

# HARRY WILT    ARMY COPTER ARMORER '66-'68

Speaker 1:    Let's start at the beginning and you give me a sense of where you came from and maybe where you went to school and then how did you find out or how did you end up in this little country we call Vietnam.

Harry:        I was born in a place called Westernport, Maryland and one of two brothers. We're three brothers. I have brother older than me and a brother younger than me, Calvin and Jim. I went to Fort Hill High School. After that, mom and dad moved to Cumberland to take care of our grandparents and I graduated at Fort Hill High School. After Fort Hill High School, I decided doing service, because my dad was in the service, my uncle is in the service and I had a family background in the military. So I enlisted in the Army.

I went to Fort Campbell Kentucky for basic training and after basic training, I went to Aberdeen Proving Grounds from our individual training which was aircraft arm repair to repair the armament systems on Hueys. Later on the Cobra come out and we worked on them also, but worked on the miniguns, rocket pods, XM-47 subsystem and the chunker. I ended up going home and telling mom that I get to go to Vietnam where she wasn't very happy at all and I got to get a ... I had a bus or train ticket down at Macklemore, then did airport, then on a flight, and off I went. Next thing I know, I was stepping off a plane in Southeast Asia, 110 degree weather.

I was assigned to the 71st Assault Helicopter Company. I got in company, spent the night at the ... Our buildings were huge buildings we would billet in and come to find out the unit was moving from Ben Wa up to Chu Lai within a few days. I went over to the flagline and once I get to flagline, I was checking around and trying to find out where the armament shop was at, and where they were doing other work in and stuff.

One of the guys was telling me about the XM-5 system which is 40mm grenade launcher. It fires an M79 grenade. He told me that the grenade had fired but the round was still in the barrel. It didn't go away to the barrel because the ring on the barrel on the round itself was too tight. I asked him where the barrel was and he told me, I got it. Then I asked him where the [OD 00:03:20] was at, and they told me where the [inaudible 00:03:23] demolition were at and I went over and asked them if they had a press I could put on that, and they said, "Press!" And I said, "Yeah, I want to press it out." And they said, "You're kind of getting in a hurry to go home, aren't you?" And I told them, I said, "Na, you got any grease?" They said, "Yeah, we got grease." I said, "I need a big bucket of grease." He says, "All right." He says, "Down there where we blow up stuff there'll be a big tub of grease for you." So I went down, a big old thing of grease, about that

big around, I hooked up the bearing pusher to it, and I filled the barrel, top and bottom with the grease, stuck it down in, and I set there and pushed that round right down into the bucket of grease, walked back up, and I told them, I said, "Here's your bearing pusher." I said, "Here's my barrel."

Then I went back over the company area and walked up to the lieutenant and I said, "Here's your barrel back." And he asked me, he said, "How'd you get that out of there?" I said, "I pushed it out." He said, "Don't you know that darn thing, you know'll blow up?" I says, " You gotta rotate so many times, before it blows." I said, "I'm [inaudible 00:04:28] the arm by rotating, and I said, "After it rotates so many times, they'll blow up." And I told him, I says, "But apparently I'm still here, so it didn't rotate enough times." So anyway, I told them that they need to check their ammunition, because the fitting, where it goes into the casing, the round itself, there's a ... it looks like a big copper band-like, but it's part of the round. And I said, "You might check that. Have someone take them and check the diameter on it, because I think you've got a bad lot of ammunition. And you probably either change your ammunition or check your barrel."

It wasn't long after that we went up to Chu Lai. We got there ... that was an exciting place. When you come out of the company area, and you go up those ... like a little POW camp off the right hand side, you can see the Viet-cong there setting on the ground in there and big wire fence, all the barbed wire and everything, and you go down the flight line and I'd go down and work on the aircraft, bore sight them, they're called mini-guns, that needed worked on. If a door-gunner [inaudible 00:05:58] had problems with their [inaudible (60's) 00:05:59] I'd replace parts, fix em for them. Check out their barrels, things like that. Test fire them.

Once in a while, we'd be sitting there on the flight line and the next thing you know you'd hear sirens and everything going off. You'd come to find out there's a jet coming in from up North, you know, from North Vietnam, apparently it's coming in is going in for a crash landing, you know. You watch them go out over the South China Sea, turn in, and they already foamed the runway. A lot of them come in with wheels up, wheels down, but I've seen quite a few of them eject out of them buggers. But because of the fire crew and the people who take care of them, I guess the fire trucks and stuff, I've never seen one not walk away. Not one. I mean, some of them were pretty bad.

Speaker 1: Did they sometimes have to dump them in the South China Sea, if they ejected and it just was hopeless? They didn't try to bring them in, sometimes?

Harry: Oh, all of them come in!

Speaker 1: They all did?

