
Brian A. Szczotka

HY 341 Vietnam War History

Date of Interview: October 10th, 2023

Interview: Brian A. Szczotka (B)

Interviewee: Glen Smith (G)

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Brian Szczotka: Okay, so we're recording now. So, I'm here with Mr. Glenn Smith. And I'm Brian Szczotka. It's October 10, so Mr. Smith, could you start off by telling me a little bit about your backstory?

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Glen Smith: My backstory? Well, you mean where I was born and all that sort of thing, or...?

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B: Where you where you grew up? A little about your life before.

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G: I was born in Mobile, Alabama, and went to after high school, I went attended Birmingham Southern College and then the dental school in Birmingham, which at that time was the University of Alabama School of Dentistry. They call it UAB now, but I refuse to do that [laughs]. And then out of dental school, I decided to the Armed Forces had an early commissioning program for dental graduates and medical graduates, and so I signed on with the Army and started out as a captain in the Army, which is pretty good because most people start out officers start as a first lieutenant. So that was just kind of an incentive to get people to join, I guess. Probably wasn't too smart to join while we were fighting a war, but I didn't have any other plans. And during those days, most of the dental graduates either if they didn't specialize or go back to their hometown where their father might be practicing, they went in the military. So, a lot of dental graduates went into the military. It was a two-year obligation. And then in my second year of service, I got orders to go to Vietnam. So, I spent a year in Vietnam that started in 1970 and ended in '71. And then at that point, I was finished with my obligation, but I couldn't make any plans while I was overseas, so I decided to extend for a year, and then after that, I extended again, and then I ended up staying for 22 years.

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B: Oh, wow.

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G: And then I retired. And then I moved to Tuscaloosa.

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B: So, you were in college when the war started, correct?

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G: I started college in college in '61. So, it hadn't really started in '61, but in '63 and '64, it kind of got rolling. And of course, US been involved in Vietnam ever since World War II in some capacity. And then of course, we supported financially the French when they were there, fighting against the people who didn't like them, colonizing them. And then when the French got kicked out, they'd get defeated, as you probably know. And then we kind of picked up the vacuum there, moved into the vacuum, and then I went to dental school. I moved over to dental school in '65 and finished there in '69. So, it was my years in Vietnam, '70 and '71 were near the end, and by the time I left, we'd already pulled out all of our combat troops. But the support we had a lot of support troops there, but the combat troops had been pulled out or were standing down, and then in '73, of course, we were out of there completely, pretty much got our POWs and got out. We had personnel at the embassy, of course, and the airfields and things, I guess, but no troops to speak of. And then in '75, the north invaded and took over.

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B: So, when the war started, what were your initial thoughts about it?

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G: You know, I didn't think much about it. I was busy, busy, focused on what I tried to get out of dental school and college and all of that. So, I really wasn't paying a whole lot of attention to it, I guess. And then when I was there, I wasn't really sure what we were doing there. And we're fighting communism. That was the broad mission, I guess. And then a lot of my contemporaries, I think, maybe didn't know for sure while we were there, and then I don't know. I think we could have won it if we wanted to. I didn't seem to have the will to win it. And then my years there were fairly there wasn't much going on, really. And the area where I went in was right after the Cambodian invasion, which you know caused a lot of problems in the States and resulted in Kent

State and all of that mess at Kent State, but the Cambodian invasion was fairly successful. They went in and cleaned know, the Ho Chi Minh trail was coming down through there, and it just cleaned out a lot of supplies and resources the way the North Vietnamese and the Vietcong were getting support there. And I think that made it safer for me where I was. So, it was pretty quiet where I spent most of my time, which was in a place called Da Lat, two words actually, I think, and it was in the central highlands, and then my headquarters was over on the coast on the South China Sea. Now, when I would go there, usually once a month for meetings and pick up supplies and continued education, we would get mortar attacks and rocket attacks there.

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B: Wow.

