

Interview with Captain John Andrews
Commanding Officer, 131st Engineer
Company (LE), VT ARNG

Interviewed By: CW2 John W. Listman, Jr. (Ret.)

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National Guard Association of the U.S. Memorial,
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(Interviewer's note: this interview started with us discussing background information before I remembered to turn the tape recorder on. Andrews stayed in the Vermont Army Guard rising to the rank of colonel and retired in 199- Also Colonel Andrews' wife, Mrs. Jane W. Andrews, sat in on our discussion and added some wife/family perspective of the mobilization).

A-So it was you know, you had to, it's not like yes sir, no sir I'll do whatever you tell me when some guy who outranks you comes up. Somewhere along the line you got to have some common sense.

Q-Right.

A-Especially when running engineer equipment. That was a difficult lesson to...some guys were diplomats and they could get away with it but some guys were just downright belligerent. "You want me to do it"...they drive a bulldozer into the muck and stick it there "you told me to do it, you get it out," you know, that kind of attitude. We didn't want that.

Q- In preparing to go to Ft. Belvoir from your armory, did you have any glaring problems...she's laughing like something happened.

Wife-He had a huge problem which he probably hasn't told you but he was...when he was activated he was in the process of being, going through some medical tests for an ulcer.

Q-Right, I know he came home or he was...

Wife- Well, no, this was before he was even activated. So shortly after they were activated he ended up in the hospital at Plattsburg Air Force Base. And from there they sent him down to Dewitt Hospital at Ft. Belvoir so he wasn't there when they were mobilized, when they actually left Burlington.

A-Well they had...most of the support people left on buses. But all the equipment operators, we drove an awful lot of equipment from Vermont to Virginia in a convoy. Everything that would go over the road we drove. And we shipped the bulldozers and the construction... rock crusher and all that stuff by rail.

Q-It says in some of the newspaper clippings that Ross (Andrews son)...yeah, I guess you weren't here.

A-We spent most of our mobilization time with the railroad, buying choke blocks and trying to figure out how to get all of the equipment tied to the railroad specifications on the loading docks. And then we dragged it all down to Belvoir and in the meantime the National Guard...they knew all our equipment wasn't going overseas because it was incompatible. So they swapped all the junk from Vermont National Guard, like all the 5 ton trucks that everybody else had that were all old and wore out, they gave to us. So we took them down and they got all our good stuff, you know, the better in shape stuff and went back to the units in the state of Vermont.

Q-Oh so the state was swapping it?

A-Oh the state was swapping it.

Q-Knowing that you were going to get...lose it...

A-Knowing that we were going to lose it anyway.

Q-Makes sense!

A-You're talking about a lot of paperwork <laughing>!

Q-Yeah, but you're actually talking about something that actually makes sense! Why let you turn in better stuff?

A-Yeah, so we turned in a lotta...But in the meantime you know you get it all loaded on the railcar and they say "we're not taking that one, unload it and put this one on" so that was uh...but that was just internal.

Q-You just wrote here for the change in the mob station from Ft. Devens to Belvoir you think it was just some kind of screw up between First and Second Army?

A-Well, there was no training facilities for engineers at Ft. Devens.

Q-That's true. That's why I was figuring they sent you to Belvoir.

A-They figured...See when this thing came down, at least what I was told...Is we were gonna be a replacement unit for a unit in Germany. And we weren't going to Vietnam, we were gonna go to Europe and Devens was the embarkation point for Europe. And then somewhere along the line like about six seconds I got activated I had secret orders, that we were gonna be destination Bien Hoa. It was top secret so I couldn't tell anybody, and all the newspaper reporters were saying "Oh, you're going to Germany, you're going here" and I was saying "Well, I don't know, that's what they tell me. But I knew I had those orders two seconds after activated. So we knew where we were going but we weren't...well, it was top secret, wouldn't you...? Tell a reporter?"

Q-They're the last people to tell.

A-Well yeah, but they, you know. A lot of these guys you knew personally and you know it was a...it's not like somebody you never saw before, it was somebody you went to college with...

Q-Well, once they learn...once it's public knowledge, then you can go back and say hey, sorry I couldn't tell you but I was under secret orders. They'll understand.

A-Anyway. That's what we were training for was to go to Europe.

Q-The next couple you filled in you answered what I was asking. On the vehicles we were just talking about. How many multi-fueled dump trucks were you issued or did you take with you?

A- 17 I think? I think there were five in each platoon and I think support had a couple.

Maybe three or four. I think we had...

Q-Maybe I misunderstood the way you put it on the questionnaire. You took Cat's and turned in International Harvesters.

