## JOHN BOLTE USMC '67 – '68 SIEGE OF KHE SANH

John Bolte: My name is John Bolte. B as in boy, o-l-t-e. I was in the 3rd Battalion 9th

Marines. I was in Vietnam in February 1967 until March of 1968. I was born in Baltimore at, I believe it was a woman's hospital in Maryland at one time. I grew up in the Pikesville area on a place called Mount Wilson Lane. At that time very rural. I went to Pikesville Elementary school and spent one year at a little school called Chatelaine which was very close to that. Then I went to Franklin High School, which is in Reisterstown, and graduated from Franklin in 1966. In 1966, most of the people, the kids that you grew up with and all, we felt that it was one of our military obligations to go and to fight for our country and then get on and live your life after you've done that. I joined the Marine Corp when I was still in high school and went in after I got out. I just figured that if I was going to be some place fighting for my country I would want to be with the best

and I felt that that's the way to go.

Producer(s): By the time you graduated, Vietnam was just starting to bubble up in the

news a little bit. Had you heard anything about it? Was the idea, that if I went into the Marines I'd end up in South East Asia ever a consideration?

John Bolte: I didn't like cold places so I thought maybe if I went in that at least it

would be warm where I may be going and I hoped not to have to go there immediately, but that just didn't seem to be the case. I went there pretty

much right afterwards.

Producer(s): What did you family think about you going into the military?

John Bolte: My family wasn't real thrilled with it. My dad, he accepted it. My mother,

she didn't care much for that idea at all.

Producer(s): Tell me a little bit about your own impression of the military, leaving

Baltimore and going to the Marine Corp.

John Bolte: It was a rude awakening. I guess maybe you just weren't prepared for

what you were actually going to have to deal with in life because you were just growing up. You were a kid and then you go to that and it's like,

uh oh.

Producer(s): After basic you end up in a specialty?

John Bolte: Yeah. I went through advanced infantry training, and then after that I

went in the motor transport training, which they put me in the motor transport. I was in 35-31 which is a driver. Then they sent us through the schooling on motor transport. When I was in high school I took auto shop and those types of things so I more or less grew up around that field. I was okay with that. Then from there I went to San Diego to advanced infantry training. Then from San Diego to Okinawa and then grouped up

with the 3rd Battalion 9th Marines.

Producer(s): What was your flight like when you arrived in Vietnam?

John Bolte: Very long flight. We stopped off in Hawaii, which was absolutely

gorgeous and we got to put our feet down on the ground, and then immediately got back on a plane again and started heading towards

Okinawa. I can say I was in Hawaii, but really I can't.

Producer(s): Your impression of Vietnam when they opened the doors?

John Bolte: We went to Okinawa and we went down to Vietnam by boat. We went

down with the 3rd Battalion 9th Marines and we boarded a boat and went down by boat so we landed in the Dong Ha port. It was very different. A whole different world. Very scary. A lot of lapses in memory.

This was a long, long time, but certain things do stick out.

Producer(s): The reason you went by boat was because you had your vehicles with

you as well?

John Bolte: Yeah. The group that I was with, the 3rd Battalion 9th Marines were

further south, they were down near Da Nang and they went back to Okinawa to regroup. The whole battalion went down as a group to Dong Ha, and Dong Ha was our rear. When we went in we went in as a group,

as a battalion.

Producer(s): Were you assigned to a different part of the country or did you operator

out of there?

John Bolte: Dong Ha was basically our rear. Then from there we went to Camp Carroll

which I went to I think maybe the second day. Camp Carroll was our

artillery support and that was basically our second rear.

Producer(s): What was your job like over there?

John Bolte:

At first I was supposed to have been a Co's driver. I ended up attached to supply and we pretty much did everything. We supplied the troops with everything that they needed. We ran food and ammunition and weapons. Our vehicles were very small vehicles, flat bed mules and might mites which were little tiny vehicles, little jeeps. Our route was route 9. We took care from Dong Ha, which was our rear, we went all the way up to a place call Ca Lu, that was basically our Rockpile. Rockpile was our forward, which was where I stayed a lot, and Ca Lu was the even further forward. That was very close to Khe Sanh. That's where I was at a lot of the time. Then, we went back and there was Cam Lo, it was a river, we had to guard the river. We did a lot of different kinds of jobs.

