

This interview is being conducted on Friday, May 2, 2025 at the home of Michael G. Allumi. My name is Fran Prokop and I am speaking with Mike who served in the United States Marine Corps and is a veteran of the Viet Nam War. Mike learned of the Veterans' History Project through me and he has kindly consented to participate in the National Archives Veterans' History Project. Here is his story:

Mike, when and where were you born?

Detroit, Michigan, Deaconess Hospital, September 18, 1949.

What were your parents' occupations?

My Mother was a homemaker and my Dad, I think at the time he delivered milk.

How many sisters and brothers did you have?

I had one brother; his name is Samuel – named after my Dad.

Was he ever in the military?

My Dad was in the Navy; my brother never joined.

How did you enter the service – were you drafted or did you enlist?

I enlisted. I didn't want to wait to get drafted because I wanted to go into the Marine Corps. I understand that every 4th guy enlisted in the Marine Corps – from the draft –

Really!

Oh, yeah, or every 10th man – they pulled him out; they sent him to the Marine Corps, so yeah.

Why did you choose that specific branch of service?

I just like what I've seen on, you know, pictures, whatever –

You just always wanted to be a Marine?

Yeah, kinda liked it very much.

So where did you go for basic training?

Went to Marine Recruit Depot in San Diego, California.

And how did you get there?

Plane.

From Detroit – did you have to go downtown to enlist to a recruiting station?

It was like a – an area in Detroit, somewhere downtown, a Recruiting Center, I think they called it, and that's where we were supposed to report – and we did. WE were

supposed to go to Camp LeJeune because everybody east of the Mississippi River is supposed to go there but for some reason they shipped us out to California, so --

How old were you when you went into the service?

Let's see -- I was 18.

And did you complete high school?

At that time, no, but I finished by GED --

In the service?

Well, I was wounded over there and then I got sent back to the States -- while I was in Great Lakes Naval Hospital. I took my GED testing there -- waiting for a final discharge -- so --

Did you have to take any classes or you just took the GED?

Uh, the guy that was giving them, he gave me this test and he says, take this test. You don't need to take any classes; you can take it right now.

That's interesting --

I thank the Catholic schools for that --

Right, oh yeah! Okay, you're in San Diego -- how were your early days of training?

How was it there?

Well, when we got there at 3:30 in the morning, and this guy, this lunatic came running out of the building and told us all to stand on these yellow footprints --

Ha, ha.

I was standing there thinking what the hell have you gotten yourself into, Allumi?

Anyway it was -- but as time went on it got better, but it was like those guys really were, I don't know, they meant business --

Do you remember any drill instructor in particular? Or things that you did there during basic training?

Well, there was a couple that I remember -- but I remember once we were doing kinda poorly at the rifle range and when we came back from lunch they -- I got meat stuck in my teeth, you know, while I was kinda trying to get that out and the main DI was up there -- and we did really bad at the firing range that morning so he said "Allumi, stand up here, Present Arms!" -- and then he came and smashed the rifle right into my face --

Oh my gosh!

Because he said I was laughing – and I said, “Officer, I wasn’t laughing.” I mean they didn’t take too many excuses like that

Wow! So it was tough – your training as a Marine –

Oh, yeah, it was tough.

Could you describe a typical day – what time did you get up – what did you eat – what exercises or classes did you do?

Trying to think – usually we got up early – can’t remember what time that was. We had like 20 minutes to get up and get dressed and whatever - oh, I don’t know, make your rack and get into formation outside and I don’t know if we went on the run first before we went for breakfast, or something like that. Then after breakfast we were going somewhere else or we were getting some training, calisthenics or something. Then after lunch the same thing. You went on some kind of an exercise or had a class on something, and so you didn’t have any time to dilly-dally around. You always had to be cleaning stuff – like in the morning you got up and had to clean your barracks up and stuff. There was nothing around really – no mops, no nothing. You never could find them and so - they’d send us around to just find some – and this one Filipino – Sergeant Balthazar, I forget what he called me, he says, he had a nickname for me because I could find the buckets and stuff, you know. He named me one of Balthazar’s Raiders or something like that – crazy, you know, but we’d scrounge up the mops and stuff and get the stuff cleaned –

Ha, ha. Interesting – so how long did basic training last?

I think it was 8 weeks; they shortened it because they were trying to get guys ready for Nam – I think it was like 8 weeks – whatever it was back in ’68.

You entered in ’68? When did you enter?

February 20th of ’68 – date of entry – okay.

After basic training is over where did they send you?

After basic training they sent you to ITR - Infantry Training something – second stage.

