

PREFACE:

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Eugene, Oregon

Interviewee: Michael Peterson

Interviewers: Alex Henry and Jared Davis

Alex Henry: So, I'm Alex.

Jared Davis: I'm Jared.

Henry: And we're recording ...

Mike Peterson: The veteran's experience of Michael Leed Peterson. I'm Mike Peterson, I was born in Orange, California, August 6th, 1948 to Carl and Idella Peterson. I enlisted in the Marine Corps in March of '67. What date ... I don't know off the top of my head. I served in Vietnam from basically January 1968 to '69, extending my tour twice for the Combined Action Platoons (CAPS). Twice being two six-month extensions. I was discharged in February, 1970.

Davis: Thank you, Mike. So what was your actual job in the Marine Corps?

Peterson: 2531, being a field radio operator, that constituted two weeks of field radio school. Not quite a grunt but ... humping¹ a Prick 25,² a field radio, but not the larger supplied radio stocks. That implied a further training ... six months training versus the two weeks that I had.

Davis: Okay. Where did you receive this training?

Peterson: Camp Pendleton, California.

Davis: Was this close to where you went to boot camp?

Peterson: Yes. San Diego boot camp. The Marines consisted of, west of the Mississippi ... MCRD [Marine Corps Recruit Depot] was in San Diego with further infantry training at Camp Pendleton. East of the Mississippi was Camp Lejeune, South Carolina, for boot camp and then ... shipped over to Camp Pendleton for the further combat infantry training or MOS [Military Occupational Specialty] training, generally.

Henry: Were you drafted or did you volunteer?

Peterson: I enlisted. I was a guppy. I believed in Vietnam at the time. Incidentally, I was educated post-Vietnam at UC Riverside and one of my instructors was Mel Gurtov who was since risen to heading [the] Political Science Department at Portland State University and he also wrote the initial chapters of what later became known as the *Pentagon Papers*.

Henry: Mmm, wow.

Peterson: ... So he dissuaded me from the war ...

Accepting the propoganda of the war, I was a true believer of the war at the time. Unlike my

¹ Walking with a loaded pack on your back.

² PRC-25, a field radio that Marines fondly called a "Prick 25."

team colleagues I knew actually where Laos was at the time of and ... the ... our immediate involvement in '62 was the Plain of Jars, not Vietnam. That was the flashpoint. Vietnam came later. Although we had training missions in Vietnam, at the time, the flashpoint was the Plain of Jars. And I knew that, and I kept abreast of *National Geographic* and the whole nine-yards, so I knew *actually* what I was doing, [laughter]. But, go on.

Henry: What made you decide that this was something that you wanted to get behind on?

Peterson: Again, I believed in the war and especially ... I don't know when it was ... the *Life* magazine article, "To Keep a Village Free", they headlined the Combined Action Platoons as the U.S. Marines Other War in Vietnam, and I wanted to go there, and I didn't know that it was ... when I ... my first tour was up and I read about it in my liberty, that was thirty days free liberty, then we had the extension. No, I don't know, it was before the first tour, I'm sure of that. Like in '67. And I wanted to be there, and be at the CAPS. In the first tour, as you know, you go where you're assigned, but your extensions, you're granted a tour of duty. Usually in your home unit, but I extended for the CAPS.

So my first tour of duty was with COM company, headquarters battalion, First Marine Division, headquartered in Da Nang. I extended my tour twice, two six-month extensions for the Combined Action Program and CAP school was in Da Nang for two weeks and followed assignment to one of four Combined Action groups. First CAG [Combined Action Group] was south in ... I forget the name ... south of Da Nang, the first one. The second one was in Da Nang. The third one was in Phu Bai and the fourth one was in Quang Tri at the DMZ [demilitarized zone]. The fourth CAG literally had no right to be there because it was contested territory and the CAPS were a platoon ... a *squad* of Marines, teamed with the platoon of Vietnamese Popular Forces and we patrolled in the hamlets [small village] as I say in the book,³ unlike the Marine grunt units and the Army grunt units, we waged our war *in* the hamlets, rather than *on* the hamlets. So we knew, you know ... the Vietnamese had three dimensions. Unlike the *background* of the grunts, you know. So, the war became ... I don't know, I think it's personal. Oh, God ... I'm jabbering on like a mouth here and now I'm winding down.

Davis: Oh, it's okay, it's your interview.