Producer(s):

So there wasn't a typical day? How would you describe your typical day?

John Bolte:

It could be any number of things. You could either be out with the grunts, you were out there trying to help them out. You could be standing guard duty, or you could be ... we guarded the river, you could be doing that. You could be ... We had to bring the Montagnards, the mountain people back in from Khe Sanh and try to make sure that they made it back down safely, or you take a flight to Khe Sanh. Our other area was Con Thien, which was an area I didn't travel very frequently at all because it was off a different route.

Producer(s):

During this period of time, and this time was before you ended up in Khe Sanh, did you have much contact with the enemy?

John Bolte:

Oh yeah. This was a constant. The second or third day when I was in Dong Ha we were rocketed pretty heavily. Then I went to Camp Carroll. That was the fourth day. At Camp Carroll we were rocketed and mortared, and on the way out to these places you were always running chance on being shot at or that type of thing. You were scared to death pretty much the whole time that you were any place away from perimeter, which even on the perimeter the rockets would come in. They hit the ammo dump at Dong Ha. We were doing guard duty and it blew me into one of the big holes that they had. That really messes you up.

Producer(s):

When you were driving outside the perimeter were you armed or did you have an escort? Did you have somebody riding shot gun with you? How did that work?

John Bolte:

Most of the time you tried to run with an escort, and you definitely were armed. I didn't let my M-14 go. Everybody was changing over to M-16's a the time and I had heard of a lot of the problems they were having down

south with the M-16's jamming, so I more or less tried to hold onto what I had, which was the M-14.

Producer(s): Do you remember any incident where you were specifically shot at going

it there or was that more of a threat that they were going to be attacking

you?

John Bolte: Oh, we were shot at several times. There was not just one particular

incident. There were a lot of times when you weren't sure that you were going to make it there or not. It wasn't something that you expected to happen, but when it did there wasn't anything you could do except keep

going if you could.

Producer(s): Just kept on moving or did somebody have to go take care of whoever

was shooting at you?

John Bolte: At that time these were areas where there was fills, and we had Cam Lo

village and what not, so you didn't dare stop. You had to keep going.

Producer(s): How did you end up in Khe Sanh?

John Bolte: Like I said, our rear was Dong Ha, Camp Carroll was our artillery area,

Rockpile was our forward area, and Ca Lu was basically right around the corner from Khe Sanh. Khe Sanh couldn't be reached by vehicles because the NVA had cut that off, so you had to fly out, fly in. We had vehicles in there, but they were flown in. We had a motor transport there also. It wasn't a lot, but we had some guys up there. They had the mules which carried the 108's and that took care of the guys that were out in the field.

Producer(s): How about specifically, I think you mentioned the fact that you had to

replace somebody who went on R and R.

John Bolte: Yeah, the one guy had to go on R and R so I had to go up and man his

position while he went on R and R, and it just happened to be at the very wrong time. I didn't think that I could ever keep my head above ground at

that point, we were being shelled really bad.

Producer(s): They still managed to find time to go out on R and R?

John Bolte: There were certain guys that were sent back for personal reasons and it

was just depending. It was right before all hell broke loose and then it took forever to get him back there, but Khe Sanh was pretty much under

siege a lot. There was a lot going on there, a lot of people killed.

Producer(s): The time you were there, you said roughly 2 weeks?

John Bolte: Yeah, about 13 days to 2 weeks.

Producer(s): Can you describe a typical day outside of Khe Sanh? What was it like

while you were there?

John Bolte: It was like I said, pretty much shelling most of the time. You couldn't get

your bearings. You couldn't get your head up out of the ground for a long time. It was scary as hell for me. I was not at all prepared for what those

poor guys were going through all the time.