And then from boot camp I think they chose two guys to be I think an Honor Guard of the Platoon and I was like the next guy, and both the Honor Guard and myself got E-2 right out of boot camp.

Oh, you got a promotion.

Yeah, promotion. The Honor Guard was top and I was second, got a stripe – they only did that for two guys out of the whole platoon.

How many guys were with you when you first got in, like in your barracks or in your group?

There were squads, 12 guys, 50 or something like that, 48

A squad is 12?

Squad was about 12. We were in like Quonset huts and there was 4 squads. I want to say something like that, maybe less, memory's kind of foggy but --

During your whole time there how did you adapt to military life?

Was this your first time away from home?

Yes.

So how did you adapt? The food and the social life, the barracks and stuff like that?

Well, it was scary at first – like I said, I wondered what the hell am I doing here but as time went on I kinda got with the program and I really enjoyed it. I really did. I was impressed and I liked all the things we were learning and stuff like that, you know, and I could see them being valuable and, yeah, I really enjoyed it.

Good! So where did they send you after your basic training was over?

I think it was called ITR –

You said that – what did you do at ITR? And where was it?

It was still – I think they sent us to Pendleton – or where we were exactly but it was like – I want to say four weeks or something and it was more involved classes, I think as far as, you know, I don't know if there was shooting or not but it was more involved as far as what you learned to be a – like out of boot camp we were considered Marines it was advanced infantry – AIT – that's what it was – Advanced Infantry Training – yeah – that's what they called it, I believe –

AIT – Advanced Infantry Training. Did you have any specialized training?

Uh, not – I don't think so because you got chosen, and some guys were – and they used to have it separated back then too like infantry men, and guys that were machine gun guys, and there were mortar guys, and you got rocket guys –

Oh, really –

They had their own MOS, ok – occupation specialty. Others were other MOSs too. They just – you know in that situation you learn more about your specialty – the different things –

And what were you?

I was Infantry 0311 – basic grunt.

So what happened after this period of time? Where did you serve?

I believe we got leave and then we came back. We were on our way to Nam. I'm trying to think – went back to California and I don't know how soon they got us out of there; we had to go someplace north to a bigger airport to catch a plane to go to Hawaii and from Hawaii over to the Viet Nam area. They stopped in Hawaii – said we might get 24 hours leave there in Hawaii – but that never happened. Then they flew us to – can't remember where exactly in Viet Nam but we landed. We were like in a staging area for everybody coming into country. And then from there, you hung around for a couple of -- 2,3, 4 days and then it was decided, maybe it was already decided, where – who you're gonna be with, and they told you and that morning they took you to where you were gonna be with that unit you were gonna be placed with –

And you had to go with your unit?

Go to where they were.

And where was this? Where did you go?

Well, my unit was somewhere, I never really knew where I was at in Viet Nam, but this was somewhere – it was alongside of a road and we were supposedly – this unit was guarding the road or something to that effect – I forget what name they – I thought it was a hill number but – I don't think it was that exactly. I can't remember what they called that location; it was just our platoon there – and kinda guard the road or something like that.

Okay. So how long were you there? How long did you do that?

Uh, we did that for I'd say about – oh, let's see – six of us – it seemed to be a couple of months and then from there they used to ship us out to operations and stuff – get choppers to fly us to where we're going and it would be out in the bush for 7 to 14 days so to speak –

Is that when you were in combat?

Yeah, I was in combat mode because when they send you out on an operation it was always because the, you know, meetin' up with the bad guys, so –

Can you describe that? What were you doing out on an operations?

Well, you did a lot of humpin'; you'd get where you were going and, uh, and then you only had like, I think, you ate in the morning and you ate at night time – that's all you got to eat; it's like you're trying to get someplace where you're going.

So you ate two times a day?

Yeah, and then at night time –

Were those K rations?

No, C – no, not C-rations –

Oh Meals ready to eat? MREs?

MREs, yeah.

Was that for both meals you had those?

Yeah. Both meals. And then we – uh

So did you encounter the enemy?

Yeah, we did, a couple of times.

Could you describe that?

Uh, well the couple of times I remember I can hear like shooting and stuff, it was off to my left and right, and we never got called up to actually assist, okay, but it was kinda – kinda like being under control I guess, you know and we would just kinda hang on and wait and then move out, so – and then from the first of the year we went afloat and what that was – it was like these smaller aircraft carriers with helicopters.

Oh!

So we got on the boats there or the ship, whatever, and they would chopper us into where they needed us – and that was kind of, uh, that was kinda good -- different, I guess.

