

Volume 1, Issue 1, February 2008

interview

With Winton Grier Campbell, Jr.

Retired Colonel, U.S. Army

About His Experiences in Vietnam



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Captain Grier Campbell in Saigon, 1965

Cover Photo: Major Grier Campbell outside his quarters in Long Binh, 1970

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Editor's Note

It's amazing what happens when you clean out your room! A year ago I cleaned out the closet in "my" room at my parents' house in Raleigh, NC and found a paper I'd written for a Vietnam Literature class. I had done an interview with my father, a career Army officer who had served two tours in Vietnam. (I got an A.)

I interviewed him in 1991, just after Desert Storm, when some veterans were beginning to talk more openly about Vietnam. I really appreciate that he was willing to speak with me (his liberal urban-hippie artist daughter) so candidly back then.

Hearing what my father had to say at that time taught me about living with multiple truths. Yes, it's true that the U.S. got into the war in Vietnam under false pretenses. Yes, it's true that terrible things happened and many things were handled badly about that war. And yes, it's also true that people did heroic things in that context, and not only survived but grew through their experiences.

Eighteen years later, I find his responses insightful and especially relevant now, with ongoing wars in Afghanistan and Iraq. I decided to revisit the tapes and transcribe the interview to put in a Zine as a way of honoring and sharing his experience. This Zine includes excerpts from the two-hour interview.

I gave my Dad several drafts to review, and we discussed what pieces to keep and what to omit. He gave me permission to do the final editing - I hope he likes what I've done! He did some research (including calling a Vietnamese restaurant in LA to ask how to spell Ba Muoi Ba, a Vietnamese beer!) and gave me slides to include and the 1963 Saigon map that is on the cover.

I hope this Zine honors my father and his experiences, and that it offers insight to those who haven't experienced combat and brings comfort to those who have.

With love and gratitude, Debbie West, Editor

Proceeds from this Zine will be donated to Any Soldier.com, an excellent organization that provides assistance to military personnel stationed in Iraq and Afghanistan. www.anysoldier.com.

Historical Note:

The French controlled parts of Indochina, including Vietnam, since the 1860s. After WWII, the French began fighting Communist forces led by Ho Chi Minh, who wanted independence from French influence. The Communists defeated the French in 1954, and Vietnam was divided at the 17th parallel.

By 1955 the United States was sending financial aid to the government in South Vietnam and preparing to train the South Vietnamese Army. By the end of 1963 there were 15,000 U.S. military advisors in South Vietnam.

After an alleged attack by North Vietnamese forces on an American naval vessel in August of 1964, Congress approved the Tonkin Gulf Resolution, giving President Johnson extensive authority to conduct military activities in Vietnam. Reports of what happened in the Gulf of Tonkin had been falsified to justify attacking North Vietnam.

U.S. military presence built up rapidly over the next five years and by early 1969 there were 540,000 troops in Vietnam, many of whom were drafted. Many people opposed the war and there were large anti-war protests in the U.S. Four students at Kent State University were killed by national guardsmen during a protest in 1970.

After 1969, troop levels decreased rapidly and a cease-fire agreement was reached in January 1973. American troops withdrew from Vietnam in March. The North and South Vietnamese continued to fight for several years. Communist forces finally captured Saigon April 30, 1975.

Vietnam was the longest war in U.S. history, and approximately 4 million people served in Vietnam. Over 58,000 were killed in action and 303,000 were wounded.



I interviewed my father, Retired Colonel Winton Grier Campbell, Jr. in my parents' kitchen in Raleigh, NC, March 13, 1991. He had served for 25 years in the Military Police (MP) Corps and was stationed in Vietnam in 1965 to 1966 and 1970 to 1971.

Debra Anne Campbell (DAC): When did you go?

Winton Grier Campbell (WGC): July of 1965. I had just met your mother about six months before that, and I left from Fort Hood, Texas.

DAC: Did you go with a unit the first time?