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G: But it was not sustained stuff, it was hit and run kind of stuff. These people that were shooting at us weren't they never hit what they were trying to hit, which worried me because they would try to hit oil depots and things like that, but occasionally they'd hit in a place where there were US personnel and there would be fatalities. But it was like it was just like maybe three or four, and then they would run from wherever they were shooting with mortars and rockets, I guess they're mostly mortars. I credit the Cambodian invasion with being a fairly quiet tour.

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B: So, how was your experience there?

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G: Well, I've told people it was probably the most extraordinary year of my life, but I actually kind of liked what we were doing. When I was in Da Lat, which was in the central highlands, I was taking care of providing dental care to soldiers and also to other people too as well. And then I lived well [laughs], I lived with a bunch of officers, most of whom were advisors to the Vietnamese Military Academy, which was located in Da Lat. And I was very impressed with that academy. And all of these officers that I lived with were career officers and they taught at the military academies in the States, so they were there punching their ticket. If you have a conflict, if you're going to advance and stay in, you need to go punch your ticket. And so, they were there voluntarily, I guess. And I was just a two-year guy and they would say, 'well, it's not much of a war, but it's the only one we got'. And I used to be offended by that. But now, having done a career, I understand exactly what they were talking about. The Army rented two villas in this

town. This was a resort area that had been founded by the French and a lot of the wealthy Vietnamese people in the country owned villas in this area and they were renting them to the army. And I lived in one of two that we were renting, and just French villas with tile roofs and we had servants.

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B: Oh wow.

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G: And then we didn't have a mess. We had a mess association. The food we would eat, we would buy locally and some would be part of the military chain. And it was pretty good, pretty good deal. Of course I was married at the time, I didn't have any children, but it wasn't as good as being at home. But it could have been a lot worse.

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B: How was your relationship with the Vietnamese over there?

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G: Pretty decent actually. I spent a month at Nha Trang on the coast where my headquarters was before I went to Da Lat. And we had all of our assistants. It was pretty good sized dental clinic there. At Nha Trang there was an army base and an air force base and also a base for special forces. So, there were three giant military compounds there and our army clinic was pretty good size and we had our own laboratory where we could make dentures and things like that, crowns and all of the assistants were Vietnamese nationals, females, and we all spoke good English and we were all very competent, so I knew them, of course. And then in Da Lat our receptionist was Vietnamese and a very nice person. And then we did some civilian work with the State Department, I guess it was, or some agency, US State Department doing working on civilians, as part of a program to try to make them like us. The original strategy was go out and kill all the enemy and then the strategy changed. Instead of search and destroy in a war of attrition, they changed. We need to protect these villages, these villages and hamlets and towns. And then the populace will work with us and help us, rather than resent us, I guess. So, I got to know Vietnamese that way too. And then occasionally, whatever agency this was, I think it was called Cords, Civil Operations...Civic Operations and Rural Development, something like that. They would occasionally have some entertainment event, invite all the Vietnamese in the area and all the officials. And I would get invited too. I got along fine with the Vietnamese.

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B: So, you mentioned briefly earlier about being shot at. How close were you to combat during your time there?

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G: Well, in De Lat there was nothing. But in Nha Trang there were mortar attacks and probably rocket attacks. And how close did I come to it? Well, it was scary. Kind of been thinking about the folks in Israel hunkering down in shelters and safe houses and we had bunkers. We had bunkers. And Nha Trang was just wood barracks where the officers and enlisted men were living. And there were bunkers outside, sandbagged bunkers. But the conventional wisdom was don't run to a bunker if one of these attacks starts because you likely get hit by shrapnel. And so, the way we played it up was and we had helmet and flak jackets and all that kind of stuff, so we'd get down on the ground on the floor and cover up with a flak jacket and the helmet. When I first got to Vietnam, I said...I asked somebody, I said, how do you tell if a rocket or a mortar is coming in or going out? Because we were shooting out too. And he said I said, 'oh, you'll know, basically now the ground shakes'. So, I don't know how close they ever got to where I was, but it sounded like it was right next door. And then I remember one day we had some people get killed. They were in a barracks. They were in a mess hall. I think it was in a morning attack. So, I don't know how many of those we had maybe five or six while I was there. And then there were these little groups of enemy that called sappers. And they would come in and get inside the wire and get inside the perimeter and go blow something up and then run. And so we had that happen a couple of times at Nha Trang. And then on one occasion I was riding in the back of a truck and we took sniper fire but didn't hit anybody. That's about it for me, really. My biggest casualty was I got a parasite.