Harry: Yeah! Every one that I seen crash they went in on the landing, but most of the time, what they do ... like one time we're come back from a CA, combat assault, and when we got to Chu Lai, we could see this jet that's up there, it was coming from up North, and it was out over the South China Sea, but it was dumping gas. I mean, it was getting rid of all the fuel it could get rid of. Because you didn't want it whenever you went in for a landing, you know, if you're going in for a crash landing, or possibly crash. But I didn't see any plane crash in the South China Sea, but they all ... most of them dumped in their fuel right over top of the ocean before they even come in.

Speaker 1: So how many guys were at that base? At Chu Lai?

Harry: How many guys?

Speaker 1: Yeah, I mean ...

Harry: Oh, my God. Chu Lai's a pretty big place. We had a [inaudible 00:08:11], then my company, we had the Firebirds, we had the Rattlers, which was the Selects, they flew all the infantry in to LZ, stuff like that, you know. But there was several units, there was a Korean unit that was right next door to us. We were told to stay away from them.

Speaker 1: And those Tigers?

Harry: Yeah. Yeah, you watch them doing their PT and stuff out early in the morning and getting into shape and all. And we just stand in formation and go to work. But they're out there doing all the jumping jacks, and everything else, and going to their [inaudible(harwashies) 00:08:58] and all that stuff, and martial arts and that, and we're, "Good-bye!"

There was a slick ... not a slick, but a Shinok outfit that was right next door to us, and I'm trying to think, I know, well, the Marines had a lot of aircraft, a lot of fighters, but they were basically on the other side of the airfield.

Speaker 1: So it was a big base.

Harry: Yeah, Chu Lai is a pretty good size. I guess because of all the aircraft, they were coming in and crash landing on that one air field that we had, that they moved, well, the company I was with, we went down to the south there. We moved to the southern part of the air base. We moved our air craft down there. I forget how long we were down there, but we got hit several times down there. There was one time that they had taken and hit us. It was at night; I was on guard duty. I'm laying in the bunk, and the guy comes in from guard duty; he opens up the door, turns the light on, and I yell at him, "Shut the damn door!" You know. And

the next thing we know, we start hearing mortars going off. So I killed the light and [inaudible 00:10:29] over the barbed wire fence into a bunker, and we sit there and after that attack, I'm between two rows of rotor blades, and a couple mortar rounds going off, and then finally we get the 'All Clear' the next morning and everybody gets out and walks around. I go over and dig up the tails off the rockets, or off the mortars. An EOD guy told me once, he says, "You know, you shouldn't do that. Some of them don't blow up." I said, "Well this one did, 'cause I was there!" I know darn well it blew up.

Speaker 1: How close could the ... What kind of parameters did they have around that base that the VC, or whoever were launching these mortars, how far out were they?

Harry: Oh, you can be a good distance away, fire a mortar. Three hundred yards? There was one time we got hit that I could sit there ... I was manning a machine gun on the second parameter, after we were told to move out, and you could see them popping out the tubes, you could see the flashes. I got a lieutenant out of a bunker one time, I said, "Come here!" And he come out ... I'm manning this M60, in case you get through parameter line, you know, if they come toward us. I set there and I showed him, I said, "Now watch that spot there on top the barrel." And he sit there watching, and all of a sudden you see the three flashes. I said, "Get down!" Because then you heard the mortars go off. I says, "Now, that's where they're coming out." It wasn't long after that, two tanks come off, and he told me that I had to get into the bunker, but out there I felt better, I knew what ... you know ... I didn't like being in a bunker, because a couple of them cave in.

But we were told to evacuate our positions and go to the beach, because they were afraid all the rounds that were coming in, that the Viet Cong was trying to blow up the Marine ammo dump, and we're right across the road from the ammo dump, so if it goes, the possibility of a lot of us getting hurt. So we moved to the beach, and it was just getting daybreak, and I could sit there and look up that beach and see Gi's that looked like D-Day. I really wish I had taken pictures at that time, but you could look up that beach, and it was probably our company and a couple other ones, and you could see all the way up to the other end where ... the other end of where Chu Lai was because it was cliffs, where the main battalion was. Because they had cliffs at their back door, you know. And I happened to look out in the ocean, and the second I turned to look out, I seen this ... I heard this noise, and then I seen puffs of smoke, and I told a guy, I said, "Look!" And there was a destroyer sitting off shore firing support for us. Now they only fired maybe three volleys, but that's all it took. I mean, when you get around that big a round at you, that was I guess they could pinpoint exactly where the mortars were coming from, where the rockets they were throwing at our compound. And we sit there, and after that we moved back in and checked out the area and cleaned and then ...

From there I went from that outfit up to another one. Oh, there was one time we were getting hit, I was up at battalion headquarters working on a part, and a friend of mine, instead of me staying up there that night, he decided to get a jeep, borrow a jeep, and take me down to my company. And he takes and brings me down. We drive into the company area, and as soon as he pulls into the company area, mortar rounds start going off in our company area. I told him there's a bunker right there. I said, "Get in the bunker!" He says, "I'm going home!" He backed up and started down the highway and I got up like a six foot drop-off in the road, on both sides, down to where the bunker's at. Well, he's hauling tail down the road and I glanced off to my right and I was watching him, and I see two mortar rounds blow up behind him, and I seen him get down in and make a left and I knew darn well he had'er pedal to the metal! So I got in the bunker, and after I could I got to my hootch I got my weapon, and the stuff I needed, things like that.

