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**Col. Arthur L. Kelly American Veterans Oral History Collection:  
Vietnam War Oral History Project**

**Interview with Donald Parrish, October 20, 1988**

**Interview conducted by Andrew McIntire**

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This is an unrehearsed interview with Donald Parrish for the Vietnam Veterans Oral History Project. The interview was conducted by Andy McIntire on October 20, 1988 in Bardstown, Kentucky.

**MCINTIRE:** An unrehearsed interview with Don Parrish, formerly of Battery C, Kentucky National Guard, Bardstown, Kentucky, conducted by Andy McIntire for History 710, University of Kentucky on October 20, 1988. First of all, I'd like to ask you how many interviews you've done with other people, we were talking about that earlier.

**PARRISH:** I'm going to guess in the neighborhood of 30, 35 with various TV and magazine and newspaper columnists.

**MCINTIRE:** You'd mentioned some of them before on the phone, do you. . .

**PARRISH:** Okay, well. . .

**MCINTIRE:** Which ones do you recall?

**PARRISH:** Well, I guess the most prominent one is Sunday Morning with Charles [Guralt], they did a tape interview in my house about 1982 or thereabouts, I have it taped. . . in fact, I've got tapes, I guess, of almost all of them. There was an interview for. . .

with Time Magazine, however, I never did see the article printed, so I don't really know exactly what happened to it. Time Life has come out with a series of books on Vietnam. They have since contacted me and asked me to send them some pictures, which I did, and I have not seen those printed yet either, so they may or may not make use of it. Been interviewed with the London Times, New York Times, of course local TV stations, WHAS, WABE, and WLKY, Louisville Courier Journal, and we also have been interviewed by German television, which apparently is, I'm assuming there is only one

West German TV station, I don't have a clue, or network, and they were here several years ago. The London Times was here and did an extensive article, which by the way, I have at the office if you'd like to take a look at it. And, right off the top of my head that's all that comes to mind. Oh, WTBS in Atlanta.

**MCINTIRE:** Kind of get around on this. [chuckle]

**PARRISH:** [chuckle] Oh yeah, absolutely.

**MCINTIRE:** Familiar territory.

**PARRISH:** Absolutely.

**MCINTIRE:** And overall, you've said there's been a good bit of interest in the Battery C. . .

**PARRISH:** Yes.

**MCINTIRE:** . . . and the events and Bardstown. Just off-hand, what do other interviewers usually concentrate on?

**PARRISH:** Well, at first, a lot of interviewers, and I was able to sort out very quickly the type of people that were doing the interviewing, when they would ask the question of a petition that had been started right after we were activated and sent to Texas for the training, I'm sure you're familiar with that petition.

**MCINTIRE:** I've got questions on that. [chuckle]

**PARRISH:** Okay. [chuckle] Well, we found several people who wanted to direct all of their attention in that one area, and I found that to be very distasteful and really did not want to participate in that type of interview, because it seemed that the article or the TV spot or whatever was going to turn. . . was going to take a negative turn, and I just simply had no interest in it whatever. So, that's. . . that's one area that had been concentrated on.

And then, for the most part, I guess the one big attraction to Bardstown is the fact that so many of Bardstown's men were killed out of the Battery C, and consequently that brought a great deal of attention to the community.

**MCINTIRE:** So basically there's the lawsuit interest and the . . . basically the . . .

**PARRISH:** The loss of life interest. I'd say those are the two big items, which is really unfortunate because there also were a lot of positive things that came out of this experience. We were deemed, for example, after we were in country for four or five weeks out of our one year tour of duty there, we were deemed the top firing battery, artillery battery in all of Southeast Asia.

**MCINTIRE:** I think I have that letter.

**PARRISH:** Mmhmm. Which really is. . .

**MCINTIRE:** [?] gave it to me.

**PARRISH:** Uh-huh. Which is really a . . . quite an honor, because a tremendous amount of work involved in operating an artillery unit, and today I understand there's a great deal more of automation involved, but we did have a . . . what they call a [Fadack], which is. . . it's a computer that we'd compute data to send to the guns. And my se-. . . my particular

job there, I'm jumping around quite a lot, I realize, but my job there was to. . . was direc-. . . I was director of the. . . or, fire direction chief. My section was the fire direction center, and we would take information by radio from forward observers and convert that to information that we could send to the guns, and then of course. . .

**MCINTIRE:** And then the guns dialed in. . .

**PARRISH:** Right, they would. . . they would crank in the information, and they were able to hit a target that may be on the other side of a mountain range. We very seldom

ever saw a target, it was. . . in fact it almost never happened. And, that was our duty. Now, that is. . . there's a great deal of automation involved. There's a whole lot more sophisticated computer available, and that's pretty much. . . it takes all the fun out of it, so to speak. [chuckle]

**MCINTIRE:** Well, let me. . . let me get you back before you left Bardstown, a little. . . just background information about yourself. You're from here originally.

**PARRISH:** Yes, Bardstown is where I was born. Been all my life.

**MCINTIRE:** And, what's your education background?

**PARRISH:** Okay, I went to local schools, graduated from Saint Joseph's preparatory school, which is. . .

**MCINTIRE:** Closed in '68.

**PARRISH:** Yes, that's correct, which is really unfortunate, it was the [Barian] brothers, and they. . . they really dealt out a fabulous piece of education. Went from there to the University of Kentucky, and I only spent one year there, because I became very interested in the family business here in Bardstown, and I just simply left. . . I was in engineering, mechanical engineering. . .

**MCINTIRE:** I can tell by your writing.

**PARRISH:** Beg your pardon?

**MCINTIRE:** I can tell by your writing.

**PARRISH:** Oh, is that right? [chuckle]

**MCINTIRE:** Engineering lettering.

**PARRISH:** Mhmm. [chuckle] Yeah, that's one thing I did pick up, I guess. But at any rate I left that in order to come back to the family business, and basically as my. . . as

that point in my life was approaching where I was going to have to do something regarding service to the country, I made the conscious decision to join the National Guards just so I would not be spending too much time away from the family business. When I joined the National Guard, I'd spend a maximum of six months out of pocket, so to speak, as far as training, and then two weeks summer camp for a year, plus monthly meetings.

**MCINTIRE:** Or so you thought. [chuckle]

**PARRISH:** Or so I thought, that's right. [chuckle] As it turns out I spent just a little over two years of my life was gone, so I can't. . . you know, you couldn't win [inaudible] I guess. [chuckle]

**MCINTIRE:** That's Vietnam.

**PARRISH:** But, if you have to go, that's the way to go, I'll tell you that.

**MCINTIRE:** Could you give me. . . not being from around here, can you describe Bardstown, 1968? Late 60's, what's going on? I'm getting some sort of feel from this. . . from the newspaper, like Saint Joe's closing, and there was a pharmaceutical plant, I believe, opening. . .

**PARRISH:** Oh, that was talking of opening here. Actually it was not pharmaceutical it was. . .

**MCINTIRE:** I didn't read the articles. [chuckle]

**PARRISH:** Oh, they were cosmetics. It was a cosmetics plant.

**MCINTIRE:** Okay. That's it.

**PARRISH:** And, I don't recall the name of it now, but at any rate, it was a big operation, and they wound up not building a plant anywhere for several years, and then

when they reactivated the plant, why they [?] for. At that time, in 1968, we had [Burdenson], was the one industry here, we had. . . basically everything else was a distilling industry, we had a number of distilleries, been here for 150 years or more. And, to this very day, we now. . . distillery. . . distillery industry is one of our bigger drawing cards as far as industry is concerned. And otherwise it was a farming community, there were many other businesses, great deal of the shopping was done in Louisville, as it is today, quite frankly, because of the proximity of Louisville. Population at that time was perhaps 5500 or so, 5,000, 5,500 whereas today it's about 8,500. And, I guess really there's not a great deal of difference between the community now and then, other than the fact that the community has probably become somewhat more oriented toward attracting industry.

**MCINTIRE:** Well you've already given me some of the background to your enlistment reasons and all of that, and you enlisted with Harold Brown.

**PARRISH:** That's right. Mmhmm. Harold Brown. . .

**MCINTIRE:** Can you tell me about that? What was going on in your mind when you enlisted?

**PARRISH:** Well, really. . .

**MCINTIRE:** It's a practical matter, I realize.

**PARRISH:** Sure. Mmhmm.

**MCINTIRE:** Had to do it, but. . .

**PARRISH:** I guess at the time, the furthest thing from my mind was the possibility that the National Guard was going to be activated in 3 or 4 years, and. . .

