

Benjamin Shewmake

## Oral History Transcript

Ben Shewmake: Basically what we are going to do is start out with your high school graduation and then go from there

Terry Horton: I graduated in May 1966 and got drafted and went in the service Dec. 12 66

Ben Shewmake: Was there already any kind of anxiety of going there yet?

Terry Horton: I thought whenever I got drafted I would stay in

B.S.: Stay in the military and make a career?

T.H.: I didn't. I got drafted in 66. Went to Ft. Benning Ga. Let us come home for Christmas and then went back for the month of January and February for basic training and then went to AIT in Ft. Eustis Va. When I got through with AIT I got shipped back to Ft. Benning Ga and me and Joe Peters had a friend that was in headquarters and we volunteered to go to Vietnam. He told us that if you volunteer to go they won't send you. We volunteered every month to go, we volunteered all the way up until October and then we didn't volunteer. We thought that since we had a little over a year they ain't gonna take us. About the 15<sup>th</sup> of October we had orders to come down and go to Vietnam.

B.S.: So whenever you went back to Benning you went to jump school?

T.H.: Yes

B.S.: Was that to get airborne wings?

T.H.: Yes we had to do that and but that was when you come back from AIT. Actually my MOS was 68H20 which was depot level maintenance aircraft hydraulic specialist.

B.S.: Which for Hueys you needed that.

T.H.: Yes, when we went to Vietnam all you went over there was to replace someone who was leaving or got killed. That's all you went over there for. Then they just put you wherever you where. When they first put us over there I was at Vang Tau which was an R&R center for in country R&R and we got detached from there to 7<sup>th</sup> Armor Squadron 1<sup>st</sup> Air Cavalry and we were sent to Dian. Which is still in the delta area, we were up there, no first we went to Phen Long. We were in Phen Long in Feb for the Tet offensive there. Then we went to Dian. We stayed there and our company built our own bunkers. We didn't get it built good before they sent us back to Phen Long. We were in Phen Long for the rest of the time we were over there but there was a lot of mess that went on over there in between there. The rain over there it rains 6 months. Tet Offensive, in 68 that was a bad deal it was a terrible time to be over there

B.S.: I imagine the Tet was, not knowing where everything was coming from.

T.H.: In Phen Long on the Tet offensive they had south Vietnamese civilians that cut hair on base and some of them were viet cong. They killed 3 of them on base when it kicked off. They were already coming on base anyhow and during the night they would attack. It was a bad bad deal

B.S.: I had some friend who talked about Afghanistan and them doing that.

T.H.: Guerilla warfare is all it is. Hard to defeat a guerilla warfare. But you know that to me I think that war was political.

B.S.: It's weird going through some of the history and how it could have been avoided.

T.H.: They would do anything, those people would do anything. If they ever got it on their shoulders they would tote it off.

B.S.: since you were depot level maintenance, when you got to Vietnam you got made a door gunner?

T.H.: Yeah they put you were they needed you. They always had a co-pilot, pilot and a crew chief always there, he was the main gunner on the helicopter(this is referencing the crew chief). Most of those helicopters had rockets mounted on the side with miniguns and then some had M60 that you shot. It's a different world.

B.S.: Had some friends that ended up Hueys and the new choppers don't have the distinct sound.

T.H.: Those two blades you can hear them popping coming towards you but not away.

B.S.: They always said that if the Huey wasn't leaking then it was out of hydraulic fluid.

T.H.: Yeah They got an auto rotate and accumulators on them, they hold pressure. If they run out like an engine stall then they can auto rotate coming down if you pull up on that lever and the accumulator will let you halfway land it. It won't be as bad as it usual was.

B.S.: When yall would go up was it mainly LZ inserts or gun runs?

T.H.: Most of the time what we did was just support

B.S.: Like tote supplies to them?