Did you go to villages and encounter the enemy there?

Well, we went through the villages and such and our platoon, our unit, didn't actually encounter any enemy except for once, okay, and I'll tell you what happened, let's see, there was a -- some of the villages we went to it was really amazing because I couldn't remember what came last – was it fire or was it the wheel? Because that's as advanced as those people were in those villages there in Viet Nam.

You're kidding!!

I kept looking around; is that a fire over there – that guy's got a cart. I couldn't see nothing that was more advanced than fire or the wheel.

Wow!!

That was some of the villages that were right in the middle, not outside or in the next town or nothin' –

They were interior villages – that's how they lived.

Yeah, yeah, I don't know why I was surprised; it just was –

Well, not everybody is like the United states.

Exactly,

So how long were you there, in Viet Nam?

Let's see – we went to – after one operation in February – it was February 20, I believe, we had made a night move, okay – supposed to be as quiet as you can be but we never are – and then come daylight, okay, we, uh, we got hit, okay, they were shooting at us. And I think I was kind of in a line on the front there, so to speak, with different guys and out of the corner of my eye to the left I seen this little guy there, you know, as I turned, you know, I could tell, he had an AK-47 with a big long banana clip – and as I turned – soon as I turned my head, he shot.

Oh!

And -- he shot me in the head.

Oh – Wow! When was this in February of 1969?

February 19 of '69. Because we went afloat first of the year in January and this was February, so – after that point, I guess they choppered – well mortar guys got hit too that day – and a friend of mine came up to help me, and on his way up there I felt bad – he got shot in the jaw – and I seen it happen – since we've been back and stuff – for years and he's passed now but every two years he had to go back to the VA and get his jaw rebuilt and stuff – you know –

Oh my goodness. So he had continuous problems with that.

Yeah and then he got – he got that one cancer; it wasn't Viet Nam related, but it was that brain cancer that was just a terrible one. He passed away 3 or 4 years ago. Anyway there was a lot of us on the chopper –

So where did they chopper you to?

First Aid –

A field hospital?

Some medical facility in DaNang – okay because like mine was considered serious because I had a hole in my head and bleeding and junk – so – yeah, it was kinda scary. I always seemed like I was in a bubble, you know – it seemed like nobody could really get at me but I could hear people and, you know, it was just kind of – bizarre. I didn't know what was going on.

Wow!

I know they made me write a letter to my parents when I got there –

Wow!

It was really hard – I really didn't have my shit together –

Well, you were only 19 years old –

And so I wrote something – I did and then they – I guess I was there for a couple of days and then they kinda got me stable and stuff and – looked like that – you know, I would – they tried to – they sent me to Guam, I think it was – they were going to try a skin graft at the top of my head. They took some skin off my legs somewhere – well it sloughed off and it didn't work so –

It didn't take,

From there they said well, he needs to go back to the States and have a plate put in his head.

Wow! So where were you shot exactly?

Right there (indicating top of head).

Was it like a graze wound?

Well, the doctor at Great Lakes Naval Hospital showed me the x-rays and said right where the skull is – the x-ray of the skull – and you could see like two tracks like that (indicating) two bullets just grazed – but they chunked out some scalp.

Grazed – well sure, yeah! Well you were fortunate – boy it just grazed your scalp.

We say grazed, but it did take out skull – about the size of an egg – is what the plate size is.

So it took out portions of your skull.

Yeah, yeah.

How long did it take you to recuperate from that injury?

Let's see, when I was sent back – I must have kind of recuperated when I got sent to Guam for the skull – because we used to go to the movies downstairs at nighttime and I was able to go to the movies and stuff, so I was, at that time I could walk around. My head was always bandaged up and stuff –

You were ambulatory – you could move around.

Yeah, yeah.

On your own or were you in a wheelchair?

No, I was walking. I'd walk down to the movies and stuff.

That was in Guam?

Yeah, that was in Guam, I think it was Guam. But then when they flew us back to the States, they made me go back on a gurney, and I said I can sit up; you got nothing to worry about. So on that long plane ride all the way back home I had to lay down.

Oh my God – on the plane! You were laying down on the plane?

Yeah! They had like a place for it –

Like an ambulance plane.

They would not let me sit in a seat or chair. Anyway, when I got to the States they sent me – maybe they dropped me off, I don't know. Somehow I got to Great Lakes Naval Hospital –

So you don't remember how you got there?

