

Oral History Transcript

Interviewer: Ben Kopriva

Interviewee: Sergeant Major Clinton Boyd

Date: Mar 2, 2019

SGM Boyd: I got my little, uh, military, info... for the questions you ask I just want to be specific about, let me give you what I'm working from.

Ben: Alright

SGM Boyd: This is my, so you can see, and I'm going to talk from this, but this is where it says, this is my military record here, that I have.

Ben: Oh really, wow.

SGM Boyd: That's my name, of course, but uh, this is my overseas travel, and we're gonna talk about it, but I'm gonna share it with ya. See '61 to '63 I was in Germany, 30 months. Then '66 to '67, uh, I was in Vietnam for 18 months. Then went back to Vietnam again in '68 to '69 for 12 months.

Ben: Alright.

SGM Boyd: Then I was in Korea, for a year.

Ben: Wow.

SGM Boyd: That's my overseas tour. Now, I come back and show you this. This is the span of my, military, oh that is my schooling there, and this is my rank sequence how I was promoted, from E4 to E5, E6, E7, E8, first sergeant, master sergeant, major, that tells you that. And of course,

that's the part I want to, uh, now this is my assignment sheet, and what I was doing. What was I.

Ben: mhm.

SGM Boyd: And see, In Germany, I went over as an infantryman and changed over to a trumpet player, you know, after I took the training.

Ben: yes sir.

SGM Boyd: Then from here, I was a trumpet player student, trumpet player, trumpet player, then I was a patient in Hawaii when I got hurt in Japan, uh in Vietnam in '67, trumpet player back, because this will tell you where I was at the time

Ben: Oh yea.

SGM Boyd: And I could talk about Fort Benning, this was Europe up here. This was Fort Benning, Georgia. This was Norfolk, uh, Virginia. Then Hawaii, you know I was in Hawaii, then I was in Camp Zama, Japan. Then I was in Hunter Army Airfield Georgia, twice. Georgia, Georgia, then, of course, with the 80th army band, because remember, I went to Nam, then I came back stateside, then I must have gone right back to Nam again, and I got sent back to the same place twice, if you notice, 15th army band, then there, then left, then went to 66th army band in Vietnam, came back and went to the 80th army band, back here, Hunter Army Airfield, because the 15th became the 80th, they changed the name.

Ben: mhm.

SGM Boyd: Then I went to the school of Music, stayed there for this entire time, and then went to Fort Rucker, then from there, uh, I went to, uh, Korea, here that's down here they have that, then I came back to California, and that's where I retired from.

Ben: Alright.

SGM Boyd: By seeing that, now, I have to, this is to guide me, these are the awards and etc. I received, this is just a paper copy, that I have of my...

Ben: It's a good record. So um...

SGM Boyd: You ask the questions and we'll go ahead and record

Ben: Yes sir. Um, when did you first enlist in the Army?

SGM Boyd: September of 60, uh 1960, September 16th actually, 1960. I'm sorry.

Ben: [speaking to myself taking notes] September 16th, 1960.

SGM Boyd: mhm.

Ben: And um, where did you complete basic training, you said Fort Benning?

SGM Boyd: Fort Jackson, South Carolina.

Ben: [taking notes] Fort Jackson.

SGM Boyd: Fort Jackson, South Carolina.

Ben: And, when you first enlisted, you said you trained as an infantryman?

SGM Boyd: ah, yes, I was drafted,

Ben: drafted

SGM Boyd: yes drafted and trained as an 11 Bravo to be exact, an infantrymen, that was just strictly to carry a rifle with a bayonet on the end and, uh, to learn the combat tactics of being able to attack a human being.

Ben: Alright

SGM Boyd: [chuckles quietly to himself, maybe apprehensively]

Ben: Alright, and how long were you there at Fort Jackson?

SGM Boyd: Uh, I was there, it was, basic training was normally, I think it was 8 weeks, mhm.

Ben: [taking notes] 8 weeks.

SGM Boyd: mhm

Ben: So, after basic, did you go immediately to Vietnam?

SGM Boyd: No no no, see in 60, Vietnam hadn't started, now if you think about the year 60, they sent me to Europe, the Berlin Wall, the division of the

Ben: East and West, yea

SGM Boyd: right, was the major focus at that particular time. Because, see, once I was in Germany, we were training to, Russia was our adversary during that particular time, we were training and I was in a unit, and infantry unit, a cavalry unit, that if the Russians came across the border, uh, to Germany, we were to attack them and hold them until the main forces organized, then they would come, then we would disperse and we would come back and join them.

