

Interview with Peter Rafferty

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Interviewer: Mark DePue

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DePue: Today is Thursday, December 15, 2011. My name is Mark DePue, the Director of Oral History with the Abraham Lincoln Presidential Library. This morning I'm in the library, talking to Peter Rafferty. Good morning Pete.

Rafferty: Good morning Mark.

DePue: And you go by Pete, don't you?

Rafferty: Yes I do.

DePue: We are here to talk to Pete about his experiences as a Marine during the Vietnam War, during the very early stages of the Vietnam War. But, as I always do, I'd like to start off with a little bit about where and when you were born and learn a little bit about you, growing up. So where were you born?

Rafferty: In Springfield [Illinois].

DePue: And your birthday.

Rafferty: October 9, '44.

DePue: Nineteen forty-four.

Rafferty: Yes.

DePue: So, in the midst of World War II?

Rafferty: Yes.

DePue: What was your father doing at the time?

Rafferty: He was a coal miner, but I don't know if he was...I assume, with it being October, he was back at work by then.

DePue: Now, you'd mentioned before that he had been a World War I veteran?

Rafferty: My father was in the Navy in World War I, and one of his brothers was in the Army, and one of his brothers was in the Marine Corps. That brother was always my favorite uncle. He left his dress blues at our house, and from the second grade on, I knew I wanted to be in the Marine Corps.

DePue: From the second grade on?

Rafferty: From the second grade on, yes.

DePue: What was it that so intrigued you about your uncle?

Rafferty: I really don't know. I cannot remember. I just know that he was a really great guy and that was the absolute most beautiful uniform that the world has ever seen. (laughs) It's like, I've got to have one of those.

DePue: Your father was a coal miner, and a lot of people have forgotten that Springfield had a fairly sizeable coal mining industry at one time.

Rafferty: Yes. My understanding is, the only part of Springfield that isn't under-mined is the downtown area. I know my father, before I was born, they were mining up by Sherman, and there was a cave-in. They crossed shafts and came out, down by Chatham.

DePue: Wow.

Rafferty: Everybody thought they were dead, because it was all caved in up there. And, of course, they couldn't hear anybody or anything, because they were walking south.

DePue: Well, there are few industries, especially in those days, that were more dangerous. Did your father have any complications, because he was a coal miner?

Rafferty: My father died of black lung. He died after my ninth birthday, before my tenth birthday. He was home on my ninth birthday, from the hospital or sanatorium or whatever, and he was home one year at Christmas. All I remember is, it

was the Christmas you know who is Santa Claus, because I can remember talking to my dad about that.

DePue: That would have been about 1953 then.

Rafferty: Probably.

DePue: Somewhere in that neighborhood.

Rafferty: Yeah, and he died in '55.

DePue: You were at a delicate age. Did that have a powerful impact on you, do you think?

Rafferty: I think it did. I know all the other kids in grade school had their moms and dads, the kids in grade school and that. I had my mom. So, of course, any family thing was, you know, you, your mom, your dad. And it was my mom and me. That's the way it was, and I just...But I sure did miss having a father around.

DePue: What was your father's name?

Rafferty: Peter James Rafferty.

DePue: Had the family been in Springfield for quite a while?

Rafferty: My grandfather came from Ireland, and they came [to America]. How they wound up in Springfield, I've never been able to find out.

DePue: Your grandfather, was he a miner as well?

Rafferty: Yes, he was a coal miner.

DePue: That was a common reason for coming here, at that time.

Rafferty: Yes it was. I know they came...My grandpa and grandma came to the United States in the late 1800s, after the Civil War and after the Indian War.

DePue: How about your mother's side? What was your mother's name?

Rafferty: Shaw, S-h-a-w, Jessie Shaw.

DePue: That sounds more English.

Rafferty: They were.

DePue: And she was a Springfield native as well?

Rafferty: Yes she was. They were from the north end of Springfield.

- DePue: After your father died—those are the years when our memories tend to be a little bit clearer—does that mean you were raised in a family of women?
- Rafferty: That means I have three out of four sisters, still bossing me around. (DePue laughs) Three of my brothers-in-law pretty much took care of me. They raised me.
- DePue: You were younger in the family then?
- Rafferty: Yes, all four of my sisters were older than me. One of them has passed. But my brothers-in-law just didn't tolerate stuff. I don't remember any of them ever hitting me. They would just let me know, "We're not going to put up with this. There's three of us, and there's you, so what's your choice?" Well—
- DePue: This one uncle you talked about, what was his name?
- Rafferty: His name was John Rafferty.
- DePue: Did he play a more prominent role after your father died?
- Rafferty: No, he didn't. He lived in Chicago. I cannot define, I cannot understand, why. I just know, out of my dad's two brothers, Uncle John was my favorite. Uncle Mark came and visited us, my mother and I, a lot more often than uncle John did.
- DePue: Did you see him in his uniform, in his Marine Corps uniform?
- Rafferty: Possibly once or twice, but it was there. He left it at our house, for whatever reason, and I'd get that thing out and just look at it and look at it. And my mom would get mad, because she didn't want me doing that. You can get hurt doing that.
- DePue: I'm trying to do the math here. You were born in October of '44. You would have been six or seven in second grade, something like that? That was about the time that the Marines were fighting in the Chosin Reservoir in Korea.
- Rafferty: Yes.
- DePue: Does that ring any bells to you?
- Rafferty: I read everything I could, and again, I think it was because of my uncle John. There used to be, in the day, back in black-and-white TV, a TV show on called *The Big Picture*. It was in black and white, but they had a lot of the fighting from Korea going on there. I read Marine Corps history almost constantly. My buddies and I didn't measure up to those guys, because those were some pretty tough guys that did that.

DePue: But, you know that, you get into those situations, and these are just normal human beings that rise to extraordinary feats.

Rafferty: Yeah, but I don't know if my buddies and I were ever — (both laugh)

DePue: Were you one of those kids, then? When you were growing up, you were playing soldier with your buddies?

Rafferty: All the time. In those days, that's what you did. And none of them went in any branch of service, none of my friends from here in Springfield.

DePue: You talked about the sisters that you had. Was the family a church-going family?

Rafferty: About half. Two of my sisters were. One of them is still a very devout Catholic; the other one doesn't. The other two became Presbyterian, I think. I guess Mom was Presbyterian, and Dad was Catholic. All I know is every Sunday—before my last sister got married—every Sunday she'd say, "Get up, we're going to church." And when Dad was home, if I would say, I'm not going, he'd say, "Now!" And I'd go to church. (both chuckle)



A young Peter Rafferty when he was around seven years old, 1951. (Patrons desiring to use this photograph should contact the ALPL Audio-Visual Curator.)

DePue: Does that mean the churchgoing kind of dropped off, after he passed away?

Rafferty: It kind of dropped off after I went in the Marine Corps. And not right after I went in the Marine Corps. I kind of just quit going to church, and then we went overseas to Vietnam. Then, I thought it would be pretty dang gutless of me to start going to church to pray to God to get me out of here, when I couldn't be bothered to go to church before. Not that I didn't do a whole lot of praying over there, but it just seemed so phony to me to go with these people to a regular church service, conducted by a chaplain and all that.

DePue: But the old adage, "there are no atheists in foxholes," makes sense to you?

Rafferty: I'm sure God got real tired of listening to me, because it was almost an all-day and half-the-night process with me, praying about this, praying about that.

DePue: Okay, I'm going to take a real quick break here.

(pause in recording)

DePue: That was a very quick break. Would you consider your childhood then, growing up in the fifties and early sixties, a happy one for you?

Rafferty: I think so; I really do.

DePue: Most people of our generation look back, and those were the halcyon days, the wonderful days.

Rafferty: Yes.

DePue: The nostalgic days growing up.

Rafferty: We grew up on the east side of Springfield, in a very poor neighborhood, in a very poor family, obviously. But everybody was pretty much in the same boat. We all knew there was better and more, but it didn't—

DePue: Where did you go to school?

Rafferty: Matheny Grade School, Washington Junior High School, and Feitshans High School.

DePue: What was the grade school again?

Rafferty: Matheny.

DePue: So, public schools all the way through?

Rafferty: Yes.

DePue: By the time you went to high school... You say you went to Feitshans High School. Is that where Southeast is now?



Pete Rafferty rides his bicycle in front of the family home in Springfield, Illinois when he was 12. 1956

Rafferty: No. Feitshans is still over there. It's at 15th and—

DePue: Okay, I know where you're talking about, yes.

Rafferty: They built Southeast to replace Feitshans, and then they turned it into some grade school, I think.

DePue: Did you get involved in extracurricular activities in high school?

Rafferty: No I didn't. Again, I wanted to play football, but you had to have parental consent. I was my mother's baby, and you could get hurt playing football.

DePue: Well, that's a bit of a disappointment. Did you have a job in high school?

Rafferty: Yeah, I was a stock clerk at a couple of grocery stores around town.

DePue: What did you think you wanted to do with your life when you were in high school, still follow on that dream that you had since second grade?

Rafferty: Yes. I knew when I graduated, shortly after I graduated from high school, I was going to make a twenty- or thirty-year career out of being in the Marine Corps.

DePue: With that kind of interest in the military, let's see... You graduated from high school when?

Rafferty: June of '62.

DePue: Sixty-two. Were you paying attention to world affairs as they related to the military?

Rafferty: The Cuban Missile Crisis especially, because that was October.

DePue: After you graduated.

Rafferty: After I graduated. And I enlisted in June of 1963. Yeah, I was very conscientious about that. I was working at Humphrey's Grocery Store, over on 15th Street at the time, and we all really thought...Of course, it was on the radio much more than TV, because that was still the pretty early days of television. The old guys that were there and myself were pretty convinced that there was actually going to be a war over that stuff, over those missiles down in Cuba. And because I was very young, I kept thinking, well, I hope they'll still let me enlist when I want to, because even then I was determined that's what I was going to do.



Pete Rafferty's senior class photo. He graduated from Feitshans High School in 1962.

DePue: That was just a few months after you graduated from high school then?

Rafferty: Mm-hmm.

DePue: Do you remember anything about the Berlin Wall going up? That would have been while you were just finishing high school.

Rafferty: Yes I do. I do definitely remember them building that.

DePue: Is that another one of the things that, well, they're going to need some people in the military?

Rafferty: Yeah, somebody's got to stop them, somewhere. I can remember when [John F.] Kennedy went to Berlin and made his speech about that wall, and claimed that he was a Berliner.

DePue: That was...Go ahead.

Rafferty: I can remember him being on TV saying that. When, I don't know, but it was shortly after they had built the wall.

DePue: Well, obviously it made a powerful impact on you.

Rafferty: Kennedy was pretty stressed about it.

DePue: This is also during the time when there's a draft.

Rafferty: Yes.

DePue: What were most of your other buddies' views about being in the military?

Rafferty: Most of them got some girl pregnant, so they wouldn't be drafted, pretty gutless.

DePue: Did you have any thought about going to college?

Rafferty: No. My mother did, for me to go to college. I really didn't. I just wanted to graduate from high school and make a career out of being in the Marine Corps. Obviously, as you get older, you're a lot smarter. (DePue laughs)

DePue: But going to college was another way to, at least, postpone the military.

Rafferty: Yes, and a lot of them used that, too.

DePue: You said you'd joined the Marines, then, in what month?

Rafferty: January. January, 1963, I enlisted.

DePue: You've already told us the Marines; there was no other choice. What happens if the Marines say, "No son, you don't quite measure up. Go over and talk to the Army folks"?

Rafferty: You know, I really don't know what I would have done, because I was so set, seriously. I mean, I probably would have, because my dad and my uncles were all in service in World War I. All my brothers-in-law were in World War II, and one of them was in Korea. In our generation, that's kind of what the norm was; you go and serve. Not necessarily make a career of it, but you serve your country.

DePue: Were any of your relatives career men?

Rafferty: No.

DePue: Why, then, were you so set on becoming a career Marine?

Rafferty: I have no idea, but that's what I truthfully had my mind set on doing.

DePue: January, 1963, did you have any girlfriends at the time?

Rafferty: No.

DePue: So, no complications.

Rafferty: I was kind of an outsider about everything, at school, sports, anything.

DePue: How did your mother feel about you going in the Marines?

Rafferty: If my mother's watching right now, she still has never forgiven me for going in the Marine Corps, and I know that.

DePue: You had this desire, since second grade. Did she not understand that you had that strong feeling?

Rafferty: I believe she thought it was just some stupid kid's dream and just talking. Unfortunately, I'm serious about it. I don't think mom ever forgave me for going in the Marine Corps, because it wasn't what she wanted for me, because I could get hurt. Well, yeah.

DePue: Well, this is the same woman who wouldn't let you play football.

Rafferty: That's exactly.

DePue: Being a Marine is considerably more dangerous.

Rafferty: It was a lot different, yeah. And I think, because I was raised by my mom, and I had four sisters, and I think it was, like, I have to do this for me. I always wanted to be in the Marine Corps, but I had to go in the Marine Corps for me. I don't know if that makes sense or not. It was something I had to do.

DePue: Where was boot camp?

Rafferty: San Diego.

DePue: Tell me about the boot camp experience. You smile. (laughs)

Rafferty: It was interesting. Every now and then, they'll have a Marine Corps commercial on TV, and they show these yellow footprints. They're there. You come off that bus, and you stand on those yellow footprints, at attention. Well, they're all a bunch of wimps now, but back then, they would say really mean

and nasty things and get really nasty and vicious. They can't even yell at those guys anymore. What the hell kind of Marine Corps is that?

But anyway, being super stupid, I was reading... On the way out to San Diego, I was reading a book by Leon Uris called *Battle Cry*. He described the whole boot camp scenario in this book, and I kept thinking, what in the heck did I do to myself? And I found out pretty quickly. They're right; it stays with you for all your life. My service number was 2-0-4-3-5-3-0. I've never forgotten that.

DePue: Do you remember any of your drill sergeants?

Rafferty: Yes, we had three. Our senior drill instructor was a man named Sergeant Jackson. One of our junior drill instructors... And they were not Dis; they were drill instructors. They call them DIs. Sergeant McVer, M-c-V-e-r. And the second junior drill instructor was Sergeant Blume, B-l-u-m-e. Sergeant Jackson said there would be no names. He wouldn't tolerate that from his drill instructors.

DePue: No names for what they called you?

Rafferty: Yeah. I mean other than usual, yeah.

DePue: Well, I've always heard that oftentimes they'll call you "girls."

Rafferty: Oh, they did that constantly and "shit birds."

DePue: What do you mean by no names, then?

Rafferty: I don't think I can say those.

DePue: That's okay.

Rafferty: (whispers) "Bastards" and "MF-ers" and that. A lot of those drill instructors did that. Sergeant Jackson wouldn't put up with it.

DePue: So they weren't going to curse or swear at you?

Rafferty: They didn't, no. The only trick was, Sergeant McVer came from Force Recon, and he would always give us fair warning that we were going to start running. That man could run, literally, all day, I think, because somebody would be messing up, not in step or not squarely in line, and Sergeant McVer would say, "You people are beginning to piss me off." Oh crap, whoever doing something, don't, because then we'd start running, and we'd run... Blume had a beer gut on him. We could outrun him. We could run him to the ground; he'd stop running. But nobody could keep up with McVer. McVer was his name, and he just—and, you know, you look back at it, and you understand why, because you've got to do this, now, as we learned.

DePue: Did your attitude about being in the Marines change some, when you were in boot camp?

Rafferty: I just wanted out of boot camp. I was okay with being in the Marine Corps, but I was tired of getting up at 4:30 or 5:00, I think. I still get up at 5:00 in the morning. (both laugh) It was a real drag then. I don't want people yelling at me, you know, and doing stuff. That got...Of course, it was always mass punishment.

MCRD, Marine Corps Recruit Depot at San Diego, is right across from the San Diego Airport. There's a runway right there. I remember this guy; I can't think if his name was Denton. He was kind of an out--of-step sucker anyway. But we're in formation and, because I'm one of the shorter people, I was always towards the back of the platoon. So one day, McVer...I keep saying his name wrong. It was McVer, I believe. But he's standing back here, behind my shoulder, and a helicopter flew over. We're standing in formation, at attention, and this guy, several men in front of me, did this number. (looks upward)

DePue: Looked up.

Rafferty: Looked up when that helicopter went over. And I thought, crap. I knew that wasn't going to work. He said, "You people think you got time to look around?" Oh crap, and we went. "No, no." But it didn't do any good. It was one guy, and he knew who the one guy was. But they didn't do that. It was everybody's in trouble or everybody's good. That's the way they did that.

DePue: Did you understand why they took that approach?

Rafferty: Yes, really. You have to be responsible for your buddies, yourself and your buddies. The Marine Corps has a 236-year tradition, and they don't leave anybody. You always know that you can count on your buddies to be there for you. That guy was screwing up his buddies, and they wanted to reinforce that opinion. So they did, several times. (both laugh)

DePue: Did you appreciate it at the time though?

Rafferty: I just wanted to beat that guy into the ground, because I knew, like I said. He was standing right behind me, and I'm like, he ain't going to miss that. And I was right; he didn't miss that.

DePue: Well, did you get a healthy dose of Marine Corps history in boot camp?

Rafferty: Yeah. When you start, they start preaching about the inception of the Corps, Belleau Wood, Chateau-Thierry, Okinawa, Iwo Jima, Tarawa. They just keep bringing it and bringing it and bringing it. And they have history lessons, like 1942, August 7th, Guadalcanal was invaded. There's no thought to that. You just know that because they do. You learn that, you learn the Marine Corps

history, as well as you learn how to—at the time—take your M-14 rifle apart, clean it and put it back together, because it's just a constant going and going, repetitious thing.

DePue: Was the Chosin Reservoir one of the lessons?

Rafferty: Oh yeah. They are very proud of that.

DePue: Because that one ended up being a retreat, but not how the Marines would describe it.

Rafferty: No. Chesty Puller said they weren't retreating; they were attacking in a new direction. And he also said it was about time, because they finally, the North Koreans and the Chinese, had screwed up. They [the Marines] had surrounded them, so they couldn't get away anymore. Like I said, those were people that had some real attitudes about how that whole thing was going.

DePue: Was all of that history effective in instilling the attitudes they wanted?

Rafferty: I believe so; I really do. To jump ahead a little bit, I got Medevac'd out of Vietnam, because I got malaria, and the hardest part of all that I had to deal with, was that I left my buddies, because that is beat in. You don't... This may sound kind of weird. When stuff started in Vietnam, we weren't fighting necessarily for democracy, although I'd rather see some other country all torn up than our country. We were there for each other, to help each other, to defend each other, to make sure that we were all okay. And that's part of what a lot of people call the Marine Corps mystique. It's not; it's history. It's been driven in. You don't leave your buddies.