A-There were no International Harvesters in Vietnam. All the spare parts were caterpillar.

Q-Well, that explains why.

A-And we used to have two kinds of Internationals. We had a TD-24, which is a big one, and a TD-20. And each platoon had one of each. So you pulled one with a ten-ton tractor and one with a five-ton tractor. Well, the instant the Army came in and they gave us all T-7's, which was somewhere in between. It was too heavy to get on the five ton tractor, and yet the ten ton tractor pulled all over the place. So then we had...once you change equipment, it's not just like changing one, then you gotta change the parts moving, you know everything goes down the drain. So anyway, that's what we...

Q-So you had a total of nine dozers when you were deployed to Vietnam?

A-Yeah. Wait a sec, we had three, six, nine, I think we had 11. I think two in support.

Q-You say 11. Okay. You wrote here...I asked what other vehicles, non personnel equipment changed in...

A-Well the 290s; Clark-290s; the pans, the scrapers. We didn't have any of those. We'd never seen one.

Q-290 scrapers. They're like?

A-I think I got pictures over here someplace. (Andrews started looking through photo albums laying on table). They're the big earth movers.

Q-You've got here nine (referencing 2nd questionnaire Andrews completed prior to the interview), I assume that's supposed to be 11 now, instead of nine.

A-Not the graters.

Q-A grater's different than a dozer?

A-We had nine...oh yeah, graters, a regular road grater?

Q-Oh, okay.

A-Okay, then we had...I know we had nine of those.

Q-What is that word (referencing second questionnaire)?

A-Clark-290s. That's what was...

Q-What's the word after the number "9"?

A-The "new".

Q- Nullones. Is that a maker?

A-Well no, they were 'new to us', we'd never had them before.

Q-Oh, NEW. Oh, new ones. Yeah. I have never found a table of organization for light equipment engineer company from the period. Found one for the 116th Engineer Battalion, the combat battalion.

A-The engineer company was...

Q-But I didn't, I've never found one for light engineer company.

A-I think I have one right here.

Q-I found pictures of them at the U.S. Army's Center of Military History, in their oral History Branch. They had photographs with that interview that you did. And there's one in there because apparently one of your guys modified and put what they call "wings" on the side of the scraper? And that was an innovation that the Army actually made note of and apparently went through and changed everybody else's after you guys came up with the idea, which is so cool.

Wife-Was that Dave Albright?

A-Well, we were spreading asphalt with the graters and they just put

the wings on to keep them...and Dave Albright welded 'em on, he still...

Q-Yeah, you can see where it's just a weld on, but the Army in with the interview...

Q-You wrote on the questionnaire that most of the classroom training you found to be repetitive. Was it mostly just basic soldier stuff?

A-A lot of it.

Q-That's kinda what I figured but...

A-Well they tried to plug the guys into...they got a little bit of mines, booby traps, that kinda stuff. Nothing that...I mean, we were running a quarry. Mines and booby traps? We were blasting over a ton of dynamite a week. And we had some guys that were good at it. And we knew how to...what we were trying to do. But the military didn't have any civilian blasting caps. They had everything was instant. You need multi-second delays if you're going to do any quarry work. Otherwise you're just a force...

Q-Didn't they have other units doing quarry work before you got there? Somebody must have pointed this out to the Army, "Hey, you don't have delay caps!"

A-Well we pointed out a lot of things to the Army, but they didn't, by the time their system got...so we'd go to the TAE guys which was specific architects, engineers and civilians and we'd trade them stuff for theirs. That's how we got our blasting caps. But anyway, that's what we used for...that's what they wanted was a quarry. And by the time I got in the country, we landed in Tuy Hoa but I screwed that all up. Because when they asked me in Belvoir if we were ready to go, they took me to headquarters and down to some room where some civilian was sitting there I don't know who, some GS-25 or something or other and they said "Are you ready to go?" and I said "Well, we just got all this brand new equipment last week and the guys just haven't had a chance to work with it." It's like getting a new car, you can make it go frontwards or backwards but there's a lot of other little gidgets you gotta worry about. So they delayed us leaving for two weeks. Well that really screwed up the works in Vietnam. So instead of landing in Cam Ranh or Bien Hoa where we supposed to...we landed at Tuy Hoa which is a little Air Force base up the coast.

Q-It had an Air Guard squadron station there.

A-So anyway, we landed there and they attached us to 577th and our equipment came in, the heavy stuff, they unloaded in Cam Ranh like our rock crusher. And that's where that went. It disappeared, we never did see that (again). And then the rest of them they ran the freighter up to Vung Ro Bay which was a bay just south of Tuy Hoa. And they used military stevedores that didn't know diddly about unloading a ship. They smashed everything to pieces just moving it off the ship and getting it on the dock. And then you get in there and "How come the fenders are broke?" I said "Well gee..." you know. So that guy Howard Salley, I mentioned his name, he was a good body and fender guy. He was our one colored guy. He did a lot of work.

