

**Oral History Interview of
Charles Camp**

**Interviewed by: David Marshall
December 15, 2016
Lubbock, Texas**

**Part of the:
*American Veteran Interviews***

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Transcript Overview:

This interview features Charles Camp as he describes his time spent in Vietnam during the Vietnam War. Charles explains the Vietnam War through a medical standpoint. Charles also discusses moving to Lubbock and working at Tech.

Length of Interview: 01:21:04

Subject	Transcript Page	Time Stamp
Birth and growing up	05	00:00:00
Being an advisor in Vietnam	11	00:13:03
Getting to the MAG Compound in Vietnam	13	00:22:30
Patients in the hospital and the MASH unit	16	00:30:30
The sergeants and doctors he worked with in Vietnam	22	00:45:29
The Montagnard and their allegiance's	23	00:49:36
How he treated patients	25	00:55:35
Life after leaving Vietnam	27	01:05:16
Acclimatizing to Lubbock and working at Tech	30	01:13:35

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David Marshall (DM):

The date is December 15th, 2016. This is David Marshall interviewing Charles Camp at the Southwest Collections, Texas Tech, Lubbock, Texas. Let's talk about—I want to talk about Vietnam but let's get a little about your early life first of all, if that's okay. You grew up in York?

Charles Camp (CC):

In South Carolina, in a little called Tirzah; T-i-r-z-a-h.

DM:

Is that where you were born?

CC:

I was born in that house.

DM:

When were you born, by the way?

CC:

October 12, 1938.

DM:

On Columbus Day. [laugh]

CC:

Used to be anyway. [laughter] Then we—I went to school in York, which is six miles away. Most of my—my mother and father both worked in Rock Hill, which is ten miles away. It was all a little farming community there.

DM:

Kind of in the foothills isn't it?

CC:

No, it's—

DM:

Not quite to the mountains.

CC:

It's all flat in that area.

DM:

You're pretty close to King's Mountain.

CC:

About seventy-five to a hundred miles.

DM:

Oh, is that right? Okay. Looking on the map it looks—

CC:

It's directly south of Charlotte, North Carolina. Rock Hill is within, probably, fifteen miles west from Charlotte. There's a little town in between called Fort Mill; it was there in that area. We were mostly cotton mills that actually made the thread and weaved the cotton into sheets. My father worked in a big plant that just re-finished off the cloth, printed it and made big rolls of printed cloth there. Most of the smaller mills either made—took the raw cotton and made it into thread, and then the thread was woven into cloth. That was sort of typical of most of South Carolina in what we call the "Upper Part." The southern part is, sort of, flat, sandy loam, and it's mostly an agricultural area. The small towns around there always had one or two cottons mills, like Cannon Mills. The mills would own, sometimes, everything in the town. We went to the company store to buy their stuff.

DM:

It was common in that part of South Carolina.

CC:

In fact, the guy that called me this morning, Frank Mitchell is his name; he grew up in one of those towns. He was my classmate at the Citadel. My freshman year we roomed together. I graduated from high school in 1956.

DM:

In York?

CC:

In York. My father died when I was about fourteen, so my mother moved back to her hometown, which is Orangeburg, South Carolina which is about forty miles south of Columbia. That's what we called "guiche country."

DM:

"Guiche"?

CC:

Guiches. They talked a little bit different, and had more of a southern accent than we do.

DM:

How would you spell “geechy”?

CC:

G-u-i-c-h-e, or something like that. It was a slang term. We all called them sand lepers too. That was another—

[pause in recoding]

DM:

Okay, so we're rolling again. We were talking about guiche as kind of a distinction of dialect.

CC:

It can be—a lot of people have guiche as a nickname—

DM:

Oh, really?

CC:

—because of the way they sound and talk and stuff like that. From about, let's see [pause] the Georgia line inland to—what's the name of that dam that has the annual golf tournament there, Augusta?

DM:

Augusta, yeah.

CC:

From Augusta on the line north to about Charlotte, North Carolina and towards the ocean; that's all flat land. Then from there up to the mountain areas is rolling hills and mostly red mud; not too much top soil, not many crops in that area.

DM:

What year did you say you graduated from high school?

CC:

Nineteen fifty-six.

DM:

And you went straight where?

CC:

Went to the Citadel; went there for two and a half years. I got married and decided I—I believe I could've stayed there, but I didn't want to. I couldn't live with my wife, I had to live on campus then.

DM:

Oh, really?

CC:

She would have live by herself. We moved to Clemson and I went to Clemson a year and a half, and finished there. The day I graduated from college I went into the army.

DM:

Oh, really? They had already, were you—

CC:

I was what they called a “distinguished military graduate” and we could get a regular army commission rather than a reserve commission the day we graduated. We graduated and we went to Fort Lewis, Washington.

DM:

Tell me the year here.

CC:

Huh?

DM:

What year would this be?

CC:

That was 1961. I stayed in the Army until about 1968.

DM:

In '61 was there any talk about Vietnam?

CC:

No. In '61 was when we had the Berlin Crisis; '61 to '62.

DM:

Also, Bay of Pigs was mixed in there.

CC:

That was before, wasn't it?

DM:

That was '61.

CC:

No, that was after. That was '62 or '63.

DM:

Cuban Missile Crisis was right in there.