**MCINTIRE:** This was in '65?



**PARRISH:** '64.

**MCINTIRE:** '64.

**PARRISH:** I entered on April 20, 1964, which also happens to be the same date that we were. . . that I, at least, received notice that our unit was being activated. It also happens to be my only brother's birthday, and it's also Adolf Hitler's birthday, for whatever. . .

[chuckle]

**MCINTIRE:** [inaudible]

**PARRISH:** Whenever April 20<sup>th</sup> comes around, there's a whole lot to think about.

[chuckle] So, but at any rate, that was when we. . . we were sworn in, on one Monday night, we were doing Monday night drills at that time, every Monday night, and then shortly after that, the drills went from Monday nights to weekends, one weekend a month. But that's. . . from there, let's see, that was in April, and we went to Summer camp that year, up to Camp McCoy, Wisconsin, and shortly after I got back from camp, I guess it was probably in. . . well, I guess it was in October we ended up going to Fort Knox for basic training, and got home for Christmas and then left on New Year's Day to go to Fort Sill, Oklahoma, which was the artillery training school, and then that's where I finished up my six month's training.

**MCINTIRE:** Can you give me some background too on what sort of, you know, people were in the guard? What their reasons were? And were they like you? Or. . . I know the draft was certainly. . .

**PARRISH:** Mmhmm.

**MCINTIRE:** . . . very much in evidence, and what sort of people did you find in the Guard?

**PARRISH:** Well, we found the Guard to be a really good group of people to be with if you're going to be involved in the service. And that one factor is why we wound up being the top firing battery in all of Southeast Asia, and the reason being was seven sets of brothers, there were several college degrees, with lots of friends that we went to school together with, with in-laws in the group, you know, there were brothers-in-law, there were. . . I had a cousin there, with all this there's a lot of camaraderie, and whenever it came time for a job to get done, everybody pitched in and saw to it that the job got done, and got done well and got done quickly, and in the regular Army, you'd never run into that, because so frequently you have a mish-mash of. . . you've got some good people, and you've got some bad people. And they're. . . some of the bad includes some of the screw-ups, if you will, that just simply won't. . . don't work well in society anywhere you want to go.

**MCINTIRE:** So rather than sort of a job avoidance ethic you had, sort of which can be applied, I guess to the regular Army, you had sort of a get-it-done sort of mentality.

**PARRISH:** Mmhmm. Absolutely. Well, we were there pulling all in the same direction. I know after the infusion program got started, we wound up with some folks that had a short amount of time left, and they basically sat back and let the rest of us do all the work, and whenever that happened, our unit efficiency started dropping, you could see a dramatic reduction in what we were all about.

**MCINTIRE:** What do you recall of, you know, your training, you mentioned a little bit about that, and National Guard experiences before the call-up, and those [?] days when you can think what. . . they'd be suddenly grabbing you for Vietnam, what was it like on a day to day basis? The social level, the personal level. . .

**PARRISH:** Outside of National Guard?

**MCINTIRE:** Well just, you know, with the people concerned, that you're going to end up going to Vietnam with.

**PARRISH:** Oh, okay, well we were involved in training, see, during the late '60's we had the race riots going on in various parts of the country, and we were involved in riot control training rather extensively, and actually the day that my dad came back from lunch and indicated to me that our unit was included in a list that was being activated, I thought to myself, "good Lord, we're going to wind up going to Cincinnati," which was where they were expecting the riot to break out most anytime. And, that was. . . and I was a little shook up over that, I'm not a fighter, you know. [chuckle] So, I was a little shook up over the fact that I would. . . maybe was going to wind up up there beating up on somebody with a nightstick. Little did I realize that. . . until later on in the afternoon, I drove out to the armory and I found out from Pat Simpson that no, that's not where we're going. [chuckle] But I found out that very afternoon that we were indeed going to Vietnam.

**MCINTIRE:** So they let you know right then, basically right away.

**PARRISH:** Actually, they really didn't. They let me know because I was on the intelligence side of it. It was rumored that we were going to Vietnam, but I would venture to say that at least 80% of the people who were talking about that were saying, "no, this is just a training exercise." Even to the point of getting onto the airplane headed across the Pacific Ocean, they were still saying, "I bet you we'll just go out so far, turn around, and come back." There were not a whole lot of people. . .

**MCINTIRE:** Wishful thinking. [chuckle]

**PARRISH:** Oh yeah, you better believe it, it was very wishful thinking, no question about it.

**MCINTIRE:** So, we talked earlier too a little bit about. . . at the time of the call-up, there were any number of quick marriages and what-not.

**PARRISH:** Yes. Yes, there were several marriages.

**MCINTIRE:** And getting. . . getting married. What. . . how would you characterize the general reaction to the call-up? It's hard to speak for other people, but. . .

**PARRISH:** Well they're. . . they certainly were. . . everybody was surprised and very much caught off guard, and several people made the move of getting married right away, because they already had plans, I think maybe in a case or two, that they're. . . they probably made plans very quickly rather than. . . it's really hard to say for sure, but I think the majority of them were planning on getting married anyway, but most of those marriages have held together quite well. So, I anticipate that there was no ill-fated move made in most of those cases.

**MCINTIRE:** Just a sort of an acceleration of timetables.

**PARRISH:** Yes, that's exactly it. And. . .

**MCINTIRE:** In a big way, I guess.

**PARRISH:** And as I've already noted, a couple of them, of course, were killed in the process and were not ever able to see their first born, or only born children.

**MCINTIRE:** During the training process, you were involved in writing, I don't know how many letters to the newspaper here.

**PARRISH:** Mmhmm.

**MCINTIRE:** I guess sort of keeping people posted.

**PARRISH:** Yes, that's exactly what it was.

**MCINTIRE:** How did you come to be doing that? What was the . . . was that just something that . . . that got pushed off on your shoulders? Or was it just the thing that you wanted to do? Or what?

**PARRISH:** Well, I'm not real sure exactly how I got involved in it, but I guess. . . I'm thinking that I wound up being asked to do something like that by somebody after maybe I made a remark, "well somebody really ought to write back and let everybody know what's going on," and next thing you know, why very frequently I . . . I kind of got into a little bit of a schedule, at one point, and then wound up getting involved in other things and kind of backed off a little.

**MCINTIRE:** Well, they appeared. . . your letters appeared in all sorts of odd places in the newspaper, even the sports page.

**PARRISH:** Oh, is that right? [chuckle]

**MCINTIRE:** When you were writing about the softball.

**PARRISH:** Oh, the softball teams, yeah.

**MCINTIRE:** Had a picture on the front page of the sports section. [chuckle]

**PARRISH:** Mmhmm. [chuckle] Well, that certainly was sports.

**MCINTIRE:** Well, it's sort of an interesting. . . just about missed it, in fact. But. . .

**PARRISH:** Mmhmm. I can imagine.

**MCINTIRE:** Can you say anything, though, about any mail coming from Bardstown to the people there? Was there. . . is there any sort of general trend that you can discuss about mail?

**PARRISH:** Oh yeah, there was. . . yeah, there was a tremendous amount of mail. As a matter of fact, mail was evidently very highly prioritized by the postal department. They would, I know in particular in Vietnam, we would wind up receiving on a Wednesday morning a letter that would be dropped in the mailbox on Sunday evening, which is very. . . much better than it is today, quite frankly. [chuckle]

**MCINTIRE:** [chuckle] Yeah.

**PARRISH:** So. . .

**MCINTIRE:** Well that was a very high priority.

**PARRISH:** Yes indeed. There was not a doubt in my mind about that. But that was. . . that was really well done. I had a package sent to me around Christmastime, my mother sent me a package including a cake, and it never got there, and we came to find out later on that it was on a mail plane that crashed in Alaska. It actually crashed in the wilderness in Alaska and it was a mail plane, so there was just a whole bunch of mail that just wound up not getting there.

**MCINTIRE:** Can you say anything about. . . do you recall anything about, you know, the. . . what sort of exchange was going on in these letters? What were people saying back and forth?

**PARRISH:** Well, you mean as far as the future that we were facing? Or. . .

**MCINTIRE:** Well, just in general, what were people talking about in. . .

**PARRISH:** For the most. . .

**MCINTIRE:** Most people say that. . . most soldiers say that mail was very important to them.

**PARRISH:** Mmhmm. Mmhmm.

**MCINTIRE:** I was just wondering what. . . and very often, not because there's anything important being said, but because it's a connection home.