Speaker 1: Now this was about ... what year was this? '66 - '67?

Harry: Yeah.

Speaker 1: Just prior to Tet? Were you there for Tet?

Harry: Well, Tet is '68. Or '67, that's when they pushed us all the way back to the beach. They kept throwing in rockets and things like that toward us. They took us and they were putting in so many mortars and rockets into our compound. And the fact we weren't afraid that they were going to hit the company compound, we were afraid of the secondary explosions from the ammo dump.

Speaker 1: Hitting the marine dump.

Harry: So if they hit the ammo dump and blew it up, then possibility we had casualties from it, a lot more casualties. So they evacuated us to the beach. I imagine there was a Hawk missile company that was right behind us, because you could come out, and turn around and look up along toward Chu Lai, look up the long [inaudible 00:16:45] and they set up on like a little hill that was there. You could see the three missiles sitting there, and there was about, I don't know what they call them, batteries, or whatever, but there was four or five of them setting there, I guess in case a jet or something decided to come down that way, or if they had some other type of target to take fire on. But I do remember them.

Tet of '67, they moved us all, was when we went to the beach. And we didn't have our swimsuits!

Speaker 1: Now, I know that because you're on a [disconnect 00:17:23]

Harry: We were sitting on the flightline one day, and I think I was bore-sighting a huey, for the rocket parts and there was a jet down the other end the runway. And when he took off, and hit his after-burners, one of his bombs kept sliding down the runway. I mean it just 'Shooooo!' right down the other end and fell off into the bunker at the far end, and if it blew up it blew up down in there. But there was a time when the Chinook outfit that was right next door to us, they had some sort of an accident, refueling accident, and one of their Chinook's blew up, caught on fire. Of course they make sure we all stay away from that kind of thing. They don't want us over, in case of a secondary explosion.

Speaker 1: Sure, sure. Now your Mom, and everybody, did she ... how'd you communicate with her? Just mostly letters?

Harry: Oh yeah. Mostly letters. But there's the one time I got to go to the ... they had a MARS station on Chu Lai, and once the company had moved from one end to the other end of Chu Lai, I had closer access to it and so I could walk down to the MARS Station, I put in my name, get a call to call to States, so I got a date and a time to call, and I went down and got into the booth, and I'm sitting there waiting for my parents to answer on the other side, and the guy tells them that whenever they finish talking they have to say, "over". So that tells me that when I'm finished talking I can say 'over'. It's like, 'over' you know. OK. [inaudible 00:19:14] we're over. But anyway, my Dad, he picked it up, he knew what was going on, so I just talked to him for a little bit and I'd say, 'over'. He'd say, "How you doing?" And I'd say, "Well, I can't talk about a lot of stuff, but I'm doing all right. Losing weight, but I'm OK." I said, "I'm trying to stay out of harm's way." I says, "Let me talk to Mom." So I'm talking to Mom. They only give you so many minutes to talk. I said, "How you doing, Mom? Over." And Mom, she starts to babbling, "Dadadayayawahtwhatwhat? And my Dad in the background, I could hear him, say, "Say 'over!'" She said, "Over!" She said. I said, "How's everything at home? Everything OK? Over." He says, "Talk a little bit, tell him something, then say, 'over'" And Mom was so happy to hear me, to hear my voice that she says, "Over, Harry! Over! Over, Harry! Ov ... You talk! You talk!" I talked to them for a little bit, and they were telling me about how the news was back in the States and every time something come on about Vietnam they'd listen to it, and see if they could find out anything, what was going on. They'd want to know what unit I was with, they'd try to catch, to see if they could hear something about a specific unit.

I always took Polaroid pictures and sent them home because I tried taking regular pictures and send the film home, but when my Dad got them and developed them, wasn't nothing on them. So I figured they had to do something with them, you know, in order to take off some of the things that were on them, some of the films that I had. I know there's probably GI's got film home, but I noticed even when I would take pictures in Vietnam, I'd send them in to have

them developed, and I'd send in like, twenty-five pictures on a roll, and I'd get ten back. Because the other ones, they'd just make them black. And they say, "Well, this one didn't come out, you must have had the cap on." I'd say, "Yeah, right." You know darn well what's going on.

Speaker 1: Do you think there was any sort of censorship, or people looking at your letters or ...