I saw Captain Fitzgerald, who was my platoon commander in Vietnam, out in Southern California, before I got out of the Corps in '67. I went up and talked to him, and I said, "Captain, I've got a problem." He said "What's the matter?" And I said, "I ran out." Now this was a career Marine officer, and he said, "You didn't run out on anybody." He said, you just ought to be glad you got your ass out of that country in one piece, because a lot of the guys didn't. And even then, I couldn't deal with it. I guess it's survivor guilt.

One of my buddies, Henry Mosier, decided in 1989, we should have a reunion. We hadn't seen each other, any of us, for like... I hadn't seen any of those guys since '65 or '66. He decided it was time to put a reunion together, so we got together down in St. Louis in 1989 for the first time. And I told Janet, some of the guys, I guess, are taking their wives—that's my wife—you need to go with me, because I don't know if I can do this, because I don't know how they're going to react when I walk in.

It was pointed out to me that I had been incredibly stupid for a whole lot of years. Whereas they all knew I was never really smart to begin with,

they really thought I was a little ahead of that, to walk around thinking that, because there wasn't anything I could do about it. But again, it's part of that, "You don't leave your buddies," and I left them. They had to stay, and I got out of Vietnam. I got out of 'Nam in December, I think, and they didn't get out until May or June of the next year.

DePue: Well, we're going to talk quite a bit about that. But how important was that, hearing from your buddies that many years later, hearing them say that?

Rafferty: (pauses) It put all the ghosts away. The demons of not sleeping at night; they're still in my head. They're going to be there until the day they finally lay me down, and I know that. But it put the ghosts away. It really helped me cut back a lot on drinking, which is good, because now I'm diabetic, and I can't drink very much anyway.

DePue: Well, let's take you back to boot camp, just a couple more questions.

Rafferty: Okay.

DePue: I assume that KP [kitchen police] was part of the equation.

Rafferty: In a strange way, yeah. We did that, I think, for two weeks. In boot camp, I believe, for two weeks we did KP.

DePue: Is that just something that everybody does?

Rafferty: Everybody in the platoon did. And then, you know, you get out of boot camp, they use it as individual punishment. (DePue laughs)

DePue: Well, did you get to pull some as individual punishment?

Rafferty: Oh yeah, yeah.

DePue: Do you remember any things that got you into trouble?

Rafferty: The gunny not liking me had a lot to do with it. Of course, the gunny didn't like any of us.

DePue: You say gunny. That's another term for a more senior sergeant?

Rafferty: Gunnery Sergeant Samuel G. Shawd.

DePue: This would have been after you were assigned to a unit?

Rafferty: Yes. And then also in boot camp, you drew guard duty, which was really freaky, because there was nothing there to guard. (laughs) But they wanted you to do this. And those dang drill instructors would come sneaking out of places. You better challenge them, and you better know how the challenge went, because if you didn't, the next morning you'd be doing a little extra

personal training, like pushups and chin-ups and step...Did they do step-ups in the Army?

DePue: Well, we did a lot of things. I don't recall that one.

Rafferty: They had a little bench, about eighteen inches off the ground, and everything was accounted for. You'd have to step up on it. You'd step up on it; then you'd step down; then you stepped up with your left foot. That was one. And they'd have you do fifty or sixty of those at a time. Boy, your legs were going to be screaming by the time you were done. They also told us—they were very emphatic—that the Marine Corps had really gotten stricter on their rules about doing pushups. They cannot make you do pushups on your knuckles, because there's sand and gravel all over that stupid camp. So they told us to do pushups, and I'm doing this. This drill instructor said, "I didn't tell you to move that gravel." Got it! Yeah. (both laugh)

DePue: So it doesn't have to be much of a reason.

Rafferty: No it didn't; it didn't.

DePue: But you survived.

Rafferty: Yeah.

DePue: Did they have a graduation ceremony?

Rafferty: Yes they did, a really formal parade. We were in our dress uniforms, and we were up on the grinder, which is this huge parade deck. Parents and siblings were invited to that. They could come to that. That was the only time they were allowed there, but being from Illinois, I didn't have anybody out there, you know? But then they give us half a day off, after we graduated. Not off base, just off.

DePue: As far as graduations that were meaningful, how would that rank, compared to your high school graduation?

Rafferty: It beat the heck out of high school. (laughs) I knew I was graduating out of high school. It was pretty iffy in boot camp for three months, because they were always finding something wrong.

DePue: So you were proud?

Rafferty: Very, very. I really was. And then, we left boot camp, and we went up to Camp Pendleton, which is north of San Diego, to ITR, Infantry Training Regiment. We did three weeks there, reading maps, running live fire problems, hiking. And after the three months at ITR, we got a thirty-day leave to come home. But the Marine Corps, in its infinite wisdom, had a catch in there. Got from boot camp, got up to Pendleton, did two weeks of KP, then you did your three weeks of training, (laughs) and then they let you come home for a month, a thirty-day boot leave. I'm like, I'm not in boot anymore, but they didn't care about that either.

But I learned very, very quickly, that you never question drill instructors, ever, about anything, because the first pay we got, they took taxes out. Because I was really young and really stupid, and I really wasn't paying a lot of attention to who was standing there—I was talking to a couple of my buddies—and I said, “They took taxes out of our pay. We get paid from tax money, that’s like double taxation. We fought a war over this.” (DePue laughing) And all of a sudden, this guy, “You got a question, Rafferty?” I said, “No sir.” He said, “Because they do it, Rafferty.” That answer satisfied me for all these years. I don't know why. Those men made a heck of an impression.



The Marine Corps' official photo for a proud Private Rafferty, upon his graduation from boot camp at the Marine Corps Recruit Depot in San Diego, California. April, 1963

DePue: When you joined the Marines, was it in your mind, you were going to be infantry? There isn't any other thing to be but infantry?

Rafferty: I didn't know. I didn't know what I was going to do. Like I said, I just wanted to be in the Marine Corps.

DePue: Okay.

Rafferty: I think, as a kid, yeah, because you know, the grunts go out and do all the fighting and get to tear stuff up. And somehow... I guess I was smarter than I thought I was, because somehow they put me in a communications platoon, still with an infantry battalion, but as a communicator rather than a rifleman.

DePue: But that still means that you have to know how to be an infantryman?

- Rafferty: Oh yes. The basic concept in the Marine Corps is, everybody in the Marine Corps is a rifleman. You can go out and take a hill anytime they need somebody to take a hill. You also learn the whole dang repertoire of Marine Corps small arms. I could gun a mortar, shoot an M-60 machine gun, shoot a...It's not a bazooka; it's a 3.5 rocket launcher.
- DePue: It looks like a bazooka to civilians, huh?
- Rafferty: Yes it did. I go, "When did they change the name?" "Just shut up!" Okay. (laughs) But yeah, that's what we learned at that three weeks of infantry training.
- DePue: When did you get assigned to a specific unit? Was it at Camp Pendleton?
- Rafferty: Yes. [I] came home on leave, and the leave paper said, "You will report to 3rd Battalion, 1st Marine, 1st Marine Division at Camp Pendleton, at whatever camp it was.
- DePue: 1st Marine Regiment? I thought you'd told me the 7th before.
- Rafferty: No, I'm sorry it is; it's the 7th. I got confused. 3rd Battalion, 7th Marines, 1st Marine Division.
- DePue: This might sound like a peculiar question, but identifying with units is very important to anybody who's in the military. Where is there a stronger identification, at the battalion level, at the regimental level or at the division level?
- Rafferty: 3rd Battalion, 7th Marines. Battalion Regiment. T that was it. We were 3rd Battalion, 7th Marines.
- DePue: So, that was what you took pride in, is that designation.
- Rafferty: Yes. And that was again, Chesty Puller's whole outfit.
- DePue: And there's no one more legendary in modern Marine history than Chesty Puller.
- Rafferty: No, there's not!
- DePue: And you knew that as well then; didn't you?
- Rafferty: Yes, I did. I really don't know. I mean, I think it would have been really something to serve with the man. I'd have probably done a lot better than I did do.
- DePue: That goes back to the Chosin Reservoir days, quite frankly.
- Rafferty: Yes, yes it does.

- DePue: Were you assigned to the unit at the time they sent you to wire school, the communications school?
- Rafferty: Yes. We reported in to 3rd Battalion 7th Marine, whatever day our leave was over. The next day, they sent all the new guys, "boots" in the Marine Corps, to radio school. The people that were going to go to schools got sent. We got one night's sleep, not even [that] exactly. We were in our unit's barracks, but they didn't give us a rack that night. They just said, "Find an empty one, because you ain't staying." I was like, "Well, okay." The next morning, bright and early, we were on buses going to wire school. I went to wire school; other guys went to radio school, all over Camp Pendleton.
- DePue: What does it mean to be in a wire team, wire section?
- Rafferty: We were old-time telephone men. We ran telephone wire lines; we hooked up telephones; we hooked up switchboards; we climbed phone poles. We did as much repair work on the equipment as we could. If we couldn't handle it, they had to be shipped up to somebody else.
- DePue: Were they using WD1 wire at the time? Is that what they called it?
- Rafferty: I think so. It was newer than...The [World] War II stuff was...I know this isn't going to do any good on that. It was really thick.
- DePue: The World War II stuff was?
- Rafferty: The World War II wire. We ran double strand, not quite as thin as this, but much smaller wire. You had to strip the ends off and hook it up and all of that.
- DePue: What little I know about this, it's hard work. You're basically humping all the time, aren't you?
- Rafferty: Yeah. The grunts had it made. When we were in 'Nam, they wore a flak jacket and carried a helmet and their ammunition and their rifle. We couldn't even wear flak jackets.
- DePue: Why?
- Rafferty: Because we couldn't get our pack boards over the flak jackets. We wouldn't have been able to walk.
- DePue: What's the pack board?
- Rafferty: It was a wooden pack board that had straps that came over your shoulders, and you put all the...If you're carrying telephones, you carried four real big, heavy telephones, and then your pack on top of that. Or, if you got on the wrong side of somebody, you would carry...I think those big reels of wire were a half-

mile of wire. That's why Jacob and I got along so well. He was a section leader. (laughs)

DePue: Jacob. I know you're going to talk about him later. His name?

Rafferty: Robert Jacob.

DePue: Robert Jacob, without an "s."

Rafferty: Yes.

DePue: How much would all of this rig weigh? Do you know?

Rafferty: Over half our own body weight.

DePue: Well, that explains all the pushups and step-ups and everything else.

Rafferty: Yeah. They didn't even know we were going to do that, so obviously they were pretty smart guys, weren't they? (both laugh) We had, depending on what we had to carry, at least over a hundred pounds on our backs.

DePue: Did you start to rethink this notion of your desire to be a Marine for your entire life?

Rafferty: No, never thought about it. But I was kind of hoping I wasn't in a damn communications platoon, because that stuff was heavy. (both laugh)

DePue: What was the first deployment you had from Camp Pendleton?

Rafferty: We left Pendleton... (telephone rings) Sorry. Can you shut this off? I'm sorry; I forgot.

DePue: Don't worry about it.

(Pause in Recording)

DePue: We were just talking about leaving Pendleton.

Rafferty: We went from Pendleton to San Diego and boarded, I believe, the *U.S.S. Mann*. That's when the Marine Corps did thirteen-month tours overseas.

DePue: Was this September of 1963?

Rafferty: About then, yeah. We went to Hawaii, met Sammy Davis Jr. there. A little bitty black guy, walking down the beach.

DePue: You met him personally?

Rafferty: We got off the bus, and he was standing there. He took us in a bar and bought us all a beer. And because it was him, even though we were underage, he got to buy the beer.

And then, where'd we go? Did we go straight from...? Then we went from there to Okinawa. That's basically where we were stationed. We were supposed to be the battalion landing team, in case something came up in the Far East. We were supposed to have been there for thirteen months. But in the process of that, the supposed Gulf of Tonkin came up.

DePue: So this is Okinawa. Before all of that... Well, there were a couple other things that came up about this same time, too. But how much did you know about the country of Vietnam?

Rafferty: Didn't even know of it. I know a lot of... I've always read a lot of old history. I knew French Indochina. But when we were overseas the first time, we did six weeks of... We went directly from Hawaii to Okinawa. We did six weeks of cold weather training at Mount Fuji Japan. Then we did our float stage, which we went to the Philippines. We went to Taiwan and ran a problem there, and we went to Hong Kong. That was about it. Then we went back to Okinawa and off-loaded.

DePue: Do you remember where you were when John F. Kennedy was assassinated?

Rafferty: Yes, I do. I was at Camp Fuji Japan. They canceled liberty. There wasn't anywhere to go on liberty, but it was a weekend, because what we did for cold weather training was, we got to be—since they wouldn't let us shoot our mortars, because I was with the mortar platoon then—we got to be the bad guys. So we went up in the hills there and wiped our battalion out in five days. Five days in a row, we took our rifle company out, and then all of them at once. They didn't like us. We come back down out of there, like on Thursday, and usually we had liberty Friday, Saturday and Sunday. Well, there wasn't anywhere close to go, and it was between payday. We were just kind of on the streets, throwing a football around or whatever. They came around yelling that everybody had to report back to their unit, and they were canceling liberty and all that. And we found out that President Kennedy had been shot.

And then, they gave us live ammunition, because there were a bunch of Japanese protestors, probably communists, that were outside the base. They were threatening to... I guess they figured we were all messed up about the president being killed. I think, they were going to try to come on the base and just cause problems.

DePue: That doesn't hardly make sense, does it?

Rafferty: No, it didn't. And you've got all these dumb-ass eighteen-year-old kids out there, with rifles with live ammunition. You want to bet? So they gave that up really quick.

DePue: Were your fellow Marines angry? What was their reaction to hearing the news that Kennedy was shot?

Rafferty: Just shocked, just absolutely shocked. You know, it was just like this dead space or something; it was just like, "Why'd that happen? Why would somebody do that?" And then, of course, we all got tarred with the fact that he had been in the Marine Corps.

DePue: Oh, [Lee Harvey] Oswald had.

Rafferty: Yeah.

DePue: I had forgotten all about that.

Rafferty: No (pause) He didn't do it.

DePue: He didn't do it?

Rafferty: He was a crap shot, and it was a bolt action rifle. There's no way. He might have gotten one shot off. He didn't get those rounds off that fast.

DePue: Was that your view at the time, or were your fellow Marines all thinking that?

Rafferty: I still believe that. It wasn't a semiautomatic rifle. He didn't get to squeeze the trigger and squeeze the trigger. He had to squeeze the trigger and work the bolt. I'll never believe he did that, because he was a crap shot when he was in the Marine Corps. He was a horrible shot, and we had better stuff than he was shooting with. I know that's a long time ago, but that's still my opinion on it.

DePue: Well you had mentioned previously about the Gulf of Tonkin. That happened in August of 1964. This would have been as you were getting close to the end of the deployment in Okinawa.

Rafferty: Yeah, didn't they time that well? But in between the Gulf of Tonkin came that... Like I said, I have a picture in this book of Captain Curnutt being awarded a Purple Heart.

DePue: Captain who?

Rafferty: Captain Curnutt.

DePue: We can get the spelling here later.

Rafferty: Okay. He died of cancer several years ago.

DePue: How did he get a Purple Heart, when you're not in combat?

Rafferty: Yeah. My buddies and I were in agreement, that damn airstrip in Chu Lai looked exactly in 1965 like it did in 1964. We were put on attach duty. Not the

whole battalion, just a rifle company and some communications guys, for like thirty days or six weeks or something. We'd come back, and others would go over there.

DePue: So this is after the Gulf of Tonkin.

Rafferty: It's before the Gulf of Tonkin.

DePue: Before the Gulf of Tonkin you're sent down to Chu Lai, South Vietnam, where there was an airstrip. In fact, I've got a couple pictures. I don't know if any of this looks familiar to you.

Rafferty: Krulak named that place, because all it was was a village. Most of those villages didn't have names. Krulak built the dang thing, and named it Chu Lai. Yeah. That was after... We were there though, because that's really developed.

DePue: Yeah. Chu Lai, at least the first time that you were there, you say?

Rafferty: Even the second time it didn't look like that.

DePue: It's in the 1st Corps—most people would say I-Corps area—which is where the Marines typically worked in South Vietnam. It's north of Da Nang some?

Rafferty: Yes it was.

DePue: But it's right on the ocean. It looks like a great port facility there, at least the potential to have a good port facility.

Rafferty: It was inland a little bit. Regiment was on the beach, and we were five miles inland from regiment.

DePue: So this is the first time you're in Vietnam. This is before the Gulf of Tonkin.

Rafferty: Um hmm.

DePue: There was, I think at that time, some Viet Cong activity; there's the beginning of an insurgency in the south.

Rafferty: Yes.

DePue: Tell me what you were doing while you were there that short period of time.

Rafferty: We were maintaining communications. The rifle guys, the grunts, the riflemen, were advisors.

DePue: To the South Vietnamese?

Rafferty: To the South Vietnamese.

DePue: So it was more than just guarding the airbase there?

Rafferty: Well, it was mostly guarding the airbase, but they were also trying to teach them how to set up defenses and do that.

DePue: By this time, you had seen an awful lot of the Orient. You talked about being in Okinawa, seeing Mount Fuji in Japan, going to Taiwan, Hong Kong, I think you said—

Rafferty: Yeah.

DePue: What was your initial impression of Vietnam?

Rafferty: It stunk more than the rest of that part of the world. That part of the world, to me, just smells terribly, and that place was even nastier. There was no civilization there. Highway 1 ran the length of Vietnam, and that was about it. There were no roads; there were no streets; there were no cities. People in Saigon were doing okay, but we never saw Saigon. We were out.

We were, as we prided ourselves on calling us, “mud Marines.” We earned our money. My wife gets upset when I say, you know, my buddies and I were Marines. That clown sat in an office. He got the uniform, but he ain't...He's just not. It's a mental thing. Even at this age, it's still a mental thing. We know what we did.

DePue: When you first got deployed to Chu Lai in South Vietnam, you said that it's before the Gulf of Tonkin incident. Do you remember your reaction? They're sending me where?

Rafferty: No, because, see, they didn't tell us. They just said you're going on this operation.

DePue: So you didn't know where you were going until you got there?

Rafferty: Until we got there.

DePue: How did you get there? Fly?

Rafferty: On ship. We weren't important enough to get to fly. (laughs) The Navy had to get their money's worth. Then we went back, then some other outfit went over, then they came back. We didn't even know it was the Gulf of Tonkin incident until after we came home.

DePue: You didn't hear about it?