WGC: No, the first time I formed a unit. I went to Lackland Air Force Base in Texas and met two other guys and we formed a unit. I was the senior man, so I became the commander. We went to Lackland to learn about dog training, and then we went out to California on an abandoned missile site, and that's where we started putting the people together. 140 dogs and handlers, 26 supervisors and 14 veterinary technicians and 8 different sergeants. And we had trucks and jeeps and equipment and had to put it all together and take it over there.

DAC: So you set that up to go over to Vietnam?

WGC: Yeah.

DAC: I have a map here, it's not the best map, but can you show me about where you were in Vietnam?

WGC: The first time I was in Saigon, just north of Saigon was Tan Son Nhut. That was the main hub, that's where we went in. And then I started moving my people all over the country, and I ended up with 12 detachments. ... It took me about 45 days to spend 3 days on the ground with my people.

DAC: So was that what you did the first time you were there? You went around to all your different outposts?

WGC: I was a company commander and those were all my people, yes. But I had a logistics nightmare, see, because I had all the dogs out there so I had to have dog food, and people food, and all the people comforts. Because all my people worked on the perimeters at night. They only worked at night, and they worked by themselves, just the dogs and the handlers.



Captain Campbell, 1965

DAC: Were they guarding?

WGC: Yeah, they were guarding ammunition supply points, fuel dumps, and really very, very valuable things. The dog was used to alert if anybody tried to sneak up on them.

DAC: And was it successful?

WGC: Yeah, very much so.

DAC: What did you do the second time you were there? [1970-71]

WGC: Second time I was on the staff, I was the Command Physical Security Officer. My job was to do surveys and inspections of how to improve the perimeter defenses and combat security. So we worked together, I worked with units and I'd go out and we'd look at their situation and figure out how to best secure the base defense. ...I didn't have any responsibility for people, it was strictly a staff job. I traveled around and made recommendations.

DAC: Were you stationed in Saigon again?

WGC: No, I was in Long Binh. Just a little north of Ben Hoa. That's where they built the big American headquarters, in Long Binh. It was a strictly American compound.

DAC: How did you feel about going both times?

WGC: Second time of course I had you and your Mom to think about. But I felt more comfortable going back than I did going the first time.

DAC: You knew what to expect.

WGC: Well I thought I did. But when I got back it wasn't the same. The whole attitude of the country had changed.

DAC: In your understanding, why did the U.S. get involved in Vietnam at all?

WGC: We had a vested interest in the regional area, because we saw the potential for communist aggression in the Far East. There was already influence in Thailand and Laos, and there was certainly the possibility of a regional takeover by communism. There was also a voice... from the Vietnamese people that they were interested in a Democratic form of government. I'm not real sure they fully -- they, the people -- fully understood that, because they had been fighting most of their lives anyhow.

Course, the other thing you've got to realize too, is that I was in the military, and we didn't get a whole lot involved in the politics of why we did certain things. And I'm not talking about blind allegiance, "Go do this cause I told you. "

...We always thought it was a just cause, and it was when we first started. In the early 60's when we first started going over there, and the first time I went over there, it was definitely. You know, we had popular support at home.

DAC: Really?

WGC: So it was... something that we needed to do.

DAC: Do you think the US could have won the war?

WGC: Yeah.

DAC: What would have had to be different for them to win?

WGC: Well, we already had adequate precedents. We had seen the French and what they had done, and their final defeat in 1954, when they got kicked out of the country.

DAC: Dien Bien Phu.

WGC: Paralleling that very closely... in Malaysia, the British had a similar experience, almost in the same time frame, back in the 40's and the early 50's. And we didn't pay any attention to that either, strategic hamlets, going in and trying to ferret out communism and the guerilla warfare. And we didn't pay any attention to either of those examples. And I say we didn't pay attention, I don't really know what was going on at the heads of government. But just from my perspective, it looked like we really didn't learn a whole lot. And then it became a political thing.

