
The date is March 26, 2012 My name is Paul Robards, Library Director at Roberts Memorial Library. I will be speaking with John Blanks, Jr. from Warner Robins, GA today about his experiences in the Vietnam War.

What branch of the military did you serve in?
I was in the US Army Infantry

Why did you join the military?
I started in the Military as a career. I had been to a military high school and to a military college and the next obvious step was to go into the military as a career.

How old were you when you joined the military?
20

Where did you go to receive basic training?
In basic training I went straight to my unit and I took a special basic training out of Ft. Carson CO.

Where did you attend Advanced Training and how long did it last?
Ft. Benning GA. 4(e9raig)5(h)ett. naidnn <I -15.36 Ta :

men into combat. The worst feeling that I had was having to leave my family. Separation was particularly hard on wives.

What dates did you serve in Southeast Asia?

I was in Southeast Asia twice. I was there part of 1966, '67, '68, and '69. In '66 I was there from June 66 to June 67. And then from October 68 to October of 69. First tour I was with the 101st Airborne division, the second tour I was with the Americal division up in Icorp.

What was your rank during the war?

First tour I was a Lt. company commander. Second tour I was a captain company commander.

If you were in a combat unit, what was your first encounter with the enemy?

The first encounter with the enemy was when I was on a patrol with my platoon into a village that we thought was deserted, but after we entered in to the village, we came under fire from a Viet Cong unit. The encounter occurred shortly after being assigned to my unit and when the action began, my men did exactly what they were trained to do. We routed the VC and none of my men were wounded or killed. I would call it a successful first encounter.

It was scary as hell. It was either complete and total boredom or complete and total chaos. For a line unit, there was never anything in between. The most memorable thing was flying in on an air assault mission. You never knew what was going to happen when you hit the ground in the landing zone. If it was "hot," that would be the enemy shooting at you when you landed and that was really scary. The other thing was moving through the jungle not knowing exactly if you were being watched or if someone was taking a bead on you, or you were walking into an ambush.

What awards did you receive?

I received 4 Bronze Stars, 5 Army Accommodation Medals, Air Medal, Purple Heart, and Vietnamese Cross of Gallantry with palms; Vietnamese Staff Medal First Class, National Defense Service Medal, Vietnam Service Medal, Vietnam Campaign Medal. I think that is all of them.

What is your evaluation of American military leadership in Vietnam and of your immediate commanders in the field? Can you give examples to support your statement?

You had good and you had bad. A lot of times you would run into a commander that was just there, and this would probably be at the battalion level, probably an individual who was close to the end of his career and in my opinion was just trying to get his card punched for the next promotion. They were not really the most astute in the combat area. They had been desk jockeys for quite a few years before that, and they had volunteered to go so they could get their card punched. That would be one extreme. The other extreme, the ones I ran into most, were officers who were very competent. They were very astute in planning operations. They had tremendous control over the happenings there, and the men loved the heck out of them.

As a young serviceman, did you understand the politics and diplomacy (of both the United States and Vietnam) that resulted in a war? What is your opinion now?

I'm an old man now, and I still don't understand what that was. I assume that they thought they could stop the communist menace from toppling Southeast Asia one country at a time. It is really, really bad when you've got politicians who have never been in the service, much less been in combat, trying to run a war from Washington D.C. and to appease all the people who are against the war.

How did your understanding of the situation effect how you did your job?

It had no effect on it whatsoever. My job was to accomplish my mission, with the least loss of

days at a time without going back in to re-supply or any type of off duty from the actual operation itself, but when we did get back there, we had tents that were sand-bagged and it was sort of a compound area surrounded by barbed wire fence and it had a mess hall [in it]. It had the same food as you would have if you had been back state side—prepared a little differently in some instances, but still the same basic food, same basic menu. In base camp you also had movies now and then, so base camp was a little bit of a respite from being out in the woods, so to speak.

What was your daily routine while in Vietnam?

There really wasn't any daily routine for combat units. You were in the field on operations, some lasting as indicated in excess of 60 days at a time. Or you were in base camp, resting, recuperating, resupplying and waiting to be sent out on another operation. Most of the time on operations, we were just walking through the jungle from point A to point B, looking for an enemy who

Also while I was in Vietnam, I received a package. We always enjoyed receiving packages; it was always like Christmas come early. This package particularly, however, I regret receiving. It was from an anonymous individual who sent me a box of soap with a letter inside stating I should use tis soap to wash the baby corpses I had killed. I don't know who the SOB was that sent it nor where it came from,

me and a couple of people that had participated in this civic action program. He had this large banquet, and there was a large crock, probably two to three feet across, a round bowl, and it had a crust or something on top of it. It had these long straws coming out of it. You would stick your straw through the crust, and it was some of the most potent adult beverage that you could ever come across. Then they passed around the meal. The meal was a very interesting meal too; since it was the Montanyards, the meal consisted of a combination of rat and rice. It wasn't the gray city rats; it was the brown field rats, sort of like eating squirrel or rabbit, but it still had an interesting taste, because it was all cooked outside over a little grill. When we got ready to break it up, one of the people from the village came over and presented me with this plate with a chicken head in the middle. The village chief was to my left and the interpreter was to my right, and I looked at this chicken head and didn't know what I was supposed to do with it, so I turned to my interpreter

Asy17D74C1015A0Z2Q 11265.1c 341.32[015A30176030011A35E0