Q-Traveling back to Ft. Belvoir, the Vietnamese orientation training, what do you remember of that? I mean, do you recall it as being effective or good?

A-Absolutely scared the tar out of everybody and it was inappropriate completely. All it was was a hazing operation as far as I...cause I didn't go through it. But all my lieutenants went through it and every platoon went through it over a week.

Q-Was it like a mock village?

A-Yeah, they'd take you through a mock village, throw hand grenades at you, snakes and all this kinda stuff. "Here's what you find every time you go in a village." Well we went through village after village and never saw anything. This was the one thing that maybe happened in country in eight years and that was what they showed you. Literally scared the living tar out of everybody.

Q-Before I went to Vietnam...I was a medic and I drove an ambulance in Ft. Benning for 6 months before I went to...after AIT. And I just went as an individual replacement. I didn't have any Vietnam orientation training.

A-Well they took us and they sent us to the...I think it was 101st that gave us the training. And those guys were used to you know, going into villages and finding all the sneak holes, snake holes and whatever. They got everybody <unintelligible> I guess it was nice knowledge to have. But boy did it scare the heck out of everybody. I never went through it. Headquarters didn't but all the rest of the platoons went through it. I just had to send one platoon at a time which meant when they were gone, you couldn't do anything else!

Q-Yeah. Your training stops anyway.

A-Well, once you break that up. So that's how that happened.

Q-You say you never saw a Vietnamese village and yet you moved a Montagnard village. Completely relocated...

A-Completely different world. Vietnamese...

Q-That's why I ask, what is?

A-Vietnamese live in little concrete houses with dirt floors and tin roofs. Montagnards live out in the jungle up off the ground. Houses with stilts. They're more like Negros versus...they're a complete separate race basically. Animals will run underneath the village and they'd drink their water here and they'd clean their animals here and they'd use this flow as a latrine in the river and the river would go downstream and the next village would be the same thing. The death rate was incredible. These girls would have 14, 15 babies and one or two would survive; 90% of it due to bad water. And that's who we ended up...there were no Vietnamese, they were all Montagnards. And the Vietnamese came in; Colonel Hung. They were going to protect the Montagnards from the VC because the VC (would) go into these villages, take all the men they wanted and then kill the leaders if they didn't cooperate with them. And so the plan was for the Vietnamese Army to take them out of the jungle and put them all in one big lot next to an armored cavalry base in Chu Kuk. We built the whole thing. We dragged...

Q-You have some newspaper clippings even related to it.

A-We spent, we had. Well, you're National Guard. When you have a weekend drill you spend all week long, month long, planning how everybody's gonna be busy. And that's the entrenchment operators, the crane operators, the 290...everybody's an operator, that's what they want to do. When we got to Vietnam, the bulldozer guys were busy, the dump truck guys were busy, the bucket loader guys were busy. And nobody else had a thing to do. They just...

Q-Which is why they were writing letters back to the editor saying "this war..."

A-Well, we were looking for things. And we got to know the province chief pretty good because we built the air field right next to his headquarters. That was like 45 kilometers away.

Q-Was the...

A-The district chief...we built the headquarters there. We sent one platoon there, they were there for a month just building that runway. Anyway, we got to know the guy, the colonel that was running it and he had all these request to do this stuff and nothing to do it with. But he couldn't go through the regular chain of command. Our colonel said "Oh no, these guys are busy" because he didn't want to admit that we didn't have anything to do. So he kind of backdoored the battalion. And we sent a ton of equipment out and the battalion found there's VC here, there's VC there, there's lines, there's this, there's that. We had guys running through the jungle every day all by themselves in ten ton trucks with low beds. That's a deep jungle with jungle grass up to your head. You stand up in your jeep so you can see where the heck you're driving.

Wife-Well did you figure that they wanted to...they wanted that air field?

A-I stopped figuring. I did what I was told the best way we could and...but we'd go and they'd have mahogany timbers this big, driven in the ground. We'd send our rough terrain crane, run its hook on it and pull it and pull 'em right out of the ground, put 'em on a low bed. Take 'em to the new place, dig a hole for them. We had an auger and put them back up and they built the same house. Exactly the way they had it in the jungle. Same boards, same...and they didn't have any numbers. And it was like a...so we built that...heck, it had to be a hundred logs. At least had to be a hundred feet long. And they'd be sectioned. Each family had a little section of the house they lived with. That's who we worked with. And we got some pictures of them. I think...