T.H.: yeah support ground crews but if you worked on one that pilot was going to have you in there on that first flight. If you worked on that helicopter you were going on that first flight. He wasn't flyin unless you were in there. We had a lot of boys from here in Jackson that went. Some of them dodged the draft by trying to go to school that weren't school material. I have some friends here that actual went to school or National Guard to get out of it. I was going I had in my mind made up that I was going to stay in there and I didn't.

B.S.: You have said before they offered you E5 to reenlist?

T.H.: They offered over there, the Col over there offered us 10,000 dollars tax free and E5 if you reup. I told him where I was going I wouldn't need the E5 but could use the 10000. It was, He

was a good man. Course everybody over there, Vietnam wasn't like, to me anyway but it may have been to some people, everybody over there was there to do a job and try to stay alive but everybody got along. In our company everybody got along we didn't have any really bad situations. The one thing I really hated to do was pull perimeter guard. I hated that course they had flares they would shoot all night. Still couldn't see.

B.S.: Where yall butted up to the jungle or in the city?

T.H.: The places that I was over there at the perimeter they would clear the timber out about 200 yards but still them folks were bad they would get high on that dope over there. They were hard to kill

B.S.: They did that in Afghanistan

T.H.: They would get high before they came and attacked you. 90% of them on the TET offensive were so doped up they prob didn't know what they were doing. They didn't feel nothing. The helicopters that we had go out, if you had one shot down they would go out and recover it. They had the big ones do that, the small ones like the Loachs, they would pick them up with Hotel model hueys. Them little things could fly like crazy.

B.S.: Were yall mixed with Cobras or was it just normal Hueys?

T.H.: Had Cobras, UH1G, They were hard, they really didn't have enough officers to dly them. The warrant officers and all flew them.

B.S.: Did you ever fly?

T.H.: No, I didn't want to I probably could have there wasn't much to them I would have loved to learned to fly.

B.S.: That was probably for the second enlistment

T.H.: Yeah, a lot of warrant officers flew those choppers. Especially the loachs, the cobras and Charlie model hueys they were flown by regular officers, Lts capt's. The hotel models is what carried people.

B.S.: So the hotel models are the ones doing the inserting?

T.H.: Yeah they carried men on them hotel models. Can't remember how many they would hold but they were a bigger chopper. The Charlie ones were just two men up front and two door gunners, they were different.

B.S.: All of your time was spent around the Mekong?

T.H.: Down in the delta, I never got above Dian. That was the furthest I went up. Vang tau was out on a peninsula that was the reason they had it and an R&R center it was like Florida but narrower. All out on a peninsula, only one way to get there and it was well guarded. Vang Tau you could actually get a pass to go downtown. You never know what you were facing down there.

B.S.: I remember you telling a story that when you were leaving you spent the last few days of your time in a bunker.

T.H.: We spent 3 days in a bunker. Me and Joe Peters spent the last three days in a bunker We left over there we stayed in that bunker we stayed right there in that bunker we came out to get on that plane.

B.S.: Didn't you say whenever you got your orders home was whenever you got killed?

T.H.: We went to the bunker then you didn't want to take any chances then. I got my ticket home I'm gonna stay in the safest place there is. I got to go to R&R two times I got to go to Australia and Bangkok Thailand which was right there but back then it was a pretty straight place. Bobby Leggett form here when he got shot at in the infantry he came to our squadron. He got shot on the first time he went out on the helicopter. He spent a good bit of time in Tokyo recouping. It was a bunch of boys form around here.

B.S.: In bootcamp did you have any choice in your MOS?

T.H.: No it was I guess it was kind of a test you took, see what your technical skills were. I had worked around cars, my daddy was a mechanic I had been around it all of my life and know a little about hydraulics. Then went to AIT for aircraft hydraulics. Mainly what we done, in basic you didn't do nothing I guess they sent you to AIT because of that test and what you knew about certain thing. What got me in basic when we first go there the sgt wanted to know how many truck drivers were there. He put them right there operating wheelbarrows. They will trick you into doing anything. I had already heard about that don't raise your hand for nothing don't volunteer for nothing.