

1967 Hulhi grad
/ saved in Vietnam

MR. AND MRS. JIMMY ROACH INTERVIEW

CH: All right, I am now starting the interview with Mr. Roach, and his wife Carolyn. Ok, Mr. Roach, what were your personal views when the U.S. first decided to join the war?

Mr. R: Well, I didn't really have any personal views, I thought it was, ya know if, if the government decided to go to war, I mean it wasn't my decision. Umm, I'm going to do what they tell me to do.

CH: So, you didn't ...

Mr. R: I didn't think it was bad. I really had no bad views, or anything, it was just something that everybody had to do if they were told to do it.

CH: So, umm, did the media display the war as a good thing, or a bad thing?

Mr. R: At the time, I think it was more, ya know, they looked down on it. There were a lot of guys that went to Canada to try and avoid the draft. Umm, but it didn't make any difference to me what they did. (chuckle)

CH: So, I was wondering if you were drafted, or if you volunteered?

Mr. R: No, I enlisted.

CH: You enlisted, and what year was that?

Mr. R: 1968

CH: What type of activities were happening at the beginning of the war?

Mr. R: As far as...?

CH: Like maybe when you were in school, or before you enlisted. Were there groups that were protesting at all?

Mr. R: No, uh-uh. Not that I recall.

CH: Um, what were some of your individual sacrifices that you gave up when you went?

Mr. R: When I went in the service?

CH: Yeah, when you went in the service.

Mr. R: Well, a lot of social freedom (chuckle). Uhh, you're away from your friends and family, ya know, although there were a lot of pluses, too.

CH: What were they?

Mr. R: Well you get to travel a lot, and see a lot of different places.

CH: Umm, What made you want to get involved in the Vietnam War?

Mr. R: Well, um, ya didn't really get involved, but ya join the service, and not everybody went over to Vietnam, and I'm not sure how they picked the people that were going to go, but I was at Fort Vains, Georgia when I came down ready to go up there. Why I was picked, I really don't know. Umm, I wasn't angry that I had to go.

CH: So you didn't know that you were going to Vietnam, they just kind of selected you?

Mr. R: I think a lot of people probably had it in the back of their mind, including myself. The chances of going to Vietnam were probably pretty high.

CH: Uh-huh. Which high-school did you attend?

Mr. R: Hilhi

CH: And you graduated in...?

Mr. R: 1967

CH: Were there any popular songs of the time that displayed the war?

Mr. R: Yes, but I can't think of a name. There was this one, "we're all going to die." (asks his wife)

Mrs. R: Yeah, I can't think of the name of it either.

Mr. R: Yeah, it was kind of a neat song.

CH: (This is for Mrs. Roach) Carolyn, and did you also attend Hilhi?

Mrs. R: Yes.

CH: Did fashion in hair and dress change over time?

Mrs. R: Well, fashion changed a lot from the middle to late sixties until the seventies. And went more from the hippie type of style in the sixties to the disco seventies, and that sort of thing. I'm not sure if that had anything to do with the war or not.

CH: Maybe it expressed more freedoms?

Mrs. R: Yeah, that's probably true. There was a lot of flower power and all that kind of stuff, and uh peace signs and that kind of stuff.

CH: Did people want to stop the war?

Mrs. R: Well, a lot of people did. Yeah, um as everybody knows, the Vietnam War was not very well supported. A lot of people, the Vietnam veterans, didn't get a good welcome

home like most war veterans do, and that's always been, um a sore spot for a lot of veterans of that era.

CH: Did you have any personal views toward the war?

Mrs. R: No, not really because um I was probably only in the ninth grade or tenth grade when a lot of this was goin' on, and I was only concerned about what I was going to do on Friday and Saturday nights (chuckle). I was in my own little world, and politics just wasn't my issue. I wasn't really concerned about what was going on ya know on the other side of the world, and I didn't know that many people that had gone to Vietnam 'til I was older. I had four brothers, but none of them joined the service. Well, one did but he didn't go to Vietnam.

school

CH: Uh-huh. Um, were there any public protests in Hillsboro?

Both: Not in Hillsboro, no.

CH: Did your family and friends ever talk about the war?

Mr. R: Uh, none of my friends did. My family, like prior to me going into the service? Well, yeah, because ya see I had a brother-in-law that was, uh my sister's husband. He was in Vietnam, two years before I went. So, actually while I was in my senior year in high-school, he was in the service, and he was over. So, yeah there were discussion among family members.

CH: Was it pretty much against it, or was it a positive thing?