Harry: There had to be, there had to be. Not to jump the gun, but when I left Vietnam, I used to paint and sketch. One of the things that really stuck in my mind, other than your combat assaults, we went out one day, I was [inaudible 00:21:57] gunner. We went out to do coverage, to cover a medi-vac that was going in. My ship I was on and two other aircraft, and we flew out ... so you come out over top of this hill, and you look down in the valley, and you see sort of like a rice paddy clearing. Grass is probably about, I don't know if it's grass, could be anything, but anyway, about three foot high. And the helicopter's setting down in it, like a rice paddy. The blades are still turning, and you look out and you see this big red cross on this aircraft, and off the aircraft are body bags, laying on the ground. I think that picture sticks in my mind a lot. Memories not forgotten.

Speaker 1: Well, you did go out occasionally as a gunner?

Harry: Yeah. Yeah, I went out as a door gunner. But I worked mostly aircraft armament, I loved to work on the aircraft. A lot of times I got to go to the [inaudible 00:23:19] whenever we'd bore sight and go out and shoot the weapons. But if they had a spontaneous mission that they had to go, they had to get covered, they might not have enough gunners to go, and they'd ask me ... I'd always go. I'd grab a weapon and jump on the aircraft and take off. As soon as you have your barrel on, and you're out, if he's banking over the South China Sea, you get permission to test fire, and if you get permission you fire off a burst, then you just go on your ... do your thing, you might not even fire a shot. The sight of you [inaudible 00:24:03] that you're coming to aid the infantry, sometimes is enough the Vietcong would break off and move back. Because we had one aircraft, it had twenty-four rockets on this side, twenty-four on this side, that was the Xm48 sub-system, and a lot of times they'd go out and it'd be flying in and they'd say, 'Well, this area is where we'd be getting all our fire from'. Well, he'd just kick it up and put them all out there. And they'd say, 'Well, that should have took care of our problem.' And they'd thank us and we'd pull off and they went on there, and we'd go back and reload and just wait. If they'd need us, we were there.

Speaker 1: The helicopter really did change warfare, from this war on, really. They never really had anything quite like this in the Korean War, or anything ...

Harry: The Cobra really changed too. They come out and the latter part of '67 we started getting Cobras. I looked and seen that skinny thing, and Holy Smoke! I was fascinated when I see one over-seas, because I'd yet to see one when I was going through school. But when we sitting here looking at them, you know, you look at the front profile and you figure, 'Man, how can you do anything, it's going to be kind of hard to hit this.' But then it's got two mini-guns, two 19-shot rocket pods, or two 7-shots, or whatever it wants to carry. It's quite an experience when you're flying in one of them, when you fly front seat. I got to fly in one one time and we went out and fired them, a chunker, a 79-grenade launcher. We went out to a firing range and I got to fire one I had bore-sighted. Pilot asked me, "Did you do a good job?" I always do a good job. I always do a good job. So we go back and land ... the Cobra come out and I guess it's the only one that I know of that on my second tour, the Vulcan, the 20mm come out, and that's a BIG Gatling gun. And that little bugger, I'll tell you, it wasn't like the ones they had, like on the nose of the aircraft, it wasn't like that. It was wing-mounted. And the pilot in the back, he's the only one that ... well, I guess the pilot in the front could to ... but it was a fixed-sight and you had to know where it was setting in order to fire it, because it didn't move left or right or up or down. It was just fixed on a target. But you knew that a thousand yards you're going to kick ass. Sorry! (laughs)

Speaker 1: Some of them relied on the pilot. If he [inaudible 00:27:14], he really had to get the right altitude to get the directional ...

Harry: Well it was the same way with the Flechette Rocket, when the pilots used them. The Flechette Rocket fired a little nail about that long, but there's tens of thousands of them in one rocket. And they got like a red dye, and whenever they fired on the rocket itself, the warhead. Most rockets, the warhead's in the front. When it hits something, it blows up. But on a Flechette, the igniter's in the back, you fire it, and after it burns so far, it blows up in the back, which forces out all the Flechette. And they cover an area ... a huge area. You figure three hundred to five hundred yards away from the aircraft, that thing blows up, and you see that red dye or that red smoke, and wherever it is, ever eighth of an inch, you've got a dart. So what's ever on the other side of that smoke is Swiss cheese. A lot of times they sit there and fire the Flechette, but see, the dye in them is an anti-coagulant. If you just get cut by it, you're going to bleed. You're not going to be able to get it stopped, because the dye in there will keep you blood from stopping, from clotting. But if you get hit by one, you're dead. There's no way to get away from it.

Speaker 1: Now, did the pilots have ... who made the selection of the weapons arrangement of the various types that those copters could carry?

