

Interview with Gary Burgard

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Interviewer: Tom Murgatroyd

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Murgatroyd: Okay, hello, this is Tom Murgatroyd, and today, which is February 13, 2014, we're in Sherman, Illinois, with Gary Burgard, and we will be interviewing Gary for the Oral History Program for the Abraham Lincoln Presidential Library, specifically for the *Veterans Remember Project* of the Oral History Project. Gary, thank you for having me at your house. Could you tell us first, your name and address?

Burgard: I'm Gary Burgard, and live at 409 West Hampton in Sherman. Was a resident of Jacksonville, Illinois. Moved here after living in Rockford, Illinois for some time, and probably have been a resident of Sherman for a period, beginning 1977, thereabouts.

Murgatroyd: Great. We've talked a little bit, and we'll kind of go back chronologically here, Gary. First of all, who do you live in Sherman with?

Burgard: My wife, Judith Ann Burgard. We've had two kids, got five grandkids, and they live in Bloomington—my son lives in Bloomington—and my daughter lives in Effingham. Both are married with children, and we have grandchildren from them.

Murgatroyd: So, you're busy?

Burgard: I'm busy.

Murgatroyd: Okay!

Burgard: We're going back and forth a lot.

Murgatroyd: Where and when were you born, Gary?

Burgard: I was born in Rushville, Illinois, in Schuyler County, not too far from here. I was born on May 19th, 1944, a long time ago. Dad was born around the Rushville area, but he passed away a couple of years ago. Mom was born around the Browning, Illinois, area, and she passed away last year.

Murgatroyd: And your mom and dad's name?

Burgard: Carmen Price Burgard and Lucy Arlene Burgard, and she always went by Arlene.

Murgatroyd: Tell me about your childhood, where you grew up, where you went to school? All the way through high school.

Burgard: Well, I grew up in—started off in Havana. Dad had an airport—a small airport in Havana, Illinois. He was a fixed-base operator, which meant that he had a flying operation and a maintenance operation. Then we moved from there to Peoria, Illinois, where Dad continued to work with, at that point, Byerly Aviation. Then we moved from there to back out on the farm—that was in and around Rushville, Illinois. After that period, we moved to Jacksonville, Illinois, and then Dad became the manager for the Jacksonville Airport. And that, again, was under Byerly Airlines. He had a fixed-base operation there. We kind of had an unusual childhood, in the fact that we lived in a hangar. Now, that doesn't sound like a very neat place to live, but the hangar was a huge place, and the airport authority had an apartment set up within that hangar, which was really, really a nice apartment. They wanted that, since they wanted somebody at the airport on a twenty-four-hour basis. So, everybody else went to a home. When I went to home, I had to raise a ten-ton door.

Murgatroyd: It was hard to sneak in. (laughter)

Burgard: It was hard to sneak in, you're absolutely right! (laughter)

Murgatroyd: Or sneak out! And grade school, high school?

Burgard: Part of my grade school was in Peoria, Illinois. It was a big school called Calvin Coolidge. Then when we moved back, or Dad moved back to the farm, we went to a little school in Browning, Illinois. It was just a local school system there. I was in the third or fourth grade when we moved to Jacksonville. Then from Jacksonville, I went to North Jacksonville, which was not very far from the airport. The airport was on the north side of town. Then I went to Jonathan Turner for one year, and that was just the point that Jonathan Turner really started the operation.

Murgatroyd: As the new junior high in Jacksonville?

Burgard: Right. And then from there on, went to JHS.

Murgatroyd: And of course, for those of us not around Jacksonville, that's Jacksonville High School.

Burgard: Right, right.

Murgatroyd: The Crimson.

Burgard: The Crimson. And was an average student, probably. Played a few sports, wound up playing football with JHS, Jacksonville High School, and we had a couple of undefeated teams. And also played with Kenny Norton, who was the heavyweight fighter of the world.

Murgatroyd: That's right.

Burgard: We even had a contest in the back of the bus one time to see who could hit the hardest and Kenny was part of that contest. We didn't know it, but he could hit—we all knew that he could hit hard. And of course, he won the contest, but now I can say I had a fight with the heavyweight champion of the world. (laughter) Still lost, but...

Murgatroyd: You got a bruise from Kenny Norton! (laughter) Yes, he was quite the deal. And he always maintained a really good relationship with Jacksonville. He always remembered it.

Burgard: Yeah, he came over to Springfield as a fundraiser one time, and one of the local reps remembered that I went to school with him, and he said, "Gary, why don't you go over and talk to him?" So, I went through this line; it was at the Forum 30. As I presented myself, Ken says, "Yeah, I remember you." He says, "Get back here with me. I'm just going to introduce you as my brother." So, these people would walk through this line, and Ken would introduce me as his brother. Well, Ken being Ken, he was still pretty strong, and nobody really knew what he was going to do.

Murgatroyd: No one's going to question you!

Burgard: Nobody questioned him! (laughter)

Murgatroyd: That's funny. What were your interests, besides sports and everything in school? Like, flying or anything like that?

Burgard: My destiny was to be a professional pilot in one form or another. I mean, I couldn't see myself in any other profession. I wound up soloing when I was sixteen, and private license at seventeen. Had a commercial and flight instructor's [rating] around eighteen to nineteen,

and actually used that flight instructor's rating to work my way through college. At that time, we were getting paid four dollars an hour for straight flight time, which was pretty good when I think the average wage was about a buck an hour. That helped a lot in terms of spending money, and being able to get through college. I think at that time the tuition was only \$375 at IC, Illinois College.

Murgatroyd: It was a lot lower than it is now.

Burgard: And it eventually went up to \$450, which was a big...

Murgatroyd: Tell us about your college days.

Burgard: College days—I wanted to pursue college, just because you needed to have a college degree to get in the airlines, and that's where I was headed. Since I was in business, it seemed logical to go ahead and study

business and economics, and that's what I wound up with. I did get involved with a local society, a literary society; it was Gamma Nu. There was a lot of memories formed in that organization, a lot of good friends that I still have and we still get together a lot.



Gary Burgard on the left, with friend and fellow instructor pilot Gary Watkins, standing next to a Cessna 140 after Gary's first solo flight, 1962.

Murgatroyd: So, this was at Illinois College, which is a private school in Jacksonville, Illinois.

Burgard: Correct.

Murgatroyd: Any other activities while you were at Illinois College?

Burgard: I worked through school, so my activities... I did play football as a freshman, but I found out that that wasn't going to be my forte, that some of those guys were actually bigger than me. Even though I was a co-captain of the Jacksonville High School team, the guys were much bigger, and I was used to being the hittee, rather than a hitter, or whatever. Those guys were much bigger, and I decided that it just wasn't going to work for me to be... I could make more money flying. (laughter)

Murgatroyd: Okay. Besides flying, or maybe as a part of flying, did you have any early interest in high school or college in the military?

Burgard: Not really, I think I was just so focused on being in the flying game, and maybe as an alternate focus, maybe selling airplanes, as a kind of a lifestyle that appealed to me.

Murgatroyd: And it wasn't a career that you had set yourself on when you started your flying—the military?

Burgard: No.

Murgatroyd: It was all commercial?

Burgard: It was all commercial, right.

Murgatroyd: Okay, Gary. We've taken you into college, and you were at Illinois College in Jacksonville. When did you leave Illinois College?

Burgard: I graduated in 1966, which would have been June. And from that point, worked at the airport as a flight instructor and a charter pilot. Received a draft notice, to be drafted into the Army. I actually tried to appeal that, thinking I could get into the airlines; at that point the airlines was an industry that was left off the draft, because...

Murgatroyd: Critical?

Burgard: It was critical, that's the term I was looking for. By the time they got back and said, "No, I don't think that's going to work," then in April of '67, I was drafted into the Army. But I thought about going into the flying program with the Air Force and the Navy; passed all their tests, and was taken up to Navy Pier, and sat in an A4D, and they...

Murgatroyd: Now, tell us what an A4D is.

Burgard: Oh, an A4D was an attack airplane that they flew off of a carrier; it was a jet, a single-place jet fighter. It always appealed to me as a level of skill to be able to fly off of a carrier. So, I was just about to change my mind about what I was going to do, meaning that I had made up my mind not to join any of the air services, because they all wanted five and a half years, and at age twenty-one or twenty-two, it seemed like an eternity to give up. Anyway, the recruiter said, "Well, all you have to do is just sign on the dotted line." I almost did it. And he said, "Well, let's go over to dinner tonight, and we'll talk about it." I decided not to, and as soon as that decision was made, why it wasn't long until I was on that bus to St. Louis going to Fort Leonard Wood. (laughter)

Murgatroyd: The Army wanted you. (laughter) So, when did you enter the Army?

Burgard: April 13, 1967.

Murgatroyd: And then you went to Fort Leonard Wood for basic training?

Burgard: Went to Fort Leonard Wood for basic training and was a part of something called F Troop. I always remember that because there was a television show

called *F Troop*, and some of the cadre around there resembled some of the *F Troop*. (laughter)

Murgatroyd: Were you married at the time?

Burgard: No, no.

Murgatroyd: Did your family have any reaction to you going into the military?

Burgard: Well, nobody wanted you to go in the military, but there was no choice. I mean, you were drafted, it was nothing that you could do anything about. And most of the recommendations coming to me was to go into OCS [Officer Candidate School], or something else, where you have a little bit more control of your own destiny.

Murgatroyd: Especially since you had a degree.

Burgard: Right. I thought I could just get in and type or do something of that nature, and get in and get out, and get back with my goal at hand, which was to be in the airlines. And that was the quickest way I could see doing it.

Murgatroyd: I see. So, nothing remarkable about basic training, other than it was basic training?

Burgard: It was basic training, I learned to low crawl, (laughter) to run, probably lost a few pounds in that thing.

Murgatroyd: Yeah.

Burgard: But it wasn't that bad and everybody told me that AIT [Advanced Individual Training] would be even easier; that was not the case.

Murgatroyd: So tell us about your AIT after basic training, where it was, and what you did?

Burgard: Oh, they sent me to Fort Polk, Louisiana, which is way down south; it was in June, and it was hot, very hot. I never experienced anything so hot in my life. When I got out of that air conditioned bus, I thought I was going to melt on the pavement. But the company I went to was run by a Russian captain—they called him the Dostoyevsky—and he was called the “Mad Russian.” We had a sergeant who said, “He might be known as the worst of the worst, but I’m going to tell you, he’s eleven times worst of the worst.” (laughter) So, every time your left foot hit the ground, it had to be double-time, and you had to yell the word, “Kill!”

And that was different. (laughter)

Murgatroyd: Different than your upbringing?

