Oral History Transcript

Interviewer: Hunter A. Hanks

Interviewee: Luther J. Upton Jr.

Date: March 12, 2019

Q: Alright, could you state your name?

Luther: My name is Luther J. Upton Jr.

Q: Where were you born, and raised?

Luther: I was born in Monroe County, and I was raised, down below Uriah.

Q: Ok, where did you go to school?

Luther: I went to school at J.U. Blacksher.

Q: Is that where you graduated from?

Luther: Mhmm.

Q: What year did you graduate?

Luther: 1965.

Q: What did you do after graduation?

Luther: I went to school at The University of Alabama, and got up there and was more interested in partying than I was studying. So, I was about to flunk out after the second semester. So, I went down on University Boulevard, to the marine recruiter, who’s in the post office there in Tuscaloosa; and I enlisted in the marine corp. Because, back during then, the draft boards were taking the black kids first, then the poor white kids. Of course, the city boys, none of them got drafted. But, I wasn’t going to get drafted, so I enlisted in the marine corp.

Q: After you enlisted in the marine Corp, where did you go after that?

Luther: I enlisted with a buddy of mine named Eddie Montgomery. We went in on a buddy system. They had a one-hundred-and-twenty-day delay program, and my dad who worked at Montesano in Pensacola, got me a summer job. So, I worked that summer, and I had to report on September the 12th. Of course, we went to the H and R farm during our initial enlistment, and got sworn in, and we would report back in one hundred and twenty days. So, does it matter what kind of language I use in this?

Answer: No sir, it’s up to you.

Luther: Anyway, so I worked that summer, and I didn’t tell my parents about this.

Q: That you had enlisted in the Marine Corp?

Luther: Mhmm, because my dad was in the Seabees during World War II, and he and his hunting buddies, They’d get a long weekend and they’d hunt and fish and stuff, and they were all World War II veterans. They’d set around and talk about, cause my dad, what the Seabees would do, in most cases, is they would go in behind the marine invading force; they would build airstrips and stuff like that. Anyway, they were always talking about the marines, and I watched a movie called *The* *D.I.* with Jack Webb. You ever seen it?

Answer: No sir, I haven’t.

Luther: You need to watch it.

Answer: Ok, I will.

Luther: Anyway, I was just intrigued with that stuff, so that’s why I joined the marines. Anyway, when it came the day to report, I told my mother, she didn’t work, she was a house wife. My dad was at work, and said momma, I need a ride up town. She said what you got to go to town for, because I didn’t have a car at the time. I said I need to go to Mr. Charlie Hadley’s garage. She said for what, and I said I’ll tell you when I get there. So, I had my little bag packed, so you know, they tell you what to bring, what not to bring. So, I got out, and said momma I’ve joined the Marines, and I’m catching the bus here in about ten minutes. She said, do what? No, you’re not. I said, I’ve already done it. [Laughter]. She was pissed off. Anyway, so I catch the bus and we would stop and pick up old women with chickens and stuff, all the way up through Camden. Finally got to the H and R point in Montgomery, there was so many of us going to the Marines, they divided us into two groups. They gave me the papers for my group. Well the first group, they put you in alphabetical order. First group went through like M, because Eddie got on the first batch. So, we flew to Charleston, well flew to Atlanta first, then to Charleston. The first group left about 3 to 4 hours ahead of us. Well, I had a friend, who was married to my first cousin, and he had just come home from boot camp. So, he told me everything we were going to do. He said, when you get to Paris island don’t be on the front seat and don’t be on the back seat. Back then, they didn’t take anybody to Paris Island in the daytime, they wanted to get you there early in the morning. Because, it’s real spooking going across that bridge.

Q: So, it would be pitch black dark?

A: Yeah, it’s like 1’oclock in the morning when we got there. So, sure enough, I went up there and asked the bus driver, this is a Trailway or Greyhound, no, it was a Trailway I believe. This is a civilian bus driver now. I went up there and said, for how long were we going to be down there. He said sit down and shut the f\*\*\* up. This is the bus driver. I said holy s\*\*\*.

Q: He was in no part of the military?

A: No, he was just the bus driver. So, anyway, we got there and we pulled up to this barracks, receiving barracks there called, I won’t ever forget it. I looked out the window and I saw those yellow footprints. So, I got me a good place in the middle. Sure, enough, that drill instructor got on that bus and threw the first guy out on the concrete or on the asphalt. We stormed out of that bus while running over one another. He told us to find a place on the yellow footprints, and I found me a place and I’m standing there. We stood out there for I don’t know ten or fifteen minutes, him yelling and cussing us. Then we had to go in this big barracks and stand around this table. Take everything out of your pockets, and put it on the table. He said, which one of you maggots has got the envelope with your orders in it? I said, I got em’. He said, I got em’ what? I said, I got em’ sir. He went on and grabbed me, pulled me across, and this was a little guy, I could’a kicked his ass. He pulled me across the table and said, let me tell you something, you s\*\*\* maggot. Anytime you address me god\*\*\*\*\*\*, you address me as sir, do you understand you piece of s\*\*\*? I said, yes, sir. I gave him the orders, [laughter] I said, by the way, I’m on the buddy system, here with my friend Eddie Montgomery, we enlisted together, sir. He said, god\*\*\*\*\*\*, he told one of the other drill instructors, he was a gunnery sergeant, he told one of the other little bugle drill instructors, who was like an E-5. He said, go up, and I told him that he was in the batch that came ahead. All this time standing at attention. So, they go upstairs, and here comes Eddie Montgomery down. They got his hair cut. He’s got on these ole big white skivvys, and a skivvy shirt. He walked up there and stood at attention. The drill instructor said, are you private Eddie Montgomery? He said, yes, sir! He said, this maggot over here says you’re his buddy, are you his god\*\*\*\* buddy? And, Montgomery said, no, sir! He turned around and looked at me and said, see you mother\*\*\*\*\*\*, you aint got no god\*\*\*\* buddies in this Marine Corps. I didn’t see Montgomery again until we got out. [Laughter] So, that’s the way that went down. We were losing so many Marines in Vietnam then, that they cut twelve-week boot camp down to eight weeks.

Q: So, they cut your training?

A: They didn’t cut the training, they lengthened the hours. We were up at 4:30 and didn’t go to bed until 9:30 all day, every day. Anyway, so, they didn’t think I was motivated enough. So, they got a thing they called motivation, I guess they saw something in me I didn’t know I had. So, anyway, they sent me and two more guys down to motivation. There was a pile of sand down there as big as that house, or half as big as that house. [Luther is pointing at a house across the street from where we were sitting.] The first thing they issue, when you get there, is a bucket, like a little water bucket. They called it, your PT bucket. Second thing was a carton of Marlboro’s; the only problem is, you couldn’t smoke. [Laughter] They sent us down there with those buckets, and we got there at about 5:30 in the morning. We had to walk, it was like three miles to the rifle range down there. There’s no way to get off Paris Island, when your there, your there. Anyhow, we go down there, and that drill instructor came down there. He hollered, yelled, and cussed us. Told us, somebody had moved this sand pile and he wanted it moved. He went and put down a stob with a red ribbon around it, and he said, I want this sand pile moved to there.