Ben: Oh ok, wow.

SGM Boyd: So we were out of the 15th Cav 2nd recon squadron as an infantryman, Bravo Troop, 2nd platoon. I remember it specifically, uh uh, that particular time.

Ben: [taking notes] Bravo troop, 2nd platoon, alright. Um, compared to Vietnam, how would you categorize your time in Germany?

SGM Boyd: It was, compared to, Germany we knew was more of a exercise of showing force, to deter the enemy, where Vietnam was a skirmish all round, uh, where, we were actually getting attacked at night, you had no, there was no security other than within the base camp. Where in

Germany, there was no threat of anyone coming at us from different directions, where, and Europe, it was a foothold

Ben: yea there was lines and boundaries.

SGM Boyd: yea lines, where in Vietnam there were no lines and boundaries, that's what made it extraordinary, ok.

Ben: So when you, first went to Vietnam, what was, like, the first city you stopped in?

SGM Boyd: The first city we stopped in, it was uh, we came into an area called Vung Tau, cause we was on a ship, see Vung Tau is an ocean, I mean its like a beach area, and they turned into a resort area for the military there, but when the ships came, they brought us in to Vung Tau, and we disembarked the ships, and then we got out onto these little boats, whatever you call em, landing craft, that would take us ashore.

Ben: mhm

SGM Boyd: And then we would get off the landing craft, and get into these trucks, ill never forget that, and then they took us to a staging area, where they had about 100 helicopters, and they were like the chinooks, the ones where they had double

Ben: yea the doubles

SGM Boyd: they had about 100 chinooks out there, because we were a brigade of soldiers coming up, see the first brigade of the 25th infantry division just had, they flew them over, but it took us 22 days,

Ben: [shocked] 22 days?

SGM Boyd: from Hawaii to get to Vietnam by ship.

Ben: wow.

SGM Boyd: Yea that was an experience, that's why today I won't go on a cruise,

Ben: Not a fan?

SGM Boyd: [laughing] I'm not just a fan of cruises because of that, go ahead.

Ben: So when your brigade left the staging area, what area did you guys deploy into?

SGM Boyd: We deployed into a place called Cu Chi. And that is very vivid in my mind, where we was in this chopper coming the area, from the staging area, to our Cu Chi,

Ben: yes sir

SGM Boyd: all you could see was a tank, armored personal carrier, tank, armored personal carrier, then they had artillery, 155, 105's, artillery pieces that were pointing out, it was a big circle, when you're up in the helicopter, you can see, but that was our base camp.

Ben: Oh really

SGM Boyd: and when we got there, there was no, they only had a bunker, bunker was made of sand bags, where they had dug it to the ground, but we got there, we had to build, enclosures, to where we could secure ourselves, from mortar rounds.

Ben: So you were on of, as far as U.S. forces, you were pretty much alone on the ground out there?

SGM Boyd: Yes, we were in a basecamp, but now we were divided up because they had the infantry stage area in one area of the basecamp, they had the artillery stage in one area, they had the ammunition in one stage, I'm just giving an example...

Ben: yes sir.

SGM Boyd: Then they had the support where our supplies came in, and most of them were brought in by helicopter, and some by road transportation, ok. Now don't let me steer you off, you stay with your questions.

Ben: yes sir. So um, from that basecamp, were you guys more of a presence or were you going out and patrolling?

SGM Boyd: No, I, we were there, I was with the headquarters company, and see, I was in the band, but we had a dual mission. We were security and support, for the division headquarters. And I'm going to break that down for you.

Ben: yes sir.

SGM Boyd: Security meant at night, we were required to pull, see bunker duty, in other words perimeter security, we were responsible for perimeter security, and when it wasn't perimeter security, we were uh, used on convoys to man the machine guns...

Ben: [shocked] oh really?

SGM Boyd: and the convoy would go to Saigon where the supplies came in to get our supplies, we were, uh, what was in saying, convoy security.

Ben: yes sir.

SGM Boyd: Now when we wasn't used for convoy security, we were used to unload ammunition off the ammunition truck that came in, and when we wasn't doing that, we had to pull grave registration duty.

Ben: [shocked] oh, really?

SGM Boyd: That's where the, when the infantryman would go out, and encounter and get killed, they had a staging area where they brought the bodies, where we were, not in the front

fighting, our job was to bring the bodies back to grave registration, they were identified, put in body bags, and sent to Saigon for shipping back to the states. Go ahead.

Ben: So that first tour you said was 18 months?

SGM Boyd: Yes, that was a total of 18 months right.