No, I don't remember how I got there. I know we left Guam in a plane. I'm assuming a plane got us to the States and from there I must have been on -- maybe another plane or a plane that dropped me off at Great Lakes Naval Hospital here at Great Lakes – which the hospital is torn down now. But that's where I was on the 8th floor with Dr. Boop, (phonetic) --was the guy's name, a neurosurgeon; he was supposed to be one of the best 12 in the world at the time for neurosurgery or something. Anyway he's the one that showed me the x-ray with the two bullets how they had just – just grazed the top of the skull and then went in –

Wow – you really don't have any scars or anything visible –

Oh, I have a scar that goes like this (indicating) –

Really, oh through your hair, but you can't see it.

No, you can't see it.

Right now, looking at you, you don't really see any scars or anything.

You can see like the top here – when I wash my hair –

Oh, I do see that now that you're saying it – you have to really look to see it.

Yeah, yeah.

Not very visible; you were lucky. So your fighting days were over, right?

Yeah. I was at Great Lakes Naval Hospital that's where I took the GED test. And then they medically discharged me, so I sat there for a while longer at Great Lakes Naval Hospital and finally they medically discharged me. So they said I had to come back in a year from the day I was shot, so they put a plate in my head –

Wow !

So all in all, was it July – I forget –

When did they discharge you? What's the date of the medical discharge?

The date is, I think it's, let's see – it's July 31, '69.

You were shot in February so you were in March, April, May, June, July -- you had five months of medical care.

It wasn't really all medical care because when I was in the hospital after I got to Great Lakes, I mean I was ambulatory –

But you were still under medical supervision.

Yes, I was.

Not that they were doing anything, but you were still there.

No, they were – and some of that was just waiting for the retirement paperwork to go through – medically retired – I guess you could call it that, yes, then they told me to come back in a year for a plate in my head, okay.

Back to Great Lakes?

Great Lakes, I go back in a year; go back in February, I think it was and they put the plate in and for a couple of days it's doing okay – so it's okay, you're good. So I left – and about two months later, I was combing my hair or something, I forget and I must have hit a pimple or something – thought what the heck is that? I didn't think nothin' of it. A couple of weeks later, you know, it's happening more frequent. I went to a private neuro doc and he said I'm not sure but I think you need to get to the VA.

Yeah.

So I went to the VA for one day and I didn't see a doctor until that night at 7 o'clock as I walked out of the TV room. He said, "Allumi, if you're gonna be in your room at a military hospital – there's no ifs – the doc's makin' rounds at 9 o'clock in the morning and your ass better be next to your bunk." Okay. The doc says IF you're gonna be in your room; this isn't the VA, they're civilians, I thought, IF I'm gonna be in my room – the hospital was supposed to have dressing changes four times a day and all this stuff – nobody medical come to me that whole day I was there. So after waking up the next morning I said, I don't know, I'm getting the hell out of here. So I called my Dad and said come and pick me up, take me to the airport, I'm going back to Great Lakes.

I get there and check in on a Sunday night, doc looks at me on Monday, and says, "Well, looks like your plate's coming out."

Ooohh!

So that Wednesday, two days later, they took the plate out, and what it was – it was like acrylic, okay – the plate was acrylic and they fastened it to the skull with stainless steel clips, well, the doc says, one of those clips wasn't sterile.

Oooh!

And all I could think of was – I love M A S H – okay. All I could think of was M A S H. Something dropped by the doctor, he dropped to the floor, he looked around, picked it up and put it back, ha, ha, ha. So anyway the doctor said the whole top of that plate was covered with infection.

Wow!!

He said a week or two more and you might have been really goofy. So I said okay –

So they took it out.

Took it out and said you gotta wait another year, come back and get a plate again.

But why did you need another plate?

They had to take that one out.

Did that cover your brain, is that what it was?

Oh, Yeah, you could see my pulse here (indicating), you know – that's why they put it there.

Wow!

That chunk of skull, right underneath the skull –

So what did you do for the year when you didn't have the plate?

Well, I didn't think much about it. I didn't play any football or nothin'.

Did you have to wear bandages?

No, after a while there was nothin' – no reason to have a bandage on it.

Was your hair growing?

Oh, the hair grew, yeah, but I guess I was kinda weird looking.

Your hair has grown back; you have hair now.

I worked at a trucking company on the dock, loading dock, and they made me wear like a safety hat – like you see like these workers outside, just when I was working on the docks, so if something would fall or anything.

Yeah. Wow!! What an experience!

Then I went back in, had the other plate and this time they didn't put no clips in.

So how did they fasten it this time?

I don't really know.

They glued it in with Superglue, ha, ha.

Could be, Superglue or something, I don't know, silicone caulk -- --

But they didn't use clips.

No, no clips that time, so ha, ha.