Mr. R: Uh, it wasn't, no there was no, nothing negative about ya know, it was just, ya know what about what he was doin' from the letters that he sent my sister.

CH: Did you get to learn about any of the information on the letters, or get to read them?

Mr. R: Nuh-nuh. No.

CH: Were there any public displays of support for the war?

Mrs. R: Well, when I was older; I know that there were a lot of friends of mine would wear bracelets of those Missing In Action (MIA). They would have their names on it and stuff. That was a form of support because you'd buy the bracelet, and it was supposed to go toward some drive. It was a form of support.

home-front

CH: Huhm, that's very interesting. I didn't know about that.

Mrs. R: A lot of people, um they would wear the bracelets until I think the end of the war, and then I think some of the people actually got to meet the person that they had on the name of the bracelet once they were...

Mr. R: Was it the Prisoners of War (POW) or Missing In Action?

Mrs. R: Well, I thought it was Missing In Action, but it may not have been. It could have been Prisoners of War.

Mr. R: Yeah, I remember that.

Mrs. R: I didn't have one myself, and so I don't know all the details, but I remember other people wearing the bracelets.

CH: (Facing Mr. Roach) Um, how did your family and relatives react to your enlistment?

Mr. R: Uh, they were probably happy to get me out of the house (chuckle). No. No, my dad was in the Army, so uh, ya know, he probably thought it was the right thing to do.

CH: So it was kind of courageous, and an honorable thing to do?

Mr. R: Yeah.

CH: Describe some important events that you can remember of that occurred in the late '60s and early '70s? Anything that happened?

Mr. R: You mean, like personal life? Gee, that's a long time ago.

CH: Yeah it is. It was a long time ago.

Mr. R: I don't know, I went to see Jimmi Hendrix live (laugh). (To Carolyn, "How 'bout you?")

CH: Umm, you married after coming back, and what year was that?

Mr. R: You were askin' Carolyn that (chuckle).

Mrs. R: Um, we were married in '72.

CH: And was that directly after you came back?

Mr. R: No, I got out of the service in '70, 1970.

Mrs. R: Yeah, well I graduated in '71, and we didn't start dating until after that.

CH: Did you think that the war brought you guys closer, or that it didn't have an effect?

Mrs. R: It didn't really have an effect. Like I said, I knew his family, but I didn't know him personally. I didn't know him while he was gone, I didn't even know that he was in the service until he had come home.

Mr. R: See, Carolyn's brother, one of her brothers is my age, and we used to hang out together, so, really that's how we got to know each other.

CH: (Changing the subject) What were some of your duties in Vietnam?

Mr. R: My duties in Vietnam? Uh, well, when I first went to Vietnam, I was in the 25th infantry, and I was with a mechanized unit. And what we would do, we would go out on our APCs which is a track, I don't know how to explain it to you. Anyway, we would go out to different areas where there has been reported enemy movement, and search that area. Then at nights, you'd have to pull guard duty. Sometimes, you'd have to go out on an AP, what's called an ambush. You would go a mile or so from your camp, and you'd set up a uh, ambush to trap some movement.

CH: And did that actually work in catching people?

Mr. R: Uhh, not when I was on an ambush. No, but uh it was effective, yeah.

CH: Did you see any of it happen?

NVA
Mr. R: Not at night time, but uh in the day time, we would search an area. Sometimes, you would find a MBA. And that was my first, ya see I was only in the field for two months. I got, I got wounded my second day in the field. So umm, I didn't spend much time after that, because, well I was wounded in the head and I couldn't wear a steel helmet, which I brought home with me (chuckle). So, anyway, riding on the APCs. Ya ride on top of them, and they bounce around a lot and the liner inside the steel helmet would rub on my scar there, and uh so they took me out of the field. And they took me to the main base camp, and it was called the med camp team. And what we would do is go up to two different villages a day, and we would take a group of medical people like a doctor, um a dentist, and uh treat the village people, mostly the kids with whatever illness they might have. We'd also take the South Vietnamese army personnel and they would go around and talk to the village people and see if there had been any enemy activity in that village. And that's what I would do, I would go around with these guys. I pull security and just walk around with the S. Vietnamese army.

CH: Was it scary to do that?

Mr. R: No, it was, no. It wasn't scary.

CH: So you weren't confused between, because I've heard that some people were confused between the Viet Cong and the S. Vietnamese.

Mr. R: Well, actually, the Viet Cong. See, ya had the N. Vietnamese army, the NVA, and the Viet Cong; they were actually North Vietnam sympathizers. They could be anyone in that village there, and they would be working in their rice paddies and whatever they do, and at night time um, they would do a 180.