CC:

When I was—in '61 we had the Berlin Crisis and we—the union I was with sent some troops to Germany, but I stayed there in—I was in—I went to jump school in Fort Benning, Georgia then when I got through Jump school I was going to go to the ranger school. They canceled my ranger school and this other officer in our unit was going—had finished Ranger school, and he and I both got ordered back to Fort Lewis. So he didn't get to Airborne and I didn't get to go to Ranger. Then, I was assigned to, after about a year and a half—also during that period when I was in Fort Lewis, Washington I went to San Antonio for what they called “basic officer training” for about four months—three months, three months. Then I went back to Fort Lewis and stayed there for about a year. I was with—there I was with the Fourth Infantry division, and a medical company. Then I was assigned to the Twenty-Fifth Infantry in Hawaii, and I was with what they called the “Fourteenth Infantry battle group.” That was during the period of what we called the “Pentomic Army,” everything was five. From there—in Hawaii, I had a medical platoon in the Fourteenth Infantry, and I applied for a general's aid job at Triple Army hospital, and this colonel from D.C came out and interviewed me and he said, “If you don't get this general's aid job, you want anything to do?” I said, “Yeah, I'd like to volunteer for Vietnam as [an] advisor.” We were advisors primarily there during that period. I didn't get the general's aid job but I did get to go to Vietnam. In 1963, I think it was about in August or September, I was assigned to Ban Me Thuot area which is in the two-corps area.

DM:

I'll try to look that up. I must've had the spelling wrong on that. Do you have a—

CC:

They changed the name.

DM:

Okay, what is the name?

CC:

I don't know the name.

DM

What was it then?

CC:

Ban, B-a-n-m-e-t-h-o-u-t, I think is what they spelled it.

DM:

Ban Me [Thuot].

CC:

Ban Me [Thuot]. Ban, b-a-n.

DM:

I'll look that up later then. When you—'61 you went into the army in '61. That was an interesting time to enter the U.S. Army. Things were really started to heat up a bit, and then Vietnam right around the corner but you wanted to go over as an advisor?

CC:

Yeah. It was a special program then. At that point in time, we were restricted to eighteen thousand five-hundred troops in Vietnam, as advisors. We really didn't have any combat troops there legally. We were all advisors or the special forces groups had separate compounds permitted by the officers, but they worked with the local militia which could have been in the south, Vietnamese. Up in our area they were Nuongs, I think that's n-u-o-n-g or something like that; mostly Cambodians. The Montagnards were very much like the Nuongs.

DM:

I'm going to put the spelling of Montagnard on here, by the way, for the recordings so that when someone transcribes it they'll have that. I found it as, m-o-n-t-a-g-n-a-r-d. Does that sound right?

CC:

Yeah.

DM:

Degar is another word, term, that's used, d-e-g-a-r, according to what I found. Did you ever heard "degar" used?

CC:

Uh-uh.

DM:

So, let's called them Montagnard. That's what you called them then, Montagnard, which means "mountain people."

CC:

It'd be interesting to find out some history about the Christian missionary lives; people who lived there with them. I would—I'd lost all contact with them but—

DM:

I wrote that down when we were talking on the phone because I wanted to ask you about that but they were already there, they had been there a long time.

CC:

Years, years. They had their families there and during the summer time they would come back to Vietnam and the they'd go to the school in the Philippines. The Philippines was where a lot of Vietnamese elite went to school to. The doctor I worked with there—the civilian doctor that I worked with there, his father had been an ambassador to the Philippines a long time, so he lived there for several years.

DM:

When you went over as an advisor, what was your area of specialization? What were you going to advise?

CC:

I was a medical service officer. Our major deal was to try to get the medical component of the division, I think it was called the Third Infantry division, and to participate in the support of the Vietnamese military. In Vietnam at that time, there were two sets of military: the regular army and then the local militia, which was support by the state also. They had provinces and we were in this one province and—I can't remember the boundaries, but my boss was in Pleiku which is

about a hundred clicks north of where I was, and it was all that—I guess you'd call it the capital of that area.

DM:

Any time you can give me a spelling, if you know it of the top of your head, so that—otherwise—

CC:

Pleiku was like, P-l-i-e-k-u, or something like that. When I was first arrived in country, I arrived on a Thursday. And so we had a plane load, we got off the plane, we went to an orientation where they told us a little bit about the Piastro [?] [00:14:48], I think that's what it was—is that what it's called—Piastro [00:14:53], yeah—and how to count and all of that kind of stuff. Then I was taken to the Majestic Hotel, which is a really nice hotel at that time, right on the Saigon River. I went in, and checked into my room, and it was in the late afternoon. I woke up the next morning, and there were three Australian Sergeant majors sleeping in my room. [laughter] They saw my clothes, and saw that I was a lieutenant and the first thing they said to me, "Hey, lieutenant, you want a beer?" [laughter] They had been in country for a while and assigned different places, so they'd met there to have fun. About—when I got up they were still in bed, left them in bed, went down, and had breakfast, and all of a sudden there was shooting in the streets. No, no, no, it hadn't started that yet. Let's see, I put on my uniform and I was going to go back to the MAG [**Military Advisory Group**] Compound, and I was told I could go out by the river and catch a bus. So I went out there, waiting on the bus. This major came along by and says, "Lieutenant, what are you doing?" I said, "I'm waiting on the MAG Compound—the bus to go back to the MAG Compound and just got in country yesterday." He says, "I think you're about to back in the hotel. I don't know what's going on but something's going on bad." I hadn't seen any activity. I went back in the hotel and told these Sergeant majors what had happened and this guy says, "You know, I hear those planes flying over; that's weird." One of them went upstairs on the roof to see if he could see what was going on from the roof, and one of them and I went back down to the lobby, which opened right out on the street and at that time they were shooting up and down the street. We could hear the shots going on and they said, "Well, we're about to go back into the hotel." I said, "Okay, I'll do whatever y'all want because I don't anything about this." They were all seasoned troops, all three of them, so I felt pretty safe being with them. They all had weapons. I didn't have a weapon at that time. We stayed in the hotel, had lunch, and we could hear the firing going on and everything, and then they decided that we should go downtown where there's a thing called the "Brinks Hotel". The Brinks was, sort of, the gathering place, a central place, for the Army troops and everything. They had a club on the top so the four of us just walked down about six blocks to the Brinks Hotel.

