

Interview with
STEVEN “STEVE” DWAYNE CROUSE

June 27, 2018

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STEVEN “STEVE” DWAYNE CROUSE

Steven “Steve” Dwayne Crouse was interviewed by Randall J. Bunn on June 27, 2018 in St. George, Washington County, Utah. He related his experiences during the Vietnam War. Also participating: Brady Fronk.

RB: Before we get into your war period, “Steve,” tell a little about your prewar experiences. Where were you born?

SC: I was born in Redwood Falls, Minnesota.

RB: You were one of how many children?

SC: Three.

RB: Your parents’ names were?

SC: Darrell and Twyla Crouse.

RB: What was your father’s occupation?

SC: He was a plumber.

RB: When were you born?

SC: I was born August 19, 1949.

RB: How long did you live in Minnesota?

SC: Until 1962.

RB: Then what happened?

SC: My father decided that he was tired of working in the snow and got a job in Seattle, Washington. We moved to Seattle in 1962.

RB: How did you like that move?

SC: It was great because it was the year of the [1962] World’s Fair.

RB: That was true.

SC: We moved there in March. [When] we left Minnesota [there was] two of feet of snow. [When we got] to Seattle it was 65° [and] the grass was green. Life was good!

RB: Life was good! In 1962 were you about thirteen years old?

SC: I turned thirteen years old that year.

RB: Where did you go to school?

SC: I went to junior high school at Kirkland Junior High [and] to high school at Lake Washington Senior High School, [both in Washington].

RB: When [did] you graduate from high school?

SC: [On] June 6, 1967.

RB: Did you attend any college [classes] before military service?

SC: I went to Yakima Valley College [Yakima, Washington] from 1967 to 1968.

RB: Did you study anything in particular or just general education?

SC: My major was going to be business administration; but I hated it. I did not really know what else to do. I had an interest in law enforcement. The school [didn't] offer [any] classes or courses in police science or anything [like] that. I thought: maybe if I went into the military as a military policeman I would get some experience. If I decided once I [was discharged] that I wanted to be a police officer I would have [some] opportunities.

RB: Was that kind of the direction you were headed?

SC: Yes.

RB: 1967-1968 was kind of at the height, or getting towards the height, of the Vietnam War period.

SC: It was still nasty. It was still nasty.

RB: That was a bad time or busy time. How is it that you came to enlist in the military?

SC: When I was in college, I went to an [United States] Air Force recruiter [and] took all the tests. I wanted to join the Air Force, [but] at the last minute I had cold feet. I remember calling my father and he said, "Do not sign anything. If you are not sure, do not sign anything. Just think about it." I did not sign. [I] got out of

school; took the summer off [and] worked. The more I thought about it the more I wanted to be a military policeman. I went [back] and saw a recruiter. Back in those days you had [could get] a 2-S Deferment when you went to college. That took you out of the draft or [allowed you to] stay out of the draft if you were in school. I was going to lose my [deferment] if I did not go back to school. I went to talk to a [United States] Army recruiter. He said if I signed up, I would not go to Vietnam. I thought: that is cool. I will go in as a military policemen and I will not go to Vietnam!

RB: Guaranteed safety!

SC: My dad, of course, pooh-poohed that. He said, “They lie out of their teeth, “Steve”.” I said, “I am going to sign up anyway.” I signed up.

RB: Let me interject here — did your father serve in the military at all?

SC: He was in the Army.

RB: What period? World War II?

SC: He was in about a year after World War II.

RB: [So] he had some experience.

SC: Yes, he knew how the military operated.

RB: [Did] you accept the word of the recruiter that this was the gospel truth?

SC: I did. I [had] just turned nineteen [ears old. I believed every word he said; much to my father’s chagrin. And I signed up.

RB: You [were] not drafted — you signed up. What happened after that? What was the procedure for reporting once you signed up?

SC: I don’t recall what month or day I enlisted or signed up.

RB: Did you have to go to a —.

SC: [I went to] a recruitment center.