- Burgard: Never visualized anything like that before.
- Murgatroyd: Can you say, looking back on it, how effective your training in AIT was, based on what you eventually have to encounter?
- Burgard: Well, it was pretty effective. They had a place called Payson Ridge which duplicated a lot of the hutches, the houses, the small villages that we encountered in Vietnam, and a lot of trees, and it was hot. I think the heat helped me more than anything else, because in Vietnam, it was really hot.
- Murgatroyd: To acclimate yourselves?
- Burgard: Yes. But the skills and everything that they provided were good.
- Murgatroyd: What was your Military Occupation Specialty?
- Burgard: Well, 11-B-10, light infantry.
- Murgatroyd: Okay.
- Burgard: Which, I kept hoping might change, but they needed...
- Murgatroyd: You and millions of others.
- Burgard: Yeah, they needed somebody in that arena, so the Army is what the Army is.
- Murgatroyd: I understand. So, you finished your AIT at Fort Polk. When was that?
- Burgard: That was—at Fort Polk, probably would have been around—probably around June, July. And then they sent me to... Anybody that had just a little bit of an IQ and maybe had a year or so of college, they sent to Fort Benning. They needed small unit leaders over in Vietnam; small unit leaders were defined as somebody at the squad leader or platoon leader level. So the Army initiated a program that replicated OCS, but in a very diminished form. I think we finished a program in two and a half to three months that usually took the OCS candidates something like six months to a year. So, we were the fourth school to graduate from that academy.

It was a lot different there. There was a lot more instruction given to you from an academic side. We learned how to deal with supervision, learned how to deal with problem solving in a way that I hadn't been accustomed to. We learned about the Army's definition of management; it was really different because in the Army, the objective comes first, and then the welfare of the men comes second.



Gary's graduation photo from the Non-Commissioned Officers Candidate Course, 1967.

Murgatroyd: Mission first?

Burgard: Yes. And that was different than civilian life.

Murgatroyd: (laughter) After you left Fort Polk, you went to Fort Benning. And from there, how did you find yourself deployed after that?

Burgard: Well, then they sent me some place around Christmas; they sent us back home for the Christmas break, then they sent us back to Fort Polk for on-the-job training. What we were supposed to do is take new trainees that were coming into AIT, like we had just been through, and we were to take them through the training cycles. So that was our job and we were given much more freedom than we ever had before. We could go off post and it was a little different life.

Murgatroyd: Okay. So, that took you through to the spring of '68 then, and...

Burgard: Yeah, correct.

Murgatroyd: And then, when did you deploy overseas?

Burgard: April of 1967, almost a year. Now, I do have a story before that.

In that on-the-job training at Fort Polk is where I actually met my wife. We could get off post. We had something to mark on the license plates so that you had free access in and out of the car gate all the time. Three of us, Phillip Peace, Jimmy Broussard, and myself, were always kind of a trio that ran together. We were out looking for girls, just to have a good time, and we couldn't find any. So, the guy by the name of Phillip Peace said, "Well, let's go over to the campus at Northwestern University,"¹ and we did. He said, "Well, let's go to the library; sometimes a lot of girls will study over at the library." So, we walked in the library with Army fatigues on, saw a bunch of girls studying over there in one section, and sat down and started talking to them. Made a date with them for the next night, and feeling really good about that, so, went home, went back to base. The next night we were coming in between Fort Polk and Natchitoches, Louisiana, that's where Northwestern College was. We were trying to decide on what girls we were going to take, because it was all kind of a blind date. I said I wanted that girl who had the black hair and the black eyes. (laughter) And I said, "I think her name was Judy." (laughter) Anyway, from that time on, Judy wound up being my wife, and it was a good time. One time that I especially remember that was kind of funny: I took her back to base on one Sunday, and I was trying to find a place to park. I don't know what she was interested in... (laughter), and we went out to the artillery range, and nobody was out there. I stopped the car, and, you know, whatever... we were just, whatever.

¹ Based on later information, he probably meant Northwestern College. NU is in Evanston, IL [Ed.]

I heard this rap on this window. I looked up, and there's a lieutenant, and he's got 200 guys who walked in on us. (laughter) And he said, "Sir, you're going to have to move." (laughter) Being a lot embarrassed, I looked up at the guys and I got a thumbs up from everybody, so that was kind of a... But that did happen.

Murgatroyd: If they can't do it, they're glad to see that somebody's having some luck, huh? (laughter)

Burgard: So, that took me a while to tell that to the kids. (laughter)

Murgatroyd: That's good! Then, you maintained a correspondence and relationship with Judy all the while you were deployed, and then came back and got married?

Burgard: Yeah, that's exactly correct. We corresponded frequently. Actually, before going home, I took the airplane back to Shreveport, Louisiana, and met her, which seemed strange to my folks, but you know how it goes. (laughter)

Murgatroyd: Well, we're getting ahead of ourselves.

Burgard: Okay.

Murgatroyd: Okay, so we've been to basic, we've been to AIT, we've been to other training at Benning, and back to Fort Polk, and we've met the lady who's going to become our wife. Then we're in—what year is this before you go to Vietnam?

Burgard: This is April of '68.

Murgatroyd: '68? Okay. So, April of '68, what happens to your life then?

Burgard: It went from training to the very serious. We took off from California, by way of Hawaii and Wake Island for gas stops, and then lined up with Vietnam. I can remember to this day, the pilot coming across the speaker saying, "Well, this is your destination; we're going to fly in at a fairly high altitude and make a steep descent, so it wouldn't catch ground fire." And that was...

Murgatroyd: Got your attention?

Burgard: That got our attention. And as soon as we crossed the coast, everybody shut up. It was very quiet.

Murgatroyd: What were you flying over on?

Burgard: It was a stretched DC-8. I forgot what the term was, but it could hold 200 troops, I mean, 200 passengers. So, it was a nice airplane.

Murgatroyd: So, it was probably a contract?

Burgard: Oh yeah, it was a contract.

Murgatroyd: It wasn't a military jet.

Burgard: No.

Murgatroyd: And your first assignment in country, in Vietnam, first unit, do you remember that?

Burgard: Well, the first thing you did, as soon as you got off the airplane, they took you to the 90th Replacement Company, which is just outside of Tan Son Nhut Air Force Base, maybe around Benoit. We stayed there for two or three days waiting for assignment. Phillip Peace wound up going to the 1st Cav [Cavalry], and Jimmy Broussard went to the 25th, and then I was assigned to the 9th Infantry Division.

Murgatroyd: All the time, as you were being assigned to the 9th Infantry Division, you're remaining in your same MOS. They didn't change you out or anything?

Burgard: No, as a matter of fact, they put a restriction on my personnel file that I had to serve six months in a combat situation, because of that NCO school that we attended. They wanted to see how we would turn out. So we were part of the results of that NCO school. So, I couldn't do anything else except go to a combat situation.

Murgatroyd: Okay. Well, Gary, now we've seen you get to Vietnam, and you're in country. What happens after you've been assigned to your actual combat unit?

Burgard: Well, I was assigned to the 9th Division; their base camp was in a place called Bearcat, which was just south and east, I think, of a place they call Xuan Loc—you spell it X-u-a-n L-o-c—and also just outside of Benoit. I remember getting all of the supplies and getting issued the weapons. I was assigned to a mechanized infantry outfit, not knowing, really, much about mechanized infantry. I just followed the lead. We were told to get on an APC, that was an armored personnel carrier; I did so. We left the gate, and I remember this to this day, it says, "Lock and Load." That meant put a live magazine in your rifle. That stayed with me. And I thought, this is it. And...

Murgatroyd: It's the real thing.

Burgard: It's the real thing. We drove about fifteen miles east of Bearcat. At that time, Bravo Company, which is what I was assigned to in the 2nd Platoon and the 1st Squad, was supplying security for a fire base operation in a French plantation that was a rubber tree plantation. Arriving at the base camp, they assigned me to a TRACK, an APC. I think I had one day of experience in training on an APC. I knew what they were. And so, once I got there, the guys that were on the TRACK said, "Well, we're going to go for lunch." And I said, since I was new, "Well, I'll stay here and watch." In the meantime, a

supply sergeant comes along, and he says, “Sarge,” he says, “What do you need for supplies?” Well, I remember this word called SOP, Standard Operating Procedure, so just make it SOP. He says, “You got her.” So, he came back and filled it with C4, and grenades, and flares, and everything. So the guys came back from lunch and looked inside the TRACK and said, “Who in the hell ordered all this stuff; we’re going to go up like a Roman candle if we hit something.” I said, “I don’t know, some guy just brought by some stuff and said, ‘These are your supplies.’” (laughter) So...

Murgatroyd: Okay.

Burgard: And then the first message I got was to—it was kind of a funny message. I got a call from the command headquarters, he says, “Crank up your pony, take it down to hardball, get some hard water, and bring it back.” I looked around and I didn’t have a clue what I was supposed to do. One of the guys, the driver, says, “We’re supposed to start the APC, go down the road into the village, pick up some ice for the captain.” (laughter)

Murgatroyd: Hard water.

Burgard: So, anyway three or four days after that we were to set up an ambush patrol, and so, the lieutenant comes in and says, “Okay, we’re going to take you, and you, and you.” And I volunteered; I said, “I’d like to go.” Everybody looked at me a little strange.

Murgatroyd: Because you’re always told not to volunteer.

Burgard: Well, yeah, but I just got through with all of this training, and knew everything, and everything was still a game to me. So I was a part of that ambush patrol, and this time we’re going to be taken out by helicopter. I thought that was a neat way to set up an ambush patrol, and given that I was a sergeant, I got a map, and we flew out to this site where we were to set up this ambush patrol. The helicopter landed, so the lieutenant comes over to me, and he says, “Well, Sarge, where do you think we ought to set it up?” He’s pointing down to the map, and he says, “I think we ought to be over there.” I said, “We’re not there.” He said, “What do you mean we’re not there?” And I said, “Well, he didn’t put us there, he put us over here.” He said, “How do you know that?” I said, “I can read maps.” Well, I got all of that experience from aviation and flying, so I followed the guys out. I could read the map following us out.

Anyway, we set up our ambush patrol on the side of the river. And then I found out what tides were, because we set it up too low, and in the middle of the night, why it kept getting spongy around us. What was happening is the water was coming up.



Gary, carrying ammunitions across a stream in Vietnam.

But the reason I mention that point, because it was probably a bad thing for me to have done, because then I became known to everybody that I could read a map. And so our TRACK always got put first for I was the first guy to hold a map and take them the rest of the way, because they depended on me to...

Murgatroyd: You were the scout?

Burgard: I was the scout. That was a good way to put it. Anyway, no conflict happened, but it was a good learning experience. The next couple days we were going out around the village and one of the TRACKS hit a land mine. It was the one before us, so they told us to get out and look for mines. And I'm thinking, where's the minesweepers at? Well, that's when we were ordered to get off the TRACK and look for mines, just by looking for mines, you know, walking, and...