Harry: Well, if you take a Huey, OK, the pilot [inaudible 00:29:02] inside, he had the options of the rockets. And the co-pilot, he had the options of your mini-guns. Now, when the pilot on a [inaudible 00:29:16], you're going in on a combat assault and the co-pilot will take down his sight, he's got his on an armature and the mini-guns on the side, they'll move left and right, up and down. So he's looking through his sight, pulling at a target, pulling the trigger, and he's covering a target. As they're going in, when the pilot gets to where he wants, he's got his sight down and all he does is punch a button and he puts a pair of rockets in where he wants them. And the co-pilot, he don't even have to quit firing, just keep shooting. And if we bank left, or bank right, whichever way we're leaving the territory, he can come down and follow that. And it's just like the door gunner, crew chief, if they bank right, he can step out and shoot up underneath the aircraft to keep anybody from trying to get a belly shot at you. So he can step out and shoot underneath long enough to keep your heads down and then you've got number two coming in behind you, and he's firing his mini-guns and his rockets underneath your belly. So then you're cleared out and once he goes, number three is in behind him and number one's coming back around in what number three says, just a continual rotation. You know, if you want to stick your head out and get shot at, go right ahead, but I don't want the mini-gun shooting at me.

Speaker 1: Now, when they would get shot up pretty ...

Harry: Yeah. We'd have to change out a pod, which your [inaudible 00:30:49] pod would move the gun back and forth. A lot of times we didn't have the pieces, we had to put into it, so we'd have to go to a higher echelon, higher maintenance up at Chu Lai, in order to get those parts. And you go up and change them out. There was one time I had to go up, I spent all changing one whole pod out in order to get it flyable the next day. Like [inaudible (rock a plies) 00:31:15], you get hold two [inaudible 00:31:17] you can change a tube. You can pull a tube out and put a new tube in, but basically that's it, just change things out.

Speaker 1: Now when you were on that base, you were at the same, where was the second tour?

Harry: My second tour was An Khe, and we went all the way into Pleiku first, and my unit from there, we moved up to An Khe. I flew up, and you sit there and fly over top the An Khe Pass, and you look down and you've got mountains here, you've got a road that goes down through between them. And off to the right on the side of a hill, you got about two hundred French soldier crosses, where they got wiped out. But there's a whole side of a hill that's got nothing but crosses on it.

We went into Chu Lai, I forget what month it was we went in there. We had Cobras, we had Hueys, we had Slicks. We got hit one night. We really never

anticipated it, but we got hit one night, Old Charlie, he slipped through, and how he got in, they don't know. But he blew up, I think six of our aircraft. With [inaudible 00:32:52] charges. I mean he blew them up. That kind of put a damper on everything. They tried to find out how he got in, how he got out, where he was at. We had a couple guys who were on guard duty got killed. Basically, at Chu Lai I was a lot of time just at the base camp. The need for me to be a door gunner wasn't there, because of the Cobra. I flew a lot on it. The Huey now, it was kind of like being phased out, in order for the Cobra to step up.

It would rain over there so much, so much.

Speaker 1: Monsoon periods stop you? Literally for weeks at a time?

Harry: I wouldn't say it wouldn't stop us, but when it's pouring down rain it's kind of hard to fly. There was a time that we sit there and it was on my first tour that we went on a mission and we were so loaded down that we couldn't get over the mountain in order to help the people that was on the other side of the hill. I think it was over across the border into Cambodia, and I think it was a Special Forces unit and we got as close as we could to them and we told them, "Duck!" And we salvoed our rockets in that area and they said we did a good job for them. But my second tour, at An Khe, and Pleiku, we didn't get hit as much as what we did in my first tour. [inaudible 00:34:59] My first tour, you could almost set a watch by. But second tour we did get hit, not that much, but it wasn't a very long hit, it wasn't, maybe a lot of times, all night long, like the first tour. It might be only four or five rockets. If we did any good, OK, but that's basically all my second tour.

Speaker 1: Did you have any reservations about signing up for another?

Harry: I didn't sign up for another. No, when ...

Speaker 1: But you could have left after your first tour, right?

Harry: Well my first tour I went home, after my first tour I went home. I really liked the army, I just didn't like Vietnam. And I asked them, I says, "If I sign up, do I have to go back to Vietnam?" And the guy told me 'no'. He said 'you don't have to'. I says, "OK." I says, "What if I signed up for six years? Could I get Germany?" He says, "Yes, you can." I says, "OK. Now if I sign up for six years, could I get a duty station like they got in Georgia or someplace like that?" He says, "Well, you're already in Georgia, so you can get a duty station here for a while." I was, "OK, I'll sign up for six more years." Three months I was back in Vietnam. And basically because of my MOS. Aircraft [inaudible 00:36:34] repair, they wanted me over

there to fix Hueys, fix Cobras, and stuff like that. My first tour was my worst tour. We got sprayed a lot, with DDT and other chemicals.

Speaker 1: Did they store Agent Orange, did it originate out of that base?

Harry: I would imagine first selection did distribute some of it. We had sprayers that would spray for mosquitoes and at that time of year they sprayed DDT. They sprayed Agent Orange along the perimeter lines in order to keep the foliage down, because you're not going to pay somebody to go cut grass. You can't do that. The best way to kill grass around the perimeter line is they spray with Agent Orange. We had mosquitoes up the yang-yang. So they did a lot of spraying in with the DDT and some people, I'd ask them, "Do you know what DDT tastes like? Or smells like?" And they say, "Yeah, I know what it smells like." And I say, "I know what it tastes like." I said, "Not only that, I sweat so much it come out my pores." I had so much on me at one time that I could wash my clothes and smell my clothes and smell it in them. And I'm not the only GI, there's a lot of them out there.

