Interviewer:
The date March the 19th. I'm here in Bessemer Alabama with Yel Jacks, and we're going to continue our interview on his military service and the Vietnam war. Yel, with that, we'll get started with this.

Interviewer:
And first question I have was if you want to give a little personal background on yourself, what year you were born, what city you were born in, what high school did you go to, what year did you graduate, stuff like that?

Yel:
I was born around Huntsville area in 1931, May the 9th. And sometimes I don't know, I was so young, when we moved to Birmingham, that I don't remember anything much about it. My dad died. I can't remember him. I was approximately two years old-

Interviewer:
Oh, wow.

Yel:
... maybe a little older. I had a younger brother, who was I guess a year and a half younger than me. We grew up in an area over there called Germania Park, located between Bessemer and West End. We attended Jones Valley High School.

Interviewer:
Jones Valley, okay.

Yel:
I went from the first through the ... well out of 12 and a half years, I lacked four credits, graduated and couldn't do very well in the English language. That was it.

Interviewer:
My grandad, he was in the same situation at Bessemer in 1958. He never graduated with a diploma either.

Yel:
Anyway, played a little bit of football, wasn't very good. I was about second or third team, whatever, but wasn't that big, people in those days. I weighed about a 150 pounds, and probably the two heaviest boys probably weighed less than 200 pounds at that time, now everybody is heavier.

Yel:
Anyway, once school was out, it was summer, The Korean War broke out in June, and it was August, and my friend Lamar Holland come by and says, "Let's go join the Marine Corps." I said, "Well that's great for me. I always wanted to be a marine." So we went down. There was 11 people trying to get in the Marine Corp at that time.

Yel:
They accepted three of us, me, Lamar, and a boy named, Hurst, who had been in the Army before. You had to be six foot tall and weigh a 150 pounds and everything. At that time, the Marines, there wasn't very many people in the Marine Corps.

Interviewer:
Right, it sounds like a prestigious group.

Yel:
Yeah, probably 50,000 people in the Marine Corp at that time. It was rock bottom. I joined the Marine Corp and went to boot camp. I was in Platoon 113, and the hardest part for me was to learn to stay in step, but anyway, went to rifle range. I had a shooter on the rifle range.

Yel:
After that, I was drill instructor's boy. I don't know. They got some award for it, or people how to shoot. I left there, came home on leave for ...on Halloween, came home, went back from leave, joined the Second Marine Division was being formed at that time.

Yel:
I went in there, and it was Marine Corps birthday 1950 is when I reported into Camp Lejeune. It was on the birthday, and as you can imagine, finding your way around on a birthday-

Interviewer:
I'm sure there were a lot of festivities.

Yel:
... about 11:00 at night, never been there.

Interviewer:
If anybody could put two sentences together you would have been all right.

Yel:
Yeah, reported at the gate. They said, "Go to building two," which was probably three or four miles inside the gate there, got checked in. They said, "Go to building so and so ..."

Yel:
Well never been there before, you can imagine with a sea bag and about 11:00 at night wandering around trying to find the buildings, went by a bus station, was there, and somebody at the bus station pointed me in the right direction.

Yel:
Went down, reported in there. The guy gave me a blanket, a couple of sheets, and says, "Find you a bunk down there," and that was it. Anyway, that turned out that was H&S and Casual Company. There wasn't no outfits in the Second Marines at that time.

Interviewer:
Right.

Yel:
That what was to be the Second Marine Regiment. So I was there, and while I was waiting to be assigned to a unit, we would go out there to the industrial area, and they had lumber out there, and you would take this lumber, and one day you move it over, stack it over here. The next day, go stack it back.

Interviewer:
Right.

Yel:
We had done that for two or three weeks, and then they started forming up units, all right. The first unit I was ever in was SemperFi Marine Corps, that's welcome to ... all right? So I was in there for probably three months, well they had too many of us in there, so one of us went to a rifle company.

Yel:
I ended up going to motor company, so I spent ... That was the rest of ... well the 19, I believe it went on over into 51 by then.

Interviewer:
You were in Korea at that point?

Yel:
No. I was still at Camp Lejeune.

Interviewer:
Camp Lejeune.

Yel:
So I was in a motor company in there for about a year, okay. I kept putting in a letter asking them to Korea, and nothing ever happened. Then one day I tried to give up on it, well here come orders, and now I went to Camp Pendleton.

Yel:
And from Camp Pendleton went to cold weather training up at Pickel Meadows. The snow, I had never seen it in my life. It was at least four or five foot deep.

Interviewer:
Oh, my goodness, and where was this located at?

Yel:
Pickel Meadows, that's in California.

Interviewer:
It's in California.

Yel:
That's up in the mountains there.

Interviewer:
Right, we talked about this last time.

Yel:
Yeah, the closest to it is ...

Interviewer:
Reno, Nevada.

Yel:
Yeah, Reno, Nevada there.

Interviewer:
That's right.

Yel:
So anyway, left there and came back and went to Korea. I got out there. I was the 18th replacement in Korea, and that was in March of 60-

Interviewer:
In 52?

Yel:
62 I guess.

Interviewer:
You mean 52?

Yel:
60, yeah, 52, yeah.

Interviewer:
I was going to say.

Yel:
Yeah, 52.

Interviewer:
Yes, sir.

Yel:
I went in and was on the east coast of Korea, went into a little place called Sochori, which was the name of an old port or whatever, but we went in. I joined the 42nd Mortar Company Field Marines.

Yel:
We was there on the east coast there, oh, I don't know, maybe a month and a half, two months, the word intelligence said that the Chinese or North Koreans were going to jump off and come down to the Sound of China Valley.

Interviewer:
Right.

Yel:
Okay, so we were moved then, moved us to the east coast, over there, we were going to be caught with the brunt of that attack, and with the army back over there. Well it never came. All it was, was then, was fighting over outposts.

Interviewer:
Pretty much, trying to gain ground, because the-

Yel:
Yeah.

Interviewer:
The negotiations were going on at that point, and everybody was trying to get leverage by gaining as much ground as they could.

Yel:
Yeah, the line had become stable.

Interviewer:
Right.

Yel:
It was a bunker warfare.

Interviewer:
Pretty much, it was a war of attrition.

Yel:
Yeah, trench and bunker, yeah. All right, let me see what I want to say. All right most these outposts, if you look back in history it'll be Berlin, East Berlin, let's say, Vegas, Reno, Carson, these were the names of the outposts. These were deadly things. There were vicious fights over these things.

Interviewer:
Right, was there a lot of human wave assaults, stuff like that?

Yel:
Yeah.

Interviewer:
Because that's what the Chinese were known for.

Yel:
We would hold them in during the daytime, and they would just come at night, and they'd be back and forth.

Interviewer:
Right, as a mortar man would you say you saw a lot of combat?

Yel:
Yeah, in other words, at one point, before I left it was going on ... We was fighting over a ... which one was it, Berlin, East Berlin, one of those with a hook?

Yel:
Anyway, it was constantly mortar fire and stuff back and forth and these things. This is when McGlocklin won the medal of honor. He was out on the outpost there. We'd fired all night long.

Yel:
At that point, I don't know what happened. We were knocked out. I woke up, and some guying saying, "Here's another dead one." Our platoon had-

Interviewer:
Essentially been wiped out.

Yel:
... been decimated. There was stuff scattered around and everything. Then it was a scramble. It wasn't a case of getting a sick day or something. There was KIAs and people wanted them, but it was wanted, able to get around. It was scramble to back over on the next little bridge land there and get set up to get back in action.

Yel:
So then this thing, it come to an end. Then it was quiet for a while. It seems like, let's see, we'd probably went into reserve after that. While in reserve, well the division came in reserve. All right?

Yel:
Then went back up, but it was further down. In other words, it would be two regiments up and one back. You would be ... If you was in this area at this time, you would be in this area over here. You know?

Interviewer:
Right, yes, sir.

Yel:
So anyway, I was due to go home in April there. I knew the thing was going to be over with, so I just extended for a month. That was May, and they let me extend for another month for June, and I believe it was July, anyway, they put a stop to it, says-

Yel:
Go home, while I was on the way home, boarded ship, the war ended. I came on home, went to Memphis, and I was discharged there. Just a short time, time I come home

Interviewer:
Back for US Steel.

Yel:
Yeah, I was back.

Interviewer:
If I could interject right here, how would you say your experiences in Korea affected your experiences in Vietnam? Like what influenced-

Yel:
Well just-

Interviewer:
Because as a prior combat veteran you have a sense of ...

