longer than me, he said: I'm in AA and I haven't drank and I'll meet you at the airport and you and I'll room together.f everybody's drinking and partying, you and I go back to the room and we'll drink soda and we'll shoot the shit. And, he did. And I went and it was great. So I've been going ever since.

REPUCCI: What do you think of the public's treatment of Vietnam veterans now? Like looking back on it?

CASSIDY: Well now I think that the treatment at the time we got home was pretty shitty. I think it was, people couldn't, didn't separate the warriors from the war. There's a difference. There's the warriors and there's the war. They were right to be angry at the war. They were not right to be angry at the warrior. But I think today that's changed. I've marched in a couple parades in Washington and around here with Vietnam Veterans and it's a very positive feeling that I get. So, I think we've gotten more respect and it's changed. But certainly after the war it was pretty lousy. But again, my memory of that was skewed because I was, I just wasn't paying much attention, long as I was partying I was having a great time.

I was sitting at the beach, I was laying. I was living the life, I was getting money from the VA. I was, I wasn't paying a lot of attention to what was going on, but most of the people that I know and what--I know what went on, it was--it wasn't good as a veteran to come home to. And today, veterans don't get that. People come back from Iraq and Afghanistan, and they're welcomed in the airport. They're cared for. I see a veteran who comes back from the war and I can tell. If they're in an airport, I buy their dinner, let me pick up that guy's tap. Let me buy him a drink, send it over, and if I'm in line, he's behind me, I pick up his tab, cause I can afford it. I've got money, he doesn't, and he's fighting for the country.

I know what he's thinking, I know what he's going through. So I do that and it's done for veterans all the time. So I think what we went through has made it really good for these guys today. And that's part of what history teaches you. That's where history comes in. That's where history means

something. Maybe the war sucked and the war was not politically the right thing to do at the time, but it did show that we would spill our blood for a cause that we decided, that even if it's not the right one, we just decided that that's where we were going to make our stand and we're going to--our people are gonna die, we're gonna die there. That's what we're going to do. We're going to put it on the line. And I think history showed something, and I think history teaches us something about how we treat our veterans, because we treated the Vietnam vets so poorly.

REPUCCI: So you brought a plaque with you today.

CASSIDY: [Laughter]. Yeah, yeah.

REPUCCI: Do you want to speak about what it's for a little bit? Cause I'm—

CASSIDY: Yeah, well—

REPUCCI: I can, I'm sure I can bring it into the archive.

CASSIDY: Yeah that's great. Well, it was given to me at the--it was our reunion that was held at the Quantico Marine Base [VA] and it was at the Marine Corps Museum. And that was where we had our banquet. And my Lieutenant, had it made up for me because it was--that year, and again, we have this every three or four years, that year was honoring the Corpsmen. So he--and I never knew it was coming--and I was the only one that got one, cause it was from my platoon, my guys, which really means a lot to me and it talked about my courage under fire at An Hoa, and then some of the Marines who later named their sons after me.

And that was Jimmy Shelton who lost his legs. And his kid named JC, was named after me. And it was really just recognizing my service. And I liked this and it said that: to the An Hoa Marines, you were a shining light in the darkness of Arizona Territory. We can never thank you enough. And it was Arizona territory, it was An Hoa, and it was a pretty nasty place and maybe I brought a little lightness to him, I don't know, whatever. They recognized my work and it was really nice. That's right on my mantle with my Yale Diploma and my Discharge. And that's right up there with that [Laughter].

REPUCCI: Have you been back to Vietnam since?

CASSIDY: No, I haven't.

REPUCCI: Would you'd ever go?

CASSIDY: I don't know. I don't have a big desire to go. My unit has gone back, some of the guys have gone back. They went back as a group. I didn't go, I wasn't interested. And they went back and I'd really just gotten to know some of this reunion guy, so I didn't go back. I'm not that interested in going back cause--and they said it's not the Vietnam that we remembered, it's totally changed. And I don't need--I don't think there's anything I need to go back for. I don't need to visit and revisit any old ghosts. I don't need to go back to An Hoa. I don't think I need to go up to the hill in Thuong Duc and see where we were. And I'm pretty much done. I've closed that part. I'll keep my memory as my memory. I don't need it refreshed, I guess. Probably not.

REPUCCI: I have two more questions for you. So one--I've been combing through archives cause I'm writing about you for this class a little bit, and I came across the name of a man who did an interview for the--I know we talked about before, but it's not on the tape. I'm just making a note of that. The archive in Texas Tech who was 3/1 Kilo Company in '68 to '69, and he was a Marine rifleman. I just want to see if you know this name. David Crawley?

CASSIDY: Oh yeah, yeah, I do know. Yeah, I was with him. Yeah. Is that right? Really?

REPUCCI: Yeah.

CASSIDY: Yeah, I know. Yep. I wasn't good friends with him, but I remember him. Yeah.

REPUCCI: I haven't listened to his interview yet.