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B: Oh, wow.

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G: An intestinal parasite and lost 40 pounds.

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B: Oh, my goodness.

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G: And I had diarrhea and all that kind of stuff, but I thought that was a result, we had to take malaria pills once a week or something like that. And that was one of the side effects of the pills. And so, I just figured, well, malaria pills are causing my symptoms and signs. And then when I got home, I got tested and found a parasite. It was easy to treat. An interesting and funny thing, I went to Hong Kong for two weeks while I was there on leaves and had a bunch of clothes made, tailor made, which is what people do in Hong Kong after I got home and I had lost all that weight and after about six months after I got back, I couldn't wear it. Anyway, that's that.

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B: So, you chose the Army and you weren't drafted. So, when you chose to go into the Army, did you have any initial training for the Army side of it? More than just the dental side of it?

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G: I didn't they didn't have any ROTC or anything like that at Southern and nobody in my family, immediate family had served. The reason I picked the Army was because I did not decide to do this, go into the military until I was a senior. And the other branches, Air Force and Navy had all filled up all their slots. So, I couldn't go that way.

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B: Didn't have a choice at that point...

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G: I probably would have picked Air Force. So, the Army was the only thing available and I didn't have any plans. I hadn't talked to anybody in practice or anything. And one good thing about the military experience as far as the dentist is concerned is you get a lot of dentists when you get out of school, you're kind of slow, so it gives you a chance to build up your speed and you don't know everything. But I learned a lot. We would rotate through specialty sections and we had a lot of specialists around us and veterans, dentists who had been around. And so, you learned a lot, you got better, you got faster and you had a paycheck. Whereas if you're going out into practice, you're going to be borrowing money to buy equipment and to lease a building, then everything else that goes with starting out, like getting a car and getting a house. I had some student loans, but they were not anything like what you see today. I mean, they were peanuts compared to what you see today. And I had that monthly paycheck.

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B: Were there any moments during the war in particular, either during your time there or after or before that really stuck out to you and resonated with you in some way?

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G: Say that again.

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B: Were there any moments during the war either when you were in Vietnam or before, after you left that really stuck with you?

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G: Well, I can't think of anything in particular that stands out except that I had a very atypical tour. Just, I tell people about it and they can't believe it. These servants we had would I had, I had, I had a clean uniform every, every morning when I got up and we had two pairs of boots, and the pair of boots that I was not wearing had been shined every day. At Da Lat, we were 5000ft above sea level. It was not typical tropical terrain. We had pine trees, and there were snowcapped mountains around us, and we had a fire. And almost every night we had a fire in our fireplace which the servants would prepare. Well, let me branch out a little bit. We had bars at the villas. We had bars. And the way we worked, it was somebody would keep the bar stocked, and then at the end of the month, they would total up how much money had been spent, and then everybody was participating would pay their fair share. So, after I'd been there for a while, the guy who was the bar officer who was keeping both billets up and stocked up left, and I volunteered to do it, even though I wasn't part of the advisory group. I said, well, I probably ought to do a little something. And so, they said, 'okay, you can do it'. And then the place where I practiced it was actually a medical dispensary, but I had a place where I could do dentistry. And we were right next to the post exchange in the little compound there. And that's where you could buy beer, and wine, and whiskey. And so, it was easy for me to just walk next door and get it. And I used, the dispensary had an ambulance, and so we use the ambulance to deliver. That was kind of interesting. And then one of the things that went on in my unit was if you were a dentist, that was in a clinic, and there were a couple of large clinics, and then we had one man clinics around. And I was in a one man clinic, but I had assistants who are enlisted men. But after six months, some of the dentists in my unit were out, not in a clinic, but assigned to a unit like the 101 Infantry Division or the First Air Cav or somebody like that. That's a different deal and probably a little bit more of a hardship deal than the guys that were in the clinics. So, these