So you've still got it in now?

Oh, yeah, I still got it.

That's called in situ – in place.

Yeah, it's still there, so –

Wow! So once you got it in the second time, it's okay now?

Yeah, yeah.

Did you have to go back again to the VA Hospital to check it?

No, they said only if you have a problem, and you know – I didn't have to go back to the VA – it was always stable looking and stuff like that. I don't think a lot of it –

But you went back to Detroit?

Yeah, yeah, I went back home. What's kinda really weird now is that I'm having some trouble with my taste buds, okay?

Oh, uh-huh.

The private ENT doc ordered some – I went through the VA and they didn't find nothin' okay. The private ENT doc said I want to get an MRI of your skull to see if there's some part with your taste buds, so they did this MRI right, but it came back showing nothing as far as a problem losing my taste. But one of the findings was, what was it called, uh, let's see, chronic brain disruption of the frontal lobe. And I'm thinking, oh, oh, that sounds like the big D.

Frontal lobes?

Yeah. Chronic brain –

Brain distortion or dysfunction? Chronic brain –

Let's see, let me find it here real quick (looking at cellphone) – see if I can – I know I put it in – let's see – it's -- and I wasn't expecting that.

You didn't have COVID, did you?

I had COVID, yes.

Maybe that affected your taste and your smell.

That's what everybody said, but when I kinda found out what that really – pursue that COVID thing I'd have to be in a study somewhere, at some university doing a study –

Yeah, right.]

They had it – reading from phone – “[chronic brain changes in the frontal lobe.”

Chronic brain changes –

In the frontal lobe, which to me signifies the big D – dementia.

No, only if you have plaques and tangles; they didn't say you had plaques and tangles.

Well, this was the first time ever, so this is like a, you know, nobody's done anything yet as far as MRI of my head. But the fact that this says chronic brain changes in the frontal lobe – even this ENT doc said that in a response to me, she said "I can't really help you with this. She said I know – she suggested I see a neurosurgeon that she knew of. Even though that now this was out of her wheelhouse, so to speak, because she's ear, nose and throat. So telling me go to a neurosurgeon, I kind of knew that's what I needed; that's one of my next steps. At some point I need to go see a neurosurgeon like probably soon.

Go see Dr. Boop.

No, he was just a surgery guy. The people that – the neurosurgeons don't exactly – well, they can do surgery, but, you know, they're the ones that people say if their spouse has dementia or whatever like that, they have to start seeing some neuro-type doctor because they could maybe help them and suggest things that would make it easier – as they got older and the dementia got worse. So anyway, yeah, but –

(off the record) -- **back on the record – what was the highest rank that you ever achieved when you were in the service?**

E-4, Corporal.

How do you feel today about emotions related to combat and witnessing casualties, not only yourself but other people, because you were a casualty too.

Yeah, really kind of hard to say; it's been so long and stuff. Now, just as many casualties in Chicago as there was in Viet Nam.

True.

Every morning we hear about somebody who got killed, no suspects; nobody in custody, you know –

Yes, I know.

And just – I really – it's - I don't really know if it bothers me or not, to be honest, because it's just – I don't know – it's just part of what's -- this is part of what God had planned for me in my life, I guess and I accept that, so I'm blessed; no doubt about it, and I know that.

Well, going back now when you were in service, how – what were your emotions when witnessing destruction of villages or peoples' homes or lives, whatever –

How did you think about it then and how do you feel about it now?

I'm trying to think of how I felt about it – well, the Marine Corps part might have been making me feel like, what I really felt like was a little bit gung-ho probably like most guys, our guys –

That war was so disruptive, you know, to America – and all the reasons for being there and things like that.

Yeah, yeah, but now, like I said, every war since World War II has been useless., as far as – except for killing a bunch of guys, maiming them and costing billions and billions – stupid government – but it's just part of what's supposed to happen in life, I think, so I accept that, you know –

Well, going back to that – how about friendships formed and camaraderie of service. Did you meet any guys there that you're still in touch with today?

Yeah, as a matter of fact I met Glenn Inman there; he was with us too over there. Him and his wife just came up to Mackinac Island in Michigan, because they were from Missouri and that was – that trip to Mackinac was on both of their wish lists –

Oh, okay.

So we said c'mon up here and we'll go to Mackinac – set up the hotels and everything

Good, very nice.

Went there – and the guy at church was a state cop in Michigan and he was on Mackinac Island one summer. I said what's the best to see there first. He said go on a carriage ride; that'll take you all the way around and you can see everything and it's really good.

I've been there; it's very nice.