Peterson: Yeah. Uh ... stop the tape [laughter]. Okay, I'll gather my thoughts, then I'll keep on going.

Henry: Okay.

Davis: I can ask you a question here. So what were your first thoughts as soon as you arrived in Vietnam?

Peterson: [Laughter] My first ... well, not my first thoughts ... you know, the closer I got to action and going to Vietnam, the more I wanted not to go [laughter]. So, not my first thoughts,

³ Michael E. Peterson, The Combined Action Platoons: The U.S. Marines' Other War in Vietnam (New York: Praeger, 1989).

but my first experience was a panic of not knowing where COM Company, Headquarters Battalion, First Marine Division *was*. I assumed it was up north, like I heard a scuttlebutt [rumor] saying, "First Marine Division was transferred to Phu Bai", that was headquarters of *Third* Marine Division, so I spent the first, oh, about forty-eight hours transferring north to Phu Bai and Hue City, where I should've stayed in Da Nang [laughter]. And I flew in a KC-130 ... and these were, like, colleagues, a team of Marines returning from med-evac [medical evacuation]. So here's a raw ... new guy ... FNG and he's stuck among a bunch of Marines, med-evac and returning to their units after med-evac, you know, "So what's ... who was your unit?" "Oh, Alpha Company 3-1 and they were wiped out and I'm the sole survivor." "Ahh!" [Laughter]. So it was just like, ahh. So I was grateful upon my learning of return to Da Nang, and hopefully of more stable assistance.

Davis: So how long were you in Vietnam before you were able to shake the image of being the "new guy" ... "FNG", like you quoted it.

Peterson: Oh, Boy.

Davis: And for our listeners, the FNG is the Fuckin' New Guy [general laughter].

Peterson: It was like about, two or three months. Mostly I just stood guard duty. I hated the idea of standing watch with First Marine Divisions Command Headquarters and all those lifers around. So I made a regular assignment to guard duty, hills 200 through 244. That was the COM Company's assigned billet [duty station] for guard duty.

To those who are not involved, the Marines Tactical Area of Responsibility was south of Da Nang and like, oh ... Chu Lai from the south to the DMZ in the North. That was the Marine's responsibility and Da Nang was the headquarters of the First Marine Division, as well as the NSA, Naval Support Activity in Da Nang, because Da Nang featured a deep-water port. So that was pretty well built up. Go on.

Henry: For when you did your first tour, before you extended it, how was it different than when you extended your tour?

Peterson: Well it was in the rear with the gear. It was like, you know ... there was no ... The Marines have the best chow. Like the Marines said, "You don't fuck with my chow and you don't fuck with my mail." [General laughter]. And the division chow was like state-side chow, you know, white and chocolate milk, for example.

Henry: Which I'm assuming is normally unheard of.

Peterson: Oh yeah! [laughter]. The regiments were bravo rats⁴ you know, rations from a can, but the Marines generally took care of their own in the built up areas. 24th Corps, by way of

⁴ B-Rations, meals containing canned or preserved ingredients typically prepared in a field kitchen.

example, that was in Phu Bai, that was at a core level and their chow ... this is more built up than the 1st Marine Division's area ... their chow sucked [general laughter] by comparison, so just sort of an "Ah!" Those two things the Marines didn't fuck with.

Henry: What was one thing that was ... or was there anything that was kind of like a pleasant surprise that you weren't expecting when you went to Vietnam?

Davis: Or an unpleasant surprise? [Laughter].

Peterson: Well, oh boy. The pleasant surprise was mostly reserved for the CAPs. We were isolated from the Vietnamese and, you know ... there were the cleaning women and the support authority. The Freedom Hill Theater or PX [Post Exchange] base was, oh, about two kilometers away and that featured an air-conditioned state-side theater, barber shops available to Navy and Marines and all kinds of personnel. The Da Nang airstrip that we flew into was nearby there. Let's see ... where am I going with this?

So it was built up and the CAPS, on the other hand, were in the hamlets 24/7 with, oh, an occasional R&R [rest and recuperation] at 24th Corps, you know, for recharging, but that didn't last ... maximum twenty four hours and then we were in the boonies with resupply once or twice a week, but then we were on our own. We had of course combat support, artillery and med-evac, but there were limits as to what we could call in *because* we were in the hamlets and we had to be very selective in our firing and that was *self*-selective. We were selective to the needs of the hamlet. That's the key difference to the rest of the grunt experience both Army and Marines. We made ... I think, we made a difference. Ultimately we did not but we made a difference in our hamlet.