CH: Did you find any of those people?

Mr. R: Well, You never really, you couldn't really just look at them and see because they could be just as friendly as a brother to ya. So, ya never know, um and none of the village people would, ya know, squeal on them. But that was a Viet Cong. And like I said, what they would do, they'd collect food, and be taxing people in order to support the NVA.

CH: That was more about the infantry, could you tell me a little about how you saved the other person's life?

Mr. R: Well, I wouldn't exactly say it was saving a person's life (laugh), ya know they write the articles to make it sound good. Well, we were on a daytime mission, and we found a uh, it's kind of tucked away in the jungle, I guess you could call it. It was a bunker complex, and this was NVA, uh, once we got into the bunker complex, there were probably three bunkers, and you know what a bunker is?

CH: No, not really?

Mr. R: Well, it's kind of a half dug out under ground, just a, well, if that area was bombed or something, the chances of them getting hurt would be a lot less. Well, anyway four of us went back into this area and we found bunkers, and there had been enemies there probably an hour or so before we found it. And when they heard us, they moved out. So we were back there and one of the guys back there he opened a amo-can and it was booby-trapped and he got wounded, I got wounded, and our lieutenant got wounded. Umm, it knocked my to the ground, and when I got up, I looked back and I saw my lieutenant, and his uhh, his foot was laying up on his chest, and so I just rushed over to him, and tried to keep him calm umm until the rest of our unit could get back in there because there were four of us back in this area. When the explosion went off, nobody knew what happened, um the enemy didn't fire on us or anything, it was just a booby-trapped that was left set when they left their area so I didn't really save anyone's life, I just did what anyone else would do.

CH: But you did stayed calm, and remained with him, and kept him calm?

Mr. R: Yeah, I tried to keep him calm because he looked like he was, obviously in worse shape than me.

Mrs. R: Who was it, there was a second guy that was wounded there as well, wasn't there?

Mr. R: Yeah, actually he was wounded, and got the worst end of the deal. But he didn't look like he was hurt that bad; he was the guy that opened the booby-trap. He lost both legs, and an arm, in that accident, but everything was in tact. There was shrapnel that had gone through his legs where you could see he had been hit, but everything was attached still, whereas my lieutenant, his foot was up on his chest there, so he looked like he was the worst off. There were three of us that got wounded, and the fourth guy didn't get hit with any shrapnel.

CH: How badly were you wounded?

Mr. R: I got wounded in the head, and it didn't fracture the skull, or anything, what happened was when the shrapnel hit my steel helmet, the shrapnel went through the lining so that it just cut my head. And then I got two pieces of shrapnel in my arm. But the three of us made it back to the base camp on a MediBac? <a helicopter> And when I got there, one of the medics, he came by, and said, "Uh, looks like your going to go to Japan." Because they would send all the head injuries to Japan at the time. But mine wasn't serious enough to go.

MedEvac

CH: Why would they send all the head injuries to Japan?

Mrs. R: It was probably the closest area that they had for more medical attention.

CH: Did you have any discussions with other soldiers, or when you talked, what was it about?

Mr. R: Well I couldn't get into that (laugh). Just normal stuff, "what's happening" ya know, just it was never about the war really. We all talked about what we were going to do the next day.

CH: Was there a lot of fear?

Mr. R: No, I don't think so. No, it didn't show if there was.

CH: Um, do you know how many people actually were wounded or hurt in your unit.

Mr. R: There wasn't a lot of people. In my company while I was there, I would say there would be probably seven or eight guys.

CH: Out of a total of...?

Mr. R: Um, a company is probably I'm gonna say a hundred guys.

CH: Um, and can you think of anything else that was really important that happened in the war when you were over there?

Mr. R: Um, important as in...?

CH: Anything that kind of struck you, or stayed in your mind?

Mr. R: Yeah, probably the kids. When I was on the med-cap team there was always tons of kids that would come up there, and uh, I could visualize the kids. We would go to these villages, and we might go back to the same village three times in a month, and um there were certain little kids that you could kind of pick out, and there was one in particular, and he was always wanting to hang out with me, and always want to be where I was at. And I wrote home, and told my older sister about this little boy, and since I took a lot of photos when I was over there, I sent her a picture of him, and she sent him a care package: clothes, toys, beach-ball, and stuff. I remember when I took it out to the village, he was pretty excited about that.

CH: How were you received by the community after returning home from the war?