We did that for the first time, it was great, and we had a great time with them. There was a black guy, Joe Washington, I've seen him 3 or 4 times – at reunions and stuff.

Oh, you go to reunions?

I had gone to reunions but the reunions for 3rd Battalion 26 Marines, those guys are all - it was '66 I think it was they went over there, all the guys went on ships over to Viet Nam – the whole third battalion –

They went back to Viet Nam. You mean after the war was over they went back to visit, or what?

No, no, this was in '66 – they put them over there to be involved as part of the defense.

And then when we were in DaNang, I don't know where we were when we first got in country, they would send us in where they needed a guy or two, okay, so they sent us

over, 26 Marines, but at these reunions, two or three of them now, it was the third Battalion 26 Marines but most everybody there was from the original group of '66 and they got sent over there as a group.

Oh, I see. I see.

Because they go over there with just one or two guys, you know, at these reunions I felt out of place. I didn't feel like I was a part of them. They said what do you mean? I don't have the camaraderie that you guys have. I want to feel like a part of that but to this day it just doesn't seem like –

Wow – you don't feel a part of that –

So, I don't know, but yeah, I see some guys and the other guys, yeah, I've seen some guys since I've been back. And we've had good times together, so yeah.

Do you belong to any veterans' organizations today?

Yeah, life membership in both of them.

Really – so VFW and American Legion?

VFW, Marine Corps League, DAV, Military Order of the Purple Heart.

American Legion, did you say?

American Legion is the only one that I never did -- I joined it but I never did a life membership.

When you were in the service, how was your communication with home – how did you stay in touch with family and friends?

Letters.

Just letters?

Letters basically, and trying to think – they sent me a tape recorder for music – maybe I recorded myself, I don't know, but it was mostly letters. In fact they saved my letters and I went through them about a year ago –

Wow – how did that feel?

Been years, you know, and it was just really kinda crazy so -- guess my Ma saved them all, especially like that first one, I think I guess I was talking like I was a lunatic guy

Really!

They made me write the letter –

Oh, they told you to write to your parents –

Yeah, and my mom said boy, she could tell something was wrong –

Definitely – I'm glad that your mother saved those.

Yeah, they're both passed now and I don't know if I got rid of them yet or not.

Oh, you should never get rid of them; that's a part of your legacy. Never get rid of them.

Cheryl (wife) – No, I think we have them

You should include some in here. Actually if you want to get rid of them, you should put them in here, one of them at least. That's an idea. I've never done that but that's certainly something that I would consider.

Cheryl – if I look around, I could swear I saw those. I don't remember where.

Well, look around. If you've got one to spare I certainly would include it with the interview.

Yeah, you could have one.

I'd make a copy of it so you could have it and I'd send the original.

You can have the original if you want it. I read it couple of times and – and it's okay.

Cheryl – we have to look around.

Well, you do that; you find it and I'll use it. The next thing now is how about your medals, honors and awards – did you receive any medals or awards? Would you state them right now for the record? I asked Michael to read them from his DD-214 into the record.

Okay, let's see – National Defense Service Medal, Combat Action Medal, Vietnamese Service Medal, Purple Heart Medal, Vietnam Campaign Medal, then there was Vietnam with 4 Bronze Stars, then I have a Bronze Star with a Combat V, Presidential Unit Citation Ribbon, Navy Unit Commendation Ribbon, Marine Corps Good Conduct, Vietnam Meritorious Unit Citation, Yellow Sea Cross, another Vietnam Meritorious Unit Citation again, Civil Action Medal First Class Color – inaudible –

And the Bronze Star, not sure how I got it, but I talked to my CO there and he said he never put me up for Bronze Star. So, I don't know. I ran across an officer there when we were coming back from sliding down a rice paddy trying to bring somebody back – one of the guys got shot and he saw my arm was bleeding, and it was a stinkin' leech – okay, and I just ripped him off and I said no, sir, that was a leech. “No, I don't think so”.

Sir, it's not, okay – so I'm wondering now. You gotta have an officer write that up. I'm thinking my CO never wrote me up –

So someone has to recommend you for that? Someone else –

Yeah, yeah.

And you don't remember anybody who would – or what you got that for?

Except for that one officer that was there. When we got out of the rice paddy finally, you know, and he's the one that I didn't recognize him. I could see his bar; he was a Captain; I don't know where he came from; he's the one that said "You've been hit". I said, "No, that's just a leech." He said, no, no – I said okay.

Maybe he did; you don't know.