**PARRISH:** Mmhmm.

**MCINTIRE:** And I was just wondering what's the nature of that connection?

**PARRISH:** Okay, well, and of course this was in. . .

**MCINTIRE:** [inaudible]

**PARRISH:** That's an area where sweethearts were staying in touch, and you know, the typical thing, I guess that. . . yes, it was a very important item, and I viewed mail in the service as a little touch of home that all of the sudden was here, everybody's homesick when you're in the service, I don't care how hard they try to tell you otherwise, and that was the little piece of home that would come to meet you periodically. There was always a bit of news being discussed. I remember my dad sent me photographs of two new trucks that he bought while we were. . . while I was out of country, and so I'd say it really, more than anything else, it was just a. . . a piece of kindling to keep the home fires burning, if you will, and bring home a little bit closer to you. Very important.

**MCINTIRE:** Another connection with home that I wanted to bring up too, and I'm really sort of getting ahead of myself, is about all of the equipment sent [inaudible] including, if I recall right, 8 refrigerators? A commercialized machine?

**PARRISH:** We had three commercialized machines, and. . .

**MCINTIRE:** Chain saws.

**PARRISH:** Yes.

**MCINTIRE:** Which were probably from your father.

**PARRISH:** Yes. Yes.

**MCINTIRE:** Didn't he have the [McCullet]. . .

**PARRISH:** Yes, [McCullet] Chain saw dealership. You've done a lot of research.

**MCINTIRE:** [chuckle] I've been combing through this. Not as much as I'd like to remember. But. . .

**PARRISH:** We had two or three old style Maytag wringer washing machines, a brand new freezer, all of this stuff was shipped, as a matter of fact, Bucky [Ice] who I mentioned, I believe arranged to get that. . . get his dad to bring that to Texas, I think is the way that happened. Either that or Bardstown Transport Line, or some. . . one of the local. . . somebody local here who had trucks hauled that stuff all the way to Texas for free, and of course it was all donated to us. And we took it all with us. We packed every piece of it up and took it with us, and we wound up using all of the units, and those that we didn't really have a need for, we saw it to it that they got into the hands of somebody else that needed one. Every community that was involved, and there were five major communities in Kentucky that were involved in 138<sup>th</sup> Field Artillery.

**MCINTIRE:** Carrollton, Elizabethtown. . .

**PARRISH:** Actually Louisville, and then Bardstown. I said five, there'd be five batteries, but there was only four cities, because two. . . service battery and headquarters were in Louisville. But, as it turns out, the guys from Louisville had nothing. Because, that community is too anonymous, it's too big, nobody knew anybody. Carrollton, I think had two or three items, and E-town had two or three items, and we had a whole trainload of items, so there's a great deal of. . . there was a great deal of camaraderie and backing behind the people.



**MCINTIRE:** Stretching. . . yeah, stretching probably within the unit and extending outside. . .

**PARRISH:** Oh yeah, no question of that.

**MCINTIRE:** . . . to the community as a whole.

**PARRISH:** Mmhmm.

**MCINTIRE:** They also threw you a send-off party, didn't they?

**PARRISH:** Yes, sure did. Sure did indeed.

**MCINTIRE:** Do you have any recollections of that? Or. . .

**PARRISH:** You know, it's a funny thing, I don't. I vaguely recall that there was such a . . . such a party, and I just. . . I really don't have much in the way of recollection of that.

**MCINTIRE:** Well, the reason I brought it up is because there was a thank you note published afterwards in the paper, and it listed probably the business directory of Bardstown, one after another.

**PARRISH:** Yeah. [chuckle]

**MCINTIRE:** Just went down the list, and. . .

**PARRISH:** Well, you know, the town really. . . the town really got together for that, there wasn't any question about that.

**MCINTIRE:** Getting back into my order here, jumping around a lot, do you have anything to say about the actual quality of the training? This is speaking about in Texas, the Fort Hood experience, that you got there as far as preparing you for what you would be doing. I suppose in an artillery battery, artillery, I guess, is more or less artillery no matter where you put it. It's going to be shooting at targets and [?] and all of that. So it's probably less an issue than with. . . with infantry. But, I remember you wrote about a

training exercise and a mock North Vietnam-. . . Vietnamese village, do you have any recollection about those, training specifically for Vietnam.

**PARRISH:** Mmhmm. Well, really there was not much training that took place that dealt a great deal with Vietnam, other than the fact that we did go into the Vietnamese Village, and that was like a one day exercise that was prepared a great deal more for the infantry than for ourselves, because we typically would go to a firebase and stay there for a period of weeks or months at a time, and then move from there to another one wherever we were deemed needed. So, actually there was not a great deal of Vietnamese training, however we did go through the Vietnam Village, and we had one fellow, Jodie Haydon who was trained in the Vietnamese language. As it turns out, the day we were activated, I found out where we were going in Vietnam. It was in I-core, right up North, and Jodie Haydon was grabbed up in Texas and sent to Vietnamese language school or whatever and learned a southern dialect that he couldn't even make use of, so. . . [chuckle] which seemed kind of strange, but I guess it seemed kind of typical for the army too.

**MCINTIRE:** Well, the reason I had asked is because Edward Kennedy had, sometime right in there, had started to probe dealing with allegat-. . . progression of allegations that the National Guard and reservist forces, and quite a few reservists mobilized, not being adequately and properly trained for Vietnam, and this is when. . . I guess with an artillery battery, it's not as much of an issue, really.

**PARRISH:** That is correct, it's not as much of an issue. What we were spending our time learning was how to move. . . what was it, move, shoot, and communicate? Or whatever it is, and. . . by using equipment that we were not familiar with. When we were here, we had M-14 rifles as a personal weapon, and when we went to Texas we were

immediately issued an M-16, and we had to learn how to take it apart and clean it and shoot it and all of that sort of thing. M-79 grenade launcher the same way. We drew the M-109 self-propelled 155 howitzer where we had a towed howitzer here, and you use virtually the same basics in shooting a howitzer, but an SP howitzer, you can. . . it was 360 degrees, or 6400 [nils] you can. . . you have around the clock shooting, whereas with a towed howitzer, you have to actually pick up the gun and turn it around if you're going to shoot behind you, and it takes time to do that and a lot of effort, because those things are heavy as can be, like 30,000 pounds a piece or some crazy thing. So, we had to learn all about the new equipment, and we even learned how to deal with a nuclear round.

They made a nuclear round for that gun, which I cannot anticipate anybody ever being fool enough to shoot it, because you know, it had a longer range than a standard round, but my God. . .

**MCINTIRE:** I would hope. [chuckle]

**PARRISH:** . . . you know, you. . .

**MCINTIRE:** Well, actually I believe it was only a .5 kiloton round, it wasn't as nuclear explosions go. . .

**PARRISH:** Oh, yeah.

**MCINTIRE:** But. . .

**PARRISH:** But even so, it's. . .

**MCINTIRE:** Even so.

**PARRISH:** Yeah, it's. . . but we even wound up with training for that, and I never understood that. I guess, other than the fact that it was probably just a part of the SOP,

you were just kind of simply. . . you were going to learn this, this, this, and this, and that being one. . .

**MCINTIRE:** And that's it.

**PARRISH:** That's right. [chuckle]

**MCINTIRE:** No argument. Okay, let's see, that's pretty much what I wanted to cover as far as getting you to Texas, with the exception of the lawsuit material. [chuckle]

Because, I did want to ask you about. . . did you go to the Louisville meeting on. . . let's see, I've got it September 25<sup>th</sup> or thereabouts in '68, that was where I believe 118 or so people, or thereabouts, pledged themselves to support a legal effort, financially.

**PARRISH:** Mhmm. Yes. Yes, I did go to that.

**MCINTIRE:** So you were at that one, do you have any recollection of what was being talked about?

**PARRISH:** Not really. The only issue that we had at all, and I really wasn't involved in putting this together, but I did join the efforts pretty much on the tail end of it. The only issue was that the contract that we had signed stated that we would not be activated unless there was a national emergency. And, nothing had ever been done, to my knowledge, to this very day that would actually cause that to become a. . . that situation to be a national emergency. World War II, unit from Bardstown went and there never was a problem, but in this particular situation, there was. . .

**MCINTIRE:** There was no declaration of war.

**PARRISH:** No. No declaration of war at all.

**MCINTIRE:** I believe it was just as William Douglass said, that he didn't see a threat, even at the invasion either. [chuckle]

**PARRISH:** Mmhmm. Mmhmm.

**MCINTIRE:** So, he was the one, I believe, who was issuing [?] for various groups to keep them from being sent, and the Supreme Court [inaudible] turning him down time after time.