Yel:
Well it was all different for me out there. It was a day-to-day thing out there. Whereas in Vietnam, I ended up ... I was on airstrip. I was in the Marine Air Wing there.

Interviewer:
Right, it was a different perspective.

Yel:
Yeah, okay, well we did get a few mortars every now and then. They'd throw a mortar in, but it was a different thing, you know? You slept on a old cot. Before there you were sleeping in a bunker with rats and ... Hey let me tell you.

Yel:
When you come off of the lines up there, you'd been in those bunkers for a month, you would have lice or whatever it is look like fire. It was little black things all over your-

Interviewer:
Over your body, oh, my goodness.

Yel:
Your ass and everything, you was ate up. You would-

Interviewer:
Well you wore the same change of clothes for a month, right?

Yel:
That's right, you didn't have a change.

Interviewer:
You were stuck with what you got.

Yel:
That's right. That's why I said these women cannot be in the infantry

Interviewer:
I agree. It's ridiculous.

Yel:
But let me tell you, you may not believe this, what do they call these things where they run the hot water through the ... a Steam Genie is what it is to clean motors and engines, well they would have a ... find a creek, and they would set up a couple of squad tents.

Yel:
That's those long tents. They would have a wooden paddle that was down through there for you to walk on. They would have a crude pipe system, just water lines, coming off of this things, hot running through there.

Yel:
You'd go through. Everybody stripped off, and you'd go through there taking a bath, shower. When you come out, you was sprayed down with DDT.

Interviewer:
Uh-oh.

Yel:
Yeah, I mean in your hair, in your crotch, under your arm.

Interviewer:
I'm sure it killed everything.

Yel:
Yeah, now, yeah, it killed all that. See that stuff now-

Interviewer:
It's illegal.

Yel:
It's off the market.

Interviewer:
Yeah. It's illegal.

Yel:
But hey, we used it.

Interviewer:
It worked for you all.

Yel:
You got what we called a shower rank. Back in them days, they'd stenciled a rank on their uniform. Whatever fit you'd come out, you might go in a master sergeant, come out a PFC, come in a corporal, come out a private.

Interviewer:
They were just giving you uniforms at that point.

Yel:
Yeah, something that would fit, that was it, old skivvies, they might fit.

Interviewer:
They might not.

Yel:
Baggie or whatever

Interviewer:
You've got to be conservative in war time.

Yel:
It was clean. It was good.

Interviewer:
You all weren't complaining at all were you?

Yel:
Nobody complained, that's right, absolutely. They was happy with it.

Interviewer:
That's funny.

Yel:
In Vietnam, a shower, see, back on the airstrip there, they had managed some big tanks, and they would fill them up with water. They had a pipe come off of the shower head.

Yel:
Well I was about 4:00 in the morning you'd get up to the last airplane at 11:00 at night. You would hear people screaming and hollering when the hot water during the day, you know the people ... it got cold though you know.

Interviewer:
This is depending on what time. Yeah.

Yel:
But hey, you got a bath you know.

Interviewer:
Yeah, conditions were definitely better back in the rear.

Yel:
Oh, yeah.

Interviewer:
No doubt about that.

Yel:
Of course you'd ... they had an old field kitchen set up. You eat just whatever it was, all dried stuff they'd take and cook. I ate Vienna sausage. These were six inches long. They've got cans of them.

Interviewer:
My grandad, still to this day, from his National Guard days, he wants Vienna sausages, Spam, and ... what's the other one he eats? He eats another one.

Yel:
Yeah, well anyway, what was it? Cheese, we got cheese, and we got bologna and sausage, and that was Spam. Yeah, I've eaten Spam anyway it could be eaten. Yeah, I almost get indigestion just thinking about it.

Interviewer:
You all used to do ... what was that called, shit on shingle or whatever they called it?

Yel:
Yeah, well that was-

Interviewer:
Corned beef wasn't it?

Yel:
Well, it was the ground beef. It was supposed to be chopped ham, but you'd never got the ham. It was always hamburger, but hey that stuff was great.

Interviewer:
... is great.

Yel:
It was good.

Interviewer:
My grandmother cooks it for him sometimes at the house.

Yel:
Well she can cook it for me.

Interviewer:
You wouldn't think it would be good describing it, but once you have it-

Yel:
It's good. They put a little garlic in it. Oh, it's something flavored good.

Interviewer:
It's great.

Yel:
Yeah, but old c-rations, see them things was terrible. If you got what's called big three, you'd get sausage patties. You got hamburger patties and ... what as that other one?

Interviewer:
My grandad used to say-

Yel:
I can't remember what it was.

Interviewer:
My grandad used to say when he was in the National Guard, they would get c-rations from 1945 leftover from World War II. He'd be eating peaches that were 20 years old.

Yel:
That's right. That chocolate, little piece of chocolate in there, you couldn't break it with a hammer. I mean you know hey all that was good. It had a lot of energy in it and helped you going.

Interviewer:
A little bit of protein, yeah.

Yel:
And another thing too you have ... you could get have these called house boys. They'd come by and they'd pick your clothes up for a couple of bucks.

Interviewer:
Right, and these were local Vietnamese people just trying to make some money.

Yel:
Yeah, they would wash your stuff. You'd have clean clothes, but the food wasn't all that good, but it was hot, you know?

Interviewer:
Yeah, better than nothing.

Yel:
Yeah, oh, sure, sure. Yeah, to me it was a different war. It was hot, sweaty. I had like a job there. In the other one it was different.

Interviewer:
It was combat, yeah.

Yel:
That's right. It was combat.

Interviewer:
It was life or death, yeah.

Yel:
But I'd see my friends. They'd pass through. We may move them. They was in an infantry outfit or something, and they'd come in. We'd move them, load them up and move them somewhere else, something going on.

Yel:
I flew on, I don't know the number of all these places, that would needs the stuff in a hurry. We'd have it loaded up. Of course, I wasn't supposed to be flying with it, but it needed some help to push that stuff up there.

Interviewer:
As you said last time, you were kind of anxious to get back out there anyways.

Yel:
Yeah. I was kind of lost in where I was it. I'd rather been out in the field there with the people. I had done that for 12 years, and then here I was somewhere else.

Interviewer:
Going back to the questions, since you were a career marine, could you see that ... could you tell that the Vietnam was going to start to escalate throughout the 50s and 60s when you saw the Eisenhower and Kennedy administration start to increase advising and financial funds and military funding?

Yel:
Well, here's the thing. Before we ever got in the war, the French was trapped at Dien Bien Phu.

Interviewer:
1954 yeah.

Yel:
Yeah, and I was in I believe it was Third Marines then. We mound out and went down there. We were up, but they never wanted us to come in. All right, and so we went onto, after that, and went down into the Philippines up on the island that was Luzon

Yel:
We made a landing down there and mayday thing out there. We had four or five days in there and came back.

Interviewer:
This was in 54 while Bien Dien Phu was going on?

Yel:
Whatever year, I can't remember what-

Interviewer:
Yeah, it was-

Yel:
All these years these things happen, but I can tell you I was there or whatever, yeah. Anyway, let's see was I ... I can't remember. I was in Japan, and when we came back we went to Okinawa. Once it was on Okinawa. Once it was in Japan. Anyway, we switched up on the thing.

Yel:
Another thing too, I can't remember what year it was, the Six Day War, this is where I'm getting messed up on Japan or Okinawa.

Interviewer:
The Philippines, yeah.

Yel:
We were in Japan when the Six Day War broke out.

Interviewer:
67.

Yel:
We were up stationed at North Camp Fuji up on ... a camp on Park Basin Fuji up there.

Interviewer:
On the mountain up there?

Yel:
Huh?

Interviewer:
Is it Mount Fuji is that what you're referring to?

Yel:
Yeah.

Interviewer:
Okay, I got you.

Yel:
There's three camps. There's north camp, south camp, and middle camp, and also our tail room is up there in a place called Camp McNeil up there on ... This is all on Fuji.

Yel:
Anyway, we were out there and in the middle of the night these trucks came up. We didn't have the lights on of course. We were tactical. I told my friends, Sargent Craig, I said, "Hey, Craig," I says, "Something going on."

Yel:
So them trucks wouldn't be coming up here with the lights on in the middle of the night, and the gunners started hollering, you know, something along the road. So we packed up up there and took off, went back to camp, North Camp.

Yel:
We got paid and told to buy only shoes, skivvies or work uniforms. We still didn't know what was going on. By dark, we were at the Yokohama loading board ship. While we got aboard ship, said, "Well there's a Six Day War, Israel and Arabs were at war."