Q-Yeah, you did. And I copied some.

A-But the...and we ended up meeting the guys. We had one Special Forces. He was a liaison I guess to work with the villages. But he was also a light weapons specialist; Special Forces. He was living with Montagnards...he loved living with Montagnards. But the Montagnards...there was no fraternization. The girls didn't wear any tops anyway, that's just the way they were. And we didn't get into the guys trying to chase the girls all around all the time. The Vietnamese were after the Gi s desperately.

Q-Because they wanted the money.

A-Oh absolutely.

Q-I know that from DaNang. It was horrible by the time I got there in 1971.

A-Well, we didn't have that. We had a complete cut and it didn't go well with the Regular (Army) guys. They wanted to chase the girls around. We said, "No, they're good people. We're not gonna do that."

Q-What is that right there? "first two months..."

A-Well, first two months we were on the coast. QL-1? That's the main...north/south highway. And then we moved to 577th (Engineer Battalion) which was right next to Tuy Hoa. And the Air Force wouldn't let us on the base because we were dirty.

Q-Welcome to the world. <laughs>

A-We were living in, you know, <inaudible> burnt out latrines and stuff. They had running water and showers. They wouldn't let the engineer battalion on the air base because we'd mess up everything. And we'd go to the PX and buy everything they had. They didn't like that.

Q-Were you able to get parts for your piece of junk crusher? The one that's a whole story...endless hours of support maintenance.

A-Well, what happened is when you run a crusher operation, you're only allowed to do so much level maintenance. In other words, you can change belts and you can do this kinda stuff. You can't change bearings...it has to go back to depo overhaul supposedly. In Guam. Well, we were doing all that stuff. Anyway, we had the equipment, we had the welders, we had the mechanics, we could change Pitman bearings. You know, the big bearings for the crusher? Major, major operation. We could do it. It took us a little while, but we were unauthorized. We weren't authorized the parts, we couldn't do it because that was only...So I go to direct support guy that was authorized to do the repairs and found out he didn't have any mechanics who could do it! He didn't have any equipment. So I had to get him to get the parts, which he didn't want to order because that was a pain in the neck for him. So I'd go to depo, I'd go over his head down in Cam Ranh. And that's how we ended up getting the parts.

Q-This next question's real important to the people I work with now, as well as the book I'm writing. You state you had armored plate and pedestal mounts put on your vehicles. None of that was identified as a necessity before you went to Vietnam? Say it, yes or no?

A-Our SOP, or standard, how we were supposed to be employed was we were supposed to be in a compound guarded by infantry. We weren't supposed to be out by ourselves in the middle of nowhere providing our own security and our own everything. And when we got out there, the road up to the armored cav base, the American advisor a week before hit a mine with a jeep and was killed; so we decided we'd go up and down that road too! And nobody (meaning the enemy) paid any attention to us. I guess because we were just engineers I guess they wanted a better target. I don't know what the heck happened, we were just lucky. But then they (Andrew's men) said "Well, we'll put, weld plates on the floor and underneath the seats so if you hit a mine you lose some of the force, it will go away.

Unfortunately when you start welding things on those old 151s they get so heavy that they won't, the suspension system flattens out and you can't do anything! Plus it was unibody and you can't weld to unibody because as soon as you heat it up it splits.

Q-Okay, I didn't know that either.

A-Well, it's a very difficult job. And that's why we tried to put .50 caliber machine guns on the back of them and we couldn't do that because it would shake the jeep apart. So we put those in the back of the 3/4 tons that had a body. You could weld to the body and that worked pretty good. We were forever trying to fix the...But everybody from the Special Forces, everybody we support, came to us because they knew we could help them. Weld this, and we had tanks and APCs and everybody else wander in there because Dave Albright was a wonderful welder. We had all the equipment.

Q-Where did you get the plating, the steel or whatever you were using?

A-Well, this is probably something...You go down to Cam Ranh...

Q-Thirty years after, nobody's gonna come after you now <laughs>.

A-We had this entire S-4 yard, which has all construction equipment out in the sun on the beach. And as it rained and the wind blew all the papers and documentation off these cartons and crates. And then the people would change you know, DEROS out, and nobody knew what it was. It disappeared. And so their solution was to go the computer.