Q: How far of a distance was it away?

A: Oh, s\*\*\*, it was from here to my mail box. [Luther is pointing to his mailbox, which is about fifty yards away.] Anyway, we got down there, and every few hours, they would come out there and cuss us you know. We worked all night long, all day, and half into the night. Sometime around nine o’clock that night, this other drill instructor came down there, raising hell about somebody moving his sand, and wanted to know who in the hell told us to move this sand pile. He said, better get that god\*\*\*\* sand back over yonder. Anyway, we moved it back, well after a day and a half of that, they sent me back to the platoon, and I was motivated after that. I didn’t want any more of that sand. So, I mean they would do crazy stuff, like we were standing in the chow line one night, you could hear a pin drop, and all of a sudden, and sand fleas would eat your ass up. All of a sudden you could hear this [Luther slaps his arm] and I said oh lord, somebody just slapped a sand flea. It was a black guy form New York, named McToy. I’ll never forget McToy. Anyway, we did pushups for days, and none of us got to go eat. Only one that got to go eat was McToy, and he was the one that slapped the sand flea.

Q: That whole time, for the two days?

A: No, just that one meal. I was back with the platoon by this time. Anyway, when I graduated, they had ten honor graduates, and I was one of those. After boot camp, they decide our MOS, which is Military Occupational Specialist. Well, mine was to be a combat engineer and demolitions specialist. Which, is nothing but a glorified grunt. A grunt, is the dumb guys they give a rifle to and say go out and kill these guys. Anyway, we went to Camp Gheiger, this was in November. Let me tell you something, it gets cold in North Carolina, in November, back then anyway. So, everybody has to go through infantry training, every marine, I don’t care what his MOS is, he’s going to go to infantry training, because every marine is basically a rifleman. Then, after that, they sent us out to Camp Geiger, which is part of camp Lejune, for demolitions training. I met, a guy that I think about all the time, he was a black first sergeant. Nice guy, well by then, they had quit talking to you so ugly, you know, because you’re a marine now.

Q: Because you had gotten through the basics?

A: Yes, He got his first purple heart, at Goudal Canal, when he was fifteen years old. He was what’s called a Montford Point marine, because back then, they didn’t train the black marines with the white marines. They trained separately. Black Marines trained at Montford Point, white Marines trained at Paris Island, which is right there close. Anyway, I think about that guy a lot, he was a good guy. He had been to Vietnam, but there wasn’t much going on. See, it really didn’t get kicked off until about ’66. Anyway, so I got through that, made Lance Corporal shortly after that. Matter fact, I made Lance Corporal before we got to Vietnam. We landed in Vietnam on my mother’s birthday, which was March the 20th. Landed at Da Nang, and the Marine stuff, Marine liaison, was on the other side of the base from where we. On the other side of the airstrip, they had two big airstrips there at Da Nang, it was a couple hundred yards across there. But, I can remember flying over, they flew us over there on a Continental airlines jet. I remember flying over there, and I looked out, and I could see some fighter jets, escorting the plane. I looked down at the landscape, and it looked like a moon surface. I said, good God’O Mighty. Anyway, so we landed, without incident, and went over across the air strip. They separated you, you either went to the First Marine division or the Third Marine division. Well, my straw sent me to the Third Marine division. So, we waited a day or so, and they took us up to Dong Ha. Which is about ninety miles north of Da Nang, which is about twelve miles south of the DMZ. Well, we got up there, and that was in, uh… I would say that was March 20th I think it was about the 21st or 22nd, when we finally got Dong Ha. They flew us up there on a helicopter. That was my first helicopter ride, and first of many.

Q: First ever helicopter ride?

A: First ever helicopter ride. Anyway, we got there, and the first thing we did was put in mine fields. They kept us busy doing that, and then we would run patrols around the base. It was our job to find the booby traps. Then they sent us up to, Cam Lo. Cam Lo was about three miles from Con Thien, and Con Tien is right on the DMZ, I’m talking about the DMZ was right there. They called it Con Thien, in Vietnamese, that means ‘hills of angels.’ Anyway, we would run patrols around, there’s a place called a washout there. It didn’t matter every time we were going to find a booby trap, because the team would sweep down from Cam Lo to the washout, and the other team would, well, the washout was about halfway, and the team from Cam Lo would go towards Con Thien for about half way. It was probably about a mile and half each way. The guys out there with the metal detectors, when they found it I had to dig em’ up. And, they didn’t find em’ all. But, they found most of em’. Anyway, it was in May, May the 18th to be exact, we went out on an operation called, Operation Hickory. We would go out in four man teams, with an infantry company, reinforced company, about 160 guys, and there would be four of us, and they called us firecrackers. They would find something suspicious and they would holler, ‘firecracker up.’ Now most of the time, you had the point guys, and the combat engineers, then the grunts. So, we stayed out on that operation for, I don’t know, maybe a couple weeks, I don’t remember how many days it was. We got into some pretty heavy stuff out there. Anyway, then, pretty much the rest of the summer. We were at Con Thien, that’s those pictures I showed you, where that tank retriever was pulling everything out. On July, the 2nd, we were attached to 9th Marines, and one-nine, Bravo Company one-nine, was running an operation just south of the, or just out of Con Thien. On July, the second, which was my 20th birthday, the gooks hit em’ with gas, and just killed just about every one of them. Anyway, we had to go on a relief column, down there to get them, and man you talking about, God’O Mighty. But, anyhow, then after the summer, I think it was in, another operation, I forget the name of it. Then in late November, or early December, I get kind of fuzzy, I can’t really remember, you know I had done made up mind I wasn’t go to make it through there anyway. We wound up on Operation Kentucky, with Fox two-nine, still 9th Marines. I think we made Operation Hickory with Mike three-four, 3rd battalion, 4th Marines. On Operation Kentucky, we walked right out into the middle, of a damn, must have been a North Vietnamese Regiment, and they busted our ass. Automatic weapons firing, mortars, rockets, they hit us with everything they had. We took some heavy losses, I lost two of my guys that day. Anyway, I spent from December the 7th, no, actually about the 18th, until about January the 8th, maybe the 9th, sometime along in there, on the USS Sanctuary, hospital ship. I was on there during Christmas of ’67 and new years of ’68. Well, Marines did thirteen months’ tours, everybody else did twelve, Army, Airforce, Navy, they all did twelve, we did thirteen.

