

Interview with Paul Lambert

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Murgatroyd: Good morning. This is Tom Murgatroyd, and today is the 8th of June, 2011. I'm in Jacksonville, Illinois, with Paul Lambert, who is going to be interviewed, as a result of his name being forwarded to us, as part of the Abraham Lincoln Presidential Library Veterans Remember oral history project. So we're here on West Morton Road at Westtown Ford, where Paul is employed. So we'll start with, first of all, good morning Paul.

Lambert: Good morning.

Murgatroyd: How are you doing?

Lambert: Fine.

Murgatroyd: A little background here. If you would, tell us when and where you were born.

Lambert: I was born on March 29, 1949, in Jacksonville, Illinois, at Holy Cross Hospital.

Murgatroyd: And your parents were?

Lambert: My dad was Ken Lambert, and my mother was Gertrude Dragie Lambert.

Murgatroyd: And your early life was in Jacksonville. Can you tell us where you went to school and when you graduated and what some of your activities were?

Lambert: Well, I went to Our Saviors [School] from [grades] one to eight and graduated from there to Routt High School. I attended one year in the old Routt, before it burnt to the ground, and finished in the new Routt. I played football, only because my brother forced me to. But I enjoyed it, and it helped me in the long run to have that.

Murgatroyd: After high school, did you go on to college?

Lambert: Yeah, I got a football ride with the College of DuPage, up around Chicago, and was playing football up there and doing well, until I came home on leave on...I think it was Easter break. Do you want me to tell you about—

Murgatroyd: What year was this?

Lambert: This would be in 1969, so I graduated in '68.

Murgatroyd: You graduated from high school in '68?

Lambert: Yes.

Murgatroyd: Well, before we get to how you got into the military, while you were growing up and looking back at your family history and everything, was anybody in your family in the military?

Lambert: Yeah. My father was in World War II. He was under Patton and saw a lot of action in Europe. He got the Bronze Star from his service there. When I told him I enlisted in the Marine Corps, he says, "You did what?" (chuckles) But we got over that. My brother, Chuck Lambert, he was in the Army, and he spent most of his tour in Naples, Italy. He was in communications.

Murgatroyd: And Chuck is older than you?

Lambert: Yeah, he's two years older than I am.

Murgatroyd: Did you ever, in grade school, high school, or anything, have any interest in the military, just before you came to it?

Lambert: No, but I did like John Wayne; he wasn't in the service. But no, I didn't say, "Oh, when I get out of school, I'm going to go in the Marine Corps," or whatever, like that.

Murgatroyd: Tell us what you were doing when you first came to your decision to join the military, where you were.

Lambert: I was still in college. I came home for, I think it was Easter break. I stopped at Yording's filling station [Yording's Standard Service]. For those that are familiar with Jacksonville, that was a nice place to get gas. So I was there getting gas, and a friend of mine was pumping gas at the time, and I said, "I

thought you were in college." And he goes, "Yeah, I got to partying too much and flunked out." And he says that, "I got a draft notice." I said, "Oh really." And he says, "Yeah." He says, "I don't know what I'm going to do, which branch of the service I'm going in," he says, "but a recruiter told me they had what they call a buddy plan, where two friends could go in and go through boot camp together." So, he started to talk me into this little project, and I thought, well, I'll have to go some time, so I might as well go when I know somebody.

Murgatroyd: Yeah.

Lambert: So I said, "Yeah, I'll go. What do we need to do?" So we decided what branch of the service we were going to go in. Navy? "No. I don't like the water." And he says, "How about the Air Force?" [I responded,] "No, I don't like to fly." So eventually we ended up with the Marine Corps.

I said, "I'm only going in for two years. I'm not going any more." So we got over to Springfield, to the recruiter's office. [He was] a good recruiter, because he talked me into four years. He said, "You're not giving the Marine Corps a chance with two years. You need to..." So I went in for four years.

Murgatroyd: That was your first experience with a good salesman.

Lambert: Yeah, yeah, that enlightened me.

Murgatroyd: So, in addition to the recruiter's sales job, what was your main reason for the Marine Corps?

Lambert: I heard a lot about the Marine Corps, just offhandedly, from people, like that it was a tough unit, and they don't pick everybody. At that time it was pretty selective as to who they would take into it. So that was kind of a, you know, a call, too.

Murgatroyd: At the time that you decided to enlist in the Marine Corps, you weren't married, but did you have a girlfriend or anybody that was holding you back, here in Jacksonville?

Lambert: No, not really. I had a girlfriend, but we had split up. I started dating my old girlfriend, you know, and it wasn't anything real serious at the time. [This would be] something different, you know?

I knew I was going to go to Nam [Vietnam] if I went in. That was just a given. So I didn't have any hopes of not doing that. But I just thought, you know, the big thing about going in with my friend. Little did I know what that really meant. Later on, I figured that out.

Murgatroyd: How did staying with your friend work out? Were you able to stay with him?

Lambert: Yeah. We went through boot camp together. Of course in boot camp there wasn't any socializing. I saw him from a distance, and we might have waved, if nobody else was watching, because it wasn't a party time; you worked every day you were there.

Murgatroyd: Did the Selective Service have any play into your reason to join the Marines, at all?

Lambert: No, no.

Murgatroyd: Of course, during that time, during the late '60s and everything, not only in Jacksonville, but all over the place, there was a lot of protests and a lot of feelings back and forth about the Vietnam War. Before you decided to join the military, did you have any feelings, one way or the other, about the Vietnam experience or what we were doing?

Lambert: No. I didn't belong to any [groups] or go to rallies and all that, against the war or anything like that. It might have been because my father and my brother were in the service that I thought that that was the manly thing to do at the time, if you were called to it.

Murgatroyd: So you enlisted in the Marine Corps, and when did you report for basic training, for boot camp?

Lambert: April 8th, 1969.

Murgatroyd: Sixty-nine. So tell me about boot camp.

Lambert: Oh, it was lovely. (laughs)

Murgatroyd: Where was it?

Lambert: It was in San Diego, nice sunny San Diego, beach front property. We flew out of St. Louis, towards the evening. We ended up in San Diego Airport. As we got off, at the airport, we met a group of sharply dressed Marines that were very loud in their communications to us (chuckles). And I heard a lot of words that I had never heard before and heard a lot of them after that.

They ordered us to stand in a straight line, nose to the back of the head of the guy in front of you, and no "gawking around," as they said. At that time, they'd put their hands on you; like if you looked to the right or left, and you weren't supposed to, you'd get a smack on the back of the head and verbal reprimand after that.

And then, after everybody was assembled in that line, they marched us out to the front of the... I assumed was the front of the airport, because I'd never been there before. They instructed us how to stand at parade rest, and

the same thing, just arms back behind you, grasped, with your legs out and spread apart and your [eyes] straight ahead, no gawking around.

Then a big school bus-like thing pulls up, and we all hurry up into there. Now, a lot of them had little packs with, I guess, clothes in it that they brought. I was informed not to bring anything, so I didn't, but some did.

They drove us out to the Marine Corps boot camp area, and we pulled up on the bus and yell, yell, "Get out, get out, get out," with four letter words mixed in there. And there was a set of pairs of feet, drawn on the pavement out there. You were to go to those, pick a pair, and stand there at attention. Some had their bags in their hand and some didn't. Some put them down. The ones that didn't put them down got smacked on the back of the head, to put them down.

And then, from there, we went right to get our hair shaved off. No talking, no talking, just straight behind, eyeball to back of head, all the way through it. About then it was probably 7:30, 8:00; it was dark. We went through, got our hair cut. Then they did kind of like a cavity search of everybody, you know. And you boxed up all your clothes you had on, because you got new clothes, and you sent it [the box] home to your parents or whoever.

Murgatroyd: So they didn't let you keep them anywhere?

Lambert: No.

Murgatroyd: They didn't keep them in storage for you?

Lambert: No, no, no. They sent them home, because you wrote out the card, the little card that they stamped on top of it. And they sent them home.

Then, they did us a little impromptu explanation as to what they expected of us. I couldn't tell you what they said, because I was in a daze at that time. This was probably around midnight, something like that. At the time, there at San Diego, they had Quonset huts, metal Quonset huts. They were progressing to the newer, two-decker type, but they had us go into these and pick a cot out.

It seemed like I just laid down, and the next thing I know, there's this garbage can, flying in from the front door to the back, making all kinds of racket and noise. At this time, it was 4:30 I believe, and they had us fall out. That's when our instructions began.

Murgatroyd: Good morning, San Diego.

Lambert: Yeah, good morning.

Murgatroyd: Overall, you were in boot camp for how many weeks?