So on the ... in the main, my recollections of the Combined Action Platoons were good. We checked the grunt impulse to waste them all [laughs]. "Okay now, these are our friends and we're searching for the enemy." So it's like we're all kind of in one big bag, living together. You got, you know ... the same family had Viet Cong, as well as government of Vietnam relationships and you had ... kind of like pick and choose ... who was the least dangerous or who was the most dangerous. So it's ... we had an impact on the hamlet. The level of destruction was nothing like the level of destruction in the free fire zones, for example.

Davis: How were relations with your family while you were away in Vietnam?

Peterson: Oh, Mom and Dad, well ... I didn't have any girlfriends. Mom and Dad ... well, Dad was ... I was a late baby and my dad had been in Smedley Butler's regiment in 1929 and the American Expeditionary Force in China.⁵ He remembers Butler as being ... a big nose, constantly tugged on his nose and wiped his ass [general laughter]. But he ... you know more than her ... Smedley Butler's maverick reputation.

I think ... I really believe that when the tape was inactive, some of our most important conversations were here. You know, the Marines, by and large, is lockstep mentality. But they

⁵ Smedley Butler was a prominent but controversial Marine general.

produce a few mavericks. Chesty Puller being one, Lew Walt being another one and Lew Walt was a trainee of Chesty Puller's academy during the '30s, The Small Wars Manual Academy. And that was the template of future operations and above all, it featured a sensitivity to local conditions and cultures, and stuff like that. Something of which the Army never knew. And Lew Walt later became Commander of all the Marine forces in Vietnam. And Lew Walt and Victor Krulak formed ... or it was with their blessing that the Combined Action Program was formed. So, there's this distinction between Lew Walt and the CAP program and, oh God ... let's see ... who was the commandant that was against the Vietnam war?⁶

Davis: Ummm ... I'm thinkin' of wrong names ...

Peterson: What?

Davis: I'm thinkin' like ... it wasn't Gerlach, he was later.

Peterson: No, he at the time was an opponent of the Vietnam War ... Oh God, again, aphasia, aphasia. That's the name for mental blocks between the brain and the mouth. Two-time Medal of Honor winner from Tarawa. Now pause [laughter].⁷

So the Marines produced, in addition to the lockstep mentality, free thinkers like Smedley Butler and Commandant Shoup and to a less extent Lew Walt. And it was this attitude that, I think, gave the Marines some flexibility. And in addition, General Westmoreland, he ran the war overall, but because oh ... Chief of the Naval Pacific command at their insistence, they gave the Marines wide latitude for their conduct of the war in Vietnam and their area of responsibility. So, just with these subtle nuances, generally, again, we conducted our war the same as the Army with these examples, these ... less damage to the hamlets. Victor Krulack said, "We ought to wage our war in the hamlets, rather than in the mountains." Wars in the hamlets, we gotta wage war there rather than free fire zones that the Army emphasized.

Henry: and the flexibility that you talked about with the free thinkers, do you mean flexibility in the conduct of the war?

Peterson: Well, I think overall, we were of the same mentality, so that flexibility in the conduct of the war can be carried too far. We subscribed, as the Army did, to "nuke the gook", you know, and all the other adjectives. But the Marines should've known better because of the small wars experience. Because of the interbellum between World Wars I and II. We had all these brushfire wars and conflicts. Sandinistas, you know, we eliminated Sandino in Nicaragua and it was just ... but we did it in such a way that we didn't level this massive of destruction that we did in Vietnam.

⁶ Chesty Puller, Lew Walt, and Victor Krulak are all prominent and highly decorated Marine Corps generals.

⁷ He is thinking of David M. Shoup, who was appointed Commandant of the Marine Corps in 1960 and opposed intervention in Vietnam both before and after his retirement in 1963 [editor's note].

Davis: So upon your return from Vietnam, were your opinions anyway transformed about our involvement?