Yel:
Well I guess this must have been just first, second day of the thing. We took off. We didn't know that much about where we was going or anything about it. We went down to the Mackala Straight to get into the Indian Ocean.

Yel:
By the time we got to the Indian Ocean, it was over with. They told us that the war was over with, so we'd currently go back. When we done that, we went and hit I guess a show of strength. We went through ...

Yel:
Let me see where is the first one that we hit? That was Sri Lanka. That was a port up there. What as the name of that country? Is it Sri Lanka? Anyway, we landed there. We, troops, we made marches out through everything.

Yel:
That's where I met the first guy that talk about ... He was an English guy. He was telling us ... We was ... bar there and he was telling us this, this is an ideal war, boys. He says, "See those mountains way, way out yonder?"

Yel:
He says, "We live here. We sleep on good beds, sheets, and everything. We eat hot chow and everything. Then we take off, go out there, and we'd bomb. There was people out there, come back."

Yel:
Well that was before we got into Vietnam, so we didn't know that kind of war existed you know until that time?

Interviewer:
Right.

Yel:
On the way back we went to Hong Kong. We went to ... What's the next to that, Hong Kong, there's part of the state right next to it, country rather?

Interviewer:
Malaysia?

Yel:
Huh?

Interviewer:
Malaysia?

Yel:
It was down there, but this is India, Pakistan.

Interviewer:
Oh, Pakistan, okay.

Yel:
Pakistan, okay, Pakistan, see that's was all India at one time.

Interviewer:
They declared independence I think in the 40s?

Yel:
Yeah, the religion you know?

Interviewer:
Yeah, it separated them.

Yel:
They're, Pakistan, they're Muslims, and they're-

Interviewer:
Hindu over in India.

Yel:
Yeah, there's different religion there you know?

Interviewer:
Right.

Yel:
I can't think what it was. We went down through Indonesia, was down in there at Hong Kong, not Hong Kong, but Singapore was down in there. Let's see where else. Anyways, we hit a bunch of places hit down there.

Interviewer:
That's back when things were so contentious, because the Chinese Civil War had just concluded and Chang was over on that island.

Yel:
See all these ain't that much different when you hit these ports and you go in there, and these little old things like, we call them flea markets, where they've got these things.

Interviewer:
Oh, yeah, little trinkets and stuff, yeah.

Yel:
Yeah.

Interviewer:
Going off of what that Englishman said about a good war, what was your opinion on William Westmorland and strategy of search and destroy? Do you think it was effective or ineffective?

Yel:
We didn't know who Westmorland was to be honest with you.

Interviewer:
Really?

Yel:
Yeah. You know?

Interviewer:
Well he wasn't the most charismatic. I'll just say that.

Yel:
You don't know. I'll be honest with you. All you know is your general.

Interviewer:
In your division?

Yel:
Yeah.

Interviewer:
Right.

Yel:
Division and outfit you're in and everything.

Interviewer:
Right.

Yel:
I don't think I ever seen a paper or anything of what somebody else ... In war, you're only aware of what's going around you.

Interviewer:
You personally.

Yel:
Fifty yards maybe, really that's it.

Interviewer:
Right.

Yel:
You don't know what's going on in the next company or anything or what they're going to do unless you've got a buddy over there and you happen to run into him somewhere or something. You don't really know that much about what's going on with somebody else.

Yel:
Now, in Korea we didn't have much use for the Army. I'll tell you. Oh, man, I'll tell you.

Yel:
In Vietnam it was ... I was out there ... I was seeing the calendar the other day and I just know this thing ... I was looking at this. Where was it at?

Interviewer:
Yes, sir.

Yel:
Ninth Marine regiment is in Da Nang, first ground troops committed ... that was in 65. Okay, well I was out there in 65, and I didn't know that.

Interviewer:
Well we had the advisors and we had the air power, but ... because we had started ... go ahead.

Yel:
I was on that airstrip out there, so evidently ...

Interviewer:
You were there before all the combat troops were there.

Yel:
Yeah, and then ... listen, that write-up I had, Hasten and Wilson all these things?

Interviewer:
Yes, sir.

Yel:
Hey, I didn't realize that that ...

Interviewer:
That's pretty historically significant right there.

Yel:
Yeah, when I seen that the other day I says, "Hey ..."

Interviewer:
You never knew that?

Yel:
Yeah, I was out there on the airstrip at Chu Lai, and this was made up of the old Marshall matting. Matting is the steel and they just put it there. It hooks together. It just flips out and rolling down.

Interviewer:
Right.

Yel:
Hey, I didn't realize that. I was there. I was in and out of ... Wait, I'm telling you to think of all these places, I'm telling you're 60 years something ...

Interviewer:
It's hard to remember all of it. I'm sure.

Yel:
Was it July, Da Nang?

Interviewer:
Was it your second tour?

Yel:
Da Nang, that was for our headquarters boss and everything, but just me and ... I had me and six people down there running that thing. That was it. What in the world?

Yel:
Anyway, you go to Da Nang, see that was big time to go up there, Da Nang, for something. Then I flew up, we'd go to ... Let's see, I'm telling you. I've been in all these little old airstrips, pushing stuff off, even over into Cambodia. Now I'll tell you something else there. What in the world is the name of it. It was all trapped up there at ...

Interviewer:
In Cambodia or in Laos?

Yel:
This was in Vietnam here.

Interviewer:
Khe Sanh.

Yel:
Yeah, it was with that. The marines got trapped up there.

Interviewer:
It was Khe Sanh wasn't it?

Yel:
Khe Sanh, there you go. All right, we was lost. They had four C130s there. It was all set up to fly stuff in there. We was all set up. Hoover was going to go push it off and all this stuff.

Yel:
The colonel told the general, he says, "Listen, you only got four C130s here. If we lose one, you've lost 25% of your air support moving people and stuff around," and so the general killed it there.

Interviewer:
Did he?

Yel:
So we didn't go through with it.

Interviewer:
Were you in country when Tet happened?

Yel:
Yeah, wait a minute now. I've been in and out of way. They call it Fubai, whatever you want to call it. I've been in and out of there, but I can't remember if that was before the Tet offensive or I was gone.

Interviewer:
We've got it written down that you were-

Yel:
What year was the Tet?

Interviewer:
It was January of 68.

Yel:
68.

Interviewer:
You were out of country I believe.

Yel:
I was gone then. That was 65 and six and 69 and ...

Interviewer:
70 that's right.

Yel:
Yeah, that's all, but in and out of all these places at one time or another, where the big thing was going on or not. It had been over with or ...

Interviewer:
Right, but there were still small calculated attacks, like when you say the marines were trapped at Khe Sanh that might not be the time they were trapped in the big battle, but they were still getting mortar fire, and there were large Viet Cong counter offenses and-

Yel:
I've been in there-

Interviewer:
... things like that.

Yel:
... when the big battle wasn't going on we'd fly in there and take something, a little something in there or whatever.

Interviewer:
Right, because they had a bunch of fire bases near the border, the DMZ, that they were just getting shelled out the you know what.

Yel:
Yeah, but like I say, you don't know what's going on except right around your little area right there.

Interviewer:
Your area, yeah.

Yel:
I guess if you're interviewing anybody else they'll tell you the same thing, that you don't know what's going on. You hear all this stuff, like if it's somebody's scuttlebutt or something, but you don't know.

Interviewer:
Right, when Johnson escalated the war in 65, you went over. How as your first tour and in comparison to the second tour?

Yel:
Well, for me it was the second tour was easier than the first.

Interviewer:
Was it?

Yel:
Yeah.

Interviewer:
Because you had the de-escalation at that point.

Yel:
Yeah, because that was this thing was going really hot and heavy and that. We worked our butt off.

Interviewer:
In 65 and 66?

Yel:
Yeah, then when I went back, I was ... I went out there, I was staff sergeant, I made gunnery sergeant while I was at Chu Lai. Then when I went back next time I made Master Sergent, while I was at Da Nang. So I was kind of a supervisor over all this stuff, and didn't have no officer. I think I had one, but you don't know who it was, or where it was.

Interviewer:
Right, for all intents and purposes you were the officer in charge?

Yel:
So you had all these things that ... but all them pilots I had knew them through a couple of tours at Cherry Point and everything. They had always wanted me to fly with them. I was saying, "I can't go. I've got work to do here." Oh, come out here. We're going to go somewhere.

Interviewer:
That's funny. Tell me about your Cambodia experience?

Yel:
Well that was a crazy place there. That area-

Interviewer:
Well people, they always keep Vietnam as one-dimensional, but it was a bigger concept, because we were involved in Laos, Cambodia, and nobody ever talks about that. That's all included in the war as well.