Q: What was the reason for the longer tour for the Marine?

A: I don’t know, nobody ever said. But, anyway we were losing men, you know the Marines lost nearly as many men in Vietnam as they did in WWII. Wasn’t but a couple thousands difference. Anyhow, all hell was breaking loose back home, and you know, everybody protesting, and everybody raising hell. Anyway, when I got out of the hospital, I went back to our rear area, there at Dong Ha, and they said, they needed volunteers, to go to Khe Sanh. Well, hell I didn’t have, this was in January, and I was going to come home in April. I said well, hell, ain’t nothing happening, thinking to myself, and I had made E-4 by then. I said, hell ain’t nothing happening at Khe Sanh, since April, hell I’ll go. So, it was me, Emmitt Stanton, and Michael Guire, and a guy named Chrismen I believe was his name. We volunteer, so away we go to Khe Sanh. They flew us in there and the first damn day I was there, our Lieutenant, who was in that picture in there, Bill Gay. [Luther was referring to a picture he showed me earlier.] Who was a hell of a nice guy, he said boys, we got a problem. We, thinking what kind of problem? He said there’s 4800 of us, and there’s 40,000 of them, and they’re going to overrun the base. I said holy shit. He said, but Colonel Lowndes, has got the answer. I said, well yeah, what’s the answer Lieutenant? He said all we got to do is kill eight a piece. I said, shit, that’s simple enough. Anyhow, it went along there from about the 13th or 14th of January, and we knew they were going to hit us but we didn’t know when. There was a special forces camp, it was about eight miles to the Laotian border, and there was a special forces camp right there on the Laotian border. Well, they hit em’ with tanks, and the North Vietnamese hadn’t used tanks before, but they almost wiped them out. And, what it was, it was a bait for Colonel Lowndes to send a relief column out to get them and they were going to ambush us. So, Colonel Lowndes so no, uh uh, we ain’t gone do that. They’re on their own. So, anyhow, on the 21st, they hit the ammo dump, right there it’s on the front page of that paper. [Luther is pointing to a newspaper about Khe Sanh] That ammo dump, was about from here, well maybe a little bit further than that, about from here to the end of that apartment building. [Luther is referring to an apartment building across the street, which is about 250 yards to the end of.] And, when it hit that ammo dump, son, there was shit everywhere. It was like an earthquake. Anyhow, our job, the next morning, they hit us about three o’clock, but we were waiting on the invading force to come but it never came. As combat engineers, it was our job to go out on that damn runway, and pick up those artillery

Q: So, you all had to clear the smoking hot?

A: Clear the runway. And those things, most of them were live. The Seabees, [laughter] the damn Seabees got stuck up there. Anyway, most of the Seabees were about 30 years old. We were 19 and 20. They had an old dump truck, [laughter] they wouldn’t come out and drive it, one of our guys had to drive it. We were picking that stuff up, throwing it over in the bed of that truck, and every time somebody threw one over, we would all do this. [Luther is getting a position similar to the fetal position, as if he were anticipating a blast.] That runway wasn’t but, it wasn’t very long at all, wasn’t nearly as long as this thing out here at the airport. [Luther is referring to the local airport in Evergreen, Alabama.]

Q: So, it’s probably the length of an aircraft carrier?

A: Maybe a little longer than an aircraft carrier, but not too much longer. Anyway, we got all of it cleared and every day, every day, for 77 days. I wasn’t there for the whole 77 days, my time came up to leave, I told em’ I said boys I’m outta here. They said, well, your going to get shot down or get killed. I said, I don’t give a shit I’m going to killed if I stay here. So, they had these little planes, it’s called a C123, it was prop driven plane, but, it had jet engines, jet boosters on it. It could land in that front yard there just about. [Luther is referring to his front yard, that is right in front of us in the interview.] Anyway, there was some guys they called them the landing shore party, or shore party. It was there job to go out, and get the stuff that the planes dropped off. Well, they tried dropping it in nets, but that didn’t work, the gooks got to it before we did. It got to where planes couldn’t land. We were limited to one meal a day, and one canteen of water a day, because they couldn’t get anything in there. They dropped more bombs, at Khe Sanh, and I’m telling you factual stuff that I know. They dropped more bombs around Khe Sanh, during that 77-day siege, than they dropped during all of World War II. When they’d get close, you could look up. You ever been standing by a highway, on a wet road, when an 18-wheeler come by?

Interviewer: Yes.

Luther: You could look up and you could barely see those B-52s, and they looked like they were right on top of you. I said, oh shit. They supposed to have, back then it was supposed to been a 300 meter clearance range, to friendly troops. They were dropping 500 yards, from our perimeter. You could hear those bombs coming, and it was what they called carpet bombing. It would start over yonder, and you could hear em’ they’d just, [Luther, makes an ooing sound to resemble what it sounded like] It would start over there and go all the way across there. [Luther pointed from North to South] But, you couldn’t stand up above ground, unless you were way far away from it. They taught us how to get down on our elbows and toes, and open your mouth. Concussion was so bad we had guys with their eyes bleeding, ears bleeding, just deaf. But, I felt sorry for those gooks, I don’t how in the world they could stand it. Anyway, that went on until, they finally, see the whole thing with Khe Sanh, they wanted to draw troops from the south up to Khe Sanh. Because the Tet Offensive started on, the siege of Khe Sanh started on the 21st of January, and I think it was the 31st of January, it was the gook new year whenever the hell that was. It was called Tet, they had the Tet Offensive. That’s when the boy from Monroeville, William Marshall got killed, he was an embassy guard, there at the embassy in Saigon. They hit Siagon, they hit every little town and hamlet in Vietnam. The whole thing was a rouse, but what really bothered me, and I didn’t know anything about this, until I got home several years later. There was a guy named Robert Pisor, he was a columnist for the New York Times. He wrote a book called, “End of The Line The Siege at Khe Sanh,” Somebody bought that book and gave it to me and I don’t remember who it was. But, I read it, Lyndon Johnson, had a mock up of the base at Khe Sanh, in the basement of the Whitehouse. They discussed using tactical nuclear weapons on us.

Q: On American troops?