Peterson: That was Mel Gertov ... Mel Gertov's influence. I've always felt we were ... with the CAP experience, directly with the CAP experience, I felt that we were waging our war in the wrong way. We still had business there but this was before ... 1970-72 my feelings were mixed. I still felt we belonged there, but if we were going the way we had been going, I felt we would be driven out. I didn't expect the complete route of ... in '75, but I felt that we would be driven out. We needed to wage our war on the hamlet level, and the hamlet's the key, you know, and stuff like that and that would be make or break, but ... it wasn't, and so I felt that we were doomed at some extent or another ... or some time. Incidentally, there was a key, I think one of the key turning points that is a "might have been" scenario. In '63, '62-'63 a thing ... the phrase that was common among most advisors was "sink or swim with Ngo Dinh Diem." If Diem didn't make it we should be out of there. If Diem could possibly pull it off, then ... then ... there could be a reason for our continued presence. But, that was one alternative not taken. "Sink or swim with Ngo Dinh Diem" boom. Our deaths would've been in the hundreds rather than in the tens of thousands.⁸

So, that was an opportunity not taken, but anyway ... Mel Gurtov, who was mostly concerned with the background of China and the context in Vietnam and the Cold War ... this was like, pre-Vietnam and China, because he spoke Chinese. He convinced me ... and us, that it was a hopeless cause. Not propagandized ... that we were doomed nine-tenths of the time. Ho Chi Minh is Bac Ho ... Uncle Ho. And to the South as well as the North. Well, we didn't know that, you see [laughter]. Ron Philips, the late Ron Philips, you don't know him and I don't need to go into details, said, "I knew we were in trouble the day that Ho Chi Minh died and South Vietnam went into mourning" [laughter]. "Ohh-kay ... we're on the wrong side".

Davis: Now it seems like a lot of Vietnam vets are very aware of political and historical issues within Vietnam, now do you have an idea of why that is?

Henry: Or, *was* that your experience?

Peterson: I don't know ... well actually, the older Vietnam vets get, the more they resort to what I'll call "the hat" organizations. That's the piss-cutters [garrison cap] and American Legion and the VFW [Veterans of Foreign Wars] and ... it's an increasing, encroaching conservatism that belies the earlier experience from Vietnam. It's as if we've got to make it mean something ... all those lives wasted for the cause ... "I can't accept that".

Davis: So it's nostalgic.

Peterson: Nostalgia has a powerful effect *contrary* to the wisdom *of* history. Contrary to ... well, we were fighting an uphill battle, at best [laughter].

⁸ President Ngo Dinh Diem of the Republic of Vietnam (South Vietnam) was assassinated in 1963 during a U.S.-backed coup.

Henry: do you think a lot of people still have that mentality if they were a part of the CAPS?

Peterson: Oh boy ... that's hard to say

Henry: Because, I feel like you can almost see the good in what you did because of what specifically you were helping with, rather than the entire war on a whole, where you have to try to justify it.

Peterson: I'll put it this way, my experience with the CAPS determined my involvement with Veterans Vietnam Restoration Project. Because the Vietnamese in my hamlet, our hamlet, assumed three-dimensions, assumed more than background poster effect. Of course, I wanted to go back to Vietnam. And with all the positives and negatives of that experience and, you know, the most shameful thing I personally did was as a member of the CAPS. I condoned torture on two occasions. That is the shameful part of my memory. We did a precursor to the water board treatment. We called it "soaping down". We rubbed ... we held down the victim and we covered his mouth with the washcloth and we rubbed soap into it. And that gave the victim not only suffocation, but also unbeknownst to us, damage to his or her digestion and that created ... and again ... that was unbeknownst to us ... a lifelong problem for the victim. And that the victims of the soap treatment suffer 'til this day. That's the only ... that's the one single thing I'm ashamed of. Let's see ...

Henry: Do you think going back kind of ... in a way was to help alleviate your own personal thoughts of that situation?

Peterson: Well, not that directly. That was war and the Vietnamese, among themselves, treated their prisoners *far* worse. Among the Southerners as well as the Northerners. So, we exercised considerably tame tactics, but the Viet Cong suspects that we sent back into the rear for interrogation, we didn't want to know what they went through.

So, let's see, it's just in general, "What are things like in Vietnam?" I thought in my ... it was not beyond my hope that with the mission winding up that I could visit my old area of operations in Hue between Phu Bai and Hue City. But that was not to be. Vung Tau was in the extreme south around Saigon. The Marines' area of responsibility is five hundred miles to the north. I traveled halfway around the world, only to be halted the last five hundred miles, so this is one reason why I'm hopeful in April of accompanying the last team before it disestablishes itself in Hue City, so I'm confident that I'll get to visit my area of operation then.

Henry: How'd you get involved in that?

Peterson: The Veteran's Vietnam Restoration Project [VVRP]. Team One of VVRP is Navy 9 and Team Twenty-Nine is slated to go for April before the project disestablishes itself. This is the last mission. So I feel I've come full circle in VVRP as well as Vietnam.