Producer(s): Were you required to go out and help defend the perimeter at all?

John Bolte: Not at Khe Sanh, no. I did at all the other places, but not at Khe Sanh.

Most of the guys that were out there in the battalions, they couldn't patrol as much so most of the perimeter was taken care of, but it was

very, very, very different.

Producer(s): What was your job there at Khe Sanh?

John Bolte: We had a mule and a might mite and that's what we were supposed to

be ... if they needed to go someplace or whatever, but at that particular

time there wasn't much of any of that sort of thing.

Producer(s): So most of the time ...

John Bolte: I spent pretty close to the ground or under the ground.

Producer(s): Were you there when they were sending the supplies by air?

John Bolte: Yes. They were dropping supplies. The air field had ... One of the planes I

think was still on the field that had been shot down at that particular time, and everything had to come in that way. Ca Lu helped supply Khe Sanh as well as Dong Ha. They had smaller helicopters. They had the 34's and all they would bring in when the shelling would slow down enough

that they could.

Producer(s): Did you have to go out and help unload the helicopters or bring in

supplies that the air brought you?

John Bolte: No, I didn't do any of that. We were down a little further away and they

had guys that would run out and take care of a lot of that sort of thing.

Producer(s): Were you relieved when someone replaced you and you got to leave Khe

Sanh?

John Bolte: Yeah. I went back down to Ca Lu, which really wasn't far. I was attached

to supply at Ca Lu and we were bringing all the weapons and all back in

out of the field from when everybody would have fire fights and

everything like that. They wanted to try and get the guy back out where he belonged and get me back to where I needed to be, and that was pretty much how that went. We used a lot of small helicopters and

things.

Producer(s): So you flew in on a 34 and left on a 34?

John Bolte: No. I flew in on a 46 and I think it was a 34 that we went back out on.

Producer(s): It was a month that you were at Khe Sanh?

John Bolte: A month. I believe it was late January/early February.

Producer(s): Then you were only in the country for another month?

John Bolte: Right.

Producer(s): You were wounded over there, correct?

John Bolte: I was, but they didn't think that I should be looked at because it really

wasn't horrible. I had a rocket mortar attack at Dong Ha and the ammo dump got hit when we were on guard duty at Dong Ha. It blew me into the hole. When I was blown into the hole I whacked my head pretty good, but that was not the end of the world. I whacked my head pretty good and I had a lot of hearing problems after that, but I had a lot of

shrapnel in my legs from the rocket.

Producer(s): They didn't consider shrapnel in the legs as a wound?

John Bolte: At that time there were so many guys that were really, really hurt bad

that it's almost like, okay, you can walk, you're okay. You just got some metal in you. Here let's doctor you up a little bit and keep going back out in the field where you belong. When you're young you just sort of okay. You don't think of things as being tragic or permanent. You think, Oh God, I'm having a hard time hearing, but it'll get better tomorrow. I got some holes in my legs and that'll be okay. No big deal. It's not earth

shattering, it's just little small wounds.

Producer(s): You still carrying some of the shrapnel around with you?

John Bolte: Yeah, when I go through metal detectors. My daughter, she used to laugh

when we'd go and ... they had to have metal detectors go over you when you went to visit her, and the people that were in charge would make a joke out of it, running a metal detector up and down my legs and they'd say, Oh! Then they'd yell to the other one, we ought to do a strip search on him or something, because they always know there is metal in my leg.

Some of it's come out and some of it's probably still in there.

Producer(s): I know it was kind of traumatic, but do you think you can describe the

feeling of being under an artillery attack or not? I've never had that kind

of experience where ... the sounds and everything going on?

John Bolte: It's like hell on earth. You're so scared. You're scared the whole time

you're in Vietnam, but when you're having rockets and mortars and artillery and all, it's just something that actually you can't describe. It's something that your mind, when it's over and done and I walk away, even today, you forget the most horrible things that happened to you in life. You're trying to remember things, like right now while I'm talking to you and I'm trying to remember things to be as honest as I can, and there are many things I'm having a lot of problems with and that's probably one of

them.