RB: Did they do a medical physical of you [earlier]?

SC: Yes, there was a bunch of us. We were all just grouped together and went through all the — we were there not quite a full day. We were there from five o’clock in the morning. My parents dropped me off in downtown Seattle. [I was with] my group of [fellows]. We went through the whole process. Then we were sworn in.

The group I was with was transported to the airport and flown into San Francisco [California].

RB: Did you have a chance to say good-bye to your parents? Or you did that before you left?

SC: [We did that] when they dropped me off.

RB: Wow!

SC: It was: good-bye and that was it. The next thing you know we [are] in Fort Ord, California at about ten o'clock at night. They put us up into a barracks [and] everybody crashed. We were all tired. First thing in the morning, it was probably eight or nine o'clock, we started to wake up. Nobody had come in to get us. We got up and sort of made our bunks as best we could. [Laughter] Our drill sergeant came in and said, "What are you doing out of your bunks! Get back in your bunks!" [Laughter]

RB: [Laughter]

SC: We unmade our beds, took off our clothes and got back in our bunks. He walked up to us and said, "What are you doing in your bunks! Get out of there!" I thought to myself: oh, gees! I may have made a mistake.

RB: [Laughter] Yes. He is going to mess with me. [Laughter] Again, what day [did] you enlist when this happened?

SC: [It was on] September 26, 1968.

RB: Why is it you remember the date?

SC: I don't know.

RB: Was it a significant date in your life?

SC: I guess; like the day I graduated high school. The date I got married. The day I went into the Army.

RB: Yes. This was a transition from civilian to military life.

SC: I remember most of the dates of whatever we did. It is all just right there.

RB: That is interesting. I found that with a lot of military people. They can remember the date that they enlisted or became part of the military. The date that they got out [and] sometimes the number of days that they served.

SC: Yes; to a day.

RB: You [were] sent to Fort Ord. Was that for basic training?

SC: Yes.

RB: How long was that?

SC: [It was] eight weeks, maybe a little bit longer.

RB: Describe basic training.

SC: I really did not mind basic training.

RB: Oh?

SC: No. During the initial few days when you go through the processing [activities], well, how can I put this? There was an area where you were processed in basically. You went through all the processing [activities]. Take all your tests. Get your uniform, get your hair cut and then they shot you up to the hill [The Hill] — is what they called it. They put us in cattle trucks. Where you are sitting, basically, they had rows going vertically. They always said, “Make your buddy smile. Move up. Make your buddy smile.”

RB: [Laughter]

SC: That was how it was going to be.

RB: [Laughter]

SC: They bused us up to The Hill; which was not that far. When we got to The Hill there were five or six drill sergeants waiting for us. Yelling! Screaming! “Get off the truck.” “Get into formation!” We did not know what a formation was. We all got off the truck. We were all in formation. I will never forget this, there were one or two drill sergeants from the [United States] Marine Corp. They said, “Everybody who was drafted, raise your hands.” And they walked behind them and said, “Marine. Marine. Marine. Marine. Follow me over here.” And the fellow took them. They were [now] Marines. “You were drafted.”

RB: That was how it was going to be for them.

SC: I thought to myself: oh, shit! Glad I enlisted.” I did not want to be a Marine. Then the drill sergeant, said his little spiel, “Okay. There is a lot of [things] you don’t need. Everybody box up your crap and send it back home; because if you don’t need it, the Army would not give it to you.”

RB: Like what kind of [things]?

SC: Just personal [items]

RB: Music?

SC: No.

RB: Pictures?

SC: No.

RB: Clothes?

SC: Everybody had their own deodorant, [and] their own tooth brush. The sergeant said, “No. No. The Army will give you this. All [these items] go home.” So everybody had a little box full of [personal items] that was sent back home.

RB: [Laughter] They had seen this before.

SC: They took away all your civilian [items]. I will never forget this either. The drill sergeant said, “You are so new, you are still pissing civilian piss.” [Laughter]

RB: [Laughter]

SC: I thought to myself: okay.