Rafferty: No. They just said, you know, “We're mounting out; we're mounting out. Get your gear; get your gear checked; get your gear packed; get your gear ready.” And we did. I was like, “Damn, a lot more days floating around on a stupid

ship.” And that's all we did. We didn't even see land, because Vietnam was way over there. We were way out there; we were at sea.

DePue: Somewhere close to the Okinawa seas though?

Rafferty: No. I think we were off the coast of Vietnam. But again, [it was] so far away, you couldn't even see a trace of land out there. Now we floated and we floated, and we missed our rotation date back to the States.

DePue: I know enough about the military that there's not much concern about keeping you informed of why you're there.

Rafferty: No there wasn't. You know, it was just like, “Hey.”

DePue: So what are a bunch of stinky, smelly Marines supposed to do on ship, day after day?

Rafferty: Got bored, god, we got bored. And, of course, they ran out of fresh water, so if you took showers, you took saltwater showers. I don't know if you've ever had the pleasure of a saltwater shower or not, but you're better off not taking a shower at all, because you're all sticky and crap when you're done. Comfort wasn't a main issue; it just really wasn't. The food was terrible.

DePue: Were you in instructional classes? Were you taking any kind of training?

Rafferty: Yeah. They would find a space somewhere on a deck of a ship, and we would have like thirty minutes of calisthenics. Then, we'd have to sit down, talk about the communications gear that we knew everything about to begin with, anyway. It's really hard to even act like you were interested, you know. “This is a double E8 telephone.” I've hooked up about two hundred of those things. It was just bad. (laughs)

DePue: Don't Marines have the potential to get in trouble in those kinds of situations?

Rafferty: Yeah, it happens.

DePue: Any interesting stories you recall from that?

Rafferty: Not from there, but after Starlite there's one. I debated on whether...because I want my grandchildren to hear this. I guess, when we get to that point, I guess they're probably going to hear about this.

DePue: Well, you told me the entire unit, then, deploys back to the United States, after that rotation.

Rafferty: Yes.

DePue: When was that?

Rafferty: October of '64.

DePue: October of '64. And where did you deploy back to, Pendleton again?

Rafferty: Pendleton. And then we got a thirty-day leave, to come home. Then we went back to the unit, because the way the Marine Corps used to do it was, half the battalion was us, guys out of boot camp in '63. So, we went overseas with guys that had been in. We came back. The guys that had been in, when we joined the battalion, got shipped to other... They got to go to other Marine bases, throughout the world. We stayed there to be the corps of old guys for 3rd Battalion, 7th Marines.

Then, what it was supposed to be was we were supposed to train these boots coming out of boot camp, for thirteen months. Then, we were supposed to have been sent somewhere. And they would have trained for another thirteen months in the states, with new guys that came in after them. Then they would have gone over, because they used to only go overseas, like... If you went overseas once, that's all you had to do. You could put in for it again.

DePue: But that rotation cycle all changed when Vietnam started to build up.

Rafferty: Yes it did.

DePue: Early '65 is really the beginning of major unit deployments, then.

Rafferty: Yes it was.

DePue: So, what's the next step then? When did you depart Pendleton to head back to Okinawa?

Rafferty: We left Pendleton, went to Long Beach, California in May. I don't know the date, but we went in May.

DePue: Of '65 now.

Rafferty: Of '65. It wasn't thirteen months. So, that's twice they lied to me, right there, in less than a year's time.

DePue: What they'll say is, "We didn't lie to you, son. The truth changed."

Rafferty: That's right. That's it. "We told you. You just weren't listening." I always listen when I could get hurt. Then we went back to Okinawa. We got to do a little duty there in Hong Kong, rest and all that. We went back to Okinawa, and we trained some more. I don't know; I can't remember the dates, but in August of '65, we boarded ships again and went back to Vietnam.

DePue: This is the point where we need to talk about Operation Starlite. The dates for that—at least from what I've seen—are August 17th through the 24th. So, walk us through that whole process of arriving off the coast of South Vietnam.

Rafferty: Third Battalion was on LPH, a landing platform helicopter, the *Valley Forge*, and they flew us in. They told us that we were participating in—you know, which I guess for history is nice to know, but it wasn't critical to us—the largest, amphibious operation by the Marine Corps, since the end of the Second World War, because they had a battalion—I don't know which battalion it was—come in by landing craft, like taking the islands in World War II. They flew us in, and another battalion came down by truck to shut off this peninsula.

DePue: But that doesn't seem possible, because the first Marines landed at Inchon in the Korean War.

Rafferty: Yeah, but that's what they told us.

DePue: Okay, go ahead.

Rafferty: But, again, they lie a lot. I don't really care if it's the largest or the smallest. I just don't want to be here doing this, because a guy could really get hurt there. They brought in an ARVN, Army of the Republic of Vietnam battalion now, to shut off the other side of the peninsula. That's where they got away. They went right through those guys.

DePue: They being—

Rafferty: The Viet Cong.

DePue: There was a Viet Cong regiment there?

Rafferty: There was a whole buildup of them in there. We spent the rest of the time I was over there fighting those same people. If we'd had one more of our outfits in there, they'd have never gotten off that peninsula.

DePue: Were there any North Vietnamese units?

Rafferty: Not in there, but we ran into them. Again, Starlite, we flew in. Before Starlite, we were at Qui Nhon. I get this messed up. I'm sorry. The Army had a huge supply base depot at Qui Nhon, Vietnam, Q-u-i-N-h-o-n, maybe? The VC were stealing the equipment, so they landed us there to guard it.

DePue: So this is right before Starlite?

Rafferty: Starlite, yes. I'm sorry, I meant to keep that straight. Qui Nhon is down in a little valley, and we had the grunts up in the hills with Chester Arthur, a Native American.

DePue: Here's Qui Nhon. It's also right on the ocean.

Rafferty: Mm-hmm, it was.

DePue: Go ahead.

Rafferty: Third Battalion, 7th Marines lost their first fatality, guarding Qui Nhon. His name was Chester Arthur; he was a Native American. I guess his squad leader thought, because he was an American [Indian], he could do real good, sneaking through the bushes. They heard some noise out, so Arthur went after them with his KA-BAR. That's a Marine Corps fighting knife. When he came back, he either couldn't say the password or had forgotten, and his own sergeant shot him with his own rifle.

DePue: You said because he was American. Was he American Indian?

Rafferty: Yeah, he was American Indian.

DePue: Do you know what tribe?

Rafferty: I have no idea. That was our first casualty. The Army got some MPs or whatever in there to guard that base, and then they put us back on ship. Then came Starlite, and (long pause) Starlite really sucked. I lost a buddy of mine there, named Steve Singer. We landed. We had a switchboard in, and the gunny, being the gunny, decided he don't like where we had decided to put that switchboard.

DePue: Is this the same gunny you mentioned before?

Rafferty: Yes it is. So he made us move it; so we moved it.

DePue: Was he the communications section NCO?

Rafferty: Yes he was. He was the platoon NCO. Anyway, he made us move it, so we moved it. The flippin' cannon cockers acknowledged the ceasefire order, and then fired one more that came in short. My buddy, Steve Singer, and I think a guy named LaPlant was with Singer. That sucker hit, where the switchboard had been. It took Singer's wrist out. I can't remember what it did to LaPlant. [I] never saw Steve Singer again. That's where... There were incidents after that.

So we chased them, and we fought them, and we fought them, and we chased them. There were some AMTRAK [or AMTRAC, a linguistic blend of the words Amphibious and Traction] guys that were running after dark, and they shouldn't have been, bringing water and supplies.

DePue: An armored vehicle.

Rafferty: Yeah, an amphibious tractor. They got lost; they took a wrong turn, and they got cut off. They were on the radios, calling for help, and our colonel wouldn't let us go help them, because he said, "Oh, it's a trick. It's a trick." Bullshit. You can tell American kids' voices from anybody else's voices on a radio. When you're in a firefight, you can tell the sound of what's being shot, as to what it is. He wouldn't let us go get them.

So, the next morning, after it got light, we went out and got them. (sighs heavily) They were all dead. They were burnt up, some of them broke in two, and we could have saved them. "But it might be a trick." (chokes up) I'm sorry.

DePue: How many people in your unit would have been combat veterans? This would have had to have been over ten years earlier, from the Korean War? Were there just very few combat veterans?

Rafferty: Very few, the career guys were. We weren't.

DePue: How about that gunnery sergeant?

Rafferty: I seriously doubt Sam served anywhere where he could get hurt. He may have been in during Korea, but—

DePue: So, for everybody, this is the baptism of fire.

Rafferty: Yes it was. We learned real well and real fast, but it was a tough way to learn it.

DePue: Well, you all had to be in the same place, I would think, scared to death, and yet, figuring out how to do the job that the Marines had trained you to do.

Rafferty: Oh yeah, exactly.

DePue: How do you deal with that? How do you get beyond the fear?

Rafferty: You concentrate on your job, and you stay very, very alert, and you keep your eye out for your buddies, because it came down to, there was "us," and if you weren't "us," you were "them." And "Us" were my buddies. Officers were okay, but it was us.

DePue: Did your Commo [communications] platoon take some casualties as well, then?

Rafferty: Not then, not then. [It] did after I got evacuated. It still comes to the mind, we could have saved those kids' lives. But anyway, after they called that off, called Starlite off, I guess that's when we went to Hong Kong for a few days. Then we had to go to the Philippines and replenish, ammunition and C-Rats

[c-rations, an individual canned, pre-cooked, and prepared wet ration] and all that.

I went in some bar in Olongapo, which is a little Philippine city there off Subic Bay. It was really, I guess, a bad timing incident. We were in a bar having fun, just relaxing and chilling, and these god dang cannon cockers came in there.

DePue: Marine artillerymen?

Rafferty: Yeah. One of those ignorant suckers started bragging about they saved our asses on Starlite. They're the ones that took Steve Singer out.

DePue: The short round.

Rafferty: Yep, after an acknowledged ceasefire. So, they didn't really seem to care a lot for hearing what we really thought of them. For some reason, one of them took major exception to being called what he was called. I lost half a month's pay over that deal, and I lost a warrant. (laughs) The next morning we're on ship, going back. You know, we're going to Vietnam again, because the damn shore patrol showed up at the worst time possible. (laughs)

DePue: Were you the only one who lost some pay over that deal?

Rafferty: No, but I lost most of it. (laughs) I was standing in front of that damn Captain Foster's desk, at office hours, and he picks this piece of paper up, and he says, "Do you know what this is? Do you know what this is, Marine?" I said, "No, Sir." I knew what it was; it was my promotion to lance corporal. (laughs) "No, Sir, I haven't got a clue." He ripped that sucker into about a million pieces and threw it in the wastebasket. And, I love this, "You're going to be fined half a month's pay." I'm going to Vietnam, for crying out loud! "And you're confined to your unit's area." All right. Hell of a deal, isn't it? They didn't make any sense. (laughs)

DePue: Well, being confined to your unit's area didn't mean a thing.

Rafferty: No it didn't. And - half a month's pay... You couldn't have money in Vietnam anyway! They gave us script. Getting caught with greenbacks in Vietnam would court martial you.

DePue: Where did you go back into Vietnam, then, the same location?

Rafferty: Chu Lai area, set up.

DePue: What was the assignment then, for the rest of the time you were in Vietnam? What was the unit doing? And this is still the 3rd Battalion, the 7th Marines?

Rafferty: Third Battalion, 7th Marines. We maintained communications, because Captain Fitzgerald, our platoon commander, called us all together, after we got in and got set up. He said, "Just a couple things to tell you men. When you get home, you can join the VFW." [Veterans of Foreign Wars] I'm like, okay? "And I want you men to remember"—and I can still remember this too—"Remember, always, you're not getting paid to be here to fight with these people. You're here to maintain communications." I said, "Captain?" He said, "Shut up Rafferty." Okay.

DePue: What did you do? You had a reputation at that time, did you?

Rafferty: Kind of. They just didn't quite understand fun. So, after the meeting was over, he said, "Come here, Rafferty." And I said, "Yes Sir." And he said, "What did you want to know?" I said, "Captain, I'm all for this, us not fighting them. Could you get them convinced that they shouldn't fight us either?" And there you go, down the hill again. Captain Fitz was great; he was the best officer I ever knew.

DePue: Captain Fitz?

Rafferty: Captain Fitzgerald. He knew he had issues with some people in the platoon.

DePue: Do you remember his first name?

Rafferty: No, I do not, and he died years ago of cancer. I'll try to find it. I don't know if I can or not.

DePue: But he had issues with some folks?

Rafferty: Well, he knew that there was stuff. We were at Qui Nhon, and he said, "You know what?" I was standing there, and [Robert] Jacob was standing right next to me. He said, "We need a refrigerator, because these radio batteries are dying from the heat. We need some way to get them cool." Jacob and I are standing there, and we said, "Well, we've got to go do this," and he said, All right."

I said, "Midget, you've got a license, right?" He drove a Mighty Mite, a cut down version of the jeep. He said, "Yeah." I said, "Well, hey. Go get us one." So he did. We got one of the other guys in the unit and said, "We're going into town, into Qui Nhon, for a little bit." We shot over to the Army base, and there was this refrigerator just standing there. So, in less than two hours, we're back there in the message center tent with this refrigerator plugged in and running. It was olive green. It wasn't Marine Corps green, but it was olive green. I got some yellow paint and I painted "Captain Fitzgerald, USMC" on it. I said, "There's your 'fridge, Cap." (DePue laughs) He knew we were going to go steal it. That man had a lot of faith in the creativity of his troops; he really did. He was quite a guy.

- DePue: Did the unit go on patrols, once you got back?
- Rafferty: The Comm Platoon would go out on operations. On patrols, we would go individually, two or three of us.
- DePue: You would be assigned to an infantry squad or a platoon?
- Rafferty: Yeah, usually with a platoon.
- DePue: Did you go on some patrols yourself?
- Rafferty: Yes, I did. (sound of pages flipping) Those are the operations that I participated in.
- DePue: We're looking at a NAVMC Form 119, Combat History Expeditions Award Record. So this is very explicit, all of the different patrols, then, that you would have been on, or the operations?
- Rafferty: Those were the operations. The patrols never got recorded, because we ran patrols every day.
- DePue: So the distinction is, an operation is a much more planned—Rafferty: It would be a battalion, at the minimum, a battalion size. Would you like to make a copy of that?
- DePue: Yeah, we sure would, and we'll get that included in your record here. Tell me what it was like to go on a typical patrol for you.
- Rafferty: Very scary. The operations we ran like started out in the day and ran them. The patrols were usually at night. We always called it "Indian country," outside the battalion area or wherever, because that country belonged to those people. We didn't move around a lot at night, only when we were out on these patrols, and we had to.
- I got myself busted out of A-position there, because they brought this lifer type in, a staff sergeant, booted Jacob out, which didn't make points. The reason I got myself knocked out of that position was, I was supposed to tell which of my buddies, when they had to go on patrols. And I couldn't do that, because there were a lot of hits being taken on those patrols. I was trying to cover all the patrols myself, and I couldn't. I got jammed up.
- DePue: Going on the patrols yourself?
- Rafferty: Uh-huh.
- DePue: Before we had been talking about your experiences as a wireman, stringing wire. I'm thinking that's not happening, when you're going on these patrols.

Rafferty: No, you carried a radio then.

DePue: What was the radio?

Rafferty: Oh god...A PR-6, I think, a big thing.

DePue: What was the range of that radio signal?

Rafferty: Five, six miles, I think.

DePue: So not too far.

Rafferty: Not far. And they had like a ten-foot whip antenna on them. Well, duh, you know? They didn't even worry about figuring out who was the officer. They knew if they took out whoever was at the bottom of that radio, there wasn't going to be too many communications going on. We had like a ten second life expectancy, which probably accounts for a lot of the drinking we did, when we weren't out. (laughs)

DePue: Was this primarily night patrols?

Rafferty: Yes. They cut a wire line once, and Litch, he'd been out running that line for three hours and couldn't find the break. Three hours in Vietnam to be walking is terrible. He had a squad of grunts with him, and they came back to get more grunts. Litch was used up.

DePue: Grunts being infantrymen.

Rafferty: Riflemen, sorry, Marine Corps. So this one squad swapped for two squads. They woke me up and said I had to go out, because every time they moved in the bush, they could hear something moving along, keeping pace with them. When they'd stop; it'd stop.

So I got dressed, and I went over to the message center. Bob Jacob, my lead guy, was there, "What the hell are you doing?" I said, "They haven't got that line fixed. I've got to go get it." He says, "No you don't." I said, "Jake, the line's out." He said, "We've got a radio link with them; it's solid. Don't worry about it."

And again, Gunny Shawd comes in there. He said, "How soon are you going out there?" And I said, "As soon as those grunts show up." And Bob said, "Gunny, can't we let that go? It's going to be daylight in like about three hours." And the gunny said, "I want that line fixed right now." Captain Fitz came in the tent, while it was going on. Jake told Captain Fitz, "The line's out, but we've got a solid radio link with them." The radio operator was sitting right there. Captain Fitz said, "Give me a check on them." He came right back. Captain Fitz said, "It'll wait till daylight," because they're setting up an

ambush out there, and everybody here knows they are. It really torqued the gunny, because the gunny wanted somebody to get hurt or shot.

The only time that bastard ever left the battalion area was when it was a major operation, and he couldn't find some way to weasel out of it. My buddy, Henry, almost tagged him. The colonel saw Henry and saw where that 45 was lining up, on one of those operations. Henry happened to glance that way, and the colonel was standing there looking at him. The colonel said to Henry, "Mosier, I thought you were going to make a god damned believer out of that man, for a change." That's horrible. They all knew he was like that, and nobody would do anything about him. That's also why he wouldn't go out in the bush either, because we would have done something about him.

I have totally come to the conclusion, the most dangerous thing on the face of this earth is an eighteen to nineteen year-old American kid, with a rifle and live ammunition, for his first time, because you're totally indestructible. I know, because I was totally indestructible, and you just tend to not put up with a lot.

So anyway, they got that fixed. Then we were out on another patrol one time. It was brutal. I had written my sister, because I knew my mom wouldn't do this. I wanted a pipe. My brother in-law still smoked, so I wrote to my sister and asked her if she would have my brother in-law go to a pipe shop and send me a pipe. She did. She raised me; she's my big sister to this day. So I got a letter back from her, because in those days, packages came a whole lot slower than letters. She told me Bill was going to go out and get me a pipe and some tobacco and send it to me. I got my mail, and that was the only thing we were allowed to do when we came back off patrol, was read our mail. Read your mail, then you had to clean the gear, then you cleaned your weapon, then you could get cleaned up, if there were time left.