Murgatroyd: You were the minesweeper?

Burgard: We were the minesweeper. And I can remember thinking, how can they do that? Somebody's going to get killed out here. And all the time, I'm going from this training into the practical, still with the training hat on. We did find the mine; it was a Chinese Claymore mine that wasn't set off. Anyway, about a week later, some place around May 7th, we got a call, and it was real hurried. They said, "Crank up your ponies, we're moving." We were moving from the rubber tree plantation towards Saigon, and when we got within fifteen miles of Saigon—and this was out of the Xuan Loc area—one of the guys looked at it and said, "Well, they did it again, they hit the ammo dump." The 2nd and the 47th was a part of the Tet Offensive, and had a lot of involvement. Some of the guys were still there from having served through that first Tet Offensive, and he said, "They've done it again." And there was a big cloud that just set over Saigon. Anyway, we headed towards Saigon, and experienced this going through the center—went right through the center of the square—and were going—I think it was towards the southwest—in a place called Cholon, C-h-o-l-o-n, which was a Chinese suburb of Saigon.

Murgatroyd: Saigon?

Burgard: It was some place around a river and a wide ridge, and I can't tell you more than that right now. But we got to a point and they told us to dismount the TRACKS, or to get off the TRACKS. And I was Sergeant, and another sergeant was told to lead two columns.



Murgatroyd: And how many people would that be, how many men?

Captain Dickinson (Second from the left) and the Advisory Team's interpreter and other Officers in Kien Hung

Burgard: Oh, we had about, counting the drivers and everything, we had probably twenty-seven to thirty guys in our platoon. And of course, the company had three or four platoons, and they lined up behind us. We were again, the lead element, because I could read a map. As we were walking down the street, there was a dead body in the street. And this is—we called them “gooks” in that day—it probably is hard for me to say that now, because of—but that’s...

Murgatroyd: But this is 1968.

Burgard: Yeah, right. So I knew something was up; everything was quiet. We just had reached an intersection, and I looked back at the lieutenant, and I said, “Which way do you want to go?” I just pointed, and he said, “Go straight.” So, the other sergeant, and myself, and another guy had just got across the intersection, and they opened up on us. Caught our whole element in the center of that intersection; three of us made it across to the other side of the street. On one side of the street there was a river; on the side that we went towards there were houses—they were kind of stucco houses. And everything was just... I got caught on the right side, and bullets were flying over my head. I was low-crawling, I didn’t know what to do; I couldn’t stay where I was at, because I was right in the middle. I thought, if I don’t move, they’re going to get me anyway. So, I just started moving, finally crawled to the edge of a building. Actually, I was afraid to fire, because I’m thinking, there’s three of us over here. If they don’t know we’re over here, maybe they won’t shoot us. So I was reluctant to fire but bullets kept flying around, and I figured at that point, they know it. So now, I’m afraid they’re going to come down with the bayonets. Strange thoughts go through your mind. We all started firing at that point, and we were into the ambush at that point, probably five minutes. And I thought the firing would never stop. In your training maneuvers, there was always a stopping. There’s no stopping; it just kept going, and kept going, and kept going.

Murgatroyd: Not training anymore?

Burgard: No. There was guys laying out in the middle of the intersection; that was not a pretty sight. The bodies were smoking because of the lead that—you know, the tracer rounds. And it’s just a gruesome, gruesome sight. I remembered it like, God, if you can get me out of here, I’ll do anything. I’ll preach—I know you’re not supposed to make deals with God, but boy, at this time, I was really taken. Anyway, they got an APC up into the intersection—all of our APCs carried 50-caliber machine guns—and they finally got one in the middle of the intersection. He was letting loose with a lot of stuff, and then they got another one moved up to about the intersection. The first guy moved up about three buildings ahead of us, and we were looking at, how are we going to get back? By this time, this thing had gone on for an hour. I mean, it was hot, no water, it was just—everything. And I think you used twice the water that you normally would use, and everything was dry. And so I saw some hope when the APC went past us and lined up in front of this building and started firing

into the village area. And then what happened, there was about a regiment in the NVA in there.

Murgatroyd: North Vietnamese.

Burgard: Yeah, North Vietnamese Army. And they blew up the building in front of this APC. Well, the APC then turned around and got in front of the next building, and they blew that building up. So then he turns around, and he parks over the top of us, because we're still in front of that building; there's no place for us to go. I knew that building was going to blow up next, so the three of us jumped behind the APC, and then we ran towards the river, which is only about thirty feet away, and jumped in the river. I thought I had it made, because now the bank was hiding us, and then the water starts splashing up all around us. And I thought how in the hell are—you know, what is going on?

Well, they were shooting from the other side of the river. They are all in that place. We eventually had to have helicopter gunships come in, and they strafed the area, and put rockets, and just literally flattened the whole thing. And then we had another company that came in and took over our position; they walked into it, and they didn't walk back out. I mean, they were... It was bad. Then we were told to go on down the road, and we started going house to house. And I always thought if I ever got into it, I'd rather be in the city, rather than in the jungle, because I was afraid of getting lost in the jungle. But you cannot dig holes in that city. You cannot get below the ground level. And when they say keep your head down, there's a reason for it. Because most guys that get killed are the ones that get hit in the head. If you get hit in the body, you've got a chance to make it.



Lt. Eleston and another team member wade through a fast moving current somewhere in the Mekong Delta in May 1968.

But as that time went on, another company came in and replaced us, and then we went on down the road. In our platoon, at that point, all I could find was five guys. We were going from house to house, and there was no order, it was just chaos. I knew our guys were kind of in the area, but there was no orders, it was just... you're just surviving, basically. So, the captain sees this, and he's got an element of security around him. He said, "Hey Sarge, how you doing?" And I said, "I'm not doing worth a damn." I may have put it more strongly than that back in that day. He says, "Well, come over, and you'll be security for me." So, we started walking down there and he gets shot; he got hit in the chest. We were fortunate enough, we had medics with his group, and they start working on him. At the same time, we're getting shot at with snipers, and so, we also had these damn photographers and newspaper people that were all around us.

Murgatroyd: So, had they been with you all the time, or they just kind of...

Burgard: No, they just kind of came out of the woodwork. And one of the guys there said, "Hey, Sarge, go over and get his ass." I put out my rifle and said, "You go get him if you're so damn eager." You know, you don't just want to just waste yourself away; you've got to take some time trying to strategize how you're going to get back in there, and what are you going to see. This particular sniper was in an alley, hidden by buildings. Anyway, I got my five guys back in there—we finally made contact again—and we were shooting back and forth.

I had a guy that had a LAW, which is a light anti-tank weapon, and it was one that you could expand out from. I told him to go ahead and use that and see if you couldn't knock him out. As luck would have it, he tried to shoot it, and he got it uncorked, and nothing would happen. He said, "Sarge, I can't—it won't work." I said, "Well, give the damn thing to me." So, I'd go out and poke my head out, and squeeze, and nothing would go off. And I'd poke my head out, and I'd squeeze, and it wouldn't go off. And finally, the third time I squeezed, and the thing went off. Apparently something happened—I don't know exactly what happened—but the firing stopped. Then we went on to the next location, and in the course of all of that, we were still without any leadership again. We were just... we'd see some American guys, and we'd kind of go towards them, and try to do...

Murgatroyd: But they weren't your unit that you started with?

Burgard: To this day, I don't know who they were.

Murgatroyd: Right.

Burgard: It was just chaos. Finally we reached a point where we were supposed to settle in that night; I got back with the unit, and we RON, which is rest overnight. But we set our TRACKS up in the middle of an intersection, kind of like a wagon train, everybody facing out, and we had positions in between. Then I assigned different guys to watch the TRACK and take different turns guarding. I had one guy that decided that he had had too much that day. I said, well, we had all had too much that day, but that's not going to stop us from taking our turns, because we're all taking our turns. And he said, "No, I'm not taking any more turns." And I told him, "Yeah, you are taking your turn. Get up on that TRACK and start pulling your guard." Well, he got up on the TRACK and he actually pulled an M60 machine gun on me. So, I ducked



Gary (right) stands with Lt. Eleston and Sergeant Garcia, who Gary credits with saving his life back in June of '68.

underneath the TRACK, and another sergeant came up behind him with an M16 and said, “You pull the trigger, and that’s the last.” They took him off and tied him up, and he went on for a court martial.

I know it was tough on everybody, but we all had to do our share, because we’re all just basically trying to survive the whole incident. The next day we continued searching, and by this time there was nothing left. It was just—I mean, there was just—buildings were diminished, and we were just walking through wreckage. We had a place where we stopped by the little water’s edge. A lady was still in there, and she invited us to come in to have tea, of all things. Here we are, in the midst of all of this, and she invites us...

Murgatroyd: The fighting.

Burgard: I said no, because I figured she’s going to try to poison us or whatever. And she said, “No, no, no, come on in.” So, I...

.Murgatroyd: How far is this from Saigon, again?

Burgard: It’s like a suburb.

Murgatroyd: Just a suburb?

Burgard: Yeah, just a suburb of Saigon. You couldn’t tell when you passed from one to the other. Anyway, she gave us some hot tea, and again, water was at a premium. I don’t know, you just usually go through a lot of water in those things; we carried two canteens each. She gave us some of this hot tea. I never have had anything that quenched my thirst so fast in all my life. To this day, I’ll drink hot coffee—I won’t drink so much tea—but hot coffee will do the same thing on a hot day. It quenches your thirst. But I thought that was one of the good things that I learned out of that whole deal.

We actually pushed into another area and we got pinned down again. We went into some houses—we called them hooches, they were not much more than straw houses. I remember getting behind a table, and we put the table up against the wall—like the old John Wayne thing, just to—and the next thing, there was crown(?) and that table didn’t stop anything, it just went right on through it. I don’t remember how we got out of that, because it was just going from one thing to another. Then the next thing I remember is that we were coming in at a point where the village stopped and there was kind of a marsh; we had chased them back into that marsh area. So they called in—it looked to me like F-100s. And I...

Murgatroyd: Probably about that.

Burgard: I was up on my nomenclature for airplanes, and I just didn’t think they had the F-100 over there, but it looked like F-100s. They were coming in with five-hundred-pound bombs. What they would do is come right over the top of us.

They come from what they believed to be the friendly zone to the unfriendly. If you're sitting down there as one of the grunts and you're watching behind you, and this guy lets this bomb go and it looks like it's coming towards you and it goes right over the top of you, and then hits on the other side ... I remember that each time they let one of those things off, I'm hoping to hell like he knows what the hell he's doing. It did work pretty good.