RB: [Laughter]

SC: Another thing I will never forget — he said, “There is a good chance most of you will be going to Vietnam. Some of you will not be coming back.”

RB: What did you think when you heard that?

SC: It got my attention.

RB: Yes?

SC: That is what they wanted.

RB: [Laughter]

SC: I was thinking to myself: ah shit, Steve.

RB: [Laughter]

SC: He said, “There are two types of soldiers in combat – the quick and the dead. We are here to teach you how to be the quick. Pay attention. Keep your mouth shut.” I thought to myself: okay. Another thing I was from lily-white Kirkland, Washington. We had two or three black people in the [high] school and a few Oriental [students]. That was it. I got down to Fort Ord and I am with a group of forty-two [fellows] in the barracks. A lot of them were from Los Angeles [California]. Hispanics, gang bangers [and] Blacks. We had Samoans and whites. Lily-white Minnesota to lily-white Kirkland, Washington. Put in with this group of forty-some [fellows]. We had to live together for two months. The drill sergeants kept telling us, “It does not matter the color of the [fellow’s] skin next to you or his religion or whatever. You are in a fox hole. You need to depend on this [fellow] to help save your life and vice versa.” You learned to get along with people that you had nothing in common with except staying alive.

RB: Yes? What was that like?

SC: Difficult.

RB: Did you have any kind of prejudices of what you thought people were like that were different than you?

SC: Oh, yes. I didn’t know what people were like.

RB: Sure.

SC: But a lot of [fellows] did. A lot of [fellows] had prejudices. There was a lot of animosity between blacks and whites; between blacks and Hispanics. The Samoans hated everybody; but nobody would mess with them.

RB: Yes. Oh? [Laughter]

SC: There were only a few of them. They projected this nasty personality that you just wanted to leave them alone.

RB: Yes. Did you see any actual conflict among these [fellows]?

SC: Oh, yes, certainly. I would not say all the time; but occasionally.

BF: Brawls and [activities] related to that?

SC: I would not say brawls, but there were fisticuffs.

RB: Were you able to ever leave Fort Ord during that eight weeks [of] basic training period?

SC: No. Well, I take that back. The day I graduated basic training, my parents came down from Washington to watch the graduation ceremony. I had a four-hour leave. That was all.

RB: Did you have a follow-on training at Fort Ord?

SC: No. Once I graduated boot camp, which was November 30, 1968; I left that night for Fort Gordon, Georgia out of Augusta.

RB: You were an E-1 [Enlisted Grade One] at Fort Ord?

SC: Yes.

RB: When you graduated did you still maintain the same grade?

SC: Yes, I was an E-1. I was a slick sleeve. [That meant he had no rank on his shirt sleeve.]

RB: [Did] you leave after the four-hour leave that you had?

SC: Yes.

RB: Where did you go during that leave? Just with your parents?

SC: It was shortly after Thanksgiving. Thanksgiving was Thursday and I graduated on a Saturday. My parents took me out to a place that [served] turkey [and] we had a Thanksgiving dinner. I went back to their motel room. I was so hungry! I had been underfed for two months.

RB: [Laughter] Did you lose weight during basic training?

SC: I actually gained five pounds.

RB: Really?

SC: We ate three meals a day. We [went] back to my parents place. I was hungry so I ordered, I remember, a pepperoni pizza and a milkshake.

RB: Yes. [Laughter]

SC: Ate the whole damn thing!

RB: [Laughter]

SC: My parents were just like, "Wow! You ate a whole turkey dinner! Then you came back here an hour later and ate a pepperoni pizza and a milkshake."

RB: [Laughter] You went back [to the base] and you said you left Fort Ord?

SC: Yes. [I] left Fort Ord probably about midnight.

RB: Where did you go?

SC: [To] Fort Gordon, Georgia; out of Augusta.

RB: Was that for MP [Military Police] school?

SC: MP School.

RB: How is that you [were able] to be an MP?