When you're scared to death, and I mean you're so scared you can't hardly even stand it, all the adrenaline in the world doesn't help you much. That's basically what you are. You're there. You don't think your going to come out. As a matter of fact, when you first get in the country you're really scared and the little bit further that you go, you go, I'm not going to live, I'm not going to get home, so I might just as well settle down and just do what I got to do. Then you get towards the end of where you're ready to come home, then you become even more petrified. You go back into this absolutely scared to death mode. All these guys that stand there and tell you they're brave and they fought and they jumped and they did this and they did that, maybe they did, but they can't say they weren't petrified because I think they were.

Producer(s): That's still with you today?

John Bolte: Yes. I always thought that as time went on things would get better, things

honestly haven't gotten better, they've only gotten worse.

Producer(s): What was it like when you left and you're short and you finally get orders

saying it's time to go home?

John Bolte: That's when you're the most afraid. When you get down to Da Nang, I

think that's where I left out of was Da Nang, and I got on the air field, I'm looking around to see if somebody's going to bomb me or do something. It's 118 degrees and I'm on an air field that's black top basically, probably made it a hundred and whatever, and I'm sitting there going, I'm not sure I'm still going to make it. It starts to feel a little bit better, but you never

really feel like you've come out of that.

Producer(s): When your plane took off and the wheels were up and ... countryside,

you didn't breath a sigh of relief?

John Bolte: Then you start feeling a little better, but it took me 2 years to learn to live

inside of a house again. Everything that would come up, lightening,

thunder, somebody's truck would backfire, it was terrible.

Producer(s): What was your reception like when you got back state side?

John Bolte: We weren't received very well. Here we thought we'd really done well for

our country and here's all these people that were marching against the war and people were yelling baby killers and just some really not good feelings that you got from people. People just really didn't like you at all.

Producer(s): Do you talk about it with people?

John Bolte: No. This is probably one of the very first things that I've ever really

discussed with very many people and it's very difficult.

Producer(s): When you look back now at the time you spent in Vietnam, how does this

whole thing fit into your life?

John Bolte: It's effected my whole life. I think probably had I not gone to Vietnam or

whatever, I'm sure I probably would have been a lot different person

than I am today.

Producer(s): Did it make you better or worse?

John Bolte: It didn't make me better.

Producer(s): I hate to go back into Khe Sanh, but those bunkers that were all over,

how big were they? How deep were you? How many other men were in

there with you?

John Bolte: Some of the bunkers were smaller. Other bunkers you could fit 8, 9, 10

people in. If you were closer to the perimeter, some of those bunkers

were only 2-3 man bunkers. At Khe Sanh they were fortified pretty well because they were really shelled a lot and the perimeter was breached a lot. When the NVA started attacking, there were 2 or 3 divisions I believe that they had estimated, and they were not too very far from there so they tried to breach the perimeters. You needed all the areas to get into to protect yourself that you could.

Producer(s): They were piled up over you, were they several, 4, 5 feet thick?

John Bolte: They were very thick.

Producer(s): Could they sustain a direct hit by a shell?

John Bolte: Not really. Depending on how it was hit they would certainly help, but

nothing's going to sustain what some of those shells were.

Producer(s): I'm trying to just imagine what it was like to be in there. When these

shells were hitting that ground, how badly was it shaking?

John Bolte: Shaking the ground. The B-52's that were out there, they were just

shaking the ground. It was unbelievable.

Producer(s): Did you get a sense that things were the way the U.S. wanted it to go

there. That the Vietnamese were actually being beaten up pretty badly by the B-52's, by all the support that was coming in, and the thousands of shells that were coming from some of the fire bases around Khe Sanh, Khe Sanh was shooting back, planes are coming in all the time. Did it look like it was a hopeless situation or was it just like well, we'll come out of

this eventually.