people who were out with the units, after six months, if they wanted to come leave and come back to a clinic, then somebody in the clinic would have to go take their place. So, I got the word that I was going to be one of those guys going to a unit, and it was going to be the First Air Calv, which they have a real nice patch. Too bad I didn't get to wear that patch, because I got out of it. And the way I did was there was a lieutenant colonel there where I was that I knew fairly well, and I said, you know, they're going to move me out of here. You're going to lose your bar officer. And so, he got on the phone and talked to my commander. I didn't leave. I stayed. One of the smartest things I ever did, I guess, become volunteer to be a bar officer. But when you're wearing a uniform, you wear a patch of your overall organization, like a Health Services Command or something like that. But on the other side you can wear the patch of a unit that you were in combat with. So boy, that first Air Cal patch is really great. It's got a horse on it. Anyway, so that's about all I have to say about that, I guess.

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B: So you enjoyed your time on base?

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G: I think I did, yeah, I think so. As much as you can enjoy something being remote from family and all that; and football...

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B: So, you were married at the time, you said. How was it in your family situation when you were over there?

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G: Well, my wife was a schoolteacher and her parents were in Birmingham and so she moved back in with them and she was teaching school at a school there. It was Barry Junior high. It's now part of the Hoover situation. And then when we were in dental school, we got married in dental school and she taught at Mountain Brook High School. Another interesting thing, she was making a salary and supporting herself and she didn't have any expenses, really, because she had a place to live. And then for my situation, I really didn't need a lot of money either. Travel and everything was kind of given to you and pay a little bit. We actually paid for our food, but it was not much and the drinks, but I just didn't have very many expenses and so I was able to save money, save a lot of money. A lot of money as it was in the 70s. But they had a deal where you could invest your money at 10%. So...I came home. I wasn't getting paid that much, but there

was hostile fire pay and there was this kind of pay and that kind of pay. It all kind of added up. So, I invested most of the money I made over there during the year at 10%. I came home with 10,000 in my pocket.

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B: Oh, wow.

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G: And we bought some stock.

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B: So you mentioned you were there during the Cambodian invasion?

G: After...it came in right after...

B: What were your thoughts on that? And did any effects of that influence your time there?

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G: I didn't have a problem with us going into and then we had a Laotian invasion. I think that did happen while I was there. That was not nearly as successful, but I thought it made sense to me to go clean out. Why observe you're fighting these people? Why observe some arbitrary line between countries? It's the enemy. They're still the enemy. Why not go take away their resources to sustain a fight? But Americans, people in the US. Didn't like it. They thought they were expanding the war instead of finishing the war and getting out. So, I didn't have any problem with that. I later came to know a physician who actually ended up living where I was living after it but he was involved in the Cambodian invasion over there slogging through with the troops. He couldn't believe the transition from that to living in this villa you know.

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B: So how is your relationship with your fellow American officers on base and do you remain in contact with any of them?

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G: I did for a while. I exchanged letters. That's about it. There were a couple of guys a couple of guys who had gone to LSU and the dental school down there. And I don't care for the LSU [both laugh], but they were good guys. And so when I was at the basic course I did basic officer

training at Fort Sam Houston in Texas, San Antonio. And so, I got to know them pretty well. And then, as it turned out, we were on the same plane to Vietnam two years later. And then they were both in my unit, my dental unit in Vietnam. And so, one of them I exchanged letters with for a while and I just kind of lost track. But all through my career I kept track of people I served with for a while.

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B: How was your experience during basic officer training in Texas?

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G: It was very hot out there. None of the classrooms were air conditioned. They had to teach us how to salute, how to put a uniform on and how to march. And then we went to all these classes. And then, of course, they were getting us ready for Vietnam, I guess. And we had to go out to this place called Camp Bullis. They had an exercise out there where they were shooting machine guns. Day and night exercise. And you had to crawl on your stomach or your back underneath barbed wire while they're shooting these machine guns. I don't know if there's any live ammunition or not but there were tracers that you could see. Had to do that and had to go to the rifle range and then had to go to gas chamber. And what you would do, you'd go into a gas chamber with a gas mask on and then they would make you take it off, and say your name and Social Security number or something like that. But they wanted you to get a whiff of that gas and then put the mask back on and to gain appreciation for the fact that the mass really did work. So, we did that. And we had a goat...had what they call a goat lab. And what they would do is they would shoot a goat and then you would go in and debride the wound. Because in war, a dental officer's secondary mission is to assist physicians in surgery or whatever. So, I guess that's what that was all about. I don't think many goats survived.