So I guess that happened a lot over there, I was told. But I don't know. I don't remember doing anything really – the significant thing that I did, a couple of guys I've talked to since then, they said were there and I wondered why I never got nothing for that. Maybe that's just a verification that – I don't know. The Purple Heart is definitely mine.

Yeah, for sure. Definitely.

The rest of them are probably but that one there just kind of – shady, but –

So you earned those – and when you got home, how was your reception by family and friends?

When I got home?

Yeah, after you were medically discharged?

There was a big party or two.

You were still young; you were just 19 years old, or 20.

Got out in September so I was probably out of the hospital in April-ish, so yeah – people were glad to see me; I was alive and everything.

So were you able to go to work? What did you do after you got out of the service?

Oh, after a couple of months I decided – I was good enough to go to work, so - my Dad worked at a trucking company at the time as a mechanic in the garage and they were hiring dock workers –

Your dad was a mechanic?

At Expressway Lines, and then he found out – well, back then it was easy to get your kids jobs –

Oh, yeah, sure.

So he (turn tape)

We just turned the tape and Mike was saying when he got home his Dad got him a job where he worked, at Expressway Lines and he was a dock worker but he had

to wear a hard hat because he did not have the plate in his head at that time. So that's where we left it.

Okay.

So did you stay there as a dock worker.

Yes, I was there for five or six years or so.

In other words, when you came back to Chicago to get the plate in your head, you went back to Detroit and resumed the job as a dock worker.

Right. And didn't have to wear the hard hat anymore, so

You didn't need the hard hat?

Didn't need the hard hat, but a couple of months after that when it got infected –

Oh, yeah, right.

And so for another year I had to wear the hard hat, waiting to get my year in – they made you wait a year for information, whatever – so yeah, got the second plate in and things were good after that.

So how long did you stay as a dock worker?

I got it on my resume somewhere but – let's see that was '69 – '74 – I think it was like 5 or 6 years. Then I went to college and –

Oh, and did you use the GI Bill?

Let's see, I didn't use the GI Bill because I was eligible for – I forget what they call it –

Like a scholarship?

No, it was like – can't remember, there was a name for it because I was disabled. And they paid for – the GI Bill you get so much a month, I think – with this one, disabled and rehab kind of a thing, and I got everything paid for – my books, my tuition –

Oh, everything, Wow!

They were even like –

Did you live at home or were you in a dorm?

Was I at home or did I live in a dorm – no I was by myself in Pontiac, yeah.

What college are we talking about?

I think it was Oakland Community College.

Is that a two-year school?

Yeah; two-year school. They had EMT program there, which is paramedic – that was back in the early 70s I think it was.

So you took that course?

Yes and graduated – I worked as a paramedic –

Where, in Pontiac?

Pontiac area, yeah.

So how long did you work as a paramedic?

Couple of years.

And then what happened after that?

There wasn't much work around for paramedics. That's when they were kind of new and stuff so I decided to go back to school so I chose to go to MoTech, which is like a Chrysler sponsored one-year all mechanic school. My wife and I wanted to move to Canada and we thought as a mechanic it would be easier for me to find a job, and it was. So –

You moved to Canada – what part of Canada?

Uh, North Bay, Ontario.

And how long did you stay there?

A year.

Did you not like it? – what happened?

Oh, I liked it but my – this guy, his daughter was the business lady, okay. And I told Darlene, I see all this stuff on my record, like I'm this and I'm that. I don't have all those certifications. Well, I just gotta do that to get you in the country because you're not –

Because you weren't a citizen?

I said, "Darlene, I don't know if I like that" – so she said don't worry about it. Well, , so anyway, got in, okay. But see Wayne, the boss, he must have read that stuff, okay and thought wow, this guy really knows his stuff. But – and then he would get mad at me because he asked me to do something and I said I'm not sure I can do that. I guess he thought he's got that on his record, why has he got –

Where was this that you were working in Canada?

It was a combination, let's see Avis Car/Truck Rental. And he also had a meat packing thing too – so we had the trucks for the meat packing outfit.

So you were a repair – mechanic?

Yeah, so I was mechanic for any one of those like semis or cars or whatever.

So you're saying this Wayne put credentials on your resume that shouldn't have been there.

No, his daughter put them on there and he read them.

Oh, he read them but she put them on.

Yes. I said don't put that on there.

Why was she putting it on for you?

She said she had to to get me in the country legally – not legally, it was illegal, what she was doing. And then one day he just flew off the handle and, I said, well, I guess I'm not staying here, so I told Cheryl I said I'd like to go home for Christmas for good. So we headed back to Michigan. Her parents had a place in northern Michigan that they weren't using, and it was a winterized cottage, so I asked if we could go up there and spend the winter, you know, we had a baby – and so we did. And I found a new job doing some mechanical work – kinda grew there.