A: [Luther nods his head] Drop them right on the base. Well you know damn well, nobody could survive that. I had two of my buddies, we have a reunion every year, and I had two of my buddies tell me that their gunnery sergeant came around and told them that when the gooks came through the wire, if they ran out of ammunition and saw they wasn’t going to make it, for them to get under the dead bodies, and when they got the password, when the gooks got in the middle, the base wasn’t, hell, I would say, outside position to outside position, probably three maybe five hundred yards. But, when they got out in the middle of the runway, they were told they were supposed to get up and attack from the rear, but nobody bothered to tell them what the password was. [Laughter] Anyway, they never got inside the wire. But, the Damndest thing that happened to me was, Colonel Lowndes, damn super nice guy, he was commanding officer up there. He came down there and Bill Gay, our Lieutenant, Bill Gay, John Pesoni, Ollie Owens, and me. He wanted us to come up with some way, that we could slow em’ down when they came through the wire, because we had put in all the mines out there. So, we came up with this thing called Fugas, you take an empty 55 gallon drum, and you fill it up with diesel fuel and gasoline, and you put nails, rocks, shrapnel, grenades, whatever you want to put in there, you put it in there. You bury it at a 45 degree angle, but, behind it, you put a shape charge. They came at 40 pound shape charge, and it’s got that concave thing, so when it explodes, that part that closest to the explosives is going to make a ball come out of there. If that gasoline and diesel fuel, now its gone blow that shit, somebody’s going to get scorched. Anyway, so we got down there to demonstrate it, and we buried it, put it in there just like we were supposed to, and we were right there, we were in some bad, Indian country really. They had a little ole shed out there, and there was a draw with a waterfall down there, on the Dong Ha side of the base, that’s the end away from the Laotian side. We set that damn thing off, and that wind came up through that draw, between the four of us, we like’d to killed all the damn command at Khe Sanh, people out here running, and hauling ass everywhere. It made a ball of fire… But, we like to killed em’ all. [Laughter] As Colonel Lowndes said, I got to have me some of that, put em’ all around the base. Well, first of all we didn’t have enough gas, but we put them in specific spots. I remember one day we were out there, and Pesoni was the tall guy I showed you in that picture, [A picture Luther showed to me in his home.] I talk to him about once a week. Anyway, we were out in this mine field, and there was a gook up there, with a recoilless rifle, shooting at us. And we down, couple Marines got hit, and Clyde and I, were out there with and neither one of us got a scratch that day. But, anyway, we were trying to get those wounded Marines out of that mine field, and I could see where the smoke was coming from but, he was getting closer every shot. So, Pesoni was up there by the tanks, he was like, I’d say fifty yards from us, maybe a little further, and I was hollering at him, pointing to the white smoke, and he was telling the tank where to shoot. Now, while the tank was shooting at the guy with the recoilless rifle, Clyde and I got those two marines out of the mine field, both of them lived. They went out there, they sent a patrol out there to check were the guy with the recoilless rifle, and that tank had blown him half into. They had a sniper up on 881, which was one of the hill posts out by Khe Sanh. I think it was 881, might have been 861. Anyway, there was an 881 and a 861, but they had a sniper out there, that couldn’t hit shit. A ole buddy, Neil Keeny, was the one telling me this, he said… Who was the commanding officer? Dabney, Captain Dabney, guys wanted to call in an airstrike, Captain Dabney, said hell no, that sumbitch can’t hit nothing, if you kill him, they put another out there, he might hit somebody. [Laughter] So, they left him alone. Anyway, it was a bad experience all the way around. But, anyhow, I think I made, if I had my book I could tell you, I think it was 9 or 10 combat operations.

Interviewer: That is a lot.

Luther: That is a lot for a 20-year-old boy, 19-20-year-old boy.

Q: Right, you turned 20 years old while you were in Vietnam?

A: I turned 20 years old on July the 2nd, 1967, When Bravo one-nine got wiped out. Then I was later attached to Bravo one-nine. Of course, I was back in the states when Nixon, the Ninth Marines, they were the first Marine unit to land there and the first Marine unit to be pulled out. Them boys down at Hue City had it tough too. There were two big major battles going at the same time, of course, we had that going at Khe Sanh, and the Marines down at Hue, they were Marines out of the first Marine division. Well, Colonel Lowndes’ son-in-law, was a Captain Christmas, he won a navy cross at Hue I think, and he later made Lieutenant General. But, I think Colonel Lowndes for some reason, he never made general. He hasn’t been dead that long, he’s been dead maybe 10 years. But, I think he told some people to kiss his ass. But, there was one… there was a part of the 26th Marines, and I don’t know whether it was 1-26, or 2-26 maybe. They sent out a patrol, right during the middle of that damn siege, and every one of them got killed but two.

Q: How big was the patrol?

A: It was Probably 40 or 50 Marines maybe 60. Killed every one of them but two. But, Imagine that oughta be, you can look that up somewhere. One of them was a core man, that made it out, and the other one was Steve Weese, I see him at the reunions. [Luther is flipping through an article about Khe Sanh] Here it is 28. That’s how many shells were fired from just one gun position. [Luther showed me the image of used shells in the article.]

Interviewer: Wow, that is an incredible amount. I have never seen a picture like that before.

Luther: It says here the 1968 battle of Khe Sanh was the longest, deadliest, and the most controversial of the Vietnam War. Anyway, they said we killed more than 20,000 of them.

Q: Do you believe that number to be accurate?

A: No. It says here that, that was called Operation Scotland. According to one official Marine Corps, history of the battle fatalities for Operation Scotland were 205 friendly. The Marines recorded a national body count of 1,602 NVA killed, but estimated the total dead to be between 10 and 15 thousand. Acutally, there were over 1,200, because Ray Stubbe, in his book, has got every name and when they were buried, and when they were killed and where. Oh, here’s a mention of that, a Journalist, Robert Pisor, pointed out in a 1982 book, “End of the Line the Siege at Khe Sanh,” no other battle in the entire war produced a basic, better, body count or kill ratio than that claimed by the Americans at Khe Sanh. [Luther is still flipping through a paper article and relaying the information.] Wes Moreland echoed this judgement in his memoirs, using exactly the same figures concluded that, the North Vietnamese had suffered a most damaging and one sided defeat. Senior Marine Corps General noting on May 13th, that the Marines had defeated the North Vietnamese and won the battle of Khe Sanh. Body count ranged between a ratio of 50:1 to 75:1. By comparison an Army General said a 10:1 ratio was considered average. But, there were a hell of a lot more, than 220 killed.

Q: At Khe Sanh?

A: At Khe Sanh, I think the total count is about 58 close to 59 thousand.

Interviewer: That’s an enormous amount of death.

Luther: Yep.

Interviewer: Hard for someone like me to imagine.

Luther: How old are you?

Interviewer: I’m 25.

Luther: You can see some awful stuff when you’re that young, but let me tell you something. There ain’t nothing more dangerous, I don’t care if he’s black, white, Asian, what. You take a 19 or 20-year-old American and you put him 13,000 miles away from home, and he don’t want to be there to start with, and you give him that damn radio and access to the USS Forrestal, he gone f\*\*\* some shit up, I can tell you that. But, there’s something that, I been told, I don’t know this, but they give you all these tests, and those tests, according to the Marine Corps, or what I’ve been told, they will tell whether you will flee or you’ll fight. If you’ll fight, you gone go in the infantry somehow or another. If you’ll flee, I guess they’ll put you running a washateria or something I don’t know. [Laughter] Make you a cook. But, it didn’t matter at Khe Sanh, if you were a cook or a truck driver or Seabee, every vehicle got blown up. There was not a vehicle on the base that ran.