See, you can't overlook media. The media played a very, very important part. This war was actually fought in the living rooms of America. We didn't have that in any other conflict we were in, Korea, even the Bay of Pigs invasion, we didn't have any problems like that. But here you had on the nightly telecast, you had the cameras rolling and the footage and the gore of really what war is about, and I think that was what turned the country against what we were doing. Because they had [seen it] for years and years, seven, eight years. They were just completely sick of the gore and the American casualties.

Yeah, I think we could have won, I really do, if it had been strictly a military operation, but it wasn't. It was for some political gains more than military, and that was not immediately obvious from the get go.

DAC: Yeah, we studied a lot of documents about it, and I got really angry reading them.

WGC: Yeah you can do that.

DAC: Because, you know, the Pentagon Papers. The Gulf of Tonkin incident, they lied about that, Dad.

WGC: Yeah, I know.

DAC: The Vietnamese never fired on us! We fired on them first, and they never even retaliated and we said they did, and that started it.

WGC: Yeah.

DAC: It just made me so angry. I guess I have more questions about that too: do you think that the U.S. government knew what it was doing being over in Vietnam?

WGC: Yeah, again, I think that from my perspective, that was not an issue with me. I was involved with a lot more simpler things, like staying alive!

DAC: Yeah!

WGC: And keeping the people I was responsible for alive. So that really wasn't an issue with me.

DAC: Just more doing your job.

WGC: Yeah. Yeah. And my job was to protect and to look after my people and do the job that we were assigned. So I really didn't pay that much attention to it. And it really was not until after both of my tours that I started getting a more clear picture of what was going on.

DAC: Do you think... should the war have ended before or after it did? You know, do you think it should it have ended at a different time?

WGC: Well, that's difficult to answer, because it should have ended a long time ago, if we had been able to fight it, but we weren't able to fight it. So, once that became apparent, the quicker the better that we finished it, because that was less and less casualties that we were going to have to endure.

DAC: Why weren't we able to fight it?

WGC: 'Cause the politicians wouldn't let us, once the tide had turned on it... When American families had had enough, when they saw what was happening, and what was coming home. That just wasn't worth it. It just was a war of attrition. And the Asians were well versed in it. ...

So I think, yeah, we should have ended it a lot sooner, once it was determined. Somebody should have had guts enough to stand up and say "Hey, let's knock this crap off and go home, 'cause we're not going to win."

And the only way we would have won, was to start in the tip end of that country, down in the islands off the coast, and go up and totally restructure the country.

DAC: That would have a big effort.

WGC: Yeah, it would have been the only thing. But strategic hamlets like we did, the French --the French and the British-- had already proved that didn't work. But we never paid attention.

Ironically, when I got back the first time, I went to school -- that was just before you were born. And the irony of that was that's what we studied! We studied counterinsurgency and insurgency operations from the French in Vietnam and from the British

experience in Malaysia. And to a lesser degree the Philippines and then some of the South American insurrections.

DAC: You studied that as a good example? Or a bad example?

WGC: No! No, that's what I'm saying. We studied the causes and effects and how to fight it, how to counteract it.

DAC: Interesting.

WGC: Yeah, but we didn't learn anything. I mean we learned in the classroom what should have been done, but we were not given the opportunity to do that.

DAC: Hmm. That's interesting.

WGC: So you had to think, so, here I was a Captain. And you had to think that certainly the Generals had been exposed to the same thing.

DAC: Do you think it was worthwhile that we went over there and would you do it again?

WGC: Yeah, yeah, and then you've got to look at the broader sense, that's where the political impact does come in. That was the fact that we, the United States, was willing to stop aggression, communist aggression, as we perceived it in the region. Because quite frankly, had we not stepped in, that whole area would have become what it is now, but it would have been different. It would have been polarized, and it is not really polarized now, from the standpoint that it is not...it's not solid. There are people there who have tasted freedom, some forms of it. And also I think that our thrust into the region had an impact on the world balance of power. I really do.