**PARRISH:** I always thought that there was. . . that justice really got interfered with by politics in that situation. I believe. . . I cannot be made to believe that the terms of that contract could be construed any differently than what I just said to you, and that this was a. . . you know, the only reason we were sent there in the first place was a grand plan to find out just how good the National Guard turned out to be. I've always felt that, I felt that before the day we went, and today, I still feel that way, and I believe I can bolster my own position on that, because now this nation's first line of defense is comprised of regular Army and National Guard and Army Reserve units, and 40% of that is National Guard. They are considered to be well enough trained to be in. . . to make up 40% of this nation's first line of defense.

**MCINTIRE:** Pursuing that just a little bit, I interviewed Colonel [Lloyd], you know. . .

**PARRISH:** Sure, Harold [Lloyd], yes indeed.

**MCINTIRE:** And he had a. . . a complaint. He said that the 138<sup>th</sup> had filed for, I believe, to get the [?] straight, a meritorious unit of war, I believed, and had been turned down.

**PARRISH:** Mmhmm.

**MCINTIRE:** Even though they'd been recommended by, you know, this that and the other general and this that and the other big wig wherever. He said that he felt that the reason it was turned down is because this was a National Guard unit.

**PARRISH:** Mmhmm.

**MCINTIRE:** And that he felt that for the Army to recognize a National Guard unit, would be admitting how bad the Army units were. [chuckle]

**PARRISH:** Yeah.

**MCINTIRE:** And there was a sort of a tinge of rivalry or what have you.

**PARRISH:** Yeah, that is very clearly there, and I 100% agree with him on it. To be honest with you, I did not realize that there had been an attempt made to get a military [inaudible]. . .

**MCINTIRE:** It's still going on.

**PARRISH:** It's still ongoing, I didn't even realize that.

**MCINTIRE:** They're. . .

**PARRISH:** If ever there was a situation that would call for [inaudible], this unit above all would deserve it. And not because I was part of it, but because I saw how well they worked. You know, there's a fellow in Texas, now that I think about it, that you probably ought to talk to. And he was a regular Army lieutenant that came into our unit while we were in Texas, and we. . . when we went overseas he went with us, and he was my immediate superior, and he was a fine fellow and did his job well, and his name is Masi, M-A-S-I.

**MCINTIRE:** He was quoted, in, I believe, the Kentucky Standard speaking about, I believe if I can get the quote straight, it was something like. . . to the effect that this was the best National Guard unit he had ever seen [chuckle] period, and that he thought it was one of the best units he had ever seen.

**PARRISH:** Mmhmm. Well, when he was in Vietnam with us, he had. . . his experience was pretty much limited to being with us, and when he got out of our unit and transferred to a regular army unit someplace else, everything was downhill. I did not realize that he felt this way until very recently, and he called me back this past winter, hadn't talked to him in 19 years, and he called one day and was wanting to, you know, just talk over old times and all that, and I guess it was an hour long conversation, between here and Dallas, and he pointed out very quickly, he says, "I went from this unit, to this unit, to this unit, to this unit," and he said, "little did I realize what a fine unit the National Guard unit was." And, it was only because. . . and he comes right. . . and it almost had to be this way, because regular army unit, you've got a mismatch of people thrown together by pure happenstance, and there's a limited amount of education, there's a limited amount of just mentality in general, quite frankly, and there's a limited amount of camaraderie, I don't care how hard they try, you cannot make two people who don't really have anything in common work well together. In our situation, that all happened accidentally. I mean, we grew up together, we went to school together, we married each other's families, we had seven sets of brothers, I mean, you go on and on and on, there was just all these reasons why our unit had to perform better. It had to perform better when we were not even trying at all than the regular Army would, and that's why we wound up being such a good unit. And it was also enjoyable. I mean, we would play sports together, and you know, basketball and volleyball and softball, and you know, whatever, so I mean these things just all came to pass as a sideline, so to speak.

**MCINTIRE:** Moving you over to Vietnam [chuckle]. . .

**PARRISH:** Getting carried away here. [chuckle]

**MCINTIRE:** When you first got there, what were your initial impressions? What did you see? What did you think? Do you recall?

**PARRISH:** Well, I guess most people who go to Vietnam, or who went to Vietnam, probably went into. . . or at least our section, northern section of the country, northern half of the country, went into Danang Airport. And, invariably, and I've heard a whole lot of people say this, invariably, you'd get off the plane and they would reload the plane with bodies heading back this way, and that was never a good scene, and sure enough they loaded our plane with body bags, which was just. . . it was really the most depressing thing I guess I've ever seen in my entire life, and it was the middle of the night, they. . . we got this orientation, as the plane had just touched down and was taxiing up to where. . . up to the tarmac or whatever, and they were going to let everybody out, and they gave us an orientation, said, "now immediately when you get off the plane, go ahead and lock and load your ammunition in your M-16 and get off the plane and disperse." Well, that kind of shakes you up too [chuckle] to think that. . .

**MCINTIRE:** You were in a combat zone.

**PARRISH:** Wasn't any question about it. [chuckle] So. . . so that, I guess, is my first group of impressions, and I guess the. . . there's a sudden. . . even though I knew from day one where we were going to go and what we were going to wind up doing, there was just a sudden realization that came with that that was just almost impossible to describe. You know, here I stand in Vietnam, you know, what in the hell am I doing? [chuckle]

**MCINTIRE:** [chuckle] I don't guess you really had all that much direct contact with the Army, did you? But based, at least. . . well, you had infantry support at the various firebases.



**PARRISH:** Oh, you mean while we were in country?

**MCINTIRE:** Yeah, when you were in country. . .

**PARRISH:** Well we were. . .

**MCINTIRE:** I'm talking just the higher-ups, actual. . .

**PARRISH:** Not a great deal, no. We had. . . we fired in support of the infantry, so we supported the infantry, actually. We had some infantry with us the biggest part of the time, not always, but the biggest part of the time we did, and the infantry we had with us, by and large, was. . . well, I know for example the first major firebase we went to was hill 88, which is out around on what's known as the hook. . . where the Gulf of Tonkin and South China Sea come together, and we. . . we had above us a company of infantry, 101<sup>st</sup> airborne, and they had a 4.2 inch mortar unit with them up on top of the hill above us, and they were to be our personal protection, should there be an attempt to overtake the hill, why they would be there to help us, but they also operated some of their own operations from that hill as well. I know, for example, they would march a squad off periodically that would go off into the boonies someplace and be gone for a week or ten days and then come back, you know, in decrepit order, but there also was a group of people up there known as CIA, which was very fascinating. They would take all. . .

**MCINTIRE:** Central intelligence agency?

**PARRISH:** Yeah, that's exactly right.

**MCINTIRE:** [chuckle]

**PARRISH:** And they were there doing their little deeds as well, they would periodically disappear. . .

**MCINTIRE:** Who knows what. [chuckle]

**PARRISH:** Who knows what, we found out and figured out what, but they didn't. . .

**MCINTIRE:** Would that [?] connect you with the Phoenix program?

**PARRISH:** I don't know. I don't have a clue on that. They basically were there trying to determine who was and who was not on our team as far as the in country people, and periodically there would be a killing.

**MCINTIRE:** [inaudible] [chuckle]

**PARRISH:** Mhmm. Yeah, they would. . . you know, they would land a. . . you know, [?] in their. . . a village chief or somebody would make an example out of them, and. . .

**MCINTIRE:** Did you have much contact with the South Vietnamese civilians?

**PARRISH:** I had none. Wanted nothing to do with them.

**MCINTIRE:** One thing I do remember reading about is, and I believe at this time [McClure] wrote back asking for clothes for. . .

**PARRISH:** Oh, yeah. Did have contact in that regard, yes.

**MCINTIRE:** Can you fill me in on that, because other than just the request for clothing there's nothing else.

**PARRISH:** Mhmm. Okay here, yeah, Tom is a member of the Bardstown Baptist Church, his wife plays the organ up there, I'm Catholic, but. . . fascinating there's. . . I guess probably more Catholics there than any other particular denomination, but it didn't make any difference, didn't make any difference at all, everybody was in the same boat together, and there was never. . . I don't think I ever heard a first word passed among people, they just. . . they didn't. . . didn't really make any difference. But, Tom wrote back here, and the Baptist church here gathered up a lot of clothes and sent them over for an orphanage, and this orphanage was located in Hue, and then Tom, and myself, and

Tommy [Razor] and Jodie Haydon and a couple of other guys wound up taking several truckloads, and we drove to Hue and went into this orphanage which was operated by. . . it was a Catholic orphanage. . . unusual situation, I think the orphanage would take in children as long as at least one parent had been killed in the war, so the other parent would wind up working in the orphanage, and that's where their labor came from. Kind of an unusual situation, but we. . . that was really the most touching thing we did the entire year, was [?] that orphanage, that really was something else, to see all those kids, and it was. . . well, I guess an orphanage that would be very similar. . . I've never been in an orphanage anyplace else, but this one had. . . you know, there was a blind baby, I know, you know, from the war, and there was. . . certainly be different in that regard, because there was also kids there with legs blown off, and you know, faces mangled and all that kind of thing, burns and so on. Hi Jim. But that's. . .