Lambert: Six weeks. Now that I look back on it, it proved to save me later, when my experience was in Nam. Basically, you learn to react immediately; you didn't hesitate. We had numerous instructions on first aid and handling wounds, what to do and all that. Man, I tell you, that was lifesaving on several occasions for me, later on, especially for the person I was helping. (laughs)

Murgatroyd: Exactly.

Lambert: So I mean, yeah, you didn't think about what you were doing. You reacted to it and did it.

Murgatroyd: As you remember back to basic and your first few weeks in the military, they're tough, and they're different than what you'd been used to. What was it, do you think, that allowed you to cope with the first experience with the military?

Lambert: I thought, they're there to help me. Now, I didn't think that anything they did or said or wanted me to do was not for a reason. I knew they were probably trying to do this to see what I would do under pressure.

We had one individual in our squad that just couldn't take it, you know. He basically...I don't know if he went nuts or not, but he certainly acted like he was. So, that just reinforced the fact that you've got to stay focused on what's at hand, and they made us stay focused. (laughs)

Murgatroyd: How many were in a class or in the squad, let's say?

Lambert: Oh man, that's hard to remember. There was quite a few. I'm going to say there was probably at least, I want to say fifty, maybe? There was quite a few of us.

Murgatroyd: Do you remember how many of them didn't go on with you?

Lambert: We only lost, I think, three. Now, they had what they called a motivational platoon. Even though this was volunteer...You know, the Marine Corps at that time was volunteers. They didn't take anything but volunteers. Later, they changed that somewhat.

So everybody that was there wanted to be there, which helped. But still, you had some that weren't expecting what was happening to them, and it was quite physical. You were punished physically. The one thing that just aggravated the daylights out of me was when they'd say, "Ready, begin." And they didn't say, "We're going to go a hundred of these." or "We're going to do fifty of these." It's just, "Ready begin," and you did them until they thought you did enough.

Murgatroyd: Pushups, pull-ups, whatever.

Lambert: Which could be two hundred, three hundred. If I knew that I was just going to do a hundred, well then I could count, okay I'm going to...you know? But you just didn't know. And you were punished. If, like, one person did something, everybody paid.

Murgatroyd: Right.

Lambert: So that made you kind of police your own there. You know, "Hey, don't be doing this, or you're going to get everybody in trouble."

Murgatroyd: So it's a little bit tougher kind of love than being with the nuns, a little bit different.

Lambert: Pretty close. (laughs)

Murgatroyd: Close, but a different uniform.

Lambert: Pretty close. (laughing) They just didn't have a ruler.

Murgatroyd: That's right; that's right. After you finished boot camp, what did you do then, and what kind of training did you receive and where?

Lambert: We went to advanced infantry training, which was at Camp Pendleton, a big, big base, a big base. At this time is when the buddy system disappeared. My friend, Mike Roach is his name, he went to plumbing school at El Toro Air Base.

Murgatroyd: Right.

Lambert: All right? And I went to Advanced Infantry Training. So that's when it [the buddy system] ceased to exist. But when you went to Camp Pendleton, the verbal abuse disappeared. "You were Marines," at that time, is what they basically said. Now there was still discipline, as far as military bearing and stuff like that, but you were treated as if you knew what you were doing, because they trained you for it.

Now my training was in weapons and demolition. I even shot a flamethrower and made napalm too, so it's kind of odd. We blew things up and learned how to do that.

Murgatroyd: Just what every boy wants to do.

Lambert: Whatever they to do. Then we shot 106 recoilless rifles, 3.5 rocket launchers, LAW [lightweight automated Howitzer]. They just started to come out with that.

Murgatroyd: What was that again now?

Lambert: The LAW. That was like a portable, like a 3.5 rocket launcher, but you would extend it to arm it. You see a lot of them. Not now, because I think they've changed it even again, but it was only about, maybe 2-foot long and extended out another foot, when you pulled it apart. An arming device, when you pulled it out, extended it, [an] arming device activated. So all you had to do is mag; it was a mag [magazine] type thing.

Murgatroyd: And it was shoulder held?

Lambert: Shoulder, non-recoilless. You just squeezed the mag off and shot the rocket out. And then 60 mortar round, we shot those. And M79 rocket launcher. We called it a blooper. You didn't shoot it straight; you lobbed it in. It just shot, lobbed a shell in. It's like a big, round shotgun. You just breach load it.

Murgatroyd: Looking back at that experience, with weapons and weapons familiarization, did that help out a lot, later on?

Lambert: Yeah. You had to break them down. You had to clean them. We had M60 machine guns we had to clean and stuff like that, M14s. Funny enough, we never were introduced to M16s until I got to Nam. That's the first time I ever seen one. Why, I don't know.

Murgatroyd: Any handguns at all?

Lambert: Forty-fives. That was their sidearm, is a 45. Not everybody got one, because they just issued them to certain people. Mostly officers had them, stuff like that.

Murgatroyd: So you finished with your AIT [advanced infantry training] there at Pendleton, about what time? Still in 1971?

Lambert: No it was 1969.

Murgatroyd: I'm sorry, '69.

Lambert: It was still '69. I think it was probably... Let's see June, July. It would have been around July, I think.

Murgatroyd: And from there, did you take some leave?

Lambert: Yeah. Of course, we got our orders, and mine was overseas. I think they just said, your destination, Da Nang, something like that. So I came home for... I think it was thirty days. I think it was quite a wait, thirty days.



Paul Lambert's official Marine Corps photo, circa 1969.

Murgatroyd: When you came home, as a brand newly minted, hair shaved off Marine, any experiences when you first came home on that first leave, after basic and AIT?

Lambert: I had an interesting thing happen to me at the L.A. [Los Angeles] airport. They take us to the airport, because not everybody is going the same place. So they drop us off, and then it's our part to get to where we needed to go. I went in to get a cup of coffee at this little stand they had there. I was just sitting there, and you could tell the new booties that came out of the basket, you know.

This flower child decided to come up and talk to me. I was just sitting there, minding my own business— and she's a pretty good looking girl — comes up next to me and sits down. I just looked over and didn't think anything of it. Pretty soon she nudges me, and she says, "I see you're in the Marine Corps." And I go, "Yes, yes ma'am, I am." (chuckles) And she says, "You're going over to Nam, aren't you?" And I said, "Yes, yes that's where I'm going." She says, "How would you like not to go over there?" I said, "What do you mean?" She says, "I can fix it so you don't have to. We can take off right now, and you won't have to worry about the Marine Corps." I said, "That sounds real good, but for one thing. If I don't go, somebody's going in my place, and I can't live with that. Sorry, thanks for the invitation." Well, she puffed and stuffed and took off.

Murgatroyd: She was offering you some kind of out.

Lambert: I didn't really care. (chuckles)

Murgatroyd: Yeah, that's right'; that's right. So after your leave, back in Jacksonville, you went overseas. Tell me about your first arrival in Vietnam.

Lambert: I think there was probably 100 of us, something like that, and we all had the same orders, except there was a few of us that had the same orders but a different color paper. I just figured they ran out of paper and grabbed some different color to finish it out. Well anyhow, found out later what that was all about.

They flew us out of California, L.A. I think it was out of there; it might have been the Marine Corps base there, El Toro. We stopped on an island—I think it was Wake—and then we went into Okinawa, and that's where we departed. I think we stayed overnight in Okinawa, and then we got onto a plane and went into Da Nang. We flew in [into] Da Nang, and they had us all out on the tarmac, walking us to the beautiful island or country of Vietnam. And they said, "Okay," and I looked off to the side there, and there was a 2-by [pickup truck with 2-wheel drive] and a 6-by [6 x 6 military vehicle] sitting over there.

The Gunny that was in front of us said, "All right, I'm going to read off names, and the ones I read off I want in that 6-by." I guess there was a couple

6-bys over there, but just one 2-by. And he kept reading off these names, you know, and I'm waiting for my name to be read off, and the guy was standing there, you know? He got down; the two 6-bys were gone, and just the ones that had all the different colored orders [were left.] "Okay," he says, "You guys get over to that 2-by." No word of where we're going or what we're going to do.

So we drive for quite a while, get to the edge of Da Nang, and I come up to this little compound, with a brick wall around it and concertina wire on the top. A sign out front says, the Combined Action Program. I'm thinking, I've never heard of this Combined Action Program. So we get inside, and they get us off there, and they said, "You're probably wondering what you're here for." And we said, "Yes sir, we are." And he says, "You guys have volunteered for the Combined Action Program¹, okay?" "What is that?" And he explained it to us.

Murgatroyd: This was an officer or an NCO [non-commissioned officer]?