Q: At Khe Sanh, was it basically like non-stop shelling from the NVA?

A: Oh, yeah, some days you wouldn’t get but maybe one hundred or two rounds, a lot of days it was over a thousand. I’m talking about solid, constantly, bout the only time it would slack up is when the fog rolled in, and they couldn’t see. It would get so foggy there, you couldn’t see your hand in front of your face, and that’s when we always thought they would come through the wire. But, that would have been a big mistake.

Q: The wire, what is this wire you talk of?

A: The perimeter.

Q: Is there actually, do ya’ll have wire set up?

A: Barbed wire and mines, I forget how many mines we put out, but it was thousands, tens of thousands of them. You were supposed to, according to Marin Corps regulations you supposed to charge your mine field locations when you put em’ in. You would put clusters, you gotta mark each cluster.

Interviewer: Right.

Luther: We didn’t do none of that shit. We just put them out there and hauled ass. [Laughter] I imagine there’s still people getting blown up, up there where them damn mines were. There ain’t no way they could have found them all.

Q: How high up is Khe Sanh?

A: Oh, it’s in the mountains, it’s up on a kind of a little plateau. There’s mountains all around it, and valleys.

Q: How far away were the NVA, when they were firing these artillery shells?

A: Oh, some of them were in Laos, they had a mountain they called Quorock, and they had some big guns up there that the jets couldn’t get to, up in that mountain. We were from here to that ditch from the wire. [Luther is pointing a ditch in front of his house that is about 30 yards away.] And, you see them, you could see their helmets moving. They tunneled up right to, you see they dug trenches, but we were stupid, we dug our trenches straight, they zig-zagged theirs. So, see if somebody came in there and dropped a grenade in, and they’d kill everybody up and down that way. [Luther is pointing in a horizontal motion, to represent a straight trench line.] In theirs it blocked it off, but them little bastards, you talking about… I told some of them guys, that went to Iraq or Kuwait or wherever it was, they had 63 of them ragheads surrender to an Italian camera man, if they had been fighting these Vietnamese, they would have still been fighting because they would have had to kill every one of them. Them some tuff little bastards, I can tell you that.

Q: Could you distinguish between a North Vietnamese regular and a Viet Cong?

A: Oh, yeah, but we didn’t have Viet Cong up there where we were. See, they had, back in early ’67, McNamara, who was secretary of defense and a piece of shit, wanted to clear out the DMZ, wanted a 300-yard cleared zone along the DMZ and they called it McNamara’s Wall. Well, it wasn’t a wall it was it was just this, they sent the Seabees up there first, and they were getting too many loses, so they said the hell with this and then they sent the Marines up there, and they cleared it off. So, and they evacuated, every civilian I think three miles south of the DMZ, maybe five I don’t know, and they called it a free fire zone. You shot anything out there that moved.

Q: The DMZ, it stands for the Demilitarized Zone?

A: The Demilitarized Zone, yes.

Q: Was it really demilitarized?

A: Except for us.

Q: Except for you guys?

A: [Laughter] yes, hell yes, I will be right back. [Luther gets up at this point to have a drink of whiskey, and to get his jacket he wore in the war to show me.]

Q: [Luther hands me the jacket he had worn throughout the Vietnam War.] What are these spots here?

A: Probably blood.

Q: Blood?

A: Yes. I’ll tell you a funny story when I came home, the 9th Marine regiment, most of the units in the 9th Marine regiment were required to carry their own body bags. I brought mine home, and I had it under my bed, and I had an NVA flag I had picked up a North Vietnamese Army flag, and I had a bunch of these ole Chai Com grenades that the grunts would get em’ and we would disarm for em’ and they’d take home for souvenirs. They would let you let take them home if they were disarmed. I sent a bunch of that shit home. Anyway, I had it in my body bag under the bed. All that stuff in there. Momma asked me one day, she said, son where did you get that nice little bag you got your stuff in? I said, what you talking about? She said, under your bed. I said, momma I ain’t got nothing in there, if you want to go through it you can. She said, son I ain’t going through your stuff, I want to get one of those bags, I like those bags. I said, momma that’s my body bag. She said, what? I said, that’s the body bag I carried in Vietnam. She said, what’s it for? I said, my ass would have been shipped home in it if I had gotten killed. She said, get that out of my house, get it out of the house. [Laughter] she freaked out.

Interviewer: I can only imagine.

Luther: Back then when I got hit, in December, they sent, my address, we lived way out in the country. My address was Route 2 Uriah. Well, I never thought about this, but they sent a Marine Major and a Lieutenant I believe and a chaplain, to try to find where momma and daddy lived, so they could tell them that I had been wounded. Well, it was during deer season, and all daddy’s buddies were around there, and the first thing they did, they went to the post office to find out where Route 2 was. Well, Mrs. Willie May Green worked up in there, and Mrs. House, well they wouldn’t tell them what it was about, they just wanted to see momma and daddy. Well, the war was raging then, you know, that’s all that was on the news. They were looking for mom and daddy, by the time they got to the house there, everybody in town had me dead you know. [Laughter] Anyway.

Q: News had spread pretty fast?

A: Oh yeah. Why else would a bunch of Marines be looking for momma and daddy. They knew I was in the Marines, and they knew I was over there. Uriah is kind of like Mayberry. [Laughter]

Interviewer: Yes, sir, I’m familiar with Uriah. It still hasn’t grown a whole lot I’m sure?

Luther: Well, its got a whole lot more people, but you can’t, let me tell you something, if you’re an African American you ain’t going to buy no property down there, they won’t sell it to you. Some of the finest folks I know down there and I grew up with, are African Americans, my best friends growing up were African Americans. Bud and Ed and Charlie Mitch English, but, what I never understood growing up, now this is in the early 60s. We played together, we lived there, right there close proximity, and we played every summer together, and went swimming together and played ball together. But, every year when school started, they had to go to one school, and we had to go to another one, and I didn’t like that. And, I have always been accused of being a sort of a liberal thinker, I mean I’ve been called everything from, well everything, including n\*\*\*\*\* lover. But, I don’t care, I just think everybody oughta, let me tell you something I served with some guys in Vietnam that I had to trust my life with. And, they had to trust theirs’s with me. We’re friends to this day, that goes beyond race. I think everybody oughta be treated with dignity and respect, and that’s all people want is really, respect. I don’t tolerate racists, black or white.

Q: Was there racism between soldiers in Vietnam?