John Bolte: I felt that it was a situation that we could have probably done better had

we been able to do more of what we wanted to do. We were doing things and ... I think, if I remember correctly, I think Khe Sanh was taken twice. They went up and they took the hill and they they went back down and they retreated from it I believe at one point, and then they went back and they took the hill again. I didn't really understand that. As far as the number of NVA that were killed, I'm sure that there were many that were. There were many, many, many of their people too. They had a lot

of people. We had no idea where they were all coming from.

Producer(s): Did you get the sense that when they were coming into the wire that

there was a chance you'd be overrun?

John Bolte: Oh yeah, definitely. They tried to infiltrate a lot. Hill 881 I believe it was,

one of them that they actually did run completely through, and that was right across I believe from Khe Sanh. It was very scary, scary place. Ca Lu

was scary, really scary. Rockpile was pretty scary.

Producer(s): Did you have any interaction with the Vietnamese?

John Bolte: We had tried to help guide the Vietnamese back down. When I was in Ca

Lu we were there to help protect and guide them down. They were good people. They were very loyal to the American's, much more so than the people further south. They had tribe leaders that some of our captains and all would more or less let them decide what they wanted to do, but we'd try to help them out. They were pretty good people. You didn't have a lot of the knife in the back things as much with them as you did with

the people that were further south.

Producer(s): By them, you're referring to?

John Bolte: The Montagnards. They were, I guess, like maybe today's mountain

people that are over in Afghanistan and all.

Producer(s): Did you get into the towns at all? Did you have an R and R while you were

there?

John Bolte: No. Where we were it wasn't like that at all. The only village that we had

was Cam Lo, which was the big one, and as you rode by you could see that they had their marketplace. You drove by that and we really didn't interact with them as much. Now when I guarded the river of Cam Lo, we came into more contact with them there. That was more like a little bit of everything, it was mixed. We had a lot of VC problems there and the people weren't as loyal as the Montagnards were. Those folks were just a

very different breed of people.

Producer(s): When all those helicopters that were bringing supplies into the

compound of Khe Sanh, there must have been dozens if not hundreds

landing a day, did some of those get hit by some of the artillery?

John Bolte: Yes, some of them did. Some of them got hit. I think it was a C130 that

was on the field. There were a lot of different people that were killed in that one, anywhere from Army, Navy, Air Force people, and everything else that were on that one. I don't even know what that one was. There was a Caribou that came in and Caribou's could land a lot faster and take off a lot faster. Anything that could get in quick and get out just as quick.

There were times when even those couldn't come in there was just too much shelling going on, but some of them did get hit.

Producer(s): When it was your time to get the hell out of there, you must remember

that moment pretty intensely. Can you describe it?

John Bolte: I'm going to be honest with you, I was so scared and I'm trying to

remember a lot of things. I can't remember which one I went in on and which one I came out on. It's the same thing with a lot of the memories that I'm having and a lot of problems that I'm having. Even today I'm going back and I'm telling my wife ... and I had written to her about everything that went on, she was my girlfriend at the time, and she's saying, you did this and you did this, and I said, I don't remember. I'm

having a lot of problems with a lot of those things.

Producer(s): Note of point though, there were Army and some Navy and Air Force

folks at Khe Sanh as well? It wasn't all Marines?

John Bolte: Yes, there was. The plane that was shot down was carrying different

people. Now whether they were on Khe Sanh I'm not sure. The plane was down when I got there so I don't know. A lot of those sort of things I

honestly don't know.

Producer(s): So you didn't have any contact with anybody from another branch?

John Bolte: No, not very much other than the guys I was with right there. If you were

down in a different area you could go and come in contact with

somebody in a different area, not there.

Producer(s): What was it like even to eat there? Were you just eating C's?

