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NEW BRUNSWICK

AN INTERVIEW WITH CASPER A. EVERHARD, JR.

FOR THE

RUTGERS ORAL HISTORY ARCHIVES

WORLD WAR II * KOREAN WAR * VIETNAM WAR * COLD WAR

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TRANSCRIPT BY

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Shaun Illingworth: This begins an interview with Casper A. Everhard, Jr., in Matawan, New Jersey, on February 26, 2008, with Shaun Illingworth. Thank you very much for having me here today.

Casper A. Everhard, Jr.: You're welcome.

SI: To begin, could you tell me where and when you were born?

CE: I was born in Jersey City, New Jersey, December 8, 1946.

SI: Can you tell me a little about your parents, beginning with their names?

CE: My father's name is the same as mine, Casper Anthony Everhard, but he was senior, just like … my son's now the third. I just passed the name along, and my mother's name was Virginia, maiden name Lamperti. What else did you want to know?

SI: Can you tell me a little bit about your father's background, where his family came from, how they settled in New Jersey?

CE: As much as I could tell, my father … was raised in West New York, New Jersey. You know where that is?

SI: Yes, directly across the river from Manhattan.

CE: Right. That's where he was raised, and I think his father came from; I'm trying to think of the place in New York. I'm drawing a blank on that name; Hell's Kitchen, [a Manhattan neighborhood], there you go, and he was raised there. … I guess, when he went into the service, [for] World War II, he got out, got married to my mom, and then, we resided in Jersey City, and that's when I was born, in Jersey City. My father worked for a living, with a company called Railway Express. I don't know if you've ever heard of that one. It's like UPS [United Parcel Service]. It was the forerunner of UPS, but it was a big, big company until UPS came out. Anyway, he worked [in] Jersey City, there, loading boxcars and stuff like that. Then, he went into driving a truck around and he got a job down here, in Matawan, he applied for it, and we moved down here in 1957, been here [ever] since. Actually, my mother and father used to live right next-door.

SI: He remained with Railway in Matawan.

CE: Yes. He went to Railway Express in Matawan, which is no longer there. … Actually, where he was working is right where the new train station is. They built right on top of it. There was a little office there and that's where the trucks used to come in, the trains [would] bring in all the packages, and then, he'd deliver them from there.

SI: Did he ever talk to you about his time in World War II?

CE: Oh, yes. I always asked questions, but he had good times. He tells me a little about this place, a girl, up in Walla Walla, Washington, and stuff like that, you know. He was all stateside [during] World War II. He wanted to go overseas, but he had, like I told you before, … the flat feet. So, he did stateside duty, and one of the things he recently told me about is, during World War II, they ran out of bases, [because] there were so many soldiers going into the war. They took over the City of Miami, all the hotels, and used them as barracks. … That was his duty down there for awhile, for I don't know how long, to make sure everything was handled, [that] people went to and from where they were supposed to go, and he was in motor transport, stateside. So, he bounced around a little bit, and then, he got out at [the end of the war], I guess, in 1945. After the end of the war, he got out, and then, he got married, but it was all stateside duty, so, he didn't have any war stories to tell me about, and that's probably why I never talked to him much about Vietnam, because he wouldn't understand it, and World War II and Vietnam were entirely two different wars. I think the two that were the closest is Korea and Vietnam, except the climates were a hundred percent different.

SI: What about your mother and her family background?

CE: Well, I'm not quite [sure]. I know my mother was born in the Bronx, and … she started getting raised in Staten Island, right by the Verrazano-Narrows Bridge. Both her parents came over on some boat, somewhere along the line, from Italy. They were both Italian. I don't know the exact stories behind it, but they bounced around a lot. Her father was a carpenter, her mother was a homemaker, a good cook, too, little Italian, your typical little Italian grandmother. I don't know, if you ever see them, they're cute, and they bounced around. I remember, they had houses, like, up in Chester, [New Jersey], and that being the end of the line; they wound up back in Staten Island and they died off. … My mother, well, prior to my father, she was married and had two kids, and then, I guess they got divorced, and then, my father married her. He already had a readymade family of two kids, and then, they went along and made four more, me being the first of four, and the only boy, though. The rest are three girls. So, like I said, he was a carpenter. They worked in Staten Island, but my mom, during World War II, helped build the PT boats, right there along the water in Staten Island, which I found really interesting. [Editor's Note: PT boats, small, fast, motorized torpedo boats used by the US Navy during World War II, were manufactured by the Electric Launch Company (Elco) in Bayonne, New Jersey, across from Staten Island.] You remember, [when] you go by there; I think about it all the time when I go up by the river there, over the Bayonne Bridge. … She said that's where she had built the PT boats, and they were made out of plywood and stuff. So, that was interesting to me, and, other than that, she worked her whole life, too, as a seamstress. I mean, with all those kids, they had to do something, to make things better for us. So, they, the parents, worked and worked and worked and worked; … a hundred percent difference than the way I raised my family. … I was pretty much raised by my bigger sister, because my parents were [busy]; one was always working, if not both. So, when I raised my family, I wanted to make sure I was always around, and my wife always around, for our kids, and my kids are still here. I can't get rid of them. They're your age, maybe older. My son's thirty-something. He's still here, but, anyway, I had a good upbringing. I don't regret anything. It was hard. I was a street boy, pretty much, learned a lot off the streets, because you're bored and that's the only [thing to do]. You had no parents around to teach you, so, you found what you had to do and amused yourself.

SI: Were your earliest memories of Jersey City or are most of your memories of Matawan?

CE: I have good memories all the way [back] to Jersey City. … Back then, we used to do what they called garbage picking and stuff, because we didn't have nothing to go around. So, we went around to garbage cans and, … [if] somebody'd throw away good toys and stuff like that, you'd bring them home and you played with them. To you, it was like gold, like having something new. Anything we had was almost [always] second-hand, even when my parents gave us stuff. I mean, I can remember there, up to thirteen, fourteen years old, getting used clothes from my cousin, up in West New York. He would get these clothes and bring them down to me a year later, because they were out of style up there. … To me, it was brand-new, down here, and I loved wearing them. But, we learned to appreciate everything we got. I mean, if it wasn't second-hand used; very rarely did you get something new. I mean, maybe a Communion outfit or something like that might be new, but your regular clothes, you got all hand-me-downs. … I had to get mine from the cousin, because my brother and I were so different in years, I guess, his clothes [did not] fit me. By the time he got done with them, they were abused anyway, because his [wardrobe] was second-hand used, too, but it was a good upbringing. We learned how to stretch a buck. … For example, if you wanted milk, back in the early '50s or the mid-'50s, my father used to buy powdered milk and mix it. Powdered milk, you mix it with water, and then, you used that and you mix it half with milk. That's how we made milk stretch longer. So, like I said, … I remember how it was to stretch a buck. Like, he [my father] tells me [that] when I was born, the only thing they could afford was a basement apartment and it was in Jersey City and my first bed was a dresser drawer. That's what my crib was. I don't remember any of that; I just go by what he says. But, [as] much as I recollect [about] Jersey City, though, is, I used to be with the kids, run around the streets, play stickball, stoopball, climb fences, climb on top of garages, what all kids do, get into a little mischief. … [When I was] eleven years old, we moved down here, and, when we moved from Jersey City down here, it was a culture shock to me, because I went from being in a city to a place that had cows. I mean, I only lived over here in River Gardens. I don't know if you're familiar with it, but, anyway, where the A&P was, is now, over here.

SI: Okay, on the highway, [Route 35].

CE: … Yes. That used to be a big apple orchard and peach orchard, going all the way down the road, and we used to pick apples and peaches and get shot at by the farmer and stuff like that. When he caught us trying to steal, he would shoot his shotgun [loaded] with the rock salt, especially when we messed with his cows, but there were pebble roads. … There wasn't many paved roads, and [they had] street lights with light bulbs exposed that we used to throw rocks at and break the street lights, get a kick out of it. Then, the electric company [would] come down the next day, replace them. [The] next day, we'd throw rocks at them, break them again. This was just boring stuff that we did as kids. … For baseball and stuff, we played baseball, we made our own ball fields, over there in River Gardens, because they didn't have any fields, so to speak of. They had one field, but not for as many kids as we had around in River Gardens. There were a lot of kids that we hung around [with], so, we made our own in the swamp, or something like that, and we couldn't even afford a baseball. We had a baseball and the cover got torn off. We couldn't buy one, so, what we would do is take electric tape and tape it around the ball and made it salvageable, and that's how we played ball. I mean, it seems like, you know, kids today, if they

lose a ball, they won't even go get it, if it goes over the fence. … I look at them and I say, you know, "That's not the way. It's a waste of money."

SI: Were most of the other residents in River Gardens families with, like your father, a father who had been a GI?

CE: Yes, I think everybody. … I believe that whole development over there was built for the veterans, and I don't know if it was; I don't think it was Levitt. [Editor's Note: Mr. Everhard is referring to Levitt and Sons, a building firm that created suburban communities, "Levittowns," across post-war America.] It was somebody else that built River Gardens. It might have been Levitt, but, anyway, that was one of the first ones down here, and it's very small houses, as you can see, and everybody over there was a veteran, now that you mention it. They were all veterans, and, yes, I never thought of it that way. I guess those veterans all stick together. … After World War II, there was the "Baby Boom" and Baby Boom means houses, … just like the Baby Boomers now need medicines and you see all these drugstores coming up. So, by the time you get old like that, there are going to be plenty of drugstores. [laughter] What else?

SI: I would be interested in any other memories you have of that neighborhood and growing up in this nuclear family-style neighborhood.

CE: Well …

SI: It sounds like the typical small town life.

CE: It was the typical thing. Yes, we were mischievous, we amused ourselves, and some parents would take the time to spend their time [with the kids]. Very few had time to spend with the kids, but … we learned to go where it was affordable. Like I said, we made our own ball fields where we played ball. We played football. We would go swimming in the creek. … When we used to swim in that creek, there used to be a sewer plant down there and, when it rained, that sewer plant would overrun and go into the creek. So, we were swimming and these turds are going down the river and we'd just push them out of our way. This is right by the bridge here. That's how nasty it was back then. We didn't care, but I look back at it now, you know, back at the years, jumping off the bridge and into the river. One guy got killed down there, because he got hung up in some concrete that was under the water [that] we didn't know about, a kid we went to school with, but we didn't learn any[thing]. Everybody just kept doing the same thing anyway. But, if you see feces going down; I would never jump in that water now. I mean, I know better now. But, back then, kids, you didn't care; just like there used to be a brick factory, right by the Parkway, and they had tunnels that were under the ground. Well, half of them were caved in and we'd try to explore the other half. Luckily, they never fell in on us, but it was just mischievous things. [We would] go sleigh riding in the woods, you had to make your own paths, crashed into the trees, you know.

SI: Was there anything more organized, like Little League or Boy Scouts?

CR: They had one Little League team, but most of us guys weren't good enough to make it, or didn't really care to. We liked playing more recreational-wise. Some of the guys that did play;

they only had one field, though, there, and that was the Cliffwood Angels. … That was started [by], all I remember is [he was] the chief of police, not even the chief, he was just a cop, probably, back then, Frank Churney. I think he, pretty much, is the one that started up all these ball teams over there. So, the guys that were better could make the team. If not, you'd just get up there and watch them, and then, you go back and play your own ball. I mean, you amuse yourselves. We did a lot of bicycle riding, you know, if you had a bike. I mean, a bike was never handed to you brand-new. My first bike, my father put together from pieces that he found all over the place, and he, him and I, painted it. It looked brand-new and they had a fair one day, over there in Cliffwood, and he told me, "Don't take it to the fair." I took it to the fair, and somebody stole it. He was furious. I was terrified. I mean, I was brought up disciplined. I believe I was pretty much punished for that. I mean, my father used to hit you with a strap, things you'd go to jail for now, cat o' nine tails, and, if you got into a fight, he made you stick in it through the end. If you're late for dinner, you suffered the consequences, like getting hit over the head with a pot, [imitating his father], "Late for dinner again." Yes, it's all kid stuff. [We] walked to school. I went to Cliffwood schools, so, that wasn't too bad, but walking to Matawan High School, from Cliffwood, … that was a challenge. … They did have busing, but there were times you missed the bus [and] you had to walk, because there was no secondary bus and there was no such thing as people having two cars, four cars in the yard, where you can get a ride. You had to walk to school.

SI: It was not where it is now, was it?

CR: What's that, [the] high school?

SI: The high school.

CR: Actually, yes.

SI: It was in the same place, [450 Atlantic Avenue, Matawan, New Jersey].

CE: Yes, because I went to the old high school for awhile, it was only one year, and then, I went into the new high school, and it was the same thing in Cliffwood, in the grammar school. I went to the old grammar school first, then, I went to the new school, right next-door. It seems like every time I went to a school, they built a new one, but, now, it's still the same schools. What I say is new is what's existing and used now. So, they had busing and stuff. I mean, you know, it was good. High school was pretty good, but I never finished high school. I got hooked up with the wrong guys, all these street guys and stuff, you know. I guess I played hooky too much and stuff, so, they asked me to quit, and so, I had to quit. So, I quit and my father says, "You quit, you go to work," and he made me go to work. So, I had to get a job, and, I guess, about a year after that, our school class graduated, because I guess it was about the junior year that I quit. … Then, they were drafting everybody for [the] Vietnam War, because it was started, and, from there on, you can keep going. I could keep going and going and going. …

SI: Before we get into Vietnam, in general, what did you think of your education in Cliffwood and Matawan?

CR: Looking back at it? I was a good student in grammar school. Education in high school, I think if I would [have] applied myself more, [rather] than trying to goof off, I probably would have done well. Do I regret dropping out? Not really, because I got my GED [General Equivalency Diploma] in the service, but, even with that, nobody even asked for proof if you graduated high school or not, and college wasn't an option. I wouldn't even think about college. I had enough trouble with high school. I was willing to just go out and work for a living. But, grammar school, I thought, was the greatest. …

SI: Was there any particular area that you enjoyed more than another, maybe the sciences or math?

CR: I was good with art. I liked the art. I liked history. I hated English, math, stuff like that. So, I guess that's all hands-on stuff. It was more hands-on. In, say, grammar school, they offered it, they had art classes, and they were great. History, sciences were okay, but, like I say, math was just grueling, and sports, I was never good at, so, you just did your gym classes and stuff like that. I mean, the first time I ever picked up a bat in grammar school, I threw the bat by accident. It came out of my hand and broke a guy's nose. [laughter] I swear, the guy was going to kill me for three years afterwards, was a big, tall, black guy. I don't know, I guess I was little then, anyway, but he was a big guy, but, still, it wasn't the thing to do. I mean, you threw the bat, you broke the guy's nose, they're going to reciprocate at you. … Nothing ever did come out of it. I mean, they were great guys. … Naturally, when you're doing it, … everybody you go to school with moves on to the next school with you, so, they always stayed together. … I guess I was not that great at sports. I just participated to have things to do, but, even in high school, I tried to go out for sports teams. I'd wind up warming the bench or things like that, basketball, baseball. I never tried football, because I was too short and skinny. What I was good at was running, and I never did try [out] for track. I was one of the best runners in River Gardens. Nobody could catch me. I guess that's from the city, learning how to run, plus, I was light, real skinny. They say I was the fastest kid around, and nobody could catch me, but I never capitalized on that either.

SI: Did you have to go out and work when you were in high school, or even grammar school?

CR: No. I had a paper route, … not a paper route, pretty much a magazine route, to make money for myself. I mean, money was very hard to come by. So, if you needed money, as you got older, you had to find a way of trying to make it, somehow. So, I had a magazine route and I made pretty good money on that, kept me in money when I was a kid. I mean, even at seventeen, when I got my first car, I mean, we had to save up money to get your first car, or barter, or something like that, to get a car. Then, to put gas in it, all the guys would have to get together and try to come up with twenty-five cents for a gallon of gas, and we'd ride that gallon of gas until we ran out, and then, try to get another twenty-five cents, but that's how things worked back then. … You look back at it now, it was really, really, cute, even though, you know, [you had to] borrow money to get from point "A" to point "B." … Like, say, my first car, … a buddy and I, down the street, … we wanted to buy this car and I had some money and he had a battery. Well, I needed the battery, so, we went partners on the car, by him supplying the battery and I bought the car, and the car was, I guess, maybe fifteen bucks. It was, like, a '49 Ford, great car.

SI: Only fifteen bucks?

CR: Yes, about fifteen bucks we paid for the car, yes. It sounds like, "Wow, yes," but that's earlier, in the early '60s. It was a '49 Ford. We beat the hell out of it, painted the whole thing up. We wanted to paint the car, so, I painted it with a brush, black. My father [said], "It'll look good, it'll look good." It didn't come out bad. My buddy got a kick out of it, though, meeting out there with a can of paint, painting the car with a brush, but it made it all one color, so, it was presentable. … We both partied with it, got in a lot of trouble with that, too, you know, go around, running over mailboxes, hitting garbage cans, stupid stuff that you shouldn't do. We used to go through Holmdel, "Let's go for that mailbox." "Boom," the mailbox would go flying, hit them with a bat. Then, we hit a garbage can one night, intentionally, and it wrapped in the fender well and we almost didn't get away from the guy. We had to keep going down the road with this thing wrapped up, with the smoke coming out of the tire and the guy chasing us down the street. He didn't catch us, but I think … we changed our ways after that. … When you're bored, I guess, like I say, we always had to find ways to amuse yourself, and we did some terrible things with cars. I mean, back then, you could do things that you couldn't do now. [To] give you a perfect example, … when all the guys had cars, and they were a little bit better [class] of car, we'd get on the Parkway here and get up to about seventy-five miles an hour and get the cars side-by-side, about this far apart, [about a foot]. Guys would get out of one car and get into the next car, while … we're going. That wasn't good enough, after just going from window to window. Then, it was the challenge to go from the opposite window, up over the roof, and then, into the car. We did these things, stupid. I mean, it's like these guys "subway surfing" now, you know. … I never told my kids about … that story, though, about the switch, changing cars, God forbid. We did stupid stuff. I mean, that's what happens … when you're bored. Would you ever try something like that?

SI: No.

CR: I don't think so, and I think the people that were on the highway and seeing us do that [were] probably terrified, "Look at these crazy kids." We were; we were just crazy. So, we really never harmed anybody.

SI: It seems as if you could get away with more stuff because it was a more rural environment. There were not as many people or police around.

CR: Right. You probably had about six cops in this town, and even the State Police were not [as large]. You wouldn't [have] had anything of anybody, because … nobody lived down here, really. Like I said, it was still "cow country." It did start [to grow], I guess in the '60s, the later '60s. They built Strathmore, [a section of Matawan (now Aberdeen) Township], and stuff like that, and that's when they really started building up around here, and it just keeps getting more crowded and more crowded. … Like I say, I did things, like my father did the same thing, back in the '20s. … You used to slide down city streets, … sleigh ride all the way down through a boulevard, I mean blocks, city blocks. You couldn't do that now. You couldn't even ride a bike down the hill. So, it's all the same thing. The more people you get on the roads, the less things you can do. Back then, … when he was born, they probably didn't even have a car, you know,

and, if they did have a car, they very rarely used it, one car. Now, everybody's houses have four and five, right? Just like TVs; how many TVs [are] in your house?

SI: A lot.

CE: Computers; I've got, like, five computers in my house. It's just technology, and you couldn't live without it.

SI: Was the church important to your family or you growing up?

CE: Church, we were always going to church, St. Joe's Church, right here. It played an important part. I mean, I wasn't really that religious, back as a kid. I mean, you know, all kids don't really care too much about religion, but I went to church functions and stuff like that, like they used to have dances over here, at St. Joe's. … They were CYO [Catholic Youth Organization] dances and there was a priest in there and he used to get all the kids that lived around here. There used to be a bowling alley across the street. Matawan/Keyport Bowling Alleys used to be here, and, if he was able to beat you in a game of pool, or something like that, which he would do, he made you go to Adoration, Eternal Adoration, down in Red Bank, and stuff like that, crazy [times], late nights, in the morning, I mean, but these were things [we did]. [Editor's Note: Mr. Everhard is referring to the practice known as Eucharistic Adoration or Perpetual Adoration, when practiced all day, in which a congregation "adores" (meditates, prays near, etc.) the host or Blessed Sacrament.] If he could beat you at this game that we were playing, he made you do something religious. It was cool, in a way. … [At] the dances, he was, like, … on guard there. I remember, he used to walk around with a flashlight and, if you got unruly, he'd beat somebody with a flashlight. He was a tough priest. I think he was a street-smart priest. So, you learned to respect him. He worked with the guys, and not just my age group, the older guys, too. He would do the same thing with the older guys. … I think he earned our respect, but, … same thing, he got us all to pay a little bit more attention to religion. These dances were the only things to go to. … Actually, that's where I met my wife, was down at one of those dances, and she was only [from] the other side of the highway, in Keyport, but I would have never went out with her back then, because she was [from a different world]. I was, like, what they called a "nork." I don't know if you know what that is.

