

Interviewer: Miles Turner

Interviewee: John Williams

Date: 28 March 2019

**Q:** Tell us your name and a little bit about where you're from?

**John David Williams:** I was born on October the 19th, 1946. I was born in Greene county, Alabama, which is just south of Tuscaloosa. I was born in the country, at home. Doctor, from old time doctor from Eutaw, Doctor Joe P. Smith came at my home, our home, which is near Knoxville and, and delivered me, uh, from where we live there for a while. And then when, when I was real young, we moved to Livingston, Alabama. And uh, my dad was done with it, part owner of the international truck and tractor place in Livingston. And uh, we were there. I actually lived in downtown Eutaw for a while. He taught for a while and then Livingston and then he got a job with the, a bigger international truck and tractor place in Tuscaloosa. We moved to Tuscaloosa. I don't remember that other than this, the next thing you knew where I was living in Tuscaloosa, you know, but lived in a little neighborhood called Eastwood. Do you know where? Oh. And just really, really changed especially since the Tornado in 2011. Do you know where the Krispy Kreme doughnut place is? I house was about two, two houses down from me. There was no McFarland then. Uh, uh, went to Tuscaloosa High School. Graduated in 1963 I went to North Lincoln elementary and in Tuscaloosa junior high school and then, then Tuscaloosa High School. I graduated in 1965. Yeah. Uh, I was the last, my class was the last four-year class house Tuscaloosa Freshman, freshman, sophomore, junior, senior. We were so large that uh, a through n. Last initial went from eight to 12, and then from the o to z went to 12 to four. We were so big. We were the last segregated class, 1966. It was integrated. Oh, I went to, uh, I was on the swim team at Tuscaloosa High School and uh, we did very well. Usually won it, it was either between us and Robert E Lee High School or Sydney Lanier High School in Montgomery. Had the premier swimming teams. Uh, I went to college at Montevallo for one year, didn't really like it that much and wasn't settled and I've transferred to Livingston University living status. What University of West Alabama now I was, I went there for a year, then I got to eat if Vietnam was going full blast or getting ready to go full blast. I stayed there a year and then I've joined the Marines on the hundred- and 20-day delight plan and joined the Marines in October of 1966. And that counted, that hundred- and 20-day delay program counted this part of my enlistment there, although I haven't been bootcamp yet. I got to boot camp in Parris Island, South Carolina and on Valentine's Day, February 14th, 1967 and was in good physical condition. I had some problems and surgeries on both elbows while I was in high school. And uh, I had a lot of trouble with, I wasn't very big and probably weighed 120, 25 pounds. But I have a lot of trouble doing the pushups, sit ups, the way they pull up, the way they wanted me to do it. So, I ended up having to do it my way because I couldn't rotate my arms around this way. And uh, uh, I caught a lot of grief in that. A lot of grief. I went off to the marines with my lifelong friend. He and I grew up in church at Forest Lake Baptist Church and he was a backup quarterback for Tuscaloosa high school football team. His name was Lambert Pain. He and I still close today. We went off on the buddy plan and uh, it just so happened it would score about the same thing. Pretty good score to real good score. After, we got to the, I've got to Parris Island and we both were selected, if you want to call it that. We both were selected for electronics training school could electronics, school radio, radio communication radio repair. We went to the Parris Island and I was just about ready to graduate. I did well at the rifle range shot expert. And uh, still, uh, at pugil sticks. Okay. And uh, I did all right one on one and then they put us off to the ones that one. Aye. Aye. Aye. I'm defeated my guy one on one. And then after they get all of that, then they put the winners. They put two on one and that match didn't last but a few seconds. And the guy that was one was on one side of them and one ends in the middle and they both fainted toward me. And one guy caught me right here with the padded end to the pugil stick and dislocated my shoulder. Uh, course the drill instructor thought I would just, then he finally got my shirt

