**Ok, today is February 4, 2014. This is Patrick Callaghan with the Westchester Public Library in Westchester, Illinois. Also present is Fidencio Marbella, Library Director. Today, we will be speaking with Mr. James J. Fitzpatrick. James served in the United States Army for nearly three-years—you said two-years, nine-months—and this interview is being conducted for the Veterans History Project at the Library of Congress.**

**Ok, let’s get started then, James. Why don’t you tell when and where you were born and a little bit about your family when you were growing up?**

Ok, I was born at Little Company of Mary Hospital in Evergreen Park, Illinois. Grew up on the south side of Chicago, 104th and Homan. I was the second oldest of eight children, growing up in a very middle class, average, middle class Chicago neighborhood. The parents did move to the suburbs when I was twelve-years old, but, for the most part, grew up on the south side, the far south side of Chicago at 104th and Homan.

**Ok, now, before the interview, you mentioned that your father was a veteran, so you have a tradition of service within your family. Why don’t you tell us a little bit about his service in World War II.**

Ok, yeah, my father was in the U.S. Army in World War II. He served under General Patton. He was in an Army engineer outfit. He did mention one time that he was involved in at least one of the glider landings over in Europe. They needed to get engineers in to get some things taken care of before the infantry was there. He served in Belgium and I don’t recall what other places, but he was definitely part of the European theatre. When the European theatre war ended he, for a very short period of time, was in Japan as part of the Japanese, part of the Japan Occupation Army of Japan.

**Ok. Of the eight, were there any other veterans, anybody else in your family who served at all?**

No. Just me and my father so far.

**Ok, and also, too, I wanted to ask you—now, you weren’t drafted.**

No. I enlisted. Yeah, I did.

**Ok. Did he have any feelings about that one way or another, being a veteran himself? Your dad.**

My dad played his cards real close—real close to the vest. He did not express one way or the other. He and I didn’t discuss Vietnam.

**Ok. Why don’t you tell us a little bit about after you enlisted and everything, the training and everything. Kind of get us started.**