Henry: How long has it been since you've been over there?

Peterson: Twenty years ... well '89. Do the math [laughter].

Henry: Yeah, twenty ... five.

Peterson: Yeah, yeah ... yeah.

Henry: That's great, That's gotta be really exciting for you to go back there.

Peterson: Oh, yeah, and for Jan ... Jan my wife, too.

Henry: Oh, that's great.

Peterson: Yeah, okay, Janet Peterson is my wife. Sarah Peterson's our daughter. Janet's more stressed about going to Vietnam than I am.

Henry: Has she been before?

Peterson: Oh no, no. And she's dealing with an alien culture. She was ... Southern California kid, what foreign language she had was Spanish and she spent a week in Mexico and, you know, with that culture, but this is a totally foreign culture, so she's more stressed out than I am. But, you know, she suffered an appendicitis attack with my first mission.

We were in a state of such hostility that communication between the states and Vietnam was impossible at that time. And so she suffered a burst appendix during the tour and I had no way of contacting her. And so, it was like, Sherrie [Clarke] ran our mail to us and that was on a weekly basis only. So, Jan had an appendix burst. Our pastor's wife watched over her in the time that I was in Vietnam and so, I administered the call. There was a landline from Vung Tai to Saigon ... Saigon had to launch a satellite communication. Not just any satellite, but a third world satellite because of our official hostility to Vietnam and that satellite beamed down, not to the States, but Canada and a landline was established from Canada to the States and so it was two hours later that I managed to hear "I'm okay" [general laughter].

So the level of hostility between Vietnam in 1989 was that intense ... we allowed practically no humanitarian aid, despite statements to the contrary. We allowed for no diplomatic aid ... no humanitarian aid and let alone, normalization of relations otherwise. We knocked down a lot of barriers, Team One did. Anyway, back to the war [laughter].

Davis: That can all be included. You're doing a service that you feel is very valuable to the people of Vietnam and other veterans, so ...

Peterson: Oh yeah ... Well, the thing is, well, especially for today, given the normalization of relations, vets can afford to be somewhat stressed out. The Vietnamese can handle that. I would recommend a trip to Vietnam for any Vietnam veteran whose PTSD is cope-able ... can be dealt with. It was very healing for me and our team and I recommend it.

Davis: Does it provide you with a sense of closure?

Peterson: Oh, you know, I had that closure with Vietnam ... earlier. With the fall of the South, I got in one of my depressions and I handled the pistol and I ... well, I didn't quite put it to my head. A Browning nine millimeter. I said, "I was suicidal before," but then, it was with the fall of the South and that triggered a response in me and I handled the gun and I knew I ... I had handled the gun once before but a part of me denied it. That part washed away and so I knew I could do it, but then I *would* do it and then a cold deadly feeling washed all over me and that scared the hell outta me, so ... [laughter] I put it away and haven't had a suicidal thought since then.

Henry: And was that your ...

Peterson: That was the down time. That was in '75. By the mid-eighties that had been dealt with. And in 2000, Doug Gremillon, who was a member of the CAP team, dealt with another area of shame I had to carry, and that was the killing of a Marine in an ambush, initiated by the ARVN, which was the Army of the Republic of Vietnam. And it left me alive to blame myself for the Marine I was ... I felt responsible for killing in front of me and the wounding of a Marine behind me, which left me untouched to blame myself because I was commander of that CAP platoon ... CAP squad. So God bless Doug Gremillon. In 2000, he called me on a ... "Doug Gremillon" ... you know, the VVA [Vietnam Veterans of America] locator. "Doug Gremillon," that name sounds familiar. And it sure as hell was Doug Gremillon, who had been volunteered for the CAP unit a week before he was put in my platoon, and he said, "Didn't you know the ARVN weren't where they were supposed to be. They were ghosting. " And so we had stumbled into an accidental ambush and the locations, as you know, are phoned in daily ... locations of friendly units and so we plotted our ambush away from the friendly units. Well, they weren't where they were supposed to be, they were ghosting and we stumbled into their ghosting outfit ... their ghost positions. So I was unaware of this at the time in 1970, which left me twenty years to blame myself, the '80s and '90s, and in 2000 I contacted this Doug Gremillon and he said, "Didn't 'cha know? The ARVN weren't where they were supposed to be." In other words, *it wasn't my fault after all*. I carried that burden for damn near thirty years.