CASSIDY: Oh really?

REPUCCI: But I just figured, I figured I'd run that name by you.

CASSIDY: Oh yeah. There's a couple of guys who wrote a book. There's two guys, our Gunny Sergeant I think, wrote a book about Kilo 3/1 in Vietnam. I forget the name of the book. I forget which Gunny. You know what, if I get it, I'll send it to you. I forget the name, but he wrote--and I never read it, I didn't get the book, but there's a couple of guys who wrote books, and this Gunny Sergeant wrote one of them and he was an older Gunny. He'd been around, he'd fought in Korea and then fought in Vietnam. Some of these Gunny Sergeants and lifers in the Marine Corps are really a trip. They are salty dudes. They'd been through it all. I mean they live to fight. That's what they love. They love nothing better than fighting, and they're not afraid of anything [phone ringing]. It's totally amazing.

We had a Gunny, we called him 90 proof Gunny. He used to drink, he'd bring a canteen. Instead of water, he'd put whiskey in it. He'd have two canteens of whiskey and it would be a hundred degrees, sweating, and he'd open up the can, and drink whiskey straight out of the canteen. And he was drunk all the time. He had a buzz all the time. Bald head. And he wasn't afraid of anything. There could be people shooting: damn, come on, let's go again. He just never, and he never got hit. He never got, he was, it was 90 proof Gunny. And these guys, that's their whole life. That's their life in the Marine Corps. Most of them die pretty quickly after they get out of the Marine Corps. But they are lifers, they're 25 years in the Marine Corps, multiple wars. Whenever there's a war, they want to go. That's amazing. I just, that's not me, I'm not, I'm the opposite.

I'm glad I did that one, but I don't want to do--guys who do three and four tours. Nope. No, no no no. I don't ever want to go back. I had nightmares about going back on the plane. For years I got nightmares of being on that plane and find out that the plane is going to Vietnam and say: what do you mean? Oh, you're going. You signed up for another tour. No I didn't. They'd say: oh yeah, you signed up for one more tour. You were drunk. You signed up. Shit, that's a nightmare. And I'm landing in Da Nang again, then I wake up, so yeah. There's some very interesting--and one of these, one of them, not 90 Proof Gunny, I think he's dead. He's gotta be dead. But the other gunny wrote the book and I'll get the name of it for you.

REPUCCI: Thank you.

CASSIDY: Sure.

REPUCCI: I have--final two.

CASSIDY: Okay.

REPUCCI: You're in '65, again, you know you're going to Vietnam, would you join the Naval Reserves again?

CASSIDY: So if I knew I was gonna go through this whole, if I knew that it was going to play out the way it played out, would I do it again? Is that your question? Yes.

REPUCCI: Would you, would you go back to Vietnam?

CASSIDY: Yes. Yeah. I would, yeah, I would do it all again, every bit of it. Cause I did a lot of good, and it shaped my life. It changed the person I am. Life is experiences and this was the most exciting experience you can have in the world, was was combat. I sat with my Lieutenant in New York. My Lieutenant Olsen is a big, he's a lawyer and he's in Manhattan and he

renovates and buys large buildings in Manhattan. He's got a big job. He does a lot of shit, he's a big deal. Nice guy. He's just one of the best guys, the best CO you could ever have. This is the guy who would not eat because his men weren't being served.

And he said to me, he said: Doc, I gotta tell you something. I have people who give me shit about projects. I'm doing million dollar projects and they're, and, there's all of this turmoil going around in business and I, and I think back and I say there's--and I tell them in court: there's never been anything more exciting that I've done in my life than to be the Commanding Officer of young Marines. And I'm in charge of them in combat. There's nothing, will ever, no matter what I do, it will be, ever be as exciting as leading young Marines in combat. He said: it was the best thing I ever did in my life. This stuff in Manhattan, all these buildings, and--this is shit. This doesn't mean anything. What I did for that year was the best thing I ever did in my life.

That was—and that's the way I feel. It was the best thing I ever did. Those guys will, when I die, if they're still around, they will show up. We go to these funerals for our guys. When they're dead, somebody shows up, or we bring flowers, or we show up. That's the kind of respect that we give each other. So I can't get that anywhere else. I can't get that in business, I make a lot of money, I did a lot of things in business as a PA and have my own corporation, and staff, and emergency room. Did all of-- what? That doesn't mean shit. It doesn't mean anything compared to what I did for that one year in combat with the Marines. So, yeah, I wouldn't trade it. Yeah.

REPUCCI: Do you have anything else to add about this?

CASSIDY: No. No. I thought it was a--I thought you did a great job.

REPUCCI: Thank you [laughter]. And thank you so much for--

CASSIDY: Yeah.

REPUCCI: On behalf of the Dartmouth Vietnam Project, myself, Mr. Cassidy, Jack—

CASSIDY: Yeah.

REPUCCI: You've been wonderful.

CASSIDY: Great. Well good, good. Thank you. Thanks.