**MCINTIRE:** Just to. . . before I get to firebase Tomahawk [chuckle] I'm getting there [chuckle].

**PARRISH:** Yeah, that happened after Tomahawk.

**MCINTIRE:** Maybe ought to turn the tape over here.

[End of tape 1, side 1]

[Beginning of tape 1, side 2]

**MCINTIRE:** Anyway, can you give me just a. . . an outline of, you know, bang bang bang sort of. . . went into Danang, then you went straight to Hill 88?

**PARRISH:** No, went straight to Phu Bai.

**MCINTIRE:** Phu Bai.

**PARRISH:** Yeah, Phu Bai was a town south of. . . pretty close to Hue, actually, just south of Hue, in fact, they shared a common airport. Went to a firebase known as Gia Lei, G-I-A L-E-I, I think is what it was, and that was located directly adjacent to the headquarters of the 101<sup>st</sup> airborne, which was. . . oh, no more than 2 or three miles out of Phu Bai, you actually would drive from Phu Bai to Gia Lei, and you didn't know when you were out of one and in the other, it was that close. So we were there for, oh, two or three weeks or so in a firebase that. . . known as the rear area, so to speak, and then A battery from Carrollton was shipped up North a short distance, and I was up there one night with them just observing, and they were no more than 4 or 5 miles away from Phu Bai. B battery was located right in Phu Bai, and then we got the word that we were going to go to Hill 88 which was some 40 miles south, and that was kind of down where the action was going on, and we came to find out that the other. . . we were really the only battery that really found a great deal of activity. And, it was always construed that C battery would get all of the details and B battery was always the loved ones of 101<sup>st</sup>, you know, headquarters, or not 101<sup>st</sup>, but 138<sup>th</sup> headquarters, and then A battery just kind of fell in there somewhere else [chuckle] that was kind of the way it was construed here, and it kind of showed up that way, and it may well be that it was thought that B battery, or that A battery. . . Charlie battery was the. . . maybe possibly the better prepared, I don't know, I wouldn't have [an opinion] on that. One thing that I know for sure is that they were all. . . they were all good units, all three of them, there wasn't any. . . wasn't a problem [inaudible], but we went. . . we went to Hill 88, I guess after we had been in country for about a month, and we stayed there until. . . let's see, we went over in

October, late October, so I guess we were in. . . well, we went to Hill 88 on Thanksgiving Day, I remember that now, drove there on Thanksgiving day in the rain, and that was scary because it was new territory, unknown and a long ways from where everybody else was, and I thought to myself why are we even going down there? So. . . and we were there for several months. We spent more time at Hill 88 than we did anyplace else. That was a. . . that was a good firebase because it was easy to defend. It was a small hill located on flats just off the hook, and right at the base of the mountains along Highway 1, so we were able to. . .

**MCINTIRE:** So you could command. . .

**PARRISH:** Oh yeah.

**MCINTIRE:** Basically a. . . the sweep of Highway 1.

**PARRISH:** Yes, we saw Highway 1 from. . . well we were along the eastern end, or the eastern terminus of a section of Highway 1 known as the bowling alley, and that was like an 8 or 9 mile long section of road, we were close to one end of that, the extreme.

**MCINTIRE:** How far do 155s shoot?

**PARRISH:** 14,000 meters.

**MCINTIRE:** So you. . .

**PARRISH:** 14,400 meters for a shell HE which is a high explosive shell, and 14,000 meters for the illumination rounds.

**MCINTIRE:** Okay, so you had a pretty good sweep.

**PARRISH:** Oh yeah. Yeah, we had a real good sweep there, we could. . .

**MCINTIRE:** From. . . from Hill 88, you. . . you went to Tomahawk?

**PARRISH:** From Hill 88. . . we went to Tomahawk on a couple of one day shoots.

**MCINTIRE:** Okay, that's . . . okay.

**PARRISH:** Mmhmm. We were up there just so we could hit some areas that we really couldn't hit from Toma- . . . from Hill 88.

**MCINTIRE:** Where is it located?

**PARRISH:** On the opposite end of the bowling alley.

**MCINTIRE:** Okay, so you were just heading down the road.

**PARRISH:** Mmhmm.

**MCINTIRE:** Here, you can draw on this. . .

**PARRISH:** Okay. I have maps at home if you want to take a look at some of them.

**MCINTIRE:** Oh, I'd love to. Especially of the . . . of Tomahawk the night of the 19<sup>th</sup>.

**PARRISH:** The hook.

**MCINTIRE:** Yeah.

**PARRISH:** Bowling alley, and then went like so, and like so. And, Hill 88 was right there, and Tomahawk was located up in some of this squiggly up in this neighborhood. Actually, there was. . .

**MCINTIRE:** You're getting into mountains. . .

**PARRISH:** Right, you're right on the edge of the mountains. And, a cross section of Tomahawk would have. . . you'd come up from the sea, down a hill, here's a road, highway 1, and you have a peak, a saddle, and high mountains, and we were set up between here and here and saddle. An impossible area. . . impossible area to defend.

**MCINTIRE:** I was going to say, that doesn't look to strategic.

**PARRISH:** That is strategically the worst place that you could put a human being, in a war situation. Tomahawk had a history of being attacked, people being killed on it,

accidents, strange accidents, soil was unstable, and I know a bunker collapsed one night and heavy rain killed two or three GIs, while we were down here on 88 that happened up here, and it was. . . it was strategically an impossible hill to defend, or position to defend. The fellow who, basically, oversaw the layout, the general layout, really had no business scattering us out as much as he did. And, I was sent back, since I had construction experience, I was sent back with a group of guys to build bunkers, and really all. . . what I did mainly was to build myself a bunker and, you know, for fire direction center, which was what I was directed to do, we were. . . we had a week to do that in, prior to the rest, you know, coming. Meanwhile. . .

**MCINTIRE:** Start up the chainsaws. [chuckle]

**PARRISH:** Yeah, literally. And, that, and had a dozer, and we did. . . we got a good start on it, we didn't get them built, but we got a good start on it, so that when the other units came in, why they had you know, enough start that they were able to do some real good with it. But we were so scattered that it was just impossible to defend. Infantry was sitting up here on top of this hill. Had a platoon of infantry sitting up here, and they were. . . what, 101<sup>st</sup>, and they basically were wore out guys, they had just come in from out in the bush, and they'd come in and spend like a week and then go back out again, and then there be another group in there, so there wasn't anybody ever there that had any familiarity at all.

**MCINTIRE:** It's a revolving door.

**PARRISH:** Yeah, literally. Literally.

**MCINTIRE:** Okay, can you give me a. . . just here, give me an outline, [?] Tomahawk. .

.

**PARRISH:** Mmhmm.

**MCINTIRE:** We've gone through sort of what was involved, what was your experience. . . well, when did you get to Tomahawk before the 19<sup>th</sup> on that. . . how long were you there in that extent?

**PARRISH:** Okay, well we went from 88, like I say, a couple of one day shoots, and on the second one of those, there was a heavy fog that came in, and our battery commander, Captain Thompson from Texas, he was regular Army, went out in a helicopter and the helicopter was, apparently, shot down out in this fog, along with a . . . another Army helicopter gun ship, and they were both shot down, and he was killed. He was our first casualty there. So, we went back to 88 after that was over with, and shortly after that we were. . . we went back to Tomahawk again, and spent like a week or 10 days, or maybe even two weeks, I forget exactly how much time, and went from there out into a place called the ROUNG-ROUNG Valley, R-O-U-N-G R-O-U-N-G Valley, which is at the very Northern end of the Ashaw Valley, and we spent all one day, actually all of two days driving in there, and the village of ROUNG-ROUNG had been basically destroyed other than a tunnel system underneath of it. And, we were anticipating a great deal of contact there, as it turns out there wasn't anything. But, we spent three and a half weeks in the ROUNG-ROUNG Valley, came from there back to Tomahawk and built a firebase. So you're talking. . .