SI: No.

CE: You know, like "the Fonz," leather jackets, those dress pants, long hair, you know, sweep back. [Editors Note: The "Fonz," or Arthur Herbert Fonzarelli, was a fictional character played by Henry Winkler on the hit American television show *Happy Days* (1974-1984).] We were cool, you know, the Italian look, very meticulous in the way I dressed, and she was more of a home-kept girl, harbored by her parents, never allowed to go to anything. … As a matter-of-fact, the first time I went out [with her], or after I started going out with her, her father went, and he knew everybody in town, … I found out, years later, had me investigated by all the police, to find out what type of guy I was.

SI: Really?

CE: Yes. … I had to earn their respect, too. [laughter]

SI: What was the term you used, "nork?"

CR: Yes, yes. … There was norks and there was, like, the "collegians," which were the people that dressed in madras and stuff like that. It was completely opposite of the way we were. So, either you were a collegian or you weren't. … Naturally, we, the leather jacket guys, were the norks. Well, like that, like I said, like the Fonz and stuff, the way he dressed, that's the best example, … like a little mixture of the late '50s and still carried into the '60s, early '60s. … I guess that was until about 1965. Then, everything changed after that.

SI: Did you have a name for your group, besides norks?

CR: No. It wasn't really a name for the group. That was just the style of dress, you know, the type of dress we [would] wear. We were the guys that didn't put up with anything. … It was pretty much, like I say, like a street gang look, but we really weren't bad, like a city street gang. We didn't go out and beat anybody with chains and stuff like that. There were a few guys around and we'd get involved with that. Somebody would hit somebody with a bat. … Yes, that would happen, but I myself would never resort to something like that, but other guys that only hung out with the group, they would … use it. So, it was a fine line. I mean, you just didn't go out and use a bat. If you thought it was going to be a fair fight, you just do a fair fight. …

SI: When you got into fights, was it just the norks and the collegians, or were there other groups?

CR: No, no. It was actually [the] same kind of group against the same kind of group, just from a different area of town, because the collegians were more, I guess, off, going to college, that type, and we were street people. … That was the mixture. You couldn't mix them together. … My wife sort of wore some of those clothes and stuff like that, but it was all right if you went out with a girl like that, but you couldn't hang around with guys like that. You'd be shunned by your group, and you didn't want to do that.

SI: What were the rival areas?

CR: Yes, like, we were from River Gardens, and Cliffwood Beach had their own, Keyport had their own, Oak Shades had their own, where I'm at now. This was Oak Shades. So, each area had their own, you might say "turf," but, like I say, nothing to do with, like, the city stuff today, where they go out and shoot you if you're on the wrong side of the street. It wasn't that way, but everybody knew [that] you don't go from here to there without some kind of permission, so-to-speak. You don't go … from here and use their ball field over there. You can't do that.

SI: The clothing obviously set you apart, but was it also that, say, this group was Irish and this group was Italian?

CR: No, not really. Everybody was mixed, except this area here, because this was all an Italian neighborhood, Oak Shades. … It was just because all the Italians lived here, that's why it was

Italian. But, that … went on for years. … Even when my father-in-law was a kid, it was that way. Anyone from Keyport couldn't go through Matawan and anyone from Matawan couldn't go through Keyport, and they fought if you crossed the turfs. That's what they told me. I mean, so, all we did was really carry on the tradition, but not on a bigger scale than what they [did]. They were pretty big back then. They were really tough, just for going through the town, you weren't allowed to go from Keyport to Matawan, Matawan to Keyport. They knew … who belonged where back then, because everybody knew everybody.

SI: Yes, very small towns.

CR: Yes. I mean, I used to go through town, even [up to the] mid-'70s, I knew everybody in town. I'd go and wave and stuff like that, you know, you're waving to everybody. Now, you go through town, you're lucky [if] you know anybody. I miss that. I mean, [if] I'd go out of the house, I could leave my doors open; you can't do that no more. … I still have a lot of faith in people, until you burn me once, and then, look out. Don't mess with me after that. I mean, I'm not the same guy as I used to be twenty, thirty years ago. I mean, I'm more laid back now. … I think that happens in time.

SI: You grew up in the shadow of what people called "the Red Scare," when the Soviet Union was a major threat and people were afraid of nuclear war.

CE: Oh, yes.

SI: What do you remember about your own personal experience, in regards to schooling or other activities?

CR: The nuclear war part, that was actually all just prior to the Vietnam Era, but I do remember the monkeys going up in the shuttles [space capsules], you know, the satellites and stuff like that, and I remember seeing it in the paper, and I felt bad for the monkeys. [laughter] I really did. I mean, they put them in that little thing and they sent them up there, to see whether they would [survive]. They were guinea pigs, and I'm never one for [taking lives]; … taking lives is hard. … They used them for guinea pigs, but [that was] the best thing I remember about all of it, and I wasn't worried about nuclear war. I really could care less. I mean, what are you going to understand as a kid? A war is war. Yes, they were making … these shelters, holes in the ground, shit like that. [If] something happens, you crawl in whatever hole you want to crawl into, if you had to do it. … If you survived a war like that, when would you be [safe]? You'd have to come out twenty, thirty years later, if that. You aren't going to stay in a hole for twenty, thirty years and live, I don't care what you've got down there. But, I remember building models of them, the spaceships, with the satellite. They were pretty tall. I used to make models to pass time, you know, like a hobby, go to the store, save up money and go to store and buy one every couple months, but, as for the nuclear part, with the threats and all that, I could care less. I didn't even know about Vietnam until after I was there. Really, … I didn't even follow it. What? It didn't pertain to me. I mean, really, probably, … didn't really care. All we were worried about, pretty much, was partying as much as you could, go sneak and get a bottle of wine somewhere or something, as a kid, you know, smoke cigarettes where you didn't belong, stupid stuff like that.

SI: Did they have drills, either in the town or in your school, for example, duck and cover?

CE: I can't remember that. … I've seen it on TV, but I don't remember doing it myself. I think my wife said something about that; they used to tell you to get under your desk, which, I think, is a stupid thing anyway. If the roof's going to fall in, you get under your desk, what's that desk going to do for you? … I remember, they had fallout shelters in all the schools, though, down in the basements. I think that's pretty much where they were pretty much told to go, was down to these fallout shelters. They had, like, I guess it was a triangle on the building, showing you how you follow the signs to go to a fallout shelter, but that was really just getting into somebody's basement. If you really look back at it now, that's all it was, getting to the lowest point in the ground. … They did the best … they could with what they had. I mean, [the] technology wasn't there to address it back then, and still not around to address it. If you thought it was going to be the end of the world with an A-bomb, yes, it could have been. I mean, you've seen it in the paper, mushroom things [clouds]. What are you going to do? The best thing to do is bend over and kiss your ass good-bye. That's all you can do. [laughter] Really, that's the way I feel about it. It's like anything else. You've got to look at it openly; I mean, when it's your time to go, you're going to go.

SI: When you left school and went to work, where did you go to work?

CE: … Actually, my father got me a job, by pulling strings. Well, actually, that wasn't my first job, but he did get me into Railway Express. My first job I went [to] is to where my sister and mother worked as a seamstress, and I wound up sweeping floors and delivering materials to the women on the sewing machines and stuff like that. I did that for awhile, for, I guess, about a year, and then, my father got me into the Railway Express. He had to pull strings, because I wasn't good with testing and stuff. So, he helped me along with the test. Anyway, he got me into it, and then, the service came up, and the only good thing about that is, when I left that job to go into the service, they guaranteed me that same job when I came back. I think that was a contractual thing with the company, which not everybody had that offer. It was a good job, though. I mean, it paid good money, I mean, to me.

SI: What were you doing? Were you loading trucks?

CE: [When] I started, yes, I would load trucks, to start with, and then, they made me a driver, where you load your own truck, and then, you do your route. … See, my dad was working in Matawan, but … he got me a job up in New Brunswick, and I loved it up there, doing those jobs, because it was like delivering [on] college campuses. Douglass College, you know Douglass? It was all girls back then. We used to get their trunks, to deliver them, and I was a young guy; I fit right in with them. I loved bringing those trunks to the colleges, because those girls answered their doors, they didn't give a shit what they were wearing, if they had anything on. It was something, going on to the all-girl campus. [laughter] … I think they just liked teasing you, as a driver. … Not all of them, but it was great to see. I mean, of course, you didn't get a tip, but you enjoyed the sights. [laughter] But, anyway, off of that, I mean, that was actually my route area, was all up in Edison and stuff like that. … I ran all the businesses in a circle, just like, like I said, UPS does today. They go around, pick up everywhere. Then, you bring them back to the office at the end of the day and you start all over the next day, bring out the old, bring them in,

and pick up the new going out. … Sometimes, you'd have to carry a gun on you, if you had gold to deliver. I used to have to deliver gold, … which was stupid. I mean, they'd give you these gold bars, and they were heavy, and it didn't happen that often when they were given to you, but you had to deliver it. I hated doing that, not so much carrying a gun; shit, I'd probably shoot myself with a gun back then. I mean, there were no qualifications. They just gave you a gun, say, "Here, you've got to carry it." There's no permits, no education. I never fired a gun in my life and they give you this gun. Like I say, it was only a couple of times, but I guess it was just in case somebody wanted to rob the gold you were delivering. I thought that was a kind of stupid way of doing it.

SI: Were you delivering the gold to a bank?

CE: I don't know if it was a bank or it was a jeweler, or something like that. I really don't know, and then, there was, like, coins, that we used to go to a coin place and deliver coins; ammunition places with ammunition, I mean, we carried anything and everything, you name it. They'd deliver caskets, not that I ever had to do that, but they delivered anything. If you put it in a box, they would deliver it, but gold was interesting. Like I say, my route was up there in Edison and, like, I used to go to the Raritan Center and I used to like going in there. I mean, it was abandoned back then. It wasn't even a college, I mean, because part of it was a college, up close to Edison. I guess that's Middlesex County College now.

SI: I believe so, yes.

CE: Anyway, it was abandoned bunkers and stuff like that, and I used to like riding through there, just looking at the bunkers, say, "Wow, this is pretty cool." So, yes, I had a lot of jobs when I was a kid, a lot, a lot of jobs. … Yes, I did the sewing machine place. … I think somewhere in-between that [time period], I worked for the GSA, [General Services Administration], I think it was. I don't know if you know what that is. It was like a government job and it was in Raritan Center, and I think it only lasted, like, a week, the job. It was, like, putting these military coat racks together. You ever seen them, or you go to the store, even businesses, they're all gray and they usually screw together, stuff like that? It was all stuff that they had to assemble there and ship somewhere else, and I guess I wasn't good enough, because I got fired within a week, [laughter] and then, like I say, my dad got me another job at Railway Express. … That was the one that was supposed to carry me through my life, but that didn't work out.

SI: What prompted you to look into the Marine Corps?

CE: Well, as far as I recollect with the Marine Corps, prior [to] getting out of high school, we got our draft notices, because we weren't going to college. [In] our whole graduating class, everybody [who] didn't go to college got drafted into the Army, and, naturally, being drafted, I think it was about three or four months' notice that they would give you, that you're going to be inducted on such-and-such a date. … There was another guy that was a buddy of mine, named George (Tappin?), at the time, and he was the roughest guy in my group and we were hemming and hawing around. He says, "Oh, shit," he says, "going in the Army, why do you want to go in the Army? Let's go in the Marines." So, he says, "Yes, we'll go in the Marines." "Yes," I said,

… "if this Vietnam thing is going on," I said, "at least we can learn to do it with the best," and he says, "Yes, we can go in on the buddy program." Well, long story short, I pursued it and he bailed out. He went in the Army and I went into the Marines. [laughter] … I think, looking back at it, I was stuck with it, because I felt that, number one, if I had to go to the war, the best group to join, to go to war with, would be the Marines. They had the reputation, and I thought I was tough enough. About 135 pounds, soaking wet, that's about what I was, and I said, "Well, the only difference is, I've got to enlist for four years," I said, "but that's like four years of college," I said. "Well, if I enlist for four years," the Vietnam War was just starting, I said, "well, they won't send me to Vietnam right away. They'll wait until my fourth year." By then, I figured the war would be over, and that's really what I thought. So, I went into boot camp, and did everything I did, became the Marine I was supposed to be, and I was proud of myself. I mean, I wished my family would have gone to my graduation, but they just weren't into that sort of thing. … My cousin had just graduated, I think, two weeks before me. He went into the Marines also, and I'd seen him while I was at boot camp down there, and his parents had gone to his graduation. So, I was a little upset. I never told my parents how upset I was that they didn't come down to this. I thought, … you know, I didn't graduate high school, but I did graduate this, and I think it was tougher to graduate from boot camp than going through school. They had no idea what I was doing, going through, down there. I mean, we wrote back and forth and stuff. Boot camp was the toughest thing I ever did in my life. That was very, very hard; go ahead.

SI: Could you tell me about the process of going down, signing up, how they got you down to Parris Island?

CE: Oh, you want to go real into little details, real little details. Well, I guess I enlisted in about November or October or November of '65, knowing that I had to go into the Marines [by] February 2nd of '66, and I went to the recruiter down in Red Bank, [where] they were at the time, and he's the one that processed all the paperwork. … We had a draft card back then, where you had your classifications, … and I was 1-A, which means you're guaranteed that you were going into the service anyway, and I didn't want to go in the Army. So, he had to straighten all that out, to make sure the Army knew that they weren't going to get me. … Well, on the day I had to leave, I had to report down to Red Bank, which was February 2nd of '66, and they drove us up to Newark. Now, I don't remember how exactly we got there, whether it was by bus, I think it had to be by bus, or a van. I really don't recall that, but I know it was snowing like hell that day and they got us there. There was a lot of snow in Newark. … Then, we went into this building in Newark, and then, you got scared in there. You were seeing what was really happening. I mean, they had guys lined up all the way, like you're going to prison or some shit. I mean, it was really regimented. I mean, I think, from that point on, I didn't know what I was getting into. … They would line you up as to where you were going and they would assign a guy to be in charge of all the guys that were going to South Carolina, Parris Island, because there's only two boot camps in the Marine Corps. One was California and one was Parris Island, South Carolina. I didn't even know where boot camp was. I'd never been [out of New Jersey], … never been on a plane, and here we were, there, getting ready to get on a plane. They were going to bring us to Newark Airport.

SI: You mentioned that you had a cousin that had gone into the Marine Corps. Did you have any idea what the Marine Corps might be like?

CR: No, not really. All I knew [was] it was the toughest. … I didn't even know my cousin had joined until I was in, and he happened to be in the class right before me. … I was in Platoon 336; I can't remember what one he was in. I don't even know if it was the same barracks, but I had seen him. Yes, he had to have [been in] the same barracks, because I'd seen him cleaning his clothes, but I couldn't talk to him; probably was … from me to you away from him and you weren't allowed to talk. So, you'd try. You do your little bits, just like being in prison, you know, and everything, "Hey, how you doing?" … You don't want to get caught talking, because, there and then, you'd be in trouble. You'd be doing a lot of pushups or something to that effect, just like they play with you with cigarettes and stuff. … They would challenge you with cigarettes. I mean, [as a] matter-of-fact, I smoked back then, [but] I quit when I went to boot camp, because I knew they were going to play a mind game with cigarettes. So, I just said, "The hell with it, I won't smoke at all," and that's what they did. They played a mind game with cigarettes, and a lot of other things, they played mind games with, but that was … actually their thing. You look back at it, that's what it was. They were [trying] to break you down to nothing, and that's what they did. They broke you down to nothing. They beat me for wearing a medal that I wasn't supposed to be wearing. Naturally, they didn't beat me in front of everybody. They brought me in the little room, drill instructors' room, there and they beat me about the stomach, called your mother a whore, God is nothing, anything they could think of to break you down.

SI: Were you wearing a religious medal?

CE: Yes, and I wasn't supposed to be wearing a religious medal with my dog tags. Now, I still wear my dog tags, but I … have them gold plated, but that's now, but, back then, I still had my religious medal on. It's underneath, but, back then, because of that, they beat me, around the stomach, and all I kept thinking is, "They can't kill me. They're not going kill me," and they just did what they did and I took their punishment, and I took the medal off. Three days later, I put it back on, but I never got caught again. I was just thick-headed. …

SI: You mentioned the line of guys.

CR: Oh, yes, the line of guys waiting. They line us up there. Guys swallowed stuff, so [that] they could fail. They were swallowing tin foil. They would roll it up into balls. … I guess they figured it would show up as an ulcer or something. I don't know what the hell it would show up as. Guys would wear wool blankets, trying to get rashes, because they didn't want to go into the service. I mean, it's a terrifying thing to go into the service. Here I was, the opposite way, I wanted to go, because it was going to be something different, and it didn't work out that way. I mean, … they were lined up, they would go to [the men], "All right, all you guys are Army. The Marines are over here." Well, the Marines needed a few more guys and they went to the Army line, "You, you, you and you, Marine Corps." They didn't want to be in the Marines. … They didn't want to be in the Army, let alone the Marines, but they had to go, but the only difference was, when they were assigned, like, "You, you and you," to go with the Marines, all us Marines that enlisted were four years; the guys that they picked out of line were only two years, and they paid that price, too. By the time they hit boot camp, they would know who the two-year Marine was and who the four-year was and they would pick on the two-year guys a bit more so than the four-year guys, because I guess they considered them "part-time Marines," and they were going

to be a real Marine. … You weren't called a Marine until after you graduated anyway, [in] boot camp, we were always called "girls." "Hey, girls," and they used some kind of foul language; I mean, "Whew."

SI: The men who were trying to get out of it by swallowing tin foil, were they guys just trying to get in the Army?

CE: They just didn't want to go into the service. They were more in, I would say, the Army [line], because everybody in the Marines line wanted to go. Not that they wanted to go into the war, they just wanted to join the Marines. … I guess we all knew something was going to be happening and we thought it'd be safe, but we found out, at the end of boot camp, well, actually, [in] all the training, that you wound up going right to Vietnam. It took a long series [of events] before we got there. It seems like a long time, but it was a sequence of events that led up to it. I mean, you took aptitude tests and stuff like that when we were in Newark, and then, we took more tests when we were in Parris Island. … Well, anyway, getting from Newark to the airport was a challenge, too, because they had to get a bus, and they assigned this guy, I remember, his name was (Thomasello?). … I thought he was a guy from around here, but all the (Thomasellos?) I've met around here don't know him, whoever the one was that took over. … Anyway, he wound up being in charge of us and he got us to the airport and they put us on this plane and I was terrified. I've got pictures of the airport and I can still see it. I mean, it reminds me, because, back then, not only was I never on a plane, they put me on this prop plane, turbo. It was a turboprop, which was half jet and half propeller, and you're going up in this plane and it's going, [Mr. Everhard imitates engine roar], and you don't know where you're going to. You had no idea where you were going. … From there on out, it was just follow-the-leader, just do what they tell you to do. We landed in South Carolina, and then, they bussed us to the base and, from then on, it's like TV, like the movies. You ever see, on TV, somebody going to boot camp? That's exactly what it was, only they … cut out some of the rougher stuff. They don't want anybody to know about that.

SI: How was your first night in boot camp?

CE: It seemed like it was a long night. "Hurry up here. Get off the bus." … They had painted feet marks on the ground. You had to get off the bus and stand, put one foot in each painted footmark. So, basically, what they're doing is telling you guys to line up, getting addressed into a straight line, because telling civilians in military terms, we wouldn't know what they were talking about, and you got in that straight line. Then, from there on out, they just flowed you through, like machines, through the places to get clothing and places to get haircuts and places to get shots. Everything was like a line, follow the line, follow the assembly lines going through, getting your clothing, just making sure you got [it]. Half the shit probably didn't fit you anyway, that they gave you, or, if they had it, they had it, [if] they didn't, they didn't, and they're yelling and screaming at you the whole time. It … just, like, kept going and going and going, like it was no end. "When's the day going to be over?" It was long. I think it was longer, as it went late into the night. Then, they brought us to this barracks and you had to stay up, make your bed, etc. It seemed like, by the time you got to bed, … it was about two, three o'clock in the morning. That's what it felt like, and it might have been, and, next thing you know, they're waking you up, five o'clock, start the day all over again. … That just went on for days and, you know, making

sure everybody got what they were supposed to have, and then, your training starts, your rifles and drill teams and things that … you learned to appreciate later on, but you didn't understand what you were doing then, like, "Dress right, dress," and I don't even … think you know what that is.