Lambert: I think it was a second lieutenant, I believe. In the CAG units themselves... Now, I'll switch back and forth from CAP to CAG, because—

Murgatroyd: Yeah, explain the difference.

Lambert: [There was] the Combined Action Program; under that was Combined Action Groups, and those broke off into CAG units. There was different ones, and then they designated them by the letters.

When I first knew I was going over, I thought, I'm going to have numbers [of other Marines] to be mixed in with, so I'm going to be safe. I'll be with a company. We'll go out and just go out to have an operation, and we'll come back. And then, three or four days later we'll go out for another." You know, stuff like that.

Murgatroyd: There would always be someone around to be with.

Lambert: Yeah, there would always be a lot of people somewhere, you know. Well, no. We broke down into CAGs. That meant that there was going to be thirteen Marines and one corpsman. Then later on, a dog handler would come out periodically. So I went from a company to a squad, basically, which is fine.

They told us what we were going to do was, we were going to be placed in a village. Our responsibility was to protect that village. We were going to be working with what they called PFs [militia soldiers of the Republic of South Vietnam], and that was popular forces. It was like our minutemen war, back in the 1700s. There was a structure in that village that

¹ The Combined Action Program was a United States Marine Corps operational initiative implemented in the Vietnam War. It proved to be one of the most effective counterinsurgency tools developed during that conflict.

we had to work with, like their mayor and stuff like that. We would help with, maybe an irrigation system. The basic thing was that we were there to ensure that these villagers were safe enough to do their farming, whatever they needed to do, without the VC [Viet Cong] coming in.

Now, basically, we were there to make sure that their crops weren't stolen, because what the VC would do, when they go into a village, they would take stuff for their supplies. You know, like they'd take their rice and whatever else they would have, for their [the VC's] use. So, we were there to make sure that didn't happen.

We were just a thorn in their sides, basically. You didn't want to create a pattern, because we didn't stay in one area. We had to move around. We were a real mobile unit, because if you set a pattern, the next thing you know, you're going to be ambushed. We were always shot at anyhow, but you didn't want a big billboard saying, "We're here, so come and get us."

Murgatroyd: While there at Da Nang and after you're introduced to the concept of the program and the CAG, how long were you trained or kept there, before you went to the field?

Lambert: We were probably there two weeks, within that period of time. I believe it was just two weeks. They wanted to make sure that we weren't going to be a hindrance to these people when we went out there, because we had to learn how to communicate with them.

So, we learned different phrases and languages because, if you didn't say something to a villager the right way, it could be an insult. Like, if we wanted one of them to come to us, like any [red] blooded American, you'd have your hand up and your fingers coming towards you. Well, that was an insult. So you had to have your hand level and lower your fingers down and wave them to you that way. That was the way you did that.

Murgatroyd: Just cultural differences.

Lambert: Yeah, just little bitty things make a big difference. Then, if you shook hands with them, you didn't shake single-handed; you shook with both hands and bowed a little bit forward. That showed respect, just little things like that, that we would take for granted. We'd just say, "Hey, how you doing?" and shake his hand, and he's thinking, "This guy's a real jerk." Just little things.

Murgatroyd: I forgot to ask you this, but I'll ask you now. What was your actual MOS [military occupational specialty] that you carried at the time, when you got to Vietnam?

Lambert: It was weapons. Ask me the number; I couldn't tell you.

Murgatroyd: Well, I'm sure they've changed too.

Lambert: Yeah. But that was it basically. And I carried a demolitions pack with me that had C4 [composition four explosive] and caps and stuff like that.

Murgatroyd: So you had special demolitions training, other than, maybe more than other people on the squad had.

Lambert: Yeah. The funny thing is, the only time I ever used that C4 was to cook my C-ration [individual canned, precooked meal].

Murgatroyd: C-ration?

Lambert: Yeah, just break off the little piece and light it. As long as you didn't stomp it out, you were fine.

Murgatroyd: When you left Da Nang, how did you get to your first village?

Lambert: We went from Da Nang to Chu Lai, and from Chu Lai we were to be dispersed to our CAGs. Now, we didn't know where we were going until we got to Chu Lai. At Chu Lai, they told us which CAG units we were going to. Me and two other guys—that went through training, (as far as flying over and I'm knowing them—were going to the same CAG. They said, "You guys are going to CAG 1-3-5." So, okay.

Later that evening, the Gunny came, and he says, "Now, you don't have to go, but we're having memorial services for a unit that was wiped out, and we'd like for everybody to be there." So we went, and the minister was up there, talking about this unit and how heroic they were and that they all got killed in their efforts and all that. And he says, "And this is in remembrance of CAG 1-3-5." The guy next to me punched me, and he says, "Isn't that where we're going?" I said, "Yeah, that's where we're going."

Murgatroyd: And these services that you went to, they were in Chu Lai?

Lambert: Yeah, they were in Chu Lai.

Murgatroyd: Before you actually got to the field.

Lambert: Yeah, before we got out. The next morning, we were going out to start that up again.

Murgatroyd: How did that make you feel?

Lambert: It made me not even think I was ever coming home. From that day on, I never thought I was coming home. I figured, that was it.

Murgatroyd: How often did you have any mail contact or anything with home, with your folks?

Lambert: The only way we could get to where we were at was by helicopter. That's how we got out there to begin with. We would get letters, and they'd be weeks old, but we'd get mail. At that time, it wasn't like it is now. [Now,] I could carry my cell phone and call home. We used little tape recorders sometimes, and we'd send messages back and forth, which was just amazing then.

Murgatroyd: Were you able to share like in a letter or anything, back home, when you first found out the extent of what you might be doing when you got in country? Or that wasn't anything that you wanted to share?

Lambert: Because they didn't want information to get out, if we sent anything, by the time it got home it was blacked out. They checked everything out. Yeah, there wasn't anything that we wanted to talk about.

Murgatroyd: So you get out to your first experience, you, fourteen other people and a Navy corpsman.

Lambert: There was just three of us that went out that day, and there were some already there who were going to come by.

Murgatroyd: Others already there. Can you remember the name of the...or what was the closest named town or village? It was just somewhere near Chu Lai?

Lambert: The maps that we had were French maps, and they showed villages that weren't there anymore, because these were old maps. At one time, we went into what was supposed to be a village, and it wasn't there anymore. There was a real old lady there that was pulling a cart, and she kept saying...It sounded like she was talking to us in French, and she was. She thought we were French troops.

Murgatroyd: (chuckles) Can you remember your first night?

Lambert: Oh yeah. I remember it like it happened yesterday. Flying out, the helicopter pilot turned around and says to us, in flowery language, that as soon as he hit the deck, he wasn't going to...He said, "I'm not going to put down. I'm going to run my skids on the deck, and I want you guys out of my f-ing plane." So, we jumped out (chuckles) when it got there, and he took off. The troops that were already there met us there, and they had a little hooch, [hut or simple dwelling], kind of like a made up village there. They had this little hooch that we went to, and they had the radio in there.

I had this pack on my back, and they dispersed everybody out. Everybody didn't stay in one area, but I'd stayed there, where the radio was. There was this bench that was about...It was probably about eight inches wide and two foot long. I edged up on the end of it and rested my pack on the back, behind me. And then that's how I slept that night, or tried to, and put my weapon across my chest.

About 2:00 in the morning, all hell broke loose, explosions, small arms fire. So, here I am trying to shuck that pack off my back and get somewhere where I could shoot or whatever. It just happened. I mean, it was just like a quick thing, just (snaps fingers), maybe five minutes, ten minutes, bam, bam, bam, boom, boom.

And here they come, carrying this PF into the structure there. He armed a LAW by extending it, and he was going to fire it. When he extended it, he didn't fire it. He figured he'd put it back together, so he closed it, one hand in the front and one hand in the back. As soon as he closed it, it went off, blew his fingers off of both hands. His bones were sticking up and blood everywhere and screaming and yelling. That was my first experience with Vietnam, and it didn't get better. (laughs)

Murgatroyd: I'm sure the Navy Corpsman had some help there or tried to help.

Lambert: Yeah.

Murgatroyd: Speaking of injuries and everything, how did you find the type of care that you saw given by the Navy corpsmen? Talk a little about that.

Lambert: Oh, excellent, excellent. We ended up having two corpsmen, at the time I was there. One, I had the misfortune of medevac'ing him out of the unit, because he got shrapnel from tripping a booby trap.