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B: Did you end up having to assist any physicians during your time in Vietnam?

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G: I never did. No, I never did. But there was a physician at the Dispensary there and so he assisted me some. He would come up and sedate patients sometimes who were apprehensive. I remember a guy and most of my patients convoyed in. There was not much there where I was and they would convoy in. There were engineers and signal corps people. I remember this guy came in and had a really bad toothache. We needed to extract the tooth and he was a little

worried about it. So, I got the physician to come up and give him an IV and we sedated him and got the tooth out. And the next day he was so pleased, and we let him sleep it off. He was so pleased that I don't think he remembered anything about the operation. And he went and bought me a bottle of whiskey. So that made my day.

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B: Fair deal.

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G: And another thing, we would go out as I mentioned, we would go out into these villages. All we did was extract teeth. We didn't take any equipment except for forceps and stuff and it was pretty and we all always went to a mountain yard village, which was mountain people who are indigenous people, I think, and they're not Asian. They were more like American Indian, I would say. And they were pretty primitive. And there were these missionaries there where I was, the Christian Missionary Alliance and they had a lot of property and they had a big villa and they had an indoor basketball court. They would coordinate our trips out to these villages because they were trying to Christianize the natives. And we would go out in a helicopter. Go out in the helicopter and a physician would go to and just pass out medicine and stuff like that. I think the gesture was good and the people in the village appreciated it. But we actually took out a lot of teeth, though. And the teeth are fairly easy to extract on Vietnamese because of the anatomy of the tooth and all. And I have a picture of me. You'd go to these villages, some of the old men would be walking around with wearing loincloths and the women were bare breasted often. And I got a picture of me taking a tooth out on a woman that was bare breasted. I mean, that's so that was that was an interesting experience. Let's see. And then the missionaries would there was a man and a wife and then there were some younger women. They were the main ones. And there was a rumor that they were on the CIA payroll because they were out there and they knew what was going on and they could inform the CIA if there's any enemy activity in a lot of these villages. That's part of the infrastructure of the Vietcong. And they didn't have a choice. Vietcong says, we're going to store rice here and we're going to store ammunition and you got to do it or we'll bring the chief out and cut his head off, stuff like that. But the older couple would occasionally invite kind of way we got connected with them was one of the physicians at my dispensary there in Da Lat was his sister, was one of the missionaries. We would occasionally get invited out to the villa for dinner. Man, it was good. Apple pie and fried chicken, good stuff. So that was interesting to do in Nha Trang. When I would go to Nha Trang on a monthly basis, the routine there was we would usually have some continuing education classes and then on

Sunday we would get up and go to the Air Force Officers Club, which is better than the Army always is. And you could get a champagne breakfast, steak and eggs for a dollar.

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B: Wow.

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G: And then they had tennis courts and I would play tennis. And then we would go to the beach, which was a really nice beach. And I got some pictures here. I'll show you.

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B: Perfect.

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G: And Nha Trang was not on limits. I got another story to tell you. Nha Trang was not on limits, off limits. So, troops could not go into the city. It was a nice city, but we could go to the beach. And there was an area that was kind of roped off for military and had concertina wire in it, so they would do that. But anyway, they had this, since it was not on limits, as a way to take care of the young males, you could check a woman onto the post. And these women had been medically screened and given whatever antibiotics were necessary. So, every afternoon at 05:00, when kind of the close of business, all these people would gather at the front gate of the compound there. It was like a fair. And people vendors were selling stuff and the troops would check out the women and check them onto the post. And we call it a meat market. I never participated, but I went to watch it because you have to see it to believe it. And it's a problem. It's a problem. You got a bunch of men locked up like young men. So that's how they solved that problem. I never saw anything written about that. There was a general who wanted that sort of thing and he wanted to have prostitution, legal prostitution, I guess, but nobody thought he knew what he was doing anyway. Bad optics, I guess. So that was something that was interesting.