off and saw that my shoulder was dislocated and they, they sent me to the, uh, to the, uh, little little hospital, I guess you could say it, Parris Island. And they couldn't get it back in for the seat. Went to the Naval Hospital in Charleston and it took 'em muscle relaxers and all of that. It took them, it was, they called it 12 hours to reduce. So, it took 12 hours from my shoulder to relax enough. And of course, they had me all kinds of pain meds. But, uh, it finally, after about 12 hours, it went back in place. Well, I went ahead and finished with my series with my platoon, cause when I was in a sling most of the time, and I went ahead and, they took the sling off for me to graduate, you know, with the parade and all of that arm is still hurt me pretty bad. But, uh, uh, like I say, we'd already had the rifle range, so they didn't, I had to go through all of that. Excruciating stances, the tightness of the sling and all of that. But, uh, and we were shooting the m 14 and, uh, when my platoon left to go to advanced infantry training at Geiger Camp Lejeune. I got left because I didn't think I'd be able to do the rigors of that. Yeah. But 29 days and because and everything was structured around getting you ready to go to Vietnam because of you, you know, even marines, then you go to Vietnam. But anyway, I stayed, uh, left about three weeks and I got up there and I saw my guys, but I wasn't with them, I was with entirely different group when I got there. Uh, one of the next series to graduate from Parris Island. Went up there and I stayed there for a little while and then got sent home, you know, for that little short leave. And then I left and went to the, uh, uh, radio electronics repair school was then at the northern end of the recruit depot at San Diego. It's now 29 palms, but then, it was then at San Diego. Went to C school, So I went through that and uh, I made PFC out of boot camp. The first course was several, several months long. I made lance corporal out of that and then the other, the finishing thing wasn't near as long as their basics. But uh, to make a long story short, I made corporal out of that. And didn't really know anything about being a corporal, wouldn't, he's like, oh, it's billing or anything, man. Anyway, I left San Diego, came home, for 30 days and, and uh, Oh, then went to Camp Pendleton. That's what they called finishing school and all that was, was, it was problem three or four weeks. I can't remember. But it was really, really hard, arduous training. And uh, we uh, were, we were quip with MILES equipment. Do you know what that is? MILES equipment was it your rifle had on electronic, the beginning part of the miles program and I forget what miles is an acronym for, but anyway, so you've got little sensors all over your flat jacket and if somebody records a hit on you, it records it for that particular unit and we went through that. Then I uh, did not get to come back home after, after Pendleton, we went straight to Vietnam. We stopped in Okinawa and Okinawa all we uh, we field graded our equipment, checked into stuff that we wouldn't go need like civies so like civilian clothes and all of that. And we had a shot caller gamma globin. It's terrible, it's like being shot in the tush with a 22 short. Depending on how close the pharmacist night the nurses got to your scattered nerve and yell. We've had to take some, some of our friends, we had to just literally take out on the stretcher because they couldn't walk. But it took, it took about six or seven minutes. It's a real viscous solution, a solution for blood clotting in tropical climate. And they gave it to you by car. You just like that in it was, I mean I saw people crying and didn't know where they were crying. It was really, really bad. But it would, it would help clot blood in the vein of a wound. Mm. Oh, I uh, we stayed at Okinawa. We stored equipment. I quit meant that one didn't need our gear. We didn't need and we got on him. Oh, well first of all, when we left Pendleton, we went to, I forget the name of the air force base, but what went to an air force base we got on Tiger Airlines, which was an adhoc airline that, that the, that the government had hired to fly troops to and from Vietnam and frankly at night and we went to that air force base and got on. I think we spent one night we got on the plane.

All right. Bye. So, you taxi, Seattle, Tacoma and uh, we weren't there, but a few hours when they topped off, they went, took the northern route across the Pacific and landed in Okinawa. And that's why we had our final shots. We didn't do a whole lot of training. We did a lot running, but we didn't know a whole lot, right. Or training and we wouldn't name her, but probably two days. And they did you that two days because it took some of us, I mean, I walked out of was a limp. Um, I didn't have to be helped out, you know, whenever, give me the gamma globin and shot, but it was, it was awful. Well, anyway, we flew in to Da Nang and, and coastal. We had stewardess on their airplane, females. And uh, we were coming in to Da Nang and Da Nang was a huge, huge air force base and of course had been lengthened and widened and all of that for military. But, uh, we flew into Da Nang and as we were coming in the pilot said "I

wanted to give y'all one more final up checkup or update, keep you up to par and see what's going on, let you know what's going on. And he told us what the temperature was in Da Nang and was sort of a comic. He was, he was also on the air force pilot, retired, but he was flying that, that jet. But anyway, he came in and he said, uh, I'd like to report that. Um, uh, what the temperature was that it was like 108 or something like that. And it was eight o'clock in the morning and he says, uh, uh, that they're having a, that not having any shelling right now, but the ground fire is light to medium. Now, you know, that went over real big with us. But anyway, when they opened up that door, I was in charge of a section on the airplane. When they opened up that door, I thought that a jet or helicopter or someone was outside right next to the door and blowing the exhaust fumes in the airplane. But it wasn't, it was the normal temperature. At eight o'clock in the morning, it was about 10 o'clock, something like that. But it was 107, eight degrees and humidity was just like air you could wear, you know, it was just awful. And I thought, my God, I got to live through this for a year. But anyway, I got to uh, the end process and all of the marines went to one place and when you went into it, it was a, a huge, huge quonset hut that they were doing the in processing and they had the MOS' on a sign over each line that you was supposed to hit in. Well, I saw my MOS (Military Occupation Specialty) and there was a buddy with me and, and uh, uh, so I got in that, uh, 2841, 2847 line, which is ground radio repair and almost going to be like in the rear or somewhere in an air conditioning place, you know, fixing radios, repairing radios that could be repaired. And uh, I was in that initial black gunnery sergeant came up to me. He had a clipboard and I had only jungle bdu's. He came up to me and he said, "Corporal," I said, "Yes sir." He said, "Can you operate a radio?" And I said, "Yeah gunny, I got to know it." We didn't have to go through a formal radio operating school, I pull more radio, operating schooling, repairs could, but we did do it because we had to know when to turn loose of the button and all that. And I said, "Yeah, I got to know how to operate it and hide operation to repair it." He said, "I need you to get over in this other line." I don't know what it was when you were in. When I was in the other, the radio operator, which was a school, we had people that flunked out of electronics training and they sent them radio operator training. It was called 2531 that was the mos for radio operator. And uh, he said, uh, "Get over here and this line," well, he had gotten two or three of from the other line. And I was about to next one to go in and get processed in the, my buddy said, what are you doing over there? And I said gunny put me over here. He said, "Get your butt back over here." So, I got back in that line again, you know, and I was about the next one up and he comes along. He said, "Get your butt back home in this other line." I got back over there and I got processed in as a 2531, which I didn't have any formal radio operator school at that time. Okay. I got processed in and he waited on me, he took me in three or four more guys and we've got on a helicopter and flew to Fubai, which is north of Da Nang and uh, stay there for just long enough to get there and get off the helicopter. We got on a C130 and I asked him why for? He said, "We're going to Khe Sanh." I said, "Okay." Here's what I want you to do. He says, "I want you to stay right on me. If I stop, I want you to run into me." I hadn't had any military gear. I have no combat gear. I was in stateside fatigues; you know the whole thing. I didn't have any jungle boots or anything and um, I hadn't got a weapon yet. So, we got on that C130, we got the Khe Sanh and we had to circle. I don't remember exactly how long it was. I know it was an hour. We had the circle because they were getting shelled, the combat base. We're getting shelled and uh, oh, we finally got clearance to land. He said, "The aircraft is just going to turn around and let the tailgate down and you get off with me." He said, "You follow right behind me." Well, the aircraft really never actually came to a dead stop. It was slow, but to tell the tail ramp was down and we took off the airplane and I was right behind him and he went into or down an incline interest in trenches next to the airstrip. Well, we got to a place and there was artillery rounds. Not really close, but you could hear them, you know, and feel, and uh, and uh, he made it, he was going to make a turn to go to the right when we got to the end of that first tunnel, it tee'd. Well, he wasn't stopped to let somebody else come by that was going to a bunker or something. And I run over him and he said, that's what I'm talking about. That's what I'm talking about. I see you doing exactly what I want you to do. Well, we finally got to the end process and then I did all my paperwork and all of that and got all the pertinent information and you got my orders and all that kind of stuff. Well, he said, I'm going to take you down to the supply bunker. So, went down there and even with all of the shelling and stuff that was going on, life was ordinary. You know what I'm saying? Life just went on. I mean, you'd