After we got through that, we didn't have to go out in the marsh area. We were assigned another spot where there was a lot of contact, and we got, again, a lot of sniper fire. We got a call to get inside the TRACKS, because they were going to pull the artillery in within fifty feet of us, and they did. Then they told us to get outside the TRACKS. We got outside the TRACKS, and either it was a short round, or there was an RPG [rocket-propelled grenade], I'm not sure which. It went off in the center of us.

One guy—I mean it was terrible, because guys got hit in the chest, in the throat, it just—I went over and tried to save a guy that was on the ground that had shrapnel in his chest. I gave him mouth-to-mouth resuscitation, tried to do what I could, and he died in my arms. I still remember that; that will not go away real soon. We picked up the guys that were alive and some that were dead, and the driver says, "I think we can get over to our medic if we just take off and go this direction." I said, "Well, let's go." HkiENE did, and we got it back into a place where they could get medical aid, at least. In the course of all of that, I was hit in the back with a ricochet. It wasn't much, but I felt something that was hot, and I thought it was sweat that was coming down my back, but it was actually some blood. I went to the battalion station after it was all over, and they just took a scalpel and cut it out, put a bandage on it, and said, "You're good to go." (laughter)

Murgatroyd: And this entire thing took, what, two days, or...

Burgard: Oh, this is about... I think we were there about seven days.

Murgatroyd: Seven days total?

Burgard: Yeah. It was—I can't tell you the smell, the hot, it was just...

Murgatroyd: That was your baptism, huh?

Burgard: That was our baptism under fire. Then we were given another situation that was—and they called that by a term I'm used to—it was a mini Tet Offensive, because Tet came in January, this came in May. They selected—as I've read about it—the NVA selected about 100-some sites that they were going to focus on.

Murgatroyd: And yours was one?

Burgard: And ours was one. After that, we went to another area that was just about ten or fifteen miles southwest of Saigon; it was in some marshy areas across some fields. They had about three companies of NVA trapped in a riverside location. So, we were running our TRACKS into those things, into that area. We set up the TRACKS in a line, and we had a whole company, so we surrounded them, except for the water's edge. Then we were told to dismount and go into it. Well, we got within, oh, probably thirty yards, maybe more like thirty feet to thirty yards, and they opened up on us again, and got a couple guys right off the bat. Then we were actually pinned down because in that particular area, you had to walk through mud; the mud was up around our knees to our thighs, and you couldn't run on the stuff. So, we were just doing one of these volley things, where we'd reach up over the rice paddy dock, and we'd shoot in, empty a magazine, reload. They would turn around and empty it on us. You know, just going back and forth. And frankly, we were within hand grenade distance from each other, doing that.

Murgatroyd: Now, this is also in May, thereabouts, yeah?

Burgard: Yeah. And latter part of May, we're still dealing with the remnants of whatever.

Murgatroyd: That offensive.

Burgard: So the lieutenant said, "Well, what do you think about if we can get artillery, get some gunships in here?" And we decided that we'd pop smoke at either end of our line, which was not very long. We got in some cobra gunships. The plan was that we could pop smoke at either end of our line, gunships would know what our position was, then fire on top of them, and give us the chance to get up and out. I didn't think much of the plan because we had to go through all of that mud, and you couldn't run through it.

Murgatroyd: Right, it's too slow.

Burgard: Basically, it worked. I mean, it took us forever to get out of there, but we finally made it back to our APCs and stayed that night. Then they threw artillery all in that thing the next day—there were trees and everything the day before—there was nothing.

Murgatroyd: Completely flat?

Burgard: When we went back into it, the NVA actually had put tourniquets and stuff on themselves, stayed there, and died in their foxholes. We wound up pulling a lot of them out of the foxholes. But that was... I thought I was a goner in that one, too.

Murgatroyd: Yeah. How many of the enemy were there that you encountered that you found the next day?

Burgard: I think we only found something around twenty. The rest of them, we figured, probably they went out through the river. I don't know how they got out; I don't have a clue. But, I mean, that was just in our area. Now, maybe they found more someplace else, but it was pretty intense. Again, on those volley things, I thought this was it.

Made it out of that one, and then went back to around the Bearcat area, and started running patrols out of there, because there was activity that was picking up all over the place at this time. I was taken out on patrol; I was on the side of the mountain, or the hill. Whenever we took the patrol out, you'd stop for a rest break and set up. But the guys were so tired, they'd all go to sleep. I'd never go to sleep because I was the guy in charge.

Murgatroyd: In charge.

Burgard: I looked down, and I saw a guy in black PJs with an AK-47; I couldn't believe I saw him. Then I was trying to get the rest of the guys awake to show them what I was seeing, and he backed down in the creek. So, once I got their attention, they didn't know what I was talking about. Then he pops back out and then somebody else pops out behind him.

Murgatroyd: Okay. That was just a quick interlude, we're back to late May of 1968. Go ahead.

Burgard: Well, anyway, this VC stands up and he waves at me. Now, I don't know if he thought I was one of their group, because we were still hid. Finally, I looked back at the lieutenant; he sees what's going on, and is kind of stunned at the same time, because usually we did not see the bad guys before they saw us. They kept looking back down, and he led his group out. After I counted about five or six of them, I thought maybe there's more of them than what there are of us; the lieutenant says, "Well, let's take them." So, we opened up on them, and they turned around and opened up on us at that time. Actually I remember running down the hillside and then I stopped when they actually started firing back. I found a little knoll, and I jumped back on the knoll on that hillside, so that the rounds would go over the top of me. Then we stopped firing at each other, and then we brought in mortars, and stuff like that. We did have a request to go down to find body count. Whether it was wrong or right, I told the Lieutenant, "If we go down that hill, and they're still there, we're not coming back up." I said, "Why don't we just wait and see what happens here."

Murgatroyd: And who made the request of the body count?

Burgard: That came from an upper command. In essence, we may have disobeyed the orders at that point, or we chose to obey them, but at a different time, you know, we wanted to sneak around and not go down that hill because there was no cover coming back up. After that, there was other contacts, other units started getting into small and unit contacts on ones and twos, and it just kind

of took off from there. You went to another place, and you went to another place. Finally, we got back that evening and we didn't have to go out on the ambush patrol; somebody else and I got a chance to rest.

The next day we got to go back out again. This time we went through a lot of bamboo, and again, it was one of those things where I looked back at the lieutenant saying, which direction you want to go, and the sniper opened up on me. Well, I got hit. I knew I was hit because it pushed my body forward. I didn't know how bad. I was always walking point, or next to a point, because I was the guy with a map and the compass. The guy that was actually on point came back, and he looked at me and he yells, "Medic!" Well, I don't know what's going on. I mean, all I've got visualized is a part of my shoulder's gone, whatever. I could feel that warm stuff running down my back, so I figured that was blood. So the medic comes bouncing up; he looks at me and he says, "We need an evac helicopter." He still doesn't tell me how bad it is. He starts putting stuff on me and I figured at this point, since we hadn't had any more exchange of fire, that somebody tripped and their weapon went off, and just shot me from behind. But about that point then they opened up on us again, and then we started exchanging fire again. But the helicopter finally came in, and said if we can make it fifty meters, and I forgot, to the north or whatever, he said, "There's an open spot. I can drop down and get you if you guys can secure the area." So, the lieutenant looked at me and says, "Can you make it?" And I said, "I'm not staying here." (laughter)

Murgatroyd: What's the alternative? (laughter)

Burgard: So, anyway, I got in, they got us over, and the chopper dropped down. He picked me up, and they were taking me back in to a medical station. I've got to tell this story, because it's kind of funny, amongst all of the crap that took place. As we sit down on the pad, three or four of them came out, and they wanted to put me on a stretcher. I said, "No, I can walk." They said, "No, you're going on the stretcher," and went into the undress station. They had nurses there and other beds where they had taken guys. At that time, we did not wear underwear because there was so much water, you could get rash and the like. And so a lot of guys just dispensed with that because you could dry off a lot faster. I started to tell the nurse as she started taking my clothes off, I says, "You know, I'm not wearing any underwear." And she says, "I've seen it all before." And before she could mention that, she had scalpel scissors that were going down my pant legs, and she even cut the strings off my boot, and everything came off in one, it was like that fast, it was like a machine. They had me under sheets and I was going down to the operation room. And I said, "Well, it doesn't look as bad as it could've been." They said, "We might be able just to cut around it and take out the dead skin." When the bullet goes through, it leaves a shock effect, so that they don't want gangrene or anything like that. She says, "We might be able to do that with a local, but you probably want to be put to sleep." At this point I'm thinking, I've heard all

these stories, and I don't want them to cut too much, or cut the wrong thing, and I said, "Give me a local." So they took me back into the operating room; there's a major and a captain. The major looks at the captain—I'm listening quite intently—and he says, "Pass me the knife and fork." They had a kidney shaped platter that was sitting next to my head, of all places, and just in a swoop, he takes out a bunch of meat, skin and the like from my back that must've been six to eight inches long and about three or four inches wide. When I saw that, the bees started buzzing pretty bad. (laughter) I think I made a mistake.

Murgatroyd: Yeah.

Burgard: Eventually I made it through it, but that was probably not a good decision on my part.

Murgatroyd: You didn't lose consciousness?

Burgard: No, but I had to fight it a lot. Oh, I was so close, and so sick, I was just... Oh, it was bad.

Murgatroyd: So, they got the—was it a through and through, or...

Burgard: It went in one side of the shoulder, and it came out through the top, around my neck. The guy just missed me by an inch or it could've had me in the head. It followed that bone around the shoulder bone, and just, you know, bullets do strange things when they hit you. That, thank God, was a strange thing that was in my benefit. I was placed in Vung Tau Hospital for about three weeks.

Murgatroyd: Now, say that again.

Burgard: Vung Tau.

Murgatroyd: Vung Tau, okay.

Burgard: V-u-n-g T-a-u.

Murgatroyd: Okay.

Burgard: It was a big medical station that was next to the ocean; it was really a pretty place.

Murgatroyd: Okay.

Burgard: I stayed there probably three or four weeks until they got it all sewed up and drained, and then they sent me back.

Murgatroyd: Yeah. While you were there in the hospital and you're recuperating, how was your care?

Burgard: Oh, it was great. I mean, there were nurses around us just asking are you okay, are you feeling okay, can I do this for you. I think it was better than any hospital that you could've had in the States because they were around you all the time. There was several of us in there. There was probably twenty or thirty beds in all.

Murgatroyd: Was it all Army, or could you tell other services there? I mean, the doctors, nurses, were they all Army, or...

Burgard: You know, I don't remember right now. I don't remember. They might've been a combination of Army and Navy.

Murgatroyd: But obviously patients were from all branches.