So I was reading this letter, and I just started cracking up. It took me from 1965 until earlier this year to tell my sister about that letter. My sister only comes to my shoulder; she weighs about a hundred pounds; I'm scared to death of her. But in her letter, she pointed out that the government was doing smoking studies and how dangerous this was and all that. (both chuckle) I told her.

I said, "Marguerite," This year, I told her, I said, "I've just got to tell you something that's been eating me forever." She said, "What's that?" I said, "You probably don't remember when I asked for the pipe, and Bill sent me the pipe. I want you to know, Sis, we had just come back in, off a really killer patrol. We lost guys on this patrol, and we were all pretty bummed about it. And I was standing there reading that letter, and I started laughing. One of my buddies was kind of upset, you know. He said, "What the hell are you laughing about?" I said, "Listen to this crap, would you?" And I read it to him, and he said, "Damn! What is that; what do you think, Raff, about fifty, sixty

years from now?" I'm thinking, yeah, probably, beats the hell out of ten seconds. Seriously, it took me until this year, 2011, to tell my sister about that letter she wrote, and how we all really laughed. I told her it really helped us, because it was bad in that tent that night.

DePue: I wonder if you can paint us a picture of the geography that you're doing this patrolling in.

Rafferty: Bush, rice paddies.

DePue: Mountainous terrain or—

Rafferty: Trees, hills, not really mountains, not where we were, but hills, trees, undergrowth, rice paddies. They had a tree over there that was a thorn tree. That's all it grew. It was about, probably, two or three inches around, and it grows straight up, and all it had on it were thorns. You couldn't walk within five feet of that damn tree without getting raked by thorns. I don't know how I managed it all the time, but I was ripped all up from that. And see, my buddies and I, when we're running those wire lines, we had to get them off the roads, such as were, and off the paths. So, we'd have to go through all that crap. We'd come back from stringing wire, looking just badly used.

DePue: Were booby traps an issue for you?

Rafferty: We lost a guy to a booby trap, because he didn't pay attention, not one of our guys, one of the riflemen. They stressed that a lot.

DePue: What kind of booby trap was that?

Rafferty: I don't know. It was on a tripwire on a gate. They said, if you go through a gate, and it's open, you leave it open. And if it's open when you come back, you come back through it. But if you go through a gate that's open and you come back [and] it's closed, you don't open it. And he did. We'd been in country for a while, and I think you unfortunately get complacent, because nothing was going on. I think, just unthinkingly, he walked up and swung that gate open, and they got him.

DePue: From what you've told me before, these weren't North Vietnamese regulars; these were Viet Cong. So how do you tell the average Vietnamese citizen from the Viet Cong?

Rafferty: You can't. A lot of them that were real friendly during the day would be out there trying to shoot your butt at night.

DePue: Is that kind of your comment earlier, about an eighteen or nineteen year-old American kid with a rifle and ammunition?

Rafferty: Yes. You shoot them, and they can't hurt you, if they're good or bad or in between.

DePue: Did you do much patrolling in the daytime?

Rafferty: No, not a lot of patrolling. In the daytime, that's when we'd go on big operations. There was one incident in a village we went through, and it kind of highlighted to me why the Vietnamese civilians were so screwed up. Rifle Company went through, ahead of us, and they set these hooches—those are their houses—set the roofs on fire. We came in behind them, and we were putting the fires out.

DePue: Do you know why they burned them?

Rafferty: No, just because they were. They were grunts; they weren't real bright. I mean, you're trying to win hearts and minds, and you set their damn house on fire.

DePue: Was any of that ever expressed to you, that we're trying to convince these people we're the good guys?

Rafferty: Yes, quite often they would hold little rah-rah meetings. But, you know, I go in there, and set this guy's house roof on fire. Ten minutes later you come, wearing the same uniform, and start putting the damn thing out. What are they supposed to think? How are they supposed to figure this out?

DePue: Did you wonder what the heck the Americans were doing there?

Rafferty: No. You know, we really didn't. We were in the Marine Corps. We were ordered there, so we went there. You told me you were in the Army, and you know, when you sign the papers, you're going to do what they tell you you're going to do, and you're going to go where they tell you to go. They're not going to be negotiate it; you're going to do this. The main thing I got out of that was, we tore hell out of that country. It was all torn up. I came home, and I've always had the thought in my mind, I'd rather tear somebody else's country up than see our country torn up like that. We tore it up. My buddies and I tore some of it up.

DePue: I wanted to ask you about...I don't know; I assume that one of the operations that's on that list is Black Ferret.

Rafferty: Yes, it is.

DePue: You wanted to make a comment about that one, I think.

Rafferty: Black Ferret, lost a kid from Springfield on that, a guy named Glenn King.

DePue: Was he in your Commo Platoon?

Rafferty: No, he was a rifleman; he was a grunt. It shouldn't have happened. I don't think he cared. We went to school together, middle school together. Then he went to Lanphier, and I went to Feitshans. We never saw each other until the day we both wound up enlisting in the Marine Corps, on the same day. We went overseas. Glenn's mother was a very religious lady. This girl got pregnant and said Glenn did it. Glenn said he didn't. His mother made Glenn marry the girl. We went in the Marine Corps; we went overseas. We'd all be going to the club and stuff or into town, and Glenn wouldn't, because he was sending all the money he could get, back to her. We were gone for fourteen months; we came back, and she was pregnant...again.

DePue: Is that when you came back from Okinawa that one time?

Rafferty: Um-hmm.

DePue: Okay.

Rafferty: And Glenn just didn't care. He didn't care about anything after that. Then we went back over, went into Vietnam. In November, 20 November '65, Black Ferret started. Glenn got killed.

He had a rifle grenade on the end of his rifle, and he had pulled the pin and threw it, threw the pin away, which, you know, you reinsert the pin, and the thing won't detonate. For some reason, he threw the pin away, and he never got rid of the rifle grenade.

DePue: Did he still have his hand on the handle on it?

Rafferty: No. It was just on the barrel of his rifle. They're point-detonating, which means when they hit, they explode. He went under a tree, and he didn't have the grenade locked down, evidently. It knocked it off, fell right at his feet. That was sad. What was even worse was, he had never changed his insurance. So that goddamn woman got \$10,000, and his mom didn't get a penny.

DePue: Do you remember any other incidents like that that you're willing to share with us?

Rafferty: I know we had a scout that had no guts. I can't remember his name. He didn't want to be there; he was scared. Well, duh, most of us were pretty... You know, if you can see what's coming at you, and you've got a rifle, you're in pretty good shape. But when they're all around you, it gets pretty shaky anyway, no matter what the heck you're doing. So he decided he would flip out. We were in Battalion area, and he decided he'd just go crazy. He started shooting, shooting his rifle, in the air, mind you.

DePue: You think this was just an act, then?

Rafferty: We know it was. We were at a bunker. We had an M-60 machinegun at this one bunker that Angel, a buddy of mine, and I were at. We got down there behind that M-60 machinegun, side-by-side, and Angel jacked one in there. This lieutenant just went all bullshit, "What are you going to do?" Angel said, as he points it around, "We're going to kill his ass." That lieutenant went over there and whoever that dude was, turned too far one way. Somebody came up behind him and clocked him. They shipped him out.

I wasn't going to let anybody shoot me. That hurts. I've been shot twice; that smarts a lot. Crazy stuff, like I said. I had to chase wire line one day, down on Highway 1. They were out there selling... We swear to god, the stuff they bottled was, like, day old. It was pretty good homemade hooch.

DePue: They, being the Vietnamese people.

Rafferty: Oh yeah. And Captain Fitz came up to us one time; we were down there fixing the wire line, and said, "You guys aren't buying soft drinks from these people, are you, because they found crap in the soft drinks over there." I said, "No sir, the thought never occurred to us." He said, "All right," and he left.

So I got back, and everybody was out of our tent, because they were on wire; they were on switchboard; they were on this; they were on that. I had originally been with the mortar platoon, as their wireman. Oh, I'll go visit these guys. I had like four bottles of bourbon, up under my jacket. They were gone; they were in a gun pit. Aw crap, so I went up to the gun pit.

We sat there, and we were having just a few beverages to pass the night. All of a sudden, these suckers called in this fire mission. I said, "Give me the headphones." So I put the headphones on. I'm calling in fire directions, because I used to do that, you know. I also used to gun that damn tube. And I don't know what happened. Then Tommy Max, this crazy lieutenant from Texas, the Mortar Platoon commander, wasn't even on the headphones. He stands up in the fire direction control tent, just screaming at the top of his lungs to cease fire. I looked down the line, like this, and I looked back, like that. "Hey Laterno." And he said, "What?" I said, "Those guys are all screwed up. Those guns are pointing that way. They should be pointed this way, because I got the directions." He says, "Oh shit." He grabbed the bipod and swung the gun around, so it was almost online. And here comes Tommy Max, hauling down there. He started raving and ranting. He looked at me and said, "Who the hell are you?" I said, "My name's Rafferty, lieutenant." He said, "Get out of my gun pit. I don't want to see you here again." [Rafferty,] "If that's the way you're going to act about it." The whole damn crew was drunk.

What got him excited was, they had a mess hall up in the hills, because the grunts were up in the hills above us. And they had a mess hall with a stove in it, basically, just to heat their C-Rations once a day, so they could have one hot meal a day. And we blew one of the grunt companies' mess halls up.

DePue: Anybody get hurt?

Rafferty: Nah. They couldn't take a joke very well, but none of them got hurt.

DePue: I can't imagine why they'd be upset about that.

Rafferty: I can't; they didn't get hurt. What the hell, they were giving me crap. I thought they were chasing lines or something, and they said something. I said, "You know, if you dudes would have stayed awake, Charlie¹ wouldn't have gotten near and grenaded the damn place." They didn't like that either.

DePue: What did you think of the Viet Cong you faced? Did you guys respect them?

Rafferty: No, we hated them. They were sneaky. I don't think respect is the word, didn't trust them. [We] didn't trust any of the people, didn't like them. My buddies and I didn't respect them. We had no use at all for them.

DePue: Didn't have any respect for the average Vietnamese peasant either?

Rafferty: They were very sad people. Yeah, we'd do stuff for them.

DePue: You'd do stuff for them?

Rafferty: Yeah, give them a C-rat. "Thought you just some..." "Well, I ate them all." The little kids were pathetic. That's the worst part about the whole thing, little kids missing arms, missing legs, being hungry, about that big around, crying. Didn't like their water buffalo, though. They didn't like us, so I guess we broke even on that.

DePue: The water buffalo didn't like you?

Rafferty: Yeah. Somebody came to the conclusion... It was the smell, evidently, of the food, because you'd see them in the rice paddies. Those little kids were all over them, and they'd just stand there. Every now and then, we'd go walking by, and one of them would decide he really didn't want us walking that way.

I was out with the grunts once, and it was so cool. *Stars and Stripes* had an article from this captain, Army captain—had to have been a city boy. He was pointing out that buffalo is how the peasants measure their wealth, and it is. We all knew that, and we were all okay with that. But he pointed out that they're totally not dangerous because, after all, their horns are pointed to the

¹ Around 1956, "Vietnamese Communists" was shortened to just Việt Cộng, as first documented in various Saigon newspapers. "Viet Cong" was further shortened to "VC," which in the NATO phonetic alphabet is pronounced "Victor-Charlie." This gave rise to the further shortened, "Charlie" designation for a member of the Viet Cong. <http://www.todayifoundout.com/index>.

back. Which direction do you think the horns are pointed at when he gets mad at you and is charging you? (DePue laughs)

[I] had a firsthand experience with that. I was out with these grunts; we were walking across this paddy, and we heard this noise. This old boy was coming after us. This is no joke. Some machine gunner cut loose with a burst from his M-60, and it didn't even slow that sucker down. The Corps then had what they called grenadiers. They used M-79 grenade launchers. They were a forty millimeter shell. And this grunt said, "I'll stop him." And he did. Hit that old boy right in the head with a high explosive round, and then we had to pay for a water buffalo.

That's all they ever came up with, was the smell, like maybe the cigarettes and food would create different body odors, and it just offended them. It was so weird. Those little kids would be playing under them and playing on them and sitting on them. They're pretty damn tame, aren't they? Just like everything else in that country, don't turn your back on it, because it will get you.

DePue: I know you got rotated back in November, so from about August through November, was that part of the rainy season, the monsoon season?

Rafferty: Yes, it was. That was horrible. It never stopped raining. It would pour down; it would drizzle; it would rain hard, but it rained and rained and rained.

DePue: But hot, as well?

Rafferty: Oh yeah, humid. It was nasty. Ponchos did no good, so we just didn't wear them. You just walked around in your clothes. They built some dirt roads—the Corps did, the Army, whoever—built some dirt roads. During the rainy season, they became mud. I had to cross one of them one time, and I went clear up to my waist, trying to get across this patch of road, because there was no other way around it. The only thing we could use then for any kind of movement were track vehicles, AMTRAKs, amphibious tractors, and they would bog down every now and then. That was a deal for the oil companies.

DePue: Oil companies?

Rafferty: Yeah, Shell, Mobil, Exxon, whatever.

DePue: Oh, okay.

Rafferty: The AMTRAKs got eight miles to a gallon of gas. (DePue laughs) [I] did a lot of thinking after I got home, you know. I still think, when my buddies and I were there, we thought we were there for the purpose of stopping communism and keeping this country free and other countries. Then you do a lot of looking, and you think, boy, big business made a lot of money off us being over there, doing what we thought we were doing that was right.

DePue: Did you get injured?

Rafferty: Mentally. No, I didn't get dinged or anything. I got evaced [evacuated], because I got malaria.

DePue: And we're going to get to that here pretty soon. Well, we might as well start in with that. It's constantly wet; it's constantly hot, so I'm thinking there's constantly mosquitoes out.

Rafferty: Lots of them and large ones. They gave us medicine every day, and this just annoyed me beyond belief. The Corpsmen would issue us some kind of pill every day.

DePue: Quinine or something like that?

Rafferty: Something like that. Maybe not every day, but they had a rotation, a strict routine. Some of those guys wouldn't swallow it. I took that medicine every day. Every time they gave it to us, I took it. And I got malaria. I just don't understand that.

DePue: Well, how long did you go before you decided to finally go to an aid station?

Rafferty: Well, five or six weeks, because there was a virus going through the outfit. The guys would go to the aid station; they'd be down for about twenty-four, maybe thirty-six hours, whatever, a day or two. Then they'd send them back.

DePue: What kind of virus, do you know?

Rafferty: They had diarrhea and were throwing up, which was the stuff I was having. I thought, well, I've got the same thing. They're not going to do anything for it, so I just kept fighting it, you know. And again, the gunny came to the fore. He decides one day, we're having a rifle inspection. I don't need to stand in rifle inspection. I didn't feel good. I had a headache. I couldn't even keep water down. I ain't going to do this.

So, I went to the aid station, and that was it. I went to the BAS, battalion aid station, and the corpsman there said, "This ain't doing it." He put me in a jeep, and they took me down to regiment, to the regimental aid station, which was five miles behind us on the beach. While I was there, I threw a 102-plus something fever—with this corpsman sitting right there—and just got hotter than hot, and it was an air conditioned room. Then it just dropped. They put about ten blankets on me, because I was absolutely freezing. Then I'd go really hot again. And, like I said, I couldn't keep water down.

DePue: I'm just curious; were your malaria symptoms more pronounced, because you had been fighting going to the aid station for a long time in the first place?

Rafferty: Probably.

- DePue: I would assume you weren't the only one getting malaria there.
- Rafferty: No. The grunt that came home with me got malaria.
- DePue: Were there some that recovered from it much more quickly?
- Rafferty: I don't know, because he and I are the only two...None of my buddies ever got malaria, the guys I go to my reunions with. I was the only one out of that whole outfit that got malaria; I don't know. But it is a hell of a weight loss program. (both chuckle) I wore a size fourteen and a half shirt when I came back from there.
- DePue: Tell me more about the symptoms. You started into it but a little bit more.
- Rafferty: Diarrhea, vomiting, chills, fevers. Not just a little cold, I mean you just feel like you're turning into ice. , Then it will turn around really quick, and you just get so hot, you're just pouring sweat. [I] couldn't drink water. I'd try to drink water and throw it up. And you just ache, just totally ache everywhere, all over your body, headache, the whole bit, glassy eyes.
- DePue: Walk us through the various steps of your evacuation and treatment, if you would.
- Rafferty: Well, like I said, I went to BAS, and they sent me down to RAS, the regimental aid station. I was there for like two or three days. Then they said, "You're out of here," and they flew me to Da Nang. I met Hugh O'Brien at Da Nang. They said I was done; I was coming home, because I was too sick for them to keep there. So they flew me to Da Nang, and I spent an overnight there.
- DePue: Was there more of a story to the Hugh O'Brien incident?
- Rafferty: I didn't know who he was. I was in this great big, huge squad base, just laying on this bunk, because they were supposed to come and get me and put me on a plane. And some candy ass came in there, and he said, "Hugh O'Brien is coming." I didn't really care.
- DePue: Did you know who he was?
- Rafferty: No, I didn't. Then I made a fool of myself. He came in way down there, and he walked all the way down, shook hands with everybody and walked all the way down that way. The door was on that end. By the time he got to that door, I said, "Damn, that's Wyatt Earp," which didn't make points. (DePue laughs) He was a second lieutenant in the Marine Corps Reserve. He had on a pair of jungle boots, a pair of white Levis, a tiger-striped shirt, camo [camouflage], and a forty-five caliber pistol and a quick-draw cowboy holster on. I thought, "What in the hell is he going to do?" And that's what he did. He got down there, and then I didn't shut up. I said, "I know who he is; that's Wyatt Earp."

And they were just, like, “Shut up.” “Okay.” He was the only person I saw in Vietnam, the USO types, because it seems like every time there was a USO show close, I was out in the field somewhere, doing something.

A lady senator, representative maybe, from Northern Illinois—I cannot remember her name—came to Vietnam. The guys were going, “Now, she's going to be in the Chu Lai area in the middle of the day of this three-day operation.” It was the only operation I wasn't scheduled to go on. I thought, “Well good; that'll work.” There was a lot of curiosity, because the envelope had the political logo on it, the White House, the dome, whatever. Career military types in the Marine Corps sweat any kind of political connections at all; they do. I don't know about the Army, but they do. (DePue laughs)

And I said, “Well hey, since I got scratched from this op, I'm going down to the airstrip; I'll meet this lady. She hated career military types. Her father in-law had been General Billy Mitchell that they court martialed. And she had a major issue with career military types. Jacob said, "What are you going to talk to her about?" I said, “I probably won't even see her Jacob. You know, she's not going to talk to me. I'm a PFC in the Marine Corps; why's this lady want to talk to me?” But the gunny got word of it, and all of a sudden, one of the guys that was going on the op didn't go, and I wound up having to grab my shit in a hurry and go.