just call, you'd getting shelled. That wasn't anything close to me, but it wasn't anything. Well anyway, we got to the supplied the bunker. I went in there and the guy, but I couldn't tell what he was, what rank he was. He was probably a PFC or lance corporal or something, but he was, he was in supply and he started piling stuff upon them up on the counter. And uh, he said, "What do you, what's your MOS?" And I, well I told him, he said, "Well, I don't know what that is." I said, "Well, I bet I've been, I've been that, I've been asked, I've been told that I'm going to operate a radio." And he said, "Okay." So, he put the 45 up there, a couple of boxes shells. See m1911a1, 45 and he gave all my, the equipment and he said, "Okay, ok corporal sign here." And I told him, "Actually cuz your giving me three boxes of shells." And he said, "What are you talking about?" I said, "I'm not leaving here with this 45 just this 45". He said, "That's all. That's your issue weapon for radio operator." And I argued with him and he got on the line, you know, crank up the land line and he said, "Wait a minute." So, he called his warrant officer and warrant officer, came down now and he said, "What do you want?" And I told him. He says, "Well, you've got to leave here with at 45." I said, "Okay." But he said, "I'll give you a 16 if that's what you want, but you're going to half to tote that and your radio and maybe some artillery rounds and machine gun rounds and everything else and probably two or three extra radios when you're in the field. But he said, if you want to do that a, he said, I'll give it to him. And he took, he turned to the guy that was doing the issuing and he said give the little bastard what he wants. So they gave me that, and I got into my bunker, my living quarters and a guy, I don't remember what he was, he came and got me and he says, oh, what do you know about the m16 I said, nothing. We had m14 in bootcamp. We got the advanced training at Camp Geiger Camp Lejeune and had the m1 and uh, and he gave me a quick course on it cause she didn't know when we'd heard about them all that. But we didn't, we didn't see one till I got to Vietnam and so, did that and I got it. Battle site zeroed, you know, cause you're not going to be shooting, nobody with a 16. Normally, you're not going to be shooting anybody with a 16 extreme range is just going to be up close and hills, bushes, and jungle and uh, so I got that, and he said, all right, here's, Oh I forgot what it was. I think he was a staff sergeant. He says, you have some rest, get some about chow tonight and then the morning early you're going to get on a helicopter. I said, okay, where am I going? He said, you're going to 881 south. Khe Sanh was in the North West section of South Vietnam, not too far from the DMZ. And, uh, I got there in the next morning and got on the CH34 helicopter and, uh, we didn't have any Hueys or very few and I all, I seen was a CH34. So, I got on that and a, I was buy myself other than they would take him some water all and all of that, you know. So, I landed on 881 south and there was an 881 north 881 south was here in Khe Sanh. So, I got there, and I landed and the guy asked me, you know what to who I want. He said, hey, we've been waiting on you. So, they, uh, took me to the bunker, I got all my gear on, got everything, you know, cinched up and got me some water and all that. And he said, he said, okay. He said, I'm going to take you to a guy that's going to show you how-to call-in artillery fire. I said, "Oh my God." So now this all happened within 18 hours of getting to Vietnam. You know what I'm saying? They would just hurly girly was just tell holes and elbows. It was just wide open. So, I got, I got my stuff and got my water. He took me to this guy that was working on a radio and he was mumbling and all of that. And the guy had on a flak jacket and his helmet was off to the side. He said, you Corporal Williams? I said, yeah. He said, alright sit down and he said, what's wrong with this thing? And I looked at him, I said, what's it doing? And he says, uh, the, the knob won't change the frequencies. And I said, well, it got a little kitchen in ring upon it. And I said, I'll fix that. So, I fixed that. And he said, okay, put it on this frequency. And we put it on that frequency. And then we went out to a little ridge that has a little, some rocks and mortar round boxes full of sand and a punch a wall over. And uh, and he said, do you know anything about operating the radio and call it calling in artillery fire? And I said, no sir, I don't know anything. So, he, he gave me the background and I was scared stiff. You could hear rounds going over and all of that, you know, freely from, from the 105 round battery at Khe Sanh so he said, well, here's how you read the map and all that. And I knew how to do that. So well let's just take for instance, if we're sitting in Duncanville and I wanted to shoot, a round, I wanted to shoot a fire mission and I wanted to shoot it Northport. I was so tentative at first that I would put in to give, you know, to give him plenty of clearance. And he didn't fuss, he said, that's fine, but if I wanted to shoot it Northport, I was putting a mission I was putting at Moundville, not that exaggerated a course, but way away off from where I'm