Ok. I did my basic training at Fort Leonard Wood, Missouri. And after Fort Leonard Wood, Missouri I was given my AIT training—advanced individual training—at Fort Rucker Alabama, which is where the U.S. Army, back in that era, was doing the majority of their aviation training. I got training in aircraft maintenance in Fort Rucker, Alabama. First school was a general aviation maintenance program. The second program I attended down there was specific to the UH-1Huey-type helicopter maintenance training. And after the training at Fort Rucker, Alabama, I was assigned to the Republic of Vietnam with the First Aviation Brigade. I was able to get thirty-days leave after advanced individual training before shipping out. We flew over on civilian aircraft. I don’t recall now what city we left out of. I remember when I came back we came back through Fort Lewis. I don’t remember what our departure station was, but we flew, initially, to Hawaii to refuel, about two-hours on the ground. From Hawaii we flew over to the Island of Guam to get refueled, and that was just a gas stop and go. And we never even departed the aircraft in Guam. From Guam, we flew over to Cam Ranh Bay. We arrived in Cam Ranh Bay, as I recall, early in the morning but daylight already. And that was my introduction to the Republic of Vietnam, Cam Ranh Bay. Stayed there for approximately—I don’t even recall now exactly how long. I don’t recall if it was a day or two or if it was hours, but I was reassigned. Not reassigned, assigned to, ultimately, the 61st Assault Helicopter Company. From Cam Ranh Bay, we flew in a C-130 to Nha Trang. From Nha Trang, we then flew to Qui Nhơn, and just outside of Qui Nhơn, Vietnam was a small town called on An Son. The 61st Assault Helicopter Company had its maintenance area at Lane Army Heliport just outside Qui Nhơn, Vietnam. And for the first five-months of my service in Vietnam, I was a mechanic with the 61st Assault Helicopter Company in An Son or Lane Army Heliport. I did, actually, have for a short period of time—it was decided that the company needed a small group of mechanics up at LZ English, which is where the majority of the company’s aircraft were assigned and were stationed. I volunteered to be part of that group. There was a group of four mechanics and one inspector—NCO also, so he was the NCO in charge of the group of us. We went up to LZ English and were assigned quarters up there, just off the flight line, and we were there approximately three-weeks when there was a sapper attack one evening. Some Vietnamese had cut the wire. It’s assumed that it was more than one individual, and they came up with satchel charges. They came through the wire one night, and they placed satchel charges inside two of our aircraft. And while this was actually going on it was already later in the evening. The sun had already set. I was out on one of the most remote pads—helicopter pads. I was standing on the hood of a three-quarter-ton truck, headlights on for illumination because we didn’t have illumination on the flight deck there, if you will. It was a pretty crude affair. And I was doing some maintenance. Shooting some grease into a tail rotor, the bearings on a tail rotor, when I heard an explosion approximately a hundred-yards away. And I knew it didn’t sound like a mortar because we’d had mortar fire there before, but I knew it was different. Anyway, I immediately got off the truck, skedaddled down to what I thought would be a secure area off the flight line, and made my way to a bunker which was a manned bunker. The 173rd Airborne people, this was their headquarters, LZ English, and they manned the bunkers. And I made my way to the security of this bunker, while what was going on was being sorted out. There were just two explosions, and two of our aircraft had been heavily damaged in this sapper attack. About a day or two later, we sling-loaded these two aircraft out. A Chinook came in, and we attached the slings to the rotor head of the Huey and a Chinook came over, and I was on top of the rotor head, holding the sling up. And the flight engineer or loadmaster, I’m not sure who it would have been. Probably the loadmaster, but possibly—the Chinook crewman through the hellhole in the Chinook, he reached down with a hook and grabbed the sling from my outstretched arms and to attach to the cargo hook on the Chinook. And the Chinook—I immediately jumped down off the aircraft as quickly as I could. It was very unnerving having this enormous Chinook helicopter hovering literally inches above me. I mean, that would have been ugly if he’d have had an engine failure. I wouldn’t have felt a thing, obviously, but, anyway, you know. It was a very routine thing to slingload damaged aircraft with Chinooks.

**Wow.**

Shortly after the incident where the sappers had damaged two of our aircraft, I’m assuming in a show of strength, the 173rd Airborne put what is known as a Quad 50 gun—I think the correct name for it is a chain gun—it’s four fifty-caliber machine guns mounted on a common platform, and it was put right on—within yards of—the break in the wire where the sappers had come through. And I think it was meant as a show of force to the locals to back off. But that was conjecture what I just said. The quad-fifty gun stayed there for about the next month only and then was moved somewhere else.

**How big was LZ English?**

Wow. I honestly do not know the size. It was the headquarters of the 173rd Airborne Brigade. The first battalion, 503rd infantry, which was one of the battalions in the 173rd operated out of there. So, one of the four battalions operated out of LZ English, as well as the headquarters company for the entire 173rd Airborne. There was a very small group of Marines there. It was a radio relay station for the Marine Corps. It was a handful of people. It was not a large base.

**Ok. Before we started the interview, you mentioned a flare mission?**

Oh, yes. After I was a mechanic with the 61st Assault Helicopter Company, after five-months of that, I volunteered to be a crew member, a crew chief, on a Slick, on a Huey Slick, and the next seven-months my duties were as crew chief on a UH-1H Huey Slick. I had two different aircrafts in those seven months. Yes, ok, so one of the types of missions that we operated was a flare mission. When we were with the 173rd, our aircraft were stationed up at LZ English overnight. We would operate out of LZ English, and one ship, one Slick would be assigned each night to be the flare ship. It would be fitted with a tub on the left side of the aircraft hooked to the external hard points of the aircraft and loaded up with these flares. The flares themselves were approximately three-feet long, seven-inches in diameter. They probably weighed in the neighborhood of forty-pounds, and they were stored outside the aircraft. And the mechanic, the crew chief, if the aircraft was needed for illumination purposes, this ship would go up on a scramble to where it was needed, and the crew chief would take—there was a lanyard at the end of each flare, and he would hook the lanyard to a d-ring on the floor of the aircraft—and he would launch out of this large tub these flares. The lanyard would stay attached to the d-ring in the aircraft, and it would, as the canister departed the aircraft, a parachute would deploy and the flare would ignite. And the device would then slowly waft to the ground, and it was often used to illuminate a battlefield. And what you would often see while you cruising around waiting—and you would be launching these flares at an interval as the ground commander deemed necessary. And he would ask that the pilots position the aircraft in such a way that it would be more favorable to his objectives of lighting up what he wanted to lighten up. And, from the vantage point of the aircraft, the aerial view would then be of the tracer rounds of the two groups going at each other. The U.S. forces and friendly forces used a tracer round that would illuminate in a reddish-orange color. The Vietnamese—the NVA and VC forces—their tracer round illuminated in a blue-green. And you could, from the vantage of the aircraft, see the tracer rounds going towards each other. And, it was an interesting sight.