DePue: Go on the operation instead?

Rafferty: Uh-huh, because the bastard didn't want to take a change on me telling her something about him. Then I told Jacob, “I ain't going. They said I'm not going; I'm going to stay here. I ain't getting my gear together. I don't have to.” That god-dang gunny came in there, and I asked him, “Why do I have to go? I volunteered to go, and I was told I wasn't going. Why am I going now?” He wouldn't answer me. I think her name was Reid, R-e-i-d, but I'm not sure of that. Some things are clear, and some things are just gone away.

DePue: Well, you impress me. You've got a pretty good memory for the details here. You've been doing very well. Where did you go from Da Nang? What's the next point?

Rafferty: Clark Air Force Base.

DePue: It's back to the Philippines, then.

Rafferty: Yeah, and they lost me. I got there, and they said your plane's going to go out in about two hours; just stay around here. About three hours later, this nurse came walking in this ward, and she said, “Who are you?” I told her, and she said, “Well, obviously, they didn't come and get you. (laughs) “No, mam.” That plane took off two hours ago.” I said, “Well, now what?” She said, “You're spending the night here. We'll get you flight out in the morning.” I'm like, okay. So, they did, and then we flew to Japan. I can't remember where it

was in Japan, but it was colder than “gee whiz” there then. All I had on was a pair of dungarees.

DePue: What kind of treatment were you getting in each one of these places? The symptoms that you described before, were they becoming less severe?

Rafferty: They were coming less, because they kept giving me whatever that medicine was and kept me hydrated, because I was dehydrated. I was just all messed up.

DePue: So were you hooked up on an I-V most of the time?

Rafferty: No I wasn't. But the worst part was, I came out of Da Nang on a “gooney bird,” a cargo plane. I was sitting like this in a canvas sling seat, or whatever. And there was a major operation going on. My outfit got cut off three times that day and fought their way out four times. They had all these grunts on litters, suspended from the ceiling of this plane, with tubes going in and tubes going out. I had to sit there for however long that flight took, from Da Nang to the Philippines, looking at that.

DePue: So, knowing that these were the guys from your unit—

Rafferty: Uh-huh. It wasn't good. And I cannot get my son convinced that's why, any meat I eat, I want well done. I can't stand the sight of blood; I just cannot, can't do it.

So, then we got to this, wherever it was in Japan. We were supposed to sit down, put some patients off, bring other patients on. We did that. They had that door open forever. Like I said, it was December, I guess. It was just colder than cold, especially after coming out of that heat. And here we are at the end of the runway, and they're revving those engines up, and we're sitting there, and they're spooling those engines up, and we're sitting there, and they're spooling those—

DePue: Nice breeze. (laughs)

Rafferty: I'm like, what in the hell are they doing? And they came on the PA and said, “We're having mechanical difficulties. We're going to spend the night here.” Okay. So they put us in a little, rinky-dink ward in that hospital in Japan, and the next day, they put us on the same damn airplane. It got off the ground, and I'm like, “Well, we won,” you know.

Two hours by jet, off the coast of California, that sucker depressurized and was headed for the ocean. I swear to God, I was strapped in that seat, had my ears plugged up, and this Air Force nurse reached over and grabbed the mask and put it on me. I couldn't hear, because my head was all plugged up. I was so damn mad, I wasn't paying any attention to them anyway. I kept thinking, this is just so wrong. All the crap I went through and been through the past whole lot of months, and I'm going to die in a frigging airplane two

hours off the coast of California? This just isn't right. I didn't really lose my faith, but I was pretty damn hot at the moment. I was like, damn!

So they got it straightened out, and we landed at Travis Air Force Base. Went to the hospital. When we got to Travis, it was early in the morning; it was breakfast time. All these really clean Air Force people are sitting in their mess hall, eating breakfast. We walked in. I was towards the back of the bunch that were ambulatory. It was kind of interesting, because I'd had the same dungarees on for three weeks. There were other people who were maybe cleaner. I mean, I was taking showers when I could, but I was wearing the same dungarees. And these Air Force people are sitting there, all nice and clean. And, as the group off the plane went by them, you could see them going (sniffs). They're sniffing and turning their heads and getting this really disgusted look on their face. I thought, yeah, I bet you we don't smell real good. (DePue laughs) Evidently we didn't, because they all left.

They took us over to the hospital, and they put us in this ward, and they locked the frigging cage door behind us. I was standing there and, because I'm me, I asked this little lieutenant, "What the hell is that all about?" She said, "Take your clothes off, Marine. Put these pajamas and this robe on." "Well, I'm leaving here in a few hours." "No. You do as you're ordered." So I started doing it, and I said, "Damn, I didn't know they were going to put us in jail." And she got all fired up about it, a little bitty little comment.

It turned out, the guys from California, northern California—because Travis is up in northern California—when they got back to the world, they said, "We're close enough; we'll walk." They were taking off. So they took our boots, our dungarees away from us, and had us barefoot, in blue pajamas and a robe, so they could identify us in case we got past that locked door and got out of that ward. What the hell kind of treatment is this? (both laugh) I can't say that I probably wouldn't have been one of them, out there looking for a nice cold beer or something, somewhere. But, you know, they could have at least given me a chance.

DePue: How long did you stay at Travis?

Rafferty: Overnight. We got there in the morning; we were there that day, and then we left that night. We got down to Scott Air Force Base?

DePue: It's east of St. Louis.

Rafferty: Yeah, at 2:00 in the morning. This guy from the Red Cross wanted to know if I wanted to call anybody. I already called my mom and my sisters, when we got into Travis, during the day. I'm going to call somebody at 2:00 in the morning, and they're going to think something majorly wrong happened. "No, I don't" So I didn't. Then they flew me up to Great Lakes, which in December with no coat on was quite a thrill, too. Boy, that'll get your eyes open for you.

DePue: Is that where you did the rest of your recovery?

Rafferty: Yes, it was. They took blood constantly up there. And when I got there, they checked me in, assigned me a bed. I decided, I finally got clean clothes with me; I'm going to go take a shower. And there I was, minding my own business, taking a shower, and this nurse, this Naval lieutenant nurse, came in there and ripped that shower screen backwards, started yelling at me, because I wasn't supposed to be in the shower. They hadn't told me I could go take a shower yet, I had to stay in bed, even though they had checked me in. I'm like, crap, I'm back in the world now. They're all stupid. And she wasn't going to leave. (laughs) I said, "I ain't coming out of here." So she left. She stood right outside that bathroom door then, and when I came out, she literally marched me back to my bed and told me, "You have to stay here."

DePue: How long were you recovering at Great Lakes?

Rafferty: Oh god, I got up there in December, and I believe I got my orders back out to Pendleton in March. But I did some time at the barracks, up at Great Lakes.

DePue: So it took you all of four plus months to recover from malaria?

Rafferty: To recover and get released and get orders cut and all that.

DePue: While you're going through that, was it in your mind, especially in the early days, that I need to get back? I've got to get back to my unit.

Rafferty: Yeah. I kept thinking, I ran out on them. My buddies are there, and I'm not, and this is wrong. This is terribly wrong. I'm supposed to be where they are. How can I help protect them if I'm not with them? And what are they going to think of me, because I ran out on them? And I'm serious; that's all I kept thinking about; I ran out on my buddies.

DePue: For that whole time period that you were recovering?

Rafferty: That whole timeframe. I said, "This is bullshit." [I] started drinking like a fish up there.

DePue: In Great Lakes?

Rafferty: Yeah. You come out of the hospital; you cross the street; there's a little park; you cross the street, and there's a Rath & Prior enlisted club. [I] went through a whole lot of beer up there during that.

DePue: So, while you're still in the hospital, they're releasing you from the hospital?

Rafferty: No, they just didn't watch.

DePue: Oh.

Rafferty: I had a set of civilian clothes there, and they didn't watch. (DePue laughs) That's one of the problems my wife and I have had for thirty-eight something years. I pretty well know what the rules are. If they make sense, I'll listen to them. But I'm going to do what I want to do. The woman still can't grasp that.

DePue: Well, there was a time when you first joined the Marine Corps, you knew what the rules were and—

Rafferty: And I did obey them! Then I found out what they were, once you get in and what they could do if you didn't do what they said. That's just like, they had two career guys up there at Great Lakes Hospital who were finishing out their careers. They would buy the scrip [a substitute for legal tender] from all the guys coming back from Vietnam, so we could have money. But they made them inventory our C bags².

Well, my buddies packed my C bag, because it was up at the outfit, and I was down at the beach, at regiment. I had a pretty good idea what was in there, because I knew what I had around there. The suckers kept my machete and my bayonet and the other knife I had laying by my bunk for themselves. But, they did give me my bowie knife. Well, I had it with me, so I brought it home. They wouldn't let you just empty it [the C bag]. You had to say, "Yes that's mine," unlock it and get away. And then, one of these two would grab it by the bottom and turn it upside down, and everything would fall out.

There was this grunt from the outfit, from 3-7. He was from Charlie Company, I think. Grunts are strange; they carry all kind of crap. I wasn't. They dumped mine out, and these four or five hand grenades came rolling out across the floor. Those guys looked... They got whiter than that wall did. About a hundred rounds of ammunition and bandoliers fell out. "You can't have this!" "Well, I didn't pack it." But they were all flipping out about... Those grenades weren't going to explode. I had tape over the spoon. That's how I carried my grenades. I learned that; I came to that realization, when Glenn pulled the pin on that rifle grenade and didn't do what he should have done with it. As long as the spoon's down, it ain't going. They didn't look that close, they just—

DePue: During the time you were in your recuperation, were you paying attention to what was going on in Vietnam as well?

Rafferty: No. I thought, and I still do believe, we were doing okay, from a military level over there, if the frigging reporters would have stayed out of it. Just like when Tet [Offensive] was over, there weren't any VC left; we greased them all. We had that sucker won then, and then we give up.

² The "C" bag, or contingency bag, is normally a bag that carries extra items or comfort items. It usually has the most space in it to add additional items.

<https://answers.yahoo.com/question/index?qid=20100808103513AA3ZYLj>

- DePue: Well that's a little bit ahead of our story, but I'm not surprised at the comments. Did you get the family coming up to visit you when you were up in Great Lakes?
- Rafferty: No. Catherine, one of my sisters and her family, lived in Aurora. It was outside the range of where you could go. It was just like about fifty miles further than they would give me authorization to go from the hospital. So my nephew would come and get me, and we'd go to their house for the weekends. As long as I was back by Sunday night, it was okay.
- DePue: So you did get out, but that was just pretty limited timeframes.
- Rafferty: It was, yeah.
- DePue: Okay, the next assignment. Once you got to March and you got new orders, what were the orders?
- Rafferty: The Marine Corps loves to mess with people. Every time, they gave me a choice of three duty stations. And every time, it came down to the one I never picked, Camp Pendleton. And that's where I went again. That was not good. We're out there at Pendleton; they issued me an M-14 again, and then two weeks later, they came and took it away. They took all the rifles away, because they needed them in Vietnam. So there was no rifle drill, no—
- DePue: So this is early 1966, when the serious buildup was just going on.
- Rafferty: Yeah, it was. And they took almost all the communications gear. So I bought a Mustang, and I washed and waxed my Mustang every day, during duty hours out there, because we had nothing to do. They had minimal communications gear. The bad thing was, they had guys like me that were just killing time to get out, mixing with these kids straight out of boot camp. And that was wrong.
- DePue: Why wouldn't you have been redeployed someplace else, assigned to a unit and sent back to Vietnam?
- Rafferty: I don't know. They wouldn't send me back to Vietnam because of the malaria, because I guess it had been as bad as it was. But why they didn't send me someplace...I mean, you know, I could have done something useful. [I] just sat out there. And then—
- DePue: Going to a place like Okinawa, where the Marines still had a presence, would malaria have been a problem there?
- Rafferty: No. I don't know what their reasoning on it was. I really don't. But then they started training boots, out in the hills, out in California. So they sent me out there. I've got my own little command tent set up. My buddy, Tucker, had my

Mustang, because I couldn't use it during the week. Tucker gave me a Case Lots card. You had to be married and living off base to have one, so you'd go

DePue: What kind of card?

Rafferty: Case Lots, beer by the case. (DePue laughs)

DePue: So that was the trade, huh?

Rafferty: Yeah, that and my own private Liberty card. There was one in the box, and I had one with me all the time. We'd go load up the trunk of my Mustang, which wasn't very big, and we'd have beer, out there in that command tent. It was my tent, running training for kids that were training to go overseas.

DePue: Well, Pete, by this time you're not anybody's idea of what a good Marine is.

Rafferty: No, I really wasn't. I was so burnt out and so hurt and so disgusted and so lost. I didn't have any of my buddies; I didn't have anybody. You know, I just kind of breezed through it, here and there.

I met a really cool lieutenant, 2nd lieutenant. He came in one day and was wearing staff sergeant stripes. The next day, he's got a 2nd lieutenant bar on, because they were promoting to get officers. His name was Thomas Timothy O'Sullivan. [The] mother had hands like that on him. He had been the FMF [Fleet Marine Force] heavyweight boxing champ for I don't know how many years; his hands were all messed up. He had a voice like he was chewing gravel. He was cool.

He caught me one time; I was running around with a stupid hat I got in a warehouse, and I found a Marine Corps cover from 1943, a rain hat. I had my corporal chevrons by then, pinning the brim up. I had a card behind that chevron, for how many days I had left. I was running down the hills out there. I was about to die out there, too much beer. But we got into it. He was wrong. He's the only officer that ever apologized to me. He thought I said something I didn't say, and he got all over me about it. I said, "Hey, lieutenant, I don't care if we stay out here for the next month and a half, then I'm going home. I'm good out here."

So we came down. We got down; we're cleaning the gear, and I had a beer sitting like that, behind my leg. Thomas Timothy said, "I don't care what you got behind there, get that off that hat, that cover." "Yes sir," so I did that. Then he came down to the tent, where Roger whatever and I are cleaning the commo gear we'd been using for that three-day fun thing. He said, "Rafferty, I misunderstood your radio transmission. I'm sorry." I was just standing there all; no officer ever said he was sorry to me, no matter what happened. And he said, "You got another one of those?" I said, "Yes, sir, I do." (DePue laughs)

He said, "What happened when that kid got his leg broken?" "Well, they're running on hills up there." He said, "Why the hell weren't you on a radio?" I said, "Lieutenant, I was in a hole, because we came under fire." We were supposed to be exempt from that crap. That's why we were there, to run radios, in case somebody got hurt or whatever happened. There was a washout on this road, and it was probably about as deep as this room, you know, a trail to get down into it. So I went down in there, just to get out of the way. And this ignorant boot sergeant said I was dead, and I had to shut my radio off. I'm like, "Okay."

DePue: When you say dead, dead as in operational dead, for this particular exercise?

Rafferty: Yeah. The guys who were shooting at us couldn't even see me, but this sergeant, on his own, declared me dead. Then one of those kids fell off a rock and broke his leg.

DePue: Well what are they shooting at you with?

Rafferty: Blanks.

DePue: Blank ammunition, okay.

Rafferty: So, I got back up there, and they're all running around now, carrying arms. This kid really screwed his leg up. And somebody came by me and said, "Call someone," and I said, "I can't. The radio is down. That sergeant declared me dead and shut my radio off." Boy, he got lit up. I turned my radio back on and called Lieutenant O'Sullivan. He said, "Rafferty, I've been trying to get you on..." He was mad, because you aren't supposed to use names on the radio. Whoa, whoa. So I cut him off, and I said, "We have an injury," and this and this and that and that. So we got a copter in there and pulled the kid out. When we got back the next day, then when we got back down to the base, that sergeant stayed away from me for the rest of the time we were up in the hills training.

So when we got back down to our little camp out there, Lieutenant O'Sullivan wanted to know what happened. I told him. He said, "What do you mean he shut the radio off?" I said, "I'm telling you..." and one of the guys said, "He did, lieutenant; he walked right over there and shut Rafferty's radio off." Thomas Timothy fixed him; he was a corporal before the day was over. You don't screw with O'Sullivan's people, and you don't mess with his communications. He gets really nasty about that.

DePue: About this time, what was your view about your future in the Marine Corps, the guy who wanted to be a career Marine?

Rafferty: I didn't want to do it anymore. Those two dances overseas and getting evaced on my buddies. All they had left in the States, outside of Thomas Timothy and a couple of other officers... The last commanding officer I served under was a

drunk. He was totally drunk by 10:00 every morning. He was here because they couldn't send him overseas, because somebody would have taken him out. They had just the dregs here, and I just...I couldn't do it anymore. It really messed me up for a long time, because I always wanted to make a career out of the Marine Corps. When I got out, when I got so fed up with all of it and knew I wasn't going to do that anymore, I had no idea what I would do with my life. So I spent a lot of time drinking.

DePue: Did anybody talk to you about reenlisting?

Rafferty: Oh, they had a—what was he—a reenlistment NCO come and talk. He talked to Walcott. The guy that was a sergeant said, “Well, I'm put down here...” And Walcott said, “I ain't staying in this goddamned shit.” He said, “Well, I'm putting down [that] you're going to go to school.”

He said, “What about you, Rafferty?” I said, “I'm getting out. I can't deal with it anymore.” He said, “Well you're just a shit bird. The Corps doesn't want you anyway.” I said, “Let's go get our dress uniforms on and compare ribbons there, Sarge, because you've got the ninety day wonder.” —that American defense ribbon, or whatever it was— “So why don't you just back off.” And Walcott came and said, “Come on, Pete; we're going to go someplace.” And I thought, you know, his attitude is why I'm getting out, because of people like him.

DePue: How could your life have been different, if you had come back to the States and recovered and they'd sent you someplace like Okinawa or on ship duty or some other place where you had a real job to do, once you were in the—

Rafferty: I'd have probably stayed in because, like I said, that's what I had planned on doing, all my life up to then. But dang, when they've got nothing for you to do, and they don't want you to do anything. All they want to do is give you crap all the time. I don't need this.

My wife was amazed that almost all the guys in the outfit planned on staying in the Marine Corps, and we all got out, because of Gunny Shawd, because of the way he was allowed to treat all of us. He sent my buddy, Henry, out I don't know how many times, trying to get him killed. And again, they knew it; the officers knew it, and they wouldn't do anything about him.

DePue: Did you blame the officers because of that?

Rafferty: Yeah, the colonel especially. The colonel knew Henry had him lined up with a 45. Now, when it's that bad, that you're willing to shoot a guy in the back of the head...I don't care what his rank is or what your rank is, somebody in charge, that knows that, should have stepped up and done something about it. And they all knew the whole platoon was like that.