SI: Please, explain it.

CE: I mean, it's like, you know, you put your right arm, raised, straight out, touching the shoulder of the man next to you, down the line. Everybody's getting in this perfect line, like this table, and that's giving you intervals, your arms, and you would do the same thing to the front, keeping the distance from the front. … You do the dressing, and they were meticulous in the way you had to line up. Everything had to be meticulous, even the clothes you wore. I mean, you'd better wear and have what they told you to wear, and don't deviate from it at all. I mean, I could go on with boot camp forever and ever and ever, and, if you've never been there to experience it, it's hard to explain, but everything was done as a group, not as an individual. … You were punished as a group, … usually not as an individual, unless you really screwed up, and then, you were punished as an individual, then, they would go to the group after that. Like, there were poor guys that were sent to, we would call it the "fat platoon." They were too heavy and they couldn't keep up. So, they would send them to this special place, way on the other side of the base, and they would run around there. … We'd see them at nighttime, running around [with] footlockers on top of their heads, for hours and hours and hours, holding this up, and they would brutalize the guys out there until they'd lose weight. … Then, they would send them back, not to our platoon, but to another platoon, and start all over again, until they finally made it through or failed so many times. I mean, boot camp was so hard, and it's just like you see in the movie there, guys tried to [kill themselves]. You've seen *Full Metal Jacket*, [(1987), based on Gustav Hasford's novel, *The Short-Timers*]? That's really the truth, what happened. … We had a guy slit his wrists.

SI: Really?

CE: Yes, he wanted out. He just wanted out, and he slit his wrist, and the DI [drill instructor] was pissed, "Don't you bleed all over my floor." We had to clean the blood up and shit, you know, and he'd be yelling and screaming like [crazy]. I mean, they took care of him fast and got him out of there, but, then, we had to do the rest of the cleaning up and listened to all the hooting and hollering. "Anybody else want to quit? You can't get off of this island. There's alligators all around. There's only one way in and one way out and that's the road. If you want out, you can see me." God, I mean, like I say, it was just every day was get up and do another thing, get up and do another thing, run the base for miles, one end of the island to the other. I mean, staying out in the rain, doing guard duty, the fire watches and stuff like that, I mean, where you stayed up and made sure nobody was starting a fire and nobody was trying to commit suicide, and that was your job. So, you're all assigned jobs. You had mess duty. I mean, like, some of the meals, … they see to it, you had to eat, especially guys like myself. I was 135 pounds. I was too skinny to be a Marine. They wanted to fatten you up. So, they made sure; you had to eat, and eat everything that's on that plate. … Sometimes, they'd get pissed off at you and they'd say, "Oh, fellows, you screwed up today." … Like, they said, "Well, we're going to give you duck in the mess hall." So, we get up to the mess hall. "Okay, guys, grab your trays. Run in that door and

right out the other door. That's your 'duck;' duck in that door and out the other door." That's the duck dinner we had, nothing, but you learned. … It actually was to learn to work as a team, I mean, you know, climbing all these stupid rope things and beating each other to death, floating in a pool with a full pack … on your back, all your clothes, and [you] had to float for, like, thirty minutes, it seemed, without swimming, called a dead man's float. I mean, it's horrible things, jumping off these big diving boards. I guess it was to get you used to if you had to go onboard a ship and the ship was sinking, to get you acclimated into how to survive. … They'd let some guys almost drown, though. I mean, you know, if you went down, they'd let you stay there for awhile before they picked you out. Fortunately, I did everything. I don't know, I lucked out, I guess, because I was light, and so, I floated pretty well. I mean, a lot of them, most of us, did, but one or two guys went under, man. … When you see somebody fail, it scares you more than anything else, wondering whether you could do it, but you had to do it. There was nobody exempt from anything. It's just like when they gave you the needles. You would go through the line for your shots. You know how a doctor injects you with a needle? Well, back then, they had these things called guns and the guy would have a gun. It's like an air gun, but they'd have one on this side, one on that side. You'd get it in both arms at one time, boom, boom, and they hurt like hell, really, really hurt, but they made sure you did that, you got your medical stuff. … They also made sure, on Sundays, that you wrote home, you'd better write home, and they made sure you went to church, no matter what religion you are. Yes, church was important, and the mail; they used to pick on you. If a girl sent you a letter, … back then, I guess they still do it, some girls would put lipstick on the back or make it smell like perfume. They ridiculed you. I mean, "Oh, look at this one," and they made you play, like playing with a dog or something, tease. God forbid you got perfume on them, though, because they always made you do something a little extra. I don't know exactly, I can't recall what it was, but you didn't want one with perfume on it. I guess it was just because of the abuse you would get for it. Maybe you wouldn't even get the letter for a day, or something like that, but they made sure you … communicated home, though. There was that, and you had to make sure [you wrote]. Sunday was your day to do all your laundry and that was the best day of the week, I mean, to slow you down, because I think training was, like, twelve weeks back then. It was a long time in boot camp, but that was only boot camp. Then, you had a lot of other training after that.

SI: You mentioned that they would play these mind games with cigarettes. What exactly would they do?

CE: Well, say, [for] example, if you wanted to go out and have a cigarette and you needed a cigarette, some guys were, like, addicted to them, "Put that cigarette out. You can't have one today," or they'd make you eat them, make you stand out in the rain and smoke them in the rain. … They would make you do whatever they wanted to do. They would make you eat some of the butts that are in the bucket. They would pick on you. … They used that as, like, a bonus thing, "You did good today; you can have a cigarette. If you don't do good, you can't have a cigarette," and I just didn't want to get into that kind of game with it. I mean, I just wanted to be left alone, don't look at me, you know, just let me go through, but, sooner or later, they do pick everybody out for something. They'll look you right in the eye, I mean. … Then, like, when you're graduating and stuff and you're standing out there, … you had to … make sure there wasn't a hair on your body that you could feel, I mean, like, on your face and stuff. You had to sit with the razor and you had to make sure you shaved this way, that way, this way, that way, so [that] they

couldn't [tell]. If they took a card, a [card from a] deck, … and heard, like, [Mr. Everhard imitates a noise] on you, you were in a world of shit, a lot of trouble. So, in other words, you had to have, like, a baby face, and then, you're standing out there, at attention, you're not allowed [to move]. They had gnats around, on graduation day, and stuff like that. You've got these gnats biting into your face and stuff like that and you could not swat them. You could not move. I mean, have you ever been to Washington, DC, or seen the Marines out there? Well, you see … how rigid they stand, and they … never move, never flinch, never blink, … nothing. That's what you're taught to do. That's right from boot camp on. That's your mind-over-matter thing and we had to do that for graduation, even though it was very, very hot. South Carolina was hot. Actually, I can remember, up here, it was snowing; down there, it wasn't. It was hot, and muddy when it rained. It was a little bit of everything, but they teach you a lot. I mean, they taught you how to shoot a rifle. I'd never shot a rifle in my life, or a gun, like I said, and, down there, you had to qualify and you had to learn to shoot five hundred yards away. Nobody shoots five hundred yards away. That's the only branch of the service, I think, that teaches you to shoot five hundred yards and hit this target, and that's where you qualified, marksman, sharpshooter, expert, but it's amazing, the technology. You looked down there, it's like shooting that knob on the thing, from five hundred yards away, and you have to raise the sights, the sights on there that you would raise up, go so many clicks. You would take one shot, you shoot it down, then, the guy would say, from way down there, they would show you where it hit. So, then, you'd have to adjust your sight and you had to shoot until you hit it, the right spot. So, it's actually teaching you how to go for what they call "Kentucky windage," because a bullet, when it travels, it hits the wind direction and everything else. You have to allow for it and they were teaching you how to do it. Marines were more thorough on teaching you how to fire guns. …

SI: What weapons were they training you on?

CE: M-14. Back then, it was M-14. That was the going gun. It was a good gun. It was a .30-06 shell. They were the best rifles ever made, I think. … Right after the M-1s, they came out with the M-14s, and they lasted up through, … I don't know, maybe only about another year, or less than a year. Then, they started changing to the M-16, back here. I mean, I remember, when I was in Vietnam, that they brought this M-16 out and said, "Here, shoot at the side of the hill, get familiar with it." We called it a "Mattel toy," because it was made out of plastic, but, anyhow, … that really didn't have too much to do with me, because I didn't have to carry a rifle in Vietnam, because I was in a tank and rifles weren't allowed. …

SI: Did you have your own rifle in training?

CE: Everywhere you went, you had your own rifle. You had to memorize your serial number. You had to take care of that rifle like it was … better than you. … Any weapon you had, you had to memorize the serial numbers, and you were always challenged on it, to see if you knew that serial number of that rifle or pistol, or whatever you had, and you had to take care of it better than yourself. You had to oil it and you had to clean it. They would inspect it daily, or maybe two, three times a day, to make sure there's no rust, no dust, no nothing, and you've got to learn to take them apart blindfolded and put them back together, blindfolded. … That was your main weapon, and they used to say, "This is your rifle, this is your gun; this is for shooting, this is for fun." That was some of the sayings. … You had to call it your rifle, not your gun. It's just, …

like I say, all a play on words, just like, when you're running, they do cadence running and they start talking, different chants, just to keep you going, the momentum. … In a way, it's good, I mean, and things, some things, do stick with you, but, as a crash course in everything, and everything was a crash course, because you figure I went in February of '66; by August of '66, I was in Vietnam. So, how many months did you have of training in there? (Boot camp was thirteen weeks, Advanced Infantry training about four weeks and Tank School was about four weeks.)

SI: Not very many.

CE: No, and, of that, of all those months, you had thirty days' leave in there, too. So, you take one month out just for leave, so, that would, what, give you four months, if that? That's all the training you got before going into wherever they were going to go.

SI: Did they bring in any real world examples, such as, "The Vietcong do this, so, we want you to learn this?"

CE: No, no, not in boot camp. … That wasn't part of boot camp. That was part of what they called advanced infantry training, which was later on. Boot camp was nothing to do like that. That's just to familiarize yourself with all the basics of being a Marine, and then, after that, you would get some leave, and then, you would go on to what they called advanced infantry training, which was in North Carolina, by Camp Lejeune. It was Camp Geiger. … That was another base, and that's pretty much where they taught you all the basics of warfare, and that was pretty scary. I mean, you went into … this base, this base must have been abandoned from World War II, because it was like Quonset huts and, I mean, with an old movie house that looked like it was made from back in the Western days. It had wooden steps. Everything was old and they must have just opened it up when we got there, but, anyway, that was where we had to stay. That was our living quarters, but all the training … for the advanced infantry training was in the woods surrounding the area, where they would have live fire, make you crawl under barbed [wire]. I don't know if you've ever seen these movies where the guys crawl under barbed wire and the bullets are going across the top and things are exploding around you? Well, this is all the stuff that they teach you how to do. That's … some of the things you had to do, learn to crawl in the rain and mud, have those real bullets going off over the top of your head and stuff like that.

SI: Did you remain with the same guys at Camp Geiger?

CE: Some of them would go there and some of them, I think they broke us up in different [areas], actually, would go [to] different areas. Some guys might have went to California, some guys went to North Carolina, depending on where you were going from there, but advanced infantry training was all part of being a Marine. Everybody received that. So, when you finished, after all that warfare training and how to tent out and bivouac in the middle of the night, it didn't stop there. I mean, you finished that advanced infantry training, then, you get your orders, after that, as to where you're going to go, as for your what they called a MOS [Military Occupational Specialty], like, an infantryman. Every Marine is an infantryman, which is an 0311. That's by number, and I wanted to be a mechanic at the time. I took an aptitude test to be a mechanic. I figured I aced it. Well, they didn't make me a mechanic, they made me a tank

crewman, which was an 1811. So, I had orders to go to California, to go to tank school, and, while you're out there, we went to Camp Pendleton. We had some training in Camp Pendleton, running through the mountains and stuff like that, and we used to [do] night bivouacs and stuff like that. … It's a different kind of an area, being it was mountainous, and, like, North Carolina is sort of flat. California had these big ass mountains, where they wanted to make sure you ran to the top and down the bottom and all this other stuff. It's called schools' battalion. So, in other words, you would be here, you're on hold before you go to your tank school, and you would be getting training there, as to like it is warfare. I mean, you would have your games, like you say, trying not to get captured and stuff like that.

SI: Like survival school?

CE: Yes, basically, is what it amounted to. Then, in-between that one and the other, you know, you'd have some weekends off, and it wasn't that long. I mean, it seems like it was only about a month of training there, because, then, we would get the tank training. Tank training really amounted to basics. Tank training was on the other side of the highway, Camp Del Mar. We're sent over there to go to school. They would give you the books, you read all the books, etc., let you run the tanks around the areas a little bit, I guess, you know, up and down the beach, [to] familiarize yourself with what you're supposed to be [doing] with a tank, and you were made a tank crewman.

SI: What was your position in the tank?

CE: You're not really assigned a position. You just became a tank crewman and, after you graduated that school, that's when they gave you your orders as to where you were going to go. It doesn't necessarily mean you were going to Vietnam. You could have gone anywhere, but, unfortunately, everybody that went to that tank school got orders to go to Vietnam.

SI: In the Marine Corps, is the tank doctrine different from the Army's tank doctrine?

CE: I have no idea. I couldn't compare the Army against the Marines in any kind of training. I just think we're the toughest, but I would say tank training would be the same in both. However, I think the Army had a different kind of tank than we had. We were trained in three different kinds of tanks and what we had was, anything the Marines had were hand-me-downs from the Army. I think most of the Army tanks were, like, gasoline; ours were diesel. So, you had to learn all the aspects of it, you know, everything about a tank. You had to know what kind of motors were in it, how to fix tracks, and how to load them, what kind of ammunition it is, this, that and the other. I mean, it's like a crash course. It gives you all the book knowledge and, after that, it's going to be OJT [on-the-job training], and that's basically what it amounted to. I mean, after we graduated from there, we got our orders. I got mine to go to First Tank Battalion, in Vietnam, and a buddy of mine that I hung around with there got orders for the Third Tank Battalion. … This guy was from Linden, [New Jersey], and we were close friends and I said, "Man, I want to go with you, the Third." So, I tried changing my orders. I made a pen change. I said, "Third Tank Battalion." I got caught with it. They said, "Who the hell gave you [permission]? Who did this?" I said, "I did." "You can't change the orders," blah, blah, blah. Now, they gave me a little bit of hell, but they couldn't do that much to me, because I had to get

on a plane to go to wherever we were going to go. … He had to go to Third Tanks, I went to First Tanks and I lost track of him while I was over there. … In other words, we went to Okinawa right from California; actually, we went from California to Hawaii to get gas, never got out of the airport, and then, we went from there to Okinawa and I think we were in Okinawa maybe a day or two, giving you shots there, I think more needles for where you're going, to Vietnam. They gave you a shot called gamma globulin, I think it was, or something, anyway, this needle they put in your ass. It must have been about that big. … They give you this big needle. You can't sit down for what seems like a week, puts a lump … about this big around in the cheek of your ass. I remember that. That's something you don't forget, because that shot hurt. But, they pretty much got you all geared up for going over there and, [the] next thing you know, you get on a plane from there, a civilian plane, this is, by the way. … Not everybody went by the same mode to where they were going. Some went by ship, some went by military planes. I was lucky enough, I went by civilian airplanes. We left El Toro, like I said, in California, went to Hawaii, went to Okinawa, then, [from] Okinawa, I think we took Pan Am. I don't know if you know that airline, and they brought us to Vietnam. … I remember getting off that plane, that air-conditioned plane, and that was the biggest shock of my whole life, I think, because, literally, when you got off that plane, here it is, August of '66, your breath, like, stopped. It was like 110 degrees with a hundred percent humidity. … From air-conditioning, you just go, "Huh," and then, the stench, the smell, and I think what scared me more than that is, we were walking one way, we're all nice, new, clean Marines, all nice, starched clothes, neat, ironed, and you see these guys that are going home and they had these looks on them, like, they just look like walking dead or something like that. I mean, they really looked just different; it was really, really different, and, looking back at it now, now, I know why it was that way. …

[TAPE PAUSED]

SI: You were talking about your initial reactions.

CE: Yes, that was a culture shock, but, now, when I look back at it, I see myself coming back and know why I looked that way, why they looked that way. It was just on the opposite end, seeing the new guys come in and I was one of the ones going, and I know why you got that look, that hardened look. (It was from the things we had seen in combat and day to day; day in and day out, deaths and injuries. The hardened way, we developed personally.)

SI: Where did you fly into?

CE: Chu Lai. You know where that is?

SI: I have heard of it. I could not locate it on a map, probably.

CE: I could. I've got it tattooed in my head. Anyway, it's, like, in the middle of South Vietnam, and I was only there for about a month. We landed in Chu Lai and got off of the plane and did that, and then, the next thing I know, there was a company truck out there to pick you up, for the guys that had to go to wherever they were going. … I was going to be assigned to B Company, First Tank Battalion, and they brought me on a truck and brought me out to the company area, which was in the middle of, like, a beach. … Yes, we were close to the ocean. It was right close

to the ocean and the airfield, they assigned me to my tank and gave me my pistol and everything I needed for [combat], helmet, you know, stuff like that, all the stuff you needed for warfare. It wasn't like you were being shot at or anything like that. It was a pretty safe area, but you didn't know what you're getting [into]. You're just terrified, you were just culture shocked, you're just going; like you did in the lines going through boot camp, same thing in Vietnam. You've just got to go with the flow. You don't know what you're getting into. They brought me out to my tank and introduced me to my crew, and then, we decided who would do what position, and me being the new guy, I was assigned, well, the guy that was the driver wanted to stay being a driver, so, I wound up being the loader, to begin with. There's only four positions on a tank. You've got a driver, a loader, gunner, and tank commander. So, I was one of four guys on that particular tank, Bravo #24, Second Platoon.

SI: Were you replacing a guy who had rotated home?

CE: Yes, supposedly rotated home, or he could have been wounded or something like that. I really don't know. You wouldn't know why you were replacing him; you just replaced the guy. I don't think I ever asked. I was probably not even thinking about it back then. I don't think anybody was wounded, though, on my tank, and we stayed down there. I guess we were in Chu Lai for about a month or two, and then, they moved us to Da Nang. While we were in Chu Lai, it was a different [kind of] geographical area. Like I said, we were right on the beach and we … used to stay on this side of this mountain at nighttime, and that's the first time I was shot at and I didn't even know I was being shot at. As a matter-of-fact, I was making; remember, I was telling you about the tapes earlier? I was making a tape, a voice recording for my parents, at the time, and I heard a, "Whoosh," go past the top of my head. … I didn't know what the hell it was, and then, one of the guys grabbed me and pulled me inside. He said, "Don't you know what's going on?" I said, "No." "Somebody's shooting at you there." "Is that what it sounds like?" I really didn't know, because it was just one shot, "Whoosh," you hear it go by. Thank God, it went by.

SI: Was it a rifle?