SC: That was what I signed up [for].

RB: They gave you what you signed up to be?

SC: Yes, some did. Some were not so fortunate. They told me do not sign up for Airborne. "Do not sign up for Raiders. Do not sign up for anything else, but an MP. If you mess with that then you are going to lose that [opportunity]." I just kept my mouth shut and [put] my head down.

RB: Good advice.

SC: Yes.

RB: Had you ever been to the south before?

SC: Yes.

RB: Really?

SC: [I had been to] Florida. If you call Florida [as part of the] south.

RB: Yes. It is slightly different. [Laughter]

SC: Yes.

RB: Refresh my memory. Is that in southern Georgia?

SC: [It is] Northern [Georgia]. It is just south of the South Carolina border.

RB: Is that where they did the advanced training for MP?

SC: Yes. AIT they called it — Advanced Individual Training.

RB: What was your MOS [Military Occupational Specialty is a code used in the United States Army to identify a specific job]? Is that what they called it?

SC: [It was] 95-B-10.

RB: How long was this advanced individual training?

SC: Eight weeks, again.

RB: What was that like?

SC: Terrible.

RB: Why so?

SC: Basic training was more physical. MP School was mental.

RB: Book learning or something else?

SC: No, harassment. Big time harassment!

RB: Like what? What did they do?

SC: We were supposed to be getting eight hours of sleep at night. With boot camp we got nothing, but eight hours of sleep. At MP school we probably got maybe five, maybe six [hours]. We would be up half the night painting windowsills that were going to be replaced the following day. Just to mess with us. Our first chow was not until 5:30 in the morning. They got us up at 3:45 a.m. It was cold. They had us out in formation for a little over an hour when they were inside the building next to the fireplace watching us. [If] you put your hand in your pocket, they would yell out, "Get your damn hand out of your pocket!"

RB: Oh, man!

SC: It got to a point where the morale of our company was in the crapper.

RB: Yes.

SC: It was just terrible. As you know, when you march, the drill sergeant sounds cadence. Well, our only way of protesting would be not to sound cadence. We all got together. We had three barracks. Three different platoons all got together and agreed that no one was going to say a damn word. The drill sergeant was marking us two, marching us two, whatever. He starts counting off cadence. And no one said anything. He was shocked. He started up again and no one said anything. Then he said, "You [fellows] don't know what you are doing." Someone blurted out, "Drill sergeant, we do know what we are doing. We are being messed with

and we do not appreciate it.” There were some people there [who] wrote their parents who contacted their congressman and talked about this captain and talked about his harassment of us.

RB: Whoa! Right.

SC: When I graduated from MP school, February 7, 1969, I was at the bus depot in Augusta, Georgia. This captain came in with two MPs and approached me. I stood up and he accused me of not signing out. He was going to haul me back to the barracks; back to the company.

RB: No?

SC: I said, “Sir, I signed out.” He said, “Well, if you are wrong we will come back and get you!” I thought to myself: okay, whatever. He left. I got on the bus and got the hell out of there.

RB: Wow!

SC: All the way to the very end it was nothing but harassment. I met a [fellow] in Germany where I was stationed a couple of years later. [His group] went through the same company the cycle after mine. [They] thought their [fellow] was a great CO [commanding officer]. They [were given] a pass after two weeks. We got a pass after six weeks.

RB: Oh, my gosh!

SC: Got one pass. He had [Charles Aaron] “Bubba” Smith, the former Baltimore Colts football player in their cycle. I was thinking: that is probably why he was so nice.

RB: [Laughter] After Fort Gordon where did you go?

SC: We had 127 people in our company. We [received] our orders in January and there were five of us [who were sent to] Vietnam. I remember — when I had a chance I ran to a telephone booth and called my parents real quick because they were wondering when I [would] get my orders. They would write me [letters] [and ask] “Did you get your orders, blah, blah, blah?” I called them and said I was going to Vietnam.

RB: You were one of the five?