DePue: What did you plan on doing in the final days that you were in the Marine Corps, once you got out?

Rafferty: Nothing, absolutely nothing.

DePue: You had no plans?

Rafferty: None.

DePue: You were eligible for the GI Bill.

Rafferty: Yeah. This is really strange, because now I'm so proud of having been in the Marine Corps, and the further away I get from it, the more proud I am of having done it. But when I got out, I just wanted away. I wanted out; I wanted away; I didn't want anything.

DePue: Did you find work shortly after the time you were released?

Rafferty: Yeah, menial jobs. And then one day, I woke up, sick like I was every morning. And I thought, "You know what? Nobody really cares. "So you can keep doing this stupidity and probably be dead in five years, or you can quit feeling sorry for yourself and go do something."

So I did. I got a job with the GM&O Railroad here and then, when they merged it with, whatever it was, the Illinois Central, I went to a data processing school that was here in Springfield, and I got into computers. And that's what I did for the next forty-something years.

DePue: You had talked earlier, when we met, about getting released and coming back home. Were you still in uniform?

Rafferty: Yeah. I didn't have any winter clothes. I got stopped in New Mexico, because I was in my uniform. I was going, I think, past Albuquerque, and this cop pulled me over. I wasn't speeding, because I knew I wasn't. I wasn't doing anything. I said, "Can I ask you a question?" He checked my papers and all that, and he said, "You can go." I said, "I want to know why you stopped me." He said, "You're wearing a uniform; you might have been a deserter." If I had been a deserter, I wouldn't be wearing the damn uniform. It was just like that, constantly.

Like when I came home from the hospital on leave, I had to ride a Greyhound. I had to stand up all the way from—what is that—Watseka, up there? Whatever it is. I stood up clear to Springfield. Stopped at Bloomington. A bunch of these college kids got on, and they looked at me like... I can still remember how they looked at me. I was trying to figure out what the hell was their problem. I didn't do anything wrong. I got home, started reading stuff, found out the reputation we had all gained.

- DePue: How were they looking at you? What was the expression?
- Rafferty: Like I was totally beneath contempt, like I was less than dirt. We didn't know about all the crap that was going on here.
- DePue: What was your reaction when you did hear about the way they viewed veterans?
- Rafferty: Got pretty drunk and pretty loud. We didn't kill babies. I didn't ask to go to Vietnam. I got ordered to Vietnam, and my buddies got ordered to Vietnam. We didn't shoot women. We didn't just walk in and shoot unarmed, innocent civilians and babies and rape women and kill them.
- DePue: But you had talked about the story about going through a village, and the grunts in front you—I think that's how you said it—had lit up the hooches.
- Rafferty: They did. I don't know why. The grunts are nuts. By definition, you're getting paid to go get shot at. Now you can't be real bright to want to go do that. I got shot at, and I thought I was smarter than that.
- DePue: Did any of that cause you to think about why the United States was there in the first place? Why you, personally, had been sent over there?
- Rafferty: No, it really didn't, because again, at that time, I was still holding onto the fact that I'd rather tear somebody else's country up than ours. And I, honest to God, and my buddies thought that we were going to win that thing. We didn't realize it was just going to end. They never, ever, one time, talked about not winning it. But all that counted were body counts and stopping this and stopping that. Then go back and let them do it again.
- DePue: Do you think the war was winnable?
- Rafferty: Yeah. Again, after Tet, all they had left were the regular North Vietnamese Army that wore uniforms that you could spot. We caught a kid on Starlite that was a lieutenant then, a sixteen year-old North Vietnamese lieutenant, because sixteen year-olds aren't scared of anything. He was in a uniform. The grunts caught him, and Sergeant Jimmy didn't, because Sergeant Jimmy was one mean little dude.
- DePue: What happened to him?
- Rafferty: They put him in a POW compound. Sergeant Jimmy would have killed him.
- DePue: Sergeant—
- Rafferty: Sergeant Jimmy. He was a Vietnamese, attached to us. He and his father fought with Ho Chi Minh against the Japanese, in World War II. He was from a very wealthy, wealthy family, and his dad didn't like the way Ho Chi Minh

was taking North Vietnam, so he got out. Ho Chi Minh put a ten thousand dollar... At that time, in '65, there was a \$10,000 American reward on Sergeant Jimmy's head. He was the scariest person I think I met in my life. He had a scar that ran from there, all the way down and around.

DePue: Around his whole arm?

Rafferty: Around his whole arm. And there was a chaplain standing there. So we're talking to Sergeant Jimmy. Three VC jumped Sergeant Jimmy in the streets in Saigon one night. That chaplain asked a really stupid question, "What happened?" Sergeant Jimmy's standing there. I can give you a hint what happened. He was just talking to us. He didn't know that was a chaplain. I don't think he cared. But he pretty much said, in pretty blunt English, exactly what had happened. [The chaplain asked,] "How'd you get that scar?" He said, "One of them cut me." And he asked, "What did you do?" "I took it away from him and cut his throat with it." The chaplain was like, "That's enough."

But I had a Zippo lighter with the Marine Corps—you know the silver color with a nickel plate or whatever it is—with a little bitty Marine Corps emblem on it. I pulled out a cigar and lit my lighter, and Sergeant Jimmy is standing there. He had a plain silver Zippo. He said, "I have Zippo; you have Zippo; you have emblem; I no have emblem." I said, "Do you want this lighter, Sergeant Jimmy?" (DePue laughs) I wanted to wake up the next morning. He was mean. I wouldn't be surprised if he's still alive, you know, out in the bush over there somewhere, still shooting at them.

DePue: While you were there, did your unit have the opportunity to work with the ARVN [Army of the Republic of Vietnam] troops very much, the South Vietnamese units?

Rafferty: Not a lot. No, not a lot, just on Starlite. We did go get them. We got a ranger battalion out of trouble.

DePue: An ARVN ranger battalion?

Rafferty: Yeah. This relief of... Well, this says I was still there the 22nd of December, and I don't think I was. But anyway, they went in there, and they really got beat up. As a ranger outfit, their colonel and his wife, their lieutenant colonel, she was called the "dragon lady." They were both petite. Vietnamese people are very petite. She used to have a 45 strapped on each hip, and she'd be right out there with them, shooting at people. As soon as it stopped, she'd start nursing their men that got hurt.

DePue: Did you have respect for the South Vietnamese troops?

Rafferty: No. They ran. The rangers, okay, but the regular ARVN outfits... They weren't getting paid; they weren't getting fed. Their officers were in control of everything, and those poor guys were just trying to get by.

DePue: Well, I would think they knew nothing but war.

Rafferty: They didn't. Look at Sergeant Jimmy, he'd been fighting since the 1940s. But this ranger CO [commanding officer] was stupid. He decided he was going to go have an affair with some other woman. The dragon lady caught him, and she became the CO. How are you going to do that with a woman who is walking around with two loaded 45s? I don't really know. Even then, when I was really stupid, I couldn't figure that part out. (laughs)

DePue: Well, maybe they were playing with a different set of rules than the Marines.

Rafferty: I don't think she was.

DePue: I want to bring you back to the United States, because when we met earlier, you mentioned to me that '68 was a tough year for the United States. There was a lot going on. And Chicago, 1968, the Democratic Convention, you mentioned that you were in Chicago at that time.

Rafferty: I lived in Aurora, and I was around Chicago a lot.

DePue: Do you have any memories about the Democratic Convention and all the riots?

Rafferty: Oh, yeah. Somehow, pacifists are on the upper floors of whatever that hotel was, throwing real heavy, glass ashtrays out the windows, because they were for peace. Well, you get a real heavy chunk of glass, and throw it out a window, and it hits pavement, it not only breaks, it shreds, and it throws shrapnel everywhere. They provoked the Chicago... I think the cops overreacted a bit. But, at the same time, they really got provoked and pushed, because they were all aware of all the national and international cameras being on there. But [Richard] Daley told them, he wasn't going to put up with it. They really should have listened to him; none of that would have happened. But I loved [Eugene] McCarthy being a peace candidate, and his people were the ones throwing the ashtrays at the cops. Something got lost there; didn't it? Well, how do you know that? Because I was there.

DePue: What were you doing on the streets?

Rafferty: Just watching, just standing off to the side watching, heck.

DePue: As far as they were concerned, you were just another civilian?

- Rafferty: I was just an idiot standing there, and I got out of there, because it was getting bad in a hurry. I thought, I've been in enough bad places, and I don't need to be doing this anymore.
- DePue: I'd like to ask you about the struggles you had to readjust. And you've mentioned quite a bit, a few things already. But what were the things that you were especially struggling with, when you came back?
- Rafferty: Again, leaving my buddies. And what's really pathetically stupid is, I got out in '67, and right after I got out. The Tet Offensive started. For more years than I can remember, I have really... This is so stupid. That was the biggest firefight in the world, and I really regretted not being there. Undoubtedly, I'd have come home in a body bag. But it was a culmination of all the stuff we had done and pushed and crowded for, and we finally had them. And I missed it by a year. Again, the guilt of... I got to come home, and my buddies stayed until May and June of the next year.
- DePue: How did your adjustment problem manifest itself? You said that you had problems sleeping.
- Rafferty: Sleeping, a lot of drinking, a **lot** of drinking, anger. [It] didn't take much at all to just trip it. Fought, and fought and fought.
- DePue: Did you have nightmares?
- Rafferty: I don't know. I know a lot of times I would wake up in the middle of the night for no reason. I assume, yeah. Sometimes I do, and I remember them, but—
- DePue: How much of that would be because you had malaria?
- Rafferty: I don't know. I don't know.
- DePue: Were you dating at the time? For the next couple years... When did you get married?
- Rafferty: Oh, I got married about five years after I got out of the Marine Corps. Yeah, I dated off and on, but it didn't go well. It was me, because I'd get drunk. I wouldn't really get mean; I would just get drunk and just be drunk all the time. A lot of girls, for some reason, just didn't really want to do that. You know, going to a party and having a good time is one thing. Being drunk five days in a row, they weren't real interested in.
- DePue: So you drank just to get drunk.
- Rafferty: I drank to get drunk and try to put everything away, and I couldn't. I was too stupid to realize that alcohol... When you're depressed, you don't need alcohol, because alcohol is a terrible depressant. It took a long time for that one to come around.

DePue: Well, what helped you turn things around then?

Rafferty: (Sighs) Well, like I said, I came to the conclusion that nobody really cared, except me. And I couldn't do anything about any of it anyway, so I might as well quit being stupid.

DePue: Was there a point in time, an incident that really came flooding into you?

Rafferty: No, not really; it just kind of gradually... Like I said, I finally figured out, nobody cares. They didn't give a damn if you came home, so why would they care if you're here. My sisters did; you know, my nieces and nephews did, but the world didn't.

DePue: But five years later, you'd pretty much sorted all of that out?

Rafferty: I pretty much had a grip on it then, except for the drinking. I still drank a whole lot. Nineteen eighty-nine was probably the keystone year. I finally wiped out, and Janet had to put me in the hospital. I got diagnosed with suffering from major depression, which really came as a relief to me, because I thought I was losing my mind. I didn't fit; I just couldn't put pieces together. You know, it's just, this is all wrong. So I stopped drinking, found that much out.

Then, later in '89, we had our first reunion, and that really turned the corner. Like I said earlier, I was able to put the ghosts away, but the demons are there. I don't walk in dark rooms. I never sit in the dark. Nobody can come up behind me.

When I went to my reunion, out in San Francisco, there was only the Mosiers and us there. And when we went in, Hank and I went walking in, and I sat down like this. Hank sat like you are, and Bridget and Janet stopped over there and were talking. They finally walked over. I said, "What were you two talking about?" Well, Bridget told Janet the same thing, Henry always sits with a wall behind him. They were wondering how we're going to work this out.

Henry says, "Very easy. Pete got here first; he's sitting there. He's watching that way." He said, "If I get here first, I'll sit there, and I'll watch that way. And he knows he doesn't have to worry about somebody walking up behind him that he doesn't know is coming." You know it's... That was forty-six god damn years ago, forty-seven years ago, and part of it is still ingrained.

DePue: Did you get quite a bit of counseling over the years?

Rafferty: No, no. Until I met with you and until today, I haven't talked much to anybody about any of it. I figured it was my problem; I should be able to handle it.

DePue: Why **did** you decide to do this?

Rafferty: Because this doctor, out of the Veterans Administration, told me a year or so ago, she thought I should write all this stuff out and leave it to my grandchildren, and that also, maybe, writing it out would help me, because I still suffered a little bit from post-traumatic stress. I was the first one of her patients she mentioned that to. She wanted me to let her know how that turned out. She might start suggesting that to other patients. I didn't know how to get started. I didn't know how to start writing. I didn't know what to do; I didn't know what to do.

Then I talked to my bossy niece, out in Dallas. Just because they've all grown up, they seem to think I'm old and decrepit, and it's their position to tell me what I'm doing in life. I told her about it, and she said, "Well, do it." I said, "Okay." And then you were interviewing World War II veterans, when Amy worked here? I think Kathryn may have asked Amy, would I be willing to do this.

DePue: Kathryn Harris?

Rafferty: I believe. And Amy told... I think she said it was Kathryn, that she didn't know; she'd have to ask me, because I haven't talked to anybody she knows about this stuff. And she's right.

DePue: So most of the stories that you and I have been talking about today, you haven't told your wife; you didn't tell your kids?

Rafferty: No.

DePue: Why not?

Rafferty: They couldn't do anything, and it hurts to talk about it.

DePue: Do you think they would understand, if you did tell them?

Rafferty: Might, probably, probably, because, see, at my reunions, it's just all the stupid stuff.

DePue: You're talking about all the fun, stupid things that you did.

Rafferty: The crazy things, like Bob Jacob getting drunk in Okinawa and in the Philippines and shimmying up phone poles or power poles, with one of those little miniature transformers that pop. He'd say, "There's a hummer," and he'd shimmy up the pole and hit it. It would knock him on his ass, out in the street.

Or throwing a phone out. Somebody threw a phone out in a lake, out in California one time, so midget wouldn't go to brig on that count. We did this in '89, and I didn't, because like I said, I hadn't seen any of those guys for about twenty-three years or so, and I was very uncomfortable the first time.

Even at my reunion, I was very uncomfortable. Everybody was great. We all recognized...It was like time had never passed. We all recognized each other. And there weren't any cold shoulders; there wasn't anything. The last day we were together, I said something to Bridget, Henry Mosier's wife, the guy that started the reunions. Henry jumped my ass about it, about how stupid I had been for all those years, just like Captain Fitz had said. So I don't know, I just...I still have flashbacks.

DePue: Is there anything in particular that's... You mentioned the demons. Is there an ultimate demon that you're still fighting with?

Rafferty: I think that's what wakes me up at night; I don't know. I mean, there are some nights I'll go to bed and sleep all night, and there are some nights I wake up five and six times a night. There are some nights I wake up, and I can't go back to sleep; I get like three or four hours sleep at night maybe.

DePue: Was the AMTRAK incident perhaps the most painful?

Rafferty: That was part of it; that had to be part of it. We could have saved those kids. They weren't kids; they were Marines. We could have saved their asses.

DePue: Well, that goes back to where we started, and that being instilled on you so strongly in boot camp.

Rafferty: Yeah. But you know, the VC sent [General William] Westmoreland a note, October 31, 1965. They were going to attack the Da Nang and Chu Lai airstrips at midnight. Westmoreland and all those candy ass officers blew it off.

I was on the switchboard from midnight to 4:00, October 31, 3-7 outfit area. They hit Da Nang at midnight. It all lit up; the switchboard got all lit up. At five minutes after 12:00, they were lighting us up. Not bad for real primitive communications. I was sitting in a tent, facing this way, with a switchboard here. The hills were behind us.

Someone ripped through the top of that tent, and then there'd be a pop. That little son of a bitch couldn't get the right angle on him, but he was putting them through the top of that tent I was sitting in. And that pathetic colonel of ours—the one that wouldn't let us go bail out the guys in the AMTRAKs — got on the phone and got all hateful with the India Company commander—whose name I can't remember—to quit shooting at the trees and rocks.

Goddamn it, you can tell the difference in the sounds of who's shooting what. The M-14s sounded like M-14s. Those carbines didn't sound like M-14s. And the captain said, "Colonel, get your ass up here on this ridge, and you can see what rocks and trees we're shooting at." The colonel shut up; got off the phone, and didn't bother anybody.

There was a machine gun going off; it wasn't an M-60. And his frigging carbine had popped, and holes started coming through the tent. One of the grunts whistled real loud, threw a hand grenade, and everything stopped. Well, I guess I'll see the sun come up in the morning; won't I? That's the same guy that wouldn't let...because it might be a trick to go get those guys. We knew their voices. We knew those were gooks shooting at us, from behind us, when he's saying they're shooting at trees and rocks. For a goddamned Naval Academy man, he wasn't real great, you know?

DePue: Well, we've been kind of jumping back and forth, which I think is inevitable, and it's a healthy way to approach this, as well. Vietnam has such a role in American psyche, even today. What's your thought about all of the protests, especially during the time... You came back, and you saw the worst of it, because the protests got really bad between '68 and '77.

Rafferty: I couldn't understand it. We weren't doing anything wrong. Seriously, to me, we weren't doing anything wrong. We were doing what we got ordered over there by the government. We were trying to stop the spread of communism.

DePue: But you said yourself that some of the stuff that you guys would do there, wouldn't make sense, didn't make sense.

Rafferty: No.

DePue: Did you understand that part of the protest, that there was an element that said, "Why are we there in the first place?"

Rafferty: Probably. But again, I was still pretty hard charging.

DePue: What did you think when, in 1975—a lot of stuff had happened by that time—Watergate had happened.

Rafferty: Yeah.

DePue: [President Richard] Nixon had gotten thrown out of office.

Rafferty: Yeah.

DePue: There was no desire in congress to go back, when the North Vietnamese launched their final invasion in 1975. What's your feeling about that?

Rafferty: Well, I knew... This is going to sound terribly (pause) racist, I'm afraid. I knew when the United States pulled out, that it was lost. I knew when they said we weren't going to support it any more, it was over, because we'd had experience with those ARVN outfits all the time we were there, and they always ran. The only time those little suckers didn't run is if you put them right out there, and you were right behind them, because it wasn't a matter of

if it's going to happen. You better stay there, and maybe you'll get through this. I knew that country just wouldn't stand up for itself.

And then, we went to Washington, D.C., took my family to Washington, D.C. one year. All the souvenir stands were being run by Vietnamese (pause) at the wall.