Ben: And did you spend that entire time in that, uh, Cu Chi basecamp?

SGM Boyd: Yes, in fact, ill give you a little overview of how it transpired. I was there for about 6 months and then my grandfather passed away, he lived over there in that house, [SGM Boyd points to a house down the street visible through the window], there used to be a house down there, and he raised me, because I was with my mom and dad, but it was kind of in-between, we shared raising of families, and to make a long story short, I was to come home for his funeral. So I had been there for 6 months, they said 'Well Boyd the only way you can go home is you extend for 6 more months...

Ben: six more months, wow

SGM Boyd: and then they sent me home! And I came home, for 30 days, and went back to Vietnam, and that's how the 18 months,

Ben: that's how it became 18 months?

SGM Boyd: yes.

Ben: wow. [taking notes]. So after that first rotation, you said you came back, and that's when you primarily went to being in the band?

SGM Boyd: Yes. Mhm.

Ben: And you said it was the 266th army band?

SGM Boyd: 266, yes, now remember I was in the band with the 25th,

Ben: yes sir.

SGM Boyd: When we left Hawaii going to Vietnam, the 22 days I told you about on the ship?

We was in the band, but we played very, in fact our instruments stayed in a conex, these metal containers, the first 3 or 4 months we never saw and instrument because we were busy pulling security, you know filling sandbags, working grave registration, etc. etc., all these things were a combination of what we were doing.

Ben: wow, okay. So, when you rotated back, did you go back to Hawaii?

SGM Boyd: No, I rotated back, I went to Hunter, Hunter Army Airfield, in Savannah Georgia, Savannah Georgia. Yea.

Ben: [taking notes] Savannah..

SGM Boyd: [looking at service record] Hunter Army Airfield and I was with the 15th army band at that time, 15th army band to be exact.

Ben: And, how long were you stateside after your first rotation?

SGM Boyd: After my first rotation, I was only stateside for, ill give you the exact time, okay, now listen to this. I left the, you'll figure this time out real easily, uh, the 10th month, the 10th day in '67, I left Hunter and went back to Vietnam, I departed for Vietnam on the 10th month, the 10th day, in '67. That's when I left Savannah, Georgia, and went back to Vietnam, to the 266th army band.

Ben: Alright, for um, for your second rotation, how would you say that differed from your experiences from your first rotation?

SGM Boyd: I'll give you, that's beautiful that you ask that. I went back to Vietnam, uh, when they sent me back for the second time, I wanted to go back to the 25th because I knew about

the 25th, but they said no, that is more combative than the 266th, because the 266th was where the 4-star general headquarters was. When I was with the 25th, you were with the 2-star general, that was infantry, that was where they were fighting, but they said, to avoid, because you've already served a tour, we want to minimize your exposure to getting hurt.

Ben: Really.

SGM Boyd: so we'll send you to the 266th, which was the, uh, that was the headquarter of Vietnam, where the, uh, main 4 star general was, General Westmoreland was the commander at the time, that was his headquarters.

Ben: So on that second rotation, when you're at the headquarters, was that more actually getting to play your instrument?

SGM Boyd: Exactly! In fact, we performed for ambassador Bunker, we were doing the really, change of commands, diplomats, uh uh, playing for dining events, it was more of what the job encompassed as a bandsman. We had dress blues and we played for, down in Saigon at the embassy, we actually played for different, entertainment, for the dignitaries and VIPs.

Ben: Yes sir.

SGM Boyd: That was called high class, doing at the time.

Ben: Which um, rotation, the first with the 25th or the second with the 266th would you say was more impactful?

SGM Boyd: The 25th because that was my first exposure, and I actually saw the results of the war. I didn't see, if you're in Saigon, in Long Binh, you didn't see any dead bodies, you didn't eat powdered food, see I ate powdered eggs and powdered milk, and you had ham. In the 25th, in

was more of a combative environment. In the 266th, it was strictly a logistical environment, and taking care of the people that made decisions.

Ben: So after your, um, second rotation to Vietnam, that was your last one, that 12 months?

SGM Boyd: Yes that gave me 2 ½ years.

Ben: [taking notes] 2 ½ years total. Wow. So after that, that's when you rotated back to the states and you started, pretty much, focusing solely on the music?

SGM Boyd: Yes, in fact, I was sent back to the 80th army band, and from the 266th, I was with the 80th Army band, and from there, you know as you progress up in rank, you have to have certain schooling in order to operate within that rank in order to qualify for the next step, etc. Then while I was with Hunter Army Airfield, they sent me to, uh, intermediate music course in Norfolk Virginia. And that's where I started my formal military musical training. Before it was all, just, reading the music and playing by ear.