The other one was from Hawaii. He looked like an Oriental, which came to be a big problem for when we had the dog handlers come in. The dog would key on him whenever he saw him. He couldn't get near that dog. That dog was going to tear him up. That was the only thing. The funny part of that corpsman, and I can't remember his name, nice, nice person. I got out of there before I knew whatever happened to him, if he's still alive or not. But, he got a sore on his leg and required a shot, with a needle. Well, I got to do that. And he says, "Now, throw it like a dart." (laughing). After three tries he says, "Just stick it in." (laughs) So I got a little punishment back on him.

Murgatroyd: A little bit of that. Yeah, he knew what he was doing to other people then.

Lambert: Oh yeah.

Murgatroyd: The area you first went into, did you pretty much stay in the same general province area?

Lambert: We had an area of responsibility, and that's what each CAG was. Our area was, it was...I want to say, Van Tron, stuff like that. There was provinces and everything; I'd have to look it up to name it. But that was our area of responsibility. So we were mobile through that whole area, and we ran operations every day; we had to. You were constantly cultivating the area to

make them know that you were there. So, there wasn't any, "Let's not go. Yeah, we'll just stay here; they won't know." Yeah. (chuckles)

We had a few occasions where we had intel [intelligence], because the villagers would tell you. They knew when somebody...because they all look alike to us, because we didn't know. But, even from North Vietnam to South Vietnam, there's a difference. There's just like, somebody in Chicago comes down to Springfield. You're going to know it, if you talk to them. Well, that's the way they were. They'd say, "That guy over here, he doesn't speak—"

Murgatroyd: He's not from around here.

Lambert: "He's not from here." So you'd know, head's up on some of that stuff. Now you had to be careful, too. Here's a little thing that just blew my mind. We had assigned to us a Kit Carson² scout; they called them Kit Carson scouts. A Kit Carson scout was an individual that was captured, a North Vietnamese, that was captured and indoctrinated into the South Vietnamese way, I guess. We had to trust this guy to lead us on these operations. Hmm...just didn't seem right to me. (laughing)

Murgatroyd: Yeah.

Lambert: He was on the other team, not long ago. What's the motivation here? And I let it be known to him that, if I ever thought that he took us somewhere where it was intentional, he was going to be the first to find out about it. He kind of understood that. He was a very, very, very vicious individual. He enjoyed his work, and he worked quite often. I think, eventually, he disappeared. I don't know what happened to him or if he saw the light and went home. I don't know.

Murgatroyd: What was the rank structure within your squad?

Lambert: The highest ranking individual in our squad, and none of us wore insignia; none of us wore rank. I was a sergeant and then it went from corporal to lance corporal.

Murgatroyd: So, he'd be like an E-5 [an NCO]

Lambert: Yeah.

Murgatroyd: And then everything flowed down from there?

Lambert: Yeah, E4, E3, E2.

² Belonging to a special program, initially created by the U.S. Marine Corps during the Vietnam War, involving the use of former Viet Cong combatants as intelligence scouts for American infantry.

Murgatroyd: Did you ever have any dealings or run into any regular South Vietnamese military?

Lambert: Yes, and that was quite interesting. They came into this village we were in. They showed up. I would say they were lost. It just appeared to me that they didn't know where they were at. They had one individual that could speak English, and we talked to him. And they said, "We're going to run an operation in this area right here," and he pointed over to this kind of a hill-like area. It had a bunch of hedge rows and stuff like that. "And we're going to clear all that. We're going to take all that over," something like that.

We thought, "Okay, have at it." So we just kind of stood by and watched, and it was interesting. He put all his men on line, and they went up that hill. Pretty soon, boom! And then a little more, then, boom! A little more. I thought, "At least he's clearing it out for us." I don't know what he was thinking.

Murgatroyd: Using his people.

Lambert: That's the experience we had with them. Other than that, we never ran any operations with them or anything like that.

Murgatroyd: About how many villagers, indigenous citizens, were there in a village?

Lambert: The map would show a village there, and it wasn't there. It might be rubble and stuff like that, where it once was. Sometimes they would go in there and would build up as much as they could in a certain area. A lot of times, just all of a sudden, all of the sudden, you'd run into a pop-up village that wasn't. But it's there in front of you, and thatch huts and stuff like that.

When I was home, before I went over there, I saw these guys going in, and they were burning these villages, you know, and stuff like that. And I thought, Man, why would you do that? We couldn't do that, because we wanted these people to trust us.



Paul Lambert on an American base in Quang Ngai province of South Vietnam, 1969.

Murgatroyd: Rely on you.

Lambert: We weren't there to take away from them. We were there to add to their structures.

Murgatroyd: To protect them, so they can go about their business.

Lambert: Yeah, yeah, protect them so they can do their life. And they realized that, most of them did. So, we didn't have to worry about that. They would see to it that we were protected, basically. Even though...If the North Vietnamese wanted to come to one particular area and take it, they could have took it any time they wanted to. We were just a thorn in their sides.

Murgatroyd: So most of the contact you had was with Viet Cong, rather than North Vietnamese.

Lambert: No, we never had any North Vietnamese regulars, that I can remember, showing up. Now, there may have been one or two that were there to check out the VC and give them a pep talk or something like that.

Murgatroyd: How far were you from the DMZ [demilitarized zone, combat-free area], from the border?

Lambert: [Looking at a map] We were down here.

Murgatroyd: Down here, okay, all right.

Lambert: So the DMZ was up here.

Murgatroyd: Right. So you're—

Lambert: Quang Ngai, and Quang



Murgatroyd: Quang Tri was the northernmost.

Paul Lambert's caption for this photo reads, "The Turific Hunters, CAP 1-3-5," his Combined Action Platoon that worked in the Quang Ngai province of South Vietnam in 1969-1970. (Lambert is kneeling, second from the left)

Lambert: Is the one at the DMZ. And there was CAPs up there.

Murgatroyd: Sure.

Lambert: And all these little dots, here, that you see are CAG units.

Murgatroyd: Since we can't show this on the tape, we're looking at a map that will be part of the record here, where the first CAG, the second CAG, third CAG, fourth CAG were, throughout the different provinces of South Vietnam.

Lambert: Yeah.

Murgatroyd: So a village could be anywhere from ten to twenty to forty, fifty people.

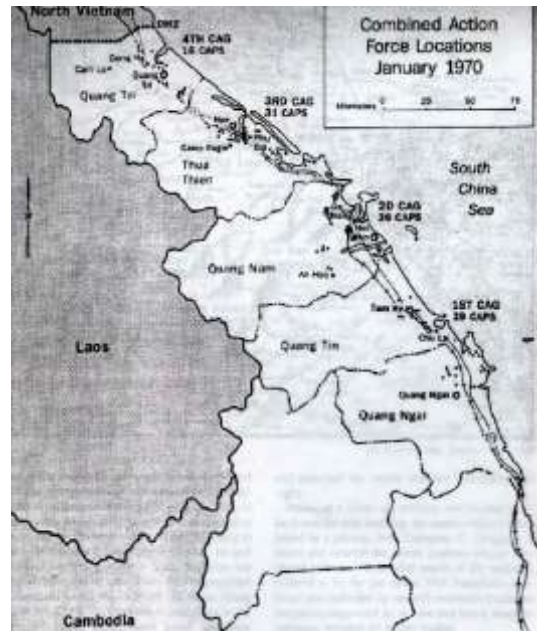
Lambert: Yeah, yeah.

Murgatroyd: Wherever they happened to be.

Lambert: Wherever they wanted to rest.

Murgatroyd: And it was all agriculture.

Lambert: Yeah, they referred to us as a coastal CAP, because, I think it was the China Sea, was right along our area. So there was villagers there that fished, that did all the fishing in that area, which helped us indirectly one time.



We got in a supply of percussion grenades. There's frag [fragmentation] grenades and percussion grenades. We didn't know it, but the percussion grenades were defective. As soon as you pulled the pin and let it fly, it blew up. It didn't have any delay.

Murgatroyd: No delay.

Lambert: One of the villagers solved that for us, because he stole one to go fishing. As soon as he pulled that pin, he was... Half was in the boat, and half wasn't in the boat. So we learned. [He] helped us there. You had to be careful, because they would borrow those to go fishing.

Murgatroyd: You already talked a little bit about mail and contact with the outside. Talk about supply. How were you re-supplied, and how effective was the re-supply from headquarters?

Lambert: Again, it was helicopter drop offs. The only time we ever went to the back was if, one, you were wounded or sick, or if, for whatever reason, you needed to go to the back. Now, it wasn't that they wouldn't let you, but you had to have a pretty good reason to go back.

Murgatroyd: And you'd call in; you'd make the communication back up the chain?

Lambert: Yeah. Every day...yeah. We had radio contact, constantly. They'd call us. We had to keep them updated as to contacts we had and any VC killed, what weapons we found or if... We were constantly on operations, so we had to keep them advised as to the situations. I've got you some sheets here of some of the transmissions.