Speaker 1: Do you attribute any of your health issues today ...

Harry: Oh yeah! Oh yeah.

Speaker 1: To that?

Harry: Yeah. My Dad, he's a World War Two veteran, he's ninety-three years old, still going strong. He got kind of upset with me because I wouldn't file no claims against the government for my health. After talking to a few other people, size seven and a half of my hind end, I decided to file my claims. And I got Agent Orange, I'm border-line diabetic. I tell people, I'm Agent Orange, border-line diabetic, I got PTSD, and I got PTA. And they say, "What's PTA?" I said, "Parent Teacher Association." Got a meeting tomorrow! And they always ask me, "How can you make fun because of the way you are, and your health?" I'm ready to die any day I die. That's when I rest. That's when my war is over. Get tired of Vietnam.

Speaker 1: Do you think about it a lot?

Harry: Oh yeah. There's not a day that goes by. And I take medications, you know they give me pills for it, happy pills, and a lot of times I might get upset or something and my wife would say, "Did you take your pill today?" And yeah, I took it. But there's kind of parts to that too. You take something for this, it's going to kill this. Now if you want this, and be pissed off at the world, OK, but if you don't want to

be mad, then take your meds, so I take my meds. I'm not a hostile person, I really am not.

Speaker 1: You think your sense of humor kind of helped you get through this?

Harry: My sense of humor does, yeah. I shocked my Dad, by the way, when I come back from my first tour. We were home and I was sleeping and I was in the back bedroom, and the bathroom's here, and Dad, he decides to walk through, and he slapped my foot. But when he slapped my foot, I come up like this, and he looks at me, he says, "What are you doing?" I said, "Blowing your head off." I said, "Because everybody in Vietnam keeps a weapon handy just in case a [inaudible(sapper's) 00:40:59] coming through, throwing off a charge or something, you got your weapon, and you shoot. Yeah. Something hits you, you come up, you're ready. And Daddy, you're gone already."

Speaker 1: And what was his reaction to that?

Harry: There's a ... I've been through two marriages. I contribute them to maybe Vietnam, maybe not. But I always try to be a nice guy.

Speaker 1: The camaraderie with other vets, does that make a difference?

Harry: Oh, it makes a big difference, it really does. I wouldn't talk about Vietnam to anybody. If someone, just on the street, come up and say, "Hey, tell me about Vietnam." I tell them, "Kiss my hind end and walk away from him." But if he comes up to me and has a vet hat on and he says, "Hi, I'm a Vietnam veteran, were you over there?" I say, "Yeah." I ask him, "Were you over there?" And he says, "Well, no, I've just [inaudible 00:42:15]" But he says, "My respect to you." I say, "My respect to you, too." I'm the type of person, that if you were a vet, I don't care what you've done in the past. You're my brother. We have one thing in common, and that is we fought for this great country of ours. But I really think it's time to bring everybody home. I really do.

Speaker 1: So has your outlook on war changed? Is that what you're saying?

Harry: It hasn't changed. But Vietnam - our hands were tied. If we had in Vietnam what we got right now, we'd just set back and push the button and put them where we wanted them. Then boom, we take some pictures and push the button and put them back right where we want them. But we had the means to stop Vietnam. We could have made Hanoi a swimming pool. But nobody wanted a swimming pool. You could fly over top of Vietnam and look out across the countryside and South Vietnam, everybody's got a swimming pool now. I mean

they're all in a room [inaudible 00:43:51] B-52 strikes, just waiting for the range, means you got a swimming pool.

Naw, I think, overseas, I hate to get into it, but I think we're fighting a losing battle. I don't think the people want to be helped. I know some of them do, some of them want peace. I wish we could help them. But as far as Vietnam, our hands were tied.

Speaker 1: When you were over there did you hear, you must have seen some of the newspapers, probably obviously not television, but some of the protests that were going on? What was your reaction to that?

Harry: I didn't like them. You know, we had a lot of people over there that, you know, when we were in Vietnam, a lot of guys would, you know we watched TV and listened to the news. We see them basically demonstrating and things like that, but that was their right. We didn't like it, for what we were doing. And we were called 'baby killers' and a lot of GI's got stuff throwed down, things like that. But if you ever notice when you look at something, GI's come down off a plane from Vietnam, and they're dressed in their khakis and over here's a bunch of people that are yelling, "Baby killer!" And throwing stuff at you. You ever notice there's always a fence between them? Always a fence. Take down the fence and they ain't going to be doing that much longer. No.

Speaker 1: Did you experience any of that?