Ben: By ear, wow.

SGM Boyd: Because I wasn't in a, I was just a musician, but as you become a sergeant, you have to be a section, uh, a team leader, then you become a section leader, but you can't acquire those positions unless you have the knowledge, the technical knowledge, then of course along with your leadership experience, that piles on to that to make you competent in what your able to do.

Ben: yes sir. So did you play the trumpet before you were drafted?

SGM Boyd: Yes. In fact, that's a story within itself too. When I was drafted into the military and taking basic training at Fort Jackson, South Carolina, uh, when you get there, they ask all basic new people, what special skills do you have? And, can you type? If you can type, get in this

group. If you can play a horn, you can get in this group. So I got in that group to play horns, to play an instrument. So they say you all get on this vehicle, you're going to be tested on your typing, you have to be tested. And those that are going to join the band, about three of us, got onto this little small truck and went over to the band building. And I'll never forget, they said 'okay we want to audition you to see what you can play.' So I took the audition, and I flunked!

Ben: Really?

SGM Boyd: They said, uh, they wanted me to play a chromatic scale, and not having formal musical training...

Ben: You knew what it was but...

SGM Boyd: I could play it by ear, but I couldn't play it. So they said well, I'm sorry but you go back to infantry. So now I get back to infantry training, and remember I was drafted into the service...

Ben: yes sir

SGM Boyd: I was drafted for 2 years, for that first time, and then they said, well Boyd, you took basic infantry training, you don't want to be an infantryman. If you volunteer to extend your 2 years to 3 years, we will give you your choice of assignment.

Ben: Oh, really?

SGM Boyd: So I said ok, if I can't be a musician because they won't take me because I can't pass the audition, I want to be a military policeman. So they said ok, you sign up for another year, which gave me 3 years, we will, uh, send you to military police training. I signed my paper, got to Fort Gordon, Georgia, went there, spent the night, and the next morning got to a physical evaluation, they said, hey, you can't qualify for an MP because you have flat feet.

Ben: Really?

SGM Boyd: Yea, because the army isn't supposed to let you in with flat feet, but the military, you could have a certain amount of flatness, but being an MP means you stand all the time.

Ben: yes sir

SGM Boyd: You follow me?

Ben: yes sir.

SGM Boyd: So they said, well, we're sorry, we can't take you. You have a choice. Uh, private Boyd. You could get the army, uh the military, for breach of contract, which they had me sign up for because I qualified but physically I could not, or you could go unassigned back to the military, wherever they want to send you.

Ben: mhm.

SGM Boyd: So I called by dad and asked him what should I do, and he said 'don't come back home', you know what I mean, so that meant I signed the paper to go unassigned, and guess what? They gave me infantry again. So that's when I end up taking advanced infantry training at Fort Jackson.

Ben: [taking notes] Fort Jackson.

SGM Boyd: mhm. I took advanced infantry training. That's where now, instead of being a regular soldier, you learn how to set up a mortar, you learn how to coordinate, read a map to give coordinates, you know what I mean?

Ben: yes sir.

SGM Boyd: In other words, you have to make yourself versatile to where they can use you.

Ben: yes sir.

SGM Boyd: and uh, from there, I graduated from advanced infantry training, and that's when I went to Germany.

Ben: That's when you went to Germany?

SGM Boyd: yes, and I was an 11 bravo, assigned to the 15th cav 2nd recon squadron.

Ben: yes sir. So the, basic was 8 weeks. How long was advanced infantry training?

SGM Boyd: That was 8 weeks too.

Ben: 8 weeks too?

SGM Boyd: see for a total of 16 weeks.

Ben: [taking notes] 16 weeks total.

SGM Boyd: mhm.

Ben: So from your really unique position of being both on the front lines in the 25th and being kind of in the headquarters in the 266th,

SGM Boyd: right.

Ben: Did you see that peoples perspective that was in either one or the other was different?

SGM Boyd: yes, because in the 25th, it was strictly combat oriented, with the 266th, there was civilian personal there, that supported the war effort. In other words, they had civil service people, in fact there were females in the, uh uh

Ben: in the 266th?

SGM Boyd: Not, well not in the band but there were female soldiers,

Ben: Oh yes sir:

SGM Boyd: because they were administrative, such as nursing, etc., but there were no females in the 25th, none whatsoever.