SC: One of the five. The one that was guaranteed not to go to Vietnam!

RB: Right.

SC: I was one of the five [who] was sent to Vietnam.

RB: Did your dad ever say, “I told you so?”

SC: No, [he] never did.

RB: Wow! Were they worried?

SC: Of course! [While] I was gone, my mother said she could not even go into my bedroom. God bless her! We each got a cassette deck and we would send cassette tapes back and forth. Easy for them because there were four of them. There was one of me. It is tough to fill up a cassette tape — a sixty-minute or ninety-minute cassette tape. She wrote probably almost daily — just talking about dumb stuff. It was home. My grandma wrote me. My aunts and uncles wrote me. [It was] pretty cool.

RB: Tell about traveling to Vietnam then.

SC: I went to Oakland Army Terminal [in California], the processing point for going to Vietnam. There were a bunch of people. There were different areas — almost like cattle. You had a big facility at one place and then you were shipped to another facility. Then at the other facility you were bused to the airport. You went through each process and we just sat there waiting. Our flight was delayed because where we were to land there was a fire and the air base was closed. It was under siege.

RB: Oh!

SC: Everybody was backed up then. Everybody just sat there thinking: this can’t be good. This can’t be good.

RB: Yes. [Laughter]

SC: Most of us were slick sleeves or E-2s [Enlisted Grade Two, with one stripe on the uniform sleeve].

RB: Were you an E-2 by that point?

SC: I was an E-2 then. There were a few [fellows] there [who] were going back to Vietnam. [They] had already been there and served their time. They were just telling us, “Oh, you will be fine. Don’t worry about it.” I thought to myself: sure, right. The biggest fear was the unknown. None of us knew what to expect. Although when I was at MP School we went through the Vietnam Village.

RB: Oh?

SC: For about three days.

RB: [Did] they have a mockup of what to expect? Cool!

SC: Yes.

BF: Did they put you through Tiger Land?

SC: Yes, we called it Vietnam Village.

BF: Yes.

RB: Okay.

SC: All of us went through it whether we were going to Vietnam or not. All of us, before we graduated MP School, went through this — three days of Vietnam Village. They talked about booby traps and snipers — everything; just enough to scare the shit of you.

RB: [Laughter]

SC: We had all these horrific images in our mind and we were just pretty much scared to death. Most of us were nineteen or twenty years old. We got down to Oakland and we [were] put into a spot where we were next. We were delayed because of the fire. Finally they said, “Okay. We are ready to go.” We got on the bus. They took us to, I think, Travis Air Force Base [Fairfield, California]. We got on Tiger Airlines [and] flew to Yokota Air Base in Japan. We all got off the airplane [and] took a bus to the NCO [Non-Commissioned Officers] Club. I remember they drove on the wrong side of the road. We walked into this bar, NCO club. We started drinking beer and watching Bonanza in Japanese with American subtitles.

RB: [Laughter] Yes.

BF: [Laughter]

SC: And then, about an hour later —.

RB: “I am not in Kansas anymore.” [Laughter]

SC: No, no. An hour later, they told us, “Okay, everybody, we are going back to the airplane and we are going to fly to Okinawa.” I guess the pilots had had too much flying time and either we stop there [at Yokota] or we stop Okinawa. So we flew to Okinawa. They put us up in hotels. They said that people in Okinawa do not like Americans. Nobody was to go out by themselves. The area they put us into was the bar area. [Laughter]

RB: Great!

SC: Just where a bunch of [fellows] need to be, right?

RB: Yes, and don't go in there.

SC: What I remember was that there were no windows in all these buildings. All they had were doors. You would open one door; walk in; and you would sit on the floor and everybody just started drinking.

RB: [Laughter]

SC: We had to be back at the hotel by five o'clock in the morning. If you were late, you were AWOL [absence without leave], of course. Some got in just in the nick of time. Everybody was hung over or still drunk. The airplane ride from Okinawa was probably about a six-hour flight from there to Vietnam. We landed at the Bien Hoa Air Force Base. Have you ever heard of that?