Burgard: I had a couple of guys from Australia next to me, and they were something else. One guy was hit pretty bad. When they opened up his wound, you could see his knee bone. They had to open those things up so they'd drain, and they wouldn't close them up right away. He was bound and determined he was going to go back, and he was going to get that son-of-a gun that got him, and take about ten more if he could. He was more aggressive than I was. (laughter) There was about two or three of them in there from an Australian outfit. But that was really, really good care.

Murgatroyd: Now, you were ambulatory at the time?

Burgard: Yes, yeah. It turned out to be a good and a bad thing, because there were so many guys that didn't luck out. I don't know why I did. I have no idea.

Murgatroyd: Now, when you were injured that time, what was the reaction, or how did you get notification, or tell your folks back home?

Burgard: Well, they had set up with each individual how you wanted notification to go back home. Rather than having a card sent by the Army, I filled in the box that I would prefer to go ahead and write myself and inform them myself. So, I sent a letter back to the folks and everything saying that I was in the hospital. I wanted them to know that I was in the hospital first, and that I was okay and just received a slight wound. I knew they were worried enough, and I didn't want them to be worried more than what they could be. But that's the way I had it.

Murgatroyd: Okay. So, they weren't notified by anybody from the military back here in the States?

Burgard: No, I didn't want us to do that.

Murgatroyd: Gotcha.

Burgard: Didn't want to have to go that way.

Murgatroyd: Okay, all right. Well, we're going to come to a stopping point now. We'll take it up here in a few minutes after we're recuperated.

Burgard: Okay.

(Pause in recording)

Murgatroyd: Gary, after you were injured and you were sent to the hospital and patched up, were you presented with any decorations then?

Burgard: To my recollection, I do recall somebody, an officer, and I don't recall where he was from, giving me a Purple Heart right in the hospital, which I thought was kind of neat. From there on, we spent three weeks, and they said I was okay to go back.

Murgatroyd: Okay. And then, when you were cleared for return to duty, where'd you go?

Burgard: I went back to the 9th Division, but at this point, the 9th Division had moved from Bearcat to a place called Dong Tan. It was further in the delta area, south of Saigon. The company assumed a lot of the road patrolling. The VC were setting a lot of bombs and stuff in the road, mines. Our job was to try to keep those roads from being mined; we also were used in convoys, trying to take different supplies and stuff from one location to another, and act as a security element for them. At night we'd run the roads, which is a term that we use for running the APCs down the road at night. We'd use the cat lights on the APC, which was just a minimal light that would just shine down so no one could see; they could hear you coming, but they couldn't see you coming, supposedly. And then we'd continue to do our ambush patrols. There was another couple of incidents that occurred in a place that we were providing security for, by the name of Firebase Moore. It was, again, an artillery base. It was a large artillery base.

Murgatroyd: Now, how far from Saigon is...

Burgard: Again, I'm going to say about fifteen to twenty miles outside of Saigon. It's really hard to tell you all of these things, because I didn't keep maps. But we did go out on the Firebase. We were going to escort a convoy, and our TRACK hit a land mine and blew off the track. And one of the guys that was sitting on the ledge got some shrapnel. But other than that, I mean it ruined the track, but it didn't cause any more damage than that. At the time, it blew me off the TRACK. I remember coming down and looking at the pavement and thought, well, maybe I can break an arm or something and get out of here, because it took a long time for bones to heal. All I did was scratch my eyebrow because my head hit the pavement, or that steel pot. I scratched my eyebrow, and that was about it.

They made an effort to supply us with TRACKS real quick. So I think the next day I had another APC. Then I was given another mission to take a

group out at night and plan an ambush with two APCs, and 105, which was a cannon. They would use beehive grounds. They were having a lot of problems with these VC mining these roads. So, the idea was that we were going to take a strike force out with us. We also had two trucks with straight legs.

Murgatroyd: Now, how many men in the strike force?

Burgard: There was probably forty or fifty. I was the first APC, and I led it, and then we had TRACKS, a truck, and then a Jeep that was carrying a 105, and then another truck, and then an APC. We were pulling into an area where we were going to set up the ambush. Unfortunately, they were sitting there waiting for us, and they ambushed us. They hit us in the side with a rocket, an RPG, so we got into another firefight that night. The trucks went off the side of the road. I don't know what happened to the Jeep with the 105, but that would've been the perfect place to set that off, because that's what it was used for. But for the most part, the two APCs, our self and the APC came up—he called me from the back and he said, "Do you want me to come up while we're in this firefight?" I said, "Yeah, bring it up." And basically, it was the two APCs that engaged in the firefight.

We lost—we didn't really lose—two guys got wounded, one guy got his finger shot off, another guy got hit in the leg. I called in the choppers and we got those guys out, but I lost another APC at that point. When we went back I got in touch with the company clerk—I think I bought him a case of beer—and I said, "We've been getting pounded. I know everybody wants to get out of here, but if you see anything comes up, I might pay some realistic attention to getting out of this unit," because we were just taking it. So, he came in one day and he said, "I've got to randomly select a sergeant to go to MAC-V to become an advisor.

Murgatroyd: Now, MAC-V was...

Burgard: A Military—I forgot what the term was.

Murgatroyd: Assistance?

Burgard: Yeah, assistance. And, "Would you like to be selected randomly?" And I said, "I think so." So, in the next week or so, the orders came out that I was to be transferred to MAC-V as an advisor.

Murgatroyd: Oh, good. You had mentioned, when you came back from your recuperation after your injury, you came back to the same unit. Were most of the same unit members there, or did they have any changes in personnel, or...

Burgard: There was different personnel, because in a period of three weeks, I recognized the driver and a couple of turret drivers. But as you say that, I do remember the guy that wouldn't take his command, that was given a court martial, was actually sent back, or came back to our unit. I couldn't believe

that they put him back in the same company. I didn't know quite how to react with that. I didn't trust him, and it was just... it was part of my decision to get out of there. There was too many things to watch, and I felt like I was running my luck as far out on that chain as I could get. This guy was assigned to another platoon, but within the same company. So, it was obvious there was going to be times we were going to be together, and I didn't There was a term over there that they call "fragging." I don't know that I ever saw anybody use it. I mean, I didn't see anybody use it, but everybody was aware of it. And that's where a person could wind up in some circumstance, maybe killing another person that was in your own unit because they didn't like him, for whatever reason.

Murgatroyd: Yeah, usually in a leadership position?

Burgard: Right. And that bothered me some. Even though the guys around me were just great. I mean, they had a term that they said, "Burgard's shit is up tight," which meant they trusted me to take them out. And I appreciated that, but it created a lot of responsibility on my part, because it seemed like I was always looking out for them. I felt the responsibility. I felt myself getting old very fast.

Murgatroyd: Did you have any impressions back in that time of the leadership of your company platoons, the officers over you?

Burgard: Well, I thought the leadership was good. I mean, the officers that came in were easy to talk to; they had knowledge about what they were doing. I was surprised that most of them could read maps as well as... You know, that's a special talent, to be able to read a map. But they did a good job of leading, and leading is taking a step where you don't want to take a step, and you're the first one to do it. We had lieutenants that did that. The fact is, that one situation where we went into the area where there was three other VC companies, it was probably that lieutenant said, "Let's go," when we had to go in the second time. And everybody, including myself, was reluctant to go, because we had taken such a hit the first time. He started walking, and so everybody else starts walking. Leadership is as simple as taking the first step and not knowing what's going to happen.

Murgatroyd: Did you notice, at any point, could you tell the difference in either personality, or the way that they approached their leadership, between West Point grads, and ROTC, or OTS guys, or...

Burgard: I don't think I was involved with anybody, other than from OCS. I mean, they came in with their bars, and they were all young, about my age, and you just really couldn't tell where they'd gone. No one really sat down and talked about their past that much. It was...

Murgatroyd: The job to do.

Burgard: ...the job to do.

Murgatroyd: So, we've got you through the first unit, and you've been randomly selected for a new assignment.

Burgard: Yes.

Murgatroyd: Tell us about that.

Burgard: Well...

Murgatroyd: And this is what time of year?

Burgard: This is now probably September.

Murgatroyd: Of '68?

Burgard: Yeah. '68, September something. Had an opportunity to go to the MAC-V training quarters. I don't remember the name of the city that we were taken to, but they gave us two weeks of intensive culture and language training, and told us that we'd be out in the field, dealing with the regional and popular forces. Our objective was to train them how to defend themselves, and how to set up ambush patrols, and similar things, like the American units were doing.

Murgatroyd: So, you would be training South Vietnamese forces?

Burgard: Correct. The cultural thing was a big thing, and that's really where I started learning about some of the people. Before, it was hard to understand when we were there, knowing that we were involved in operations that resulted in people getting killed. Why did the local population not tell us where these people were at? After a while you start thinking, it looks like "we" and "they." "We" were Americans, "they" were the VC, the NVA, and the local people, because it all looked like they were strategizing against us.

Murgatroyd: They were Vietnamese no matter what, whether they were good or bad.

Burgard: Yeah, you couldn't tell the difference. But in this cultural training thing, it made us closer to the people. I started learning that there were different ways to approach the citizenry. Motions that were acceptable and non-acceptable, how to call a person. We sometimes would gesture with our palms up and bring the fingers towards us. Well, that was considered an insult because it meant that you were a higher status than somebody else. The correct way to do it was to put your arms out at arms' length, about the level of your eyes, and with your palm down, motion with your fingers to come this way. And that meant that you were of equal status. It made a big difference with the people once you knew what they were looking for; it kind of soothed some nerves, I think. It might've been helpful in the American unit to know that.

Murgatroyd: For everybody, if they had known something like that.

Burgard: Yeah, for everybody, yeah.

Murgatroyd: Now, you were instructed or you were trained in this back in Saigon?

Burgard: In Saigon, correct.

Murgatroyd: And by...

Burgard: I think Xeon was the place, something like Xeon, it was right outside of Saigon.

Murgatroyd: But the training was conducted, not only by US Army, but also by...

Burgard: Some Vietnamese.

Murgatroyd: ...Vietnamese civilians?

Burgard: Right. A result of that I was sent off to the Macon and Forcor area, which was way down in the Delta, I would guess, 50 or 60 miles south of Saigon. The closest American forces would've been the 9th Division out of Dong Tan. We were assigned to a place called Keinhoung—I'm going to spell it, K-e-i-n-h-o-u-n-g—that was under the Chien Tien Province—and I'll spell it, C-h-i-e-n T-i-e-n Province. There were no other Americans in that area, except for five other guys that headed up a district team. We were sent into the area...

Murgatroyd: They were military?