**MCINTIRE:** Where you were eventually attacked.

**PARRISH:** Right. So it's three and a half weeks, and then we were about two weeks on Tomahawk prior to that and we left 88 in. . . sometime in April. I can't tell you exactly



when it was. So you're talking. . . I'd say we got back to Tomahawk in the middle of May, that's an educated guess.

**MCINTIRE:** Okay.

**PARRISH:** And then we built the firebase and pretty much had it the way we wanted it, oh, say a couple of weeks before the attack.

**MCINTIRE:** Okay, on the night of the. . . well, in the period immediately prior to the attack, can you draw me a quick sketch of, you know, who's where, and. . .

**PARRISH:** On the hill?

**MCINTIRE:** Yeah. How is it. . . how is it set up? Where did they come in from?

**PARRISH:** Okay, you just kind of. . . this is a general perimeter, and the 101<sup>st</sup> is sitting up here on a little knoll, there is an entrance that came off highway 1 down here, and that was probably. . . oh, it must have been 500 yards long. There was a maintenance area, there was a mess hall, there was. . . communications was over here, and right in here was what they called the exec post, and right in here was fire direction, that was me. We had a gun emplacement. . .

**MCINTIRE:** Let's see, you had how many guns? Six?

**PARRISH:** Six. And I'm going to be very foggy on this. . .

**MCINTIRE:** Well, just generally.

**PARRISH:** One here. . . One here. . . there was one back over in here, and there's one back in here, and one up in here, and I think one right in here, something like that, these were guns.

**MCINTIRE:** Okay.

**PARRISH:** And then. . . well I guess that was all of them, really. There was a. . . there was a guard post going up the mountains, and there was a guard post. . . there was an outhouse right here, and a guard post up here, and the 101<sup>st</sup> manned this guard post.

**MCINTIRE:** So they basically had you covered both sides. . .

**PARRISH:** Right, on both ends. And then over here, highway 1 came along here like so, and then made a big loop and out.

**MCINTIRE:** Okay, so it. . .

**PARRISH:** This was pretty. . . straight off over a hill, and then over here is the same way.

**MCINTIRE:** Can you put a north indicator too? So that we. . .

**PARRISH:** North would be. . . yeah, north would be something like this.

**MCINTIRE:** Okay.

**PARRISH:** Mmhmm. We had. . . there was a garbage dump back in here, there was. . . the Captain's quarters were up in here, first sergeant, that was the headquarters, I guess, right up here.

**MCINTIRE:** Okay.

**PARRISH:** This is where the flag was flying, so. . . I've got that flag, by the way, that was on Tomahawk.

**MCINTIRE:** Oh really?

**PARRISH:** I believe with burns and bullet holes, and this whole bit.

**MCINTIRE:** And where were the bunkers where the men were actually. . . sleeping?  
Or. . .

**PARRISH:** Okay, during the attack. . .

**MCINTIRE:** . . . wherever.

**PARRISH:** Okay, well the bunkers would all be very close to the guns, there'd be bunkers here and here, you know, something like that. Like, you know, FDC was right here, we had a passageway here with steps leading out, this is going up a hill, and this was a door that kind of opened out down on ground level.

**MCINTIRE:** And then you were wired to each of the emplacements.

**PARRISH:** Yes, we had. . . you know, telephone system. . . actually no, the telephone was to the exec post, and then we were wired to the exec post. So, we would call the exec post and give them the data, they would call each of the guns, and. . .

**MCINTIRE:** And you had somebody, as I recall, from the telephone company in the unit, didn't you?

**PARRISH:** Yeah, there was one fellow there. . .

**MCINTIRE:** Who was helping to wire all this. . . [chuckle]

**PARRISH:** Yeah, he was the. . . he was part of it, sure. Yeah, indeed. Two guys from the comco were killed, actually they both were killed within literally inches of my steps right here. [McAvoy] and Ronnie Simpson.

**MCINTIRE:** When the attack came, can you just outline what was going on? What was happening? Who was doing what before, you know, actually turn the Vietcong or the NVA loose.

**PARRISH:** Okay. 1:45 a.m., I was sleeping. . . see, we had our sleeping quarters in here.

**MCINTIRE:** In FDC.

**PARRISH:** And then FDC was up here. So, we could go from here to there without ever getting out of the bunker, so to speak. 1:45 in the morning, it was about time for me to wake up because our shift changed at 2:00, and I was off-duty, and. . . this used to be a whole lot clearer than it is now, 20 years does take its toll. Okay. Let's see, we were talking about the events of that morning. I was about to be woke up to go on my shift, and in fact, Tommy [Razor] who was leading the other shift came in, and was. . . had actually just reached down, well actually he had gone outside and turned off a generator, which they had been using to charge the batteries, to operate the radios, and he had gone out to stop the generator, and just as he came in, he came in to wake us up, and he was shaking me at the time the first explosion occurred.

**MCINTIRE:** Quite a wake up. [chuckle]

**PARRISH:** Really was. No question about it. They. . . but what happened, apparently, was that the NVA that. . . that launched the attack were. . . knew our routine, and whenever we set. . . we shut our generator off, then a bunch of lights went off at the same time, and they were trying to gain everything they could in way of darkness. So. . .

**MCINTIRE:** Makes sense.

**PARRISH:** Mmhmm. So, evidently that's. . . that's how we put it all together after it was all over with. Anyway, he came in, woke me up, and of course we all woke up after that, literally all hell broke loose. There were rocket propelled grenades, and they. . . we found out later on, there was one individual who was captured alive, and don't know what his eventual demise was, but I'm satisfied there was one of some sort. But he said that there was a red flare fired by their people, which was the signal to launch the attack,

and in the meantime, they had. . . this entire unit had infiltrated our perimeter and had come on in and was hiding everywhere, they evidently were. . .

**MCINTIRE:** So they were actually inside here.

**PARRISH:** They were all inside and scattered throughout, because when that flare went off, and there's some of our people that saw the flare, so when that flare went off, there were explosions everywhere. It was a very well orchestrated attack. There was a . . . virtually every gun was attacked at the same time and there just was no time for anybody to really react very well, but they did manage to get. . . I think a couple of our guns managed to. . . to be alerted, you know, a few seconds before and they were able to kill the guys, you know, that were carrying the satchel charges and all that, but the majority of their attack was a very successful venture. They entered into our perimeter earlier during the evening, during. . . undercover of a real heavy rainstorm, there was a tremendous heavy rain, it was like five inches of rain or something that fell. And, during all that rain, of course there was nothing to see, it was blacker than the inside of a cow as I say, and there was every opportunity for them to come through the wire and up that hillside, and nobody's going to get out and take a look because it was. . . there just wasn't anything expected, and sure enough that's when they got in and did their dirty deeds. But at any rate, there was rifle fire and rocket propelled grenades, they did kill all of the guards up here. I think there was like five. . .

**MCINTIRE:** The 101<sup>st</sup>. . .

**PARRISH:** . . . four or five, wasn't it? Yes, that were in this particular guard bunker over on the western end, and they were all killed. One of our guys, I don't remember now who it was, happened to be in the john, and. . . when all this happened, and he was

laid down flat on the floor, and that's all he could do, there just wasn't any. . . ti would have been stupid for him to do anything different. He felt bad about it later on, but I certainly couldn't see any reason for him to. [chuckle]

**MCINTIRE:** Do you remember who that was by any chance?

**PARRISH:** No, I sure don't. I don't. Kent Bishop might possibly be able to help you out on that. But, basically they went running from here to there and they were throwing satchel charges into bunkers, and then they were also using rocket propelled grenades, RPGs, very much like a . . . our bazooka, would penetrate the roof of these bunkers, and of course they wouldn't shoot right through a gun, they'd penetrate two inches of armor plate without any trouble at all, and once that sharp metal, hot metal got inside the gun, it would detonate the powder, and then away everything went. That's the way most of the guys were killed. There was a total of 14 Americans killed there that night, 5 of them being in our unit, and. . .

**MCINTIRE:** As near as you can tell, was the attack directed at the gun emplacements themselves to knock the guns out of commission? Or was it directed at personnel?

**PARRISH:** No, I think it was directed primarily at the gun itself. We were creating a lot of problems for Charlie, and they wanted us gone, and we finally got to a point where they could do us in, and there wasn't any doubt about it. But, they also were attempting to get the fire direction center, that's where communications and. . . that's the nerve center of the whole operation, and we were fortunate in that when we built the thing, we all agreed that we needed to go one more layer of sandbags on the roof, and the curious thing is that the two required layers were not enough, and wherever they were hit by an RPG, they would just blow the top right off of the bunker. When they hit two direct hits

on top of ours, they blew off two layers of sandbags, and had the third one stopped, which was. . . now, it was quite a noise inside.