DM:

Did you see any activity along the way?

CC:

Everybody was deserted; the streets were empty at that time. Then we went up to the Brinks Hotel. On the roof there was this officer's club, and we could look—and they had a pool up there—we'd go to the pool and look over, and we could see them shooting from the corner the hotel was on into the president's residence right there. This was in— Diệm was president and it was the first coup d'état since he took power about five or six years before. He and Madam, whatever his wife's name was; they lived right there. That went on during the night, and then they breached the hotel and got in—I mean the capital building—and they got in and they killed Diệm right away and then they killed his wife. Things quieted down so we went to the—another club somewhere and they wanted to go to the Australian Embassy to see what they should do. They went over there, woke the guy up—they knew where he lived, in his hotel room, and he told them, “Don't do anything. Go back to your hotel and just stay there,” so we went back to the Brinks hotel and one of the three decided that he'd go see his girlfriend and we left him. He came back scared to death because he had gotten caught by the secret police but they let him—he had his pistol and a brown paper and he's just holding that back. He told them that he was from Australia, and the guy couldn't speak Vietnamese or English on either side, so he got away from that and just came back to the Brinks.

DM:

So, was he able to keep his gun because it was in a brown paper back?

CC:

Yeah, he just had it like he had something in the back. Something to eat or something. But anyway, we stayed there until about three or four o'clock on the morning and then we sort of dispersed. I went with this one guy and I'd had too much to drink. And I woke up, I didn't know where I was, but some place close to Ton Son Nhut airport. I said, “I got to back to the MAG Compound today.” They said, “Okay, go.” I went out on the street and I saw some soldiers at this bridge about a block away, so I started walking down towards where those soldiers were and I was like, “Maybe I could get a taxi cab driver,”—they have these little Renaults over there then—“to stop by and pick me up.” He could speak a little English. I said, “*Đi đi*,”—“*Đi đi*” means “go”—“*Đi đi* Majestic Hotel. *Đi đi* Hotel” So he said, “Okay, okay.” He started out, I bet he was going sixty to seventy miles an hour. It felt like ninety in that little car; they drive fast over there anyway. He took me directly to the Majestic Hotel and I think I gave him twenty or forty dollars American, U.S., money. He said, “No, no, no, no, no. Too much.” He tried to give me twenty dollars back and I said, “No, you keep it, bud.” [laughter] “You got me back here safely.”

DM:

Driving in a war zone. Who were the soldiers on the bridge?

CC:

Vietnamese. I didn't get that far. I didn't get to see them or talk to them, the guy picked me up. I imagine they were standing out there by the bridge—I imagine they were assigned to protect that bridge. The guy just, the taxi driver, knew what was going on, so he took me directly—as fast as he could. because I think he was afraid too. Because what we called the “white mice”, the police then, the local police, city police, they had all abandoned their post. They had just disappeared. The next day things had, sort of, quieted down; this was then on Sunday. I went to the MAG Compound, and they took me to the airport, and I went to Pleiku where the headquarters was for our area. I had a major, I can't even remember his name now—I walked into his room and he was laying on the bed naked and his Mama-san was in there cleaning his room. That was my first introduction to that area, and he says—we talked about fifteen to twenty minutes, and he says, “Well, let me know—he didn't give me any instructions, no reporting, no nothing. He just said, “I'll keep in touch.” I stayed there about an hour or two or something and then I got a ride to Ban Me Thuot by helicopter, I believe it was in. I went to Ban Me Thuot and I never heard from him again except one day he came to see me, spent about an hour, and went back to Pleiku. I reported to the colonel who was—we had a bird colonel who was the chief advisor to the general; Vietnamese general. Super guy, super guy.

DM:

That's at Ban Me Thuot?

CC:

Ban Me Thuot, yeah. Our main compound was the Bảo Đại, who was the former president of Premier [?] [00:25:15], or whatever it was, before Diệm. That was his place for his concubines. It was made out of creosoted wood. It was about six feet, seven feet off the ground. Every room in there—it was about eight or nine rooms upstairs, and every one had a bathroom with a bidet [?] [00:25:48]. The ranking officers up there and the enlisted and junior officers like myself, were in—we had two rows of bedrooms on this side, just a bedroom. We had a common toilet and then on the other side we had about twenty rooms of three rows of bales that the enlisted were in mostly. We had a kitchen and a dining room on my side and in the back of the elevated building, we had a clinic; I worked out of there. While I was—for a year—I was there for a year and for about three months I had a doctor there.

DM:

Otherwise it was just you in the clinic?

CC:

And a sergeant. I had two different sergeants while I was there that come and go and myself. We just ran a, sort of, sick call; any time a guy was sick or something, we'd take care of them.