And they couldn't find it, so they'd "X" it out. You'd go down to Headquarters and ask the warrant officer "do you have any flat steel?"...the biggest one was cutting edges for graters. Piece of steel about that long, about 8 feet long. "None in the country." The guy says "Here's my computer print out, this is absolutely right, there aren't any." Well, he made a mistake one day and let us in there. We found out that he had everything that we needed sitting right there but he didn't know what it was. So we blackmailed him and said, "We'll take it. But you don't tell anybody we have it because you don't have it to start with. It's not in your system." He said, "That's a great idea." Well, instantly I had the biggest S-4 yard in Vietnam. I had every cutting edge in Vietnam. And then when somebody wanted one, and word got around, all the steel plate they brought for one thing and it wasn't used, just there as an abandoned shipment, we put it on the truck, took it with us. Because we had transport. We had 18 low beds. Once you took the bulldozer off you had a heck of a cargo carrier! So we ran a convoy every single month. By the end we knew the system and we knew what was going on. The poor guys in Cam Ranh had all just rotated in. And they had no idea what was going on. And it was kinda like a license to steal, but that's how we ended up with...

Q-That's great though, it's called field expedience. <laughs>

A-Well, they didn't know what it was, and it didn't exist. And I said, I know what it is. <laughs> So we took it. And that's where all the armor plate came from.

Q-On the crew-served weapons, about how many machine guns do you figure?

A-That's a whole other story. That's a good National Guard story. My little brother when I went through OCS, Vinny Beniveno. He's a full colonel in the Guard now. He volunteered to go to Vietnam and

ended up as an ordinance officer in charge of all aircraft armament in Southeast Asia. And they just discontinued a Mohawk...evidently its some kind of plane that had .50 caliber machine guns on it. And somebody decided they didn't need that plane in Vietnam anymore so they weren't going to use it. But all the .50 caliber machine guns were still in the country. So they sent me down to Saigon as an Article 32 officer, something or other. Anyway, I looked him up and I told him, "Hey, we're on this base camp out in the middle of nowhere and we've got two M-60s. We weren't supposed to be by ourselves." He says, "What do you need?" I said "You got any machine guns?" He says, "Yeah, I got a whole" <laughs> I said, "Well, how do you know?" He gave us fifty .50 caliber machine guns.

Q-<laughing> Good lord!

A-I think we ended up with 35, it's the most we could get. We sent a low bed. No we didn't. I think we ended up being big friends with the assault helicopter company down the road. We sent helicopters down there. They put machine guns on helicopters. And flew it back up to our compound. And so this was how we got them. We had to sign a hand receipt, but because we weren't authorized, but the helicopter company was; so I got, Jim Meadows was the name, got him to sign his name on his hand receipt for the machine guns. That covered Vinny. Machine guns were given to an assault helicopter company. So they went to Ban Me Thuot and then they came to us. Come to find out they were all aircraft .50 caliber which means they were fired electronically instead of the butterfly plate on the back. These things, well, we couldn't use them. So then we had to get the Vietnamese involved. They had .50 calibers on their tanks with the butterfly plates. And so we swapped them twelve .50 calibers, and they gave us twelve sets of butterfly plates. Then all of a sudden we had the butterfly plates on them, but the cyclic rate of fire for an aircraft .50 caliber...

Q-Is much faster.

A-When you pull that butterfly trigger, those 500 rounds in that little box were gone. And a concussion was absolutely...I mean, you just...So that's why we had so much trouble mounting them. We put them in barrels of concrete along the perimeter. And chained the concrete barrels to posts we drove into the ground trying to keep the concussion down. But when you pulled the trigger, the entire area just disappeared. And you'd get twelve of those going...

Q-Where did you get ammunition since you weren't authorized the guns?

A-We weren't authorized the 81mm mortar either. But we knew the guys at the armor supply point. And we convinced them that we needed it and we traded with the ARVN. The armor supply point didn't ask too many questions. If you needed it, we weren't authorized half the stuff we got. We had 81mm mortars that we used to fire rocket flares at night. That was all unauthorized. But we went and picked that up too.

Q-Mines including claymores, all around your perimeter?

A-We had five or six bunkers. When the Vietnamese ran it as a quarry they had concrete sheds they used to store their dynamite in. And we used those and put watch towers on top of them. So it was concrete underneath. And each claymore was run there. And you had each numbered so you knew which claymore went to where. And then the mortar was...we didn't have M 10 plotting boards or any way...we put big panels out in the field. You know, one, two, three, four, five, and then registered the mortar on these panels so the guys

in the guard post would say “to the right of panel four, add a hundred.” So that’s how we directed our mortar fire. Which was very simple but it works. We could drop the first round anyplace we wanted.

Q-It says that most of your operators had their own M-79s?

A-When you were like a trench machine operator or guys in a quarry they were issued 45s and M-79s. They didn’t get M-16s. So we had those (M-79’s). Everybody had them. We must have had 40 or 50 of them.