Yel:
I'd just would go in there and fly in that place.

Yel:
Because when you'd land, it'd be hillside, you'd just- the airstrip had been cut out through there.

Interviewer:
Right.

Yel:
And you'd go in there and the thing, I don't know if it's true or not, but the thing was all the guys would talk about it there and everything. Says hey, they got these Vietnamese played poker over here on the other side, we have to keep them separated, they'd fight each other.

Interviewer:
Yeah.

Yel:
Over religion or whatever it was.

Interviewer:
Well they were both ideologically Communist but for some reason, the Khmer Rouge and the North Vietnamese government, they just butted heads naturally.

Yel:
Yeah, they should pay for that, they were all on our side but they would fight each other if they got together. That was my thing about Cambodia out there.

Interviewer:
It was wild, I believe there were 3 different governments out there while we were involved during the Vietnam War era because 1 would throw the other one over or whatever.

Yel:
You know something about it's area history then, I don't know that much about it. All I know is they had to keep them separated because these people, here they are fighting the war and want to fight their self-

Interviewer:
You can't do that.

Yel:
You can't do that. That was the thing that I knew about that.

Interviewer:
So what were you all doing in Cambodia, were y'all just supplying the Cambodian Army?

Yel:
Taking tanks and supplies in there, flying people in there.

Interviewer:
Right, because we had advisors and CIA Operatives and people like that.

Yel:
Yeah. So now it's, I'll be honest, you never really knew what you was doing.

Interviewer:
You just did it.

Yel:
You just done it. You know and combat, you just know what's going on right, you know, far as you can see around you, that's about it. It's ... it's just a crazy thing.

Interviewer:
Here's a question for you, as a thirty-five year old in Vietnam, what was it like working with nineteen year old draftees that didn't want to be there?

Yel:
Well, the thing is, you’re the boss and it's like anything else, whether they like your attitude or not, you've got a job to do and you've got to do it. I mean, I kept one boy and he was a problem, he was one of these Doves, you know. Hey, I told him, look boy you out here going to get your butt killed if you don't do what you're supposed to do, I mean. And it's ... most of these kids when they get there and they realize hey, if you know, everything's on the line-

Interviewer:
It's life or death

Yel:
They'd perk up, you'd be surprised what an eighteen, nineteen year old can get a little common sense, you know. I mean, hey, this is real stuff and- straighten up and do it. In Vietnam, the problem was I don't know where these guys get this pot, but all of them-

Interviewer:
They were all high?

Yel:
They all smoked pot, I mean, they ain't nobody can lie if they all smoked pot. But I can honestly say I never smoked 1 ounce.

Interviewer:
You're not missing out, you're not missing out.

Yel:
I've been around it, I know the smoke and everything. But hey, you know, tell them we're gonna do what we've got to do-

Interviewer:
That's what I was asking about your Korean War experience, I just felt that you were a lot more mature and prepare for something like that. Emotionally, psychologically-

Yel:
It's nothing like that, you didn't run into that in-

Interviewer:
Korea. Well it's a different generation-

Yel:
The whole country, that stuff wasn't growing right here, it was wild out there.

Interviewer:
Oh, they would get it straight from the source, they were getting Opium from Burma and that was going through all the fire bases and air bases in Vietnam. I mean, they were getting some of the heaviest drugs out there.

Yel:
Yeah ... When you only got 6 people, you can keep a pretty good thumb on them, you know. And ... You've got to really take care of them because you've got to do the work. It was like labor gang, loading, unloading. And I had 2 guys that of all people, it was flying to make a manifest up, you know. But that was pretty easy, come down there, you have a company there or whatever and they'd break it down you going to get fifty or sixty or whatever, you're going to get on a plane and you tell them, their Sergeant, somebody, give all their names, make the names up and everything.

Yel:
And that way, if I had 2 people doing that and 4 people myself out there, I'd decide how to divide that stuff and get it stacked up and put it in pallets and about what it would weigh, so they're balancing out on the airplane and everything. And they were 5 of us, 1 guy would be running the forklift, the rest of us would be getting on the airplane there. I'd be over there saying get this next and had the Loadmaster and 3 guys loading the plane there, they'd be putting it in there tying it down and soon as you done that, then you'd have people come out there with packs or whatever and put that on the ramp of the airplane. That’s all you've got. And then load them up and we'd get people out of there, shoot it wasn't thirty minutes we could load up, load people here and load them- we was more efficient in the Air Force.

Yel:
Air Force, they had a couple of guys there and they'd have a plane come in and just drop off a pallet or 2. I'll give a good example of that, they didn't show up out there and an airplane come up. You know what a fifty cube- how big a fifty cube box is?

Interviewer:
I do not, no sir.

Yel:
It'd be about that-

Interviewer:
It's be pretty heavy to pick up.

Yel:
About that high-

Interviewer:
Yeah, you couldn't pick it up then.

Yel:
No, oh no. Not that. But this thing was full of whiskey. And I got that stuff, I didn't realize what it was. Well loaded it there and setting it and I looked at it and it's Chi Chi C-H-I-C-H-I, that was another place I worked. They'd missed the place-

Interviewer:
Chi chi.

Yel:
Whatever that was. And I seen that, I got to looking and said what is this? And it was full of whiskey, big fifths of whiskey. And I said my gosh, I've got to get rid of this some way. If it's troops in this area on this air strip, they'd be drunk.

Interviewer:
You didn't keep them?

Yel:
No man! You can't do that, you've got work to do. And I got on the phone and called Wing Headquarters and I told the guys that was on I was talking to, he said I'm Captain So-and-so, I said look Captain, I'm going to tell you something between me and you. This has got to happen and happen quick. I said I've got fifty cube-

Interviewer:
Of fifths of whiskey.

Yel:
I'd bet, shoot, there'd be a hundred fifths in there or more.

Interviewer:
Oh my gosh.

Yel:
I told him, I says look, I says this is supposed to go to Chi Chi or however you pronounce it. I says, I've got to get rid of it, if people on this air strip find out this is down here, I said my twelve won't even be functional anymore. I said you can you get something down here and get it? And he said yeah, he said I'll get it.

Interviewer:
I bet he did.

Yel:
Yeah and it wasn't thirty minutes and there was this vehicle come down there and they got that thing. I don't know whatever happened to it.

Interviewer:
Oh, I'm sure it was his personal stash for about a year.

Yel:
I'll bet it went to the officers.

Interviewer:
I'm sure it did.

Yel:
I mean, somebody could handle that stuff but I'm telling you, I mean, can you imagine all these guys? I mean it wouldn't-

Interviewer:
With a hundred fifths of whiskey, oh my goodness.

Yel:
3 or 4 slugs and- then ain't had none of it.

Interviewer:
Because y'all didn't have any liquor, so y'all's tolerance were so low anyway.

Yel:
They'd be knocked down, I mean, I'm telling you.

Interviewer:
That's funny.

Yel:
But anyway, while I was there, about the hot pad they had two F-4's sitting up in that thing down there. They'd be engines running and everything, it was about as far as that house across the street there. Man, I don't know if you've ever heard one of them things-

Interviewer:
Oh, they'll kill you.

Yel:
When they wind up to go some- I mean, they'd like be like loud and they'd, I mean, Man you'd-

Interviewer:
I don't know about F-4's, but my granddad, his farm, he has a little forty acre plot in Bibb County. That's restricted airspace, so the F-16's down in Maxwell, they do all of their tactically training five-hundred feet above us fishing. And you'll hear, you'll see that plane and then about 5 seconds later, you'll hear that deafening sound and goodness gracious, we won't catch a fish for the rest of the day. You can understand why.

Yel:
Them pilots sitting there in them things-

Interviewer:
Yeah it's crazy.

Yel:
Yeah, I don't think they was maybe 2 hours of gas up there, you'd see planes rotate around whatever, you know, a guy can't sit there forever. But they'd take off, that thing, you just wouldn't believe that thing's scream.

Interviewer:
Oh, they're so loud.

Yel:
Then they had these A-4's there, it's a little old small airplane. And they'd load them things up and they'd have a- with this jet-assisted take-off, this thing would be mounted on the side of it and have all- man, they'd take off and they'd kick that stuff in let it go. I don't know what happened, it'd just, I mean, that was the end of it. Explosion, everything. But-

Interviewer:
I've never heard of that.