DM:

This was U.S. personnel that you were taking care of.

CC:

Yeah, only U.S. personnel. Then the military had taken over the hospital. The hospital consisted of one open bay area for about twenty patients that had a lab and an X-ray there. The first I tried to do was get the X-ray technician to stand behind the leaded shield, and wear the leaded coat.

DM:

He wasn't doing that?

CC:

He wouldn't do that. His hair was already coming out and he just wouldn't do it. I had to use it a—he couldn't speak English so I had use an interpreter. I talked to him several times, through my interpreter. I had a Vietnamese interpreter assigned to me who was shot after I left because they thought he was a spy, Viet Cong spy. Nice guy.

DM:

He was executed? I mean, he was killed?

CC:

I think he was just shot. [laughter]

DM:

Just to make a believer out of him, I guess. Was there not a doctor assigned there at the hospital?

CC:

There were three doctors and—no, two doctors and three dentists assigned. The captain, the lead guy, his name was Captain Mann. He's on one like—I can't remember his name—he treated a patient. I never saw the other two doctors do anything with the patients. The lady who was the lab technician spoke in English, pretty good English, so most of the time I would go over there and spend time with her. She was trying to teach me Vietnamese and I was trying to teach her English. I might've learned ten to fifteen words and I could know the numbers and all of that kind of stuff at that time. She was real nice and she, I think, was friendly with one of the dentists—one of the dentists and it was his girlfriend. In Vietnamese society, it's sort of like our society was a hundred years ago, maybe more. They don't touch each other or do anything like that until they're committed to marry.

DM:

Who were the patients at this hospital?

CC:

All soldiers.

DM:

All soldiers? All U.S. and Vietnamese? U.S.?

CC:

No, all Vietnamese.

DM:

All Vietnamese soldiers, okay.

CC:

We had a hospital in la Drang, what they called a “MASH hospital”; Mobile Army Service Hospital. They had doctors and nurses over there, and if I needed help with anything I’d call them and they’d tell me what to do, or I’d just send the—if the guy was really sick, I’d send him to la Drang. We usually had two or four helicopters assigned to us all the time so we could evacuate if need to. The helicopter base was at Qui Nhon, which is north of la Drang. I went over to la Drang and spent a couple weekends there.

DM:

Was the MASH unit actually set up better than the hospital, if you were sending really sick people over to the MASH unit?

CC:

I guess. The hospital, I’d say, would be set up like ours was. We’d have a hospital like this maybe in the thirties and forties. Most of them were trained in the French method of medical care which is called “minimal care,” minimal care. Minimal medication. They mostly survived. If they didn’t die before they got to the hospital, they’d survive. We would pick up Vietnamese soldiers from the field, if they were transportable we’d bring them there and they’d take care of them.

DM:

Were they mostly combat injuries, or disease, or parasites?

CC:

Both. A little bit of everything.

DM:

What was the most predominant issue when some—

CC:

Probably combat, or broken legs, cuts, bruises. They didn't bring anybody there who was seriously wounded. I don't know where they took them. I never did see any seriously wounded there.

DM:

Makes you wonder then if they, kind of—could they have just written them off as “you're not going to make it.”

CC:

I flew into an area one time, and they had taken over this place and killed, I'd guess ten or twelve Viet Cong. They were all just lying there on the ground. The Vietnamese are very brutal. As long as it's not me, we can do anything.

DM:

So was that typical then; if they killed the enemy they just left them out, didn't try to bury them? That was standard, do you think?

CC:

Yeah. They might've had a burial. The Vietnamese were not very religious from my point-of-view. Either Catholic or Buddhist. The major religion there is Buddhism, and the French had a large Catholic population there. The Catholic church in Ban Me Thuot was very limited. We didn't have much relationship with them. They didn't have a priest there.

DM:

The Montagnard—after you told me about the Montagnard the other day, I read just a little bit on them, and they had their problems with Vietnamese mainstream. There's an ethnic difference apparently. They're a different ethnic group the Montagnard, is that correct?

CC:

Yeah.

DM:

There was some uprising—from what I read there was some uprising previously, and then part of the U.S. role I think that you mentioned was to try to ease them into the mainstream, or get them some benefits anyhow.

CC:

At the hospital, they had a separate building, a wood plank building, with one row—I believe it

was just one row, of bunks made out of wood. No mattresses, just a flat surface for them to lay down.

DM:

That was for the Montagnard?

CC:

Most of the Vietnamese slept like that too. They don't have many mattresses over there; they didn't then. Usually everybody there slept on—if they had a bed, they slept on a bed with a rice mat on top of it, that was it; about that thick.

DM:

About a quarter inch?

CC:

Or less. A typical—

DM:

This is a sack basically with rice in it that allows about an eighth-inch cushion?

CC:

No, no cushion.

DM:

No cushion? It's just the bag?

CC:

Not a bag, just a piece of—like a mat you put on the floor made to fit right in that little bed. When I would go into the village with these—I would go into villages on what we called “civic action trips”.

DM:

To the Montagnard?

CC:

To the Montagnard or Vietnamese. If I stayed overnight in the village I'd take over a house. I personally didn't have to do it, the Vietnamese militia would take care of it; take care of me.

DM:

They found a quarters for you?

CC:

Got me a quarters. The family would be out of it. If it was a long house—that's what I'd call a long house; it's up on stilts off the ground, and it's got a deal. I'd always carry me a folding cot, and I'd set that cot up in there, and they would abandon that area and give it to me. So I'd sleep in there. I'd sleep in a— [pause]

DM:

Sleeping bag?