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B: When you would go onto the villages on your visits, were you ever fearful of the Vietcong at all?

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G: I was. Particularly. I was...I didn't know what kind of situation I was going into. And I remember on one trip I was the only guy, plus two assistants, two dental assistants. We didn't have anybody else. And then the helicopter would drop us off and leave, I said oh...And we had weapons. I had an M 16 and pistol and all that, but I couldn't hold out for very long. And so, and then one thing that worried me was they had a rainy season and a dry season. And in the rainy season, the morning would start out pretty good, but by about midday, the clouds would roll in. And always worried that and we would be looking to be extracted out of there at midday and always worried that the helicopter couldn't get in. And I didn't spend the night. I didn't want to do that. I got some pictures that kind of demonstrate that. Yeah I didn't worry about it, but I was young and stupid, so I probably didn't fully appreciate what peril there was or could have been. The mountain yards were they were good people, though. They were more trustworthy. It was generally assumed that they were more trustworthy than the Vietnamese. And my villa where I lived, and the other one, we had guards. We were in the city. We were in the town, but we had a fence and concertina wire and all that, and we had guards. We hired these guards, and the mountain yards were the ones we wanted because we felt they were more reliable. And then the officers would take turns every night going around. You would go around and check the guards, make sure they weren't falling asleep, and then you had to report it in to somebody. I don't know, everything okay here, but we never had any problems, never had any problems in Da Lat.

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B: So, when did you come home? You said '71 or '72.

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G: '71. Came home in August, I think it was '71.

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B: And you were still in the army at that point?

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G: Yeah, that was just finished my second year, so I stayed 20 more years.

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B: So how was your experience coming home in terms of the journey back and then adjusting to life faster?

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G: Yeah, that's a really good question. It was not easy. And that's when you heard stories about anti war people spitting on soldiers and calling them baby killers and all that kind of thing I would not venture. I went to Fort Benning, Georgia, near so basically all I did that first year home was go to work and come home. I would not venture out anywhere with a uniform. I just did not want to be seen in public with a uniform on. And it took a while to kind of get adjusted. I think everybody, every military person has that problem, no matter what transitioning from military lifestyle to civilian lifestyle, it's just not the same. I had a guy, I had a friend at Fort Campbell. I finished up at Fort Campbell, and I knew an officer up there who retired. He was the chief of staff, and he went to work selling cars, a the car salesman. And he said, the difference is, he says, in the civilian world, nobody's in charge. That was what he liked to say. And he'd already always had somebody ordered him around. I guess a general or somebody. I think what he was saying was, it doesn't seem like there's anybody responsible, I think is what he was saying. You're just kind of on your own out there and good luck.

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B: Were there any experiences to you in that initial period back of adjusting that stuck out to you? Either an experience you had with anti-war movement or the opposite, someone commending you for your service in some way?

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G: No, I didn't know I didn't have any problems. No, I didn't have any problems. Fort Benning is a huge post over there, and it's a military town. And I tell you, we lived on post, and our quarters were near Calley, Lieutenant Calley over the My Lai massacre.

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B: Oh.

[\[00:43:57\]](#)

G: He was under house arrest in the area where I lived.

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B: Wow.

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G: And he was from Columbus, I think. He was complicit, of course, but he was probably scapegoated. I think people above him got all scot free, and I can kind of understand them losing it like that because they had some had some of their members of their unit get killed, and they blamed that village, but they wiped it out, like we just saw in Israel. Anyway, I wasn't in their shoes, so I don't want them to be too judgmental.

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B: And then during your next 22 years in the Army, what did your experience look like from then?