Yel:
In Da Nang, I seen them come in and the hydraulics would be shot out and all, it'd be just maybe the front wheel. You wouldn't believe it but they had the crash trucks up there and they were runway foamed and buddy, they'd, them trucks would have a running start and that guy would come in and they'd be just kind of behind him. But it wasn't hit, they'd spray him and save him and the plane there. These planes that's got this, looks like a mushroom on top of it.

Yel:
Me and the Captain was standing there talking, it was ... Monsoon time, it was rainy, cold weather, dropped down seventy degrees and you're freezing to death and rainy. We was talking and I asked him, I says you ever fly one of them? He says no, he said but if you ever lost control of that thing, he says it's- you're gone. And we were watching it, and sure enough, one of them, something lost power on one of the- they've got 4 engines, lost power or something. That thing, man- he wasn't in over there and he killed some people over there and they said, I forget how many people that- twelve, fourteen people in that thing with all this electronic equipment and everything. And the only one who survived, the guy was back in the tail of it. And it killed some people on the ground, wiped out some airplanes.

Interviewer:
That's terrible.

Yel:
But hey, I seen a helicopter one time, I don't know what hit it, but man, something in that thing just exploded. I mean, man, bodies just falling-

Interviewer:
Going everywhere, so it was mid-air when it exploded?

Yel:
Yeah, I don't know if something hit it or-

Interviewer:
Right, like a rocket or something?

Yel:
No, no, no. I heard, you know, you hear something, you look up-

Interviewer:
How much of a security threat were y'all in being on the airstrip? You said you'd get morning fire, did y'all have any snipers or anything like that?

Yel:
No, I don't know. The rifle companies I've got, you didn't see them. I don't know how far out they was or what the perimeter was.

Interviewer:
But they were patrolling the area?

Yel:
Yeah, in other words, there wouldn't no way 6 men, 6 people were going-

Interviewer:
To defend that area, yeah.

Yel:
But we worked until we'd get that last plane out at eleven o'clock at night and start, get up at 4 o'clock in the morning.

Interviewer:
Y'all had busy enough of a job, right?

Yel:
Yeah, we didn't have to do any of that, but-

Interviewer:
I got you. You said you got married in, I believe '64?

Yel:
'62.

Interviewer:
'62, okay so-

Yel:
Camp Lejeune.

Interviewer:
How did y'all correspond while you were on active duty overseas, you and your wife?

Yel:
Just regular mail.

Interviewer:
Regular mail, writing letters.

Yel:
Yeah and I would, it might be by the time she wrote, I'd get it, it might be a week, ten days, you know. Mail had a real good priority moving around to the troops. They'd be around-

Interviewer:
Booster, yeah.

Yel:
You know it's just ... she never asked me did you have a good time in the rain and snow, getting hot, getting cold, you know.

Interviewer:
But y'all kept a fairly common correspondence?

Yel:
Yeah, yeah. But you know, in fact, my daughter, I was stationed at headquarters for the Marine Corps and got orders back to Vietnam. And the baby had to be born, I had, it was thirty days delay-

Interviewer:
Delay for birth, yeah.

Yel:
To be born and get them both flown back out there. That was the last time I wanted-

Interviewer:
Well my mother and, I believe, your daughter are pretty good friends.

Yel:
Is that right?

Interviewer:
Yeah, they went to school together I believe.

Yel:
Oh okay.

Interviewer:
I think at, did they go to Bessemer Academy?

Yel:
Yeah,Flint Hill.

Interviewer:
Well my mother went to Grammar School there and she went to Bessemer Academy when she was-

Yel:
Who was your mother?

Interviewer:
Kim Robinson or Kim White. Kimberly White.

Yel:
Kimberly.

Interviewer:
Johnny's-

Yel:
I'm sure I know-

Interviewer:
You would, yeah. But yeah, they were both born in '68 I believe.

Yel:
Oh okay, that's right. That'd be Johnny White and them youngin's.

Interviewer:
It's okay, I forget stuff like that too.

Yel:
I don't even think about stuff.

Interviewer:
There's no need to.

Yel:
There's so many kids in and out of here every time, we didn't know how- you've got, you ain't married though are you?

Interviewer:
No, I'm not married. Nobody would put up with me.

Yel:
Yeah, but think back when you was younger, you know, you had a buddy and you was always over, back and forth.

Interviewer:
Right, yeah, absolutely. Yeah we do the same thing. But going back to that, how pivotal would you say the 1968 election was to American policy in Vietnam? Were y'all up to date on the '68 election? You know, Nixon, Wallace, Humphrey? Were y'all following that at all?

Yel:
Yeah, let's see. I always voted absentee, I can't remember what year or who but-

Interviewer:
Well everybody says '68 was such a crucial year because Johnson, he stepped down because of Vietnam going so terribly. And then you had King shot in April, Kennedy shot.

Yel:
Let me think, let me think. ... I'll tell you, I voted for-

Interviewer:
Wallace, probably.

Yel:
No, I voted for, who'd I vote for? That was ...

Interviewer:
Nixon won.

Yel:
Yeah, Nixon won the thing. I'm trying to think ... See, I was a Democrat until-

Interviewer:
Reagan?

Yel:
Reagan, yeah. So I probably voted for Nixon back in- I always thought a lot of Nixon.

Interviewer:
I did too, I think he does not get the due credit he deserves. He was a great president up until Watergate I think.

Yel:
He sure was. Johnson was a crook.

Interviewer:
Of course he was a crook, there's no doubt about that.

Yel:
I mean, Johnson ... the only reason he was Vice President, Kennedy needed him to get Texas-

Interviewer:
To get the Southern support, that's exactly it.

Yel:
That's right.

Interviewer:
I mean, he was a ruthless politician, some of the stuff they did.

Yel:
Johnson was no good, Kennedy wasn't no good either-

Interviewer:
Either but you could respect Kennedy in certain ways.

Yel:
But here's the thing ... morally how rotten they are, if they can run the country-

Interviewer:
I mean, Trump's no altar boy, but he can run the country.

Yel:
But that's the best we've had, you know-

Interviewer:
In a long time.

Yel:
That's right. That's the thing, I mean he can run the ship and that's it. You know, I mean, he ain't the cleanest guy around but see, he's come through all that stuff, he paid his dues. You know-

Interviewer:
Well they're still going to be going after him.

Yel:
If he wins the next election-

Interviewer:
They're going to lose it.

Yel:
They'll never-

Interviewer:
They'll never get over it.

Yel:
Yeah. I think he'll win.

Interviewer:
I think he will too. I think that his economic policies have been so successful and, at the end of the day, Domestic Economic Policy is the most important policies.

Yel:
If he gives you a job and you're feeding your family and you can do this and that-

Interviewer:
How can you crucify the man?

Yel:
Isn't it enough to vote against him?

Interviewer:
It's ridiculous.

Yel:
It is.

Interviewer:
It's the lowest unemployment rate since Nixon in 1969, fifty years, and people are talking like he's Hitler, I've never understood that. But you know, that's just the hysteria of the left. But bringing this back into perspective, so you were a Nixon guy. Nixon kind of ran on a peace with honor, we're going to unify the country, we're going to bring a conclusion to Vietnam that'll be honorable and respectable. And was that something you wanted to get behind? Because I feel like with Tet-

Yel:
Well I felt like that thing had gone on enough and it got crooked enough and-

Interviewer:
We couldn't fix it. I think Tet revealed that more than anything else because Westmoreland kept on telling the…. and this was the same with McNamara as well. You know, we're winning this war of attrition, we're killing you know, ten of them for every 1 of us, we're going to win and then Tet comes around and they clearly almost take over the country in the matter of a month.

Yel:
They was too much on this body count stuff, you know-

Interviewer:
And that was the thing, McNamara was always statistically-oriented, he was analytical. And he thought that's all that mattered in a conflict.

Yel:
See, you've got to think about the troops, your troops. You can't worry about how many you killed, didn't kill, or whatever. That was the thing that lost me on that thing. And they was this Jane Fonda, how could she go out there and come back and everything? Hey, somebody had been took out on the way in and out of there, you know?

Interviewer:
I don't disagree with you.

Yel:
And let me tell you, while I was there, have you ever heard of Martha... What was her last name? They called her Big Mouth. Martha, Martha, Martha...

Interviewer:
It wasn't Martha Stewart?

Yel:
Was it? She's a actress.

Interviewer:
Actress? Ann-Margret, I know she used to go to the U.S.O.

Yel:
She was out there with Bob Hope.

Interviewer:
Yeah, doing the U.S.O. stuff.