**Tracer is like, what, every fourth or fifth round?**

I believe they were every fifth round. Yes, the M-60 was every fifth round. The Vietnamese machine gun, I am not certain—it’s probably a Russian manufacturer—it was probably the same.

**Ok. What was the purpose of an assault helicopter company?**

Well, an assault helicopter company in Vietnam was based on three platoons. There were two platoons of Slicks. Slicks were armed with two M-60 machine guns, one on either side. The crew chief was responsible for operating the machine gun and the protection of the aircraft on the left side of the aircraft, and the fellow named the gunner was responsible for the security of the aircraft on the right side of the aircraft with the machine gun on the right side of the aircraft. There were two platoons of twelve Slicks. In each platoon there was one gun platoon, and, in the company I was in, the gun ships were Huey UH-1B and Huey UH-1C models. We did not have the Cobras. The Cobras were already in Vietnam, but the outfit I was in did not have Cobras. We had the old B-models and the C-models. The B-model and C-model gunships had two crew members, two pilots just like Huey Slick, and it also had a crew chief and a gunner that flew with the aircraft. They operated—the gunner and the crew chief had M-60 machine guns that were bungee-mounted. They were free M-60 machine guns, M-60 machine guns of the infantry style. They were not hard-point mounted to the aircraft. They literally were suspended by bungee cords, giving the crew chief and the gunner much more field of fire than the Huey guns, which were firmly mounted and had stops to prevent firing and hitting your own aircraft. There’s such a thing as—it happened occasionally, where, in a gun ship the crews the pilots would bank the aircraft, while the gunner or the crew chief was firing on a target forward. And what would happen was the machine gunner wouldn’t really sense the motion of the aircraft. So as the aircraft would be banking, the target on the ground is still stationary. And what would end up happening is the gunner or the crew chief would maintain his focus on his target, the aircraft would literally fly into his target, and he would shoot up a piece of the forward part of the aircraft. He would realize his mistake, and he would stop firing. But it was called target fixation. And that is why the M-60s on the Slicks, they had stops. They had mechanical stops, but they chose not to do that on the gunships. The gunships were loaded with 275-meter rockets. They had mini-guns. Some of them had 40-milimeter grenade launchers mounted on the nose of the aircraft. They were a formidable aerial gun platform. They were our big brother.

**Ok.**

So, you asked me what the purpose of—

**The assault helicopter company.**

Ok, to support infantry. U.S. Army infantry, as well as our allies. We also, the 61st also supported the ROKs—the Republic of Korea infantry—the South Vietnamese infantry. Yes, we worked with at least three different armies.

**Ok, interesting. And then you were on another type of mission. You mentioned a sniffer mission.**

Oh, yeah, the sniffer mission was an interesting mission. On a sniffer mission it was a device that, we would run an approximately one-and-a-half inch in diameter flexible tube-type hose out the chin bubble—the clear Plexiglas window beneath the pilot’s feet. And this hose would then go back to a machine that a technician, an operator, had in the passenger compartment of the aircraft. This is a device that would sense, I believe it was sensing body heat. I do recall in conversations with other people that it wouldn’t necessarily differentiate between a heard of buffalo and a large group of people. And these missions were flown in areas of suspected gatherings of large groups of enemy soldiers.