Murgatroyd: We're referring to some of the operation summaries that will be part of the transcript, too. But the daily operations, the daily what to do, is entirely up to you and the team. [The summaries referred to above are not available.]

Lambert: Yes, yes. Usually we would meet as a group and talk about what we thought, because different villagers would come to different people and say, "I heard that there's some men we don't know about that are over in this area, over here," and da da da da. We'd decide what we needed to do.

We got some intel once that this little coastal village that was down, maybe fifteen miles away, that there was some people that nobody really knew, down there. And they had weapons, **weapons!** So, we decided that we were going to go in there early in the morning. It was never documented, but we had a landing. We did an amphibious landing on this village, and we went to the backside too. We had troops coming in the back. I was one of the ones that went on the amphibious part, and it was comical.

Murgatroyd: What kind of watercraft did you have?

Lambert: This was one of these little boats. It was probably 20-foot long, about 4-foot wide, at that. There was three of us on it, and then there was the guy that owned the boat, then there was three or four PFs. We're putting along, going down the outside. We're going to wait until dawn to all hit at the same time, so we were radioing back and forth, "Where are you at?"

This guy that owned the boat, he was back there, and he had this big metal hat on, like an old World War II pot hat. Pretty soon he shuts the motor off, and we're going, "What's going on here; the motor quit or something?" We look around, and he gets up, goes to the middle of the boat, pulls up this wooden plank, takes his pot hat off, and starts scooping out water. (laughing) We were taking on water. "Too many, too many people, too many," as they're scooping out water. Then he went back, started the motor and we—

Murgatroyd: Your assault craft was taking on water.

Lambert: Oh man, we're going to drown out there.

Murgatroyd: Was it successful? Did you find the folks that were supposedly there?

Lambert: We made contact. Unfortunately, we lost a couple PFs and our corpsman. He went in and tripped a booby trap. When he got to the top, the two behind him

got hit, and he got shrapnel all through the back. Didn't kill him, fortunately, but we lost him for the tour. That's when we got our—

Murgatroyd: A new one.

Lambert: A few days later we got our new corpsman.

Murgatroyd: So, you'd have enemy contact, either every day, or you could go a week or so without it?

Lambert: Probably every other day or so. They would test you. They wanted to see how aggressive you would be. At nighttime, if they knew you were in a certain area, they would recon you with fire. You know, they'd shoot and see what response they would get. We had claim wars and stuff like that. We sat out. We'd set a parameter up, so that we could fight it out, because we all knew, but we never talked about, it that if we got into a real hot firefight, we wouldn't get out of it, because they would overwhelm us.

Murgatroyd: Well, the numbers weren't there.

Lambert: Yeah. We just didn't have that many. But the PFs would, hopefully, come and help, you know?

Murgatroyd: Did the PFs have their own weapons?

Lambert: Yeah.

Murgatroyd: Or did they depend on you?

Lambert: I think the government supplied them with their weapons, because they had M16s, all of them did. And some had AK45s, and some had AK47s, because they found them or got them off of a deceased VC.

We found an old Thompson submachine gun that was buried in the ground. Evidently they buried it, to come and get it later on or something. It had been there a long time. We had to see if it fired, and the rifling was gone. You could pull that trigger, and as soon as that round went off, it might hit over here, two feet away or five feet. Anyhow, we disposed of that.

Murgatroyd: Paul, let's think about the first day or two that you're out in the field. Can you remember the first time you had enemy contact, first combat?

Lambert: Yes. We were going out to make a patrol, just through the area there, and we came upon, like I said, this village that was not there. It was on the map, but it wasn't there. And we split up. A group of us went down towards the middle, and another group went around the outside. As we proceeded into the center—I went with a group at the center—we spotted some people, off to the left side

of us. They were all in black, and it looked like they were running down, parallel with us. So we spotted them, yelled at them.

As soon as we yelled at them, we got return fire. They fired upon us, small arms fire, just a few bursts. And then we started running and shooting too. All the way through, we were just shooting back and forth and running. Whether we hit one or not, I have no idea, because our concern was that our other men were on the other side of them somewhere. And we weren't hearing them fire at all.

Well, when we had stopped to see these people, they were still moving. So, they were ahead of everything. They ended up meeting them before we... We were chasing them towards them [our men], which they didn't know.

We got to the end of this fairway here, that used to be the center of this village. It got quiet, just bam, nothing. I heard yelling and screaming and ranting and raving. I said, "What's going on?" So I proceeded around the corner, and there were steps leading up to this rise. So, I went over to those steps, and I kept hearing all these noises, up off the steps. So I walked up to where I could just see over the top of that. I could see our men there, the Kit Carson scout was there; the dog handler was there. These four individuals were sitting over, underneath this little hut thing, and their weapons were up against the wall.

Now, they'd been shot, and they were moaning and screaming and rocking back and forth. The Kit Carson Scout was just... I got the feeling he knew them, because the way he was so adamant about these people. He was yelling at them and screaming. I just got a feeling, something wasn't going to be right here. As soon as I turned to go back down the steps, I heard open fire, just a rat-a-tat-tat-tat automatic weapon. I turned back around right away, and the Kit Carson scout had shot all of them.

Murgatroyd: Shot all four of them?

Lambert: To me, he killed them, basically. There was a big pool of blood, and all of them were laying in it. The dog lapped up some of that blood, and the dog handler beat that dog, I mean... because that's one thing you didn't want them to do.

Murgatroyd: Right.

Lambert: But I thought, they must have known him, for him to do that.

Murgatroyd: For him to turn like that.

Lambert: Because our main thing is to get a prisoner, so we can interrogate him, send him back to the camp, to the headquarters. Information, that's what we

survived on, was information. And he just destroyed any bit of information that we could have had then.

Murgatroyd: Four pieces of information right there.

Lambert: Gone.

Murgatroyd: Yeah.

Lambert: So I just never trusted that guy.

Murgatroyd: How long did he stay with you?

Lambert: He disappeared, probably—

Murgatroyd: Oh, you said he disappeared.

Lambert: ...three, four months into it. I don't know if he—

Murgatroyd: Maybe some of **his** friends found him.

Lambert: Yeah, that might have been. (laughing)

Murgatroyd: When you had your first enemy contact, did you think back at all, after it was finished or during it, about how did my training prepare me for this?

Lambert: No, not really. Not then. You're caught up in the action. You're caught up, and you know what to do, and you're doing it. So the reflection wasn't there then. Later on, after I was back and out of country and home, reflection started popping up, because you reacted. You just (snaps fingers). It was on key.

Murgatroyd: You're in survival mode.

Lambert: You did it. You were there. You did it.

Murgatroyd: Did you remember, after things calmed down, your first few times? I mean, did you have any reluctance at all? Did it make you reluctant or I should say, more weary the next time you went out?

Lambert: You were always on edge, because the enemy was everywhere. It was just a matter of, if we got enough of an irritation to him, that he was going to take care of us. We lucked out several occasions. Ambushes were set up, and we didn't walk into them. One time, we bumped into the site of one, and all hell broke loose.

Basically, a U-shaped ambush is what it was. The idea on a U-shaped ambush is to let you go in the center, and then they would make contact with you at the front. And then they'd make contact with you on the side, heavy

contact, because they wanted you to pull you...Everybody was going to be facing towards that. And then that backside would come in on you.

We were always trained to go out, right and left. You'd flare out, so one side would protect the other side, like that. Fortunately, we ran into the end of that, because that whole side opened up. And then, after we came in contact and drove through it, the other side, you could tell they were laid out over there. That was a lot of fighting going on then. I never ran more in my life than when I was there.

Murgatroyd: You were in country. You entered first, basically, in August of '69. Were you able to do any R&R [rest and recuperation], while you were there?



Paul Lambert stands outside one of the hospital buildings at Cam Ranh Bay, in South Vietnam, while he recuperated from malaria in the summer of 1970.

Lambert: Later on, in 1970. After you're there three months, I think, you could put in for R&R. I put in for Hawaii. But before I...I contracted malaria. So, I was Medevac'd out of the unit, to be treated for that.

I just figured I had the flu or something like that, because I just was sicker than a dog. It ended up to be malaria, and later on I found it was falciparum malaria [the most dangerous type of malaria]. It should have killed me to begin with, but I survived it.

Murgatroyd: And this was what time...What period of time did the malaria happen?

Lambert: It was probably...I want to say, it was probably February or April.

Murgatroyd: Of '70.

Lambert: Seventy, yeah.

Murgatroyd: So you really didn't get a chance to R&R.

Lambert: Yeah, I got R&R.