DAC: Would you go again?

WGC: Certainly. Yeah, I certainly would. You see, when you choose a profession, it's just like a marriage of sorts, you pick it for the good and the bad. You pick it, then you make your decision to stay with it. Whether you decide, you know, whether it gets to the point where you have to go to war, or whether you stay totally peacetime, it's immaterial, because you take the good with the bad. So yeah, I'd go again.

DAC: One problem in Vietnam was the draft and who had to go. How do you feel about the fairness of the draft in Vietnam?

WGC: It wasn't. I know people who had avoided the draft because of who they were and who they knew. And they took poor people from the inner city, and poor country folks who didn't have any of that pull, and were in good health. They moved out. Even if they weren't in good health. And they had a very difficult time in making it, because when the buildup started, there were a lot of physical things that were overlooked, and certainly not a whole lot of mental tests were given. And thus we had problems like with Lt. Callen, the My Lei massacre.

DAC: Oh yeah.

WGC: Where we had instant "Shake and Bake" officer and NCO development programs. Most of those, by and large, were excellent programs and excellent screening devices to pick the young leaders. But it doesn't take but one or two. And there were a lot who didn't get caught. They did the same thing Callen did, probably worse than that. That's where we got all this animosity between the officers and the enlisted men, the "fragging" incidents, the killing of our own, which was asinine. And probably preventable.

DAC: Yeah. You think a lot of that was because they weren't really selective, and they didn't go through a lot of psychological screening?

WGC: Yeah, I don't think there was a lot of preparation. "Do it because I said to." Not a whole lot.

DAC: I know that's one theme that has come up in a lot of the works we've read, the insurrection against the officers. In one book I read, *Going after Cacciato*, an officer, they called him "Ready Mix," because he was in and out, you know, dead.

WGC: We called them "Shake and Bake."

DAC: Yeah, Shake and Bake, Ready Mix. This officer was all by the book, you know. He was making his men do things he wouldn't do himself. Finally he went in to search the tunnel himself, and they threw a grenade in and killed him. Kind of shocking to us.

WGC: Yeah, but it happened. It happened. Now if you take the same circumstances you can somewhat understand the frustration level when you're driving with a truckload of your people through a small village, and you have a young eight year old girl throw a grenade in the back of the truck, and kill three and wound four, and when these same people got out in the field and come to a village with nothing but women and children, how their frustration level would build, and how sometimes without discipline, they could massacre that village, knowing that little girl or little boy has the potential of being a Viet Cong sympathizer and throwing a grenade in the back of a truck.

And when you saw this time and time again, and people's short-time calendars, which everybody had [counting down how much time they had left there]. When somebody had been in-country about 8-9 months, they got real skittish about where they went and what they did. And some of them just went paranoid from the standpoint they never slept. Then here comes the drugs and the alcohol and all that, and that paranoia sets in. Very, very easy to do. Very understandable. I got a little nervous.

DAC: I'm sure!

WGC: I had a week to go, and they called from the out-country and wanted me to come up and talk to them. I didn't want to go.

DAC: Cambodia?

WGC: I had about a week to go. No, it was up at the 25th Infantry Division, up at Cu Chi. And they were going to send a helicopter after me, and the helicopter would wait for me and bring me back. I was worried about the helicopter being shot down. I went, but boy I'm telling you, I was a nervous wreck. And the last night I was in country, I didn't sleep at all, I stayed up all night.

...

DAC: I wanted to ask you some more social questions, like how was the attitude of the country different, each of the two different times you were over there?

WGC: The first time we had popular support at home. We were the knight in shining armor, coming to the rescue of the damsel in distress. We were enjoying a lot of victory, just because of our firepower, our equipment, everything. Particularly the helicopters. We could move so quick, we could move so many people so quick, and bring an awful lot of firepower to bear on the Viet Cong.