CE: Yes, it was a rifle. It was small arms. … I think it was an oddball time, too, because they don't usually shoot at you during the day. They pretty much liked to attack you at night. It was just somebody just trying to mess with you, I guess to keep you on your toes. So, anyway, that was the first time I was shot at. That taught me a little bit about, "Maybe this is real," and we used to go out, down the beach, with the tanks, and then, we used to go along the beach, and then, go down to this river. … Then, we'd get on this raft, you might say, put one tank at a time on the raft, and they'd float us across the river and put us into this other particular area, and then, we went out there and we were trying to chase out the Vietcong, and stuff like that, and [we] got into some firefights down that way, meaning that we followed with the infantry and we were trying to kick out the Vietcong. So, that was my beginning of my tour of Vietnam. We didn't have to shoot a lot, because the infantry did most of the shooting, because they would be in front. We were just in support of them and, like I say, … that was very brief, down there, and, I guess about a month or so later, the Marine Corps made a big move, because the First Tanks was at my division. First Tank Division was in Chu Lai, stationed, and Third Tanks, where my buddy was, was in Da Nang. Well, they decided they wanted to take the Da Nang group of Third Tanks and move them up to what they called the DMZ, [the Demilitarized Zone, between North and South

Vietnam]. I don't know if you know what the DMZ is. That's the North and the South. They sent them all up there. So, we filled in and took their place, like a follow-the-leader-type deal. We took over where they went up. … I knew my buddy was there. I tried to find anybody that would know him, but there was nobody left that would know. I didn't know where he was. All I knew was he's in Third Tanks. When you're trying to find [someone], that's like looking for a needle in a haystack, because you didn't know where he was, except for the battalion. … Anyway, we took care of their area. … We stayed there and each company was assigned a different geographical area around Da Nang and we wound up west of it. I mean, Da Nang was actually the biggest city, I think, in the area. Da Nang was a city, compared to Chu Lai. Chu Lai was, like, maybe a village. Da Nang was like a city, like you might say like a capital, might have been at one time. I've never seen the real city itself; I was always on the outside. But, our tank battalion took our position just to the west, and then, each company was assigned different areas out with different infantry groups, and we always were moved around to different areas with the infantry. You know, wherever they needed us, we would go, because we were a tank. We were good firepower for them and they liked to have us with them, with the infantry. They loved us. They loved us as long as we were mobile. I guess we were all right when we couldn't be, meaning, like, there was two seasons in Vietnam; you either had very, very hot or it was very, very wet. You've seen *Forrest Gump* [a 1994 film], right? Yes, I always use this with kids; I tell them, "Remember which way they said the rain came from?" meaning this way, that way, up and down. That's the way it was. It seemed like, half the time, it rained. Six months out the year it seems like it rained, or it was just dry. There was no middle between them. So, obviously, when it rained, there'd be no paved roads in Vietnam, a tank wasn't much help because it would bog down in the mud. So, they would leave you in a fixed position, pretty much, sitting on top of a hill with a base. … They'd have a bunch of infantry on the hill and we would be stuck on the top as a main [source of] firepower, because the firepower of a tank was like a company of infantry. They loved to have us there, because, if anybody was to shoot, we would be the first ones to be shot at, but that's when we were fixed. Other than that, we would go out with the infantry on patrols. We would go out on operations and search-and-destroy missions, minesweeping operations.

SI: What was the terrain like around there, where you could go out on these patrols?

CE: Well, Vietnam only had one highway, north to south, and that was a dirt highway, meaning that was like the street you just came up, my street; that's about what a highway was over there. It wasn't much. The rest of it was like little dirt roads, paths that were made a little wider by us. … Our engineers would go out there, make things a little wider, so [that] we can get through with trucks, and so forth, but everything was dirt. Most roads had bridges and, if the bridges were blown, … we (the engineers) would put temporary bridges up and stuff like that. I mean, we protected some bridges and, as a matter-of-fact, there was one bridge I was assigned to. It was on the north side of Da Nang and it was right on the river and there was an Exxon refinery, not a refinery, but a storage area, across the way. It just seemed weird to see, "Exxon," on the side [of] this big tank, on the side of a hill, and here you are, in a foreign country. I mean, it was there. Anyway, that was Route 1 and that's actually the bridge between Da Nang and going up north. That was the main bridge that they had to try to blow [up] to stop us from … going north with all our heavy equipment. So, we were assigned to protecting that and we did that for about, I guess, a couple of weeks, maybe a month, and then, we turned it over to the Army, because we

had to go someplace else, and the Army went there. Next thing you know, we hear the bridge got blown. When the Army was there, they [the enemy] blew it up. So, then, they sent us back there and we went back and the bridge was blown and they had a temporary bridge put on the other side. I mean, it slowed us up, but it didn't stop us. So, then, we stayed there for awhile, until they made sure that we built sandbags and, you know, built up the area, until we were relieved from there, and then, they just kept reassigning us to different areas all over, to where tanks were needed. … If we had a slow time, we would go out with the infantry, … trying to take mines out of the roads and stuff, and that was pretty successful in a way. I mean, sometimes, you'd hit a landmine and it would blow the tracks off. We were fortunate enough that my tank never hit a landmine on those roads. Sometimes, after we'd clear a road and we went back, … they would put them back into the road and the engineers would hit them and it would blow up their tractors and kill the engineers and stuff like that. Our tanks, south of Da Nang, caught a lot [of mines]. They lost a lot of tanks down there, where the landmines would be tripped. They would put bigger mines out there for the tanks and pretty much rattle up the guys inside, blow off the fenders and the wheels, tracks, and we would see that devastation when we … went back to the rear. Every so often, we had to go back for oil changes. So, then, you would hear what was going on with the other platoons, otherwise, you don't know. Because you would all meet up in battalion, and that's the only place you can get a hot meal anyway, was when we went to the rear, but, pretty much, we did our preventative maintenance on the tank and would have down time and could get cold beers and good, hot food and anything else we would need to go back in the field.

SI: During your time out in the field, you were living in the tanks.

CE: Yes. Well, we were fortunate. With a tank, we could bring a tent with us and stuff like that. So, we lived pretty good, compared to the infantry. I mean, the infantry, … if they had a tent, they were lucky, but, yes, we had this big tent we would carry with us and we would stay out there and, like I say, be utilized day after day, to whatever [the] next day addressed. You couldn't make plans, like, next week, you're going to go and do this, you know. There was no such thing. You had to do it day by day, unless there was a big operation coming up, which means … they bring [in] a lot of different companies from all over and there'd be, like, a thousand guys, or something like that, and you go out and try to … kick up the enemy. … We were always fruitful. … We always did hit something. I don't know if it's exactly what they were expecting, but it was … sort of like hunting. … I don't know if you ever deer hunted. Well, anyway, you go through the woods, just like trying to kick out the deer, and the deer would run and get shot. Well, this is what we did, basically did the same thing, but come to find out that the Vietnamese, Vietcong people, were very inventive. They had a lot of tunnels underground. They lived like ants and they were all over. They would be in the middle of people's houses. You'd lift up what you'd call a kitchen stove or something over there and there was sure to be a tunnel going somewhere. … That's pretty much how they got away from us all the time, was all these tunnels, the mazes of tunnels. I remember, one time, as a matter-of-fact, it was towards the end of my tour, we were going through a rice paddy and it was the dry season, so, there was no water in it, so, it was pretty dry and we just went across it. All of a sudden, "Boom," the tank went down. What happened was, … we went across one of their tunnels that they had dug underneath and the weight of our tank, … the tunnel couldn't support it, and we went into that tunnel, and then, we threw a track. That was the only track we threw. So, we had

to be babysat by the Army, which pissed them off, because it stops them from going where they had to go, because they had to stay with us until we could get our tank out of the hole and fixed. So, we'd try to get one tank to pull another tank, and then, put it back together. My tank was very lucky over there, that … we didn't hit any landmines, so-to-speak, you know. Although almost every other tank around did hit landmines, we were fortunate.

SI: Did the Vietcong use other antitank tactics?

CE: Yes. I heard [of], I was never shot at by, what they called an RPG [Rocket Propelled Grenade launcher], and they would pretty much do a job on a tank. They would … penetrate a hole through the side and ricochet around inside and kill the guys. They had them to the south of us, but they weren't in my geographical area. It's either that maybe they were there and they chose not to use them, God knows, I don't know, but I'm glad they didn't use them, when I was there, on me. I mean, the most we were ever … [hit with] was shot at by small arms fire and, yes, it was, like, [when] I was wounded over there on a hill, which seems weird. We were shot at; I was on a hill, and we went to get our tank in a better position. Well, naturally, we were outside the tank, because it was, like, a hundred and some degrees. Tanks are not air-conditioned, don't have a fan, so, we always sat on the outside. So, we started to go down this hill and I went to get inside. So, when you're being shot at, you're supposed to close the hatches, the doors on the top, you know. So, as we were going down, I just unlatched the door, and I didn't have my helmet on or nothing, and the driver hit the brake, all of a sudden, like this, and, of course, it jolted all forward. As he did that, this flat steel door came down and, just as I was getting in, I had my hand like this and it was like a guillotine. The handle went through the top of my head and the tips of my fingers got torn off. You see the scars are here, if you look hard [enough]. They sewed them all back on, plus the big holes in my head. It put me out, and they wanted to give me the Purple Heart for that and I told them, "No," I said, "I don't want a Purple Heart." I said, "Guys are getting killed. So, I didn't get shot," I said. There's no way in hell I wanted a Purple Heart. … So, anyway, I didn't get it then, but that was a learning experience. The only thing I did get out of it, that helped … after I got wounded, is I got to see Bob Hope, and I don't know if you know who Bob Hope was. [Editor's Note: Actor and comedian Bob Hope participated in various USO shows for the US Armed Forces during the Vietnam War.] Not many people know who he is anymore, but it was around Christmastime of '66, yes, that he was there and it was nice to see American girls, too. We called them "round eyes," because everybody over there was "slant eyes." Anybody American was called "round eyes." We sat in the rain. I had a bag over my hand and, being wounded, it gets you up a little closer, but, still, you couldn't get as close as the officers could to Bob Hope. I mean, you know, it's "rank has its privileges" and stuff, but, still, I got pictures of them. I know I was there and … it was wonderful. I mean, there was a lot of people that gave over there, I mean, like USO shows. They would come out, try to entertain you and stuff. I don't know if anybody ever talked to you about that kind of stuff. … Like, I know, Roy Rogers came out there one time, I think, and his wife, Dale Evans, and I'm trying to think, was it Howdy Doody, whether he went out there? [Editor's Note: *Howdy Doody* was a popular NBC children's program that aired from 1947 to 1960, starring Howdy Doody, a puppet voiced by co-star "Buffalo Bob" Smith.] There were people from Italy that came out to entertain you. It would be at different, sporadic times, where they would have a different area where it was pretty safe and you could go back there and feel fortunate enough to see this little bit of show, which was nice to do. I mean, it gives you a little

bit of a break in the warfare, because the war in Vietnam wasn't twenty-four hours a day. I mean, it actually did go twenty-four hours a day, but most of it was nighttime. So, the nights were theirs and the days were ours, and vice versa, but we always had more firepower. … We always had some kind of a break in-between, where we could get to see these little USO shows and, every couple of months, I think you were offered to go on R&R, which is rest and relaxation. That's where you save up your money and go on a vacation outside the country. I think I was in-country, I believe after you're [there] about three months, I think you were offered … a chance to go. You put yourself on a list and they'd give you a choice of different places you can go. I think it was Hawaii, Bangkok and Japan and Thailand. I think Hawaii and Australia, you could go to, yes, it was, but you couldn't go to Hawaii unless you were married or an officer. I wasn't married, I wasn't an officer, … and I knew, if I ever got to Hawaii, I probably wouldn't have went back to Vietnam. I was scared when I was over [there]. I think everybody was scared. So, I went to Taiwan for a week, and that's where you take all your money and you party like a king, do the things that you can't say on this tape, [laughter] but it was good times. …

[TAPE PAUSED]

SI: Can you remember anything more specific about those patrols at Chu Lai, what it was like to go out there and how you felt the first time you ever went out?

CR: I really don't remember how I felt. I was probably scared, didn't know what I was getting into. … When you start out going into the war, you're really, really scared, and I guess it takes about, I wouldn't say days or months or something like that, maybe there's no set time, but you've got to get shot at a few times, you might say, … and see people getting shot and blown apart, to where you … become what they call hardened, where you accept death, like, "All right, he's dead, just move on." I mean, I've seen a lot of guys killed, but, fortunately, they weren't the guy right next to me. … For example, the first … guys I'd seen really get hurt over there were, I think there was four Marines and they were in our company area and they were bored. So, they started playing around with a hand grenade, I guess, inside the tent. It's called a "Willie Peter" grenade, white phosphorous, [a slang term first used in World War I, derived from the common initials "W. S."], and I guess they were passing it around. I was probably from here to maybe forty feet away from that tent and it went off and we'd seen the smoke and we heard different things. I can't remember whether it was screaming, … but I just remember this one guy coming out and he was bare ass naked and he was smoking. His whole body was smoking like a ham and the skin was peeling off. There was no hair, no nothing. He was just like a walking zombie coming towards me, and I remember that. … I don't remember exactly everything that happened after that, at that point, but I know we had to go back inside, and I heard stories about [how] the hand grenade had blown … one guy's hand off and another guy's penis and stuff like that. They got all the bodies out, and then, we had to go back in and pick up the parts. … I remember picking up the guy's thumb, and that was probably the first thing that really, really; the smell and the sight of something like that was, and it was non-combat related. I mean, it was just something stupid that they did. This one guy, supposedly, … his wife just had a baby back in the States; to lose your testicles and stuff like that. I don't even know if they lived. I really don't. I think, after that, that was the first rude awakening for me of what war could be about. I mean, sure, it was their own [fault], they did it to themselves, but the enemy could do that to you, too. But, the smell and the stench, and I could still see it, like I said to you, that guy walking up there;

that smell, God, burning flesh is terrible. I mean, white phosphorous gets into you and it just keeps burning and burning and burning and burning, until it burns right through to the other side, but to see the skin changing colors. … After that, I mean, you just learned to give and take. If you're shot at, you shoot back. I mean, I don't think we ever just shot at somebody that didn't shoot at us first, and that's pretty much [the] only way you could find the Vietcong, anyway, because you couldn't tell the difference between them, whether they were enemy or foe. I mean, they might have been your friend during the day, anyway, and they were your enemy at night; you couldn't tell. You didn't know who was who. You just pretty much had to trust your street smarts, you might say. Maybe that was a good part of the street smarts I got from being a kid, might have helped me over there, I don't know, but anything they taught you in the book, you could pretty much throw away. I mean, it was the basics, but everything you learned from a book will not carry you through a war. As a matter-of-fact, it might carry you to the grave, because that happened a lot with second lieutenants when they came over there. They wouldn't listen to us seasoned guys that had been there for awhile and they would do stupid things and get themselves killed, wounded. They didn't last long. I mean, it's like putting an American flag over your head and saying, "Shoot me," or some shit. That's how long they seemed to have lasted. I didn't have many officers that stayed out there with us. The highest-ranking guy I would have would probably be an E-6, which is maybe a step above a sergeant, something like that, and he would be in charge of our tank platoon, I think; go ahead.

SI: Who would be the tank commander?

CE: Tank commander was whoever the senior guy was on the tank at the time. It could have been a corporal, it could have been a sergeant; usually, it was a sergeant.

SI: Okay, it was not an officer.

CE: No. As a matter-of-fact, there wasn't an officer on my tank until two weeks before I left Vietnam, and he didn't last but a day.

SI: Do you recall some examples of things that lieutenants would do that would get them killed?

CE: Well, pretty much not listening to the guys, I mean, you know, "Don't go here. Don't go there." You know, they didn't want to hear you tell them they shouldn't do this or shouldn't do that. They wanted to do their book thing and, reluctantly, I mean, like, you're going on patrol; for example, this one officer I said didn't last but, like, two days. He took my place on the tank, just before I left Vietnam. … Apparently, they were going on patrol out in the road and they're going, like, in this little valley, and then, they probably told him, … "Maybe we should button up in here," or something like that, "because you might get something," and they did get hit in there with claymore mines. … The tank came back and it was all full of blood and this guy, I don't know if he lived or died; I think he lived, because I'm hearing stories on the Internet and it sounds like this lieutenant, now, forty-something years later, telling the same story that I remember, except he was the recipient. … I sent him an email, but I don't know. I never got an answer back from him, saying that I was the one, he took my spot. So, I remember, … I had to clean that tank when it [had] come back with all the blood on it, stupid things.

SI: Was he the only one wounded?

CE: Yes, severely wounded, yes, because he was the one that was on the outside. The other guys had enough sense to get inside and he just didn't. He hesitated, whatever it was. I mean, … if you hesitate a second, you're gone, and, being a new guy, you don't know how fast you're supposed to react, and he just didn't have the opportunity to react the way he was supposed to have. He was too green. I mean, it's instinct. It's like, one day, during my tour over there, we were sitting on the hills; remember, I told you, we'd sit on top of the hills [when the] tank couldn't go anywhere. So, I was bored, as a tank crewman. I said, "Can I go out on a patrol with you guys?" because they were going to go out and patrol through the villages out there, to look for Vietcong, and so, I took my, they call it a grease gun, off the tank, which was like a little submachine gun, which was really nothing, but I went out with them. Sure as shit, when we get out there, we got hit, shot at, ambushed, and it seemed like forever. I mean, I was there, … I'm looking at you here, the shot went, "Boom," those guys are gone. They knew, instinctively, where to go, how to react. I just stood right in the middle of the trail, it seemed like for five minutes. It seems like it was; I'm sure it wasn't. It was probably only a second until somebody, probably, finally, grabbed me and pulled me down. Well, the point I'm trying to get across is, I wasn't supposed [to do that]. I wasn't trained to react like these guys, like that. Like I said, that officer there didn't react fast enough on top of that tank, I didn't react fast enough to respond with those guys, because they knew exactly which way to go, which way to cover, and which way to return fire. I mean, it might have lasted maybe ten, fifteen seconds, [that was] all the firefight was, but … it only takes one second to get killed, if that. After that, I never volunteered to go with the infantry again. … That's it, man. I said, "God let me live that way," and I was fortunate that day. So, I didn't want to get bored. … I used to take pictures and send them home. … Every picture I ever sent to my parents, I never told them what I was in[to] over there. I would be sitting, like, I'd find a folding chair, or something, be showing pictures of me drinking beer or reading or writing, never anything, or tell them anything about where I was or what I was doing, and I just wanted them to know I was, like, on a vacation, and I pretty much did [succeed]. I think I snowballed them for the whole year. They never said whether I did or didn't succeed in that venture, but most pictures I showed [them] did not show much of anything horrific. As a matter-of-fact, all the horrific pictures I had, coming back with [me], were confiscated in Okinawa. I didn't give a shit if they took my underwear off and sent me home naked. They could take whatever they wanted. … So, they did take them all. I think somebody just wanted to play war hero and say, "Well, I was in Vietnam. Look at these pictures I took." Those pictures are in my head. That's where they'll stay. They were gory, though. We'd take pictures of dead bodies, and just lay them over the barbed wire for a week and watch them rot and shit. I mean, war is hell. I mean, yes, I guess it is, looking back at it, you know, [now] saying, "That's kind of gross," when we thought it was kind of cool. It's just like when you had body counts. … They always had to count, accountability, as to how many Vietcong you killed. … Our officers liked to fabricate those numbers, you know. If we had shot one, they'll say we shot six. That's where, later on, they started talking about, "Well, cut off the guy's right ear, the Vietcong's right ear, and bring it back, and we don't want the left ear, just the right ear," and that's what they started doing later on. They'd cut off the ears to get body counts, right ears only, I think it was. … The United States always liked to [count bodies], especially back here. … Mail was slow, so, whenever I got a paper from back home, it would say, "On such-and-such a date, the United States says, now, there was three or four guys," I'm just using this for an example, "three or four guys in

Vietnam killed this day," which was never three or four guys a day, but you yourself know, look back on that date, you've seen ten or twenty guys get killed on that day. So, they really never, the government never really …

SI: You mean Americans?

CE: Yes. In other words, back here, they never tell the truth. They always want to say, "You're winning the war." Yes, we were winning, but it was a costly fact. I mean, the numbers that I'd seen them portray, I think they made up their numbers. So, instead of, like, two or three Americans were killed, I myself had seen ten, … and that was just in my area. I'm just saying we knew it was wrong, and the same thing as opposed to how many Vietcong you killed. I mean, if you come back with one ear, he said, "Well, that's two guys then." So, they always wanted to make it a little bigger. The more Vietcong you killed, the better you were treated. It was, like, a bonus thing, a bonus game, in a way, that the officers would play in the rear. They liked numbers, but they don't look at numbers; I mean, numbers are bodies, man.

SI: If you saw, say, twenty Americans killed, eventually, they would have to explain where those twenty guys went.

CE: I don't know how they would do it back in the rear. I don't know how they justified their numbers, but I'm just saying how they did it publicity-wise, you know what I mean, publicly. They had to justify it on paper; they had to bring the bodies back. I mean, we never left one of our people over there, no part of them. We would pick up whatever was there, if not that day, the next day. We would [eventually] get them, and the Vietcong liked retrieving their bodies, too, as much as they could. … That's if they made it through, but our firepower, if they fired one shot, we'd fire a hundred back. I mean, the firepower we had was phenomenal. I mean, I used to watch these jets come in and strafe the top of the trees and drop this napalm on top of the villages. … We could always [tell], like, when we'd see the jet come in, we would say, "This guy's married; that guy isn't," and the way we would tell is, the guy that wasn't married, … like, it seemed like he'd go maybe about five or ten feet over the top of the treetops and drop his napalm. The married guys would stay up about a hundred feet and drop their napalm. That's the way we justified it, you know. We made up our own thing. I mean, we'd seen a lot of different things over there. I mean, you'll watch a B-52 blow off the top of a mountain and that was just so impressive to me, to watch this, shockwaves, "Boom, boom, boom." I mean, it was like, maybe, five, ten miles away, this mountain, but, just to watch the shockwaves, I said, "I wouldn't want to be on that mountain." I mean, just to see the technology that we had over there, it's antiquated now, but it was phenomenal then, and we just overpowered [the enemy]. We had more firepower than the Vietcong, and that's pretty much like they say, with the Vietnam War, I mean, we won every battle, but we lost the war. We lost the war and I feel we lost the war because of the government, and I do have harsh and ill feelings towards the government.