CC:

Sleeping bag and I'd zip it up all the way to the top because I could hear the rats going through the roof like that, then they'd sometimes fall down the roof and fall down on me. When I'd move, they'd run off or something like that.

DM:

What about parasites? Was there a lice? Problem with lice, and things like that?

CC:

No, not really. They don't wash very often, and when they do wash they go into the river; if there's a river nearby. Some of the villages were by a river, some of the villages were in a more remote locations where I don't know where they got the water from. [laugh] I would never drink their water. I would drink their *nước chấm*, which was this liquid they put in this big—they'd have a clay pot which was about that big around and about that high.

DM:

About three feet tall, huh?

CC:

About three feet tall. They put rice in the bottom, maybe a rat or two, and then cover it up with grass or leaves, and then fill that jug up with water above that. Then they would put bamboo straw down in it, well then they buried it out in the ground and let it—

DM:

Ferment?

CC:

Ferment. They'd bring it in, and then they would have—it was really weird. In most of the long houses—this was only one of the ones that—they did this in the long houses only. They would have a big drum, about that big around, maybe that wide.

DM:

About three feet wide; a big drum.

CC:

A drum. They'd beat on it; they'd be having this ceremony during something and saying something, and they'd be beating on that drum, "Boom, boom, boom, boom, boom," and then they had little pan-like things, like a metal pan, and they'd be beating on that with a little stick. They would [imitates sound] and then in the background, "Boom, boom, boom, boom, boom, boom." That was their music.

DM:

Really? This was not a religious ritual, it was just entertainment?

CC:

I don't know what I was. These tribes—each tribe has some different kind of religion. Some were animus, some worshipped the Sun god, stuff like that.

DM:

Did they have shamans? Did they have healers; healers in their community?

CC:

No, not that I know of. They never—I had to have a Vietnamese turn Vietnamese into English for me. They had to have a guy who turned Montagnard to Vietnamese so by the time it got to me it might be something else, or what I say be something different than the Montagnard got it, because it had gone to two different languages: English, Vietnamese and Montagnard. We went to several different kinds of tribes. A lot of times we'd just drive there with this groups, sometimes we'd fly the helicopter. We had a bunch of civilians there doing civic action. They would come into that area and they'd want to do this, this and this. One time they came in there and brought sewing machines.

DM:

Brought sewing machines.

CC:

Brought sewing machines and gave them, you know, these old pedal sewing machines; gave

them that. There were able to teach them how to sew in two days. [laughter] Sometimes they'd—one time they brought in a truckload of barley, so we had to teach them how to cook this barley, which nobody liked, and I'm sure they fed it to the animals later, after we left. One time they brought pigs, they were going to raise pigs.

DM:

These were civilians in this, were they foreign?

CC:

No, they were Americans.

DM:

They were Americans, okay.

CC:

In Ban Me Thuot, we had a local advisor to the police, and he and his wife lived there in Ban Me Thuot. I went to his house a couple times for dinner. They had a Chinese cook a great, great meal. We had a separate group of people from the Defense Intelligence Organization that didn't live in our compound. One of the sergeants shot himself in the head, and I had to get him and a bag. That was a strange story too.

DM:

He committed suicide?

CC:

Yeah. He was going to Hong Kong buying stuff with money that he was supposed to be paying off the Vietnamese with and selling these items to them. This major came to our compound to arrest him, and he put him under house arrest. That night, he shot himself in the head. A day or so later, they told me I had to put him in a body bag and send him to Saigon. My sergeant at the time wouldn't touch it, he couldn't touch dead people. [laugh]

DM:

It was a Vietnamese sergeant?

CC:

No, he was American. He had shot himself like that—

DM:

Oh, no.

CC:

—and his hands were still like that.

DM:

And now *rigor mortis*.

CC:

And so I had to, sort of, break his arm to get him in the bag, and then do that by myself. We got him in the bag and luckily, my sergeant would help me carry the bag. I had some strange sergeants while I was there. One of the guys got bit by a rat, and so the people then, the la Drang, says we need to give him this series of shots where you shoot him in the muscle, in the stomach—you rotate between muscles—and my sergeant wouldn't do it. He said, "I can't do that. You got to be under direct supervision of a physician to give shots like that," so I called them, "Hey, my sergeant won't do that. What should I do?" They said, "Well, kick him in the butt [laughter] and see if that'll make him change his mind." I said, "No, I can't do that, you know what'll happen there." He said, "Just go ahead and do it, and if he has a reaction medevac him over here and we can take him. It won't kill him, he'll just have some kind of reaction. I did. So he came up there every day to the clinic and I shot him. I think we gave nine shots or eight shots or something like that. Even if the rat went rabid [cough] they just give them shots to prevent somebody from getting [inaudible 00:47:02]. That was an answer, and I had this doctor—I think his name was Huric or something like that. He had just gotten out of med school and had done a one-year internship somewhere, and so in their great wisdom, they sent him to Vietnam. Nice enough guy, but he wasn't much of a doctor; he hadn't had enough practice yet, but he did have enough known. One day, a guy came in there, and had this great, big ol' cyst in his behind and he said, "Charlie, why don't you take care of that," I said, "What do I do?" He said—he gave me a scalpel and he said, "Stick that scalpel up in that wound, about that far."

DM:

Three inches?