[\[00:44:49\]](#)

G: It was good. I got involved in Fort Benning. I got involved well, first of all, the commander at Fort Benning, Dunk Commander was I had had him at Fort Seal, my first, and so he knew me, and he liked guess, and so he put I was assigned me to the hospital. So, I worked at a hospital dental clinic, and that was nice duty. And then about halfway through my tour at Fort Benning, I got into training dental assistants. And the Army kind of pioneered in expanded duty dental assistants. So, we were letting these assistants do things that would have been against the law in Alabama or Georgia, and we were letting them fill teeth. The dentist would prep the tooth, and then the dental assistant would fill it and finish was involved in training. And these were civilians. We were training civilian dental assistants, and we called them expanded duty assistants. So, I did that at Fort Benning. And then when I moved to Fort Stewart, I started a program there. And so that was different, and it was interesting. And we had a lot of classroom and a lot of working on models before we went into the clinic. But the way that's set up is a dentist would have two of these expanded duty dental assistants and have two chairs. So the dentist is moving. He really doesn't have any downtime. He's busy. He's busy not waiting around with the students. When the students first came in the claim, they were pretty slow. I could manage six different dental assistants, expanded duty dental assistants. And one of the reasons they had that program because we were losing officers. They were getting cut the number of officers we could have. And so, the way to provide the same amount of care and the same access to care, this was the answer. And then the ADA. American Dental Association decided they didn't like it. And they told the Army they tried to get the Army to stop doing it. And he said, if you'll stop doing this, you can do it with military, but not with civilians, then we will use whatever influence we have to get bonuses for your officers. And he did. So, they stopped training civilians and officers ended up getting a \$10,000 bonus per year. And interestingly, the dental school at Alabama was doing that too. As a matter of fact, the dental school at University

of Alabama invented forehanded dentistry, which is the dentist sat down and the assistant is right there handing him instruments, high speed evacuation. Alabama invented that. And actually, the Army used to be the dentist would have a wall of cabinets and he would have to turn away from the patient and get know. But now with the assistance right there just feeding you instruments, they had to have a special cart, a mobile cart. Alabama designed a cart, which was called the Alabama cart. And that was in the federal stock number.

[\[00:48:45\]](#)

B: Oh wow.

[\[00:48:46\]](#)

G: It had a federal stock number you could order. And it was a North Carolina cart too, I think. So, it was the Alabama Cart and North Carolina Cart. So anyway, that's kind of a little off. But anyway, Alabama was pioneering. They were getting into this expanded duty dental assistant too. And the State Board of Dental Examiners says you can't do you we're not going to let you do that. You got to quit doing and the dean of the dental school, Scotty McCallum, who became the vice president in charge of the whole medical center and then became president of UAB, he's now deceased. He was also an oral surgeon. And so, one year the state board was written. You had to do national boards, but there was a state board. It was a little bit of a written test and most of it was clinical where he saw patients and the dean, who was oral surgeon, every year when his residents would come in, a lot of them would come in from out of state. He made them take the Alabama state board. And the state board flunked every one of them one year.

[\[00:50:04\]](#)

B: Wow.

[\[00:50:04\]](#)

G: Just to send a message to the dean, cut out this expanded duty stuff. But now Alabama is a lot more liberal about it now. And I don't know if they can do fillings or not, but they do a lot, and a lot of states are kind of going that way. It's the same thing that medicine did with physicians assistants and nurse practitioners. And this was the same idea because you get a tremendous amount of basic science in dental school, you got first two years, it's almost all the basic science, and you don't need that. You don't need all that stuff to do dentistry. In Germany, they go straight out of high school to learn how to be a dentist. They don't do all that science. So just two different ideas about how to train. But that was interesting, training those assistants. Then I had a

residency. The Army and other branches, too, had they had they had oral surgery residency, endodontics, which is root canals, periodontics, which is gum treatment. We would send their orthodontists and pedodontists off to Washington University in St. Louis, I think, but they also had what was called a general dentistry residency, and that was a two-year residency. And so, I did that about halfway through my career. And it was fabulous. I learned a lot. Learned it. And we rotated through all the different specialties and did a lot of stuff. Went to the operating room, fixed fractured jaws, extracted wisdom teeth, all that kind of stuff. That was good. It was good for me professionally, too, to improve my knowledge and skills.