**Ok.**

These missions were flown by the Slick at treetop level, nap-of-the-earth, at 80-knots or so, approximately, and it was always a very exhilarating mission. We always would have a light gun team in support of us, trailing us, in case we got in trouble. To protect us, essentially. But it was nap-of-the-earth, high speed, and it was always, you know, to an eighteen-year old kid, I mean, it was yahoo. It was.

**And that was a reasonable expectation, to perhaps encounter enemies. I mean, that was the whole purpose of the sniffer mission.**

It was to detect large groups of people so that there could then be a larger infantry operation in that area. It was intelligence gathering. It was clearly meant to gather intelligence. If a large source of people was down there, there would be further military infantry action in the near future. Yes, that was always, that was an interesting, exciting mission.

**You went on a few of these, or you went on one?**

That was several, several. I would guesstimate at least half a dozen of those type of missions in the seven-months that I was a crew chief overseas.

Oh, another mission that I didn’t really talk about that we did also do would be a combat assault. We would do combat assaults, and in a combat assault, there could be a variety of ways for the area to be prepared before the landing of the—a combat assault was a mission insert into an area infantrymen.

**Ok.**

And they always would prepare the landing zone where the infantry would be put with some sort of firing advance to soften the enemy. In could be an artillery barrage. It could be as simple as a group of gunships from your own company preparing the LZ. It also could be an Arc Light mission with U.S. Air Force B-52s. I was in on, at least, I can recall one vividly. And it was a B-52 prep. It was a huge combat assault. It was the biggest thing I’d ever been on. There were hundreds of Slicks involved in this operation.

**Wow.**

And I remember I had a big knot in my stomach that morning. This was not an ordinary event. Anyway, we got to, we loaded up our infantrymen, and there was a group of probably twenty or so Hueys in a row in the group I was in, and we got there a bit premature. And the coordinator of this mission between the Air Force and us told us, “Well, you’re going to have circle for a few minutes over in this area away from the landing zone because the B-52s had not dropped their ordnance yet. We circled a few kilometers away, safely out of harm’s way, and a few minutes later we were given the ok to go in. We then went in, and it was an uneventful insertion. There was no enemy fire whatsoever, but the cratering from the five-hundred pound B-52 prep of this LZ was very impressive, very large, huge craters from the B-52 bombs. Fortunately, it was very, very quiet. It was a cold LZ. There was no enemy resistance. So that was one of the combat assaults.

**You mentioned waking up with knot in your stomach, you know, going into that. How much advanced notice do you have on something like that? I’m just trying to get an idea of your kind of mindset going into it.**

I think we were informed of that the night before.

**Oh, ok.**

To be honest, I don’t think they let us know much in advance. This was a very unusual, large, very large combat assault. Usually, combat assaults were much smaller in nature than this. This was a huge, huge undertaking up in the Central Highlands of Vietnam in northern II Corps. Yeah, over near the Laos and Cambodian border. But it was uneventful for us, fortunately.

**Yeah, I was going to say, that’s a good thing. Any other missions?**

Oh, yeah, an unusual mission and appreciated mission. One day—I don’t know how I ended up with this—but my ship was assigned to fly two young ladies from the states who were overseas on a USO tour, and the one lady’s name was Kathy McDonald. She happened to be, I believe, Miss September, 1969.

**[Laughter]**

She graced Playboy Magazine that year. I think it was September of 1969’s issue. She was a very pretty young lady, and she flew in my gun well with me on just two legs. That’s all we had was these two ladies. I never did get the other lady’s name, but she flew in the right side gun well with my gunner. And I remember the Army Lieutenant who was escorting these two ladies, he was not a happy man with the situation. He thought he was going to be given more of a VIP-type aircraft. He had been given—we had been on a nasty mission the day before. We had the seats folded up in the cargo or passenger area, essentially because, I think we were on a CA the day before, and when moving infantry guys you don’t want the seats in the way. And he wanted to know where our jump seats were, and he wanted to know where our doors were. We flew without doors, and I haven’t seen a jump seat since I’ve been in the country. Anyway, the girls flew in the gun wells with myself and the gunner, Mr. Dostie on the other side. And it was a very interesting, well-appreciated mission, yeah. That was the most unusual mission I think I flew all year, but that was a good one.