CC:

About that far. He says, "It's deep, I'm sure, but when you break through it, you'll just go to where you hit the back of it and it'll come out." And boy, I got through it, I got in there—but I know why he had me do it.

DM:

Why?

CC:

It smelled so bad. Oh, jeez, it almost made sick. I said, “Doc, you got me on that one.” He said, “Yeah, I hate to do that kind of stuff.” [laughter]

DM:

Oh, man. Was it always U.S. personnel that you were treating?

CC:

Yeah, except the civilians. We went out and we would look at and see—I tried to get one of the Vietnamese doctors to go with me, sometimes they would.

DM:

Did you treat Montagnard?

CC:

Montagnard, and they had Vietnamese relocation communities that relocated all over the area. They would give them the ground, they could grow their crops and stuff, and we would go to those villages also.

DM:

Was there some concern about the Montagnard, maybe if they weren’t treated right, maybe going to the Viet Cong; issues of allegiance there?

CC:

This was what the Viet Cong would do: they would come into a village, Vietnamese or Montagnard—the Montagnards were not good fighters, the Nuongs were. These people, sort of, kept to themselves, isolationists I guess, in their community. They separated themselves, and the recent history when I was there, there was no conflict between them to speak of. These missionary people had no problem in being with them whatsoever. It didn’t appear to me like there was any type of conflict between the Montagnards and the Vietnamese except the Vietnamese wouldn’t have anything to do with them. They’d treat them like second-class citizens. Soon, we were sort of like here in the 17-1800s where we started taking over the Indian territory. They were in areas where it wasn’t very habitable for the Vietnamese. There wasn’t any problems that way but they were easy to deal with from my—there was always somebody in the village who had been to medical training somewhere and they would provide first aid. Sometimes—

DM:

Fairly decently?

CC:

No, no, no, just rudimentary. It actually went a long way, let me tell you, because these people hadn't had any kind of medication. Most of the time, I was by myself or I had a Vietnamese sergeant with me, who I could always depend on to go with me. He would sometimes get one of the doctors to go, very seldom, or one of the dentists. There was—one of the interpreters we had, had been to dental school but hadn't finished dentistry. He found a patient that needed his tooth pulled, but he refused to pull a tooth, so I had to pull a tooth. He was afraid he'd break the tooth off and he'd die from—bleeding to death. So I said, "Well, I guess we'll take the chance," and so we did it. I guess, also, when you're in that environment, people die and it's not a big thing. It's like this stuff you hear about Syria; the big question is, "Why are all of those civilians there? Why didn't they leave a long time ago?" Usually what happens is the people have the means and have some money and resources, they do leave. I think everybody who owned any type of property and everything, left Cuba. They lost their upper-middle class and middle class population in Cuba. I'm pretty sure if you see forty or fifty children, these are the children of the rebels or people on the other side. When you—I think it's different when they send me to Vietnam, and I'm there as an American in a war-time situation, I have a different perspective than a guy who lives there. If you have no means of leaving the place, where are you going to go? Back in those days, we had no communication with the United States. I never talked to anybody in the United States the whole time I was there.

DM:

You talked—your commander was the full colonel and that's who you communicated with?

CC:

Right.

DM:

Then for medical information, sometimes the MASH unit—

CC:

I could talk to the people in Ia Drang, we had communications with them. And—

[phone vibrates in background]

DM:

I'll pause this if I need to.

CC:

Let me answer this.

[pause in recording]

DM:

You were talking about how you had to step in. You had to step in pretty often when there wasn't a doctor around, or when a doctor didn't want to do a procedure, or a dentist didn't want to pull a tooth. That was kind of an experience for you. How did the Montagnard respond to you if you were treating them? I don't know what kind of treatments you were typically giving them; if it was a broken bone or a disease or a parasite. When you were treating them, what typically was the treatment?

CC:

Aspirin or—mostly we gave them Aspirin.

DM:

For any kind of pain.

CC:

Disease, we didn't worry about. We tried one time, but I had this doctor with me and he gave him a pretty strong antibiotic pill. She took them all at one time, and so she died. She was an old lady. I don't know how old, maybe sixty or seventy. You age much more when you live outside all of the time; skin gets wrinkled and everything, you can't tell. Sometimes we would suggest them to come in to the hospital to see a doctor. In Ban Me Thuot, they had one civilian doctor, and so he saw the local people and, I guess, they could send them to Saigon or someplace like that, they had the means to get there. Otherwise they died.

DM:

Death was a common thing for them, I guess?

CC:

It was part of life.

DM:

This conflict that was building, did it really affect them very much?

CC:

No, no.

DM:

Their life went on pretty much the same, as precarious as ever.

CC:

The Montagnards, evidently the Viet Cong didn't bother them too much because they are uneducated and maybe uncontrollable, and most of them could not speak Vietnamese, or very little.

DM:

And they weren't good fighters, you said.

CC:

They weren't good fighters. Our Special Forces people didn't recruit them. They could get them out of Cambodia; they paid them money. Through the ones they recruited, they could recruit more so they paid them a lot.

DM:

I guess it paid off for the Montagnards to not be very good fighters then, huh? [laughs]

CC:

Well, it depends on how you look at it. Remember, everybody that gets in combat does not get killed.

DM:

And also they were stepped on an awful lot.