John Bolte: C-rations, that's all. At all of the areas, I think I ate C-rations almost a

year. That's all we had were C-rations. I got to Ca Lu, we had huts and on the side of the huts ... because of the rainy season and all you didn't want to stay in the ground all the time because it got so wet, so maybe one or two nights you'd try to get up above ground to dry yourself out and we'd have C-ration boxes to try and protect us from the rain. The rain would come in sideways. You were in the ground most of the time and we ate C-rations. The only time that I ate something other than C-rations was back at Dong Ha and we didn't spend a lot of time back there. We spent most

of our time forward from there.

Producer(s): So you could get a shower and be normal [crosstalk 00:38:17].

John Bolte:

Right. Then the shower, we had a rocket attack that blew the shower up. I have one picture of that. Here we are trying to get in the shower and come back out of the field and that night we got hit. You hear this whistle and you go, oh. If you can hear the whistle coming in, when the whistle would go past you know it's hitting past you, but you still had to get in the bunker as quick as you could. When you hear a whistle coming, this is instinctive, you never knew this or were taught anything like this, when you hear something whistling and it's coming at you and it stops, you better be in the ground because it's right where you are, and basically the one that hit the ammo dump was like that. They had rockets and mortars on that one.

Producer(s):

Instinctively when you're in a hellish situation like this, did you ever catch yourself dreaming of what it was like back in Pikesville or Reisterstown right at that moment, and how the hell were you on the other side of the earth in this situation?

John Bolte:

I probably did, but I honestly don't remember. I'm thinking that I was thinking of being home I'm sure and being safe I'm sure, but I honestly don't remember those thoughts.

Producer(s):

How much longer were you in the core after you got back from Vietnam?

John Bolte:

I got back from Vietnam, I think I was only in the Marine Corp for a couple more months. I went into the 2nd Tank Battalion I think it was and they more or less wanted to know if I was going to make a career out of it and I politely refrained from that because I don't think life expectancy was all that great at that particular time in life. You know that as soon as you reenlist you were going right back to Vietnam again. There was no doubt about that.

Producer(s):

Girlfriend the first time you got back.

John Bolte:

I think I do. My memory and my mind are so rattled by Vietnam. I do remember and I do remember how happy I was to see her and she's my wife now, today. I owe everything to her because I don't think I'd be here without her.

Producer(s):

You said that you hadn't gone down to the wall because you're not ready yet?

John Bolte:

All the pictures and things that I've had were all kept in one place and I never even really looked at them. I never went to the wall. I felt that I wasn't really ready yet. There was a guy that I grew up with that was a

local guy right here in the area where I lived, a guy named Dicky Walker that I grew up with, and he was killed in Khe Sanh, and I guess I'm just not ready yet. I'm hoping that I get there because I'd like to go, but I'm having a hard time with it.

Producer(s): Worth while, the war?

John Bolte: Not the way it played out. I really felt that we would have and probably

should have done things differently.

Producer(s): Did you feel you had your hands tied half the time?

John Bolte: 90% of the time, even when we were on guard duty on the perimeter we

were told that we had to request permission to fire on the enemy and procedures that you had to go through. You wonder what the heck, here you are being attacked and you can't do anything about it until you're told that you can. Maybe be it's just me, I didn't understand that.

Producer(s): We certainly thank you for coming out here. I appreciate the time. We

got kind of blindsided by your daughter a little bit, but I appreciate you taking the time and [inaudible 00:43:51] and appreciate your service over

there, and even if it's belated, welcome back.

John Bolte: Not a problem. Like I said, it's more for the memory of the people that

gave their lives. They should be the ones that are honored. It dramatically changed their families. Like Dicky Walker I was talking about, their whole

family was devastated after he was killed.

Producer(s): Do you go visit them and tell the family about what you knew of this

classmate?

John Bolte: Yes, we try to keep in touch. I try to keep close with them. When Dicky

was killed the military didn't pay a lot of money to bury them and my dad helped the family out. The family was really grateful that he had done that for them. They're real good folks, but it destroyed their whole family

because they love this guy.

Producer(s): Was he killed while you were there or shortly before?

John Bolte: Yeah, he was killed on the other side of the hill in Vietnam in Khe Sanh

when I was there and I didn't even know it for a long time after that. I had finally gotten a letter from home or what not that said that he was killed.