Q-You had LAWS? I’m surprised at that. You must have gotten those through the ARVN too.

A-Oh yeah, we had laws. I was a commander, but I don’t know where a lot of this stuff came from <laughing>

Q-And then there was “foo gas.”

A-You got that all over the place.

Q-Yeah, well you had enough capability to make your own.

A-Yeah, we did.

Q-A question about the laundry because I was really intrigued about this. I see here the donations the refrigerators and ringer washing machines...Did you do laundry for other units or just you guys?

A-Just our own.

Q-Just your own people. You didn't take in helicopter pilots' laundry and start your own business?

A-Well, we did a lot of guys. Some of these guys you just can't believe...well, if you were there...

Q-I was in DaNang. I wasn't out in the boonies.

A-Well a couple of these guys humping the boonies hadn't changed uniforms in two or three weeks. We used to wash them and then got a hold of them. We figured how to work to replace...see, we had our own copy book. The National Guard guy who was with us was a supply officer. The first mortar attack, he went home. Chicken. Never even came to see me, nothing. He left. Then we didn't have anybody for about five months. And then finally they gave us a CW-4, Regular Army guy who knew absolutely nothing about maintenance. But boy, he knew the supply system, not engineer equipment supply but blankets and that kinda...He had that thing, he knew exactly how to work that system. So instantly, all of a sudden we got all these uniforms. So we could give them brand new uniforms. So he would DX a lot of his stuff and we figured out how that worked. That was a major problem. You had to...and then that guy came back and served...

Q-So your base camp was literally right beside the quarry basically.

A-Yeah, it was just across the street.

Q-And you were never infused and you don't know why which is probably a good thing. Your unit probably suffered a lot less grief because of that.

A-In fact, we exported...one lieutenant they gave him to another company. Because we were in a compound with B Company, the 70th Combat Engineers. And we figured they'd be kind of our security, because when we moved in there it was nothing. But they were the sorriest unit that has ever been created on the face of the earth.

Wife-Did you tell him what happened <inaudible>?

Q-He said something in here about the 70th.

A-Well, here we came in and we got there like in oh maybe October. And Captain Paul Isabel, I'll never forget the guy's name, VMI graduate was the company commander. He was about maybe 22, 21. Of course, I was about 30 by that time. And he came in and said "I'm the base camp commander, here's how we're going to run this, here's how we're going to run that." I said, "Well no problem with me, you've been in the Regular Army, you know what's going on, we just got here." Well, about a week into that, and those guys had nothing.

Every tool box was empty, everything they had was worn out and broken. We had all brand new stuff. And they thought they'd come over and start stealing stuff. Well, instantly there was three or four fist fights. And then one night after we'd been in the compound maybe three weeks, there was an explosion. They fragged (killed) him along with the first sergeant, and that was just across the compound. So anyway, the CID showed up, you know all those guys in uniforms but no tags. And they never did find out who did it. But all of a sudden, I was in command of everybody.

Q-So you're commanding a Regular Army...

A-The Regular Army unit and mine, because I was a ranking officer, I was a captain. And these guys were bad. I mean they were on drugs, they were just absolutely...they hadn't had any PX privileges. They'd send them out to patch potholes in 150 degree heat and that's all those poor guys did. It was just terrible.

Q-Where was the closest, not to get off that subject, but while I'm thinking about it since it's not something I thought about before, but where was the closest PX?

A-Thirty five kilometers to Ban Me Thuot. They had just a minor one so we were on sundry packs. They'd ship us little sundry packs full of cigarettes and candy. And we'd get those...

Q-Like a care package, kinda.

A-Yeah. So that's what we'd...most of the guys didn't smoke, but the guys that did smoke, they took all those and some of the guys liked

candy, so you had...it was kind of our own PX service we had going. I was in charge of the whole damn compound. And then I changed all the rules. Told those guys that I didn't care what the heck their rank was or anything else was. I drew a line right down the middle of the compound. And I said "You guys come over that line in the middle of the night, we're going to shoot you." And I had a couple of guys stationed up on top of the equipment. And they...well, a couple of rounds went off at night and they got the message that we weren't screwing around. Eventually after eight months they could come to our side of the compound if they were invited by one of our men. And that guy was responsible for their behavior. Because by that time we had a club. Cold beer, all the time. And those guys hadn't seen any, ever.

Q-Well, but by that time did they have a commander? Were you still the commander of everybody?