SI: Do you think it was just bad planning on the government's part or something else?

CE: No, I think the government, to me, seems like they controlled the war too much. I can give you one example I remember right off the top of my head. … I don't even know if it was towards the end of my tour, maybe three-quarters of the way through. We were at Da Nang

Airfield, which was right by our battalion headquarters, [which] used to get hit with rockets every day from a certain area. So, they said, "Well, we'll put this tank up there," which was us, "and watch where these rockets are coming from; if so, stop them." Well, we were sitting in that position and, sure as hell, that night, there goes a rocket. We call back to the rear to get permission to fire, because you just couldn't fire unless you got permission. This is in the rear; this is the way they worked. They had fire zones and no fire zones, and I don't know if you ever heard this from other guys, what they called free-fire zones and no-fire zones. So, anyway, this … particular area was an area you weren't supposed to fire into. Well, we watched that rocket go off, another rocket go off. … Long story short is, that guy probably got off about three or four rockets and we never got permission to fire. How many guys got killed because of that? I don't know, but we didn't get permission to fire. The story goes that we had to call back to our company, our company had to call back to the battalion and the battalion had to call all the way back to the United States for us to get … permission to fire. How can you do that when you've only got a window of three or four minutes to make these calls and to give you permission to fire? I mean, that really, really pissed me off, you know. Looking back at it, no matter which way you look at it, how many guys got killed because we could have stopped him right after the first shot and not let him get off the rest of them? and we were told, "No, you can't fire in there. That's a good village." Bullshit, that guy was pushing those buttons and letting that thing go. … We had him right there, man. We could have got him. I mean, we shot guys out of trees from a mile away with our tank. I mean, I'd seen a guy, one time, when we shot him, he was sitting in a tree, like this, … in the "V" in the middle, and he had some Marines pinned down below and they asked for us to fire on him and we took our big gun and put it on him, crosshairs, "Boom," fired. The tree went, "Poof." They brought back his foot, as proof that we got him. I mean, it was like picking a bird out of a tree, was basically what it amounted to, but the story I was trying to get across is that, you know, you could see politics ran it too much. There was a lot of politics in there, just like the Red Cross used to bring supplies over, and they always say how good the Red Cross is. Well, the Red Cross did bring the stuff over, but, before they got it to us guys out in the field, the guys in the rear sold them to the black market. The only way we can get a carton of cigarettes or a soda, or something like that, is [you] had to buy it off the black market, right off the Vietnamese on the roads, because they had it all. We couldn't get them. We had to buy it off them. Is that right? no. Yes, so, I've hated the Red Cross ever since. I'm willing to change a little bit now, but I don't like them, don't like the government.

SI: Did you ever have to work with the South Vietnamese?

CE: You lived with them. I mean, the South Vietnamese Army, … the military?

SI: Let us talk about the military first.

CE: … My experiences with them, they're … chickenshits, the ARVNs [Army of the Republic of Vietnam]. … They were nothing but playboys. They'd be the first ones to run. They just played up to the women and stuff like that. They were always; I don't think I've ever seen one that was dirty, got down, you know, … right out dirty in fighting. They were always squared away, … and they would find the hookers and stuff for the guys, God knows, but, if you were fired at, you had no faith in them. They were absolutely useless to me. Who were good over there? There were a lot of different people I was attached to over there. The Australian Army

was; they were very good. I had them attached to us down at Chu Lai, and then, they had the Korean Marines over there. They were called ROK [Republic of Korea] soldiers. They were the Marines that we used to be. They were allowed to do anything and everything, and did do it, and there's things we did that we weren't supposed to do, but you can't say on tape, because, … in a way, you could get a lot of people in trouble. Just like today, they torture people and stuff, like, they say, you know, "You can't do that." Well, how are you going to get a prisoner to talk? You going to give him a candy bar and he's going to say, "Oh, you're so sweet. You gave me a candy bar. I'm going to tell you everything you need," you know? … That's not part of war. So, the media and the government and all that; … I'm getting off of the ROK soldiers and stuff, but the ARVNs, I really held no faith in. I did not want to be attached to them. I thought they were more of a magnet to the Vietcong than anything else, and probably half of them might have been Vietcong dressed in ARVN clothes, but … they just didn't have what they needed to have.

[TAPE PAUSED]

CE: Where were we, ARVNs?

SI: We were talking about the ARVNs and ROKs.

CE: Anyway, you learned not to trust them. The ROK soldiers were good, the Marines, Korean Marines. I'm trying to think of who else. …

SI: What would you do with the Australians, for example?

CE: Actually, the Australians, I didn't do too much with them down there. They pretty much would go on search-and-destroy operations with us, just like anything else, like you would take the Army along with you. They would mix in, commingle, with the Marines, and the only place I'd seen them, they were down in Chu Lai, and, like I say, I was only there a month, so, really, it wasn't that long, but I remember them with their hats. We wanted to trade hats and stuff like that. The Australians played a pretty good part of the Vietnam War. I mean, you could find them on the website today, the Aussies talking about the Americans, and, actually, the Canadians were with us, too, but they were in our [units]. I had a Canadian in my Marine group who was a tank crewman; he volunteered to fight in Vietnam, from Canada. Why? I don't know. I thought the guy was crazy, in a way, nice guy, quiet guy, but they didn't have to be there and they just volunteered. They came to the United States, and then, enlisted. I don't know how they did that. I always thought you had to be an American to go, but these guys, … I don't know, I guess they were bored in Canada, [laughter] but our obligation was, we didn't have a choice; we were there.

SI: Did you always have the same four guys on your tank?

CE: No, actually, the Vietnam War, even typically over there, it was never as a group thing, not generally. I'd say ninety percent of the time, it was an individual going home. So, you rotated out as your anniversary date comes up. In other words, your job, Marines, when they went over there, their tour of duty was thirteen months. The Army went over there, their requirement was twelve months. Why the Marines did thirteen months, I guess they just wanted to say they had to be better than the Army, show up the Army, and [show] they can do thirteen months. I don't

know; maybe because we had less guys to go through, so, they made it thirteen-month tours. So, actually, my tour over there, I was there twelve months and twenty-one days, so, I had a week cut off, which was great. Having a week cut off is great, but you would go home as an individual, the same as you went over, as an individual. So, you're replacing one guy in whichever tank; it was never a whole crew, and I don't know if that's good or bad, but I guess it's good, because you had three seasoned guys on there to make sure that they would sort of take you, you know, by your hand and lead you through it. … That's the only way they're saving their life, too, by making sure you learned how to load the gun and stuff like that. Like, they always showed you, even in school, they would show you, you had to put your hand in like this and push your hand up. Otherwise, the breach block would come up and take your hand off, if you didn't do it the right way, and you had to get acclimated into what kind of rounds to put in as they called for them, because there were a lot of different kinds of shells that you put in them. So, anyway, the long story short is, each guy on that tank [had] seen to it, so, like you were a child, "You're the new guy on the tank, so, we've got to watch you and wean you, and then, we're going to break you in … to where you're going to be," and we learned how to work as … gears in the machine. I remember, that was a big decision when I left. I mean, I left just prior to what they called the Tet Offensive, [a widespread attack by the North Vietnamese Army and the Vietcong on the Republic of Vietnam conducted between January and September of 1968], and that was one of the biggest things that happened over there. We were aware the Vietcong were building up and, when you go home, when your time is up, naturally, the company commander tries to sway you not to go home, you know, you could re-up. … Re-up means you sign up for another tour of duty while you're there. So, not only would they benefit that way, they would give you enough money, as a bonus, that, which was tempting, you could have bought a new Mustang back then, for that amount of money, and they would give you an extra rank. So, it's a good money-making thing, in a way, but, then, you think, "Wow, man, I'm missing home, missing my parents," you know, it all plays … on your mind, and then, on the same token is, I really felt is, when I was leaving, I said, "I'm leaving three guys behind on that tank. What's going to happen to them if I leave? Maybe, I might be the cause of their demise." … You always wonder whether you made the right decision or not, "Did I cause anybody to get killed by leaving?" or, "Maybe I should have stayed," and they say this about a Vietnam veteran, you know, … we all have this guilt and it's a problem we have, I mean, because that's the way the government was. I mean, one day, you're in Vietnam; the next day, you're home. There was no unwinding of you. They didn't really care about the Vietnam veteran. As a matter-of-fact, even when I got back, I … still had, like, two-and-a-half years to go and I wound up in guard duty down here at Earle [Naval Weapons Station, in Monmouth County, New Jersey]. … They used to tell us to pick up cigarette butts and stuff and I just told them, "No, I ain't going to do it." I became very agitated towards the Marines and stuff like that, by them playing their games, and it was sort of my downfall at the end. I mean, I wound up in the brig, … because I rebelled. I mean, these guys, playing [games], "What are you going to do, send me back to Vietnam?" or something like that. They couldn't do that. I just didn't like the games that they played. They resented [us]. You know, you were brought back, you were a veteran, … and nobody wanted anything to do with you, nobody. Society wanted nothing to do with you, families didn't want to talk about it, I mean, not that you offered to talk about it. I mean, I've asked my mother, … in years since, how it was when I first got home? … She told me all about the nightmares and stuff I was having and I think she had the toughest part of it, [which] was accepting me when I came home, and, you know, being a mother, she probably paid more attention to whatever the hell was going on with

me. … Anyway, the Vietnam War was a big, big changing point of my life. Coming back was a bummer, but wondering whether I should have stayed, to this day, … like I said, I still wonder, "Should I have stayed?" Do I regret it, you know, making those decisions? I said, "No, there's a reason for it." I mean, the whole time … I was in Vietnam, I prayed that I would live long enough to be able to come home and have kids, and I [did] come home, had a family exactly as the one my father raised. He had a boy and three girls, I've got a boy and three girls, same order. So, I'm thankful. I mean, my prayers were answered, and not everybody's prayers were answered.

SI: Because of the rotation system, and, also, casualties in general, were you able to form bonds with the men or did you keep to yourself?

CE: Well, you never let anybody get that close to you. The only way [was], you would get close to the guys on your tank, but just so close. I mean, … really, you had no choice but to get close to them, because, I mean, you're with the guys twenty-four hours a day, you know, seven days a week, and you felt what they felt and vice versa. I mean, you had no choice, but you kept your distance and you really didn't want to get too close, because it's hard to lose somebody. I mean, when you're a veteran over there, I was closer to those guys than I was to my own family, and that's just the way it is. I mean, if those guys were here today and I had to lay my life down on the line for them today, I would give it up for them, yes, … without hesitation, and I think it's the same way all of us feel. There is a special bondage, camaraderie, you might say, and I see this when I go up to Lyons [Veterans Administration] Hospital, because I'm a what you call a hundred percent disabled veteran now, with PTSD [post-traumatic stress disorder] and the wounds and stuff like that. So, I go to these outpatients up there. … I look forward to it, every Monday, to seeing the guys, and we all talk and care and talk about our problems, and we all have the same problems, drinking, self-medicating, hard to hold relationships. Well, I'm fortunate; I'm one of the very few that's still married. Most of the guys can't hold it. I don't want to go on with their problems, but it's nice to have that camaraderie back. So, I'm getting off of where you were.

SI: No, that is a good point. How long were you in the hospital for, recovering?

CE: Oh, it didn't last long. It was, like, … an outpatient thing. I remember going back there, when they took me back to the rear area to stitch me up. … They had my hand soaking in peroxide, I remember it fizzling, apparently, and I wanted them to take care of my hand and they said, "No, no, we aren't taking care of your hand. We've got to do your head first," and they started stitching my head, and then, they got hit with mortars. … The mortars put the lights out and there I was, sitting there, with my hand in peroxide and the needle's just hanging out of my head, and everybody running around, looking for lights. … Now, the hospital there was not what you'd conceive to be a hospital; it's just like a tent, I guess sort of like *M*A*S*H,* [a TV medical comedy-drama produced during the 1970s and 1980s set in the Korean War]. You've seen *M*A*S*H?* that kind of a thing, with a tent. I mean, that's the kind of area it was, but I remember, they had that little, bent needle, like you sew with, sticking out of the top of my head up there. So, they stitched me up and it was the next day [that] I went right back to the company. I mean, I couldn't go back out to my position, and I had to go back to the company headquarters

and stay there until I was healed enough to be able to go back to my position on the tank. So, I imagine it was maybe about two weeks.

SI: That was pretty fast.

CE: Yes, I'd say two weeks at the most. As soon as you get stitches, you know, you can come out; when you can use it again, you went back. … I was glad to go back. I mean, I didn't want to be in the rear. … At the same time, I was worried about the guys out there, who was filling my position, what they are doing. …

SI: Were you always a loader?

CE: No, no. I was a loader, and then, I was a driver. I liked driving. That was cool. I mean, a tank back then was not … what you would think a tank would be. You sit in this little hole, … real little, around you, but it was an automatic; you didn't have to shift anything. You only had one panel and you had to shift on the floor and it had a steering wheel, like a car. It would go [Mr. Everhard imitates the sound of the movement], and you went wherever the guy up top told you to go. I mean, you just couldn't take the tank and drive down the road yourself, because you wouldn't be able to judge your clearances, especially backing up. There's no rearview mirrors, or nothing like that, so, you can't see going back[ward]. So, you have to listen to everybody that's up and around you, saying, "Go to the left. Go to the right," you just steer, whatever, "Go this fast," "Go that fast," or, "Stop," and you had to stop to fire, though, because you couldn't fire and shoot [while moving], because the sights on the thing were not adapted for it. Those things were antiquated, really, [when] I think about it. … Looking back at it now, the radio systems and stuff we had were terrible.

SI: Do you remember what type of tank they were?

CE: Mine was called a medium-sized tank. It was an M48A3, … Army calls it a Patton tank. It's a takeoff of World War II tanks. I've been looking around to see one. The closest one I can see, that's similar to it, is over at Fort Monmouth, but it's not the same tank as mine. I'm going to have to go to, I think, Aberdeen Proving Grounds, [a weapons testing facility in Maryland]. I want to see another tank before I die, the same one. I mean, they're so old now, the only way you would find them is in a scrap pile, or some kind of a museum, and I understand Aberdeen Proving Grounds might have them. So, I hope to go down there some day.

SI: They have a large collection of vehicles.

CE: That's what I hear. I went to the Marine Corps Museum, figuring I'd see it there, … this new one that they just built.

SI: The new one in Virginia.

CE: Yes. It's a beautiful museum; however, it didn't have what I wanted. I mean, it has its own Vietnam Era, Korea, you know, Second World War; it's really, really nice. They did a wonderful job, but it didn't give me the tank that I was looking for. [laughter]

SI: How were the tankers viewed by the other Marines?

CE: They loved us. I mean, when they'd seen us come in, we were a godsend to them. I mean, we were like a security blanket. We had more firepower. They could relax a little bit, knowing they had somebody to fall back on that's right there. Like, artillery and stuff like that, you'd have to call back to the rear to get artillery, and then, the artillery has to shoot up over you, and hope they don't come up with the short rounds, which they did a lot, meaning they fire for effect and it would hit here, and then, all of a sudden, they've got to walk it up, and, hopefully, you're not standing there when a short round comes in. So, if you're a tank, there's no such thing as a short round and you're just firing right into [an area], where you're seeing what you hit, and artillery couldn't. So, anyway, that was [preferable]. With a tank, you've got a fifty-caliber machine gun, you've got a thirty-caliber machine gun and you've got the ninety-millimeter, so, we had a lot of firepower. So, it was the deterrent for the average Vietcong, … say, six or seven, to try to come and take you. They had to have bigger numbers than that, because they wouldn't stand a chance, because we could fire too far away, and, usually, like I said, we were on a hill, always looking down. I mean, sure, it's a good shot to shoot up at it, if they had an RPG, but they pretty much didn't, for some reason or another, in my area, … have that bigger stuff. They did up north and they did down a little further south of us, but I was lucky. … Where were we at on that?

SI: I was curious, because, in previous wars, armored forces were good, but also bad, because tanks attracted a lot of fire, but it does not seem like that was the case here.

CE: Yes. Well, the only time it was bad is, like I said before, I mean, when we lost a track and you're stuck in a spot, it's a fixed position. … You know, you don't want to hold the infantry right there and they've got to stay until they get you out of the mess. I mean, it's good and it's bad. It's just like [how] they loved us to come to be, like, a taxicab. We would be a ride for those guys, instead of them walking all the time. They would love to sit on the top of the tank and ride. Well, God forbid, when we're riding on it, and it did happen a lot, to a lot of tanks, that we hit landmine; what happens to them guys on the outside? So, it did happen, unfortunately, to a lot of guys, but not enough to deter them from getting that ride, because, if you walk for a year, man, you're tired of walking. So, it was nice to see a ride and it's nice to see a tank sitting on top of the hill, because you know nobody's going to mess with you, usually. So, it's a little like a security blanket. So, everything has got its pros and cons, just like a tank, being in the tank, I mean, … when it was hot, it was too hot to go in and, when it was wet, you couldn't close the doors and stay in it. … There was no air system in there to keep you in there. I mean, you had to leave something open to get the air to move.

SI: Could you tell me a little more about what the conditions were like in the tank? Was it noisy? Was it hot? How was it to work in that environment?

CE: I don't know if I ever really weighed into it. I mean, it was a very small, confined area and, when you're busy in there, you're not paying attention to what the hell's going on. … If you're going somewhere, you're doing something, you're fine with the ride and all. I mean, you wanted to get to where you were [going], do the job, and get back and be able to get out of it. You didn't want to stay in it, because, … like I say, there's no room. You couldn't turn around, you couldn't

smoke a cigarette in it, you couldn't do anything. You had just enough room to do your job, and then, you want to get out. So, it was just, like I say, like a cab, sort of, you know, get you to point A, point B, and do your job and get out and come back and relax, unless you broke down, and then, you had to stay with it … and fix it. I mean, if we broke a track, we're the ones that had to put it back together, and that was a lot of work to put a track back on the tank. Well, like I say, I only had to do that once.

SI: You were able to do that out in the field.

CE: Oh, yes, yes. We always carried spare parts. You learn, as time goes on, what parts to carry, that you're apt to run into a position with, and, like I said, the biggest thing in our area were landmines in the roads, or in the fields, or something like that. So, you would carry these little spare wheels and a couple of sections of track, and we knew how to fix it and all, but it's not like changing … a tire on a car, you know. It took a great deal of time and, sometimes, you had to be towed out of that position, to get you level, to be able to lay the track down, because what we'd do, say if you broke a track, … the track would go lay down in a straight row. Well, then, you would have to drive the tank on that track, get it started on that one side, and work the track back into where it is, and then, be able to hook it back together, replace the parts that are broken and put it back together. … Sometimes, you have to use explosive devices, or something like that, to blow these little hinges off. It was just technique. …

[TAPE PAUSED]

SI: Could you tell me a little bit more about the living conditions, both in the field and at the base? What was the setup? Did you have to build anything?

CE: Well, the base in the rear, which, to us, was a good place to be, when we went back to [the] rear for, like I said, … oil changes or to get ammo and stuff like that, whatever we did for preventive maintenance on the tank. It was a good time. We'd go back there, it was set up where they had a mess hall, where you can get warm meals, and it had bathrooms, not running water bathrooms. They were like these Johnny-on-the-Spot-type deals, [portable toilets], that you see out here, except they were made a little differently, but the living areas we always had, … it was like a big tent, screens around the inside, and it had a wooden floor and you were assigned [an area]. You always had your certain area [that] was yours, for when you came back to the rear. … They had a cot and having a cot was, you know, one of the best things in the world. I mean, if you didn't have one for a long time, it's nice to have a cot, and you had a footlocker. Whatever way you could have dressed that [up], like, I had a corner assigned to me, I had the end spot, inside that place, for whenever I came to the rear, so, I had a cot and I had bought an air mattress, and it was nice to have an air mattress on top of the cot, made the best you could out of it. So, I had this cot all set up for when I came back. I mean, it had a good blanket, the pillow, comfy as home, you might say. I had a footlocker that I bought off the Vietnamese. It was made out of a little wood, but I kept my stuff in there nice. You kept all your civilian clothes that you had. You had civilian clothes you had to take with you, because, if you went on R&R, [rest and relaxation], you needed to wear civilian clothes, not military clothes, and whatever your personal belongings are, I mean, that you didn't use for war-related things, you know, your dress uniforms, everything, would be back in the rear. But, they had electric [power], so, you would

have a fan. … Guys would have these reel-to-reel tape recorders, you know, where you can play music. They had a radio. We could have a radio, because they had that radio free thing that was put on, like *Good Morning, Vietnam*, let me just say that.

