

Interview Questions Regarding Lifestyles during the Vietnam Conflict with Stephen Gard

What is your memory of the Vietnam Conflict?

Stephen Gard

This is the first time I had anybody ask me these questions, and it has been 30 years, so it has been a long time. Um memories are that I enlisted into the military in October of 68. I was 20 years old I went to Vietnam in 1969. I was 21 years old um nervous, scared. That was where everybody was headed was to Vietnam. I remember after I was in Vietnam there was a sign somebody had wrote over there on the wall was the vacation spot of the world cause that was where we all went. I remember leaving Gulfport, Mississippi flying on a C1-41, flew all the way over to Vietnam. It's a long trip. I remember landing in Da Nang. I remember when we started to get off the plane and the doors was open, that the heat of Vietnam just blasted you right into the face like a blast furnace. It was so hot. At that same time there was a jet going down the runway had its afterburners on and there was bombing going on out in the mountains around Dengue and stuff. I was scared and also thought about what was a little kid from Darwin, Illinois, doing over here, which I am sure everybody had the same thoughts. After we landed in Da Nang, we had to wait six to seven hours before we could fly up to our base. We took a C-130 up to our base, which was Dong Ha, which is in the Northern I-core. I remember flying and we had cargo nets across our laps, and when we got up there, we all thought we had gotten hit because when we all came in, the plane dropped straight out from under us and came straight down, and I am thinking ah its over with already, and at that time that's how they come in. They don't come in low so they don't get shot at, so that was scary. First night over there too we got in late and they just told us to go find a bed somewhere and crawl up on it. Didn't have no mattresses or nothing. Just old bed springs. Then, we had to muster the next morning and start to work. We worked six days a week, and 10, 12, 14 hours a day. Um, I was a Sea-Bee. I was alpha company. Um, built roads, bridges, base camps, whatever needed done. We built a road out of Dong Ha, which was Highway 9, which led to North Vietnam. We worked many, many months on this road. Tore down half a mountain. Built bridges. Went way up into the mountain. It was beautiful over there, but also after we left, and then years later the North Vietnamese used this road to invade South Vietnam. It's kind of ironic. Um, I remember also that um, there was nine of us from Marshall that all entered into Sea-Bees at one time. We all went through Gulfport, Mississippi Company 104, 94, 94 not 104 Company 94, but there was nine of us from Marshall. Um, I remember one of the boys that went through basic training with a man whose name was a Charlie Coborling. He was from New York. He drove an auto car, which was a tractor semi that hauled gravel and when they got to the spot they would dump the gravel. Charlie ended up getting killed over there with a mine. I still think of him all the time. Um, there was some good memories over there and some not so good ones. I know about ever third day we would have to stand guard duty, whether you liked it or not. Sometimes at two o'clock in the morning, or sometimes four o'clock in the morning after you worked all day. It was unbelievably hot. I remember the first time we had rain. I am from the country and the farm that when it rains you are rained out, but over there it rained like crazy, and I thought boy we aren't going to work for a week. Just a few hours later it was dry again and we were ready to go. It was unbelievable. The clay over there was a red clay. After you worked around it you just come in and it was just red with the dust. Some of the best times

we had was, uh, every couple months we had a United States show come in, and we got to watch. That was a big highlight. Traveling bands, uh, groups that were from Australia, Manila and I'm sure some from the United States. Plus we also got to go an hour or hours one time each tour. I made two tours over there. That was definitely a good time to get away and let your hair down. What hair we have now. Um, at that time it seemed like the right thing to do. Now that I am 50 years old and I look back it, uh, wasn't the right thing to do. I know that's what it was at that time. Government had talked us into it, but (clock chimes) it was a useless war. It was a political war. It was never meant to be won because with all the fall power and people we had we could have if they really wanted to, but they didn't, so that is what is a joke about it. About the whole thing, a lot of young men died. Lot of 18, 19, 20, and 21-year-old guys. 58 thousand of them died, so that is about all my memories of Vietnam.

Stephanie Gard **Do you remember any protest or rallies with Anti-Vietnam sentiment overseas or on TV?**

Stephen Gard While we were over there we didn't have any TV or anything. Once I got back home you could see in the national news every night there were protest and rallies against Vietnam an...and stuff. That was going on and there was Kent State. There was a lot of people up...up in arms against it but while we were over there you would hear about it, but you didn't actually see it.

Stephanie Gard **What did people do in Marshall to help men and women in Vietnam?**

Stephen Gard To my recollection, I myself, never received anything other than letters and stuff from my family. I received care packages from..from my family, my mom mainly, um, but I can't think of anything that..that people had done and maybe they had, but I..I was not aware of it.

Stephannie Gard **Do you know what the community was wearing during this time period?**

Stephen Gard What I can recall is that, uh, bell-bottoms was a big thing. I know I liked wearing them, um, lot of the kids had their hair longer and wore beads, necklaces, and headbands and peace symbols. Um, men wore their suits and stuff was narrow lapels, thin ties, straight leg pants that I can remember.

Stephanie Gard **What type of music, shows, and people were popular then?**

Stephen Gard I don't remember the shows, and I don't remember too many people other than Jane Fonda, and she wasn't popular. Ah the music. Uh, the ones that come to my mind real quick was Creedence Clearwater, which was one I really, really liked and Blood Sweat and Tears. Um, Moma's and the Popa's, Donovan, Mellow Yellow, just to name some. Plus, the Grand Funk Railroad was a good one.

Stephanie Gard **Was it an important topic in Marshall to discuss, or was the problem avoided?**

Stephen Gard I'd imagine that the discussion of Vietnam was over coffee. Every morning people would talk about it, I'm sure. Ah people that had loved ones over there or I know they cam..came to getting it or whatever, but ah personally, I don't know because I wasn't there, but that..thats

what I..I would guess it was. Just loved ones talking about their own family that was over there.

Stephanie Gard **How were the soldiers welcomed when they came home?**

Stephen Gard The soldiers were not welcomed when they came home. It's as if they slipped right back into society and nobody knew anything about them like where they had been. Ah, I remember walking down street after I got back and running into a person that was a junior, or so, older than me and..and they asked me where I had been and if I had been off to college, because they didn't know. I also remembered what was very strange about this war compared to other wars was that one day you're in Vietnam, out in the middle of nowhere, and next day you are back in United States of America, driving down Interstate 70 like it's nothing, and that was a hard adjustment for me. I know that I go 72 hours at least before I could just get so tired that I just fall asleep, cause it's so strange and it was a really hard adjustment.

Stephanie Gard **How old were you when you went to Vietnam and when you returned home after your tour of duty?**

Stephen Gard Yes, I went to Vietnam in April of 1969, and I was 21 years old. I got back on the fifth of December from 1969 and then, I went back over in April of 1970 and got back Veterans Day of 1970 I'd been 22.

Stephanie Gard **How did Marshall react when the war ended?**

Stephen Gard The only thing I can remember about when the war was over was watching the national news at night time, um, and how people were so scared over there and, uh, everybody that was uh collaborated with the United States was trying to get out so they wouldn't get harmed. Um, that is about all I remember of it.

Stephanie Gard **Would you like to add something?**

Stephen Gard The only thing I would like to add is I want to thank my daughter, Stephanie, for asking this of me. I would have never guessed 30 years ago that I would have a child asking me about Vietnam, but I want to thank you. There are still some memories that's there that I didn't say on this tape because it would take a long, long tape for me, and hopefully, one of these days will bring back memories of this. Thank you very much.