assuming. And uh, he worked with me for several hours and uh, with his help, we fired several missions that afternoon. Next morning started all over again and by that afternoon, afternoon or the next day I was, if I wanted to hit the city hall and Northport, I was aiming at the city hall, I was given coordinates for the City Hall. Well anyway, to make a long story short, this guy was a major, a nice guy. You know, I could tell he probably had some college, but I didn't have any idea of what, what he's rank was, but he was on the major. His name was major, Jerry Lynch and to fast forward about 35 40 45 years. He retired from the Marine Corps. I know, I know a major general, but I think a lieutenant general, but I know he was two star when he retired, but anyway, he was a, he was the fire directional control officer for several batteries of 'em. Bravo 113 which 13th 11th to 12th Marines were all artillery and these on the 105-artillery round. Anyway, I stayed there for several weeks, about four or five weeks and back then they wanted second lieutenants to be forward observers and here I was a corporal and I got in a brand new bunch and about four or five weeks, I got in a brand new bunch of second lieutenants, I mean green butter bar, second lieutenant. And I was given some instructions, Major Lynch, kept checking on me. He said, you're doing a fine job if things cool. And uh, I had gotten, I'd gotten called sort of cocky then, you know, I'd get in to where I was shooting a lot, uh, enemy in the open, enemy in the bunkers and tree lines and, and all of that. You could actually see em moving in some cases. And I had a second lieutenant, I forgot what his name was. He came up to me and he said, Corporal, I said, yeah. He said, I got a problem, with taking orders and instructions from a corporal. I said, well, sir, I hate that that's the case, but if you know more about this than I do, I said, you're welcome to take over. And, uh, he had been to fort sill, which is an army base in Oklahoma, but that I'll ever all the military base that went there for artillery training. And uh, he said, well, I'm, I'm just having a problem with taking orders from, from a mere corporal for, I said, well, I'm sorry. I said, the best thing for you to do, I'll go with you. Or you go by yourself, go see Major Lynch. He said, I intend on doing that very thing. Well, the next day he got back out there, and he came up to me and he said, corporal, what can I do? Major Lynch to had given him a prayer meeting and from that point on he, he became a good artillery officer and a good student, but he had asked Major Lynch. I said, what did you tell him? I said, I told him, I said, you can go by himself and see you or I'll go with whatever one you wanted to do. He said, well, you won't have any more problems with them. All right. I did that for about six or seven weeks. I was with Bravo 113 and they needed an operator and bear in mind now the whole time that I was talking to a radio operating, I had to take my time in the bunkers at night for the net control and uh, they needed a, they needed operators since two second lieutenants that got in, I got them snapped in the radio operators, second battalion, 26 Marine regiment, which is who I, went with. Uh, I stayed there. I went, I went there, and it just so happened that about the time I went to second battalion, 26 Marines Major Lynch also went. As the story went. And uh, I was his radio operator for several, several, several months and uh, lived in the same hole and of course we went to different fire bases and then did a lot of on the ground humping and walking. And uh, hadn't had a whole lot of trouble with my shoulder. It was, it was sore. It hurts, it's painful. And I had to do a lot of humping come back. Back then you had to carry you radio plus and hedged radio. And I was working on radios and so I had all of that stuff and at two nine or two antenna, which came in a canvas bag and we set that up and uh, we were really just, we'd go would, we will, what do you call them? A Battalion Landing Team, a BLT, and we were BLT 226 and then our rear was on there was two LTH's, in pad helicopter and they were carriers, they will small carriers, they weren't made for fixed wing, they were made for helicopters, USS Okinawa and USS Princeton. And we, our rear was on board the ships. And then when we go out on an operation. We'd vertical lift on the helicopters and we'd come back after the operation was over with, get rested up, patched up, radio's fixed, all the other gears, inventory and fixed and then we'll go out on another operation. Well that's what we did for, oh, I don't know, several months. But sometimes we would get, we would, we would have to, would vertical lift on helicopters. We would go into a Quang Tri, Dong Ha, Cua Viet. Uh, and that was after we left Khe Sanh and, uh, December the first 1968 I've been in country a good while, and uh, we had operation Meade River. It was a cordon operation was we had our ARVN and Marines. We were in a cordon, a circle, and every day we would tighten it up, tighten it up, tighten it up. And we knew we had a lot of NVA and Viet Cong in that, circle. We've been doing that for about three weeks at home. December the first 1968, uh, myself and my friend was Didi Sailor from Dennison, Iowa.