SI: The Armed Forces Radio?

CE: Yes, the Armed Forces Radio, yes. That's pretty much what you listened to. Then, you'd have the one from Hanoi, [Trinh Thi Ngo, "Hanoi Hannah"]; … she played good music, too, and you would listen to music like that, you know what I'm saying? and relax, drink beer, and, when you had your time off, you'd do that. You might be able to see a movie, because they maybe would show movies at night. It was more of a relaxed atmosphere, where you would sit back. They had a little pub that they called the "Playboy Club." It was no more than a shack building that they made up. It looked cute, though. They had the Playboy Bunny painted on the outside and you'd go in there and get a cold beer. I mean, it was nice to have a cold beer. I mean, you're out there in that hot weather. … They had ice in the back. I mean, it was great to have. I mean, the things you didn't have were things like ice cream, milk, etc. But, hot meals, I mean, considering the food that we eat every day, it was tremendous to have a hot meal and stuff like that. So, we loved being back there for a period of time, but, then, after awhile, it got boring. You get tired of listening to the rear echelon guys, "Do this, do that," stuff like that. You just wanted to go back out and get into it again. So, I would say, out of my twelve months and twenty-one days in Vietnam, I was probably out in the field at least ten months, I was out there, I would say, and I liked it out there. I didn't like that rear echelon stuff and people messing with you, you know, "Why don't you do this, do that?" This way here, when you're out there, you just do your job, do what you're supposed to do and take care of each other, and move on, you know, do what you do, what you … went over there to do. But, we had, like I said, … to go back for the oil changes. … While they took the motors out and changed the oil, did whatever they had to do, we had to paint the inside of the tank. We had to wash the tank, like it was a car wash, you know. The Marines are always that way, meticulous. Even in war, you had to keep things clean, but it wasn't to the extent where you had to iron your clothes and stuff like that, because that didn't work.

SI: Did the rear area come under attack?

CE: They would pretty much get hit with rockets, small arms fire, occasionally, not that often, because we pretty much kept them [at bay]. Our positions, on the outside, were to keep them at bay, out there, before they [could] get back to the rear. So, then, we were like the frontline, protecting them, all the way around. They're here; we're here, here, here, here, all the way around. We're holding them out there. That way, they won't be here, but they were still there anyway, I mean, some of them. … So, it was nothing on the scale that we were [facing] out there, or the guys to the north, where they were getting hammered twenty-four hours a day up there. I mean, in geographical areas of … South Vietnam, all the way up to the north, each area's unique in its own. I mean, there, like, down around Saigon, … it was all the rubber plantations and stuff like that, and then, you get up by Da Nang, or start with Chu Lai; Chu Lai was all beachy and some hills. Da Nang was the same thing, so-to-speak, not that much beach, but had a big, flat area, and then, the big mountains, and then, you went further north, up to where Third Tanks were and stuff, that was all hills. So, geographically, like I said, they were unique in their

own. I mean, we had a place called "Elephant Valley" by us, where, supposedly, there was elephants and tigers. I've never seen one of them, but, I mean, we had operations through Elephant Valley and we had operations all over the place. I think we were even told that we were in Cambodia at one point, and we didn't know that. I mean, they [did not] give us a map; we just go where they told us to go, and then, we hit Cambodia and they told us, "You better get your ass out of there. Turn around and come back. You didn't belong there," but it was a nice ride.

SI: Can you try to give me a feel for, when you are in a tank in action, in firefights, what it was like for you as a driver or a loader?

CE: Oh, a driver; I'd rather be the loader, because the driver, all you do is pretty much sit there and wait for a command to move, and, if you're not moving, you're not doing anything, except watching what's going on around you, because they're moving the turret this way and that way and you can't get out, unless you go out through where your head's sticking. So, you just pretty much sit there and wait it out, I mean, though you're in probably the safest position in the whole tank. You're in that part, because that's the thickest part of the steel around you. You're pretty protected, you might say. Like, being in the womb of your mother, you might say, but, as you're firing, inside a tank, I mean, the loader's busy loading and doing what he's supposed to be doing, following the commands, and the gunner is over there shooting the hell out of everything, whatever he's told to shoot at, and the commander's also doing the same thing while giving commands to the guys below, and firefights don't last a long period of time. Like I said, if they lasted five minutes, you're talking about a lot. … When the tanks were around and we overpowered them, they hit and run. That's all. … That's what it is, pretty much, hit and run, and that's what they would do all the time. It wasn't a control thing. They couldn't maintain the firepower long enough to overcome the firepower we had, not just meaning the tank itself, I'm talking about just the United States, the Army, the Marines and stuff like that. I mean, they were always outnumbered in our area. I mean, then, you read history books, now, about up north, where they came with waves of Vietcong and North Vietnamese. I mean, we didn't see that many of the North Vietnamese regular army, NVAs. We didn't see that many of them down by us, but they were more north, because, geographically, they'd come down that way and they would go around, through Cambodia, and infiltrate through into Vietnam that way. … I mean, you figure you've got Red Chinese, Red China, you know, those NVA regulars, they were big guys. They were six-foot tall. They were big people. They stood out, and they wore uniforms, like regular military. The Vietcong wore black pajamas, just like the average, everyday Vietnamese person, so, that's why you couldn't tell the difference that way. But, the firing inside of a tank was, like I say, it was just a routine and you did what you had to do, and then, after you got done, you had to clean up your mess, "Pick up your brass," as they said, and that's what we had to do. We had to bring [back] all the shells that we fired, because, when you fire a shell, you've got to throw it out the hatch of the tank to the ground, because, obviously, you couldn't throw them on the floor, because you wouldn't be able to move. So, each one that fired, you had to catch it and throw it out of the tank, while it was hot. So, after the firefight, you would go back and pick it up, and then, bring it back to the rear.

SI: Why would you have to do that?

CE: I think what it was was, they were made out of brass at that time, metal, money, money, brass. [laughter] I have an ashtray, but it's not here now; it's at the Memorial, [the New Jersey Vietnam Veteran's Memorial and Vietnam Era Educational Center]. It's the base of the round. It's about this big around and it stands about this high, when it was real. So, that's solid brass; so, that's salvageable material. After awhile, they were made out of steel, after we went through the brass. Brass [shells] were made for World War II. That was leftover ammunition. I think, sometimes, … that's why they started the Vietnam War, was just to get rid of the shit they had left from World War II and Korea, really. I mean, the food we were eating was made the same year that I was born

SI: Really?

CE: Yes. Did you ever see the food we eat, that we ate over there?

SI: C rations?

CE: Did you ever see the C rations?

SI: Yes. I have not seen the Vietnam version, although I guess they are the same ones. I have seen pictures of the World War II version.

CE: Just give me a second.

[TAPE PAUSED]

SI: We were just looking at the C rations display you made for the Vietnam Veterans' Memorial, for the tours. Yes, they are very old. [laughter]

CE: They're as old as I am. I'm sixty-one years old. That's how old they are, sixty-one.

SI: Marines are famous for being able to adapt to things, like inventing things in the field and scrounging things. What do you remember about that?

CE: Right, live off the land?

SI: Yes.

CE: You always learned to do with [less], basically, the same as the Vietnamese, the Vietcong, did. Like, you've just seen those C rations; you see those cans? If we would toss those cans to the side, they, [the Vietcong], would … make an improvised bomb out of it. They would make booby traps out of them. Anything we threw away, they could turn into a bomb, even unspent shells. That's pretty much where they got these things to make landmines. Now, Marines are taught to do the same thing. I mean, we learned to, say, make that food taste better. We learned ways of [doing that]. If you're fortunate enough, you could heat it up with this Sterno, if you had the Sterno; otherwise, we would use what they called C-4. You know what C-4 is?

SI: Yes, plastic explosive.

CE: Yes. We would use that to heat up the food, because that food was horrible, and most of the black guys that were over there came out of Detroit and all, I mean, there was a lot of them over there, but they learned to, they showed [us], at least taught us, how to modify the taste. They would have people send them Tabasco sauce and stuff like this. So, we all learned to share different things and to make the food taste better, and we had to barter for anything we wanted. Like I said, if we wanted a cold drink or something like that, you had to find ways of bartering, like, … when we were out on a hill, northwest of Da Nang, we found these Seabees [CBs, naval construction battalion] who took a liking to us and they used to go out of their way and risk their lives just to come out and give us ice.

[TAPE PAUSED]

CE: Okay, where were we? Improvising.

SI: The Seabees.

CE: Yes, the Seabees used to bring us out the ice, they'd bring us out Old Grand-Dad [whiskey], they would bring us out beer. They … let us live like kings. They risked their lives to bring us ice, and then, that really made us feel good, that they would do that for us. I mean, it's all part of bartering. I mean, it's like, we would get these drums, and fifty-five-gallon drums, you might say, or something like that, … [with] ingenuity, we'd make a hot shower out of it, by using these kerosene burners that we used to use to make [hot water]. If we had hot water, a luxury was to have hot water, we could make it. These things [were] set into these garbage cans and that would make the hot water. Well, we found a way to make that hot water go into these fifty-five-gallon drums up on the top of a hill and with a little rack, and then, you could stand underneath and get a hot shower. Maybe fifty-five gallons at a time, but this is the way we would do it. So, you were inventive, the same thing as, if you wanted to go to the bathroom and stuff, you had to find a way. You know, you don't carry your own toilets with you, so, you had to find a way to build your own little toilets and live off the land, you might say. It's the same thing as … when you build a foxhole, right. You ever see guys digging a foxhole and stuff? Well, then, there's ways of modifying that, by filling up sandbags and building up walls around it, which we would do with tents and stuff. So, it's making yourself safe. It's all part of stuff of living off the land. I mean, we went down the road, one time, and, let's say, for example, I would come upon a banana tree. No, I never knew bananas grew on a tree, nor did I know that they grew up, instead of down, and we'd go along, whack off a stack of bananas and we ate bananas for a week, great. It was good, and then, I saw the things we wouldn't eat. We wouldn't eat, like, one of the Vietnamese people would want to give us chickens, and stuff like that, and [have us] eat their chickens, and it was nice of them to offer it, but I said, "Man, I can't eat them things. … I don't know what they're feeding those chickens." I said, "I don't even want to think about it," or they would give you the chicken eggs. I mean, it's all part of, like I say, bartering with the people. They would do our laundry, too, the Vietnamese people. … Most of the places we were, we commingled with the people of the villages. They liked coming to the bottom of our hill, where they could sell us the stuff they got from the Red Cross and all that, and do your laundry, and that's the way they made money for their village. What they ever did with that money, whether

they used it to give it to the Vietcong or whatever, we don't know, but it made our lives a little easier. So, the little things, we could get; if we got a carton of cigarettes, if you'd get a pair of what they call "Ho Chi Minhs," is these little things. They were inventive. Like I said, they made stuff out of our stuff. They would get these tires off of a truck, or something like that, that were disposed and they would use the inner tubes and make the straps, and the bottom of the tire, they would cut out in the size of a foot, and then, they would sell them to you, "handmade." I've got a pair of them, too. [laughter] A lot of inventive things; I mean, where they learned to live off the land, they were like us. We were the same way. I mean, for me to get a pair of jungle boots, when I was over there, because it rained so much; all the Marines, when I first went over, all we had was leather boots. There was no such thing as a jungle boot, but the Army did. So, I had to barter with a guy in the Army to get a pair of boots, took me a couple of months to find a guy that finally would do it. So, I got a pair of hand-me-down boots from him, one of those guys there, which let my feet dry a little better, I mean, because all of us over there had problems with that. … Even being in a tank, I stayed so wet so long, … during the monsoon season, that I contracted ringworm, jungle rot and fungus on my feet, all around my ankles. … I'm saying even inside the tank; you think about these infantry guys. They don't have anything to cover themselves except for the poncho, but everything you put on was just as wet as what you took off. Maybe, at best, it was damp. … So, that's why you would get this jungle rot and fungus, and you had to go back to the rear, get medical attention and cure it a little bit, and then, go back out again. So, they did that all the time. You would go back to the rear and get [treated]. You had dentists and stuff like that. You could go back to the rear, go to the dentist. So, your hygiene part was, they did the best they could with what they had, and we did the best … the way we could. Like I was saying earlier, … when we went to the company area, we had a cot and a fan and a radio. I mean, that was like living like a king. Yet, though, when we went out and we didn't have all those luxuries, we just had a tent and the walls around us, we were still living like kings [compared] to the infantry, because the infantry didn't have those tents. Like I said, they had their ponchos, or, if they did have a tent, they were really, really lucky, because we always had to move, except during the monsoon seasons. Then, like I say, we usually sat. Then, when the dry seasons [started], we would get out and agitate the hell out of everybody, and that was our job. … Put it this way; if you sat [in] one spot for a year, you know they're going to blow the hell out of you because you're never moving. You don't want to sit in one spot too long. So, there was always some form of movement, some way, but living off the land is what the Marines were taught, and I could live off the land pretty damn good. You could take me in the woods today, I'll survive. I'll find my way out. Just drop me off, I'll find my way. I don't think there's anyway you can get lost in these United States; just follow the sun, follow the moon, follow the stars. Something'll kick back in you. It's part of your training that you had, you know. It never goes away. It's there. It's like they always say about the Vietnam veterans; we're always looking around. … Everybody swears, like, I was a cop, because I'm always aware of who's around me at all times and always looking for escape routes. You're never going to pin me in a corner. The only place I'm secure is in my own house, and I know where I'm at, but you get me out at a restaurant, I usually sit at a table with my back to a wall, watching the front door, stuff like that, but it's all part of the training that we had and it just stays with you, your whole life, but that's all part of PTSD, too, though. They never unwound us. I don't mind it. The only thing I do regret is all the drinking I had done trying to self-medicate.

SI: Did a lot of people drink in Vietnam?

CE: Oh, we all drank, yes, drank, smoked. Once in awhile, you'd probably get a couple of joints, and you would only use them if you were in the rear, because you wouldn't want anybody high with you out in combat. If you're in the rear, you feel like you're in a safe zone, so, you're not responsible. Say, if my tank was down and out, you know, it's no use to me, there's no ammunition on it, there's no nothing, it's just sitting there, they're fixing it, what are you going to do? You had no responsibilities. … Downtime, you self-medicated, a little bit, but nothing more than maybe a joint, and that was in the '60s. I mean, … some people perceive, they believe, that all the Vietnam veterans are drug related, a lot of drugs, but I understand that they really didn't come into play until the '70s, and it was strictly in the Army, not the Marines, and I really believe that. … Would you want to go to combat with the guy next to you being so high that you didn't know what the hell he's going to do, let alone the guy out there? No, I don't think so. I'd shoot that son of a bitch first, so [that] I'd know I'm safe, but, yes, drinking, … it was probably … the best way you could unwind. I mean, you really wouldn't want to get "drunk" drunk, but you relaxed. You're sort of relaxed and [everyone] bullshitted, had a good time. … You made whatever you could out of each day, listening to music, write letters, you drink, you go to the club, you socialize a little bit, but that only lasted a day or two, and then, you're back out again, but it was sort of a way to unwind. I mean, it's nice to, like I said, go back to the rear and get a hot meal, drink, use the bathroom, write letters, get whatever necessities you needed, supplies that you're going to take with you; back out again.

SI: Do you remember any situations where people refused to go back out again?

CE: No.

SI: Or had any sort of problems?

CE: No, not really, nobody I [knew], not in the Marines. They would never. Never did anybody refuse an order. You always did what you were told to do. You might disagree with it, but you would do it, because everybody around you depends on you, so, you've got to do it. You had to follow through, even though your senses might tell you you're walking in a wrong direction. You know, you're looking for tripwires, you're doing whatever. No, … nobody ever refused.

SI: Was there anybody who broke down?

CE: Broke down, crying?

SI: Broke down mentally, had to be removed?

CE: Well, I guess all of us run into a problem. I wouldn't say removed from combat situations because of being terrified, but there were devastating times, such as "Dear John" letters, [letters written by a loved one indicating that their relationship was over]. I myself experienced that when I was over there, from, actually, it's my current wife. She was my girlfriend back then and she wrote me that Dear John over there and I didn't give a shit for nothing. I sat as a silhouette on top of my tank, hoping somebody would have shot me, and nobody would. I just sat right on top of my tank, for hours on end, making a silhouette. It was nighttime. … I just didn't know

what to do. I was really that stupid, devastated, back then. That's the way I was, I mean, and all the guys that did get Dear Johns over there, … you would break down and you would cry. I mean, you wouldn't cry, probably, in front of all the guys, but you would cry internally, or, at best, you felt it. I mean, it seemed like your whole world [had] come out from under you. "What am I doing all this for? And they're back there partying and I'm here and stuck," but I can't do [anything]. I can't even make a phone call. You can't do anything. I mean, … the most you could do is write a letter, which you'd get a couple of weeks later, … and then, letters would flow back and forth, but each guy had to take care of the next guy. So, maybe I experienced it at this point, then, a month later, another guy would get it. So, [I would say], "This is how I dealt with it," and you go that way. So, we all dealt with it that way, but that's the only way we would break down over there. But, I've never seen anybody break down in a firefight, about anything, no, because we just took it in stride. If somebody got shot, you did what you had to do and moved on, send the guy back to the rear and the next guy steps up and fills the position, and you moved that way.

SI: How bad were casualties in your unit?

CE: What do you mean by casualties; killed or wounded? …

SI: Both.

CE: Well, KIA is killed-in-action; there wasn't that many. Most of the guys would be wounded, mostly due to landmines, like I said, things like that. I would say, maybe, the experience I had, in my platoon, it was very few. Maybe, I'd say over a year's span, maybe four guys got wounded, in my platoon, but, then, there was another platoon, Charlie Company platoon, on the other end. Man, those guys got devastated every time they went out. I mean, they were hitting landmines real, real bad. Their tanks were always in the rear, being put back together, and guys were getting, not so much blown apart, but wounded, from landmines and stuff like that. … Then, as for killed-in-action, I'd say maybe there was only, … not even a handful, in my whole company, that got killed while I was over there. I mean, I figured tanks to be, fairly, the best place to be over there. I mean, there were a lot of other places that had mechanized armor where they would lose guys left and right. I mean, they had these things, these vehicles you would ride in, Ontos [Rifle, Multiple 106-millimeter, Self-propelled, M50] and stuff like that. They weren't very well armored and guys would get shot right through them. I mean, it was just so stupid. Our tank was safe. The tank was the safest way to be, and that's the bottom line, that's what I could say, unless you're up north. Like I said, if they hit you with RPGs [rocket-propelled grenades], then, you didn't want to be in that tank, but very infrequently did we get hit with an RPG. Mostly, we were hit with, the biggest thing was landmines and claymore mines and different kinds of mines, booby traps, stuff like that. That's it. Casualty-wise, I'd say we were on the better side. Infantry had it the worst. Every time we went out, more of them got killed than anybody, because they were out kicking them up and they [would] kick them up, we would return the fire, but they were one-on-one.

SI: What are the things that you remember most about being in action? Was it the actual action, or waiting for something to happen, or the aftermath?

CE: The action part, I try not to dwell on that too much, because, I mean, really, I don't think, it wasn't a day after day fighting situation. It was a threat every night, or during the day, but mostly at night. So, you really didn't rest at night. You tried to rest during the day, or, most of the night, you were on your [toes]. I'd say you might nod off, if anything, but somebody was always on guard duty. You had to be right there, ready to respond, … but combat was sporadic and, usually, nine times out of ten, we had to institute it. We had to go out and we had to kick them up, to disturb them. Like I say, they didn't want to really mess with a tank too much. I think that was the biggest deterrent. I mean, you get these infantry guys, they'll tell you stories [about] out there, you know, when they've got a tank around, it was like a godsend, to where they could relax a little bit, instead of just sitting there, because they would have to go out and sit in the middle of the jungle and wait for somebody to shoot at them and try to kick them up during the night and stuff, sort of like being a guinea pig. They'd send out four or five guys on this little patrol, and then, everybody else knows where they're at, but, yet, when they call you and tell you they see the Vietcong in a certain area, then, you've got to shoot at them, hoping you're not shooting at the patrol that's out there, sitting there, trying to kick them up, … like a guinea pig thing. … That's the way it pretty much went, when we tried to disturb them during the night. We knew that's when they were bothered and that's when they would respond, because, during the day, they went into hiding. During the day, they'd be the ones that cut your hair and do your laundry and serve you drinks and, during the night, they'd be the ones that cut your throat.