CC:

I imagine they were sort of like the United States in the 18-1900s, between us and the Indians, and us and the blacks. They were just second-class citizens and didn't think much of them. This is what—I was going to tell you this a little bit ago—this is what the Viet Cong would do: they would move into the village, and they would write on the walls a sort of a saying, “We live with you—we eat with you, we live with you, we die with you.” Then they would force everybody in the village that was able-bodied to take what they wanted to take to go with them. If they got a lot of opposition from the head guy of the village, they'd kill him; cut the head off, shoot them, whatever they needed to do. They were pretty much brutal and that's the way the Viet—
[stutters]—these soldiers were the same way with the Viet Cong; “As long as I'm not the one being killed, it's okay.” I think—to win a war, you have to take control and maintain control over the territory. You can't be under combat here, go out here two or three times a week, have a little combat, and come back into your compound. You got to be there, you got to live with them, take control, help them maintain control. Why we didn't learn that in Vietnam, I'll never know. We're doing the same thing in Afghanistan now. They could collect intelligence, where our troops were and all of that stuff very easily, follow us around, and keep tabs on us because if they went near a village, somebody in the village would tell them everything they need to know.

A lot of the people who were in the Vietnamese army were raised in north Vietnam, and the Viet Cong had taken over their businesses and this and that and the other, and that's the reason they were in South Vietnam. This Vietnamese sergeant that I dealt with could speak English, no problem. His family had run a newspaper in Hanoi. His family had been killed, he lost his business and everything, and he moved to Saigon and joined the army.

DM:

So, a substantial amount of the population of Saigon were refugees from the North?

CC:

North, yeah. A lot of the leadership people in the army and everything, were in military. The Vietnamese military academy was in Dalat, which was in our territory. I went over there several times, nice place. It looked like North Carolina; had pine trees and everything all around, smelled like North Carolina. Anyway, because of that, a lot of the people in the North Vietnamese Army had been trained at the military academy in Dalat. It had a different deal and I think—when I was there and when I came home I thought, What we needed to do was have a couple divisions of U.S. military come here, and start the South and just go North, run them out. But what we did was we went over there, had real—we had to have refrigerators, and this, and that, and everything like we have here. We can't live without air conditioning, jeez. We set ourselves apart from everybody else, and we tried to convince them that this is way you have to live. We don't adjust to their society. I think that's the reason the Vietnamese in Viet Cong, the North Vietnamese, were so successful because they took control. Then they had enough people in the South where they got complete control, ran us out. I think we have repeated this deal over and over again since Korea. The big difference in Korea is we drew a line, and we established an authority to take over the country side South of that line. The French did that in 1958, however we never did establish a strong enough government to keep out the Viet Cong. I'm pretty sure the Chinese, and the Russians were involved to quite some degree.

DM:

What year did you leave Vietnam now?

CC:

Nineteen sixty-four.

DM:

After that, you really watched this thing heat up from stateside I suppose. Where you stateside then?

CC:

I got of the Army in '68 and one of the main reasons was because I didn't want to have to go back to Vietnam and leave—I had my wife and four kids then.

DM:

I was going to ask you if you had initially intended on being career.

CC:

Yeah.

DM:

You went to the Citadel, you went—

CC:

I probably should have stayed twenty years, that's the best retirement you could ever get. We probably spend more now on military retirement income than we do on active duty military.

DM:

I told my nephew that just the other day, so I'm glad to get some confirmation. I said, "You know,"—he's been in eight years I think so twelve more years.

CC:

Is he enlisted or an officer?

DM:

He's enlisted.

CC:

It's harder to stay in now if you don't get promoted. At all levels now they keep the best, the brightest and the best. If you don't do this, and you don't do that, you don't get promoted and you can re-enlist if you're enlisted.

DM:

I think he's willing to do what he has to do to stay in. He just was questioning, Do I stay in now? Do I get out now? Anyway, so you came back in '64, what did you do after you were out of the Army? You came out to Tech in '75.

CC:

Seventy-five. I stayed in the Army, my last assignment was the Army Surgeon General's Office in Washington, D.C., I came back from Vietnam, I went to Fort Knox, then from Fort Knox I

went to Fort Sam Houston for the advanced course, then I went to the Army Surgeon in Washington, D.C. My next assignment would've been to a base in Maryland, a hospital there. I decided to get out because after that, I would have had to go overseas again, and I didn't want to do that. It was one of those things that—you like choices. I think I made the wrong choice, because I'd been in the Army Surgeon General's Office, I could've gotten sent to graduate school, probably in anywhere I wanted to go. Then I went to—I got out of service in '68 and I joined Westinghouse Electric in Pittsburgh. We moved to Pittsburgh and lived there five years. Things got tough; our group just lived off of government contracts and in '74, '73 to '74-'75, things got really tough. The group I was with in Westinghouse was disbanded and so I got a job with a group selling—leasing from a continental bank group in Chicago, which I vetted, I felt really good. A month after I joined them, they closed down. I could've stayed in Pittsburgh, and gone to graduate school there at the University of Pittsburgh, I had been admitted into their medical hospital and administration program. I got this job at GE [**General Electric**] doing government work again, and the guy who is head of that group, is called GE Tempo, was a personal friend of Melvin Laird, who was the Secretary of Defense. So we got all the contracts we wanted until he died. About two months after I joined the deal, our boss died.

DM:

Golly. A string of bad luck there.

CC:

We did mostly intelligence work in Russia, but I had—I was at a group where we were doing military stuff, primarily. I saw the handwriting on the wall that we were going to close down, so I started looking for a job and luckily, I found one right after I got laid off at the med school here. That's why we moved to Lubbock in '75, in June of '75. I worked for the med school until '78, and then I went into the computer business for myself, I had a company there called Comp Techs.