They put us on an LP, which was about 200 yards in front of the regular outpost, rice paddies. And uh, well we went out there. A little after dark. We set up our claymore mines. You know what a Claymore is? Anyway, we sent him, uh, and uh, we were both awake and, and, and uh, we call him DD, DD Sailor, and he, uh, I said which watch he wanted, you wanna go first. You want to go first You said, I think I'll let you go first. Okay. That was about 10 or 10 30 at night. And mortar rounds had been shooting up with illumination parachute, and uh, he liked it and it went to sleep right beside me. And uh, I had to pee about a quarter to 12 and he was going to take over about. if I could stay in at 1230 to 12, 1230, one o'clock. But I was tired. We were always, we're tired and uh, I had to pee. We were on a mound of dirt. They buried their dead in the country in Vietnam, just like the Indians dead in Moundville, except that the mounds were very, very small in compared to those. And I was leaning up against one of the, I guess you'd call it the headstone, but it was just a rock and a, I guess my mound was about size the area of two or three pickups, rice patties all around. So, I stood up to pee and all I did was just step forward two, three places and peed off the little mound. Well, I stretched and I did all that you know, I stretched and I sat back down and instead of putting my rifle this away because I was tired and I was trying to stay awake, I laid it down this way next to me and I didn't have my hand on it. Well, about that time, it's very similar to a kill Dee. It's a swamp bird. Okay. Do you know what a Kill Dee is? He as a bird we have here in the United States, in the south, and you can look them up. If you look them up on Google, it's like kill deer, but it's a killed Dee. We all, that's what we knew and well, or growing up and uh, some Kildee he's, I call him killed. He's got up. I said, Ooh, that's kind of strange. But I didn't, I didn't change my position of my rifle and I should have had it like this, but I had it down here like this. And, uh, just about the times I was trying to look real close and something I saw movement in my eye and I thought, well, I've just got me and Sailor killed cause uh, I didn't have, I wasn't ready, but uh, I just kind of flopped my hand down on it. And then I saw another one and then I saw another one and I saw another one. And then I saw two more. I thought, well, I'm going to die right here. And uh, I act like I was asleep. I turned my head down like that and I want, cause I had my helmet and flackjacket and all that on it and some more kill dees got up. And then I got an a. So, somebody had requested Oh, illumination off to my left and he gave me a pretty good light. Well when they, when that thing went off popped, they went off, they looked and when it did. I came up with my rifle on fully automatic and just strafe like that and then came back down. Sailor never said a word. He rolled over and I never did say anything to him. I didn't gouge him or anything. He rolled over into, the first thing he did was he set off the claymores. And then because he had his pistol in his lap while he was asleep, he fired off, 7 or 8 rounds with that m1911 45. And then before and all of that and echo of those rounds was gone. He, uh, came up and did the same thing I did with his rifle. And you'd think that something that traumatic would make you remember, but I don't remember how many I, we killed, but there was five or six of them laying down there on some of them almost cut in half because they were, they were probably 25, 30 yards away. And, uh, then the radio went to chattering and wanting to know what was going on, you know, and, and we could hear lots of noise. We know there must have been 25 or 30 of them. And, uh, some of the ones that we had shot didn't die immediately and we knew we had to finish them off, but there was, they were shot up so bad they wouldn't know way they were going to live in it, that close range. And, uh, anyway, one did not run back the way they came. He ran to our right. Well, he got beyond us in between us and the lines. So, I called and asked for or illumination and uh, and got it. And uh, we had two forms of communications. We had our radio and we had a landline that we strung wire up to our listening post. I got on the land line and told them what was going on and uh, I said, we got one, it's between me and you. And uh Major Lynch said, well, will they call me willy? So, Willy, what direction is he headed. And I said, he said, headed straight towards you. And I said, I don't know what he's armed with. I said, I know he's got a weapon, but I don't know what he's armed with. And Sailor was looking after those that were in front of us. And I got on the radio, put it over on my shoulder in the harness, and then some people, a gunnery sergeant and a reaction force came out to meet me. Well, in the meantime, this guy had finally figured out where he was between a hard place and a rock. And he had set up in there and the corner of rice paddy and he was shooting. It wasn't a big weapon. I don't know exactly what, you know, at the time, I didn't know exactly what it was. I said, well, I tell you what then was a friend of mine named Nubby Jay Nix from Orange, Texas. He came out there and made