SI: Was that something that you felt at the time or something that you discovered later on?

CE: No, no, we knew that at the time, just like there were stories … they would tell you about sexual activity over there. … Naturally, sexual intercourse has a lot to do with everybody, and a lot of guys really wanted to; we'd go into these villages and get these girls and stuff and come back with this hepatitis C and all this other "drip" stuff, the clap. … Then, there were stories about [how] the girls used to insert these corks up inside of them, with a razor blade in the middle. … Once the guy went in there and hit it, you know, you're going to be in excruciating pain, and it wouldn't kill you, but what happened would be, … at this point, when you're down and out, the Vietcong would come in and grab you, right at that point, and capture you, because you're not going to respond with something like [that done] to you. … There was a lot of different ways they tried to deter you from having sexual activity with the girls, and I was apt to believe it. So, I always tell [people] I was actually like a priest when I was over there. I had no sexual urges whatsoever. Those women were the ugliest looking girls I [had] ever seen in my life. I mean, maybe the girls in the city were pretty, but the ones out there, they had, like, these red or black teeth, because they'd chew this betel nut. … That used to keep them high all the time and their teeth would turn, they say it's bright red enamel; I'd swear they were black. When they'd give you that smile, I don't know how you could even think about sex with something that ugly, and dirty, because they had no hygiene. They didn't have bathrooms, they didn't have tubs. … For them to go to the bathroom, they'd just walk along the road and pick up their leg, open up those big legs and just squat, go, not wipe themselves and get up and go again. How can you do something with something that dirty? You really had to be horny. [laughter] That's the way I look at it. It wasn't me. I waited for R&R and stuff like that, to where it was better. There, that was a good deal there. Girls were clean; cost you money, but they were clean. So, you go on your R&R for a week, then, you go back and start all over again.

SI: Were there cases of VC [Vietcong] being discovered at your bases, among these people who worked on the bases, or in the local area?

CE: Not in my area, no, not to my knowledge, no. This all came to light years later, that it was more so in the rear, like, where the Air Force was, the airstrips and stuff like that, where they had infiltrated the bigger bases, not … so much the company bases that I was at, not my tank battalion, but it was mostly to the rear, yes, I would say, because these people, they were more regimented into the American way than anything else. I mean, these guys had air conditioners, they had everything that you had here, just about, over there, and they had housemaids. We didn't have any of that. …

SI: Was there any tension between the rear area guys and the frontline guys?

CE: No, the only tension would be is if we went to the rear, that far to the rear, and they would call it a safe zone, and, if you had to go back there, they'd ask you to surrender your weapon before you could go onto the base and stuff like that. … Guys resented the fact of, "You ain't taking my weapon from me. I don't give a shit where you are, we're still in a war zone," and they didn't like us because we were dirty, we're stinky, [but] probably more so that we were scary, by the way we looked and acted. I mean, obviously, we weren't spit-polished. We weren't nothing. We were just semi-clean, you might say. I mean, to get a bath, the only time you can get a bath was in the river and the only way you can get a shower is if you improvised, if you were lucky. Otherwise, you had to depend on the rain. So, hygiene was, you did the most you could with your hygiene, but it's tough. It was tough, I mean, because the only way you had water was, they would bring it out in what they called a water buffalo, which was like this wagon with this tank on the back. That's where you would get your fresh water from, and that would be … mostly for drinking. They wouldn't be using it so much for washing, but you had to wash. If there was no water around you, you had to use some of it for washing, you know, put it in your helmet or whatever pan you had, or something like [that], and you'd wash and shave and stuff like that. You had to do that. You wouldn't be allowed … to grow beards and stuff. You still had to get haircuts. … You had to keep up that image, and hygiene is number one. I mean, like they teach in the Marine Corps when you first go in, "You've got one pair of feet and that's the only thing that's going to get you in and out of the Marine Corps, so, take care of them. Your feet are your most important thing." So, this all had to do with hygiene. So, you did keep your hygiene up, so [that] you can move on.

SI: You mentioned that officers would come into the unit, and then, they would be out pretty quickly.

CE: Yes, they just didn't last, I don't know, for whatever reason, I don't know. The officers, pretty much, that I had in my company stayed in the company area. They never, ever came out. I wouldn't say "never ever;" we had this one guy, this Captain Cherico, who used to come out. We called him a glory hunter. I hated him. I still resent him to this day. He would come out, if we were in the thick of it, you know, and after everything's almost done and over with, he'd come out with reporters and stuff like this.

SI: Really?

CE: Yes, and want to go out and take all these pictures for the newspapers and things like that, and make him look like a big chief, or something like that, you know. But, that's where they stayed, in the rear. … Like I said, the most we had out there was an E-6, which was a staff sergeant.

SI: How did you get along with those officers?

CE: I didn't get along with any of them, never did. Even when I came back here, I didn't like officers, because, to me, most of them are a bunch of glory hunters. I may be mistaken, but the ones I met, most of them were just glory hunters, looking for their medals or whatever the hell, that they didn't really earn.

SI: You mentioned that there were reporters. Would there be reporters around?

CE: You sporadically encountered different kinds of reporters as you were over there. I'd see in the company, somebody, I don't remember who, they were making a movie on the beach, *Charlie Company* or something. So, you did run into them, but we tried to stay away from them, because we didn't want to get involved. I mean, we weren't there for the glory. We just wanted to do our job and get the hell out. We weren't there for show time, but, as for the captains and guys like that, taking them out here, so [that] they could send these pictures home. I've got his picture in the paper, in the thing. What are you going to do? Nice photos of him crossing the river, all for show; then, they hand you the bullshit letter, saying what a terrific job you did going through this valley. It's all for publicity purposes, that's all. But, … the day-to-day shit, I think he would have been the first one to run, if he would have really been shot at, but we made so much noise when they were going across that river there, they would have ran anyway. So, they weren't going to kick nobody out.

SI: Are you just talking about the tank battalion?

CE: Yes. … Well, the infantry was along with us, but … you usually always took infantry with you.

SI: Do you know if there were infantry officers out there?

CE: No, I don't remember. I really don't remember that. As a matter-of-fact, … on that particular one, where he sent the pictures back and stuff, I wasn't even on that actual patrol. The other guys, a couple other tanks were, and my sergeant, and they were the ones. I think they made us stay back in the rear, for some reason, probably didn't like his (unintelligible?); then, it was [our job] to hold the fort down. It's always my platoon that went out, through this river, into this Elephant Valley, and, when they came back, they said he was out there just for all the glory. He had his photographers, he had this, he had that. As a matter-of-fact, he went from lieutenant to captain while he was over there, which was a pretty big jump in grade pay, you know, second lieutenant [to] captain. It's money, but he was more for the publicity. They really didn't want to have too many of them around. Officers, usually, if they knew the rank, … if you were around

them, they were the ones who would draw the fire, because, naturally, everybody wants to shoot an officer, including me. [laughter]

SI: How important was it to have some communication with home, either receiving letters or sending home letters, or these recordings?

CE: … That was very important. Every day, you looked for mail. I mean, if you didn't have anybody to write to, you would find what they called pen pals. … I had two or three of them while I was over there, just to have somebody to write to, to communicate to, to know that there was a real world outside of the world we were in, and there were three different girls, I think, or was it two? Anyway, yes, that was very, very important. You always looked forward to the mail from home, even though it was weeks old, you know, [it] took forever to get a letter or even to send one home. … Sending them home, all you had to do was write, "Free," on the envelope and everybody else had to pay postage for mailing them over there. So, it was a frequent thing, of getting mail as often as you could; maybe you didn't get it every day, depending on where you were. I mean, there were some days where we wouldn't get it, or some weeks, we didn't get for a week, because we weren't accessible for anybody to bring them out, but, whenever they brought out the supplies, C rations and stuff like that, they would bring the mail. So, you would catch up on whatever you had. But, it was important, very important, mentally, for writing home, yes; that way, you can know what's going on the world. They'll send you a newspaper, even, that might be a couple weeks old, but you think, "Boy, what's going on back there?" and then, we heard about all the music and clothes and all the hippies and, God, the world was changing. Music changed drastically. I come back from Vietnam, the music was just no more around, what I was listening to. I was listening to, like, the Four Seasons, the Four Tops, and all this other stuff, and then, … all the [new] stuff was coming out, like the Mamas and the Papas, … I mean, all that kind of music. That was different. It was really a different culture shock, compared to what the music was … when we went over, and, for all that to happen within a year, it was something. I mean, clothes, the way people accept you; the whole world changed, big, big time, really, really major.

SI: Did that have an effect on the unit's morale, to hear about the antiwar movement, what people were saying at home about Vietnam?

CE: Well, I didn't experience it too much in the way a lot of people did in California, you know, [they] were being spat at and stuff like that. I experienced it on a smaller scale, but, yes, I'd experienced it. Like, I came back from Vietnam, I wanted to join the VFW and it was right here in Keyport and they didn't want me to belong there. They said, "You're not a war veteran. Vietnam was not a war. It was a conflict," blah, blah, blah. They didn't want you at all, and me being a fighter, like a Marine, I finally, you know, stayed with them and fought through it and got in there, and I stayed in for it and became commander. … Then, after my time was up, after doing all that, I never went back, just proved a point, that I … [had] made the objective, and I think that's what, in any Marine, we always have an objective, what you do, you're going to follow through with it. … I pretty much did the same thing with them, even though they resented it. They fought me tooth and nail, mostly the women, who were controlling the men, but I did it and I overcame it and I moved on. I mean, you weren't accepted by [some women]. My wife was going; well, my wife, she was my girlfriend, again. I got back with my girlfriend,

who is now my wife, coming out of Vietnam and she was in college in Jersey City and I went up there in uniform and stuff like that. I mean, I was looked at, I was kept away from, but, even on the college campus there, nobody spat at me. I don't know why, maybe it was the way I looked, the way I acted, I don't know, but they left me alone. But, you were reading in the paper every day about what was going on, people spitting, you know, degrading anybody that had anything to do with the service, and it's the same thing as when I got out. A lot of guys took all their uniforms, everything, threw everything in the garbage, everything. They wanted no association whatsoever with the military. I kept mine, brought it home, put it in a cedar chest and just left it there, closed the door, and I never talked about it again, just went on with your life, did what you could do.

SI: Towards the end of your tour, did you find yourself counting down the days?

CE: Oh, in Vietnam? Oh, yes, we have what they called the, I had it, … short timer's calendar. I don't know if you ever heard of that one.

SI: I have heard of short timers, but not a calendar.

CE: Yes, a short timer was a guy with short [days in-country], I mean, he only had a few more [weeks], maybe ninety days or less, to go. … Towards the end, you get really scared, when you get shorter and shorter, figuring you aren't going to make it home. But, it was a picture of a boot, like a calendar, but it was a boot, and, in there, it looked like a puzzle, puzzle pieces, with numbers in them, so many days left. Each day, you would color it in, until, finally, the boot was full, and that means [it is] your time to go home, but, each time you marked one of them things off, you'd get more and more scared, like you were in the beginning, only it was … in reverse. It was a long time coming home. I mean, being a short timer, I don't think I'd ever want to go [through] that short timer stuff again. That was really, really [scary]. I think it was harder than going in, being short, because you really didn't know what the hell was going on, and then, when they took you to the rear and took you off your tank and put somebody else in your place, … you didn't even have a weapon no more, so-to-speak, and you felt useless. That is a weird feeling, but, yes, that's the story on the short timer [calendar]. [laughter] I never thought about that, but it was just the reverse role. Like I said, in the beginning, you go in, you're scared, then, you become hardened all the way through. Now, you don't think about this until many, many years later; in the end, you're really scared again, I think more scared than, like I said, in the beginning, being a short timer, because a lot of guys didn't make short timers. You hear stories about planes getting shot down, helicopters, when they're going back to the rear and stuff. They didn't make it home, but I did.

SI: When you were in Vietnam, were services and prayer, that sort of thing, important to you?

CE: Every opportunity I had to see [a chaplain], whether it be a priest, a minister or a rabbi, I don't care who it was. … Pretty much, I think they tried to do a little bit of each religion as they came out, but I would do one-on-one, if I could. I mean, … I sat there, out there in combat, where the priest just made [an altar], took two ammunition boxes, another one on top, made an altar out of that, and two or three of us would have Mass with him or something, and one-on-one confessions. When you did have the opportunity, sure, you would go, I would think, being

religious, you know. I mean, I was probably more religious then about going to church than I am now. It was that important to me then. I mean, I was praying; I made it, day after day. I owed the Man something. I wanted to pray some more, … until I went on R&R; then, all the prayers went out the window. [laughter]

SI: Did you have much interaction with the Vietnamese civilians?

CE: You had that deal there. That's like I told you; they did the laundry and stuff like that. I mean, I've got pictures of these kids that were so cute. I could show you pictures of, say, for example, … while we were out there in, … not the jungles, but out in the fields and stuff like that, we came upon this cathedral that was built by the French. … It was manned by a couple of French-speaking Vietnamese nuns and they had, like, an orphanage there. … In that orphanage were mixed-race orphans, mixed because of the United States, because they were half Afro-American and half Vietnamese or half Caucasian and half Vietnamese, and they weren't accepted by their people. … They really had no way of getting funds, because, you know, they didn't have, like, Masses and stuff, where people went out there and made collections and stuff, so, what little stuff they can get, they'd appreciate. So, anything we could get, we used to go out there and give them, whether we had C rations, or anything we could. Every time we went by there, we would stop and give them money, food, candies, you know, something, and we sort of adopted them, for about a week or so, and then, we had to leave the area. But, … just like today, war is not just killing; there is a lot of good we do, more good than you ever hear of, I mean, and that's a daily thing. I mean, we always adapted to the situation. I mean, like I said before, there was a girl, … this little girl, we used to call her "Cha-Cha," real cute little girl, and she had her family and they were having a time, struggling, but they always, like, were there for us, to do our laundry, or, like I said, give us a chicken. … Throughout the seven months I was in that area, I would see her sporadically, in that we would always make it a point to go and stop, if not stay there for awhile with them and deal with them. … She was just such a cute girl, sort of like a kid [sister], you would make her feel like she was, like, your sister or something, and she sounded like she cared for you. I don't know, she probably would be a good politician today, but it felt good. I mean, you were doing good for them and they were doing good for you. So, yes, … everything's not bad, bad, bad, like I said, about war. There is a lot of good. Just like you say, "Did you pray over there?" and things like that, yes, you do pray, and there's a lot of things you do forget about, the good that you did do. Like I say, you always think of Marines, they are just kill, kill, kill, and it's not true, and I think that's just part of being a human being, not so much being a Marine or a soldier or Navy, just being you. It's what you make of it, just like you make what you want with your life now. It's what you make of it. You're doing this, we did that, and what you're doing is great. Maybe other people don't think you're doing a good thing, but I think you are.

SI: Thank you.

CE: You're quite welcome.

SI: Is there anything that we missed about Vietnam, before we talk about your coming home?

CE: I don't think so. We could just keep talking in circles and trying to bring up more memories. You can talk and talk and talk. …

SI: Were there any major operations that you were a part of, that you recall?

CE: I couldn't even tell you the name. Actually, the operation, major operations and stuff like that, I think I was only on one, but the lot of the ones we were on were, like, sweeps. We more did the smaller scale. We escaped the major. Believe me, we didn't want to go on those major operations, because … that was like walking into a beehive, you might say. You knew, all the time, you're going to kick up shit, man, and, if you could not go into it, like you're told going into the Marine Corps, "Don't raise your hand and volunteer," and we didn't. So, we were lucky that we were an oversight in a lot of things. So, we got to sit back in the rear and do certain things, not in the "rear" rear, but you know what I mean. When these guys go out, somebody had to protect the place that they were at, so that the things are still intact when they come back. So, we did that a lot, too. So, now, major operations, one, maybe two, that's it. Other than that, we just did our daily routine. That was enough to do. I mean, you see all those fires, all those bullets going over your head at night, and the flares popping in the sky, and all the shit going on, rockets going over. Oh, man, you talk about the Fourth of July, when the artillery's going over your head and you're praying that none of [them] caught you, it's tough.

SI: Were there any other times that you were injured or wounded, besides when the hatch came down on you?

CE: No, no, that was the only time I was actually wounded and, like I said, the only other time I was sick was with the ankles. Yes, … I was in pretty good shape.

SI: Were there any other close calls that you remember?

CE: We'd have close calls every day. … Lucky, you know, you got your head out of the way, shots come in, but, no, not that … sticks out on the top of my head, other than the daily routine, you know. We're going along, if you hit a landmine, you hit a landmine. You just shrug it off. I mean, it depends on how close you are. … We could go over a mine here and it would blow up over there and we just were fortunate enough never to have a mine go off underneath our tank. We either were here or there and the guys behind us got it, which is just being at the right place at the right time. Why we would go over one and somebody else behind us would trip it, God knows. That's why I said that's why I'm here today, no big glory hunting things, like I said, but it's nice to be able to talk about after all the years that we didn't talk about it and nobody cared. Your generation cares, that's amazing, but our generation, [no].

SI: Yes, it is a very divided generation.

CE: Certainly is. … Some years from now, somebody'll listen to this and say, "Yes, is that what it was like?"

SI: Can you tell me a little bit about coming home? You mentioned that being a short timer was very nerve-wracking.

CE: Yes, it was a nerve-wracking part of the coming home, but coming home was an experience. … Like I said, I remember going to Okinawa. …

[TAPE PAUSED]

CE: Got to Okinawa and that's where … we sort of cleaned up, got the muck out of us, so-to-speak. I mean, a lot of guys wanted to go have sex right away, but, me, I went and looked for the, believe it or not, a stupid thing, there's a place there, they would give you a mudpack, to get the dirt [out], sort of cleanse your body. This is what I went for. I wanted to get all, everything, just out of me, and I went for that. I didn't care about the [sex], I didn't want [it]. I just had to get clean, and, like I said, all the pictures that I had, that I had taken back from Vietnam, the gross ones and stuff, they confiscated all that. I told them they can keep everything and anything they wanted, "Just don't hold me up another day. I want to go home." So, I think I was there a day or two, not much longer than that, and they put us on a plane, again, a civilian airliner, and, I remember, we went up through Chicago, that way, to New York. I watched the sun go up and down three times. I wouldn't go to sleep. … I just stayed awake the whole flight, and then, I got home, to Newark Airport, and it was raining like hell, just like monsoon season … over there, and it was like, I think, three, four o'clock in the morning. Naturally, there's no public transportation around. There was a cabbie there and I didn't give a shit for nothing. … I said, "How much do you want to go to Matawan?" … I think, back then, it was probably like ten bucks or something, to drive me back home. I said, "Okay." So, I got in the cab and, when I got in that cab and that guy hit that Parkway, I was terrified. He was doing fifty-five miles an hour. That was too fast for me. You wouldn't believe how your mind changes from not moving that fast for a year. It was a scary ride, like, it felt like he was going like two hundred miles an hour. Anyway, he got me home, to the end of the street here, and, like I said, it was still raining. I didn't want him to bring me up in front of the house. I said, "Drop me off at the corner," and I walked up the street, and then, I looked at the house and I said, "Am I really here?" and my mother had a banner made on a sheet or something, "Welcome Home." I must have stood there for five minutes, just looking, before going in. … They knew I was coming home and, from that point on, I remember going into the house, and, I guess, like anything else, after that, all the kisses and hugs and chit-chat, and you're home. So, you're home on leave for thirty days again, another thirty days leave, and you did whatever you did while you were here. I mean, like I said, you weren't really accepted too much by anybody else. You're welcomed home by your family and there were only a few friends around, because everybody else was either in college or in the war. There wasn't much to do. …

SI: Could you see changes at home with your parents?