Murgatroyd: You did get R&R, but it was a result of the malaria?



Corporal Paul Lambert in 1970.

Lambert: After I got out of the hospital...I was in the hospital for 28 days.

Murgatroyd: Okay.

Lambert: From Chu Lai, they transferred me down to Cameron Bay. And when I got out of Cameron Bay, they said, "There's no use sending you back out there, because your R&R is now." So, I went to...best recuperation I could have.

Murgatroyd: Hawaii.

Lambert: And that's when I met my buddy. He was stationed in Hawaii. (laughs) While I was in Nam, he was stationed in Hawaii.

Murgatroyd: What was his reaction to how well you'd stayed together?

Lambert: He kept wanting to ask me, "What's it like?" I said, "Nah, you wouldn't like it." That's all I'd tell him. I didn't want to talk about it.

Murgatroyd: While you were out in daily, weekly operations and in contact with the enemy, can you think back to what your reaction was? What made you motivated to just continue day to day, you or the other guys?

Lambert: Basically it was survival. I didn't want to be taken prisoner. That wasn't going to happen. They might have had my body, but they're not going to have me. I imagine that was everybody's motivation, because they liked to take you, and they'd get information from you too, just like everybody else. But that wasn't going to happen.

Murgatroyd: Did you know of any guys that were taken prisoner?

Lambert: Not that I know of. That wasn't anything people talked about.

Murgatroyd: Right.

Lambert: But I'm sure it had to happen.

Murgatroyd: Of course you were given some training, probably, at least at Da Nang, before you went out, in what would happen if you were taken?

Lambert: Mm-hmm, yeah, yeah. I carried a .38 pistol with me, and that was going to be my last resort. (laughs)

Murgatroyd: That was your out. Get out of jail free.

Lambert: Yeah, get out of jail free.

Murgatroyd: Now, I'm just covering a little bit of what went on. This is cutting things down.

Lambert: Sure, sure.

Murgatroyd: There's eight months here we're talking about, but is there anything that I haven't asked you about combat or contact with the enemy, any highlight action or operations that you think about or talk about?

Lambert: One night I saw "Puff the Magic Dragon" work out. That was amazing. An old B-52 bomber, I think, and it had 40 cal (caliber) machine guns out each side. When that thing banked, it opened up fire, and all you heard was a roar from the banking and then br-br-br-br-br, just oooowwww.

Murgatroyd: Was he in support of you or just in the area?

Lambert: It was probably another CAG down that way, because it was nighttime, and you could see it working out over there. The Vietnamese called it "Puff the Magic Dragon," because it roared like a dragon, they said. There was just streaks of red coming down from that plane onto the ground. Supposedly it covers an inch... There's a shell or a bullet, every inch for forty yards.

Murgatroyd: Yeah.

Lambert: That can make a lot of damage.

Murgatroyd: Make an impression. Now, besides the malaria and I'm sure, just little injuries here and there, but you had no gunshot wounds?

Lambert: No. I was blown up... Well, the guy that nudged me when the reverend said, "1-3-5," probably a couple months after we were there, we were talking about home. He was from Iowa, and Craig Kempton is what his name is. We were talking about home, and here it was night. We were up on a ridge there, just on a lookout type thing. I went to sit down—there was a little bunker there that was makeshift and off to the side—I went to sit down and, as I went to sit down, he stepped right in front of me, facing me, still talking to me. I was almost down, and he stepped in front of me. All I remember is like a s-s-s-s-s and then a big white... I don't remember an explosion, but it was all white, and this was night.

The next thing I know, I'm about twenty foot away, no weapon. It's pitch black, and I'm hearing this shrill scream that I've never heard before and hope I never hear again. I had a metal popup in my side pocket, on my pants here, and I pulled it out. It's a canister type, where you've got to take the top off and put it on the bottom and slam it on the deck, and it shoots up in the air and illuminates the area, because I needed to find my weapon. When I did that, I blew it up, threw it up in the air. I could see a shadow of somebody running down towards this campsite. I picked my M14 up and took out running after him. I could see that some people were coming up, and he hesitated when he got to those people and basically ran through them. When I got there, they said, "He said you were dead." [I knew] he's hit bad.

So I took out through them, and it was just like slow motion. He started getting slower. I mean, I've never seen anything like this before, but he was just like slow motion. I was running up on him, and he just started to spin. And as he was going down, he was going down in slow motion, until he hit the ground.

This is when my first aid came in very handy. I rolled him over, and you could hear the bubbling in his breathing. One piece of shrapnel went through his lung, and the other one went through his elbow. Another one took out his spleen. We patched him up as best I could and got him Medevac'd out of there.

Well, when they come at nighttime to pick somebody up in the helicopter, they're not going to put down just because you told them to come down. So, here I was out there with a flashlight over my head, like this. It was up above my head, shooting skyward. You could hear the helicopter coming in, and as soon as he got ten feet above me, he lit me up like a Christmas tree, just lit up. There I was, choop-choop-ping-ping, incoming, you know? He lit the light off and dropped the deck, and we loaded him up and got him out of there. It was just (snaps fingers several times) like that, just bam, bam, bam, bam. After it got out of there, I thought, damn. It all of the sudden hit me what happened.

Murgatroyd: What was going on.

Lambert: But he survived, fortunately.

Murgatroyd: That's good.

Lambert: As a matter of fact, I talked to him about a month ago. I found him and called him up, and he says, "Where in the hell you been for forty-three years?"

Murgatroyd: Of the team that you had when you first went out there, during the time that you were in the field, did you have any KIA [killed in action], besides the PFs and the corpsman?

Lambert: PFs we did. The Corpsman wasn't killed in action. He was wounded, and he did survive too. Most of the time, when I was there, I was lucky enough that I didn't have anybody that was killed. Most of them were injured enough they got tickets home, but we just lucked out there.

Murgatroyd: Yeah. What was your overall impression of the kind of leadership that you were given, the guys in charge, both up the chain and the NCO in charge there?

Lambert: Well, the only chain I was involved with was right there immediately, in our unit, and you couldn't ask for... Well, we had to depend on each other. There wasn't any of this, "I'm going to go to this house over here and find this girl to

have fun with.” No. That was a no-no. You were there for only one reason, and that was the reason to protect these people. You weren't there to take advantage of them or to defy any of them. And we made that quite clear. When we got a new guy in, we said, “You don't do anything. You don't drink; you don't get drunk; you don't do the drugs; you don't...” The weakest link is the problem you have. So we eliminated that. We all made sure we were straight up.

Murgatroyd: How would you describe the morale, then, primarily in the unit?

Lambert: Didn't have any problems. We all knew what we had to do.

Murgatroyd: Focused on their—

Lambert: Yeah, we had to do our job, and we wanted to get out of there.

Murgatroyd: Did you form any opinions about the PFs and the civilians that you had to deal with?

Lambert: Well, you know, I felt sorry for them, because I looked at it as if somebody from another country came into my neighborhood and said, “Hey, you're going to do what I tell you.” Whoa, wait a minute. There'd be a problem. And that's the way I looked at it. This is their land; this is their home, and these people let us stay there. We would have a family take us in, because we had to spread out. When we went into a village or something, we just all didn't stay in one area. We had to spread out. And these people opened their arms up to us, invited us in and said, “Hey, this is where you...” They had a place for us to sleep. We were there to protect them, and they were there to help us.

Murgatroyd: So you felt that there was some gratitude from most of the village people?

Lambert: Yeah, yeah, because of what we were doing, I think, mainly.

Murgatroyd: Sure.

Lambert: We weren't there to burn their houses down or hurt them in any way, and they knew that.

Murgatroyd: Your food. Talk about how you survived on your food and water and drink.

Lambert: Whew. Well, a lot of times we had to eat what the villagers ate, and that was rice. I don't eat rice now; I don't touch it. But it was good then, had to have it. And they'd bring ice. Every once in a while, we'd have ice. You had to pick the straw out of it, because that's how they got it there.

You didn't really drink anything, unless it [had] a cap on it, because every once in a while, you'd have a soda. They'd bring what looked like a Coke bottle, an old one, and so you had to be careful of that. But they had this

one; they called it "tiger piss," and that was their beer. They always served it hot, and it tasted like Old Stag beer. Terrible stuff, whew, wow. I tried it, but I never—

Murgatroyd: That was given to you by the locals?

Lambert: Yeah.

Murgatroyd: So, mainly it was C-rations?

Lambert: Yeah. Now, when it was what they would consider their new year, if they invited you into eat, you'd better well go in and eat, because it was an insult if you didn't. And you didn't want to eat it all either, because if you ate it all, it meant you were hungry; you needed more. So we knew that ahead of time. It's kind of hard to eat a salad that looks like a salad, with fish eyes looking back at you, you know?