A: No, not in Vietnam, there was some after you know, of course people tend to congregate with people of their own kind. But, once you go off to war and come back, it’s a little bit different. You look at it one way when you go over there, but it’s a whole lot different when you come back. I served with some black guys that, they know that they can get anything I got, I know that I can get anything they got. It’s that bond, you can’t explain to somebody who hasn’t been there, you can’t do it. I mean it’s a brotherhood. We know what each other have endured and it’s just one of those things, you would have had to of been there to know what I’m talking about. Nobody’s going to know that. I got a good friend here, Johnnie Mack Grace, he was in the Army, but he lost both his legs in Vietnam. One of my best friends and like I say, he can get anything I got or I can get anything he’s got. Speaking of which, I wish he would bring me that 20 dollars he owes me. [Laughter] But, it’s good to see these guys, I go to most of the reunions, and I keep in touch with them over the phone. Raymond Phillups, everybody had a nickname, his name was Clyde. He lives up in Southside in Etowah County, just out of Gadsden and I keep in touch with him and I keep in touch with Bill Gay, I keep in touch with John Pesoni, and my buddy Ollie he comes, he came down here turkey hunting last year, year before last, and Wollie Hoffman, Neil Keeny, I keep in touch with them. One of my buddies died here last year. I’m going to show you his picture, see if you know him.

Interviewer: I’m sorry to hear that.

Luther: You might know this fella.

Interviewer: Ok.

Luther: If I can find his dumb ass… [Luther is looking for a picture of his friend to show me.]

Interviewer: Yes, sir.

Luther: I got to drive an aircraft carrier.

Interviewer: How was that?

Luther: It was neat. USS Harriet Truman. You recognize that fella?

Interviewer: Yes, sir, I do recognize him. The movie that I’m thinking of…

Luther: Full Metal Jacket.

Interviewer: That’s it, Full Metal Jacket. [The picture Luther showed me, was of Ermie Pyle.]

Luther: Well, Ermie was full of shit, is what he was. I’m getting on his ass right there. [Luther is pointing to a picture of him sitting down with Ermie.] He does all this Marine shit, but he was in 1-1, which never did anything, and then his second tour in Vietnam he was in a damn air wing. I said, you come across this dumb sumbitch here, he ain’t nothing but a p\*\*\*\*, and I’m explaining it real well to him.

Interviewer: Yeah, it looks like you’re engaged in a very serious conversation. [I am referring to the picture Luther is showing to me.]

Luther: Yeah, well, he’s got to quit doing that phony shit, well, he’s dead now though, so it don’t matter

Interviewer: I didn’t know he had passed.

Luther: Yeah, he died about three months ago now.

Interviewer: Oh, ok.

Luther: That’s a picture, there’s me right in the middle, out on the USS Harry Truman.

Interviewer: Wow.

Luther: I got a picture in there of me driving the damn aircraft carrier. You want to see it?

Interviewer: Yes, sir. How long ago was that?

Luther: This last month, was a year ago.

Interviewer: Ok.

Luther: They got what they call a COD flight, it stands for cargo on board delivery, you go from like 150 or 60 mph in four seconds, landing on that damn carrier.

Interviewer: Now, that’s a big turnaround, in four seconds.

Luther: Taking off is worse than that. It’s like getting shot out of a dang sling shot. [Luther walks back into his house to get a drink of whiskey and grab some pictures.] That’s me driving the aircraft carrier.

Interviewer: That is cool man. That is awesome.

Luther: It’s got a little steering wheel right there, it ain’t but about that big around. [Luther is making a small shape with his hands that resembles the size of the steering wheel.] See them big guys standing behind me with those pistols?

Interviewer: Yeah.

Luther: That’s up on the bridge. [Luther brought out a number of other pictures for me to look at as well.]

Interviewer: Platoon 3101

Luther: Mhmm.

Interviewer: This is your graduating class right here?

Luther: From Paris Island, yeah. November the 10th 1966, the Marine Corps birthday.

Interviewer: When you guys graduated, you were all split up in to what?

Luther: Most of us were infantry, they had one or two that went to air wing, and different places. Very few of those guys still living right there. [Luther is referring to the picture I am holding of his graduating Marine class.]

Interviewer: Did you stay with some of these guys for the whole entire time?

Luther: [Luther shakes his head no.]

Interviewer: None of them?

Luther: None of them, not the first one. We came back off patrol one day I was pissed because a rocket had hit our bunker, damn gooks. [Luther showed me another picture of the destroyed bunker he referred to as being hit by the rocket.] I tell you what, I got a thing there from, it’s an article, from Gunnery Sergeant Caldwell, that big tall guy right there, he was a senior drill instructor. [Luther is pointing at one of the drill instructors pictured in the photograph with his graduating class.] His grandson called me, he said so far the only two, that he’d been able to get up with out of that platoon, was me and a guy named Jeff Nicely, Jeff lives in Ohio, and you know, those guys look all just alike don’t they?

Interviewer: Yes, they do.

Luther: Don’t they all look just alike, you haven’t found me yet have you? [I’m looking at the picture of Luther’s graduating Marine class.]

Interviewer: I haven’t found you yet. I have been looking though.

Luther: I’m dead center in the middle. Right there. [Luther points himself out and that was the one I had my finger on as well.]

Interviewer: Yep, that’s the one I was pointing to.

Luther: See the Indian in me?

Interviewer: Yeah, you definitely have a dark complexion about you.

Luther: Yeah. You can’t tell but I have my hand around that little steering wheel right there. [Luther is showing me the picture of himself steering the aircraft carrier.]

Interviewer: Yes, sir.

Luther: That steers the whole damn boat, 3,500 feet long, and running 35 mph. You can ski behind that sumbitch.

Interviewer: That’s a big vessel to be cruising along.

Luther: Yeah. They’re dying at a rapid rate. [Luther is referring to Vietnam veterans as they are getting older. He is turning pages in book, looking for something to show me.] I was trying to find that letter to the editor. I tell you the best thing I’ve done since I got out was build that monument up here. [Luther is referring to the veteran’s memorial monument in Evergreen, Alabama.]

Interviewer: Yeah, that is a really nice monument.

Luther: One of the nicest ones.

Interviewer: Yeah, it’s really nice man. [This monument that we are talking about is in our hometown. It is a very nice monument that Luther helped to get funded and built for war veterans.]

Luther: Let me tell you what, I had the privilege to meet Major Jack Jacobson. You never heard of him have you?

Interviewer: I haven’t heard of him, no I have not.

Luther: You know what his claim to fame was?

Interviewer: What’s that?

Luther: He was General Patton’s logistics commander.

Interviewer: George Patton, General George Patton?

Luther: [Luther nods his head yes.] World War II. You ever see the movie Patton?

Interviewer: I have not.

