Sean Bowen:Hello, can you please state your name for me?

Billy Mims:My name is Billy J. Mills.

Sean Bowen:All right, and how old were you when you went to Vietnam?

Billy Mims:I figured I was in Vietnam. Let's say I was 20. I guess I was 22.

Sean Bowen:All right. And where were you sent after you completed basic training?

Billy Mims:I was sent to Fort Leavenworth and well, no, they didn't lock me up. I was at the US Disciplinary Barracks at a base.

Sean Bowen:And what was your job there?

Billy Mims:I was a supervisor in carpenter shot at Leavenworth military, prison.

Sean Bowen:Can you talk about some of your time at Leavenworth?

Billy Mims:Yeah. I tell you when. A little bit of backstory, I finished basic training and January at Fort Benning. And then we flew into Kansas City, and they had a cab pick. Four of us up and they dropped us off at Leavenworth prison, Disciplinary Barracks, is what they call it, but it was a military prison. And we left Atlanta, it was about 60 degrees. We got to Leavenworth that morning at one o'clock and it was 33. So we, we wasn’t or well I wasn’t prepared for the cole going in.

Sean Bowen:All right, and what was it like being in Leavenworth?

Billy Mims:Well, it was difficult. I'd never been inside basically a prison like that. But I worked in a carpet carpenter shop trying to teach vocation if you will, because I was in construction. For years before I went in, and I had what the army called MOS. I had a carpenter's MOS and I was working as an instructor inside the prison.

Sean Bowen:And I heard you played basketball in Leavenworth, Can you say a little?

Billy Mims:I did. I was six foot five and and I had a partial scholarship offer to Living ston state, and I turned it down. But anyway, I walked in the office next morning. I after we got the Leavenworth me and young man from I forgot where Jones was from that's what I can't even remember his first name now. But anyway, we walked in there. And top Sarge was Sergeant Dyess. And he walked in. He said Mims, how tall are you? I said, Sir, I'm six. He said Don't call me sir. Call me sorry. And he said have you ever played any basketball? I said Yeah, a little bit and he said we got a game tonight and said I expect you to to be on the court says we'll go do a little practice this afternoon and then we'll practice tonight. And me and Jones come in from Georgia he was from Georgia he's from Dalton Georgia, I believe it was but anyway, the little background Leavenworth was also a Officers Training kinda like Maxwell field because they had field raid or they had so many officers as field grade and above. And it wasn't a big place but there's kind of like Maxwell where foreign officers and way we were lucky even our I was lucky enough. But anyway, getting back to the to the basketball game. They had a big guy that was about six six. And but he was way bigger than I was. And he had been scoring 25 to 50 points a game and there was a competition I was assigned to first guard company and we were playing the two o'fifth MP company, and it was always a rival between first guard and a MPs because First guard use, they had won it. Two years before I got to go in the last year. The 205th won it. Anyway, they had a big guy. And I had a he had been averaging 26 points a game I held him to 18 points. And then from then on I just wrote my ticket. I played basketball and then later softball. But it was a it was a it was a good place to be stationed and the people were real friendly in Leavenworth.

Sean Bowen:When did you find out that you were being sent to Vietnam? Like how long were you at Leavenworth?

Billy Mims:Oh, I was out there almost six months. Okay, before I come out to all orders for Vietnam. When you at that time, you almost expect, you know that is right out of basic or a few months out of basic and everything. And the odd part about it was that the orders didn't come in to. I got him at 11 o'clock in the morning. And I left the base at three that afternoon and my relationship with first Sarge, or the company Sergeant paid off because he had my laundry. I had some laundry, the quartermaster. And he'd done everything he pulled our string he could because I only had I think it was 10 or 11 days before I had to ship out to Vietnam. But anyway, he got me out of the post. Normally it takes about three days. And we don't know about for four and a half hours.

Sean Bowen:Right? Yeah. What were those days between, like getting shipped out to when you were told that you would be shipped out?

Billy Mims:I didn't. I didn't know. You know, I didn't have any warning. What I'm saying it, but I only had like a day or two to clear post. But I done in three hours work and get home and have a few days off see my wife. And so it was it was a it was a good thing. I was coming up on being getting rank. But I didn't have like another month to have time and grade to become a E4. And Sargent Dyess has told me said Mims. He said there is no way possible in this man's army, your E4 strap will be waiting on you time you get to (Viet)Nam but it wasn't right. I didn't expect it to know. But he was he was real good. He really took care of his men.

Sean Bowen:And where were you set when you first arrived in Vietnam.

Billy Mims:Where was I

Sean Bowen:like what area Vietnam did you arrive?

Billy Mims:Oh, we arrived in in Cam Rahn Bay. I flew into Cam Rahn Bay and I was with the 497th port construction which was housed at Cam Rahn Bay. Our outfit was we had a Cam Rahn Bay had three power ships that that powered electricity for the base. And it had the we were on we were on a mountain overlooking the bay and the Seabees was up above us and we were underneath. But we were done. I was only in the company area two weeks in Cam Rahn Bay and I went temporary duty assignment to Nha Trang driving pilings, building the pier for the loading and offloading for PEX supplies and equipment.

Sean Bowen:Right And can you talk about your time there?