Yel:
This gal, Martha, what was her name? Her and this Colonel a Mac-12, she would come in there and I'll tell you, I'm not impressed with these movie stars and all that stuff, I could care less. Them troops you know, they wanted to do baggage and stuff, you know, I could care less. I'd- Bob Hope, I'm thinking, I liked Bob Hope-

Interviewer:
I think some of those troops were delusional when Ann-Margret came, as far as doing her baggage and stuff. I don't think that was going to develop into anything.

Yel:
Anyway, she used to come in there, there was something went on between her and the Colonel because she would come in there ever so often, she'd fly in there and she got the treatments over to the Colonel's bunker, Mac-12 there, thing... Not Stewart, that wasn't her name. Martha, Martha, Martha...

Interviewer:
Do you know any movies she was in? Because I like old movies, I could tell you-

Yel:
I'll think of that name. Martha, Martha, Martha, what was that name? And this other guy, he was a little faggot, he used to come and I liked to hear him, he sung the Twelfth of Never. I liked to hear him sing that, I don't know if you've heard it or not. But he was half-white and half-black.

Interviewer:
Oh, Johnny Mathis.

Yel:
That's it, Mathis. That was him.

Interviewer:
My granddad didn't know he was a faggot until 2 years ago.

Yel:
Is that right?

Interviewer:
He was so shocked. He was a big Johnny Mathis fan back in the day.

Yel:
When I heard him sing, I knew he was a faggot.

Interviewer:
It was pretty obvious, yeah.

Yel:
Let's see, Ann-Margret and Bob Hope and- Bob Hope had a bunch of girls come out there with him, good-looking girls.

Interviewer:
At the golf tournament The Bob Hope Classic, he'd have all those models out there with him doing that, so, yeah.

Yel:
Man, I remember twice out there, my people would go over there and pack him up and everything and had instructions says that this guy that worked for Bob Hope was in charge of all that stuff. Said don't go against him, he's a real smart guy, you know. He'll cause you a lot of headaches. Just do whatever he says, you know. I'd never even go over there, I didn't care.

Interviewer:
You didn't care one way or the other.

Yel:
Same thing, I can remember in a crew they had people, I can't remember Bob Hope come out there or not but I remember one of them things. I didn't care about all that music and all that stuff. Oh what was her name, Martha Raye, Martha Raye.

Interviewer:
I don't think I know her. A little before my time, I'll have to look her up. Martha Raye.

Yel:
I think she was a comedian or something, well she would- look it up. Yeah, Martha Raye, that was her name, Martha.

Interviewer:
That's funny.

Yel:
A lot of crooked, funny things, you know went on she could remember them there, when they were out and-

Interviewer:
Now did you want to go back on your second tour?

Yel:
Yeah, yeah. I volunteered.

Interviewer:
You volunteered?

Yel:
Both tours. I didn't have to go, I mean. See I had got in a car wreck, well I've told you about-

Interviewer:
The shoulder surgery, yeah.

Yel:
And everything but ... yeah. I volunteered and went twice, I didn't have to.

Interviewer:
What was the attitude and the sentiment from the troops’ perspective in 1970, as opposed to 1965? Was it a little more cynical and pessimistic, saying the war's winding down, we're not going to-

Yel:
No, no. You know they was there and you didn't hear much about it. It was, except this one guy but I can't remember-

Interviewer:
He was pretty political?

Yel:
He was ... you didn't even hear it mention, it was when they was going home, you know. I don't know how long, how much longer I got, you know.

Interviewer:
That was the one thing they were concerned about.

Yel:
That was the big thing, yeah. Especially with us, I mean, when they wasn't doing something, buddy they'd crap out and go to sleep on the spot.

Interviewer:
Well y'all worked for a living, unlike most people.

Yel:
Yeah, it was the thing. My buddy had come through there in the snow and man, he said, I wouldn't have your job. I said they ain't no choice. But, you know, shoot, I'd do it again. I would like to be out in the field though, I mean ...

Interviewer:
It's what you signed up to do.

Yel:
You know, your roots, you want to stay with them, you now, it, you do something-

Interviewer:
Yeah, it's all about that Marine Corps lore, as they always say.

Yel:
Well, once a Marine always a Marine.

Interviewer:
That's right. I notice you're not wearing your ring today.

Yel:
I lost the set out of it. Did you know them rascals, I called them-

Interviewer:
I bet they're pretty expensive to replace.

Yel:
They wouldn't replace it. And I said well, if I buy a more expensive ring, will you give me something for the old one? And they wouldn't do that either. I told them, I said well, you lost a good customer. Yeah, they wouldn't do it, I mean. I guess they're kind of past through with it, you know. But yeah, I lost the set out of it and it ain't much good without that. Maybe go have some kind of stone put in there or something, birthstone or something.

Interviewer:
Right. What was your opinion of the South Vietnamese government and South Vietnamese Army?

Yel:
Well, the government, I didn't know nothing about it, see. If you're talking about when you're out there you know, you don't even think about your own government or anything, you know. It's a day to day thing-

Interviewer:
Operation. But in retrospect, I'm sure you've researched and kind of said well, the South Vietnamese government, they were extremely inept, they didn't take care of their own people, they-

Yel:
And the troops. The troops were not like our troops. Our troops were-

Interviewer:
They were Inspired.

Yel:
Disciplined, you know.

Interviewer:
Right, and they weren't just-

Yel:
I'll give you an example. You move American troops, when they're gone, everything gone is clean. Nothing. Yet the South, you move them you'll find grenades, you'll find ammo, stuff, you know. In fact, one time me and the old Sergeant Gage, this guy I don't know where he went to take a crap or whatever but taxing out and he come running up and the ramp on the C-130, you know raises up. Well the Loadmaster was back on that thing and he was fixing to raise- Me and old Sergeant, this guy was running down behind the airplane. And these guys don't weigh a hundred pounds, I had him one shoulder like that and old Gage had him with the other and threw him up, I mean, we had to throw him up ten feet. I guarantee you it was ten feet, that ramp in that airplane, it was all the way up and we throwed him up in the air. I mean-

Interviewer:
They're built to do that though, you can throw little people around like rag dolls.

Yel:
But here's the thing, you wouldn't have an American troop run off somewhere like that. He's going to stay there.

Interviewer:
Right, he's disciplined, right.

Yel:
Because he ain't going to miss that ride out here, these guys are just-

Interviewer:
Well they were farmers, I believe. They were a conscripted army for the most part, they didn't sign up.

Yel:
They probably don't want to be there or nothing, you know, they don't care. But that's how I had contact with them on the airstrip there like that. I have seen them bring prisoners down there, they'd be dressed solid black, no shoes on. And them guys would hear them plane motors going and they, I mean, they'd be like that, they'd thing they was going to take them up and throw them out. They probably told them that, you know.

Interviewer:
I wouldn't be surprised if they did it and I don't blame them either.

Yel:
But anyway, them guys would be scared to death.

Interviewer:
I bet they would have.

Yel’s Wife:
You all have talked on the phone so much- so funny. I been talking to Mildred. She's wanting us to come out, she lives in Fultondale it's-

Interviewer:
That's a little bit of a drive.

Yel’s Wife:
Oh yeah, well she said she would come and get us said well, you know, that's a long ways off. But she's wanting some flowers, she's got the Mexican Petunias. And they multiply and she'll say well y'all come out here and I'll give you some.

Interviewer:
That will be pretty for the Spring, very pretty.

Yel’s Wife:
Yeah.

Yel:
They was saying his mother used to go to school with Candy.

Yel’s Wife:
Do what?

Interviewer:
My mother went to school with your daughter, Candy at Flint Hill. Yeah, he didn't remember that actually.

Yel’s Wife:
Yeah! Mm-hmm.

Yel:
Well I didn't know, probably I wasn't around all the time, I worked on the road and I was getting out and-

Interviewer:
What'd you do after the Marine Corps, by the way?

Yel:
I went to work for, well, first job I had was-

Interviewer:
U.S. Steel, right?

Yel:
No-

Yel’s Wife:
You mean when you got out of the service?

Yel:
Yeah. No, remember I had a job out there with a little old company there, $2 an hour working there at the thing, that was minimum wage then, $2 an hour. I worked that a little bit and I got a job with Sewer, Johnny might know of them.

Interviewer:
He probably does. If it's around here, he definitely does.

Yel:
He cleared the air condition there out in Irondale out there. Crawled up and under the houses putting duct work in and stuff.

Yel’s Wife:
What's that you got when you got out of service? Out, out.

Yel:
Then, I worked, where'd I go? I got a job out there with Bob, me and him made these camper tops.

Interviewer:
That's a good little operation right there.

Yel:
You wouldn't believe it, me and him made $80,000 worth of those things one year. Just me and him-

Interviewer:
That's incredible, back then? That's a lot of money back then.