So you continued being a mechanic.

Yeah.

Did you work at any particular place there in northern Michigan?

Well, I worked for this one guy that had a – he had a company that put in cable I think for utilities and he had a bunch of trucks. And after I left Jim I think I went to a dealership –

But you stayed with the mechanical line?

Yeah, and then a friend of mine got me into Weyerhaeuser, which was a mill up there that just opened up; that was like in '80, I think it was; did that about ten years.

Where did you retire from? What was your last job before you retired?

I think it was an urgent care nurse in Michigan Health Park in Houghton Lake, Michigan.

So you went back to nursing; you gave up mechanics.

Yeah, nursing.

Where was that at – the urgent care nurse?

In Houghton Lake, not Houghton, there's a difference.

So you retired from there?

Yeah, I kind of – well, I kind of took, let's see, what would you call it - a service officer -- he was working on a claim for me like saying I was unemployable. He said what else you got? I got nothing else to tell you. I said it is what it is. So you gotta get on this.

So he called me one day about six months later and said what you up to? I said well I just got done with orientation for a job. He goes, what do you mean? He goes, your unemployability came through. And I says, you told me that wasn't going to happen.

So what now?

So I talked to my counselor and I wasn't sure it was the right fit and I said , you know, I don't really want that anywhere now – but she said, well you got a choice, Mike. You can either follow through with what you were doing, and at that time I was going to school for – in the medical field but it wasn't nursing – what do they call it – like like an x-ray tech, or, she said, as soon as you finish school you're gonna be – they're gonna want you to work in this position.

Right.

So I thought, gosh, I mean I really didn't know what the heck to do. I just – I don't know – after a couple of months I thought about it and thought I'm just gonna take the unemployability thing and even though it wasn't really, I don't know, felt pretty frustrated.

Okay. How did your military experience affect your life?

It's been, well, it's been very good because I'm all about veterans. If you're in the Patriot Guard Riders in Michigan – we had a lot of KIAs that came back in the '80s from Afghanistan and Iraq, and boy that really made me – that turned me into something different. I talked to guys that were there and that seen much more action in Viet Nam than I did and stuff, and every one of them said being in the Patriot Guard Riders done more for them than any amount of VA therapy could ever do for them. And I thought man, I feel that way too.

Wow!!

All the stuff that I did before and stuff, whatever, PTSD and all that, but just going there and being with the family, seeing the guys, you know, going through all the solemn, being honored and everything like that, it was just like – it was like wow – I couldn't believe how proud it made me be to just do that and be there. You feel bad for these young people and their wives and stuff, you know, just at one of the funerals there we went to the cemetery, we were lined up with our flags and I was kinda at the end. And right across where the casket was and they got done with the ceremony and were just gonna lower the casket down, and the wife just throws herself on top of the casket –

Oh my God!

And I think I cried –

Yeah, my God.

Something like that, it's sad, but I don't know. That seemed to really kind of to do something positive, even though it wasn't positive, nice to be in a positive way.

Well, what about life lessons you learned from military service?

Life lessons – don't assume anything.

That's good – ha, ha.

Can't really assume – when you hear somebody say we got this deal – yeah,, right. I don't know, now I just look back, I'm like 75, 76, whatever, it's like wow – you know, there's so much in life that you just don't know about till you really experience it or it happens to somebody you know or to you and it's like wow, what a lot of inaudible junk out there. But, I don't know, I'm at peace, I guess.

Good; good for you; that's a good place to be.

It wasn't all the time, but for now – except for this move. I wasn't at peace with this move.

Why did you move here?

Grandchildren.

Mike moved here for the grandkids; he's not really truly happy here.

Well, I only came because Cheryl's too good of a woman to let go.

Well, that's good; I'm glad you appreciate your wife. A lot of men don't.

Okay, I think that about sums up everything, unless there's anything else. We'll see if you can find your letters and if you want we'll incorporate them. But if you can't find them today, that's fine; you can get them to me anytime.

I read them here.

Yeah, I'm sure you'll find them. I don't need to have them today. This is not going to go out for a month or so.

I'll give you the whole box –

That's fine with me

If you want to read through them –

No, I'll pick one – maybe even that first one – well, we'll see.

Okay, fine.

I think that this concludes the interview – if there is anything else you want to add

I can't think of anything.

Well, I thank you for this interview and thank you so much for your service and sorry about your injury, after all this time, but thank you for your service.

You're very welcome. And thank you for doing what you do.

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