**Ok, how did you like flying and maintaining the Huey?**

I loved it. I love flying. To me, you get such a great perspective of the earth flying around at a couple thousand feet. It just presents the world in a totally different way. Vietnam when you get outside of the cities was actually an incredibly beautiful country. There are so many different shades of green in that country. It is absolutely astonishing. You go out in the Central Highlands, we operated in the Central Highlands a lot, and it is a very, very, very scenic countryside to put it—to be honest, it is. The Huey was a pretty incredible helicopter, actually. It could just almost carry its own weight as far as its cargo capacity. It was a very strong and yet light weight airframe. I learned much, much later that there had been a situation called mast-bumping where if the aircraft was operated too aggressively—like cyclic climbs and rocking the aircraft, physically, with the cyclic—could cause the masts to snap. And obviously if you lose your rotor blades, you’re going to fall like a brick. But I learned about these problems many, many years later, and it took very aggressive, wrong-type flying to create these situations. I always felt safe in a Huey. I did have one situation, and I forgot about this. I’ll have to call it a partial power failure. We didn’t completely lose the engine. We were—I remember this day now—we were on a combat assault in the morning way inland in the Central Highlands. Fortunately, everything went very, very good for the CA, but later that day we were out near the coast in a much better area to land—an area where you don’t have power, a much safer area. Anyway, we were in a formation, and the crew, the aircraft behind us radioed that he had seen a huge fireball come out of our tailpipe. Though, we didn’t see it because were forward of our engine, we know that something horrible had happened back there because it was a significant boom. It was a compressor stall. It’s a turbine-type motor. The Huey had gas turbine motors, and when a gas turbine motor has a compressor stall it is a very, very loud explosion if you will, out the tailpipe. And all eyes in the aircraft were immediately scanning all the engine instrumentation, and the exhaust gas temperature was pegged red line maximum. The N1 and N2 speeds were decreasing. The Huey is a single-engine aircraft. Anyway, we were losing power, and real fast. Fortunately, we were in a coastal area, and even more fortunate there was a very small Army post, if you will, a group of maybe fifty infantry men that had this little tiny—I don’t even know why they were there. It was right adjacent to a rice paddy, excuse me, a rice paddy area. Anyway, long story short, we knew weren’t going to fly any longer. The pilot wisely and successfully landed the aircraft, semi-autorotation, semi-with-power and put it down on a road, more like a service road connecting a group of rice paddies, and this was within about a hundred yards within this group of infantrymen. And it was very fortunate for all of us because they accepted responsibility to guard the aircraft. The four-man crew on the Huey were picked up by another Huey, and we did not have to spend time with the aircraft. It was later sling-loaded out, and I was not involved in sling-loading it.

**[Laughter]**

But, yeah, I had forgotten about that day. Fortunately, it was in a good area to happen, and the pilot maintained his cool and landed very nicely. Might’ve been a little bit firm, but it was good.