DePue: Obviously, that makes you furious.

Rafferty: Yeah. My buddies died for them, and they ran.

DePue: Do you have any sympathy at all for some of the Vietnamese, who left as boat people?

Rafferty: The Montagnards, yeah. The Montagnards helped the hell out of the United States, too bad. I, to this day—and I don't think I'm ever going to be able to—cannot walk down the wall in Vietnam. We took our grandkids there a year ago, to D.C. on vacation. [We] took them to the Marine Corps Museum, took them here, took them there. Went to the wall, and there's a statue there of grunts. I wanted my grandkids to see that, and I told them, I said, "You know, grandpa and his buddies carried radios and other stuff, besides what these guys have got. But, that's really a lot of the way we looked and the gear we had." And Sammy was standing there, looking and looking and looking up at that statue—she's a little bitty thing—and she said, "Grandpa, were you ever that skinny?" (laughs) I said, "Yeah, baby, skinnier than that when I came home. And then I walked... The wall is there, and I walked over to the end of it, and got a picture of the nurses' statue.

So we got home, and my wife... We'd been through this dance before. She's going through the pictures, and she said, "You took a picture of both those statues. You didn't take a picture of the wall." I can't do the wall. That wall hurts, and I guess it's going to, every day.

DePue: Do you think it's possible for your wife or your kids or your grandkids to really understand why you feel the way you do, to really understand what was going on in that war?

Rafferty: I don't know. My wife is nine years younger than me, so she—

DePue: Has she wanted to have you tell her some of the stories?

Rafferty: I don't think so. I don't think so. She kind of thought I shouldn't come and do this. I think she was afraid it would bring back a lot of bad. I mean, she meant it in a good way, because unfortunately, I really think it's something you had to be there to go through, to really... They try. At our reunions, our wives are very supportive of us.

DePue: Believe it or not Pete, we've been at this two and a half hours.

Rafferty: You're kidding.

DePue: It doesn't seem like that, does it?

Rafferty: No, it doesn't, oh damn.

DePue: And we've talked about a lot. I've appreciated your candor very much going through this. I know it hasn't been easy. How would you like to finish up? Let me ask you this, and you've already mentioned this but, a lot of the things you talked about is how screwed up things could be. Are you proud of your service?

Rafferty: Yep.

DePue: Are you glad you did it?

Rafferty: Yeah, I am. Strangely enough, yeah. And every day I'm further away of it, the more proud I am of what I did, and what my buddies did.

DePue: How do you think all of these experiences changed you as a person?

Rafferty: I grew up a lot. I've seen stuff that I wouldn't want anybody to see, done stuff I wouldn't want anybody to do. I think it gave me, probably, a wider outlook on maybe people shouldn't send kids off to war. They should, maybe, negotiate better, in better faith. Then, I guess, if it comes down to it, then you go get them. It has greatly made me appreciate the fact that I can go anywhere in this country I want to go, and I don't get stopped and checked and all that, and that I can take my Boy Scout troop damn near anywhere. We don't have to have armed security with them, to keep them safe while we're out in the woods or next summer, going out west or wherever. And I've told my kids that—all the kids throughout my troop all these years—I've told them that.

DePue: We've talked quite a bit about, what I guess I would say, are the regrets of your life, especially dealing with trying to make those adjustments, coming back. Are you in a better place today?

Rafferty: I think so. I really do. I still, for some reason, get pretty teary-eyed sometimes. I don't know why.

DePue: How would you like to finish up Pete?

Rafferty: I have an appointment. Can we do this—?

DePue: Okay.

(End of Interview)

Interview with Peter Rafferty

VRV-A-L-2011-064.02

Interview # 02: December 29, 2011

Interviewer: Mark DePue

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DePue: Today is Thursday, December 29, 2011. My name is Mark DePue, the Director of Oral History with the Abraham Lincoln Presidential Library. I'm here for my second session. I think this one is going to be pretty short, Pete. We've got Pete Rafferty across the table from me, and we're here at the library.

Before Christmas, Pete, we had an excellent session, talking about your experiences in the Vietnam War and, specifically, with the United States Marine Corps. We wanted just to have a little bit more opportunity to finish up some things. I know you've got some things that you wanted to mention here, but I want to just ask you a couple general questions, as we get started. The first one would be how you managed to keep in touch with the family while you were in Vietnam.

Rafferty: Letters. There weren't cell phones back then. There was a MARS [Military Amateur Radio System] outfit. I can't remember what the MARS stands for, but you could talk on ham radios. They had a station in Vietnam. But, when you're on the gunny's list, you just didn't get to do a lot of things. (DePue laughs) So my communications factor was letters home, letters from home.

DePue: Was mail call something that you looked forward to?

Rafferty: It was very important to all of us; truthfully it was. That was the only thing we could do anytime we came back out of the field or off of patrol. We could

read our mail, and that was it. Then you had to get the equipment. Well, first you had to...In the Marine Corps, you had to clean your weapon, and then all the communications equipment. Then, if there was still time and daylight and the showers were running, you could clean yourself. So they at least...Even that gunnery sergeant did, at least...I think the captain made him concede the fact that we needed to hear normal stuff.

DePue: Tell me about what was on the menu. What was the food that you had?

Rafferty: C-Rations.

DePue: That was pretty much it?

Rafferty: Yeah. They finally built a mess hall in the battalion area. They got it done when the monsoon season started, and the only thing they would feed us was split pea soup and two slices of bread. Once they opened that mess hall, they wouldn't let us draw C-Rations any more.

So, we would call one of our buddies, with the rifle company, and tell him to pull a wire off that phone, at this time. We'd say, "We've got to go run a wire line; we need to draw some C-Rats, because we're not going to be back in time for meals. Or we would go up to the supply corporal that none of us really cared much for, and we would distract him. The supply tent was built on the sandy bed of a dried-up river. So we would go out in front of the tent and talk to him and get him distracted. And our buddies would go behind the tent and dig in and pull cases of C-Rations out. We'd bury them under the sandy floor in our tent.

DePue: In other words, once you had the mess hall, the food was so excellent you still preferred C-Rations. (laughs)

Rafferty: Yeah, yeah. We had a puppy that didn't last long, because they came around and confiscated him, but he wouldn't even eat that split pea soup. That's pretty grim stuff, because those dogs over there are kind of like my Boy Scouts, they'll eat almost anything that isn't moving, and he wouldn't touch that stuff.

DePue: What was the favorite C-Ration?

Rafferty: The fruit. I've got a box of it; I wish I would have brought it. In the C-Rats cases there were meals A, B and C. A was the best box to get, because it had like a chocolate disk in it and a can of fruit, peaches, whatever. C was the worst one to get, because it was like nothing.

But, once again, the government, in its infinity, put the row of A's, put the row of B's, put the row of C's. And the sergeants, to make sure everybody didn't grab for the A's, would always turn the case over. But all you had to do was get close and wait. Your buddy reached on this end, and if he pulled an A-Rat out, you'd reached in there and grabbed the next one. They thought we

were as dumb as some other people did. (DePue laughs) We were in a lot of things, but taking care of ourselves we weren't.

DePue: When it came to the eating, huh? (laughing)

Rafferty: Yeah.

DePue: What was the meal that you least liked?

Rafferty: Ham and beans. To this day, I will not eat ham and lima beans.

DePue: Ham and lima beans.

Rafferty: Yes, canned ham and lima beans. We'd be out on a blocking force, which meant we were up on a ridge, and a couple rifle companies would be driving VC towards us. So we couldn't have... We'd go out real early, when it was still dark, and set up. You couldn't have fires to warm your C-Rations. When you'd open these small cans of C-Ration ham and lima beans, there would be at least two inches of grease on top of that, a preservative.

If you could heat it, it would dissolve, and it wouldn't be that terribly bad. But eating that stuff cold... You usually used the butt end of your spoon to get rid of all the grease you could off the top of that thing, and then you'd try to choke down cold ham and lima beans at 5:00 in the morning. It's like, I will never eat these again. I have not, to this day, eaten ham and lima beans.

DePue: I wonder if you have any humorous stories that you haven't told us about yet.

Rafferty: Well, there's one about... I don't know if it's humorous, and again, if my grandchildren are going to hear this, they might as well learn as much about their grandfather as they can. In the Marine Corps, they had EE-8 telephones that looked like a small box, and you cranked them. I told you, I think, before about my buddy Bob Jacob, the midget. When we got back from overseas the first time, the whole outfit went on leave. But Bob stayed out in California. He signed off for all the wire gear, all the telephones, switchboards and all that. We got back, and he was missing a telephone. He knew if he didn't get it, didn't find this phone, that he was going to go to the gunny, who'd put him in the brig—again, the gunny didn't like any of us—and he would be fined and all that. I was his number two guy, and I told Bob, "Don't worry about it. I'll take care of you." [I] went a lot of places around the base there, and the regiment was the only outfit to use the same kind of phones we did, in base area out of Camp Pendleton.

I said, "Got it covered." And I went to the regimental gymnasium. There was a master sergeant in there, and I told him, "I need to pull this phone to PM [primary maintenance] it." And he said, "Okay." So I took off with the phone. I told midget, "Got your phone, boy. We're not missing any now." He

said, "Where are we going to put that?" I said, "The colonel's office; nobody mess with him."

So, I went up and knocked on the colonel's door and told him, "Sir, I need to swap these phones and get your phone cleaned up for you." He said, "Okay." So I put it in his office.

About two weeks later, this master sergeant was roaming our area, looking for his telephone. He stopped me on the street and questioned me. I said, "I don't even know where the regimental gym is, sergeant. Don't have a clue." And it just went on from there.

It got more and more involved. The next thing I know, I was sitting at the switchboard one day in the message center office, with my back to the door of the message center, and our gunnery sergeant and the regimental sergeant major came walking in there. Now, you're talking pretty high-ranking stuff. The gunny was standing right behind me, and he says to the sergeant major, "Well sergeant major, we know they got it. I even know who took it, but we can't prove a goddamn thing." And I was, like, you're right, buddy. And that phone is still out in a lake on Camp Pendleton, because I told Bob

And then, the worst part of it was, division came. Bob had sent a phone up to division to get it repaired, and he forgot about it. That was the phone that was... Now we're one over, and we can't be one over, either. So I decided I'll go to town tonight. I got a buddy of mine that had a car out there [to] take me to town. I say, "Stop here by this lake." Then [I] threw that thing in the lake, so we're all squared. And it took until 2005... Again, this is part of the loyalty thing that we haven't discussed.

We had one of my reunions in Savannah, Georgia in 2005. One of our former sergeants was there, and I was walking down the street. The man's a native Georgian, and he has never been able to say my name; it's always "Raffity" to him. He can't get that second "r" in there. He was walking with his wife, right behind me, and he said, "Hey Raffity, got a question." I said, "What's that, Jack?" And he said, "What's this I hear about a phone being in a lake?" [Rafferty responds] "I don't know anything about it." He said, "Gotcha, you're busted on it." (DePue laughing)

But it took from 1964 or '65, until 2005, for them to learn about it. I thought it was gone, that it was all forgotten. Now, I hear about it every couple of years.

DePue: We're going to take a very quick pause, and then I'll get us started again here.

(Pause in Recording)

DePue: Well, that makes me wonder if you guys had enough equipment when you were over there, because yours was one of the first units that got to Vietnam. Was equipment a problem?

Rafferty: Small stuff. It's a very humid, wet climate, and the only tape we had to splice wire lines together with—like when one broke or we ran out of wire and had to splice another one into it—was black friction tape, which would just let moisture drain through it. So we're all writing home to parents, brothers, sisters, whoever, asking them to go to the local hardware store and get us black, plastic electrician's tape that's waterproof. We had hard communications gear, like phones, radios, batteries, what have you.

DePue: I'm surprised, because didn't the Marine Corps fight all the way through the Pacific, in plenty of wet environments?

Rafferty: Yes, yes they did. Evidently, at that time, friction tape is what they had. I don't know how they managed to make it work, because we couldn't. And the other thing we wrote home for and got a lot of... The water was disgusting. You had to purify every bit of the water you drank.

At that time, there was a knockoff of Kool-Aid® out. It was very, very cheap, and you could put one or two packages of Kool-Aid or this other drink mix in an envelope, with a letter. We were always asking them to send us that. I cannot, for the life of me, remember what the knock off of this Kool-Aid was. They didn't have flavored stuff. It was just treated water that was really, really gross.

DePue: **Treated** water, though.

Rafferty: Yeah. They'd hang it in what they called Lyster bags. I don't know what they did with that. It was just—

DePue: Did you have water purification tablets that you could use, as well?

Rafferty: I think so, but usually they would replenish us with water when we were out. They would fly copters in with water cans. But we did have some kind of purification tablets, because there were times they couldn't get to us anyway.

DePue: Well, this is an indelicate question, but was there any sort of indoor plumbing there?

Rafferty: No.

DePue: What did you use for latrines?

Rafferty: They built outhouses. That's if you were in the area. If you were out in the woods, you just were very careful to make sure there weren't any snakes where you were stopping or other critters that crawled over there. I can't

remember their schedule, but on a set day, they would burn out all the latrines. They'd dump kerosene in and light them, every one of them in the battalion area, on the same day.

DePue: Well, what does that **smell** like? I hear, in Iraq, as well, they do this.

Rafferty: Yeah. It's just really nasty. You can only wait so long, and you got to take care of business. They lit every one of them off within thirty minutes of each other, on the same day. You know, common sense would say, burn this one; wait a couple of days, and then burn the next one. Nah, we're going to do this now. Whatever.

DePue: Well, if it's going to smell bad, we're going to get it over with and be done with it.

Rafferty: Evidently, yeah. But it sure inconvenienced us a lot of times.

DePue: I think you had a couple other stories or a couple of things that you wanted to, perhaps, correct the record on here. I'll give you a chance to do that.

Rafferty: One afternoon for some reason, Interlicchia and I got sent down to regiment, which was five miles behind us.

DePue: That was his last name, Interlicchia?

Rafferty: Yes. It was Roger Interlicchia. I-n-t-e-r-l-i-c-c-h-i-a. Lich and I got sent back, five miles down the road, to regiment, because evidently we were right. Their echelon guys couldn't do anything, including run a wire line. They should have been able to do that, but for whatever reason, they didn't. It was getting dark when we were out there, and it's one of the very few times, except on patrols, that we were moving around, down in the country, in the dark. We were still basically inside the regimental area.

We took off with a Mighty Mite Jeep, with a driver. Lichy and me, in this jeep, running out this—it was a half mile, I believe—spool of wire. And we ran out. We didn't get from where we started to where we were going before we ran out of wire, because it was further than they said it was. We knew, if we just laid the wire on the...Dark over there is **dark**. There aren't any lights; there's no artificial light; there was nothing. Lichy and I knew, somebody was going to have to stay with that wire line, so we could find the end of it.

So I told Lichy, "I'll stay here. You and that dude go back, and get another spool of wire, and get back out here. And, to this day, I don't know how they found me. They came right back. I could hear the jeep coming. But in that time, it got really weird. There was a slight rise behind me, and I had this spool of wire, what, about two feet across, I guess? I had it propped up in front of me. I swear I had every bit of me behind that two-foot diameter

aluminum...No, it would have been steel then; they didn't use aluminum that early, I don't think.

Anyway, I was crouched down behind it with my M-14, locked and loaded, waiting. And somehow they came right back to me. I can't believe Lich ran that wire line in his hand, because he was in a jeep, it would have cut the heck out of his hand. But they came back. I was so glad to see those guys.

DePue: How long was it before they returned?

Rafferty: It seemed like forever. It was probably about a half an hour. A half an hour can be a long time, under certain circumstances, it truthfully can. (laughs) Anytime over there you're by yourself in the dark, it was very bothersome, even at nineteen or twenty years of age.

I think that's why, to this day, I have night lights in my house. I don't walk in dark rooms. I never walk through the dark. I don't have to do that anymore. When I'm out camping, I have a flashlight, either in my hand or on my belt, if I think it's going to get dark before we get back to our campsite. Again, probably thirty minutes can be a long time. Some things are a lifelong habit, if you just cannot get stopped.

DePue: Did you have any...Let's say, a fear of the dark, before that?

Rafferty: No, I really didn't. We got over there. I don't think we were scared of the dark. We knew what was probably out there in the dark, trying to get at us, so I think it wasn't necessarily...Now, when I wake up, I want a light so I can see if there's anybody—

DePue: So it sounds like it was more an issue of just being alone.

Rafferty: Yeah, I think. When we were out in the bunkers at night, two of us in a bunker, even if your buddy was sleeping, it was okay; you weren't totally by yourself. But that night was really...Like I said, I have no idea. It just seemed like he was gone half the night, that night.

And then, of course, you start hearing things. There's nothing there, but you're thinking is, well, what are you going to do now? Pray even more than you've been praying. (DePue laughs)

DePue: Did you have a tendency to fall asleep in situations like that? Apparently not that night.

Rafferty: No, I never did. My buddies and I, the guys that I shared bunkers with, would stay awake on their watch. We usually did two on, two off.

DePue: Two hours on?

Rafferty: Yeah, two hours being awake, two hours being asleep. Usually two hours being asleep wasn't two hours being asleep, but your buddy was wide awake.

DePue: Would you have a hard time falling asleep in situations like that?

Rafferty: Yeah, yeah. I fell asleep one night; I was at a bunker with a guy named Joel Angel. He woke me up, because he heard something coming towards us. It was kind of a really bright, moonlit night, but there were clouds. The moon went behind the clouds, and Joel reached down and touched me. I woke up, and he said, "There's something coming." Okay. So I got up; we had our M-14s ready to go, and Joel looked up at the sky. He said, "The moon's about to come out, and when it does, whatever's out there is gone." Well, thank god, the moon came out before we started shooting, because it was one of the scrawniest cows you've ever seen in your life. (both laugh)

It really heightens your sense of hearing, of seeing, of smelling, and then you're all wired because, again, that entire country at night was... We called it "Indian country." If you weren't here in the circle, that was all theirs. They were always sneaking around us anyway. So, you hear a noise at night, and you figure, here they come.

DePue: Any other stories that you can recall?

Rafferty: No, but if we have the time, I would like to tell you about a guy named Ron Kovic.

DePue: Ron Kovic, go ahead.

Rafferty: He was in the Marine Corps. He's the gentleman who wrote the book, *Born on the 4th of July*. He is a gutless wonder. He enlisted in the Marine Corps. I got evacuated, and they flew him in. They let the gunny know that his daddy had been a Marine Corps hero in Korea, and his grandpa had been a Marine Corps hero in [World] War II, and all he wanted to do in his life was to be a Marine Corps hero. He didn't have the guts for it.