A-I still was the commander the whole time. They never got anybody. They took one of our lieutenants and put him over there, because all the rest of our lieutenants, they didn't have any. So I really had...and those guys...we spent most of our time court marshalling those guys for smoking marijuana, disobeying an officer, doing this, doing that, doing the other thing. All my officers did was court marshal these guys. And they were just sorry sorry excuses. And big. I think they took the biggest guys they could find in the Army and put them in the combat engineers! All these guys were 6'5", 285, 290, and big, big men. Of course I had my own gang which was just about that big too. So we...you know, not all Army discipline type thing. There was no honor, I can tell you that right now. But we prevailed, because we just all stuck together.

Wife-Did you tell him that you didn't let any Vietnamese on the base?

Q-Yeah, he did tell me. In fact I put that in one of these questions because he had told me that on the phone.

A-Because I didn't feel that...well, we'd seen *The Green Berets* (the movie) where they're counting off the paces between there and there and I said "We're not gonna have that nonsense." So we ended up doing our own uniforms. Did our own laundry. And each platoon had a day they'd donate a man to the laundry to help Lenny, and they'd do all the uniforms for that platoon on that day. I did mine at Headquarters. I just put mine in the same way, so they weren't ironed, but they were clean. The colonel would come out and say "Your personal appearance is not what an officer should be." But he had this little girl doing his wash and I said, "Look, I'm going to do just what the rest of the guys are doing out here." I got an awful lot of grief about not looking shiny and crisp like...

Q-Yeah, that was one of the things that you'd said something about...not the best soldiers when it comes to saluting and other military stuff but they were damn good engineers.

A-Well, we were clean; the best we could get. But we didn't iron, we didn't starch, we didn't have mamasan in there doing all this stuff. And the guys kinda did...it's hard to stay clean when there's no electricity. We ran a rock crusher with a 100 KW generator.

Q-The compound had no electricity?

A-We didn't have nothing! It was just what we had. We had little five KW generators to run the mess hall refrigerator. So what we did was we figured out a way, we took all the wiring from the light sets and we wired all the bunkers. So that at night, when the rock crusher shut

down we got a couple night switches. And we could switch the lights to the perimeter lighting. And we put perimeter lighting all around the entire compound, plus lights inside each one of the barracks, inside some of the bunkers. But they didn't have any...just a regular light fixture? You could not get them. The guys were using coat hangers and twisting them and putting a light bulb in there. Of course the coat hanger would turn bright red the resistance was...Holy Christmas! But that's how we finally got a hold of enough porcelain fixtures to do what we had to do. But they didn't exist. It wasn't in the Army system. And Charlie Douglas, one of the first guys to die (after unit returned home from Vietnam), he was an IBM guy but he knew electricity. He wired that entire compound, running at 440 watts too. And it rained and everything would short circuit and when it got dark, all we had was our mortar for illumination. And that was every night, but we got so good at fixing the things. We had two generators and one of 'em we burned up the armature in about the first week. We couldn't get it fixed. It just went out of the country and never came back. So the second one we were bound and determined, we were never gonna let that out of our sight. It would run 24 hours a day, 7 days a week. Eventually the bearings were shot, the rings were shot and it started burning oil. We had one of the mechanics, a diesel mechanic at home before we got there, he'd order all the parts. We gave him three assistants and he'd shut the engine off at day break. And he could rebuild that engine in one day. All new rings, all new bearings, everything you needed to rebuild an engine and have it going by dark.

Q-That's amazing.

A-That's how good he got at that engine. And by gosh we had lights that night. We fed him right there, he got no breaks, he had all the help he needed. Six mechanics handing him wrenches and we had all the parts laid out, exactly what he needed. All the piston rings, all the bearings. It got to 2 in the afternoon and there were pistons here and crank shafts there and by gosh it ran that night so...But that's how hard up we were for electricity. People take it for granted. But it

wasn't. That was just part of the problem.

Wife-You told him the donuts story?

Q-Your daughter actually told me that first. When I was trying to reach you by phone.

A-Did Ronnie ever answer your?

Q-No.

A-He didn't? That's a shame.

Q-Oh yeah. He's the only one that returned my questionnaire besides you. Of all the questionnaires, this is the only one I've gotten back.

A-I can't believe that. Chucasette (?) didn't send one?

Q-No. So when you get home, please kick some butt. I'll send you another stack.

A-At the first of the year I sent them to all the guys in Middlebury.

Q-I would like to come up and sit down and interview other men, but I can't do it until I...See, I took your questionnaire to tailor this.

A-I bet you Ronnie didn't...How supportive was your employer?
100% and it was his father, who died while Ronnie was gone.

Q-I did call him right after I got the questionnaire. I would like to ask him some stuff but I can't justify driving to Vermont...

A-Did he tell you he had asthma so bad that he shouldn't ever should have been there?