Murgatroyd: Just enough to be—

Lambert: Polite.

Murgatroyd: Polite, yeah. (chuckles) So, tell me about when you left Vietnam. When it was and how your return to the States was.

Lambert: We had to go back to Da Nang, because that's where you flew out of. They had a little thing you went through before you boarded that plane, that said, "Any contraband, drop in this." It was... You'd go into this curtained off area.

Murgatroyd: Amnesty area?

Lambert: Yeah. And you'd look and see if anybody dropped anything off. (chuckling) I never saw anything, but I guess that was your last chance to get rid of whatever you may have had that you're not supposed to bring home.

Murgatroyd: And what month and year was this?

Lambert: I'm thinking it was—

Murgatroyd: Seventy?

Lambert: Yeah, it was in 1970. I was thinking it was August.

Murgatroyd: August of '70?

Lambert: But I don't know that for a fact.

Murgatroyd: So it's about a year, a year from August of '69 to August of '70.

Lambert: Yeah. Wow, that night [that] I stayed there before we flew out was the first night I had a nightmare. [I] don't know why, but they had bunk beds there that were three high, and I got on the very top one. Sometime through the night, I ended up on the floor, because I'd jumped out of that bed. I can remember; I was dreaming I couldn't find my weapon. We were in a hot zone, and I couldn't find my weapon. I needed my weapon. I guess I bolted out of the bed, and it woke me up.

Murgatroyd: But you were in a bunk, back in Da Nang.

Lambert: Yeah, yeah.

Murgatroyd: So then you flew home, flew back to California, or did you go to Hawaii first?

Lambert: El Toro [CA].

Murgatroyd: El Toro, okay.

Lambert: From there, they shuttled us to the airport, and there was protestors. They had us put on civilian clothes that you could get there. Of course, we were pretty scroungy looking. Well, we went from Da Nang to Okinawa, and then from Okinawa we went to El Toro.

I can remember going into L.A., because we always flew out of L.A. airport, and the first thing I did was head to the lounge and had me a drink. The next thing I know, I hear somebody paging my name on the intercom. So I go check it out, and they said, "Do you realize sir, you missed your flight?" I go, "What?" "Yeah, you missed your flight." I said, "When's the next one out?" This is like 3:00, I think, in the afternoon. The next one's out, not until midnight. I go, "What?" So I spent from 3:00 until midnight, roaming around that airport.

Murgatroyd: Oh, the airport.

Lambert: I can tell you anything you want to know about the L.A. airport. It [has] probably changed now. But it worked out pretty good. I had to call my mom and say, "Hey, I'm going to be a little late." But when I did fly out, I got on the plane, the stewardess looked at me, and she says, "You're just coming back from Vietnam, aren't you?" And I thought, "Here we go." I said, "Yes, ma'am." She goes, "Come with me." She took me up to first class and sat me down and says, "This is where you're going to fly home."

Murgatroyd: That's great.

Lambert: So it worked out pretty good.

Murgatroyd: That's good. So then, tell me about the rest of your time in the Marine Corps, after you finished your leave, back in Illinois.

Lambert: Well, I got engaged and got married. It was a girlfriend from high school. I don't think I'll mention her name, because we're not married any longer. My next duty station, since I had three years to go, was Camp Lejeune North Carolina. The town next to Camp Lejeune, North Carolina, is Jacksonville, North Carolina. So I took my new wife, and we went to Jacksonville, North Carolina.

Murgatroyd: From one Jacksonville to another.

Lambert: To another. I think it was the 3rd Battalion, 8th Marines, 2nd Marine Division was where I went to. And while I was in a hospital in Nam, an office pogy, which is somebody who works in the office, we called them office pogies, he knew me. He came to me, and he says, "Now, you're going to be in the Marine Corps for three more years. When you get back, you need to change your MOS [military occupational specialty]. It will help you later on."

I said, "What MOS is available?" He goes, "They've got a critical need for noncommissioned officers for the military police." He says, "Do you want me to put your name in on that?" And I said, "Yeah, go ahead." So he did, and I got it. I got my MOS changed; 5800 is the MOS. But I didn't know that I had to request that I be put in that field. So that's why I was going to 3rd Battalion, 8th Marines.

So I got there and found out, when I got there, that that's a flotilla. We were going to go float around in the Mediterranean for six months. Just newly married, moved my wife down there, and now I'm going to go ship out in thirty days to float around and run NATO games with the European NATOs.

[I] saw a lot of nice, nice countries over there, met a lot of nice people and had the best time I ever had in the Marine Corps there, because when I was on liberty, I was on shore patrol. Because of my MOS, they put me on shore patrol. I had shore patrol, liberty, shore patrol, liberty. So when the guys that owned the taverns and the restaurants and stuff saw me come in, in my uniform, they knew I could close the place down. So when they saw me in my civilian clothes, [speaking with an Italian accent] "Hey, come here. Sit down right here. You want a drink?"

Murgatroyd: They were nice to you.

Lambert: So, that worked out pretty good.

Murgatroyd: So you were in the Mediterranean primarily, while you were at Lejeune?

Lambert: Yes.

Murgatroyd: How long were your cruises?

Lambert: I only went on one cruise, and that was six months. I went to Athens, Greece; Barcelona, Spain; Rota, Spain—Barcelona was a beautiful place—Athens, Greece—which is wonderful—Naples, Italy; Genoa, Italy; Sardinia, Sicily; Turkey. Now Naples, at the time, was NATO headquarters. I think Athens is now, but then it was Naples. My brother had been stationed in Naples, so I knew about the Flamingo Club. That was the big club there. As soon as you got in a taxi, immediately they took you there. (chuckles)

Murgatroyd: Yeah.

Lambert: That's where everybody wanted to go.

Murgatroyd: So this is all the time your new wife was back in Jacksonville, North Carolina.

Lambert: Yeah. Wondering, "What the daylights?"

Murgatroyd: Wondering, "Why are you not here?"

Lambert: Yeah.

Murgatroyd: When you were back at Lejeune, you were just an MP, part of the MP Battalion there?

Lambert: I'd put in for it, so when I got back, I was put into a transitional company. Then I went from that to 2nd Marine Division Military Police Headquarters, and I was a patrol sergeant.

Murgatroyd: Okay.

Lambert: We had some interesting times there too.

Murgatroyd: Just there on post and off post?

Lambert: Yeah, there at Camp Lejeune. We busted up a big drug ring that was operating out of... And it all started because they parked on the grass. (chuckles) When I got out of the Marine Corps, I had to go back and testify for that too, for the court-martial.

Some guys, they had a little route. They'd go through all the military bases and drop off marijuana. I got a call from one of my patrol corporals, and he says, "I got this guy from out-of-state license, parking on the grass here, and I told him twice, and goes..." See, he'd just drive from one unit to another. And I said, "Really? He's going to all these different places, huh?" I said, "Keep an eye on him, and I'll be right out there." So we followed him to the next one, and he would take like a garbage sack in.

Murgatroyd: How obvious is that?

Lambert: This guy thinks we're stupid. So he came back out; he was in a car, and we stopped him. I said, "I'm going to need to look in your trunk." He says, "You can't look in my trunk." I said, "Sir, as soon as you hit this base, you no longer have any say. You've given that up when you came onto this base." So we opened it up, and he had a trunk full.

Murgatroyd: Remember that big sign when you came in?

Lambert: A big trunk full of marijuana, and then he had a shotgun in there. Anyhow, we arrested him and turned him over to the NCIS [Naval Criminal Investigative Service], I guess you'd call it now.

Murgatroyd: Mm-hmm, yeah.

Lambert: And they later contacted us and said, "You know that guy that you guys arrested? That was just the tip of the iceberg."

Murgatroyd: Part of a big operation.

Lambert: He says, "We got a bunch of them in Bragg [Fort Bragg, the largest military base in the world], and all of them."

Murgatroyd: When you got out of the Marine Corps, you got out of the Marine Corps for good in what year?

Lambert: Nineteen seventy-three.

Murgatroyd: Seventy-three. Did you have any intentions of then becoming a police officer or a cop?

Lambert: I was going to make it a career. I was going to stay in the Marine Corps.

Murgatroyd: Oh, okay.

Lambert: But unfortunately, my wife at that time didn't want to, so I came back to Jacksonville. She was from Jacksonville too. I was thinking about getting on with the Cass County Sheriff or Morgan County Sheriff's Department or something like that. There wasn't any openings when I come back. Then I found out that they weren't paying very well. Hopefully they are now, but then they weren't.