Luther: George Patton was something else, and Major Jack’s job was to coordinate all the supplies that went in to Europe after D-Day. When I met him, he was 106 years old.

Interviewer: Wow.

Luther: And I asked him one day, my friend Barry Booth who does a lot of veteran stuff around Mobile, you seen him on TV I’m sure, Barry is a good guy. Anyway, Barry called me one day and he said, when are ya’ll going to uh… He came up one time and we cooked frog legs and gator tail. Down at Jr. Bohannon’s at Goodway.

Interviewer: Oh, yeah, I know him.

Luther: And he said, well you let me know I got a guest I want to bring. I said, well tell you what I think we are planning one in about three weeks. He said, well, let me know. So, I called Clarinet and said, are we gone cook in three weeks? She said, yeah. So, I called Barry back, and I said Barry, three weeks. So, he shows up with this old man, and the old man is walking, and he and I got to talking and he said I’ve never had frog legs or gator tail, he said are they pretty good? I said their pretty good. He said, well I was in the beef industry in Kansas City, I moved to the Gulf coast, and he said, he had become very successful, he had retired out of the Army now, in 1949. That was two years after I was born. Anyway, he was, what did I do with my phone? Oh, there it is, let me show you this picture of him. [Luther unlocks his phone and begins searching for the picture.] And, he knew Patton personally, and I said, let me ask you something Major, I said, how was General Patton to work for? He looked around, he said, I don’t know these other people, he said, but I’m going to tell you, he was a son of a bitch. [Laughter] There he is. [Luther finds the picture of the Major on his phone and shows it to me.]

Interviewer: Wow.

Luther: That old man is something else.

Interviewer: And that’s him?

Luther: That’s him. I mean it was honoring to meet somebody who had sat at the table with General Patton, I mean it is to me, Patton is one of my heroes.

Interviewer: That’s awesome that you got to meet that person.

Luther: And, anyway, look let me show you something else. [Luther looks for another picture of the Major on his phone.] I brought him up to the monument, and he said, it’s the nicest one he’s ever seen.

Interviewer: And you know he has seen some things.

Luther: He died at 107.

Interviewer: In his lifetime.

Luther: Yeah, I went to his funeral, they buried him down at Spanish Fort. At the veterans cemetery, down there. You ever been down there to that cemetery?

Interviewer: I have not.

Luther: Let me show you something. [Luther looks for another picture to show me.] My wife is buried down there. They call that the Arlington of the South. That’s a beautiful place.

Interviewer: I have never been down there.

Luther: It hasn’t been open but a few years and it’s feeling up. All these old Vietnam guys are starting to die there were 5 million of us.

Interviewer: 5 million, that’s a lot of people.

Luther: That’s a lot, but see we were Vietnam veterans before it became cool to be a Vietnam veteran. There were people claiming they were in Vietnam who never even set foot outside of the United States. Bunches of pieces of shits is what they are.

Q: Being in Vietnam how does that affect your life? Is that something that always stays with you?

A: It stays with you, it’s a, somebody asked me one day last week, he said, when were you in Vietnam, I said, about 3:30 this morning. It’s just something you can’t get out of your mind. It’s there, It’s locked in. If I had of been there when I was 30 or 35, I would have probably forgot about it by now. But, you’re at such a young and impressionable age at 18 or 19 or 20, you see shit that you can’t get out of your head. I mean, when you stick your hand over where your buddy was at night, you put your hand in mush where his face was, you don’t forget that shit.

Interviewer: I couldn’t imagine having to.

Luther: Nah, like I said, unless you been there you don’t know, you can’t explain it.

Interviewer: Yes, sir.

Luther: But, I love this country, and I despise the shit that’s going on now.

Q: Do you feel like, when you were first going to Vietnam, that it was necessary for you and many others like yourself?

A: Well, I thought, I don’t know what I thought, I thought it was my duty to do it, it was something I wanted to do, and I knew, I mean I played football in high school, I was in good shape.

Interviewer: Yes, sir. Yeah, from the pictures, you looked like you were in dang good shape.

Luther: I was in damn good shape, and I was, you know, I would go down across the line to pick a fight just to see if I could fight. And, I won some and I got the shit beat out of me sometimes.

Interviewer: Well, you win some, you lose some.

Luther: Yeah, when I got home I had a big old handle bar mustache, hell I was a Marine sergeant, and I was as tuff as that brick sidewalk down there. An old boy down there said, I’ll tell you, his name was Barney Singleton, there were two Barney Singletons, this was the old Barney Singleton. I went to Frosty Acres to get me a beer, actually, I went in there to get me a half pint of Walker’s Deluxe. And, I’m in there and an old guy named Lee Miller owned that place. He said, Upton where in the hell have you been? I said, I been gone for a while, and old Barney in there says, Upton, come over here and let me buy you a drink, he said, I saw that thing in the paper about you and he said, you must be a good boy, and there ain’t no demand for good boys, but I’m going to buy you a beer. We set there and I drank a beer with him. Drinking out of my half pint, and he asked me, he said, let me ask you something Upton. I said, what? He said, when did you start playing the piano? I said, what the hell you talking about playing a piano? He said, well they told me one time that didn’t but two types of people play the piano, and that was [Laughter] well, piano players and cocksuckers. When he said that, it dawned on me, I buried my fist about that deep between his eyes, I knocked him cold as a wedge. Lee said, you can’t come in here whipping folks. I said, well, drag that sumbitch out of here I’m gone. [Laughter] Anyway, man that pissed me off, I went and shaved my mustache though. I didn’t have any idea that people thought like that. You know, I had forgotten about it, because I had been away from home for 3 or 4 years,

Interviewer: That’s crazy.

Luther: And, uh… I don’t know. There’s my dog Bob. That’s him in his sunglasses, he’s cool. [Luther is showing me a picture of his dog named Bob.]

Interviewer: [Laughter] The dog Bob, ok, he’s looking cool in his sun shades.

Luther: Oh, yeah, Bob is a cool dog, he’s a rescue dog, I got him out of the highway down there. When I brought him home, my wife died a year ago, this past December.

Interviewer: I’m sorry for your loss.

Luther: Well, she had cancer and it was bad, I miss her every day, But, anyhow, Mandy here is sort of my caregiver, I’m trying to get her to give me more than care but she won’t do it. [Laughter] Because, hell, I’m 71 and she’s 39, that won’t work. But, anyway, she’s a sweet girl, and she helps me out, and drives me when I need to drive, because I’ve always had a nagging thing with alcohol, I love the taste of whiskey, and I love the way it makes me feel. I don’t do drugs, never have been much on drugs, I’ve done some cocaine, and I’ve smoked enough marijuana to fill the bed of your truck up, but, I quit all that.

Interviewer: Yes, sir.