DM:

You set-up your own company?

CC:

Own company. We did custom software, ran a time-share service for a while, internet business—we went up an internet company, got involved in a cellular start-up deal; cellular phones. And when we started, we had no concept of what the cellular phone was going to move into. I tell you, none whatsoever.

DM:

It's massive.

CC:

Technology's changed beyond our dreams. What we had—I got into the computer business in 1965 when I was in the Army. The group I was with then—

DM:

I was wondering where that came from because you were doing medical throughout this other career, but then all of a sudden all technology oriented.

CC:

The group I was assigned to in the Surgeon General's Office was starting up what they called a "Automated Military Outpatient System," it was called AMOS. The fact is, I thought of that acronym, that was my idea. Anyway, I got involved in computers then, and so then when I went to Westinghouse I was the computer stuff or medical stuff. We had a contract to do the, what we called "the new generation of military hospital." They paid us about a million-four to come up with this concept, and guess what, they never build that hospital. They built a new Walter Reed, and they use our concept to some degree, but they spent five million dollars for another group to come up with a better concept. Now, they want to close down the new hospital they built at Walter Reed, they say it's obsolete. They can't bring themselves to tear down the old hospital. That was the deal. That's what brought me to Lubbock.

DM:

And here you are. From South Carolina, beautiful area, beautiful state. Was there a difficulty in acclimatizing here?

CC:

No, we lived in Hawaii and Pittsburgh. I didn't like Pittsburgh weather because it was so cold and crappy during the winter time. Every time I had to come to Texas I loved it, so it wasn't a hard transition for us to come to Texas.

DM:

It's funny that a lot of people that came to Texas Tech over the years from some very different climate environment stayed and retired here. They got to where they liked it and they might have had some concerns at first—through the first dust storm, but then go, "Hey, pretty decent place to live. Low cost of living."

CC:

You know, I was assigned to San Antonio twice, and I never heard of Lubbock or Texas Tech until I responded to—I was on my two weeks active duty in San Antonio, and I responded to an ad in the San Antonio paper, and about two months later they contacted me.

DM:

The Health Sciences center was brand new about that time wasn't it, '74?

CC:

Actually, it started in about '72. The first class I think started in '72-'73, one or the other. I think by '75 we graduated our first class. We were in Drane Hall primarily, and then—

DM:

While it was being constructed or?

CC:

Before it started construction. Then we moved to Thompson Hall, and part of it's in Thompson Hall and part of it's in Drane Hall. We had that little building with the traffic office, something, between Drane Hall and the SUB [Student Union Building].

DM:

It's the Honor's College now, that small building.

CC:

Is that right? That small building? We had that building, I think that's where we had a lab or something there.

DM:

The bookstore was still across the street there.

CC:

Yeah. Then we had a pharmacy set up in Thompson Hall, and our major patient load was the Student Health Clinic. We were trying establish a deal with Covenant, or Methodist Hospital, which we never did. When I was here, we got started trying to work out a deal with the county for the new hospital. In '76, I think, we started construction of the med school and we moved over there about '78.

DM:

You said you were in the basement?

CC:

Well, we had two locations: we had the computer system down in the basement which was really not a computer, we were a remote job entry station to the computer over here. After I left they got their own computer. I got fed up with the politics within the administration. While we were doing this, I got my masters in management information systems.

DM:

Right here at Tech?

CC:

Right here at Tech.

DM:

Good for you.

CC:

I thought the grass was greener on the other side. I probably should've stayed here, there wasn't any reason for me to leave. I had gotten involved with some customers, and doing stuff on the side, and I just started doing it full time. The thing that changed primarily is the PC [**personal computer**] started a new environment; everybody could have their own computer. When I was taking classes here, we had to use cards.

DM:

I did that. I came out here in '78 and we were doing Fortran cards; punch cards. Then by '85 I had a PC, one of those little Mac 512k's, no hard drive.

CC:

Were you in graduate school or undergraduate school?

DM:

No, I started undergrad in '78.

CC:

In '78? Oh, yeah, I was in graduate school '78. The fact is I graduated in '78. We had to do all cards.

DM:

Did you go over to the computer center there on the engineering key to run your cards?

CC:

Oh yeah. I dropped a box of cards one time in a mud hole out in the parking lot. Oh, that was a mess.

DM:

How terrible. You know, you're right. There's a huge difference between those days and then the PC.

CC:

In the late eighties, I think it was, I bought a hundred megabyte disk drive, about thirty-thousand dollars. That was a huge disk drive at that time, and I thought I was getting a real bargain. Now I can buy a gigabyte for less than ten dollars.

DM:

What they say about the Apollo computers, the computer systems during the Apollo flights, is that they weren't as sophisticated as what you have on a cell phone. [laugh]

CC:

That's true, that's true. A cell phone is far beyond anything we could've conceived of fifty, forty years ago.

DM:

It's truly amazing. It's interesting that your career has lapsed that time. It has seen the beginning of that transition.

CC:

Just think about it; since let's say the thirties or early forties, particularly the thirties, society has advanced more in the last seventy-five years probably than the previous two-thousand years.

DM:

That's right. It makes you wonder what's going to happen in the next twenty years. It's exciting and frightening at the same time.

CC:

Right, yes. I got to go use your—

DM:

I'm finished with my questions. Was there anything else you wanted to add here?

CC:

Let me go to the bathroom real quick.

[end of recording]