Yel:
Yeah, It was. And we sold them things $235 a piece. And so you imagine how many of them- we'd work from daylight to dark.

Interviewer:
Mm-hmm, it paid off though.

Yel:
We couldn't make them fast enough.

Interviewer:
Because they were just in such high demand?

Yel:
Yeah, so I made $2.35 an hour him and the place I worked with. And here's the sad thing, I got up at the pull and I was making a little over $5 an hour, see. So I had to leave it. Well me and him made them gliders, in other words you'd tow it by the boat or something and you get it up, you know, and everything. And I told him, I said Bob I ain't going to jump that thing, that thing has got solid wings, we've got to have some kind of opening in them things so the air can escape and give that thing some push. If that rope breaks or turns loose, that thing can fall straight down. "Oh, you don't know nothing about dynamics" I said well you don't either! That ain't going to-

Interviewer:
That's not going to work.

Yel:
I ain't doing that thing. So one Sunday, him and his wife, after we got that thing complete, they took it up Smith's Lake and towed that thing up, got it up, and something, I don't know what happened, if a rope come loose from the boat or something. But it did, it fell straight down.

Yel’s Wife:
How old is your mama?

Interviewer:
She just turned fifty-one last week, actually.

Yel’s Wife:
Yeah.

Interviewer:
She sure did.

Yel’s Wife:
Yeah.

Yel:
Well Candy will be fifty in May.

Interviewer:
Yeah, so my mom was a little older. But I think they were a grade apart but they were really good friends back in the day.

Yel:
Well, it wound up that thing fell straight down-

Interviewer:
Yeah, time flies.

Yel’s Wife:
Fifty in May, you know.

Interviewer:
Right.

Yel’s Wife:
I think that's right around the corner, ain't it?

Interviewer:
It is, it's next month.

Yel’s Wife:
Gosh, it seems like this passed-

Interviewer:
Mm-hmm, yeah, this year has really passed quickly. It sure has.

Yel:
You've seen this little plastic seats on fishing boats, you know. It ain't nothing but plastic. Well that thing was mounted on this thing and it was 1 inch aluminum tubing. When that thing fell, it broke his tailbone, and knocked him out. His wife said if they hadn't been some people fishing-

Interviewer:
He would've died?

Yel:
Run over and got him out of the water, he'd have drown.

Interviewer:
Oh my gosh. What'd he pass out from, shock? Or did he hit his head?

Yel:
No, no, I guess-

Interviewer:
Just shock, yeah.

Yel:
You know, she set it up fifty, sixty feet and that thing like that. Then called me that night and says Bob's in the hospital, I said well what's wrong with him? I mean he- you know, told me so. I was working on pulling then, well they had a girl in college there and everything and Joe couldn't make those things and everything so every evening when I'd get off work for about 6 months, I'd go over and work with them at night and I didn't charge them a thing whatever we made. Because I knew you know, they had to have a living because they had 3 girls in school and 1 in college and me and him, best friends, I'll tell you.

Interviewer:
Is he still around or is he passed?

Yel:
Oh yeah, I mean-

Interviewer:
He's a little bit younger than you, isn't he?

Yel:
Yeah, I mean, he had some good fortune after that. Well AMP over here in Fairfield-

Yel’s Wife:
When was that that the ambulance and- was that yesterday? You said Joe come by in the ambulance and- was that yesterday?

Yel:
Where, down on the corner?

Yel’s Wife:
It was because-

Yel:
Yesterday, yeah, yeah.

Yel’s Wife:
I'm going to go back down there again and see if I can get somebody to go for me. See you.

Interviewer:
See you, thank you for letting me borrow him for a couple hours. But anyway, what were you saying?

Yel:
Oh, she interrupted me now.

Interviewer:
It was a good friend you were working with, y'all were working nights.

Yel:
Oh, AMP had a big-

Interviewer:
Do you mind if I go turn that off? It's a little loud, it's interrupting the broadcast. You don't have to get up, I can do it.

Yel:
Yeah, yeah. There's the remote laying there.

Interviewer:
Yeah, I got it, yes sir.

Yel:
AMP had this big building, that thing was probably a hundred feet or more by fifty feet. Anyway it was a huge thing. So they took a bid on that thing and we bought that thing for $300, they wanted it down and gone. We took that thing down and moved it. Well he got over in Pratt City, right in the middle of Pratt City. Alright, got a bulldozer, he bought a lot there for a couple thousand dollars right there in the middle of town.

Yel:
This was back in the 70's, see, everything's cheap. With everything bought, me and him dug the footing for the, where the columns are, and we moved that thing up there, me and him and his wife put together. His wife brought a forklift, lifted that stuff up and we'd have to take a Spud Wrench run up in there and get the bolts and we put that thing up. And it made campers there, I was still working the pull you know. But we done that and got it together and he used that thing a couple years and he sold that thing for $100,000. Okay, then his dad had died and left him a farm up in Cullman and he built the Cullman Flea Market. If you've ever seen it when you go up the interstate there like going to Huntsville. Anyway, he put- I helped him build that thing. I'd go up weekends, paid me ten bucks an hour working, you know, doing that and that-

Interviewer:
That's not bad back then, that's pretty darn good.

Yel:
Well anyway, he sold that thing and, anyway, he accumulated a lot of wealth off that stuff, I'd guarantee he probably-

Interviewer:
Is it still up and going?

Yel:
Somebody, yeah he sold it to somebody else. I guarantee he got five or six-hundred thousand dollars off that.

Interviewer:
Pretty darn good for what he invested into it, yeah. That's a pretty good retirement.

Yel:
That's what I was saying, I've helped him out on a lot of things and he's accumulated a lot of wealth off of it. And so me and him's good friends, he buys and sells all the time and he does well. Now he's got a safe up there that's probably-

Interviewer:
Big enough to hold a lot of money.

Yel:
That wide and that deep, it was the army, he got it on surplus. And he believes in this thing biblically about the mark and all that.

Interviewer:
Some sort of end time apocalyptic thing is coming.

Yel:

 Silver, that thing, I don' know how much silver it's got in there-

Interviewer:
My granddad is kind of like that. He's never acted on it, but he's researched investing in gold and silver and alternative-

Yel:
He's told me "I've got a water bucket full of quarters, half a dollars, dimes, it was silver". He said "I can't get the bucket in there" so he dug a hole-

Interviewer:
And put it in the yard.

Yel:
It's in the ground. And he's got a big old pot full of-

Interviewer:
He and my mother would get along, she's into that stuff.

Yel:
But he believes that, he said "well all this change at times come ... that money's no good, but silver is".

Interviewer:
Well it's a universal-

Yel:
A dime, or quarter or half, he said the silver bars are not any good or gold, you can't, you know.

Interviewer:
Well it's a universal currency so anybody can use it.

Yel:
There ain't no telling how much it's worth, all that stuff, you know.

Interviewer:
Yeah, exactly.

Yel:
Silver especially, you know.

Interviewer:
Kind of going back to this, we're kind of in '69-'70 now, during your second tour, was it apparent that the Vietnamization Program was going on? Because you saw the troop reduction and a lot of people going home and-

Yel:
Well, you didn't know.

Interviewer:
You didn't know?

Yel:
You didn't know, that's what I'm saying. All you know is what is going on around you.

Interviewer:
So you didn't have a lot of dealings with South Vietnamese troops at that point?

Yel:
At that point, no. It was mostly all moving, just passengers and these passengers ... a lot of them was going out of country, going back to Okinawa. People rotating and stuff like that.

Interviewer:
Getting phased out.

Yel:
Yeah.

Interviewer:
Because if you were drafted, what was the term of enlistment? Was it 1 year or 2 years?

Yel:
2 years if you're drafted.

Interviewer:
If you're drafted, okay.

Yel:
See, in the Korean thing, they drafted people. Got all these Koreans- not Koreans ... Damn. Puerto Ricans. And these guys probably your granddaddy would know of them and said there you know hey do this, no comprehend amigo.

Interviewer:
They didn't speak English? That's crazy, they were in a U.S. Army uniform.

Yel:
But they understood it, see. You'd say "chow down" and they'd run over you. "Pay call", they'd run over you.

Interviewer:
Well it's funny that you mention that-

Yel:
Never did that, you know-

Interviewer:
It's funny you mentioned that because I watched a World War II or Korean War documentary and they all said the same thing, there was just a mass influx of Puerto Ricans that came into the armed services because of the territory, but they didn't speak English half the time.

Yel:
Yeah, but they understood things, see.