**MCINTIRE:** [chuckle]

**PARRISH:** There was a 12 by 12 timber about 15 feet long that was actually broken down as a result of that impact.

**MCINTIRE:** How big. . . just to get some perspective, how big was this?

**PARRISH:** The fire direction bunker was about 15 feet across and probably overall 40 feet long divided into three sections, the bigger section was where the. . . was our sleeping quarters, and then the smaller section. . . not a lot smaller, but maybe 60, 40.

**MCINTIRE:** So they're shooting these RPGs into the. . . on into the roof?

**PARRISH:** Yeah, they were lobbying them into the roof. . . into the roofs of bunkers, and they scored in a lot of places, and very short. . . I'm sure they had a lot of misses as well, you know, there were craters everywhere where they were hitting air, so to speak, so. . . but that and satchel charges and gunfire. And, there was quite a bit of rifle power.

**MCINTIRE:** Of the casualties that C battery had, were they from gunfire or from RPGs or satchel charges, or what? Just mixed up?

**PARRISH:** Well, I can pretty much name those to you, one of them pretty much had his head blown away by RPG. One fell. . . fell on a satchel charge and just blew his body all the way to the hillside, literally. His spine wound up laying right at my feet, you know, as I came out of the bunker, I was the first one out of the bunker, and here that was, and I saw his leg laying over yonder, that was incredible. One fellow was shot with riflefire.

**MCINTIRE:** Can you attach the names to those?

**PARRISH:** Yeah, Ronnie [McAvoy] was one that was blown away, Ronnie Simpson was killed by rifle fire. David Burr Collins's head was blown away. Who else? Let's see, Jim Ray was killed outside of Tomahawk afterwards, and. . . oh, Chapel, Luther Chapel was our first sergeant, he had transferred there from A battery, but he was our first sergeant at the time, and he was also killed by gunfire. So that's one, two, three, four. . . Jim Moore was in a gun and he was burned by it. It was a case of the excess powder inside the gun that was touched off by. . . it was touched off by the exploding RPG round.

**MCINTIRE:** He was the one who died on the 22<sup>nd</sup>?

**PARRISH:** Yes. Mmhmm. Curious thing. Jim was a big man, well-built, just a. . . he looked like a fat man, but he was built like a rock, and he and I went to school together, and Jim was burned severely, head to toe, and in fact he was off-duty at that particular time too, and he rammed the gun, along with some other guys, wearing nothing but his shorts. He got out of bed and shot to the gun, you know, immediately, which is, you know, the instinct under those circumstances. And, when that gun exploded, another fellow evidently was right in the path of the round as it came through the gun, because he was really just badly mangled, killed instantly, and Jim, of course, suffered all the burns, but he was. . . his shorts were burned off of him, wasn't a hair on his body, and he came walking into my bunker, my bunker was the only haven on the entire hill, and he came walking into my bunker, somebody laid him in, and I could tell, you know, there was just virtually no light other than the gun flashes and that, and I could tell by the shape. . . shape of his body who it was, I knew instantly it was Jim Moore, and I walked up to him and put my hand on his back and said, "Jim, what's your trouble?" I knew there was



something wrong, but I couldn't tell what it was. And, as I touched his back, his skin came off on my hand, and that smell hit me like you wouldn't believe, and he said to me, "Donald I'm burned up." And to my knowledge. . . well he was very cooperative in that he. . . he didn't want to sit down, he wanted to stand, so he stood, and. . .

**MCINTIRE:** He came walking in though.

**PARRISH:** Yeah, and he. . . 3<sup>rd</sup> degree burns they [inaudible]. Don't know how he survived it. There were several other guys on the guns that burned. . . that were burned to death also, and it was a flash explosion, it was over with in milliseconds, you know, it just. . . no time at all to make that happen. And, I guess that's all the guys as far as who was killed and how they were.

**MCINTIRE:** Can you remember what you were thinking as this was going on?

**PARRISH:** Yeah, I was thinking my God are we going to get out of this? You know, and Jodie Haydon, a good friend of mine to this very day, of course we. . . they were bringing wounded in, we had over 40 of our people that were brought into my bunker, and they would just basically stack them in corners, and wherever we could get them, and there was. . . there was one guy in there that had his arm blown off, and he was able to try to maintain order among some of the guys who had minor wounds that were losing it all. You know, I remember this one kid had a bullet that went through his upper left arm, on the backside, missed the bone, came out, and it left a little flap of skin out, very much like that scar I've got right there, and just kind of a little flap, maybe the size of your pen, just kind of laid out a little bit, and it looked strange, not bleeding much, and he was screaming, absolutely to high heavens for his [inaudible] which was really a pitiful set of circumstances. And this lieutenant whose arm had been blown off flush to the shoulder,

and it wasn't bleeding, my wife who is a nurse tells me that can happen in certain shock situations, but he took his only other arm and hauled off and roundhoused him and knocked him cold, which got him up, because he was really upset, there was a bunch of guys there that were really hurt bad. Really an incredible. . . I mean, there are just so many stories like that. Saw one guy who, again, was very cooperative, and he was badly hurt. He had been hit by a piece of flying metal evidently right behind his ear, and it took his ear off, and it basically took his whole face off back up to along the middle of his face or so, and it laid that flesh over against this other side, and I could see his teeth and the hinge of his jaw, yet he was being very cooperative, and you know, somebody would tell him to turn a certain way, you know, so they could try to help him, and he'd move and he would. . . he was. . . he kind of had control, you could tell he was in a lot of pain, but he had control. But yet this other guy who wasn't hurt nearly as badly was losing it all. And I guess, again, that's just part of it.

**MCINTIRE:** Had all sorts.

**PARRISH:** Yeah, absolutely. And, I can't say anything against or for either one of them, I mean it's just. . . that's just part of the story.

**MCINTIRE:** How would you. . . this is a really general question, how would you summarize the impact of this on Bardstown immediately after, how did it break? And. . . I imagine the initial impact was nothing less than massive shock, but. . .

**PARRISH:** Sure. Well, of course I wasn't here to see that, Jodie Haydon said to me after the attack was pretty much over with, you know, daylight came and that's when the attack was over with, it was. . . it went from 1:45 until about 6:00 in the morning, non-stop, and we just fired literally thousands on thousands of rounds of ammunition, and

managed to keep them out of fire direction center, and I'm not real sure yet how we did that. But Jodie Haydon said to me, after things kind of settled down a little bit, he says, "boy, this is really going to kill Bardstown. And evidently he was right, because there was a . . . and I knew it too, you know, that there was just. . . the thing that really hurt here was that word of the attack came by the way of news, well let's see 1:45 in the morning there was 1:45 in the afternoon here. And the 7:00 news had it. No, I take that back, the 7:00 the next morning news had something on it, and it mentioned, I believe they said it mentioned firebase Tomahawk, but nothing said about the National Guard.

**MCINTIRE:** But people knew that's where you were.

**PARRISH:** Sure. And after that the . . . I think the big problem came from the lack of knowledge, rather than knowledge. I know I was listed as missing in action at one point, my mother never did know. Jodie Haydon was listed as missing in action, and I'm the one who called the names in of those people who were killed. Said, "we know for sure that. . ." you know, I had this list and gave the list off.

**MCINTIRE:** Mmhmm.

**PARRISH:** And those things get screwed up somehow or another. But then, somebody. . . let's see, Jerry Janes was wounded, and they flew him to Tokyo, and an Army hospital, Yokohama, and he got on the phone and, you know, he had a burn on th back of his hand and part of his arm or something, he was not seriously burned, or injured, but he was burned and was shipped home, just that simple. You know, if you got a burn, you went home, because of infection. And, when he got to Yokohama he called his dad. And I guess that was really the first news they got back that. . .

**MCINTIRE:** And then you wrote subsequently. But I guess by then people were already. . .

**PARRISH:** Yeah, people already knew what was going on. As a matter of fact, this happened on a Thursday morning, and on Saturday I was scheduled to go on R&R and I went to Tokyo, and went down to Yokohama and visited those guys down there, and I proposed to cancel the R&R, you know, to stick around and take care of things there, well they said, “no, go,” you know, so I left, and so when I was. . . while I was in Tokyo I called home.