sure we were all right. And, uh, I had a piece of shrapnel in my face and a probably from off that rock, some of the rocks that the rounds that came in that were received very little fire from the group that we moved down. Oh, WJ came in, he says, I know where he is. And I said, I do too. I said, you tell her, cover me, I'm going to see if I can advance a little bit. Well I jumped up and illumination was up in the air, You've illumination at night. It's real eerie. You know, shadows jumped and mist on the patty and all of that, you know, as long fog and all that. It's really eerie. Really, really, eerie and of course You're all pumped up with adrenaline. You know, you just survived something that you weren't supposed to survive. And I said, I said, WJ, "cover me". He said, "I got you." Well I jumped up and I took off running toward where I thought he was and um, uh, I'm not racist and I've changed my vocabulary since I've been in the service. But back then we called gooks. That's just what we're call. I mean, you know I did, but what we call them gooks or nips, but we called them gooks. I said, I know where the gook is. I'm gonna, I'm gonna see if I can draw a fire and you get him. He said, "okay, well illumination was going off and they will put some more illumination up, some more illumination up." And I made sure that Major Lynch, or the captain of the unit, the platoon leader of the unit, had m60's in already and they knew where we were. And uh, I jumped up it headed toward that. And when I jumped up, he shot several rounds where that thing did he add in the rounds actually the little geysers the bullets would hit them. The bullets would hit the rice paddy. You just like on the movies; all those guys just went between my legs and I flopped over to the side. I dived, to the side and I, I can't say exactly what I said it, but I'll tell you I'll, I'll change my verbiage up a little bit if you don't mind. I said to hell with this John Wayne stuff. That's what I thought I think was said. I said that, I said the hell this John Wayne stuff. I said, man, can get killed doing this. Well anyway, we pressured him enough to where he left, what he was doing. He was sorta coming back, back, back around to the left. And he got in. He got in a minefield in the patties, we dispatched him, and it ended up, he had a crazy look in, I'd love to have had it, but it was capable of firing fully automatic. But it was actually, it was actually a pistol. Okay. Had a longer barrel on it, but it was on some kind of Chinese. I don't know what it was, but I didn't, I know, I know it can kill you. And uh, anyway, we got, we pulled in, we got him, and they sent them, they sent them a squad out to get those other ones. And I was all right until I got back. And then I saw what we had, what I had done, what we had done and uh, made me sick. They all bad combat hardened marine made me sick, I vomited, and the gunny said, are you sick? I said, no. I said, that just kind of, he said, man, don't worry about that, that he said he was trying to kill you, but it was almost like I had an upper hand on them because they, when they looked up at that lumination going off, that's when I cut it loose. Well anyway, uh, that was operation Meade River wherever we went on several more operations and then my shoulder started really bothering me, especially when I would throw her hand grenade or pick up something heavy. Which was explosive, but we had a compound called c four and uh, I was there and pulling line duty one night and I'm in a bunker and artillery round landed on top of the bunker because we had some air mat and some sand bags and some boxes full of sand and may or may happen, you know, and it just rattled us real good. And uh, that busted some ear drums and stuff like that. Well, I was at, uh, I forget where it was, but anyway, we were at fire direction control and I wasn't doing the artillery stuff. But fire direction control, an artillery round, A rocket round came in and severed coaxial cable. On the antenna sitting up on top of the bunker or this was a huge bunker now is about half the size of this house in 15 to 20 feet down in the ground. And that coaxial is running down to, you know, where the radios were. And uh, I said, well, we'll get a little low. I'm going to go out there and see if I can fix that coaxial. So, if I don't I'll take another with me. Well, I went up there and I worked on it. I had just squat down several times because rounds were coming in, pretty close and I finally getting to where I thought it would work. And again, the guy that was with me. I told him, I said, you go on. He said, you sure? And I said, yeah, you go on, I'll be right behind you. And I was going to pick up a sand bag and put over the place that I'd been working on. On the coaxial and uh, about that time, he'd already left. He had already left, and was about to go in the door, the bunker and that artillery round and landed on the opposite side of the bunker and it the concussion, came around and picked me and through me 50 feet in the air, landed on my shoulder. And uh, I didn't immediately get medevac'd to the rear, but the time it got to wear, and I was having a lot of indigestion cause you didn't eat good. You drank nasty water and, and uh, oh I was having indigestion all the time and back then, I was naive and

didn't think about what, but I was trying, I was taking, we'll call them APCs, aspirin. Well that was making it worse, you know, that's like taking an aspirin for an ulcer. Well come to find out that I was added, I started losing weight and didn't have that to lose. I started losing weight and my shoulder was really given. So, they medevac'd, me to Da Nang and I stayed there for about two or three days and then he put me on an airplane. A c123, not a c130 and they flew me to Cameron Air Force base, which is way down south getting down toward Saigon, but not quiet. Well I stayed there, and I was in there, they were, they were, they tended to me and trying to get me straighten up and they finally came in. They said you've got to go home. You can't stay here. I was losing weight. Well, come to find out I had a hiatal hernia and internal parasites. Well, I stayed there for about three weeks. Then they put me on c141 at Cameron, flew me to Tokyo, spent the night in Tokyo the next day, flew to Anchorage, refilled in Anchorage and then flew me to, I'm having a senior moment flew me to um, Patman air force base in Illinois and I spent the night. Then the next day they sent me to Memphis, which was an orthopedic and internal hospital. Um, I say Memphis, it is a little town north of Memphis called Millington. Millington, uh, naval air station, north of Memphis. I stayed in the hospital. I was sick for four or five months and uh, and had been made sergeant, E5 and didn't know it and they had a little ceremony for me in the hospital. And then they started, well at first when I first got there, they started trying to get the internal parasites. I mean, it was the awfulness treatment. That's one of those, that's one of those situations where the coupe, the cure is about, as worse. Just, it was awful. It was awful. I got to where I could go home. I went home on convalescent leave from Memphis, from Millington to Tuscaloosa. We lived down below Tuscaloosa down at Morris Estates. And uh, we got married not that weekend, but two or three weekends later I got married on convalescent leave. I weighed 108 pounds and uh stayed at Memphis and got well. Still hadn't had surgery on my shoulder. And the Marine Corps in his infinite wisdom sent me to instead of sending me to Pensacola, Parris island or Lejeune or something like that, they sent me to the third marine air wing at El Toro, California to run a radio shop and of course that duty wasn't too bad. My shoulder was really hurting a lot. And uh, got time for me to, I was going to give, huh. Let's see, I would go and get discharged around on or around January the first 1970. And then about that time they started hitting me up real hard too, Re- up. And uh, I did, I decided that I was ready to get back, go back to college and finish my degree. So, to make a long story short, I got discharged in January. On January the first and the weather was terrible between California and Tuscaloosa, snow, ice. It was awful. And uh, I got back to Tuscaloosa and well, hardly with any rest. And they wanted me to go to Babble, a naval hospital in San Diego to get my shoulder worked on and I said, no, I'll be all right. While I went back to, uh, I was naive, but I went back to, uh, Tuscaloosa the next day we went and found an apartment in Eutaw, Alabama and I was two weeks late starting to that one winter quarter at Livingston. But you know, I caught up, and uh, but then when I was still in Eutaw and was getting better, I went to one quarter of school and my shoulder was hurting me so bad. It was dislocating. So, five, six, seven, eight times a day. So, I went to the VA hospital in Birmingham and when they did surgery and it was by today's standards, it was real crude and nothing against surgeons or anything, but it just, that's just what surgery was then. September of 70, I had my first surgery on my shoulder and since then, and I've had eight more. My last one was in January of 2015. And, uh, while I was in Eutaw, all my friends that I was hanging out with Hunting, fishing, working and all of that was in the National Guard. I said, well, I liked the money. So, I decided that, well, I couldn't even pass the physical when I first went in, because I still so debilitating. When I finally got in and Dr. Stagers, let me in, he just passed me, let me get in. And I said, well, I'll stay in until I graduate from Livingston. And then when I move, I'll get out. I got out in 20, I got, I got out in November 2002 so with my Marine Corps time and my National Guard time, I ended up with 34 years and retired as first sergeant of troop command in Montgomery. Some that were good troops. But the majority are more very cowardly. They were alright as long as they were surrounded by Americans and a lot of firepower. But if they are adding to be in a sector where they were receiving a lot of fire and now artillery rounds, they would run.