**Interesting. Ok, can you give us an idea of what life was like in LZ English?**

LZ English was pretty basic. As I recall, we had a cot. It had a thin mattress. It was probably a one-inch thick mattress. I mean, it could have been worse. It was definitely—and yet, it was definitely better than the average infantryman had out in the field. And the reason I know this is one day while we were resupplying the hawk’s nest. The hawk’s nest was a little anomaly where, out on the Central Highlands to the coast the mountains went almost all the way to the coast. And this created a barrier north and south. And the U.S. Army chose to put a radio relay station out on the top of this anomaly coming from the Central Highlands, and it was nicknamed, codenamed, nicknamed the hawk’s nest. It was a significant altitude. I don’t recall the altitude exactly, but being its proximity to the coast and up in the air, it was very often in the clouds. And, as a result, there was a small group of 173rd Airborne infantrymen assigned there to protect the radio relay station, and they always had a sixty-day, I believe it was, a sixty-day supply of C-rations because it was so difficult to get resupply missions in. There were no roads, obviously. The only way in was by helicopter, and helicopters very often could not get in there because the site was very often in the clouds. I do recall one time we got up there, and one of the infantrymen who was unloading the aircraft happened to be a fellow I went to high school with. We grew up together in Westchester, Illinois. He was a good buddy of mine, and I knew he was in country, but I had no idea he was on the hawk’s nest. I told the pilot I was going to disconnect for a moment or two while talking to my buddy, and he said go ahead. And we talked for maybe one minute, and I got back in, and we took off, and we resumed our missions. Later, I visited Bob—that was his name, Bob Sadkowski—and he had been reassigned from the hawk’s nest to another location called the squirrel’s nest. I went out to the squirrel’s nest one day—one day my aircraft was in for maintenance. I had done all the crew chief maintenance assignments. The aircraft was still in on a hundred-hour inspection, and the rest of the maintenance people were dealing with that, and I got permission from my CO and his commanding officer to jump on an aircraft, go out and spend the day. And I went out to the squirrel’s nest and spent the day at the squirrel’s nest. And the guys in the infantry definitely roughed it. They basically had an air mattress to lay down on. This was very, very—my one-inch thick mattress was very, very nice.

**[Laughs]**

Yes, it was very, very nice compared to what the infantry dealt with—especially when they were out in the bush.

**So, day-to-day life there, was there camaraderie among you’re fellow soldiers?**

Sure, there was the club, and there was the NCO club and the enlisted men’s club. You could get, it was probably three-point-two beer being a military base, but they did serve beer. If you wanted a pop you could have a pop. There weren’t bells and whistles. You had mama-san to wash your—lady civilians from the local community were employees on these bases, and they would come on to do laundry for the GIs. They would have jobs in NCO clubs, EM clubs. There were civilians. And the civilians I remember were actually down at Lane Army Heliport. That was Lane Army Heliport. I do not recall now if there were any of these civilians at LZ English. I don’t recall, in all honesty. I remember vividly down at Lane Army Heliport. We had a lot of civilian people on base on a daily basis doing services for us.

**Now, the civilian people, did you say they were local?**

From the local community.

**Oh, ok.**

Yeah, from the villages nearby or, in the case of Lane Army Heliport, Qui Nhơn was a major city that was pretty close to Lane Army Heliport.

**Ok. So, you did have contact with the locals and so on.**

Yes, yes, yes.

**Ok. How was the weather?**

The weather, you know, during the rainy season it actually would get cold. I remember flying. We flew our Hueys with no doors on them, and I wore a jacket. When you’re flying at eighty knots in the breeze in monsoon it’s actually quite chilly after the non-monsoon season. On the ground, it’s quite warm. You know, it’s—a hundred degrees is not uncommon. Non-monsoon season it got hot, yeah.

**Ok, so, of your two-years-nine-months of service, how long were you actually in Vietnam for?**

I did what they call a one-year tour. It was actually cut short a little bit. I was in-country eleven months and twenty-two days. My guess is that the Vietnamization program contributed to my being able to leave the eight days early.

**Ok.**

It’s ok with me!

**Right.**

That was eight days less than I was away from home.

**Yeah.**

So, yeah, it was eleven months and twenty-two days overseas.

**Ok, then you came back.**

Yeah, I came back. I had a thirty day leave. I was assigned to down to Fort Hood, Texas.

**Oh, ok.**

Yeah, I served the rest of my hitch in Fort Hood, Texas, yes.

**Ok. Alright, something we’ve been asking is, so your experience in the service, and sort of your whole experience living with, you know, other servicemen and sort of being responsible for each other’s safety and everything, what impact did that have on your life after the military?**

Military life is good. It’s good in the sense that I did not make a career of it. It was very good for me. It taught me discipline. It taught me restraint. It taught me—I did a lot of growing up.