Billy Mims:Yeah, I had a real good deal out there. The good Lord was looking out after me because Alaska barge was in charge of the barges and offloading the PX main px supplies and supplies Last, and they stayed in air conditioned house right? And we got we didn't have any K P Duty or anything. They serve four meals a day had an American chef, For the civilians, right but we were staying because we were working basically for them or attached to them. So I put on about 30 pounds in four months. I was up there. every other Friday night we would have lobster. And that was a real treat. So had a wonderful time and then I had to go north and out in the boonies and didn't like that quite. quite so much.

Sean Bowen:How was that like?

Billy Mims:Well, it it was a whole lot different than then stay in in Nha Trang but I was stationed then in Toy Hoa I went up with diesel powered driving hammer. I didn't go with any of the outfit. They sent me up there and the diesel hammer. And like the army does sometimes they get cart before the horse. It was four weeks before I actually went to work but I just stayed there. And I would actually stand formation then go wherever I want to is wanted to until they got ready was subject to drive some pilings for a bridge out on QL One was what it was called, or what we called it. It was a main highway from Saigon run all the way to the North. DMZ up there

Sean Bowen:right. Did you work with any of the Vietnamese people while you were there?

Billy Mims:I did

Sean Bowen:Alright, and what was that like?

Billy Mims:Oh, they are very talented people after I had got I actually didn't work with them in Cam Rahn Bay, I worked with them. The four weeks that I was stationed, I was stationed with a 5/72 light equipment company. But it was part of the 577 engineering. But the sergeant and chartered motorpool found out that I had a carpenter background. So I took the Vietnamese and we added some storage space to and then the Vietnamese actually built a bar for the NCO club that they had. And I got a I got two merit awards commendation for the work that I've done with the Vietnam people. It was kind of unique because they use their feet and toes bout as much as they did their hands, they would actually hold a nail where their toes stood on hold and who were there other hand I used to joke with them they spoke, some of them spoke partial English. And I told him I said I'm gonna take you back to Montgomery, Alabama, I could make a fortune with you guys and he just laughed. But I was really fortunate I had I won't say a good time, but I mean it was It wasn't bad at all. It wasn't like we were either place was a secure and even in Cam Rahn Bay. Cam Rahn Bay was probably the most secure place or base in Vietnam, or at least it was at the time I was there.

Sean Bowen:Alright, Did you ever see any combat while over there?

Billy Mims:Well, not exactly. But when I was in Toy Hoa during I was over in 68 Tet offensive, and we would take mortar rounds about two bout two or 2:30 in the mornings. And we had what, what were Toy Hoa, where this where we were stationed was on the South China Sea and we were Our engineering battalion was right next to the Airborne Division. And they had a helo pad. They had helicopters and everything. And but we would occasionally get perimeter fire. small arms fire at night. And you have to put on your gear and have to go into the bunkers and whatever. But as far as actually combat that's about it.

Sean Bowen:All right. Is there anything else you want to talk about about your time in Vietnam?

Billy Mims:Not much. It's, I wrote I was able, in my spare time, I probably read every Louis L'Amour Western paperback books, I could get my hands on I probably read 20 to 25 of them at least. Because for weeks, I had a lot of time. Just but I, I was very fortunate with my duty assignments and everything.

Sean Bowen:All right, and what was like, what was it like when you got found out that you were getting sent back home and going back home?

Billy Mims:Well, there's a unique story about that. I had never because I was TDY. Most of the time, I had never actually pulled guard duty. And the two times I had to pull guard duty two times when I got to the I was stationed 497th Port construction Cam Rahn. But the way they had it set up if you made what we call the man, you were inspected before you went on guard duty, well, if if you was neatest and the sharpest, and so on and so forth. Yeah, you didn't have stand guard duty you had not actually had to post but you had to be with a sergeant that was in charge. And I did that twice. But anyway, I had come off duty off of active duty and shipping out the next day. And I went in to mail my last letter home to my wife to tell her when I would be home and we had gotten they had gotten Small Arms fire that our supply yard and the lieutenant in charge told me says ma'am grab you have your gear and your rifles said we'll get but I thought it wasn't but Lieutenant, I'm off duty. He said I told you to get your helmet a yes sir. And the story behind that I had seen and heard of people, you know, spending a whole year and I'm thinking oh me Is this my time, you know, having to go out there in a dangerous place. But everything worked out. But it was unique about that. So I didn't have too much time to think about it

Sean Bowen:doesn't sound like it.

Billy Mims:But then I flew back in to Fort McCord and was discharged.

Sean Bowen:Alright, and how was it like, adjusting after the war when you came back home?

Billy Mims:Oh, it took a while. Oh, any sudden noise? Oh, when I got home, we got an apartment on a kind of a busy street. And at night sometimes 18 wheelers go by and it was back. The trucks would backfire. And boy, my wife, I'd jump you know, I'd sit straight up because over there you you sleep but you don't sleep. Because you got to be aware of your surroundings and everything. But it took a while. Because life. You know, it was just different.

Sean Bowen:And did you get any negativity coming towards you when you got back?

Billy Mims:No, I didn't. And I seen a a few protests when I flew into Atlanta. But nothing, nothing major. We heard about it over the radio stations and stuff. I forget what they call it now. But anyway, it was us radio stations when I was over in Vietnam. So we were aware of the displeasure in the Vietnam War some but personally I never expected H anything other than saw just a little bit of what I got home

Sean Bowen:all right anything else you want to mention before we end up?

Billy Mims:I don't think so

Sean Bowen:all right thank you for your time