**Q:** And that was about the ARVN



**Williams:** Right. I did get a chance. You know, you hear a lot of people will tell you, well, what was you in? And I was so I know what's one guy was in the navy and then now that he's over at the kit services at the VA, he ended up, he was, he wasn't a cook or anything like that, but he was supply or something like that. But to end telling, where he tells it with all of our friends at the pool at the VA, he was, he was, he was a seal. That's not so he was not a seal. He was not a Force Recon Marine. But to hear him say it, that's what he did. But uh, you know, if they can live with that, that's all right. But now I did get one instance in Vietnam, and I forget when it was, but it was one instance in Vietnam where, and I was not a Force Recon Marine, oh, I was just a regular Marine. But they needed a radio operator. They were, they had a one unit or one side of a razorback ridge, real straight up and tall. It's short, sharp razorback ridge. And they had another unit over here. Well, they couldn't talk because of the mountain and my communications officer, I think he was a Lieutenant Elliott. We were, we were only, we were in the rear this time. We were in the rear on the ground and not on ship. And he says, do you feel like you could, could help them? And I said, yeah, but I said, now look, I'm not a force recon, I'm not gonna eat snakes and all that kind of stuff. And he said, no, you ain't going to do that. You ain't even have to move. He said, you can put you up on the razorback. And I said, well, how am I going to get up on that razorback? But he said they gonna, they gonna, try to land a helicopter, but the, they may have to hover and you get off. I said, I can probably do that. And I said, how long am I going to do that? He said, "probably a week to 10 days". I said, "how am I going to get supplies?" He said, that's going to be taken care of. Well anyway, to make a long, a long story short, they put me up on that razorback thing and I did have to get out of the helicopter, wasn't any place for him to land. And uh, I did find a nook in some rock where I could put up a shelter half and they put me in out enough water and enough sea rations. To feed a company for a month. But now the only time they take the only contact I have with other folks with by that radio. We did end up having a landline, some Camo wire that a helicopter came and gave me a wd1 telephone and I could talk to the people over here, but I couldn't talk to him over here by landline, but I could talk to both of them. But I set up at two, 92 antenna. I was all by myself up on that razorback ridge. And one day an officer with a lieutenant, first lieutenant would force recon came and stayed with me. He probably was with me over a day because I had plenty of water, plenty of chow and uh, no baths, no showers or anything like that, but could, you know, but, uh, I did that for a while and then one of my most enjoyable, if you want to call it that I had, uh, I went on a, uh, operation one night with Korean Marines? Bad, bad boys. Of course, you know, I, I wasn't, I wouldn't a rookie I'd been in Vietnam several months, but uh, and I thought I could get around pretty good, but they were silent. We had a line between us, with rope, you know, the Marine Corps and the navy calls it a line and they, they didn't want that line to get tight they wanted slack in it all the time because everybody was moving as one. I did that one night and then went back with them to their compound near Dong Ha and they'd been out all night and they've got in and got, just a little rest. And then I heard a bunch of racket going on, they were out there in the compound doing hand to hand combat and they asked me, did you want to get in on that? And I said, can I bring my 45? Oh No, you can't do that. But anyway that afternoon, do you know what I'm anglico officer is aired naval gun liaison officer? and I got a chance to shoot and course I would, you know, I knew I knew how to call in fire by then, but I got to change to shoot the New Jersey 16 inch shells weigh as much as a Volkswagen weighed. I got shoot it and I got to shoot the Newport News five inch 50 from the Newport News. They were off the coast, but I got to shoot the New Jersey of course anglico officer was right there and he double checked everything I did. He said, that's perfect. Tell them to fire for effect and when those things came over us it was, it was eerie, eerie feeling that, do you know what an Arclight is? Arclight is B52. Several B52's just dropping a whole load at one time. It's like it's like a volcano, because of the static and the energy that's in the field, and the debris dust and all of that. When they drop em, it actually creates its own lightning. That's call it an Arclight and it was terrible and how anybody could, we've actually gone through two hours after a b52 had dropped an arclight. Like the next morning we'd go through that actually be people still, if you want to call them alive. They weren't dead, but I don't see how anything could live through that. It was, it was unmerciful.