Murgatroyd: So it was monetary.

Lambert: I started working construction, and through a friend, I found out there was an opening for a parts guy at a John Deere Dealership in Virginia, so I started working there. Then that changed a little bit there, and I came over here and talked to Nick Xamis about getting a job selling cars. He says, "You want to sell cars?" And I said, "Yeah, I think I might want to." He said there's this

thing that they make you fill out, and they send it to Chicago. It gets analyzed to see if you're capable of doing this or whatever.

So he calls me back and said he wanted to see me again. So I came back in. And he says, "This tells me that you'd be most suited for one of our service advisors." And I said, "It probably would, because that's what I did for the last fifteen years." So he says, "I'll tell you what, if you want to give this a shot," he says, "I'll let you sell cars, and any time you decide this isn't what you want to do, I'll let you go back to service department work." Okay, that sounds good to me. Hence, I've been here twenty-five years.

Murgatroyd: So, starting out on a trial basis.

Lambert: And I'm still on trial. (laughs)

Murgatroyd: Twenty-five years later, a car salesman.

Lambert: Yeah, I'm still here.

Murgatroyd: That's good. Paul, when you think back to when you first came back to Jacksonville, after Vietnam and while you're still in the Marine Corps, of course, did you feel any different in the way people reacted to you, as a result of being in Vietnam?

Lambert: No, not really. It's strange, but I never had anybody ever thank me for my service, until probably three years ago. And I didn't really expect anybody to do that. But it surprised me that this one customer that I had, Buddy Miller is the gentleman and his wife says—because I had a thing on my wall about being in the Marine Corps—she says, "Were you in Nam?" And I said, "Yes I was." And she goes, "I want to thank you for your service." I thought, "Gee, I never had anybody do that before." She even went out of her way to make me one of those glass things, because that's what she did. She made one of those and brought it to me.

Murgatroyd: That's nice.

Lambert: Amazing.

Murgatroyd: That is nice. Of course, Jacksonville is kind of a sleepy community and is not near big cities and everything, but you didn't ever see any big protests in Jacksonville that had to do with the Vietnam War?

Lambert: No. Not that I was aware of.

Murgatroyd: You and I are about the same age, and we've kind of grown up and seen a lot of things together and had reactions. Have you ever had a chance to think about how Vietnam and your experience in Vietnam shaped you into the Paul Lambert that is today?

Lambert: I'm definitely not the same person I was when I left. Now whether that changed for the better or not could be questionable. But I'm just glad that, when I was there, I had the good sense to be in the Marine Corps, because I think that in itself helped me quite a bit.

Murgatroyd: Yeah. Can you see yourself doing things now, even in civilian life, in the automobile business and anything around town, that you were taught or that you remember, something that, I remember being taught this, and this is something that I can do from the Marine Corps?

Lambert: Yeah. I'm anal, like I'll iron my clothes every day. Every day I get up, and I iron my clothes to come to work. I polish my shoes to come to work. That military bearing just sticks with you. I can remember my wife now; when we first got married, she ironed some of my clothes. And she says, "I ironed your clothes there." I went over, and I didn't say anything to her, and the next thing she knows, I'm ironing them. I said, "You don't have to do that anymore. I'll do it."

Murgatroyd: I want to do it the way I was taught.

Lambert: [That's] just kind of the way it is.

Murgatroyd: That's right.

Lambert: And my fellow employees call me Lambo, like Rambo, you know, Lambo.

Murgatroyd: Yeah, right.

Lambert: Because I'm set in my ways of doing things. The cars have got to be lined up a certain way and da da da da. (Chuckles)

Murgatroyd: Did you use the GI Bill when you first came back or anything at all?

Lambert: No, just recently did I even go to the VA for anything.

Murgatroyd: You're in the process of working with them for benefits?

Lambert: Yeah.

Murgatroyd: Did you join any veterans' organizations, or have you joined any veterans' organizations?

Lambert: Only the Marine Corps League, I'm a member of that. I don't participate in anything they do, unfortunately. A lot of times I



Paul Lambert as he appeared at the time of this interview in June, 2011.

don't have time, because I'm still working. It's probably the same way in all branches of the service, but in the Marine Corps, you're more bonded with...I mean, I've got a Marine that comes in here. He's got to be in his eighties, and he's a survivor of Iwo Jima, and it's just like we're brothers.

Murgatroyd: Brothers, yeah.

Lambert: He's eighty-four or five, and I hate to say it, but I'm sixty-one. It's just that bond that's there. It just stays with you.

Murgatroyd: Yeah, yeah. Have you ever had any reunions of anybody in the CAP or CAG at all?

Lambert: No.

Murgatroyd: You said you had a contact with a guy in Iowa.

Lambert: Yeah, I called him, because when I was getting involved with the VA, I got the feeling I should try to get a hold of this guy. And one of my customers, Keith Points, told me, he says, "Go to Anywho.com. As long as you know his name, his first name, his last name and the state he's in, you'll find him."

Sure enough I did. I called the number that was on there and kept calling, because I couldn't get an answer. Finally, his wife answered, and I could tell she was thinking, "You know, here's this guy trying to sell me something." I said, "I just want to let you know that I'm not a salesman." I told her who I was, and she goes, "Oh, I know who you are." I go, I never met the lady. Evidently her husband had told her about me. She says, "He doesn't like to talk on the phone, because he doesn't hear real well." Imagine that?

So I communicated with him through email and stuff like that, and he filled me in on a lot of the people that we knew. I'm probably going to get enough nerve up to go visit him, one of these times. It's an emotional thing.

Murgatroyd: Yeah, I'm sure it is. When you got out of the Marine Corps, when you got off your four years, did you have a Reserve commitment? Did they keep you on the back, on the shelf?

Lambert: Yeah. Back then you had two years, and so I was officially out in 1975.

Murgatroyd: Mm-hmm.

Lambert: But back then, very, very, very seldom did they call up Reserves, like they do now. Now they call them up immediately. I don't think they ever let them out.

Murgatroyd: I notice on your 214 [DD form 214, proof of military service], "Is undecided about reenlistment."

Lambert: Yeah, yeah. (laughing)

Murgatroyd: You had no desire or thought about going into the Marine Corps Reserve or anything?

Lambert: No.

Murgatroyd: Of course, the closest, I think, is Peoria.

Lambert: Really? If I hadn't left Lejeune to come home, it would have been different, but I was so far out then.

Murgatroyd: You'd made that break.

Lambert: Yeah.

Murgatroyd: I'm sure people have probably asked you this, but I'm going to ask it again. Do you have any thoughts, for the people who are going to listen to this tape, about Vietnam and what we did there? And was it, in your mind, successful, unsuccessful or one way or the other?

Lambert: It should have been successful, and it would have been successful, if we would have fought it like a war. We tried to make it a political war. That doesn't work. What we did, as far as the CAP and CAGs were concerned, was...

And I was surprised to find out that they're still doing that. They're doing it in Afghanistan. So it's being used again, and it's like anything; it's like I said. When you get somebody coming into your neighborhood and tell you, "I'm going to help you..." Well, wait a minute, I'm going to help myself. So, I see it as a help, that way. Now, you can get online, and go from top to bottom, and shoot anything that's in front of you. You might win, but it's not going to win the people over.

Murgatroyd: Right, right.

Lambert: Hopefully we helped as many as we could. Unfortunately, they pulled us out before we got our job done.

Murgatroyd: This is a question that I think was designed to ask somebody who was like your eighty-four year-old Marine buddy, but I'll ask it anyway, because we are getting up there in age.

Lambert: Oh yeah.

Murgatroyd: Do you have any advice for people coming up, that are thinking about either going in the military for a short time or for a long time?

Lambert: I can't see it being anything but a benefit, to be in the service. It helps you be able to work with others. It gives you a feeling of accomplishment, to do what you need to do. I just can't imagine why somebody wouldn't, unless they were afraid to. I mean, everybody's got a fear. But hopefully, when they do decide they want to go in the military, they'll go where they feel they need to go.

Murgatroyd: Okay.

Lambert: Naturally, I think the Marine Corps would be their best bet, but not everybody is suited for that.

Murgatroyd: Right.

Lambert: That's why we've got different branches. (both chuckle)

Murgatroyd: Well Paul, it's been really great to talk about your experience in the Marine Corps and Vietnam and afterwards, and it's been good to catch up, since we haven't seen each other for a long, long time.

Lambert: It's been a long time.

Murgatroyd: And just to go along with what that lady said, I want to thank you for your service.

Lambert: I appreciate it. I'm glad to serve. I'd do it again.

Murgatroyd: All right, thank you.

Lambert: Thank you.

(end of interview)