Q-I did too, but...<laughs>

A-No but, he was a mechanic and he couldn't breathe, so we made him our night radio operator. He worked nights, from midnight until late in the morning.

Q-He didn't put that in there.

A-I didn't think he would.

Q-But see that's the kind of stuff I'm looking for.

A-That's Ronnie. And that's Sebastian Cabot came to visit us (looking

at photo).

Q-Is that who that is?

A-Yeah, Sebastian Cabot.

Q-Alright. Oh wow.

A-That's Ron. I missed him, I wasn't there. That was the entrance to our TOC. He was the main operator. And he took apart radios, got the speakers out of them and had speaker systems installed in every bunker. So I could talk to any bunker from the command post.

Q-Was it like a switchboard? Could you talk to just one bunker, not everybody at the same time?

A-Yep, I could do everybody at once or individual bunkers.

Q-He sent me some clippings. And I copied a couple of your pictures out of your scrapbook. But your daughter's the one that originally told me this story. Did she ever get around to sending back those slides?

A-Mickey Keamaolos, he's the one that got the Purple Heart. That's Doug Cohen, he was the bulldozer operator. See the size of him?

Q-Good lord.

A-Had eight of them that were about all that size.

Wife-We just came down in our small car...

A-He has a 16 mm movie that he took there.

Q-Okay. That came up in a conversation I guess with Ross (Andrews son).

A-I haven't been able to...I've never seen it but...

Q-I would love to get it transferred.

A-We conducted school at night after work and everybody would go. There was no excuses. We got all but four guys their GED. And those guys were so dumb they couldn't...they couldn't read, they couldn't... We got all the college graduates we could find. Found out what their specialties were, regardless of rank. We had privates teaching sergeants. English, math, and we had mandatory classes at night and when we finally had a big party and a celebration and dressed them all up in caps and gowns...we made out a...and had them walk across the stage and shook their hands and gave them all...

Q-Nobody took pictures? You don't have any pictures of that?

A-There might be some. But I had a...

Q-But that's just so cool. I mean, because that's part of being in a Guard unit. Because unlike a Regular unit...a Regular unit would never do that. Very seldom.

A-Yeah but...you know, this having privates teaching sergeants...

Q-But the fact that you're comfortable enough with each other because you're all home town guys. You all know each other, you've known each other in some cases for many years, went to school together, you're intermarried, whatever. Unlike a Regular Army unit, you wouldn't find...

A-Anyway, I was very proud of that. That we got the whole crew...

Q-That's great. Alright well, since the crowd out here...let's see what else.

A-They did a good job.

Q-Howard Salley, do you know how to contact him?

A-Haven't seen him since we left Vietnam. That was a story that...
<inaudible> use the Regular Army that they gave the option of going

to Vietnam with us or go to jail.

Q-Oh. I do need to know...did you stay with the unit when it returned home? Or did...

A-I had my resignation that day. I got hit on the runway at Fort Devens. So I got out just as soon as the Guard...but I got transferred to Head Quarters.

Q-So you left the unit then...

A-As soon as we got home. And one of my lieutenants, (Steven P.) Lobombard took over. He was the next company commander. But everybody else got out. The only guys that stayed in the unit were the full timers. Everybody, the entire 186 guys got out.

Q-You did go to the Reserve Unit Commanders' dinner at Fort Myer?

A-Yeah.

Q-I assume you went (asking Mrs. Andrews)?

Wife-No.

Q-No?

Wife-I wasn't invited.

Q-They didn't invite spouses?

A-No. I didn't have a job. (Major) General (Reginald M.) Cram (Adjutant General of Vermont at the time) lent me fifty dollars so I could go. And I was in the...they sent me in some little cubicle down here in Washington someplace. I didn't know anybody. I'm not too familiar with the big cities. I stayed in that little room and then they came and picked us up in a bus and took us...lined us up. They were all colonels and generals, I was just...I was the lowest ranking guy there! As a captain. I shook (General) Westmorland's hand and they took us over and I got to shake (President) Nixon's hand. And then they said goodbye! And that was the end of it.

Wife-We had lunch. You had lunch at the White House didn't you? Or something?

A-No. We had lunch at the Officer's Club someplace.

Q-This was a dinner at Fort McNair is what the invitation itself actually was. That's why I was...

Wife-This is something for a luncheon...

Q-That was the invitation that was in the scrapbook.

Wife-Oh.

Q-And I was just wondering...

A-Yeah, there was a luncheon. It must have been a luncheon. But they had...you know, there's a visual. You know them all because you've talked to all the ones that were there. There were a lot of colonels and <inaudible>. I was there all by myself. <inaudible> there was nobody...I was the only one invited.

[end tape]