The big thing, the biggest change I saw was, when I was over in '70-'71, we had suffered some serious defeats.

DAC: TET offensive, in '68.

WGC: Yeah. And we'd also had some others in '70. Now, if you can envision, much as what we saw in Desert Storm, you had units that had trained together, been together, going over to Desert Storm. And these same types of units went to Vietnam the first time, ok? As you stayed in, attrition, either getting killed or wounded or coming home, then the unit was back-filled. So you had this constant transition and did not have the camaraderie and the relaxed atmosphere to get to know each other and train with

each other at Fort Whosits and Fort Podunk Junction. And get that camaraderie and that training together so that you had real teamwork. What you had was piecemeal, the guy learned when he went out there to do it for the real thing. So consequently, your morale was a real roller coaster ride.

DAC: We learned they were called FNG's. [F-ing new guys.]

WGC: That's right. That's exactly right. And you had half FNG's and the other half were veterans, and of that last half that were veterans, some of them were extremely short [had a short time left in-country], you had just some real problems. And now change leadership, and bring in a brand-new, green lieutenant, who's been trained to go by the book, and "This is the way we did it on the mock up table in the sand" and all this, and it's no wonder the frustration of the guy who's been out there doing it, and knew that if we did what he said, it's gonna get us all killed. And that just fanned the fires of insurrection. And then throw the racial mix in there, and the agitators. And some of those were right and a lot of them were wrong. ...

DAC: The second time, the attitude of the country must have been...

WGC: Yeah, it was... they knew things were winding down, so everybody was grabbing what they could, 'cause we were turning installations over to the Vietnamese.

DAC: I mean the U.S. country, but anyway...

WGC: Yeah, but the problem, see the whole thing permeated. Everybody said "Why are people still getting killed?" and "Hell no I won't go," because they knew the thing was winding down, why should I go over there and get killed? So that was a problem. The GIs got over there and could see what the Vietnamese were doing. We'd turn over a compound to them, and within a week or so, they had it stripped. They'd go in, they'd take all the wiring out,

they'd take all the plumbing out, they'd take all the wood off the buildings, they'd take all the tin, and pretty soon there was nothing left.

DAC: What did they do with it?

WGC: They'd build their own little hooch. Because it was theirs, we'd turned it over to them. So they were getting ready, hoarding as much as they could, knowing we were going to leave. They were going to get their part. So when the GIs saw that, then there was this reluctance to go out on missions. "Why go out if this thing is going to end, why should I be the last one killed in this conflict?" And what you saw were replacements coming over there who had been subjected to all of this back here, all the rhetoric, all the anti, and at the same time, some of them seeing the vets that were disgruntled and maimed.

DAC: And disillusioned.

WGC: And seeing that the government wasn't providing ANY support for them when they came back. So you had some heavy, heavy morale factors.

The fact that I came back the second time and changed my uniform before I got on public conveyance to go home, I think that says a lot. Just because it wasn't safe to travel in uniform. And you know, I represented what everybody disliked, but it wasn't me making the decision. Better than getting spit on, getting involved in some kind of altercation.

...I don't mean to throw bad on the TV and the media. The media certainly does a lot and has done a lot in keeping people honest, but just the constant barrage of seeing in color, in living color, unedited footage of somebody getting blown away and medivaced out, and showing the body bags. Like in *Full Metal Jacket*, they run out of body bags and try to cover them up with a poncho, and the poncho blows off and the news camera pans over all these grotesque bodies.

... I used to travel a lot of conveyances over there, different helicopters and planes, and it was nothing to ride with a bunch of body bags coming back. And we tried not to internalize that. But I guess a lot of people had seen their friends blown up and blown apart, and I'm sure that would have had a significant impact on me. I was fortunate in that I never experienced having somebody blown up in front of me. But I saw a lot of blood.

DAC: Really?

WGC: Again, you just... you try not to internalize it.

DAC: I guess you were a lot older too, than a lot of people that were over there.