Davis: So what was your source of motivation to write your book, The Combined Action Platoons? Available at Amazon.com [general laughter].

Peterson: The first and only publication was about three thousand max books, so if you want to hurry, contact Amazon now [general laughter]. It was the basis of my thesis and that, in turn, was the basis of Glenn May's "The History of the Vietnam War," which I thought I'd skate through, you know, easy A stuff. Glenn May wasn't so accommodating [general laughter].⁹ So, it was the basis of my history paper and it grew from that paper and it was a graduate paper, not an undergraduate paper, so it was more detailed. It blossomed forth into my thesis, "The Combined Action Platoons", which I've sent a copy to the library and that actually has more of the Pacific Action Projects, this is like, one-half to two-thirds of the total work of that stuff, which is located in the master's thesis section of the University of Oregon Library. Where am I

⁹ Professor Glenn May has taught a course on the Vietnam War at the University of Oregon since the mid-1970s.

going with this?

Davis: Did you receive a lot of support from some of the historians at the University?

Peterson: The Marines. Yeah, well the, yeah. Glenn May.

Davis: Or even Marines. A lot of Marines you served with, were they able to help you out with this?

Peterson: Yeah. The basis was phone interviews with oh, thirty ... well no, twenty or thirty Marines. And ... I don't know the questions. It's attached in my appendix at of the University of Oregon Library. So where am I going with this ... [general laughter]?

Okay, the basic ... Gerald Fry and Glenn ... oh ... one of the graduate faculty advisors served on my thesis team and I got support from them obviously, but I had to make it related to international studies so, what is more interesting than community development in times of war when the very essence of community destruction is involved, so it had to be the Combined Action Program as a source for community development in something so destructive as the war overall and I had a project or two that I contacted ... I was able demonstrate those projects in the light of the whole Vietnam War. That served as the basis for my thesis and it was published, well not published, but it was accepted and I said, "This serves as the basis for *a* book." I didn't consider myself so arrogant to be a writer, but one of the biggest mistakes is I should've sent my thesis to Ron Boerem in Ontario, California, who had a master's in English, and he'd have tightened it up. But, that's one of the coulda, shoulda done.

Davis: Who's your audience for this book?

Peterson: This is an academic imprint. So, its very nature, its expense was eighty-nine dollars to begin with, and I don't know what it is now. I wrote in the style as best I could to where it was accessible. Yeah, obviously the CAP Marines and segments of it are published on the CAP website. Yeah, I was surprised when Praeger¹⁰ accepted it, actually, because it was chock full of errors and I felt it was okay for a master's thesis, but it wasn't fit for publication into a book, so I was as surprised as anyone they accepted it. I think, in my brain, Praeger, as an entity, wasn't quite up to snuff on things Vietnam and it was a rush job for them [laughter]. "Okay we got our official Vietnam history of this year and we'll leave it at that." [General laughter].

Henry: Did you, right after you got out, did you immediately go to school, or what was the thought process behind that?

Peterson: I went work.

Henry: Okay.

Peterson: I went to school a year later in Ontario, California. Chaffey Community College for

¹⁰ Publishing company.

my AA, UC [University of California] Riverside for my BA in 1979 ... Yeah, '79 [laughter]. I spent two years on Catalina Island with my parents, who moved over there. Met my wife there around '78, '79. We were married in '79 and moved to Oregon in 1980. I wrote my thesis of course in 1988 ... eh, '87, '88.

Henry: So you only did your master's up here, right?

Peterson: Yes.

Henry: Why did you decide on Oregon?

Peterson: It was ... boy ... it was ... we had relatives, my cousins ... my cousins were the fishers on Camp Creek Road and so we had a place to stay and, you know, unlike California, the cost of living was cheap here. And the recession of 1980 to '83 hadn't hit yet, so there were jobs. My professional experience was restaurant, you know, I'm a cook, and so there were plenty of cooking jobs available and Jan and I were each interested in pursuing a Masters. She, an MBA in accounting was what she ended up with. And I, being more nebulous, a master was ... political science of some nature and gravitated toward international studies, of them an East Asian emphasis. So, that's how we ended up here.

Henry: Had the military influenced your decision on going to college at all?

Peterson: No, no.

Henry: Did you always want to?

Peterson: Yeah.

Henry: Okay, gotcha.