Burgard: They were military, right. We had a captain, a lieutenant, a sergeant, and an interpreter, and myself. Naturally, they sent us in without the interpreter; that was to come later. And they were supposed to send a Conex container.

Murgatroyd: And a Conex container is?

Burgard: It's a steel box, just about eight by eight by eight. It's a cubic square that's about eight foot. Inside that Conex container were supplies that we would need—tent, sand bags, machine gun ammo—all kinds of things that you would need to set your encampment up as you lived with the VC. When we opened ours up, it was damn near empty. We were sent out without an interpreter. We didn't have any food.

Murgatroyd: Very few supplies! (laughter)

Burgard: We were able to deal with our district, and they had five guys in there that had supplies. So we were eating with them when they made their accommodations available to us.

Murgatroyd: And what type of accommodations were that? I mean, tent, wherever, or...

Burgard: Yeah, we had a tent. They actually had a little better quarters. It was like a barracks overseas, where they had the slats. If you ever watched, in the Korean shows, there was a tent over the top, and screens, and stuff like that. So it was a lot better, and they did have a generator. We did not have a generator. The good thing about serving with this outfit is that I didn't have to go out and patrol as much for their company size. We would go to different villages, and we would set up a training exercise on how to train them in caring for weapons, and that kind of thing.

Murgatroyd: With an interpreter?

Burgard: Eventually, we got our interpreter, who really didn't understand English. (laughter) But we borrowed one from the district, which were the five guys that were there. So, when we had their interpreter, they didn't have any. And it was different.

Murgatroyd: What was the reception with the local populace when you...

Burgard: You know, actually, it was good. We were treated very nicely. We got a chance to meet with them individually. We were even invited to a supper with them, which I was impressed. In fact, here's a little story. We were invited to an evening meal. When we arrived, they had chicken, and of course rice, and something called basi day, which was a rice whiskey. At the end of the meal, there's a chicken head that was uneaten yet. The Vietnamese officer there said he gave me the chicken head as the most ranking. Well, I was the biggest guy there, but I wasn't the most ranking guy. And I looked at the lieutenant, and I said, "Lieutenant, if they find out that you're a higher rank than me, and I ate that chicken head, they're going to be angry." I said, "You need to eat that chicken head." And the lieutenant now said, "You son of a bitch." (laughter) And he ate the chicken head. But they had eaten everything that comes apart.

Murgatroyd: With rank comes responsibility.

Burgard: That's right! (laughter) We didn't get into that many skirmishes while we were over there in that outfit, which was good. We did have a couple incidents where we encountered, oh, long range sniper fires, and the captain wanted to call in some artillery. Not having an interpreter, you ask the lieutenant, the Vietnamese lieutenant, where are the enemy? So, the lieutenant gave them some coordinates. Our captain calls in the artillery, and I said, "Captain, let me take a look at those coordinates—where's he given those coordinates." The lieutenant gave him our coordinates. I told the captain, I said, "You better cease that fire mission. He's given us our coordinates. Right here is the dike in the road." That captain turned white. He called the guy quick; he got it ceased. But again, my map reading experience came in handy.

The fact that we didn't have an interpreter was a real problem. So, we never went out without an interpreter after that. There was another incident

where we got wind of a company of VC that was in an area that was about ten miles from us. It was a long hike, and everything. I appreciated those APCs because we didn't have to walk. Down there, we had to walk every place. We got within, oh, I don't know, a quarter mile from them, and they opened up on us with mortars. Well, the mortars started coming down, and I remembered you're supposed to run back and at a forty-five degree angle so it would be hard for them to track you in on that mortar. We're running through rice paddies. So I took off running, and the lieutenant was not to be found. I looked around, and he was behind the rice paddy dike. I told him, "You've got to get out of here. If we don't keep moving, they're going to zero in on us." Finally, I got the lieutenant out. And the reason I say that is because they had an E7, who is a long time sergeant, and I was just an NCO, and he said, "Sarge, I was impressed with you. You may have some hope after all." Because he didn't care for my quick ascension into that E5 rating. (laughter)

Murgatroyd: He showed a little bit about how to...

Burgard: Yeah. And there is another story about him. As I got closer to the point where I was going to go home, there was a B-52 strike that came in not very far from us. The ground just rumbles. We had built a bunker outside of our tent. Somebody yelled "incoming" while I slept with the shorts on, and ran out to the bunker. And this sergeant, he tended to sleep nude. Well, he came out with his combat boots, his steel pot, and his rifle.

Murgatroyd: Nothing else.

Burgard: Nothing else. We got in this bunker, and he looks at me, and he says, "What the hell are you going to fight with?" (laughter) But we didn't know it was a B-52 strike at that time. He had to go out past the guards, the Vietnamese guards, and they started laughing. It was funny, but you know, he was right, I would've been wrong, but...

Murgatroyd: So, the B-52s were trying to hit some place close to you?

Burgard: Yeah, right. They had apparently found something over there that they wanted to knock out. It was a rumbling that I had not heard before. I had not been close to a B-52 strike before; the ground just shook.

Murgatroyd: When you were doing this mission, about how far away from other American forces were you?

Burgard: I think we're probably thirty or forty miles from anybody.

Murgatroyd: And thirty or forty miles from you would be another type of a team?

Burgard: Advisory—yeah. Our connection was with a helicopter. The Army would bring our supplies in by helicopter. There were times when we were staying out within a village, away from our fort. So, our mail would come overseas by

jet, by caribou, twin caribou, then by helicopter, then some of the local people would bring it by sampan to us, and that's how some of our mail got to us.

Murgatroyd: Okay. So, you were close by a river, then?

Burgard: Yeah, we were. Lots of river area. The fact is, we claimed we owned one part of the area, and across the river the VC owned. So, you never wanted to stay on the other side of the river.

Murgatroyd: Were you on the east side, west side, or...

Burgard: I think we would've been on the north.

Murgatroyd: North, okay.

Burgard: The north side, the river tends to run, I think, southeast, into the—I don't know where it was, China Sea, or something was there. The air spotter was an American guy; he flew in a little Cessna 170, and we had air contact with him. So, he became our air force. I remember one night he was patrolling the area, and after six o'clock, there's not supposed to be any river traffic. He rolled in, and he said, "Well, there's some sampans down on this river. They shouldn't be here." He said, "I'm going to take a roll in and see what they're doing." He came back up and he said, "Well, they got up and they started praying to me. That's probably the oldest trick in the book." He said, "This is," whatever his name was, "and I'm rolling in." They had white phosphorous. He was using those as his rockets, and used them more aggressively than more spotter planes. At one point, I actually met the guy, and he wanted me to go up, because he thought I had flight experience. He said, "You can go up with me; we'll let you do some flying up here." But I was getting short, and I said, "You know, I have enough trouble trying to stay alive just on the ground. You make too much of a target up there."

Murgatroyd: Yeah. Now, you talked about getting short to come home. We're talking about what time of year are we in now?

Burgard: This is January—probably in February.

Murgatroyd: Of '69?

Burgard: Yeah, '69.

Murgatroyd: Now, did you have any R&R while you were over there?

Burgard: I did.

Murgatroyd: And when did that happen.

Burgard: Took two R&Rs. Actually, one was some time in or after Vung Tau, which would've been after June—probably in July some time. I went to Singapore, and that was really nice. Singapore's a very clean city: lots of bands, and lots of bars, and all of those kind of things that seemed to appeal to me at that time. I don't know if they'd appeal to me now.

Murgatroyd: How long were you there?

Burgard: Just a week.

Murgatroyd: Okay.

Burgard: But when I went to MAC-V, I took the personnel folder with me, and they looked at it, and the papers hadn't come back from the prior...

Murgatroyd: 9th Division?

Burgard: ...yeah, 9th Division, and so it didn't show any kind of trip. So he said, "Well, you're eligible. You want to go to Japan or Australia?" And I said, "Well, if I can go to Australia, I'd sure like to try that." (laughter) So, anyway, I got two R&Rs, whether it was kosher, or not.

Murgatroyd: Where'd you go in Australia?

Burgard: We went to Sydney, and I was able to meet up with Jimmy Broussard in the 25th, and one of the guys that we had gone in together. We had kept correspondence throughout the time we were in, and we lucked out; we were able to go over there together and had a lot of fun.



Gary (right) with Jimmy Broussard during some R and R time in Australia, February 1969.

Murgatroyd: Good, good. That's great. So, you had an R&R with the first unit, and then an R&R with the MAC-V unit. You were injured during June 1968, when you were with the 9th Division. Any other injuries during your time over there?

Burgard: Actually, that first one was when I got that ricochet, and it also counted as a Purple Heart.

Murgatroyd: Oh, I see, okay.

Burgard: I think I've got orders for both of them, but I see that they didn't show up on the final paperwork that came out. I also got an Army Accommodation Medal with a V Device, and that was for taking the guys that got hit in Cholon there to the medic, where we drove them through. Actually, everybody should've gotten one on that, it just wasn't me, because it was the driver.

Murgatroyd: When did the Accommodation Medal—when did it show up, pretty quickly after?

Burgard: You know, I don't remember right now, I think it was sent to me.

Murgatroyd: While you were in Vietnam?

Burgard: Yeah.

Murgatroyd: Yeah.

Burgard: But it didn't make a big impression on me when I got it. Then later, after I got home, I got a Bronze Star for my service with the Vietnamese. And actually, that came from the Vietnamese government.

Murgatroyd: Did it?

Burgard: I was a little surprised when I got that, basically, for meritorious service, and stated some terms how I helped the local Vietnamese out.

Murgatroyd: We'll get to those at the end of the interview. But one of the questions we always like to ask is—and you've told us a little bit about your fellow soldiers, and your impressions of leaders, officers—is there anything that struck you as positive or negative about morale in either of the units that you were with?

Burgard: Well, one of the issues, as I recall, that most of us stumbled with, was the leadership would tend to put us in situations where we were bait. Once something happened, then they'd bring in others to try to conquer what we got into. None of us liked being bait, and we all felt like we were used a lot.

Murgatroyd: Used to draw fire?

Burgard: Yeah. I'm sure that was a strategy that was used; it was pretty self-evident. But when you're part of the bait, it doesn't feel good.

Murgatroyd: Right, right.

Burgard: Other than that, the guys all tended to support one another really well. We had some drinking. Our outfit was able to carry lots of beer in the APCs. A lot of times in the morning, I'd have a beer and crackers out of the C-rations. And that was standard, it was quenching. But we didn't have any trouble with the drugs that I've seen so many shows show to. I was aware some of the guys might be, very few, smoking maybe marijuana or something like that. But I don't think anybody had any hard drugs. We were all pretty ripe, because you had to be that way to stay alive. So, I don't get a lot of this stuff that came back, not that it wasn't there. But I think it wasn't quite so much available to

the guys that were out in the field as it was, maybe, to the guys that were in the back areas.