Ben: yes sir. So um, as far as their total experience, their opinion of the war, how would you say it differed from the 25th to the 266th? Did the 266th like lack some of the frontline perspective and vice versa?

SGM Boyd: of, of course they did because, they had, uh, a perception of being privileged...

Ben: Oh yes sir.

SGM Boyd: they felt that they were privileged to be there, but now as far as being subjected to, you've heard about the Tet offensive in Vietnam where they start, they were not immune to it because we'd receive incoming rounds,

Ben: Really? The Tet offensive?

SGM Boyd: Yes, that was when I was in Saigon. We didn't have the anything like Tet Offensive in the 25th because we were fighting units all around, they couldn't get close enough to us, to overrun us because we were a combat unit.

Ben: yes sir

SGM Boyd: But now the headquarters in the 266th during the Tet Offensive, they sabotaged, uh, a main ammunition depot, they even sabotaged some of the shipping docks that came in,

Ben: yes sir.

SGM Boyd: so it was more of a, sappers, almost just like where they bum in town, cause the infantry unit, they were just no match for us. But with the headquarters company, I mean...

Ben: yes sir, they could get to you. So um, your experience, during the Tet Offensive, you were in Saigon at the time,

SGM Boyd: yes.

Ben: How did, what was your experience there. How did y'all react?

SGM Boyd: Well, we performed security duty as a band because that was our dual mission, the band was a mission and security, and in fact, during the Tet offensive, we had 3 bunkers, and ill be a little more specific with you, that's one, two, three [motioning bunker positions with hands], we were trained that if we received a night, normally they wouldn't attack during the, until the night, that our job was, whether you was in the bunker, if not you were and ammo bearer to carry ammunition to the bunker. And we lost, that night during the Tet Offensive, we lost and Lt. Colonel, they actually, they have a shoulder weapon called an RPG,

Ben: yes sir.

SGM Boyd: they actually hit the number three bunker and killed our Lt. Colonel, our battalion commander, he was there, but I was a reserver at that time, an ammunition carrier, all we were doing was as the machine gun dispensed of all their ammunition, we were required to run, deliver it, and come back.

Ben: wow. Did y'all vacate Saigon or did y'all stay?

SGM Boyd: No we stayed.

Ben: You stayed the whole time?

SGM Boyd: We were able to, cause they had reactionary forces that were nearby, that, when they pinpoint where the majority of the aggression was coming from, they were able to get infantrymen in there to encounter it, we were never, there were three layers, I'm gonna put it to you like that, of security.

Ben: yes sir.

SGM Boyd: you has the outer perimeter of security, then the inner, then the inner, see, and we had infantry units that were not actually in the headquarters, they were out and about, but they could be called in to reinforce what was needed.

Ben: So, how would you, um, what would you say about your time stateside after your two tours as a musician compared to your time in Vietnam more on the frontlines? Which would you say was more impactful on your life?

SGM Boyd: Well, '66 to '67, not that you're old enough to know this, but with the 25th, it was really, uh uh, a life changing event for me, based on, but there were something just as equal going on in America, on the homeland when I got home.

Ben: Yes sir.

SGM Boyd: they were fighting integration, you know what I mean, segregation, and we were told not to put our uniform on, because we were afraid that you would, because that's where the movement about, killing innocent people, etc., and I was as an individual, kind of torn in-between here I am a soldier fighting for my country, yet still, this is what I getting when I come home. So that was, really a mixed bag for me.

Ben: yes sir.

SGM Boyd: it caused me to, question, what we call patriotism.

Ben: yes sir. Um, not as much obviously of an extreme today as it was in the 60's, but in today's culture, do you see the younger generation missing some of the experiences that y'all had and the lessons y'all learned in Vietnam?

SGM Boyd: Now, my, perception of that looking back, we were caught up in a political setting in Vietnam, and of course you see documentaries today about what took place back then, we

could've won the war very easily over there. If we were just allowed to do what we were capable of doing, the war would've been over with. But it was politically constrained, and as I look back, we would run the enemy to a certain point, we would stop, and pull back, and they would come back.

Ben: wow.

SGM Boyd: now compare that, our philosophy has changed on it today, and then you ask the question about the youth and the impact, how they perceive. The only comparison we have we look back to desert storm, desert shield, you know the fighting in Afghanistan today, as far as we're concerned, there's not a war going on. If you wasn't told about it. But everyone knew Vietnam was going on because of the protesting, you know, society, the whole country was involved in it to a certain degree. But right now, you don't hear anyone talking about Afghanistan, bringing the troops home from Syria. So that's the difference, the magnitude.