Mr. R: (laugh) Just like, when I got home, Oh, my best friend picked me up from the airport, not that my folks didn't want to come, it's just that I wanted my buddy to come get me. Really, there was nothing special, but just business as normal. And go about like you had never left; like you'd been on vacation or something.

CH: So there was no special welcome home for soldiers?

Vets

Mr. R: No, nuh-nuh. Because there are guys coming home every day ya know, it wasn't a group of people, umm. When I first came home from Vietnam, we, there was a whole plane load of guys that left Vietnam, we all left together. Um, we flew into Seattle, and couldn't go into the main part of the airport, um it was just a stop for refueling, because we had to go to New Jersey before we could be cleared to go home on label, but that was kind of weird because when we landed in Seattle, um we were in one secluded area, and we couldn't go onto the main terminal or anything.

CH: Why?

Mr. R: Well, we hadn't been cleared yet. I'm not sure, we got to get off the plane and everything, we just weren't around any civilians. Then we went to Fort Dicks, back East, where we could get cleared, and then finally we could go back home. It's kind of a long trip from Vietnam to Seattle to back East, and then to Portland.

CH: Was it your choice to come home, or was it that your time ended?

Mr. R: No, my time ended. Yeah, everyone spent a year there, and then you were rotated out.

CH: How well did you re-integrate into civilian life?

Mr. R: Um, after I got out of the service, I did a lot of partying because I was glad to be out.

Mrs. R: There was a lot of people that went through turmoil, but Jim didn't have that experience because he was finally allowed home.

Mr. R: See, after I left Vietnam, I wasn't done with my service. I still had another year left. After my 30-day leave, I went to Italy for my last eight months. That was kind of neat.

CH: Was there anything special you learned over there?

Mr. R: Well, I went to Venice, and Rome. Probably the highlight of that was I bought a TR-6, a new car, while I was over there. Me and two other guys we flew to England where the factory made the cars, we picked up our cars and drove them back to France, and back to Italy.

CH: What happened after you got out of the service?

Mr. R: Well, I was going to go to school, and started at Portland Community College, but after being in the service for three years, my mind wasn't really ready for school. Didn't want to study. So I quit school, got a job, and have been workin' ever since.

CH: What do you do?

Mr. R: Right now, I am a manufacturing manager for a business in Wilsonville, we mfg tools for the mining industry and I've been there for twenty-five years.

CH: To what extent has having participated in the Vietnam War affected your life? Did you modify your previous lifestyle or views of life?

Mr. R: Uhh, the Vietnam War, itself, really didn't really affect my life any, um, the military helped me grow up faster, and I'm sure the Vietnam War played a part in that. But it seems like, and I'm not knocking the younger guys now, but it seems like that they don't really mature as fast when they don't go in the service. It makes you grow up a lot faster with discipline.

Mrs. R: (adding on) commitment

CH: And you probably also learn to be more dependent on a buddy. Um, did you modify your previous lifestyle or views of life since then?

Mr. R: No, ump, before I went in the service I was pretty young, and I hadn't experienced a lot of life before I went in the service.

CH: Did you get special treatment like some veterans would get loans, or an education?

Mr. R: Yeah, you would have the military pay for your schooling, a low interest loan to buy a home, that's really all the benni's that I received from it. Of course I didn't use much of the schooling, but I'm sure I could go back later like after I retire.

CH: Do you have anything else you would like to mention?

Mr. R: No, not really, but I have some picture albums if you'd like to look at them.

***LOOKING AT PICTURES**

- He received a Purple Heart, an Army Accomodation Medal (for achievement), Bronze Star
- An article on December 22, 1969
- First stationed in Taiguen, City?
- Kit Carson Scouts either turned selves in, or captured and helped NVA, or U.S.
- They (Vietnamese) had underground hospitals
- All APCs had names "Why Us"
- Rockets in the evening, head for bunker when siren, or you hear the explosion
- Wanted to convince S. Vietnamese to help own people
- Medical City Action Program= Med-Cap team – taught them hygiene
- Didn't meet any "homeboys" so never really stayed in touch w/any "buddies"
- Caught "parasites of the stomach" from the food & went to hospital for a week
- Had to watch post as a "short-timer" when people did laundry
- Display of weapons/bodies of enemies in heaps
- Water buffalos didn't like scent of Americans
- Draft lottery once someone turned eighteen, but could get out of it if listed in college
- Back in the late sixties and early seventies, there was still a dress code, and it was cold for girls to walk around in an open campus type of school at the new Hilhi bldg. So girls got together, and did a sit-in at lunch, and the dress code finally changed.

School