[\[00:52:15\]](#)

B: And then when did you retire?

[\[00:52:18\]](#)

G: Retired in 1991.

[\[00:52:19\]](#)

B: Okay, and then how long did you practice dentistry after that?

[\[00:52:24\]](#)

G: Well, we came to Tuscaloosa, and I didn't do anything for a couple of years, and then I got a job in Birmingham with the Jefferson County Health Department. And I did that for about eight years, and then I kind of just quit. And that was an interesting job, too. I wasn't really a dental job, except that I supervised hygienists who were doing dental sealants on children in schools. And we would take air portable equipment to underserved schools in Jefferson County, and equipment was pretty good. And we would set up these hygienists. The team of hygienists would do plastic sealants on the surface, chewing surfaces of teeth supposed to prevent decay. So I did that. And the state required direct supervision of hygienists. I don't know if they do or not now. I think they may still, but the only reason I really had that job was that they had to have a dentist in the room. And then I examined all the patients, too, because public health always wants data, they always want the numbers. So that was interesting. And then I came just quit doing dentistry. I kept my license active, though, which meant I had to take continuing education courses so much every year. But now I'm not licensed anymore. Just, I'm old.

[\[00:54:12\]](#)

B: And then my last question for you is, do you have any other thoughts or things you'd like to add for this project?

[\[00:54:21\]](#)

G: I don't know. I was telling you about...in fact, I was reading...I have a lot of books about Vietnam, and I have a lot of them, and this is one of the ones I really like called *A Better War* [shows *A Better War* by Sorley]. And this guy who wrote it served in Vietnam, but he also taught he taught at the Army War college, and he kind of showed how it was possible to win the war. And we changed that with Westmoreland you know, the much pillary General Westmoreland, he was the search and destroyer attrition, war of attrition. And then after he left Abrams, Creighton Abrams came in the Abrams tank and all. He had been with Patton in World War II and probably Spanish American or Mexico, I don't know. And he was the one who wanted to get out into the villages and hamets. And that involved me because we were a part of that, pacify the natives, basically, Vietnamization I guess. It really changed things. Even though we had all of our combat troops were out or standing down, the South Vietnamese were fighting very well as long as they had all our financial support and artillery from air support and Navy. Without it, they weren't great. But with it, they could fight. In '72 after I left, there was an Easter Offensive, I think, is what they called it. Nixon or somebody had been bombing the heck out of the North. And then the North invaded the south, just like in '75, and had tremendous casualties. And it showed they could finally fight you know, but they had to have our support. But in '74 I think it was, Congress or somebody pulled the rug out, and pulled all support out. And of course when '75 came, the Vietnamese ran off. Sad ending to it all you know? 58,000 killed you know. And no telling how many were wounded. There were problems there...oh and another thing. They didn't call any reserves up. Maybe a unit or two. Basically, the reserves which are well trained and well seasoned people, they were never called up. So the Army, and all the other branches had to start from scratch...to find people and train them. They say that resulted in a rather undisciplined Army. And there were drug problems, serious drug problems. And there was prostitution. And there were gangs. There were gangs. I had a friend who was an investigator for the MP's, CID, Criminal Investigation Department who confronted a gang in Vietnam. And they killed him. So you had that. And everybody was smoking marijuana. Everybody. Including the press. Haha. I think the print media liked being there. There were tremendous problems like that, morale and discipline problems towards the latter part. So, it was a mess. Just a mess. In retrospect, I think it was a mistake.

B: Going into the war?

G: The way I feel about things now, if we were going to commit to a war, or a conflict, send our men and women, sons and daughter into it, we need to commit to win it. Use everything you can to win it, and win it quick. But to go and say 'you can't do that because these people have nuclear weapons, and we can't do that'...and that's probably what we're going to see in this situation now with Israel, needs to stop their invasion, too many casualties... but I say if you're not willing to commit to win, and win quit, don't go at all. But that's my personal opinion. But I have no regrets. I had a good tour, they still pay me, I still get a check haha...

[Shows book missionaries gave him, tells quick word about them]

B: If that's all, I'm going to end the recording, thank you so much.

[end of recording]