He sold out my buddies. He went in—I never met the clown, nor do I want to—I went out; he went in. My buddy, Mosier, was a radio operator. They were out on an op. The operation was going on the day I left, the day I got evacuated, where my battalion got cut off three times and fought their way out four times.

Kovic was operating the radio, the battalion net radio. He was by Mosier, and Mosier was running the regimental net. Like I said, we got cut off three times. It started getting heavy radio traffic, and Kovic couldn't handle it. So Henry [Mosier] swapped radios with him; Henry took the battalion. And then it got even thicker, and he needed regimental backup. And that weenie threw the handset on the ground, curled up in a ball and started crying. So my buddy Hank's got a radio handset in one ear, talking to battalion, for support,

a radio handset in the other ear, talking to regiment about support. They got out of there, and the good old gunny covered for that guy. None of this could appear anywhere, because of his family of Marine Corps history hero stuff.

So he came back to the States. To show you how pathetic he is, he got out of communications and became a sergeant in a grunt company, and went to Vietnam. If he hadn't stood in a rice paddy, he wouldn't be a quadriplegic or paraplegic, whatever he is. Of course, he also wouldn't have written the book, become a millionaire and had Oliver Stone make a movie about him.

My buddies, nor I, have seen that movie or read the book, nor will we ever. He even, in his book, wrote a line that Mosier told him. Henry said, if ever I see him, he'd like to ask him, "Why did you use that? I'm the one who told you about it, because you didn't know anything about it."

DePue: Do you remember what the line was?

Rafferty: Yeah, "The rounds going past you snap."

DePue: You heard of all this, I take it, from Mosier himself?

Rafferty: Yes I did.

DePue: Did you know anybody, in your experience, —that, you know, the first time they experienced combat... This is kind of like the *Red Badge of Courage* syndrome, where you see combat, and you perform very poorly, but after that experience, it steels your nerves, and you can perform better, afterwards.

Rafferty: When we went in on Starlite, I was shaking so hard on that hanger deck, I couldn't get rounds in my magazine for my M-14.

DePue: So you yourself experienced that.

Rafferty: Yeah I did. When we went in, as soon as you hit the ground, damn, it's noisy. Until that one round from the cannon cocker came in on us, it was just noise and yelling and people screaming and carrying on. You just started doing... You did what you were trained to do. We were supposed to run wire lines, hook up telephones, hook up switchboards.

DePue: But it doesn't sound like you or Mosier, either one, are willing to give Kovic the benefit of the doubt, that he improved his performance afterwards?

Rafferty: Nope. A whole battalion of Marines get wiped out, because he was crying, because he was scared. We were all scared. But, as I've told you, they're your buddies. You get past **you**; you take care of your buddies. And after we were there so long, it was **us**. It was us, then everybody else. Wire section took care of wire section and the com platoon.

If anybody outside came around, we just didn't tolerate it, you know? These new officers come around and try to tell you, "You're going to go do this." "Say what?" "You're not my captain." And then they feel called upon to point out that that would be considered insubordination. We would always come back with the line, "Well, our captain outranks you, and he told us we're going to do this. You go talk to him, lieutenant."

The most dangerous thing in the world, outside of a nineteen year-old American kid with a whole lot of ammunition and people to shoot at, is a brand new boot lieutenant. They get people killed a lot. They think they're still running war games. Hey, those weren't necessarily considered war games over there.

DePue: One of the questions I often ask people like you is, what did you think of the officers and the NCOs? You've already told me a lot about what you thought of one particular NCO, the gunny.

Rafferty: Yes.

DePue: But take him out of the picture. What did you think of the NCOs you worked with?

Rafferty: They were good. That man was the worst human being I've ever met in my life. And, unfortunately, he could break those NCOs in the Comm platoon. They were all career guys.

DePue: But the rest of them, you respected?

Rafferty: Yeah, pretty much, seriously. And the officers, except for a couple of them.

DePue: A couple of those were the green, second lieutenants?

Rafferty: Oh, we didn't respect them. We didn't even think about them. It's like, you say what you want; we're going to do this. Our officers, overall, except for our company commander who was kind of a joke...I can't remember his name, but he was a real heavy guy. He never spoke to anybody; he yelled. No matter what it was, he would yell. His face would just get twice as red as the top on that cup ever was, and he would just yell. At that time, I wasn't deaf, I didn't need to be this close to him and have him yelling (DePue laughs) I could hear him very well. And that would be whether you had messed up or whether you were doing something good, whether you had done something. He was a very, very profane person. Of course, so am I, now.

DePue: The theme that holds everything together that we've talked about, is the feeling you had for your fellow Marines.

Rafferty: Yes.

DePue: That obviously started right from the very beginning. But what was it... What's special about a Marine in combat? Can you express the feelings that you had?

Rafferty: You're not going to get left there. Even if you get killed, you're not going to be left there. They're going to take you back with them. We all knew that. We all knew we would never be out by ourselves and left, just like that night out there waiting for Lichy to come back. I knew Lich was going to come back. I wasn't sure what the end result of that was going to be, there for a while, but I knew Lichy would be back. I mean, there was no question. Somebody had to stay; somebody had to go. That's how much... And he was the same way with me. We knew we would come back.

And again, the Marine Corps, at least in the old Corps... I don't know if they do it anymore, but they still show the yellow footprints on their TV commercials. The second you get to boot camp, they start bonding you into a group. You're not a person; you're a group. You trust them; they trust you, and that's why do you do the things you do, not because you really want to, but not because I wasn't shaking like that, trying to load those rounds into that magazine. But my buddies were going in there.

DePue: But you didn't necessarily appreciate that, did you, at boot camp?

Rafferty: No, we thought it was all just a bunch of people, with stripes that we didn't have, being able to just mess with people constantly. They were very good at it, truthfully, messing with people. (both laugh)

The only thing is, and I still question, those three months in boot camp, we had to learn close order drill, rifle drill and marching and all that. They never taught how to go do the job you're assigned to do. Their claim was, you learn to march together; you learn to react as a unit, instead of an individual. I guess they're right about that, but the basic existence of the Marine Corps is to go shoot bad guys.

So, we had three months of boot camp, two weeks on a rifle range, and then went up to every training regimen for three weeks, I think, to read compasses, read maps. Very little of that was live fire. It was just running hills and doing stuff. We started actually training, using live ammunition and calling in air strikes and using mortars and big guns and all that, when we got to battalion. But, looking back at it, I think we should have done more of that, done more—

DePue: Patrolling and learning what to do in combat.

Rafferty: Yes.

DePue: Quick reaction things.

Rafferty: Yes, I really do. Of course, that would be considered heresy by the Marine Corps, so I probably better delete that, if I can, because I'll get in trouble with somebody.

DePue: Certainly, since the Vietnam War, the military has revolutionized how they train people.

Rafferty: Yes they have. I think one of the best things is, Mark, they honestly, honestly recognize and admit that there is such a condition as post-traumatic stress syndrome, and they're working with these kids a lot better. You know, we were treated as complete outsiders when we came home. We didn't belong in the Marine Corps; we didn't belong in civilian life; we didn't belong...anywhere. And we were just trying to get somebody to feel sorry for us.

DePue: Would you say that you yourself had PTSD coming back?

Rafferty: According to my doctor, I still do. When I told him I was going to come and talk this out, he said, "That would probably be the best thing you could do." And I'd appreciate you letting me know how it turns out. I go to him next week, so I guess we'll let him know next week that I think it helped tremendously. DePue: Now, we probably have addressed this before, but I think this is worth asking you again. What is it about your experiences that has led to PTSD, has led to your difficulties beyond that?

Rafferty: (sighs) I really didn't like the way we were treated when we came home. I didn't like the fact that we were totally ignored. I didn't like the fact that I went out to join the VFW, and I was told we didn't even fight a war, and they did. This was from some World War II guy. Like I told him, "I've got news for you. Anytime somebody's shooting at you, and you're shooting back, it's a war."

DePue: Was it especially hurtful, then, when a fellow veteran, World War II veteran, slighted you like they did?

Rafferty: Yeah.

DePue: Well, we've touched on that a couple times already.

Rafferty: Because if I had shot him, it wouldn't have been his arm. I don't wake up yelling or anything, but I still sleep a night through very, very seldom. There's still stuff. And even when I go to bed, when I take my hearing aids out, I still sense or hear a movement or sounds. Hearing sounds wakes me up, which, I guess, works really good when I'm out camping with my Boy Scouts, because they can't get out of their sleeping bags, outside their tents, without me knowing somebody's up moving around out there. Now the aggravating thing is, then I lay there awake, until I hear the tent zipper zip back up and hear them zip up their sleeping bag again.

DePue: Is that elevated levels of all the senses working, that you haven't been able to crank that down to the civilian level?

Rafferty: I think so; I really do. When I came home and got out, I moved up north to Aurora, because I couldn't find a job in Springfield. I was living with one of my sisters and her husband. [They] let me live with them and their seven or eight or nine kids, however many they had. I told my sister and the kids—they were little—don't touch me when I'm asleep. You don't have to yell. Just open the door, and say my name, and I'll wake up. Don't come up behind me and try to scare me, because I'll hit you. Not that I want to, but there's some things I haven't gotten under control.

Her and my brother in-law went out one night, and she asked me if I'd sleep in the baby's room, because I was sleeping downstairs, and I wouldn't be able to hear the baby if she woke up. I said, "Sure." So, did that. The next morning, we got up, and my sister, Catherine, said, "You weren't exaggerating, were you?" "About what?" She said, "I opened that door to Theresa's room about two inches, and you were sitting up on that bed looking around at the door saying, 'What do you want?'" "No, Sis, I wasn't kidding. I hear things." All my buddies and I go from a dead, sound sleep to wide awake.

When I was in the hospital at Great Lakes, something was waking me up at like 2:00 in the morning, I think it was, every morning. There was a sound coming through there. They had naval nurses up there, and they wore the white nurse's uniforms. I finally figured out...I woke up one time, and I laid there for the longest time, and I figured out what it was. That nurse would make her rounds at 2:00, and her slip was rubbing on the inside of her dress. I'm not making that up, either, but it was a disturbance in the sound. You hear that.

DePue: That takes me back to the night you were left out there, with the end of the wire, for a half an hour. I'm sure there wasn't a moment in your life that maybe your sound wasn't more acute than it was that evening.

Rafferty: It had to be, because, literally Mark, you couldn't see from here... How far do you think I am, sitting away from the recorder?

DePue: About two and a half feet.

Rafferty: You couldn't even see that far out. It's dark over there, because there weren't any big cities, so there were no reflected lights at all, more than the moon that night.

DePue: I don't know how much we've talked about this, but I'm curious of your reaction. In 1990/'91, we're really in the first shooting war that we had been. Grenada, Panama, those were very short, but now you've got Desert Shield and Desert Storm, going over in Iraq, very short war. But then, afterwards,

those units came back. That's a lot of the National Guard units and Reserve units came back, as well. Do you remember watching and experiencing the celebrations and the way they were treated, versus the way you were treated?

Rafferty: Very few of them, because it really upset me. Nothing against the guys that came home, seriously. But I used to think that the whole country was treating them that way, and the whole country totally turned their backs on us, except our families, some members of our families, some of the guys' families.

DePue: Some of the explanation for that is kind of a collective sense of guilt over the way you guys **were** treated, when you came home.

Rafferty: It was, and I understand that. But it was kind of tough, you know.

DePue: It made you angry?

Rafferty: No, it just...It disappointed me, because we didn't need major parades down San Francisco or down New York, whatever. But it would have been nice, had we been acknowledged, just a little portion of what they'd done.

DePue: How do you feel, then, about our current war, and the way the veterans today are treated when they come home?

Rafferty: I don't know that they're getting treated as well as the media is making out. There have been more veterans from Iraq who've killed themselves than have been killed in Iraq. They committed suicide. There's something majorly wrong.

Being given firearms and ammunition and told, "Go get the bad guys," when you're a kid, eighteen, nineteen years old, that's pretty dang exciting. You can actually go out and prove to the world you're this major bad ass; going to go shoot somebody. The other side of it is, they're going to be shooting at you, and you're going to lose buddies, and you're going to lose people, and people are going to lose parts, and you're never going to be what you were. You can't be.

They closed Walter Reed Hospital, because they let it deteriorate **so** badly. This is wrong. Obviously, they're treating the veterans coming back better, but really great? I'm not sure about, Mark. There's nothing you can do to give it back, to give back what was lost before you went overseas and did that stuff, because you're going to see bad, nasty stuff; you really are. Mine was forty-six years ago, I think, and I still see it. When the movie, *Platoon*, came out, a lot of veterans were—

DePue: That was '87 or '88.

Rafferty: Something like that. A lot of veterans organizations recommended that Nam vets take their significant other with them. Except for the Hollywood crap

between the two sergeants, because you just didn't do that. So my wife and I went to it, and my wife's major comment was, "Did you and your buddies all cuss like that all the time?"

I said, "Yeah." There was nobody there; it was us. We were scared half out of our minds most of the time. There weren't any moms or sisters or wives; there weren't any women around there weren't any kids around us. The f-word came out a whole lot, about describing almost everything and everybody. We weren't trying to be obscene or profane or nasty, it's just, you know, it's hard to say, but yeah, we did. Honest to god, we cussed like Marines.

DePue: (laughing) Or sailors.

Rafferty: Couldn't get her convinced that there was reason to do that.

DePue: So, the Marines cuss better than sailors?

Rafferty: I think so.

DePue: What do you think about the way society now looks at PTSD? It's been called a variety of things, over the history of warfare.

Rafferty: I think they're finally starting to accept that it is, it's a mental thing. It's like anything else; some guys are going to try to get away with everything they can get away with. But most of the people that are suffering from that, seriously, are really suffering. It is a condition; it is. My hands are a mess, and I asked my doctor, "What are we going to do about that?" And he said, "We're not going to do anything about that. That's a symbol of you suffering from PTSD," or whatever they call it.

DePue: When you say your hands are a mess, is it cuts and scars?

Rafferty: I chew them constantly, always. I keep saying, "I've got to quit doing that." I'm sixty-seven years old. I very seldom bite my fingernails, but I chew around the ends of them. A sixty-seven year-old man shouldn't be doing that kind of stuff.

DePue: How would you like to finish up today?

Rafferty: I got to tell my little stories. I think I corrected some historical things that had been terribly wrong, at least from my point of view. I would just, again, like to thank you for your patience and letting me talk. I've never talked.

DePue: I think it's very important, and I really appreciate your taking the time to talk about things like the PTSD, which needs to be understood much more, and the connection, the explanations of why people suffer from it. And it can differ from soldier to soldier, can't it?

Rafferty: It can; it truthfully can. I saw, when I was coming home on the plane, on the Medevac plane, MTS, military transport system, whatever, there were a couple of guys there that were totally shell shocked. Not post-traumatic stress, they were messed up.

They had them on stretchers, strapped into the stretchers, with leather shackles around their wrists and their legs. They'd lay there, and they would talk just as calmly as you and I are. Then, all of a sudden, one or the other would just go off and scare everybody on the airplane. We're always checking, looking back, checking, to make sure that they were on those stretchers, where they belonged.

There were nurses on that flight that we came out on, and one of those guys got very disgusting with one of the nurses. He informed her that when he got up, he was going to rip her throat out, in just the calmest, most deadly voice I've ever heard.

DePue: That was one of the guys that had been strapped in?

Rafferty: Yeah. And, you know, what did they do with them? Did they confine them to a mental ward in a VA hospital and keep them strapped in for the rest of their lives? Since I didn't know who they were or what outfit they came out of, I have no idea. Our compensation, or my compensation, was coming home and drinking beer by the ocean and being really stupid for a long time.

DePue: Well, it was not until the 1990s that a lot of the World War II veterans really started to reflect on their experiences. You mentioned *Platoon*, but there were even some movies like *Saving Private Ryan* and *Band of Brothers*, and the books that were written. Suddenly, the American public found out and were concerned about the World War II veterans. Was that far removed? Is that something that you think is necessary for this?

Rafferty: I do. Like I said, I woke up on my birthday this year, and before I got out of bed, I thought, "I beat the government for forty-six years now." Like, our first reunion was in 1989. We had not seen each other since '65. My buddy, Hank Mosier, put it together, put that first reunion together.

The night he called me, he said—after he made sure I knew who he was, which I did. This is so weird. I hadn't seen or spoken to that man from 1963 until 1989. We were getting ready to sit down to eat dinner. I answered the phone, and he said, "Is this Pete Rafferty?" And I said, "Yeah." He said, "Are you still living on East Jackson Street in Springfield?" And I said, "Yeah." And he said, "Well Pete, you probably don't remember me." He said, "This is Henry," and I says, "Mosier." You know? It's just weird.

And to this day, we call each other, and we start talking. We don't even say who we are. We know who we're talking to. But he said it had been a long enough period that he thought it was time for us to do some healing.

I think, if this could be done earlier, like if this could have been done years ago, everything would be more clear, but I think it would be too clear. I think you need to...I think the veterans need to get some distance and some time. Unfortunately, not a lot of time, because then you can't get to a lot of them. Then it's all gone forever, and it shouldn't be gone forever. Whatever it did, Mark, it made my buddies and I what we are.

There's only been one failure out of the communications—outside of Kovic, and he didn't count anyway. One of the old guys, one of our buddies, a guy named Pepowski. I have no idea what his first name was. He was either Pepowski or "Little Ski," because we had two Polish guys in the outfit. He was an alcoholic before he went into the Marine Corps. When we came home, the last anybody heard of him, his family had totally disowned him. He was living on the streets somewhere, staying drunk, doing drugs and mooching money.

But all the rest of my buddies did good. They all got respectable jobs. They've all retired; we've all retired now, raised kids. Some of my buddies were married like three and four and five times, because, since they came home, they got married. They weren't ready for that, and, unfortunately, the young ladies that married them had no idea what they were getting into, except for Lichy. Lichy became a very young father. They brought him back from Vietnam to marry his fiancé, and he and that lady are still together.

DePue: And how many have you had, just one?

Rafferty: Yeah.

DePue: That's something to be proud of.

Rafferty: Yeah, thirty-eight plus years.

DePue: Well, I really appreciate you taking the time to do this, to help future generations to understand what your experiences were, because I think it is very important. I'm happy that we're able to have the conversation and maybe help a little bit ourselves.

Rafferty: Thank you. I'm so very thankful you did this, except now I've got to tell that dang doctor at the VA, she may have been right. She ain't been right about anything with me yet.

DePue: Well, you've overcome that, perhaps.

Rafferty: I guess.

DePue: Thank you, Pete.

Rafferty: Thank you. (End of Interview)