WGC: The first time, yeah, I was 25 and 26. I turned 26 over there the first time. But I had been in the Army 6 years. I knew a little bit of what to expect. Although I was not prepared for it.

DAC: I don't think anybody can be really.

WGC: And I was scared to death the whole time I was over there. And I say that because I think that was a healthy way to be. I wasn't scared to death, I mean I was scared in a way that made me acutely aware of what was going on, what the potential was. And consequently I think that's why I lost a lot of weight, because my metabolism responded. And I didn't eat like I should the first time I was there, because stuff wasn't that well arranged until I got ready to leave in '66. Things were picking up a lot then.

DAC: How do you feel about the protesters, people who dodged the draft, and went to Canada?

WGC: Well, I have a problem with it, and that is because of what this country stands for. And here I was -- I'm not a good example, I guess, because this was my chosen profession. I did it because I wanted to I be there. I didn't want to go to war; I don't think

there's many people wearing a military uniform who want to go to war. That's not...but you need to be prepared for it.

Let me digress just a minute. If you go back to the Bay of Pigs, and you go back to the Cuban missile crisis of '62, the one thing the Russians understood, and Khrushchev specifically, was brute force. That's one thing he understood, and that's why he got those missiles out of Cuba. It's because Kennedy told him "Get out, or this is what's going to happen." And then when we fired across the bow and stopped that ship, that did it. Khrushchev said "That guy ain't going to back down. This is not a wimpy America anymore."

Ok, that is what my feeling is, that we need the deterrence, that we are capable of flexing our muscle, and not just flexing it, but doing something when we need to. So that's why we need a strong defense.

DAC: Speak softly and carry a big stick.

WGC: That's right, but when you've got people who enjoy all the freedoms, and all the benefits of that society, and then decide when the time comes that they want to run and hide and let somebody else do it, and then when things cool off I'll come back. Now that bothers me, ok?

Now at the same time you had the draft, and there were some inequities in that draft, a lot of inequities from a lot of people's perspective. And I guess... I don't know what I would have done if I had been in their shoes. I would like to think that I would have gone and done what I was supposed to. But I don't know what those people think today. I don't know that they're that much better off having gone to Canada. You know, I'm not sure that they are having to live with a lot of other stuff that maybe they would have been better off going over there.

DAC: They do. We talked about that in class a lot, and a lot of people feel guilt, for the same thing you said, they didn't do their duty, they wimped out sort of.

WGC: And somebody will counter and say that was my job. That's true, but again if I had been drafted, that also would have been my job as it was my responsibility.

DAC: It's complex.

WGC: Yeah, it is. There is no right and wrong solution.
...

DAC: Do you think veterans were treated fairly by the VA?

WGC: No. No. And I don't blame the VA. I think this again was a systemic breakdown. And there were probably a number of reasons, some of them good at the time and some of them bad. The stories you heard about were only those stories which were able to get covered. I'm sure there were just untold broken families, broken homes, broken bodies and minds that could have been maybe avoided, or at least the pain lessened, if there had been some kind of system to accommodate it. But that didn't happen for a lot of different reasons. Some of those were political, some were fiscal, some were just the war.

DAC: The attitude of the country.

WGC: The attitude of the country, yeah, yeah. See, the unfortunate thing is that the poor young person that went over there and got the broken body and the broken marriage and the broken family and all that, he's the victim. He's as much a victim as anyone, cause the system failed him. He went over there and did what his country asked of him, and when he came home, they kicked him in the ass.

DAC: How did you feel about the Vietnamese people?

WGC: The first time I was intrigued and trying to be the friendly American to help and all that. And of course our contact was all the secretarial and custodial help that we had. So I was generally trying to be nice and learn some of their language.