Harry: Oh yeah. Yeah, when we come back from overseas, first tour, second tour, basically both of them. There's always someone there to yell at you. I come back from my first tour with a guy named [inaudible 00:46:20] when I landed down there, had my duffel bag. Guy came up to me and he says, "You can't stay here. This section's closing." And I says, "Well, there's the gate. My parents are coming to get me. " And he says, "Well, when that bar closes, you gotta close." Where I had to leave. So I set there and a security guy come by, wanted to know what was going on, and he says, he was telling me that I had to leave whenever the bar closed. He asked me where I was from. I said, "Vietnam." He says, "Who's coming after you?" I said, "My parents." He told me, he says, "You lay down here and go to sleep, and I'll watch you. Ain't nobody going to bother you. I'll watch you."

First thing I want when we got back home - milk. I wanted milk. Yep, milk and lettuce. Weird combination!

Speaker 1: Guess you didn't see much of that over there.

Harry: Oh, my God. I drank some kind of milk over there and it ... awww! I think it had to be goat milk. The most foul tasting stuff I ever tasted. I didn't mind the bread. The bread had protein, it had bugs in 'em. Had roaches, all kinds of little bugs, insects, you know. It came with protein. And you know when you take [inaudible 00:48:07] that was it, that's the way you did that.

Speaker 1: How did you regard the Vietnamese culture over there? I mean, did you get to see a bit of it? Did you interact with the South Vietnamese?

Harry: Not too often. The biggest time that I got was I got a three day pass and I got to go down to Saigon to spend the weekend. That's because on my second tour I didn't take an R&R. So I'm down to Saigon and I'm sitting there at this bar, I'm drinking bombady-bomb, eating food, probably cat or whatever, I don't know. I didn't care, I was drunk and happy. We had a hell of a good time. I went upstairs to my room, me and a friend of mine, and we took our two lady friends with us, and the next thing I know it's like three o'clock in the morning and you hear this knock on the door and one of them big gate. I jump up out of bed and I'm listening and I hear Mamasan talking her Vietnamese and my lady friend is with me and she says, "Shhhh. [inaudible(be-see-cup) 00:49:38] money, money." They had to pay for doing what they were doing. I reached behind me and took out my 45 I had and she says, "No, no, no, no, no. [inaudible 00:49:55] you OK here, you OK." So I'm sitting here waiting. Finally I hear the gate close and I heard someone coming up the steps, but it's only single steps, you can tell it's one person coming up. I'm ready just in case. But Mamasan said [inaudible 00:50:15]. So they left. I didn't sleep no more that night. The next day I wanted out of there.

Speaker 1: You said you went on one R&R. Where did you go to?

Harry: I went to Hawaii.

Speaker 1: That must have been like a world apart from ... and then to have to go back to Vietnam after two weeks of that.

Harry: Met my wife there. No, as a matter of fact, second tour. That was the second tour. The first tour I didn't go on R&R. I didn't have an R&R on the first tour. The second tour I met my wife in Hawaii. We went to [inaudible 00:50:59] and stuff like that. I had some of the weirdest damn clothes I ever wore in my life. Big old damn bell bottoms, skin-tight at the top, big old bell bottoms at the bottom. Stripes on them. That was a fad you know. Oh my God. Get me out of here and back in Vietnam, give me my green.

Speaker 1: Tell the story about the fellow from Hawaii that you took home.

Harry: Joe. Well, when I went in the service ... there's certain things that touch you during your military career that stick to you all the time. When I was going through AIP, I met a young man, his name was Joe Kovols. Joe was from Hawaii. I was making a phone call to Mom, making arrangements to come home on a weekend. He was telling his family, I believe his adopted family, that he'd be on post this weekend, wasn't going anywhere. I conversed with him for a while. And come to find out, he was just going to stay on post. And I told him, I said, "You're more than welcome to come home with me." I said, "You can come home and I'll call my Mom and Dad ..."

Speaker 1: Was it a major holiday, though?

Harry: Huh?

Speaker 1: Was it a major holiday though?

Harry: Yeah, it was Thanksgiving. So he went home with me. We took a bus, we got down to the bus station and I said, "Teach me some Hawaiian." He says, "What do you want to know?" I said, "I don't know. Teach me some Hawaiian." He says, "OK." He says, "This is crazy. He's ... I know! [Hawaiian language 00:52:46] Now how am I going to say what it is? Me and you both don't know what it is. So I don't think anybody out there's going to know what it is, except the Hawaiians. But anyway, Joe and went home and he taught me this little phrase, so I would be on the bus and I'd say, "Hey Joe, does that guy [Hawaiian (Pupullie) 00:53:12] He says, "Hey man, don't say that." He says, "They might know Hawaiian." I said, "Yeah Joe, here we are in Maryland and you're expecting somebody other than you to speak Hawaiian. I kind of doubt it, you know!"