CE: No, not really. … Like I say, we didn't discuss the war at all. There was nothing to do. They were just glad that I was home. … I don't believe, they didn't pry or anything like that. Nobody really pried, trying to get any information out of me, and, I don't know, I think I was probably reluctant to even want to talk about it. I might have been that way, … probably still had that stupid look in my head, about being, you know, I wasn't the same kid that went over there, and I think maybe that scared them. I don't know what they'd seen, but I know how I was, and I really wasn't looking for acceptance or somebody to tell me, "Yes, it was okay," that you

did a good job, blah, blah, blah. I wasn't looking for that. I just wanted to be home and have it behind me, and then, figure out what the hell I'm going to do with the rest of my time, because I had orders to go back to Camp Lejeune, [Jacksonville, North Carolina], after that, after my thirty days' leave. So, I had my thirty days' leave and I guess it's about that time that I got back in with my ex-girlfriend. I mean, I didn't want to see her. It was just a fluke thing that I got to see her again, as a girlfriend. It was weird; it was a weird set up. Anyway, bottom line is, I was going out with, like, I think, four girls at a time and she was one of them, and I just went down the line, eliminating one at a time, until I finally figured out which one I wanted to keep, [laughter] and sounds like a playboy, but it's the truth. My wife could even tell you that story today, that it's true. She wound up being the one I kept, but, yes, that's within that thirty days. I went back to Camp Lejuene and, at that point, … there was really no duty for us there. They gave me guard duty around the tank park there, and they had tanks and I was still part of them. They were inside this fence and they give me a stupid ass rifle with no bullets and tell you, "Now, you do guard duty." I'm walking around with this stupid rifle with no bullets in there, saying, "What the? What am I doing this for? What are they, crazy? What are you protecting? The tanks are in the middle of the base, I'm walking this stupid fence, nobody's going to come in here and steal a tank. This isn't like Vietnam." It just felt like a kid in play land, or something like that, you know. So, anyway, I sort of told them I didn't like doing that stuff, and then, he says, "Well, we could send you on a Med cruise." Would you, [Shaun], like to go on a Mediterranean cruise? Yes, you would. I said, "No." I said, "I just spent twelve months and twenty-one days in Vietnam. I do not want to leave this country." I really didn't. Looking back at it now, I should have kicked myself in the ass. I should have went. I mean, it would have been an opportunity of a lifetime, in a way, but I chose not to, but, inside the barracks, or it was in the offices, I can't remember where it was, they had postings on the walls of job bids, you know, placement bids at different bases and stuff like that, and I'd seen the thing down there for Earle. I said, "Can I put in for this?" and they say, "Well, yes, you can put in for it, but, … for you to get that, you've got to re-up [re-enlist] for two years," or three years, or something like that. I said, "I don't think so." I said, "Can I just put in for it as a gamble?" and he says, "Yes, you can put in for it." Well, sure as hell, I put in for it and I got it. I got the job down at Earle, which is right down the highway, and that was the biggest mistake I ever made in my life, was being so close to home. It was bad, because, what happened was, they got me home and I got stationed down there and, naturally, I'm so close to home, where do you want to be? You want to be home more than you want to be there. So, I did my guard duty down there and [I would] go home every chance I got, whether it was at the end of the day or even in-between shifts of the days that I wasn't supposed to leave. On guard duty, you had, like, four on, eight off, hours. I would sneak off the base and go home in those few hours, because I knew all the guards and stuff, you know. Anyway, that was the start of my demise with the Marines. [laughter] We had our ins and outs. … I sort of had a good time, in a way. I mean, we hooked up, a couple of us Vietnam veterans that were there; we had our own special camaraderie. … Give you an example; we had guard duty one night and we wanted to party a little bit and the girls came down to the base to say hello and stuff, these girls that you're messing around with. … We bought some wine and beer and, naturally, you aren't supposed to be drinking, because you're on guard duty, even though it's your eight hours off. Well, we brought them into the barracks and we're having a good old party and, all of a sudden, I get a phone call in the barracks. I had to walk up the hall and got a phone call. They say, "Your party's going to be raided, because, you guys, somebody turned you in, that you're having a bunch of parties in the barracks." As soon as I turned around, with the phone on my ear, … here

come the Marines, crashing in, and they caught me in the phone booth, and then, they went down to the hall, "What's going on?" blah, blah, blah. Then, they caught the girls and the guys, a few guys, a couple other guys in the room. They had me go down there with them. They said, "We got you. You're going to go to jail," blah, blah, blah. "Follow me." So, they start walking out the door and going up the hall and, all of a sudden, the four of us took off and ran out the back door, while they were going that way. I can go on and on with this story. Anyway, we went out into the woods. … Snow was about that deep, it was cold and they were looking for us. They couldn't find us. They closed the base down. They had the State Police surround the base. They were patrolling around the outside, the military police were patrolling inside. We said, "This is stupid, standing in the woods. The girls are freezing." So, then, we finally had to give ourselves up, … which we did. The State Police took the girls and we were taken to Fort Monmouth and they tested us for alcohol, you know, being drunk on duty and all this kind of thing, took our blood test, and we talked to the guy that was there. … Fortunately for us, this guy was getting out of the Army the next day or two. He said, "Don't worry about it. I'll take care of this blood test for you." I said, "Yes, we're in big trouble here if you don't." He said, "I'll take care of you." I said, "Great, great." We didn't really think he'd take care of us, but I think he did something to the blood where it was no good. Bottom line is, we beat the charges against us. They couldn't prove anything, and that was the start of my up-and-down thing with the rank structure in the Marine Corps, because I didn't like being played with and, … naturally, they didn't like getting burnt at that point. So, they turned around and they tried to get you for different things and this game went on for the next two years and they finally got me, through my fault again. I was on guard duty, down at Earle, and I think I hurt my back in the Marine Corps and they were giving me Darvon. I don't know if you know what kind of drug that is.

SI: No.

CE: It's like a muscle relaxer or something. You're not supposed to drink or nothing like that, but they didn't tell me. … I was on guard duty and I wasn't supposed to be drinking, but I snuck off base, because … my sister's [family] lived in Union Beach and they were having some kind of a thing for her [child]. Well, it was actually the first grandchild of my father's. So, I snuck off and popped a few beers and went back to base. I was fine until I went on guard duty. The beer had such a reaction to the Darvon and stuff, the muscle relaxers, that I couldn't stay awake. They woke me up four times on the main gate. Finally, they had to relieve me and they busted me down. Well, it didn't work. I had to get busted. They busted me down to private and sent me to the brig for thirty days in Brooklyn, and then, after that, it's just I went back to Earle after that and finished up my time, got out, became a civilian again, but I got out with an honorable discharge. That was the important thing, one stripe and an honorable discharge.

SI: Before that point, had you thought about staying in the Marine Corps?

CE: You know, you kick it around in your head. I thought about becoming a state trooper and stuff like that and I said, "The way I hate the Marine Corps now, … the State Police is so much the same thing as [that]," I chose not to. I mean, I could have been a hell of a state trooper, I know I could have been; could have, would have, should have, but, no, I had enough of the Marine Corps at the time. I didn't want any more to do with them. I just wanted out, and I didn't want to know anything about the military, because, really, once you got out of the base, you

weren't accepted by anybody anyway, so, it didn't make any difference. Now, one of the worst jobs I had, while I was down there in Earle, too, was, and I never talk about it; … I always seemed to get away from it, like I just did. I should tell you, and I look back at it and it bothers me, is one of the duties we used to have to do was honor guard, burial details, and the guys that we had to bury. … I've got this guy in my head, coming back from Vietnam, he was laid out in Freehold, and I can't get this guy out of my head, because it was in that funeral parlor and we buried him afterwards. … We're standing at the honor guard at the thing and you can't move. … You're just right by the edge of the casket and this guy was in a glass case, with big bandages around his head, where he must have [had] the top of his head taken off. … Well, he was dressed in his dress blues and all, but just to see him in there, and I could still see him this way, in that glass, so that nobody would touch him and stuff, and we buried a few guys, but that guy, distinctly, I think that must have really bothered me somehow, more so, and it took a lot of years to figure out how, than how many [other] guys I buried out of there. Just like the Marine Corps [League] detachment I belong to, [Phillip K.] "Tinker" Dorn, [Detachment #198], down here in Middletown, it's the only one down that way, and I actually buried him, too. It's named after this kid, from Vietnam, and that's where we do our ceremonies every year, is at his grave, and that brings back memories every time I go there, because I remember burying him, too. So, I did that throughout the state while I was there. But, I sort of, like, probably chose not to remember it, bury it, so, I forget. I was just thinking and I said, "Well, maybe it's a good thing to put in here." …

SI: What did that duty entail, just standing honor guard, or would you have to deal with the families?

CE: Oh, no, we didn't really commingle with the families too much, unless we went somewhere afterwards, if we were invited. You know, you would be a Marine anyway. You didn't really party, you just went to the affair and talked, and [said], "Yes, ma'am. No, ma'am," you know, that kind of stuff, but, no, I wouldn't want to even get close to them. … Whoever's in charge of the detail, that's their job, to be the politician, but to be a Marine, standing there, nice spit-shine, squared away, paying homage to him there, it sort of made me feel good, in a way, but bad in another. You know what I mean. But, it just didn't bother me then, because dead is dead. I mean, even to this day, dead is dead, and I don't think I've cried but one time since I've come back from Vietnam. That's a lot of years, takes a lot to get me to cry, an awful lot. So, you become, and stayed, sort of that hardened guy, you know what I mean. It's tough, but that's the way your image is. You have an image to keep up. You have an image to keep up, and so do I. I stayed like that.

SI: What was your first move after you were discharged from the Marines?

CE: First move, after getting out, getting a job?

SI: Yes. Did you get a job right away? Did you take some time off?

CE: … As I said in the beginning of this, … yes, well, I was naturally going to take some time off, then, I contacted the company, Railway Express, that, yes, then, I could go back there and they did take me back. … They held true to their word and I had a job, and then, … I guess

about a year or so later, … it started going belly up. They tried different things to survive, but UPS was coming out, and so, UPS actually put them out of business, and I didn't think that would happen. The company was so big, Railway Express; this new company coming in, I don't know how they did it, but they did it, but my father [had] seen it coming. He told me, "Get out." So, I quit there and, God, I don't remember where [I went next]; I went to so many different jobs. I think, between 1970 and 1983, I must have had ten jobs, easy, ten jobs, different decisions in life. I delivered oil; I quit there. I worked for the gas station; that didn't work out. I, Christ, worked for General Motors and I quit there, because they thought you're no more than an assembly line and I got numbered, like the military. I told them [to] shove the job up their ass. That's after I had to pull a lot of strings to get a job in there. I had good jobs, I had bad jobs, but, over ten years, I could not hold one, and, finally …

SI: Was that related to your time in the service, or was it just the jobs themselves?

CE: I think, looking back at it, probably, a lot of it had to do with the service and, … also, in that timeframe, somewhere towards the end of it, anyway, in the later '70s to early '80s, I took to a lot of drinking alcohol and stuff like that, and almost succeeded in killing myself in a motor vehicle accident and shit like that. I think that's what turned me around a little bit, after that, made me think, "Hey, you know, shit or get off the pot," because I had a couple of kids, I almost died, blah, blah, blah. … Then, I got a job up at Hess, [their] refinery in Port Reading, through pulling another string to get a favor, do a favor to get me a job in there, when the girl got me interviewed, and I got the job there, and I stayed with them for twenty-three years, until I retired, at fifty-seven. I went out early at fifty-seven, physically disabled from injuries and, also, through one hundred percent disabled from the VA [Department of Veterans Affairs]. … That had to do mostly with, I think, I'm thirty percent for combat wounds and a hundred percent PTSD [post-traumatic stress disorder], and then, I went out physically because I had rotator cup shoulder surgeries on both shoulders. I always tell somebody, I did it when I was playing golf, really, is when I did it, I tore both rotator cups, I say, "I got disabled because of the Golf War,'" and you sort of get a chuckle out of that, "Golf War." [laughter] It's G-O-L-F instead of G-U-L-F. [laughter] But, anyway, I couldn't do my job any more there. … Between the both of them, I'm making the same money as I [would have] made if I was working still. I had enough. So, now, I'm retired, since fifty-seven, [am] sixty-one now, so, I'm going on four years, and I give back to the community now. I do church organizations, I belong to the athletic council there, I belong to a couple of military places. Most importantly, I belong to the Vietnam Veterans Memorial and do tours all the time there and, when I'm bored in-between that, I search out veterans in search of benefits and try to steer them into the right direction of who to contact to get some of these benefits that nobody's telling anybody about. … It's all word of mouth and I do the best I can with that and that makes me feel good. So, I don't know, that's pretty much it. I was quick with the end of my life there.

SI: Do you want to go into more detail?

CE: No, I'm just saying I just went through it all. You know, I don't want to go into details about all the jobs and stuff, you know, because that's boring, but I think, … looking back at it all, and what I'm told through the PTSD from Lyons, which, like I told you, I go up every Monday as an outpatient. I've been doing that for four years and it's all Vietnam-related things, issues.

To me, it's normal. It was normal living, but, according to these psychiatrists and shit up there, they say we've all got the same problem, anger management, you know, things like this, alcoholism. I was told not to drink anymore, one time, when I had a gall bladder attack, pancreatitis, and the doctor got in there and looked and said, "Do you drink anymore? Do you drink a lot?" I said, "No," which I wasn't at the time. I was slowing down. "Did you drink a lot?" "Yes," and my wife was with me at the time. … He says, "See, this picture?" He says, "See this pancreas? You ain't drinking no more." Long story short, he told my wife, he says, "These lips never touched any alcohol; he's not to have any more alcohol if he wants to live." So, in other words, … he caught it in time, that I'd wrecked my insides from drinking, all my prior drinking days, trying to drink myself into whatever I was trying to hide, whether it was Vietnam or just it was everything, maybe feeling sorry for myself, God knows. I haven't drank since, but it's part of the things I did, and that's probably part of the reason I didn't make a lot of decisions I needed to make to have a better life. Like I say, … looking back at it now, I would have been a hell of a state trooper. If I would have survived it, God knows, but I know I could have done it. Could have been a hit man; Marines teach you how to do that. I thought about that, too, … passed that idea up real quick, though. I just went along with the blend, just go with the flow, try to make a better life. I didn't do too bad. I've got four kids, got a nice house. I mean, it's a house you live in. It's nothing fancy. …

SI: It is a very nice home.

CE: As I'm saying, you know, I believe in love and family, that's it, and that's my life. I'm happy. I don't regret anything I did.

SI: How do you feel about the VA?

CE: They're the same thing as the government. They screw with you and they need a lot of improvement. I mean, each day, they give you something; the next day, they take it back, just like the Marine Corps did. They give it to you; remember, as I said, back in boot camp, with the cigarettes, they play with you with that? Well, the VA's doing the same thing. I mean, you've got to stay with them, you've got to fight with them, you've got to know where to go. It could be a lot easier. They're being handed a lot of money. I don't know where the hell it's going, but it doesn't seem to be going to the right places. I mean, they're cutting back on doctors, they're cutting this, they're cutting that, they fix this, they fix that, but everything's half-assed. They're not doing a good job and, as for the one, just me, in my case in particular, in Lyons Hospital, it is the hospital administrator who's playing with everybody up there. It's not the state government, it's not the federal government, it's the hospital administrator that's making all these changes in policy. … I'd like to punch the guy in the damn head, that's what I'd like to do, because he's just playing with you. I've got to find a way of getting around it. You've just got to think about it. … For me to control my anger, I've always got to sit back and drop and think before I answer or respond to anything, any situation. I learned that now, but, say, if you punched me in the mouth today, I'll think about it before I respond to you, but look out tomorrow, whichever way I come. So, I don't want to regret saying what I said today, and I'll just think through it, but it's been good. It's working out. The VA's fine, I'm fine, I'm not nuts, I think I had a good life; talking about this a long time. I told you I could talk a long time. [laughter]

SI: Is there anything else you would like to add to the record?

CE: No, I think you've pretty much covered everything, everything and anything, unless there's something that you … missed.

SI: I am just trying to think.

CE: We went through a whole bunch.

SI: Yes, you have been very open and candid with your answers. I really cannot ask for anything more. Living in Matawan for basically your entire life, how have you seen the town change?

CE: Just like any other town around here. I mean, it's the population explosion. Everybody from New York, including ourselves, I'm from Jersey City, we moved down here. Now, it's everybody from New York moving down here. It's good. My house is going to be worth more money. Then, I could retire and go south a little bit. I mean, I would never leave this area permanently, but I want both places, say, the best of both worlds. That's about all. My kids are stuck here, I'll never be able to leave, family's still here, but this area, it's not that bad of an area. I think it's a good area. Like I said, back in the beginning, I used to know everybody in town. Now, I don't know hardly anybody, and I don't like that feeling, but that's the way it is. It's the same thing as when you get out of the service. You know, like I said, you don't realize how much you missed the camaraderie, and I found it again in Lyons Hospital, and that took how many decades for that to happen? So, it's the same thing. Maybe I could find what was here down South, that little, quiet town with the front porch where everybody says, "Hey," to everybody, you know. That's all I want. I don't want hustle and bustle and aggravation. I don't need it no more. It's like I smoke cigars; I sit on that porch out there and I'll smoke a cigar. I get bored with that, I'll go in the backyard and smoke a cigar, whatever, ride my lawnmower, just leave me alone. I'll play in the garden. … I get [into] my own little worlds.

SI: You talked about your involvement with the VFW and the Tankers Association.

CE: And the Marine Corps League.

SI: Did that all start right away when you came back?

CE: No, actually, … the VFW was right away. I tried that right away, and all the rest are later, within, I think, the past five or ten years. Marine Corps League, I just started about two, three years ago and the Tankers Association was probably about ten years ago, because I didn't know they were out there. The only way you could find it is through the Internet, you know. You get on the Internet, you find all kinds of stuff. So, you go start research different things and you find things and I'm a firm believer, I don't really want to join anything to just be a card-carrying member, so, if I join something, I want to give myself wholly to it and not split up. I mean, what's the sense of doing half a job? I don't want to do that. So, the Tankers, … that's not a one-on-one thing, you know; that's just strictly through the Internet, that kind of an organization, and the mail. The VFW over here, I do whatever I can to help them out over there. I'm a hall rental

chairman and stuff like that, but that's as far as I want to go. In the Marine Corps League, I do want to become an officer, but that takes a long time to get there, and my tours with the Memorial, that's the best of all. I'll never stop doing that, until I physically can't do it anymore. As a matter-of-fact, I've got a tour Friday. I had to change my eye doctor's appointment, because they called me and said there's a tour. I want to do the tour.

SI: From what Carl Burns tells me, there are a lot of grade school kids and high school kids.

CE: A little bit of everybody, and I specialize in, [from] what they tell me over there I'm very good at this is what they tell me, is special needs kids, say, inner city kids that come down, hardened, you know. Really, they come in with that attitude, you know, "I'm a street punk. Don't mess with me. You can't show me nothing." Well, I get through to them. I have that ability, somehow or another, to reach them, and the same thing, token, is if a grammar school kid comes in, breaking everything down from this level to their level, so [that] they can understand, or to the college level. I can, you know, step up, too. So, I'm very flexible in it. I feel confident in it. I get a lot of letters from there and I always ask for them to evaluate me after I'm done and send me a letter, and I've never gotten a negative answer back on what I do. … That makes me feel good, that I'm reaching them and telling them and what I tell them is the true story. Like I'm sitting here talking to you, that's what I'm allowed to do there, but I've got to do that in forty-five minutes, no more. [laughter]

SI: Do you find the kids are very receptive to what you are saying?

CE: It takes a little while to get to them, each group, but it depends. You've got to be able to reach them at their level … for them to be interested and to come back and ask questions, because you … can talk. But, after awhile, you can only listen to so much when it's somebody talking, so, you've got to get them hands-on, something, someway or another, get them into it, to respond back and forth, find something that you have in common with them, and there's always a common denominator in everything. So, I find it, hopefully. So, that's about it. I love doing it and life goes on, and I don't mind doing these [interviews].

SI: We appreciate it. I am very thankful for your time. Again, if there is anything else you want to add later, you can always add it to the transcript.

CE: … You can do the same. If you have a question, call me, you have my number.

SI: Yes.

CE: All right.

SI: Thank you very much.

CE: You're quite welcome. …

----------END OF INTERVIEW----------

Reviewed by Stephen Campbell 10/15/08
Reviewed by Francis Donnelly 10/15/08
Reviewed by Shaun Illingworth 12/15/08
Reviewed by Sandra Stewart Holyoak 12/28/08
Reviewed by Casper A. Everhard, Jr. 8/10/09