The second time was I wasn't sure if I was being conned or not. I just had a real apprehension. But I never got to the point where I was hostile to them. I really never felt that. I know the Mama San, that's what they called the maid I had the second time, was really kind of a victim. She was probably a sympathizer with the VC by necessity, but I tried my best just to treat her like a regular person. She was very good. I don't know how old she was, but she didn't have many teeth, she chewed on beetle nuts all the time. I think she was probably in her 30's but she looked a lot older than that. Really had a tough life.

DAC: How do you think the Vietnamese people felt about Americans?

WGC: Probably felt prostituted to a large extent. It was just another god to serve. They had put up with the French, there was a strong Chinese influence. There was a lot of bad blood between the Chinese and Vietnamese. So, I think probably they looked at us as rapers and pillagers.

DAC: Really? Do you think that was a fair assessment?

WGC: I don't know.

...

DAC: How did you manage to keep yourself together and sane? You said you saw a lot of bad things and a lot of gore and everything. How did you keep it together?

WGC: I was lucky. I had tools. I had a group, a little camaraderie, other MPs that we were together, the second time more than the first. The first time we all used to eat lunch together in the same mess hall so we got to know each other real well that way, and some other officers too. And then at night we'd get movies. We got on the movie circuit. For our small BOQ, there were only about 30 of us in there, we got a movie projector and started getting movies in it.

Long Binh, 1970



And then the second time, we had restaurants on the post, we had officers clubs on the post, so we had a lot of shows. There was an awful lot to do the second time, because Long Binh was a massive, massive compound. It was really big.

DAC: Earlier you said just not internalizing it, kind of staying distant from it.

WGC: Yeah, you did that. It's just like I've done the whole time I've been in the police business. You see an awful lot of things that people do to each other, you can't internalize that. If you do, it drives you crazy.

I've seen...I've been around dead bodies, I've seen all kinds of bad stuff, cuts, blood everywhere, that kind of thing. A guy with a gunshot wound to the head... But you just don't dwell on that, you don't internalize that. You recognize it for what it is. I don't recognize it as somebody's son, daughter, mother.

What you need to remember, nobody wins in a war. Nobody. This thing over in Kuwait [Desert Storm in 1991], nobody won. We didn't win. We had some people killed, that means somebody's father, son, brother isn't coming back. It doesn't matter how many, or how few. Somebody, so we lost. The Kuwaiti people, the Iraqi people, the suffering, the human suffering that's going on. I'm

not talking about money, or oil, or gas. I'm just talking about the human toll. So nobody wins in a war. That's why nobody wants to fight. That's why a guy in military uniform would give anything if he didn't have to have that.

And the way we did that, in my opinion, is having a strong deterrent. That's the reason why we're there. I believe, and I still believe in that, that the best defense is having the offensive capability. A lot of people think I'm a warmonger, but I'm not.

...

DAC: What do you remember most about Vietnam?

WGC: Oh lord, most? I don't know... I think probably, handling the fear. And I guess every person, and you know the macho man has got to think about it, but every person has a threshold, and I never knew what mine was.

DAC: How'd you handle it?

WGC: I think I did pretty well. I really do. And I found out again with this group, camaraderie, that I wasn't alone. It was the type of thing that men don't like to talk about, us being scared and being afraid. Because that's not, quote, the manly thing to do. But as we all talked about it after a while, that was a very healthy thing to do. We were fortunate. And I think we were sitting around drinking some Ba Muoi Ba (laughs).

DAC: That helps!

WGC: Yeah. It was like formaldehyde, it would kind of numb your face.

DAC: (laughing) What a terrible thing to drink!

WGC: It was called "33," it was a Vietnamese beer. I think they were turning it out before it was completely fermented! It was some powerful stuff!

I think the thing Vietnam showed me was... it showed me more of myself because of the situations I was faced with. And I thought that I was very well prepared, and I found out that I wasn't as prepared as I thought for some of the things I had to deal with.

DAC: For example?

WGC: Well, I was fortunate enough the first time I was over there not to have anybody killed. I had a man wounded, I had a man we had to put his dog to sleep. He had been with that dog for two years, and the dog had protected him and the dog had gotten shot and we had to kill it. And trying to console him.... I think...I don't know. I remember when the MP Lieutenant got killed, that was just down the street from where I was living.