Peterson: I entered Chaffey College prior to my service and promptly flunked out, so ... the draft was breathing down my neck and I believed in Vietnam anyway, so I enlisted in the Marine Corps. [Laughter].

Henry: Right. What made you decide on the Marine Corps?

Peterson: Like father, like son.

Henry: [laughter] That makes sense.

Peterson: But, yeah, the closer I got to actually serving in Vietnam, the less I became enamored with it.

Davis: Okay, how about one last questions here. Would you do it all again?

Peterson: No. The trauma of getting a Marine, let alone a Vietnamese killed, dictates my lack of

my ... I wouldn't do it all over again. I had some positive experiences ... most of the time, you know the story, most of the time is *boring* and country. And sheer tons of boredom punctuated by moments of terror that I'm sure you've heard that phrase ... it's true.

The sounds of the Vietnam war ... I'm more enamored with the texture of Vietnam than anything ... well, not than anything else, but the sounds of the Vietnam war were Hueys.¹¹ The distinctive "chop-chop" of that blades. You find any Vietnam vet and if there's still a Huey in service, he'll look up at it. Okay, I'll stake my reputation on it. He'll look up at it and to this day the distinctive chop of that sound that Bell UH-1B is distinctive. And the smell of Vietnam is burning shit. [Laughter] And that smell is not duplicated anywhere. And also, combined in my case, the smell of rot and perfume and the birth all rolled into one in Vietnam.

And I've got an interesting story. I paid my respects to the wall in 1988, when I wrote this thesis. '87, '88. I was granted scholarship by the Marine Corps to study at their historical archives in the Navy Historical Yard. So I was granted interview access to ... what is the ... Krulak's follies. The command diaries of the regiments. And so, I paid my obligatory visit to the wall. And Hueys were in service then ... even ... what ... the choppers now ... is a what?

Davis: The MV-22 Osprey we have now. And we still have Hueys but they're now four-blade.

Peterson: Yeah, yeah. I didn't expect the sound to emerge from the wall. So ... Thomas Williams ... this is for you Tom. Thomas Williams, I, you know ... engraved ... had them engrave the Thomas Williams and ... it is impressive, but the sound I didn't expect ... the sound was ... it radiated from the wall of the Huey background courier traffic that goes back and forth Washington and I didn't expect the sound, which actually radiated from the wall to *me*. [Laughter] The Huey traffic. That was unexpected, and well ... yeah, it makes my skin crawl to this day.

Davis: Thank you very much for your time.

Peterson: Thank you very much too. Feel free to ... my thesis is in the history ... this is my last book for Sarah, so I can't give you this [laughter]. But I think my book is in the library as well as my thesis, but I would urge you to read my thesis, because it's got a lot more Pacific action projects and Pacific action oriented.

Henry: Well, thank you very much.

Davis: So what role did your father have in you deciding to serve as a Marine?

Peterson: Well, my father recommended against it. [Laughter]. So, he was ... he didn't discourage it, but he sure didn't recommend it because he knew I'd get myself ... I wasn't sure of what ... I didn't have knowledge of what I was getting into. And he couldn't impart that. But even he in 1929, the Marines were different than World War II. Qualitatively different. He not only served under Smedley Butler, which I think ... I don't know if it widened his eyes, but being

¹¹ Bell UH-1 Iroquois, military helicopter.

a commander and being interested in saving American lives, rather than American property, which the Americans were expected to do, for example, it made the mission qualitatively different. And so, the Marines were more the State Department's Army, rather than the military. The World War II changed all that. Because the draft and the need for expansion into, what, five divisions from like, say, two divisions, or maybe even one division.

So there was a loss of coherence and I would say the beginnings of a ruthlessness the Marines didn't have before. And that includes weapons training as a result of World War II. The Marines in my time, and certainly your time, were taught to kill the enemy. One of the more revealing lessons and of obvious concern to the military was that by and large, the Marines in World War II and the Army, certainly the Army, fired their weapons into the air. Like about eighty-nine percent, or ... there was a number ... it's more than seventy-five percent. Eighty-nine percent were confirmed misses rather than shooting the enemy dead. The Marines and the Army made sure that didn't happen during Vietnam and especially in post-Vietnam Era. You hit that target, and it's just like, there's a ... not a progression toward brutality, but *ehhh* ... that was, as a result, there's a brutalization and I'll say it's across the services. And I would expect it for the military. You know, you better learn to kill and ask questions later.

Did that answer your question?

Davis: Oh yes, it did, of course.