Producer(s): So you were that close but didn't know it.

John Bolte:

We were that close and didn't know it. He went to Vietnam a year ahead of me and he was injured. I met him when I was going over to Vietnam in Okinawa. When we met we sort of talked about back home. We talked about families and everything like that and became really very close. When we were growing up we were a year difference in age, we weren't all that close. When I went to Vietnam I knew he was going to an outfit that was in Khe Sanh, I think it was 1-3, so when I went up there and spent the time that I did up there, you're thinking in your mind, okay, maybe I can find him, but there was no way you could even think about that. Then I went back down to Dong Ha later after I went back to Ca Lu and then I went back to Camp Carroll, and then I went back down to Dong Ha, and I think I had gotten a letter then that said he had been killed on the other side of the mountain from where I was at. He was killed at Khe Sanh and it just destroyed their whole family.

Producer(s): A lot of family's.

John Bolte: A lot of them, yes. I'm not trying to take away from anyone else's part.

Even today, I'm sure it's the same things. Guys are going over and losing limbs and losing lives and it's like somewhere along the line .... these are

young kids. They're our future.

Producer(s): John, let's sort of resume a couple questions based on what we just

heard a little bit ago. Don't say like I said, like we already discussed this.

John Bolte: No problem.

Producer(s): You actually went with another colleague to Hue. Tell me about that.

What was this city?

John Bolte: Captain Clark and I went to Hue. We went to pick up a personnel carrier

which is like a bigger jeep. We needed that for our unit. We went to Hue. We walked through the town of Hue and we more or less, there was an imperial palace that was in ruins at the time, There were a lot of people walking around, civilians. These people were very different than the

people that we were talking to in our northern areas.

Producer(s): How so?

John Bolte: A lot of these were French Vietnamese people. They were much more

educated. They lived a whole different lifestyle. There was a lot of military people there that we had come in contact with and become friends with. You become friends fairly fast. We walked all around the area while we were waiting to pick the personnel carrier up, and it was

very calm, very quiet, didn't have any reason to think anything bad was going to happen. We went through, looked at the palace and the palace had the great big walls and the walls all around it were embedded with gems, ruby's, emerald's. At the time we didn't think much of it, but when you sit down today you go, oh my goodness, someone put all these jewels in the side of this building.

We went back to Hue to pick up the personnel carrier, we met up with a lot of the military people there, the Army people, the Navy guys that we were dealing with to get this personnel carrier loaded onto the ship. We were taking an LSU, which is small boat, out of Hue and went back out to the China Sea, and then from the China Sea you'd head north, I think about 60 miles to go to Dong Ha which was where we were taking it.

I think we had stayed overnight. We left that morning and we started to head out towards the China Sea. We weren't really that far off of the dock and all of a sudden behind us, we started looking around and it just looked like the world was coming to an end. There were bombs, just horrible. It just looked like a world war was taking place and we were heading out towards the sea, and we're going, what in the world. So, we get out a little further and it just looked horrible behind us. We got out to the China Sea and then we started heading north towards Dong Ha, and it wasn't until we had reached Dong Ha that we found out that this was the very beginning of the Tet offensive. We also found out that a lot of the people that we had come in contact with and had actually talked to and become friends with were killed. That was the very beginning of the Tet offensive.

Producer(s): Were you [inaudible 00:52:18].

John Bolte: Oh my goodness, yeah. I said we were down in Hue. It just looked like

there was no war going on at all. It was just really very shocking. That was

the beginning of a great big build up.

Producer(s): Hue was part of that Tet offensive later, was it not?

John Bolte: Yes. Hue was probably ... I think Hue was probably one of the very first

areas that was hit. From what I understand, they hit Da Nang, they hit Saigon, they hit all the different areas. They tried to do it all at the same time. They even went up to the DMZ and up to areas where were approaching, so they were trying to more or less hit it all at one time.

Producer(s): How did your life change when that happened?