But we became good friends. He would go home with me on weekends, visit my Mom and Dad, and Mom and Dad really took to him. He was a good friend, a damn good friend. He went home at Christmas but then, I think he got to go home also to Hawaii then. I rotated and got orders for overseas and we met up again before we got to Vietnam. He wanted to go down town and get drunk and beat up people and get locked up so we didn't have to go. I told him, I said, "Naw, we'll go downtown and have a couple beers and stuff, but I've got to be there for my flight. So in Vietnam we meet, we split again. The next time I see Joe, it's his name on a wall. Joe [inaudible 00:54:41]. I missed him dearly. He's a part of my life I will never forget.

It's a little thing. I mean, a lot of guys say now come on, that ain't [inaudible 00:54:57] Yeah it is. It's a memory not forgotten. It's one of those little things. Four packs of cigarettes and a pack of C-rations. Memories not forgotten. A pound cake, memories not forgotten. It's all kinds of things. It might have been

some time that you were sitting someplace on a rice paddy, or something like that, and you handed your canteen over to one of your brothers and he drank out of it and give it back to you, and you drank out of it. The memory's not forgotten. War does it for you. Vietnam did it for me. I spent some time in the military, I was planning on making it a career. My wife decided a little bit different so we went our special different ways and I got out of the military.

Speaker 1: So, overall it was ... it had both it's pluses and minuses in your life, just like much of life is.

Harry: It was times I had good times in Vietnam. There were times that you know, pain in the butt. There were times I wanted to just drown myself in booze, just drink and forget about that day. I realize where I was headed with the bottle. I said, 'whoa, you'd better slow down, this is not a good thing for you'. So I threw the bottle away. That was easy for me to do. When I was up at Chu Lai, one of the hardest things there was for me to do was take a guy to jail. LBJ jail. He went to jail for peddling dope, for selling dope to Gi's. The First Sargent called me over and he says, "I got a problem." I says, "What's up[inaudible 00:57:10] and he says I need a guard to take a prisoner to LBJ jail." He says, "Will you do it?" I said, "Yeah. Why'd you pick me?" He says, "It's your second tour." I said, "Yeah. Why?" He says, "You ain't afraid to pull the trigger." I says, "Well, OK." So I took the guy to jail. And I told him when I got him out of the MP's stockade, "I don't yell Whoa, I ain't going to yell stop, you want to run, go right ahead. The only thing I'm going to do is take the pistol out and shoot you. That's all there is to it. You know that, I knew that, let's go." And I took him down, no problem, because he knew if he run, I'd shoot him, I ain't going to yell at him; I'm going to shoot him. That's it. I don't chase people. Let the bullets do that.

Speaker 1: Harry, I want to thank you for opening up to us, sharing with us. Thank you for what you did over there as well.

Harry: [inaudible 00:58:14] like Chu Lai, like I say, it was my worst tour. They hit us all the time, no matter where we were at. There was a time when I came out of my hootch and made a turn and I looked at a flightline and I see this Vietnamese walking off our aircraft into the [inaudible 00:58:35] and he's stepping off our aircraft for a mortar attack. And one of the guys, my friend, I can't remember his name, I think it was Mitchell, I told him to go get the First Sargent. He said, "The First Sargent isn't going to come out here and talk with you." I said, "Well, go tell the First Sargent I called him an SOB. And he's better get his FS fat ass our here quick." And lo and behold, here comes the First Sargent, he brought his entourage with him, and he asked me what was going on. And I said, "Look over my shoulder, down the flight line. You see that guy down there, that Vietnamese in the light brown pants and Khaki shirt with the hat on his head and the

broom?" He said, "Yeah. I see him." I said, "Watch him." And he said "Holy smoke, he's walking off our aircraft, because you could watch him, he'd step and he'd count his steps and then he's pause and you'd see he would look at one thing and three right left, three left four. You know, you put numbers on them until you know the distance, how many meters certain places are, how far it is. So he sent the MP's down to get him. There's other times when we'd be going on a combat assault or even flying back from someplace, we might go down south, pick up supplies, come back up, you know, just cover slick on it's [inaudible 01:00:07] from a trip. And you get up to Chu Lai and you bank right and you look out over the ocean and there is this huge white ship called "Hope". The hospital ship "Hope". I know there's a lot of guys who were at Chu Lai that were fortunate enough to go over and look down over the cliffs and see that ship out there. That's just like the time they moved us all the way back to the beach, I know there's other GI's that experienced that with me. That's the one's I'm looking for. I would love to have that person that says, "Yeah, I been there. I was there. I seen that ship, yeah, I seen that. I seen that POW camp too, that little camp. Yeah. That's the individual I'm looking for in my life, that I would love to sit down and talk to. He's probably I would say, another brother of us, like a super-brother. But it's my privilege to sit here and tell you, and I hope [inaudible 01:01:24] good thing.

Speaker 1: Sure.

Harry: And I'm not [Hawaiian 01:01:27]

Speaker 1: Well thank you Harry, thank you for coming in. Thank you for everything you did.