**Ok. Yeah, that’s pretty much exactly in-line with what other people we’ve spoken with said—that it was a good experience, and it really—I don’t know—really informed their decisions and behavior after the military and professional lives in a very positive way. Ok, was there any other missions or anything you wanted to discuss or?**

Oh, I do recall one specific mission. It was the only time I was ever involved in a rope extraction of troops. There was one of the groups we worked with fairly frequently was November Company 75th Infantry. They were the Ranger company that worked with the 173rd Airborne Brigade. They actually were—November Company 75th Infantry—actually had their company area adjacent to the heliport where we kept our aircraft at LZ English. And these were guys who would go out on, I believe it was five-man, it might have been six-man, patrols. And they would go out into, they were supposed—they were the eyes and the ears of the infantry. They would go out, and they would get information. They would route around areas of suspect enemy groups, and they would gather information on the size of the group that was there. Et cetera, et cetera. And working with the November Company 75th Infantry was usually kind of interesting. Always a small group of guys, and, one time, a group of Rangers got in trouble. They had made contact with enemy forces, and they were able to withdraw from the firefight and to get away from confrontation, but they needed to be extracted. Now, they were in the Central Highlands, this was the Central Highlands in northern II Corps. And we were assigned to go get them, and it was known that there was no landing zone. There were no clearings in the area. This was very, very densely foliated area, and the decision was made, from the beginning, to go out with the rope ladder on the aircraft. The rope ladder was a wound-up, aluminum-wrung, nylon rope device that would be wound-up from both ends, and it would be anchored to the floor of the aircraft on the d-ring. So it would be secured to the floor of the aircraft, and then, once we got over the location where the guys were to be picked up—because we couldn’t land. There was nowhere to land. That’s why the decision was made to go with the rope ladder—it would be lowered out both sides of the aircraft. The infantrymen would scamper up a few steps, and the six of them—three on each side of the aircraft. And we merely—they did not climb up into the aircraft. We did not fly away at high speed. Fortunately, there was no contact with the enemy, so we were very easily able to safely, slowly move away. And we dropped these gentlemen, I’m guessing, a kilometer away, approximately. And we merely dropped them off. They waved goodbye, and we pulled the ladders back up, and we took off. The one and only rope extraction I was ever involved in, and it was out of the ordinary. But it was cool, yes.

**Was that another know-in-your-stomach morning?**

No, no, no because no time to think about it. No time to think about it. You knew that they were out there. I’d worked with them before, and everything went well. Everything went well for everybody.

**Fortunately, right?**

Yeah, it did go ok. There was one other thing I was going to mention. There was a time when there was a friendly fire incident, and some civilians had been hit by some errantly placed artillery. Anyway, we went in, landed in the village, picked up these people, civilians, and took them to an Army hospital.

**Ok. Something that I had mentioned when we talked about you going back to Fort Hood, I guess I kind of glossed over it. Curious about the experience coming home.**

Oh.

**So not just coming back to the United States, but actually coming home. That must have been a really great feeling.**

I remember vividly both the flight going to Vietnam being a very, very quiet and somber flight. And I remember the flight home. Everybody was boisterous, happy, yeah. The difference—you couldn’t be any more different, the flight over and the flight back. Yeah, the flight back was a very joyous, happy event to put it mildly. And when we got back to Fort Lewis, Washington, the Army popped for a steak dinner.

**Alright!**

**[Laughter]**

Yeah, I do remember that. Yeah, and then from Fort Lewis, the steak dinner, go to the airport, get on the flight, and go to Chicago, visit family for thirty-days, yeah.

**Well, what was that like?**  
  
The?

**Coming back to Chicago.**

Very, very happy. My parents immediately—well, it was immediately decided, my parents invited all their friends. I invited all my friends. And we had a huge, huge, huge [laughs] welcome home.

**Aww, great. Well, do you have any other final remarks or other thoughts or anything else you wanted to say or?**

Um, no, I think I pretty well-covered my experiences as much as I’m going to. So, that pretty well covers it, guys. It’s been interesting.

**Yes, it was very good talking to you today. And thanks very much for sharing your memories with us.**

Alright, any time , Patrick. You did good, guy.

**Thank you.**