**MCINTIRE:** Let’s see, is there anything else you can think of to mention about firebase Tomahawk? [chuckle]

**PARRISH:** [chuckle] Well, it was. . .

**MCINTIRE:** That covers a lot of it.

**PARRISH:** . . . hell of an experience. Nothing else comes to mind, I guess, really at this point. There was. . . yeah, there was one other thing. We did a. . . I told you there were good times as well as bad, and we managed to find the food stores back in Phu Bai a few weeks prior to this, and that was being operated by a National Guard unit, I believe from Massachusetts, and they were a part of supply division, and we were up there the day before the Tomahawk invasion, and we got into a particular area, and they said, you know, basically you’ll find the good stuff over there, and we kind of went over there and got hamburger patties that were destined to go to the officer’s club, you know the officers were just basically given a great deal better treatment than the enlisted men, and I’ve really got my problems with that [chuckle] that’s another story all together, but at any rate.

**MCINTIRE:** A little more egalitarian in the [?].

**PARRISH:** Yeah, right. [chuckle] So, we went over there and we got. . . we got hamburgers and buns, and I don't know what all, we got the awfulest bunch of stuff you ever saw. Found a refrigerator someplace that wasn't being used, took a wire rack out of that, got a barrel and made a grill, and we had a party that night for everybody on tomahawk, and we grilled hamburgers until we [inaudible].

**MCINTIRE:** So this is. . . when was the barbeque now?

**PARRISH:** The barbeque was actually the night of the 18<sup>th</sup>.

**MCINTIRE:** Night of the 18<sup>th</sup>.

**PARRISH:** And then, well we had movies over there too, and you know, periodically we'd get a movie and they would set it up over in the maintenance section over here. That night there was a movie. . . oh, Bonnie and Clyde, it was only. . . the first time I had seen Bonnie and Clyde, it was a brand new movie at the time, and we watched Bonnie and Clyde that night.

**MCINTIRE:** It was showing here. [chuckle]

**PARRISH:** Yeah. [chuckle] They were showing. . . that's right, it was showing in the, you know, first run right here. So here we were watching Bonnie and Clyde, and that big rain came during the showing of Bonnie and Clyde, and then they. . .

**MCINTIRE:** That's when they set it up.

**PARRISH:** They were in the process of setting it up, and when that movie was over with, we all went back to our bunkers, and of course I went to bed and went to sleep for an hour or so, and it was time for me to go on duty.

**MCINTIRE:** Time for the attack.

**PARRISH:** Yeah, all at one time, so. . . tried everything in the. . . excuse me go ahead.

**MCINTIRE:** No, go ahead.

**PARRISH:** Well, I was just going to say that we were. . . it was determined that we had been attacked by a battalion of regular NVA infantry.

**MCINTIRE:** That's what Colonel [Lloyd] had said, specially trained snipers.

**PARRISH:** Right. Mmhmm.

**MCINTIRE:** Designed. . . designated to input. . . infiltrate. . .

**PARRISH:** Right.

**MCINTIRE:** And trained for this. . . to knock out this. . .

**PARRISH:** Firebase, that's right. That's right. And, a. . . a lot of that information came from the one individual that was captured. Now, I never did hear whatever happened to him, but something tells me he probably had been. . .

**MCINTIRE:** See how [inaudible] security [chuckle]

**PARRISH:** Yeah, I'd say probably so. [chuckle] Be my guess.

**MCINTIRE:** Colonel [Lloyd] said. . . he mentioned that you had had. . . there was a memorial service a day or so later.

**PARRISH:** That was four or five days later, probably, yeah. And, I was in Tokyo at the time, so I didn't see any part of that. I did see the one for Captain Thompson earlier, and that was. . . kind of a moving event, for sure.

**MCINTIRE:** Well, moving on past Tomahawk, I guess, for the remainder of the term, by this point the infusion program was really largely underway anyway.

**PARRISH:** Actually, it was largely over with by that time.

**MCINTIRE:** Okay, so they'd already. . .

**PARRISH:** Yeah, the infusion was. . .

**MCINTIRE:** . . . infused or defused whoever. . . [chuckle]

**PARRISH:** Right, that was basically complete by the time the Tomahawk incident came along.

**MCINTIRE:** Okay. Did that have any effect that you know of? Or can you speculate about?

**PARRISH:** You mean as far as the. . .

**MCINTIRE:** As far as the unit.

**PARRISH:** . . . the effect of the infusion?

**MCINTIRE:** As far as. . . I suppose, for the most part, there wasn't very much that the unit could do once it was under attack, and. . .

**PARRISH:** Probably not, but I would say this, it. . . and, I really would have a hard time saying this for sure. I do know that when some of these regular Army guys were on guard duty that there was a lot of sleeping going on. I know that for a fact.

**MCINTIRE:** Speaking of the 101<sup>st</sup>? Or people. . .

**PARRISH:** I'm thinking of people in our own guard bunkers, and they were members of our unit. I know of several guys who have been called by name that this. . . "so-and-so will always sleep on guard duty, I don't really feel comfortable with him being on guard duty, because he'll sleep," you know, that kind of thing. So I know there was a lot of that going on. In their defense, I don't know that it would have made a lot of difference if they had been the most astute and all this.

**MCINTIRE:** Under the circumstances.

**PARRISH:** Yeah. Now, in retrospect, you know, looking backward to . . . with 20/20 vision, with or without glasses, I see that if I had been on guard duty, which I never was in Vietnam, because I was a section chief, but if I had been on guard duty during that kind of circumstance, I believe I would have used some of these small hand-held parachute flares, and periodically during that real heavy rain, I think I probably would have fired off some of those to see if there was anything happening, because of the fact that with all the heavy rain, you cannot see and you cannot hear. Because that is. . .

**MCINTIRE:** Perfect infiltration.

**PARRISH:** Yeah, it really is. If you're ever looking for a perfect situation for it, that was it.

**MCINTIRE:** Well, moving on, like I said, past Tomahawk, does anything stand out about the remainder of the term? Or pretty much just downhill, waiting to get home? Or. . . [chuckle]

**PARRISH:** Oh yeah, couldn't wait to get home from that point, naturally. Couldn't wait to get home, and obviously looking forward to coming home, but at the same time, there was one side of me that wasn't really anxious to get home too, but I knew there were families here that would have nobody to come to, that would have nobody coming home to them, I should say. I came home on the early detachment, there was three of us that came in early to ready the way of getting the rest of the unit in, and run through the routine of physicals and all the nonsense that goes with coming home. So. . .

**MCINTIRE:** Was there the. . . what's kind of referred to as the short timer phenomenon? People, as it gets close. . .

**PARRISH:** Yeah. . .



**MCINTIRE:** As it gets close, counting the days and marking them off on the calendar. .

**PARRISH:** Well, oh yeah, that was going on, but the interesting thing about that is that a regular Army guy who was about to go home had a one-man show going, he was really excited and bent out of shape over the fact that he was, you know, in just a few days he'd be leaving there, he had his car-. . . calendar with. . . frequently it was a girly calendar with sections of her body all marked off [chuckle] and he would, you know, like I say, it'd be kind of a one man show. With our unit, it was kind of an altogether different picture, in that there was so much halleluiahs going on so little work going on at the same time, and of course our replacements came in, they took over our equipment, and we left our equipment over there, I guess it's still over there and in, you know, the hands of those people, but whenever some replacements would show up, you know, a guy might come into our unit, and I had. . . or into my section, I had like 10 people in my section, and there was only five or six of us that were National Guard, and here came somebody else, you know, and well, as I would get one regular Army guy in, three others would quit working [chuckle] so there was that kind of thing going on, because that's just pure excitement. So, that was definitely underway, but there was. . . there was a lot of good times, and there also was the end of good times, you know, showing up, and I could see that, and I could see, you know, people that enjoyed pitching horseshoes together and playing softball and suiting up a mule and making a. . . a drag vehicle out of it and those kinds of things that went on all the time we were there, there was a lot. . . you know, that good time was coming to an end, and I could see, whether they admit it right now or not, but I could certainly see that there was. . . there was a little sadness over here, along with

the glee over here, you know. And, so. . . but obviously the glee won out over that.

[chuckle]

**MCINTIRE:** What about your return home? When you got back here, what was that like? Of course, you came a little early. . .

**PARRISH:** Yeah. Mmhmm.

**MCINTIRE:** But as far as when the unit got back, what was that like?

**PARRISH:** When I got back, there was just, what, 20 or so of us on the plane, and we kind of had the back section of a plane, and as we touched down at [Stanaford] going, you know, the uproar in the back of the plane was phenomenal, and of course everybody sitting up front was looking back there, “what are these idiots up to?” [chuckle] And we got to the terminal in [Stanaford] Field, I think there was like 3800 people waiting for, you know, merely 20 or 24 of us.

*[End of interview.]*