(end of interview #1 #2 continues)

Interview with Gary Burgard

VRV-A-L-2014-010

Interview # 2: February 13, 2014

Interviewer: Tom Murgatroyd

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Murgatroyd: Okay, we're resuming our interview with Gary Burgard on the 13th of February, 2014. During your time in Vietnam, what were your impressions of our U.S. Army, as regards the integration of the services?

Burgard: Well, at that time I thought we were fully integrated, because we had blacks and whites that really fought together in the same routines. We were all given rank on a can-do basis. There may have been some overtones that existed about black and white. I'm sure if you dug deeper, there was probably large overtones, small overtones, based upon who was involved. I had some good experiences and bad experiences when we were in combat together. I found that everybody wanted to survive as much as they could. (laughs) I had a turret driver that manned a fifty-caliber machine gun, and in one attack, he actually wore the skin off his hand because the fifty-caliber kept jamming up all the time; cocking that with his hand, he was a good reason why we got out of there. I say that because we were all stuck in the same thing, in the same place, and if you wanted to get out, it didn't make any difference what color you were. Now, back in base camp, the black guys tended to hang out with the black guys, and the white guys tended to... I don't know how they forced that, but that was at the time, kind of the way that it took place. But I thought we were fully integrated.

Murgatroyd: As much as you saw for advancement, or promotions, and things like that, was there any difference one way or the other that you could tell?

Burgard: Well, no, not as far as the enlisted. The fact was there were a lot more black sergeants, I thought, than there were white sergeants. Most of my training was through black sergeants.

Murgatroyd: And it could've been because they were more... they were career guys, primarily.

Burgard: Yeah. It was just standard operating procedure to see somebody in sergeant stripes that was black, and the rest of the guys could be black and white; I can't remember an individual who didn't take his responsibility seriously. And we had a lot of guys that were in the medics that were black. And to me, that was a position that was beyond the call, because they had to jump and run, regardless of the situation, and that would've been ... I was not aware of any problems, except when we got back to base camp, and maybe the blacks wanted to hang out with the blacks, and the white guys would hang out with the white guys.

Murgatroyd: Did you have much to do with civilians, either U.S. civilians, government civilians, or with South Vietnamese civilians that worked with or for the Army?

Burgard: We had a lot of South Vietnamese civilians that worked within the ranks of the base camp, and they did a lot of cleaning and furnishing a lot of labor-intensive things when it was called for. As far as the United States is concerned, very little contact with any civilian people, because most of my service time was training, and the training was completed through the regular Army. When we were in MAC-V, we actually had a couple of people that took care of the tent for us. We paid them, and I think we paid them out of our own pocket. But that was the extent of my involvement with, basically, contracted civilians.

Murgatroyd: Did you—other than contact...

Burgard: There was one other group, what was it—the group that was flying all the time, that used to bring our supplies, I understand they were—what'd they call them?

Murgatroyd: Transamerica?

Burgard: Yeah, we had some contact with them, because they would bring supplies in sometimes when others weren't available.

Murgatroyd: But, I mean, other than just resupplying you, that was...

Burgard: That was it.

Murgatroyd: The enemy you came in contact with other than combat, contact that way, you had no other impressions or contact with them at all?

Burgard: Well, actually, that's not true, because we did have what they called a Chieu Hoi, which was an NVA soldier that gave up on his side and switched to our side—I didn't mention it—and we used him a lot in leading patrols. He could talk Vietnamese, and he had a little English that he could use around us. I kind of hung out with him a little bit. He was a college professor and taught math. We started to engage each other a little bit, and we found out that through math, and equal signs, and algebraic equations, that there was something in common that we had. So, I did have some contact with him. Then, of course, when I was in MAC-V, we had a lot of civilians that helped around the camp. We had the Vietnamese popular forces who were our primary source of security.

Murgatroyd: Have you remained in contact with anybody other than some of your guys that you were in training with?

Burgard: Most of the guys I've been in contact with are limited to two of the guys I was involved with initially in the training, and that's Jimmy Broussard and Phillip Peace. But we all went through the same process. Phillip went with the air cav; he was wounded, hit in the chest and arm. I finally made contact with him forty years later. Jimmy wound up with the 25th; he was given a Silver Star, and a Bronze Star. He was involved in a human wave attack, going the wrong way with him. We were all involved in a lot of stuff.

Murgatroyd: But you didn't remain in contact with anybody from the 9th Division, or...

Burgard: No, I didn't. I didn't.

Murgatroyd: While you were there, of course, we've talked about your R&Rs, and your time in the hospital, how did you rotate back? Was there a point system to come out of there, or so many months, so many...

Burgard: Strictly days, 365 days, and we all counted down.

Murgatroyd: Okay.

Burgard: So, the term "short" was used to indicate you were close. And if you were "short-short", you were within ten digits of being ready to go.

Murgatroyd: So many days and a wake-up.

Burgard: Yes, yes. In order to leave, I had to catch a helicopter—it was a Chinook helicopter—I had to catch a helicopter from Kienhoung back to Chien Tien. From there, I caught a Chinook helicopter into Canto, and then from there, I caught a Jeep patrol. It was kind of like the old World War II rat patrols, and they needed somebody to be a shotgun guy. So, I volunteered, because I was

going to Tan Son Nhut, and they were going to Tan Son Nhut. I like to died on that thing, because those guys were just crazy. I remember coming across the bridge, and they were running those Jeeps as fast as they could run them. The torque on that Jeep, once it left the ground, started twisting the Jeep so that it didn't land in a straight line. We hit, (slapping sound) and bounced and bounced, and I thought I really made a mistake. Here I am ready to go home, and I'm going to get killed on a Jeep. (laughter)

Murgatroyd: On your last drive!

Burgard: Yeah! (laughter)

Murgatroyd: So, you came back to Tan Son Nhut, and what was your out-processing there before you left the country?

Burgard: I know that they lost my orders, which is my biggest fear, is somebody could lose my orders, and then I have to go back and start all over again. But they found them. I think it was just a minimal processing, or out-processing. We left our rifle there, and all of our duffle—or anything that you had in the duffle bag that couldn't be transported back—was left there. They checked to make sure you weren't carrying any guns back, that kind of thing. And that was primarily it. You loaded on that airplane. My heart was pounding hard when I saw that airplane.

Murgatroyd: Okay. So, they got you out on time?

Burgard: Yeah, actually I was ahead. I left on March the 22nd, so going into the services, April 13th. I was a few days under my two years, but I didn't tell anybody.

Murgatroyd: We talked about it a little bit earlier, but you stayed in contact with your family, and with Judy, through letters?

Burgard: Through letters. Wrote extensively.

When we landed in California, we spent about a day checking out—a day and a night—and they gave us free tickets to go wherever we wanted to go. So I said, "I need an airline to get me to Shreveport, Louisiana." I think it was an American Airlines. I remember getting on a bus that had a lot of ROTC students. I started to get on the bus and there wasn't a seat available. The bus driver told the ROTC students, he says, "Make way for a real soldier." (laughter) That made me feel good.

Murgatroyd: That's good, that's good.

Burgard: Got to the airport, got on the airline, and we took off. I'm glad somebody woke me up when we got to Shreveport, because I was sleeping all the way.

Murgatroyd: Now, you're in uniform the whole time?

Burgard: I think I was in uniform, right.

Murgatroyd: Yeah. Okay. So, didn't get rid of your uniform, get your civvies on, until you were back in...

Burgard: Back in the States, right.

Murgatroyd: Anything we haven't covered—any humorous, unusual events that we haven't talked about?

Burgard: Well, I think I missed a story. One time we parked above a hillside. Every once in a while you have to take a dump, and I took my entrenching trowel, went outside the perimeter, and started digging the hole. Just had dropped the trowel when a sniper started shooting at me. I didn't carry a rifle with me, so I low-crawled back to the perimeter while this sniper was shooting at me. Now, it's kind of funny, because he must've been laughing too, because he was missing me a lot. Even the guys back in the TRACK were laughing because of the way I was approaching the perimeter. (laughter) And anyway, it was funny. It was not funny, but it was funny.

Murgatroyd: You can look back on it.

Burgard: Yeah! (laughter)

Murgatroyd: So, you're back in the States, and you go to Louisiana and join up with your girlfriend and fiancée.

Burgard: Spent a couple days with her and then took off from Shreveport, went back to St. Louis, met my folks there. Dad actually flew down and picked me up in St. Louis and flew us back to Jacksonville. It was a very happy reunion with Mom and Dad and two sisters. I think I had a week where I kind of did nothing and just visited a few friends. After that week I went back to work. It was a lot different for me than a lot of people, because I had a job to go to, and it was a good job. So, I wasn't unemployed, I wasn't looking for work, I knew what I wanted to do, and things started to fall in place. So, it was much different for me than a lot of guys that are coming back.

Murgatroyd: So, you started back up with the flying operation, and then after that, what did you do with employment?

Burgard: Well, I stayed there for a couple years. But what I hadn't planned on was, the number of guys coming back with heavy flight time was just overwhelming. The economy took a nosedive; I was sending letters off to airlines and fully qualified, but it took such a downturn that things just didn't work out. As a result, I needed to gain something a little bit better than where I was at. So, I asked my wife, who was working for the state hospital at that time in

Jacksonville, “How do you get a job like that?” I went to her personnel officer, and he said you have to take some tests. Some of the tests that I wound up taking were oral tests. I remember one of the guys that was giving an oral test to me for a job. After we got through everything, he looked at me—he knew I was a flight instructor—and he said, “How do you teach an old son-of-a-bitch like me how to fly?” And I said, “Well, sir, if you’ve got the desire to learn, I can teach you.” He says, “That’s a good answer.” Went on taking more tests and happened to come back for another oral interview. I recognized this guy that had been part of an oral group before that was doing it for another department, and he recognized me. And he said, “Haven’t you got a job yet?” I said, “No, I’m still looking.” And he says, “I’ve got somebody in mind for you. With your business background, and your degree,” he said, “How would you like to go work in Rockford as a business administrator for the Department of Children and Family Services?” So, it beats what I’ve got now. I interviewed with a lady by the name of Margaret Kennedy, who later became the Director for DCFS. I can remember one of the questions that she asked me that I think put me over the top. She said, “So, how do you feel about working on weekends?” And I looked at her and I said, “Does that mean I’m going to get a weekend off?” And she laughed. She said, “I think you’ll work.” (laughter)

From there on, we moved to Rockford. I worked for DCFS, the Department of Children and Family Services, as a regional business manager for about four or five years. Then the department started to want to contract out a lot of jobs and services. Since I had the business background, could understand a little bit about the social services, they said I’d be a good candidate to start contracts. So, I was in on the starting element with DCFS where we started contracting for social services throughout the State of Illinois. I wrote a lot of the contracts and did a lot of the negotiations—a whole bunch of the negotiations—for contracts. And that’s how I ended my career, as a contract administrator for the state.