Luther: But, Vietnam, hey let me tell you something, I had a buddy, I didn’t serve with him in Vietnam but, he was at Khe Sanh too he was in 3rd recon. His name was L.W.J Ike, he was an Indian from Elko, Nevada. He and I were stationed at the Marine barracks Bremerton, Washington. He and I would go off and we would drink, he was a big ole Indian, big guy and a hell of a nice guy. I could piss him off, tell him he was a Navajo, [Laughter] and he’d say yeah, you son of bitch, you a slapaho, and he’d knock the shit out of me. Anyway, we’d fight, when we couldn’t find anybody else to fight, we would fight each other. Well, one night, we were, what was the name of that bar uh… In downtown Bremerton, Washington, the Tahi, named after an Indian chief or something. There were sixty-something Marines, at the Marine barracks there, and the USS Ranger, and the USS Enterprise were at dry dock there at about the same time. In ’68, but about a week before the sailors come in, their wives and girlfriends start coming, so it’s like a buffet. So, Ike, you know I regret I don’t have a picture of that son of a bitch, but, anyway, we were in this bar, and there wasn’t but three or four Marines in there, and one of those boats had came in, think it was the Ranger that came in first, I don’t know it could have been the Enterprise. But, now you got to figure there is four or five thousand people on those ships,

Interviewer: That’s a lot of people.

Luther: And there’s sixty of us. The place was crowded and Ike was sitting right next to me, and he and I were sitting there drinking at the bar, and there’s something the Navy does and I don’t know how this works, but something about when they sail across the equator they can grow a beard, I don’t know how that works. But, it’s a strange thing, it didn’t make sense to me, I don’t think I have been across the equator. But, anyhow, there was this big ole navy guy that came in there and he said, uh… Ike got up and he said, watch my chair. I’m watching his chair and he goes to the restroom, this big ole sailor came up there, and he said, I’m going to sit down here. I said, partner, my buddy is sitting there. I don’t see anybody sitting here. I said, well go on and sit down, he’ll be back in a minute. Damn, when Ike got back, he grabbed that son of bitch, and proceeded to pounce on his head and grabbed his beard and pulled him a handful of that beard out, bleeding. [Laughter] Well, they call, naturally they call the shore patrol but, you know who ran the shore patrol in Bremerton?

Interviewer: Who’s that?

Luther: The Marines. At the barracks. [Laughter] So, they sent ole Samuels, Sergeant Samuels over there and he got us out. Ike wasn’t nobody to mess with. Anyway, the story about Ike was, he had a friend from Michigan, that came to see him out in Nevada, his buddy went back home and committed suicide and when Ike found out about it, he committed suicide. Now, we had a reunion in Reno, ahh… shit how long ago was it, I don’t know probably, ten years ago, eight years maybe, but, Ike’s brother Phelix, was also in Vietnam, as a Marine and he is the chairman of the tribal council up there. There Apache Indians and you know.

Interviewer: Apaches.

Luther: Yep, anyway, Phelix came and I’m going to show you a hat he had somebody make me.

Interviewer: Ok.

Luther: Let me go find it. [Luther gets up to go look for the hat.]

Interviewer: Ok.

Luther: I tell you what, you talking about how that affected me? [ Luther is referring to when I asked him how the Vietnam war affected him.]

Interviewer: Yes, sir.

Luther: I’ve been married four times.

Interviewer: Four times.

Luther: My first wife, I got out of the Marine Corps on September the 9th, 1969. My daughter, was born on June 9th 1970. It didn’t matter who picked me up at the airport, it just happened I called this one girl that I knew and she was in school at the University, and I dated her in high school, if you figure that, that’s nine months to the day. Anyway, my first wife, I was having a nightmare one night and she shook me, and I like’d to killed her. I knew then, they didn’t know what PTSD was back then.

Interviewer: Right.

Luther: Anyway, she said, you do that again I’m leaving you. I said, let me tell you something, if I’m having a nightmare, don’t put your hands on me, take a broom and job me with it, and haul ass. So, that didn’t last. My second wife, we stayed married about nine years. It got to where I couldn’t stand her and she couldn’t stand me and I was drinking heavy. So, and I’ve always been able to make money you know, working, I’ve never been without a job. The only time I ever filed for unemployment was when Ivan came through. Because we were off the air for like, three weeks. Anyway, and I’ve never filled out but one job application, my whole adult life, one job application, and I’m going to tell you about that in a minute.

Interviewer: Ok.

Luther: My third wife, I married a girl that I dated at the University of Alabama, she was from Fairhope, and a lot of water had been under the bridge and, I got to where I didn’t like her, and I’ve never been one to not say what I think.

Interviewer: Right.

Luther: So, we go on this cruise, I was running this Pensacola office for this radio station, and everybody went on the cruise, there was about thirty of us. Well, we got out there and I got to gambling, and I’ve always had a gambling problem, and a drinking problem, and the one that will solve your gambling problem is being out of money. Something that will solve your liquor problem is your out of liquor. Alright, so anyway I had quit drinking during this time, I quit drinking for like six years. But, I loved to gamble, loved to play black jack, so we got out there and I maxed up all my credit cards and spent all my cash, and I told her, sugar I need to borrow 2,500 dollars until we get back in Pensacola. What do you need 2,500 dollars for? I said, it don’t matter what I need it for. I need to borrow 2,500 dollars, and she had plenty of money.

Interviewer: Right.

Luther: She said, well I’m not going to let you have it. I said, what do you mean your not going to let me have it? She said, you’ll just gamble it away and lose it. I said, it don’t matter what I do with it, I’ll give it back to you when we get back to Pensacola. Because, I was making good money, I was making 70,000 dollars a year and that was 30 years ago. Anyway, she wouldn’t let me have it. So, I said, tell you what, we get back to Pensacola I want your ragged shit out of my house, I want you out of my house. Well, that ended that, so anyway, then I married Molly. I’d known her for a long time and she and I were just like that, I never cheated on her, she never cheated on me, and I never even thought about getting a divorce, and we were married for 25 years.

Interviewer: That’s a long time.

Luther: And then, she up and dies. She didn’t up and died, she suffered, poor ol’, that thing, let me tell you something, if I could find the damn doctor, that gave her that radiation crap in Monroeville, she had 37 radiation treatments, I swear to god I’d put that rod up his ass, and put it wide open and leave it there until he disappeared. But, anyway, that’s just me. Anyhow, she passed away and I love her very much, and I won’t ever get married again, just ain’t gone happen.

Luther: You know, if you were a Vietnam veteran back in the late 60s early 70s you couldn’t get a job.

Interviewer: Nobody would hire you?

Luther: Nobody would hire you.

Interviewer: Why was that?

Luther: Gate Precast in Monroeville up until a few years ago, it may still be this way, wanted to know if you were a Vietnam veteran.