DAC: Is that the one we looked up on the Wall? [The Vietnam Wall memorial in Washington DC.]

WGC: Yeah. We had a bomb blast that rattled the windows of my place, about 4 o'clock in the morning, I was sure we were getting hit. Just a lot of different situations, you just never thought how you'd react. I never panicked. Came close to it a couple of times.

I had driven from Na Trang down to Cam Rhan Bay, and we got a late start coming back and it was dark. It was a lonely stretch of road. The only way they traveled that road was on convoys. And it was just the driver and me on the road. We took a couple of rounds over the jeep, scared us to death. We were driving so fast I thought we would have a wreck. Then I was afraid we wouldn't have a wreck, and somebody would shoot us. I expected to get ambushed any time. Those two rounds went over the top of the jeep and he started driving a little faster. And we finally made it back and it was pitch black when we got back, and everybody was complaining and saying we were stupid, and I said "You're right! I will never do that again." And I didn't.

I don't know, just a lot of things. And I guess over the years I just

pushed it out because it was not a popular thing to talk about, so I suppressed a lot of it. I never even thought about it. I think looking at these pictures will probably rekindle some thoughts. Nobody wants to talk about it now, you know? Most of today's generation, just like you just reading about it, don't know a whole lot about it. Unless you're around other vets, it's just something that doesn't come up in your daily conversation.

DAC: I know I was curious just to learn a little more about what you experienced, and what it was like for you, 'cause I can't picture, you know.

WGC: There are a lot of things I have done in my life I would rather not even talk about. And that will happen. So what you do is you suppress them. And it's there, but you just don't cognitively think about it. And I think that's the way Vietnam was. And on top of that you had Nixon resigning and all that.

DAC: Bad times.

WGC: Yeah, everything was bad.

DAC: Do you think it was any easier coming back since you were in the Army, and it's not like you went to a totally different career where your experiences in Vietnam were discounted?

WGC: Yeah. I do. I think coming back was easier from that standpoint because I did not have to assimilate back into the civilian environment. I stayed in the family and I was accepted. I was accepted more readily in the Army fold because now I was a two-time returning Vet and that had, quote, status in the family. The more tours you had and the more decorations you had, the more respected you were inside the military.

And it automatically gave you a peer group to talk to. So ya'll could swap war stories and talk about things that I wouldn't talk to your Mother about. And I was talking to somebody who

understood exactly both what I was feeling and had felt, had seen or done. They had been there. That's why Don King and I were so very close. [A neighbor in Germany.]

DAC: I think that's really good for you to have had that support.

WGC: That's the systemic breakdown I was telling you about. The structure wasn't there for everybody. And the same type of thing should have been there for the guys assimilating back into civilian life. But it wasn't.

DAC: That's a shame.

Do you feel that Vietnam changed you?

WGC: Oh yeah. It certainly did. From a maturation standpoint, certainly. I'd like to think at 26 I was mature, but really I wasn't. And again I think just because of the exposure I had, the responsibility, the things that I witnessed. Yeah, I think it did a great deal in changing my life. I really do.

DAC: It sounds like kind of in a positive way.

WGC: Yeah, I look at it as a very positive way. You've got to do things in your life with gusto, but not in a destructive way. ...I'm glad that I did what I did because otherwise I would have been called up and gone another way. And it probably would have had a very negative impact on me because I would have been just getting started on something in the civilian world and been pulled out.

I enjoyed going to work every day, I enjoyed the people I associated with at all levels, people that worked for me and people I worked for. I think I gave a little of myself to them and I took a lot from them. And I think that type of work ethic I am demonstrating today. And I'll continue to do that. It is a discipline, but at the same time it goes back to something that I grew up with, "If you're going to do it, do it right. If it's got your name on it, make sure they can read it."