John Bolte: That's when it went from being really scary to unbelievable. I thought

things were bad and now they're a hundred times worse.

Producer(s): Back to your base, which was at Camp Carroll?

John Bolte: We went back. We took the personnel carrier to Dong Ha and from there

we went to Camp Carroll, and then from Camp Carroll I went back up to Ca Lu, and then from Ca Lu it wasn't long after that I went to Khe

Sonh.

Producer(s): So the Tet war was breaking out everywhere, and the intensity had

quadrupled or maybe by a factor of 10.

John Bolte: Oh yeah.

Producer(s): Did your whole perspective on the war change at that point?

John Bolte: It really did. It was bad before and it was a hundred times worse.

Producer(s): Did you think we had a chance at winning at that point?

John Bolte: I didn't really give winning or losing a thought at that particular point

because we were still able to stand up in the positions that we were in so

I felt we were pretty good there, but we were also becoming more cautious about everyday activities where before it wasn't quite as much.

Producer(s): How did you regard this enemy that was really consisted of third world

people with sometimes spongy sticks and little rice bags attached to their

belts.

John Bolte: That was maybe guerrilla warfare or something like that. A lot of the

military that was up in the area where we were at were more of the North Vietnamese regular Army and they were much more sophisticated and they were much more like our military was, but they did do a lot of ambushes. They did a lot of things that would try to break our morale.

Producer(s): Tell me about that one ambush that you personally experienced.

John Bolte: We went from Rockpile which was where we were manning, Rockpile and

Ca Lu, and I went back to the Rockpile and there was a convoy that came in, I believe it was 9th Marines, and they were heading up to Ca Lu. We were told that they were supposed to be fortifying Ca Lu, but we pretty much felt that they were trying to open Route 9 back up so that they could at least get more supplies back up to Khe Sanh easier. From

Rockpile the convoy came in. I think they had about 200 Marines, they had a tank in the front and a tank in the back, while the middle of the convoy was ... we didn't realize it was going to happen, but the middle of the convoy was ambushed. We were in the back of that and we had to go and help with the ambush and that was pretty devastating.

Producer(s): Were there a lot of men lost?

John Bolte: I believe there were 19, 19 Marines were killed. The convoy I think went

on for 5 hours. A lot of people were wounded. These weren't regular infantry guys. Most of these guys were pretty much from all walks. There were cooks. There were a lot of different people from that particular area. Up at Ca Lu they had to take a bulldozer because when they were ambushed it screwed up the whole convoy. They had burned one tractor trailer that was going up so the bulldozer, I believe that had a Navy guy on it, went back down and pulled the tractor trailer back up so that the convoy could continue. That was a really messy day. That was a bad day.

Producer(s): Did you have to use your M-14.

John Bolte: Did I? At that point, no I didn't, but I went up there and I had a .45, and

we were told that we had to come up from the rear and help, which is what we did. We weren't allowed to fire until we knew what we were firing at. Some of the guys that were already involved were doing the

firing. No I didn't.

Producer(s): What were you hauling by the way?

John Bolte: What was in the convoy? They had, I believe, the 9th Marines had a lot of

building materials, engineer bridge type making materials. A lot of things

were on the convoy.

Producer(s): Thirteen days in Khe Sanh, I'm imaging this was one of your other worst

days.

John Bolte: This was probably the worst day.

Producer(s): Did you think that might have been your last?

John Bolte: Yeah, I would have thought probably would have been one of my last,

that or the rocket attack and hit the ammo dump, that was pretty intense

also.

Producer(s): So I guess this was the beginning of of Tet. Did you leave the country

before Tet was over, which was about 3 1/2 months?

John Bolte: I left country in March, so I think Tet was pretty much winding down at

that point, and then I was pretty much done.

Producer(s): You were ready to get the hell out.

John Bolte: I was ready to get out of there.

Producer(s): I thank you again. That was a nice addition. Anything I miss Rich?

Rich: No.

Producer(s): I think we got it. Thank you.