Interviewer:
It's kind of like today when you see a white guy running a work crew over here, you know, none of those people speak English but they understand, you know, go hammer that or do this.

Yel:
These guys that- we were getting mortars one time, this little boy named Max was from New Jersey and had this Puerto Rican he was Hernandez. They was over there in a hole and I hear all this noise oh my, so you can see that leg kicking up, man, he was cussing that guy.

Yel:
Yeah and he said you wasn't praying yesterday, don't start now!

Interviewer:
That's pretty funny.

Yel:
But yeah, man I'm telling you-

Interviewer:
You've been around!

Yel:
Oh I've- some crazy stuff, yeah. Crazy Joe Frizatto, did I tell you about him?

Interviewer:
I don't think you did.

Yel:
Well, this was back at DMZ back out there after the war was over with I was end up on DMZ. Well, they'd blow the whistle at night and you'd have to run and get into your position and everything. Well I was in the A-1 government borders then, well that base plate branched down to a base plate and a base ring. You got the ring, it goes there and the base plate goes in it. So old Joe was a base ring man so man, we'd run up there, up kind of the side of a hill there and it'd level off and that's where we was at [inaudible 00:48:06] said run up there old Joe would always fall down and we called him Crazy Legs Joe. And I remember he went up there and he made it and he was racing up yeah, yeah, yeah Joe made it! And he stepped off in the gun pit and fell and broke his leg.

Interviewer:
He was almost there and he just couldn't make it.

Yel:
Yeah everybody was Yay Joe!

Interviewer:
And this was during a wild fire drill on the DMZ?

Yel:
Yeah.

Interviewer:
That's crazy!

Yel:
Yeah, I mean, it was just- We was out there and so they said take your squad and go down there to the river run along there and all this old village there. A lot of peddlers and everything. Said there's been a lot of activity down there, these South Koreans slipping up in there to their old homes. They said take your squad and go down there and work it out and see what you can find. So we went on down there and went all through that thing. And we picked up and old man, an old woman, and a young girl, it was the daughter.

Yel:
So we're coming back and I hear kind of some noise there, old popison and all of a sudden, you know-

Interviewer:
They were speaking gibberish.

Yel:

Looked back there and old Romano behind that young girl walking along patting her on the butt, see. Hey, Romano, you can't do that!

Interviewer:
Oh, that's classic. I hope you don't mind, but I told that story about the Water Buffalo to Johnny and he loves it. You've got to be so oblivious. Alright, I'm wrapping this up because I think we're going on about 2 hours.

Interviewer:
Okay so the war ends in '73, at least for us. We had a similar outcome in Korea to where they had an Armistice, they didn't, you know, neither side won one way or the other. How did you feel about that?

Yel:
Well, you know, it didn't bother me one way or the other. It's- hey, let's throw the thing. I said well, at least people won't be going out there and getting killed and something like that. But political end of it, you know, you don't know what is it going to cost us? That's the thing, you know. These things, we try to buy- our government has always tried to buy their way out of everything and it don't work.

Interviewer:
It doesn't, you're right.

Yel:
It don't work.

Interviewer:
Reagan always said "Peace through strength", so.

Yel:
That's right.

Interviewer:
I kind of attest to that.

Yel:
And I'm going to tell you ... back, way back there, let's go back these years, a Oriental back in those days if you treated him real nice, he didn't have no respect for you.

Interviewer:
You had to be stern.

Yel:
But you jumped on his ass, you was a good guy. That was it. And it was that way even in Vietnam, but more so-

Interviewer:
In Korea?

Yel:
Yeah, in the Korean thing, you know, so backward-

Interviewer:
Well Koreans are just conditioned like that because they had been under the brutal rule of the Japanese for fifty years. So they had always grown up oppressed like that.

Yel:
Let me get a book, I'm going to show you the difference.

Interviewer:
You don't mind if I come back here with you, do you?

Yel:
No, no come on back. Let's see. I wanted to show you this, you'll see a difference in why this guy, I can't understand why he didn't accept Trump's offers and stuff. Alright now, listen, this is-

Interviewer:
That's Seoul, is it not?

Yel:
Yeah, now this is what it looked like.

Interviewer:
In 1950?

Yel:
Yeah, this is ... well. Now that's the way it looks today. Okay, now I'm going to tell you, this is ... I mean, that's refugees there, there's somebody with babies and stuff. But I'll let you take this with you if you'd like.

Interviewer:
That would be extremely helpful.

Yel:
Now, I'm going to tell you I don't know whether that's a doggy or Marine there but ... we always took care of kids, going out and sharing rations with them or whatever, we'd do that.

Interviewer:
They were in more destitute circumstances than y'all were.

Yel:
That ain't their fault that they're in this stuff, you know?

Interviewer:
Yeah, absolutely.

Yel:
Alright now, here we go, here's ... Memorial service, that's something if you ever see, that was in the field there, these things there. See the helicopter just got started back then in those days, you know. It wasn't a big carrier or nothing-

Interviewer:
They all just had those little bubble
Yel:
Yeah, look like M.A.S.H.

Interviewer:
That's what you got, yeah.

Yel:
So, I'm telling you, let's flip through it here. But you can take this with you, there's old Truman.

Interviewer:
Were you more of a Truman or MacArthur guy? I think you told me-

Yel:
I tell you, I liked Truman because hey, he was boss.

Interviewer:
Yeah he was, the bus stops here. He was very similar to Trump as far as temperament. He really was.

Yel:
Yeah. There's a lot of history right here.

Interviewer:
Yeah, you know, it's a shame because they always called this one the forgotten war.

Yel:
Well, it is, you know.

Interviewer:
It is, you don't hear about it enough. It always either gets thrown into a post-World War II context or Cold War context. But, like when I was signing up for history classes, there wasn't a history class on the Korean War. There was one on World War I, World War II, Vietnam, but there was nothing on Korea.

Yel:
Okay, I've been there at Inchon and I'm telling you that when the tide goes out ... They'd be flat in the sand there, you know. And I mean, way, way, when the tide goes out, it looks like a mile out there.

Interviewer:
Well I remember reading about it, they had to time the landing correctly because they didn't want to get caught on the beach.

Yel:
Oh yeah, that's right, I mean, see and they had to get over the sea wall. There's a little island or something it's out there to the left-

Interviewer:
It took y'all eighty-seven minutes to take that, I believe.

Yel:
Yeah.

Interviewer:
It was something incredible because MacArthur though there was going to be a slaughter on that island.

Yel:
I just flipped them through here. See those, that's the old course there, if you're on the hill here, you can just about see that guys eyeballs-

Interviewer:
Are these Douglas Course here, like dive-bombers here?

Yel:
Yeah, well they were on the strafing run there, that was back when Napalm and all that stuff-

Interviewer:
That was brand new as well, I think Korea was the first time we used Napalm.

Yel:
And we used to laugh at how close a guy come in, oh that was married man, that's the same old guy.

Interviewer:
Right, you could tell, that's-

Yel:
Yeah. Now listen, these guys that got caught up north, buddy, that was tough. I was-

Interviewer:
You weren't in the country at that point.

Yel:
Now I wasn't in, I come in after that. But I was on the East coast over there for a short while. The mountains are tall, there was some miserable people, I'll tell you.

Interviewer:
I know. And they always talk about the roads on those passes up there that were so narrow, and they would try to move thousands of troops up there. It was rough.

Yel:
Yeah, let's see. Now found some of this stuff here-

Interviewer:
It's amazing to me that people can argue that we shouldn't have been in Vietnam when you can see the potential-

Yel:
Can you believe that?

Interviewer:
Yeah. I mean, that looks like Atlanta right there. Or some economic booming capital of the world, which it is.

Yel:
Yeah, well I want you to take this with you and a guy from VFW somewhere out there, they was having a Southern Poppies and I come along and he asked me what war was you in? And I told him, he says I've got something in the car I want to give you out there. And see all these airlines and, I mean, I can't believe it.

Interviewer:
I mean, it's amazing, I mean they are literally in an economic groundswell in that region. They really are.

Yel:
Well see, we're begging them people for jobs now, you know. Come here and build cars. But listen, you take this with you.

Interviewer:
Yes sir.

Yel:
Long as you need it to-

Interviewer:
Do any research, I appreciate that.

Yel:
I'm sure you can get some good stuff out of there to help you. Help maybe some dates or places or something, you know.

Interviewer:
Yes sir. Well anyway, it's always a pleasure. I plan on being back at some point and we can come and shoot the bull again as you say.

Yel:
Yeah, sometimes you don't have to come through with that.