**Mr. Williams:** How was it when you came back?

Okay. I was not probably had a reason to, but I will not a typical moaning and groaning and can't keep a job. Can't have babies. My wife doesn't understand me. Got a bum steer. Oh, I did not. I never have that attitude. I had a girl in at the airport in Memphis. One of the few times I got to fly home. That's one way we had airplanes that flew into Tuscaloosa, but you leave Memphis and go to Tupelo or something like that and fly to Tuscaloosa. But anyway, when I was at the airport in Memphis this and a girl came up to me and said, oh, were you in Vietnam? I said, yes ma'am. Is that where you got hurt? And I said, yes ma'am. She said, you deserve everything you got. Okay. But now that was up there very rare instance, but you weren't around and a lot of the people you are going to talk to weren't around. But back then the atmosphere was, it's so refreshing now that when you see troops come back from Desert Storm and Iraq and Afghanistan and Bosnia and all of that, the way they are received, we weren't received that away. We absolutely were not received that of what we were more of a somebody that had leprosy. People want it, you know, they keep you, you know, you're going to climb up on top and Denney Chimes and go to shooting or something, you know? And uh, I will say that I was a Christian before I went to Vietnam. Yeah. I believe that, that belief, I know it's gotten me through my last, my several last surgeries on my shoulder. But I honestly believe that's what got me through Vietnam. And, uh, but, uh, the Vietnam Veteran today is hailed in higher esteem than he was 40 years ago. And people realized, well, you know, they went to in the wars are they all shoot real bullets. Okay. They all have real rockets and real artillery rounds. They have real airplanes with real bullets. They have real gunship helicopters. But, uh, it was different from the type of warfare that went on in Kuwait in Iraq, Afghanistan, it was different. Uh, we would go out. I know one time that we went out during right before monsoons. And uh, monsoons are something to behold. But anyways, wrapped before monsoons and we were out 63 days, we didn't shower, we didn't shave, we didn't take our clothes off. We didn't get a haircuts. If you didn't keep a close eye on your toothbrush, somebody would get it to clean their rifle with, but we didn't have a haircut, a shave, changing clothes or anything. And that particular operation when we got back to the rear, we would get off the helicopters and take our clothes off and be completely naked. We take our clothes off, we throw them in a pile, and they put, they put a layer of diesel fuel on them. Then somebody else would go three or four more and you put diesel fuel. Then three or four more and put diesel. And then when you went by there you were would you pack in your rifle and your helmet and your flak jacket. Nothing else on, took your socks off. What was left of them. Take your socks off, put them in the pile and they put fuel on it and then you'd go buy this supply guy that was, he would throw you a pair of BDUs, jungle fatigues and mine may have been for somebody that weighed 200 pounds and his maybe for somebody that weighed the same thing I did. Well then, they just left it up to you to, to find out somebody that was, that had a pair that was close to your size. And then you take a shower. And like I say, he hadn't shaved in over two months and uh, tired and hungry. We would go say, how's that possible? You'd catch a cat nap. But we would go, we would go days without sleep. And you say, well Vietnam is a jungle hot, nasty place. It is. But at night, if you were up in the upper elevation, it got really cold. I'm not talking about frost or anything, but it might as well have because it would, you know, we would get so cold, you just shake and then the next day you'd burn up. But we went 63 days. One time without changing clothes. And you can imagine, Oh, let me, let me, let me tell you this. We came in off of the beach one time, and we came in on to the came off the beach into landing craft, much like they had in WWII. And we came up to the ship, got down at the bottom of the ship, upon the Leeward side, and we climbed up the net just like you've seen marines in world war two go down the net. We went up the net. Well we got up top and I'd been there. The sailors had been assigned to help us when we got up to the very top, well do you get all of this going on from the shore to the ship. Maybe two or three miles. But they wanted me to get back in combat operations center and set up the communications between the ship and the shore to find out who's what and what's what and what's all that. So, uh, me and my communication guys, were the first one up to net. Well, I got up to the top of the net and I don't believe this was after that. Now there's, this was another time. It was after that, that time we'd been two months when I bath, but we'd been several weeks without a bath. This time, I got up to the top and the navy guy grabbed me by my flackjacket and my load bearing gear. And he said, Oh, you nasty bastard. And when he did, he, he wanted to get rid of me. He said, you nasty bastard. And he threw me and I got scraped up on my elbows and my shoulder and all that. Well

hell, not doing that. We were tired, you know, but they came off and they had net and they beat the living out of him and didn't say any more about putting up a resistance and oh, the um, master at arms and his people were blowing whistles and uh, that will just about ready. They were about ready to throw one guy. It was, it was coming down on him, not on the flight deck, but on the hanger deck. And, and uh, they were just about to throw one of the navy guys off the hanger deck and whether he hit the boat or hit the water, I don't know, but, but the, um, master at arms, shore patrol got it stopped. When they were doing all that fighting, when I finally got up and turned around and saw all the Marines coming over the net, I was like a feist dog, no, I got me on good fight started, but I just rolled up my stuff and kept on going to see Command Center and got the communication set up. But, uh, that's it in a nutshell.