Murgatroyd: So, you worked for the state from what year to what year?

Burgard: Oh, it would’ve been—ended up about 2001. And I’m trying to think, 1979, maybe.

Murgatroyd: And when were you and Judy married?

Burgard: Nineteen sixty-nine.

Murgatroyd: Okay, so right after...

Burgard: Right after we got back.

Murgatroyd: Came back, okay.

Burgard: Yeah, they had a job for her in Springfield, and had it all set up, and her folks said, no, she's not coming unless she's married. So, we changed our plans real quick, and we got married. (laughter)

Murgatroyd: Now, I know you've had experience, too, in real estate. So, when did you start doing that?

Murgatroyd: I did it on a part-time basis, just because I liked the challenge of dealing with people on a person-to-person basis and looking at decision makers. So I did a lot of stuff on a part-time basis before I quit the state because I had weekends and such available; Judy had a realtor's license, so she could pick up and do all of the stuff that was required when I couldn't do it. Then we went into full-time real estate, probably, in 2002, immediately after I retired from the department, and worked in that until just a year ago. And we did quite well. Real estate's a fun occupation to get into. Selling is like scoring points, or whatever, in basketball.

Murgatroyd: Just a competition?

Burgard: Yeah, it's competition, and I love the competition.

Murgatroyd: Okay. Since you've been out of the service, did you join or maintain any relationships with veterans groups?

Burgard: I am a member of the local Purple Heart Chapter, and a member of the Disabled American Veterans; you can be a member—even though I'm not disabled, per se, as long as you were wounded, had a Purple Heart, you're eligible to be a member of that organization.

Murgatroyd: Do you attend any unit or military reunions?

Burgard: I haven't, and I'm not sure that I really want to. I like to think of everybody the way I like to think of them right now, and I'm afraid if I go back, I don't know what else I'd have in common, except for that one year.

Murgatroyd: The one thing I didn't ask, but did you use any GI Bill, benefits?

Burgard: I did. When I got back, I finished up my instrument rating on the GI Bill. I went to Chicago, and they paid for the whole thing. And then I got a twin-engine rating paid for by the GI Bill, so I used it quite a bit.

Murgatroyd: Was there any trouble at all, in getting that to pay?

Burgard: It was slow at first, but once I was established, then it did what it was supposed to do.

Murgatroyd: Now, this is your chance to be a philosopher.

Burgard: Okay.

Murgatroyd: (laughter) As you look back on your experiences, both military in general, and in combat, do you think any of that changed you or your outlook on life?

Burgard: Well, it certainly had an effect. I think the biggest thing that it changed was going into an unknown situation, that as long as you take the first step, you can usually be in a position where you can take the second step. I think it taught me a little bit about people under duress and how to work with them, and that people react differently under duress. Duress comes at different levels to different folks, and it doesn't have to be a combat situation. You can see the intensity draw near as people go into a situation where they're not sure of what the outcome's going to be, and that's basically combat. I think it helped me to get along with people from that standpoint, to try to work together and get jobs done, knowing a little bit about how people react to those kinds of things.

Murgatroyd: Okay.

Burgard: I think that a lot of people that hire people forget about that whole echelon, and don't give it the credibility that they should, Because I think those guys that are coming back with all of that experience, being under duress, they can get the job done, and they can probably get it done through a lot more trials and tribulations than a person that hasn't had that experience.

Murgatroyd: And that kind of leads into the next question. How has your experience in the military influenced your thinking about life or our current situation in the country?

Burgard: Yeah. I think that maybe two things happened that kind of influence a little bit of how I think. I think the military's never going to win anything when they don't go in with the attitude "I'm going to win." In a police action, you know, we broke even in Korea. I think we broke even in Vietnam. I don't know what's going to happen in Afghanistan, in Iraq. Basically, they broke even. But I think anytime you go into a situation where your goal is not to win, you won't win. And the outcome of working with people that you don't know, their culture, don't understand their language, is that we become a "we" and a "they" situation. Regardless of what good effort you put forward, it's just not going to end up in a good relationship with those people. That's unfortunate, because a lot of guys gave their lives in all of those wars, and it's just hard to think about. The only thing I can say, from the positive side, I think that as I look back on Vietnam, I think, really, what the United States was trying to do was stop the spread of communism. I don't think that we stopped the spread of communism, but I think we slowed it down a little bit. From that standpoint, communism went ahead and self-destructed for the most part. So, I take some reward in being a part of that. But to look at Vietnam as trying to

say that we won something out of it, it's hard to say that we really won anything in detail out of it. I'll just probably have to let it go at that.

Murgatroyd: And here's the philosopher question.

Burgard: Oh, I thought that was.

Murgatroyd: No, no, no! That's pretty good, though. Do you have any advice or wisdom for future generations?

Burgard: Oh yeah. And that is if we're going to be a police force, that we do a better job of saying what we're going to do, and do it. This police force effort is just—it's not going to win anything. I think we almost need to go in with the attitude that we're going to—I hate to say it—conquer, and then turn it back over to the people and let them run it. But anything short of that is going to be short.

Murgatroyd: Okay. Did anything in your background, before you went into the Army, before you went to Vietnam, anything in your background that you can look back on, prepare you or didn't prepare you for what you encountered?

Burgard: I think, as I look back on it, the thing that prepared me the most was, I'd have to say sports in a roundabout way. Because of the competition, never wanting to be last, always wanting to be first, and always knowing that it's going to take a lot of dedication to move from A to B, even when you didn't feel like it. There was a lot of times I didn't feel like it over there, but I knew I had to do it, and I felt like I could do it. I think some of the guys over there had the attitude that whatever's going to be is going to be, and I couldn't deal with that. I said, "You're not going to be in my squad with that attitude." So, if you want to jump off a building and see if you come out alive, that's fine. You find your own building, but we're all going to work together. And so, I was under the influence, you do what you can do, and it's not just destiny that takes over, it's...

Murgatroyd: You have some control?

Burgard: You have some control, and if you don't take control, it's going to take control of you.

Murgatroyd: Well, Gary, I think we've asked most of the questions. And if there's anything more we can think of, we'll take this up again. But I thank you for your time. I know you've got a bunch of pictures and some documents we're going to go through. We'll line them all up, and inventory them, and get them down to the office, so they're going to be part of your portion of the interview, and your portion of the oral history project.

Burgard: Okay.

Murgatroyd: And I certainly thank you for your time.

Burgard: Well, I appreciate the chance to be a part of this. It's one of a few, and I feel very honored. So, thank you very much.

Murgatroyd: And as they say, and I'll say it to you, thank you for your service.

Burgard: Thank you, very good.

(end of interview #2 #3 continues)

Interview with Gary Burgard

VRV-A-L-2014-010

Interview # 3: June 4, 2014

Interviewer: Tom Murgatroyd

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Murgatroyd: Good afternoon, this is June the 4th. This is Tom Murgatroyd resuming the last of our interview for the Veterans Remember portion of the Abraham Lincoln Presidential Library Oral History Project. I am in Sherman, Illinois with Gary Burgard. As the last of our interview, Gary, we want to talk about your experiences when you first returned to the United States from your year in Vietnam. Tell us about what you experienced when you first came back.

Burgard: Well, I can recall that I was very anxious, and just couldn't believe that I was about ready to get on that airplane to head back to the United States. I do recall boarding the airplane and feeling, again, somewhat anxious. I wanted to get off the ground, get in the air, and really see if I couldn't make it back, or if we could make it back in one piece. And as we flew, I think we landed in Japan for a fuel stop, and for the most part, I think I slept on the flight, just trying to waste the time away so I could shorten the time. I recall, as we were coming back into the United States air space, that the pilot came back on the PA system and said, "We're now within twenty-five miles of the coast of the United States, just west of San Francisco," I think it was. Everyone got

quiet—we were quiet anyway—anticipating just what it was going to be like. We were just moments away from actually getting back in the United States.

As he made his approach and laid down, it was just... you could hear a pin drop again. As the runway starts sliding by and he made the landing, we heard and felt the wheels touch down, everybody clapped. We were just...everybody, just so thankful to be back in the United States. We de-boarded, or deplaned the airplane, and the first thing I noticed was the clean air. In Vietnam the air is really heavy because it's hot and humid and there's a lot of vegetation that rots and leaves a really bad smell. You get used to it after you're there for a while. And then to experience no smells, and the air was light, and it was fresh. I just will never forget that experience, and then just the whole feeling of getting back in the United States. I said, "I'm home." We took about twenty-four hours to turn in our equipment, what we had left. I think they gave us a pair of class A's, just don't recall right now, but I think they were the gray types, not the green, because it was in summertime. We departed the gate and there was a bus awaiting us. I was one of the few that was going to take off on American Airlines and go to Shreveport. As I got on the bus, there was a bunch of ROTC students and the bus driver; the ROTC students were all in the front of the bus. And the bus driver said to the ROTC students, "Make way for a real soldier." (laughter) They all got back and looked at me with eyes—I could tell the look in their eyes, like what have you been through?—and they could tell it was real.



Gary and his wife, Judy in their home in Fork Polk, Louisiana.

Murgatroyd: Yeah. And it could be them in a few months.

Burgard: Yeah, it could've been them in a few months, that's correct. And so, then I flew back to Shreveport and met Judy back there. Then the rest, I think we've talked about before.

I did have one thought that comes to mind, that if we're ever in another conflict that looks like that, that we need to look at ways to win it, and not just be a police action. It seemed like we were always defense in motion. We could really never win anything over there; it was just an unwinnable thing. I did have a lieutenant that was from the Vietnamese army, the popular force, that I recall one day he drew a picture of a snake on the ground, and he marked the head of the snake "Hanoi." We didn't have an interpreter, but I understood what he was saying. He took a stick and he crossed through the neck portion of Hanoi, then made an "X" on the snake's head, and he said, "That's where we need to go to win this thing." I thought that was really an intelligent observation, and I think in the future if we get caught up in this thing, that somebody has to think about how they win this thing, and be

willing to go all the way, because otherwise we get stuck in the same situation all over again. So, if there's anything we learn from it, I hope that's it. Otherwise, we've just wasted a lot of time and a lot of lives, and no one really wants to do that.

Murgatroyd: That's right.

Burgard: So, with that, that's about...

Murgatroyd: Good. Okay. Well, those are good thoughts, Gary, thank you. And I thank you again for being willing to participate in the interview process. And thank you very much for your time and your service.

Burgard: My pleasure, thank you.

(end of interview)