RB: What was it?

BF: Bien Hoa.

RB: Bien Hoa.

SC: B-I-E-N H-O-A. Big air base. Everybody was quiet. We were all hung over, drunk or scared shitless. A very quiet ride. We landed right about twelve noon. I remember when they opened the door to the airplane, you walked out and it was like "Oh! I am walking out this door. Oh my God!" It was so hot and it smelled bad.

RB: This was February or March?

SC: This was March 2, 1969.

RB: You left a relatively temperate winter and you ended up in summertime.

SC: It was hot! And humid! And smelled bad! We got off the airplane and they separated us into groups. They took away our green backs [American money] and they gave us military payment certificates!

RB: What was that?

SC: Your military money. Your monopoly money.

RB: And you could use that for what?

SC: [As] money.

RB: What could you buy with it?

SC: We called it MPCs [Military Payment Certificates]. [It could be used for] anything on our base or post. If you were going into the PX [post-exchange] you could use MPCs. What GIs [troops] did was they would go down to a village or town and they would exchange MPCs for Piasters which was the Vietnamese currency. They would give you more on your dollar than if you went to a bank on [the] post [base]. Let us say you [have] \$22.00 for a bank on post. You [could] get \$30.00 on the black market. You lost your greenbacks and all the MPCs were paper. Nickles were paper. Dimes were paper. No more coins. They separated me from a lot of them for whatever reason. I was in a barracks with three other [fellows]. I remember, there were rockets or mortars or whatever in the background. I don't know if they were incoming. I don't know if they were outgoing. But it was unsettling. I don't know when it was — maybe nine or ten o'clock at night. A [fellow] I went through the MP School with, he was on the next flight after me. He just got there, walked in the door and said, "Crouse!" I thought: great! I know somebody! It was not quite so bad. The next day they bused us to Long Binh. [Twenty-four miles east of Saigon — now Ho Chi Minh City.]

RB: How do you spell that?

SC: L-O-N-G B-I-N.

BF: B-I-N-H.

SC: B-I-N-H, yes.

RB: B-I-N-H? Okay.

SC: Anyway, we were there for one day. Then they bused us to an area in Saigon called Cho Lanh. It was the Chinese area of Saigon. They put us up in a hotel. We were with Australians and Americans. It did not have A/C [air conditioning], but they had overhead fans. Every night they had blackouts so the fans would be nonexistent.

RB: [Laughter]

SC: You just laid there and just sweat and not [get] much sleep.

RB: Wow!

SC: The following day they bused us to Tan Son Nhut Air Force Base. [Four miles from Saigon.]

RB: How do you spell that?

SC: Tan Son Nhut? T-O-N – I don't know. Somebody might know.

RB: I am saying that for the benefit of the person who is going to have to type this up.

BF: T-O-N S-O-N N-H-U-T.

SC: Could be.

RB: Thanks.

SC: We all had to pull details. I was chosen with one other [fellow]. We went to the motor pool and they had this big pile of sand and 100 sandbags. The [fellow] we had to talk to said, "I want you to fill those sandbags and set them up right here, so high." "Okay." We spent all morning doing that. He came out about lunch time and said, "What are you [fellows] doing?" I said, "What do you mean? We are filling sandbags." He said, "I said to put them there not there. [Gesturing.] I want you to move all those sandbags over here."

RB: Oh, no!

SC: I was thinking: you are kidding! We went to the mess hall and had lunch. I said, "He does not know our names. I am not going back." The other [fellow] said, "I don't want to either. I am not going to." They had a little snack bar that had pinball machines and we spent probably four or five hours doing that.

RB: [Laughter]

SC: The bus was leaving at five and we had to be back. We went back at five o'clock. I got back to the hotel. I walked in and a messenger was asking, "Is Private Crouse here? Are you Private Crouse?" I said, "Yes." He said, "CO wants to see you." I thought to myself: oh shit! I am busted. But I walked in and he said, "Are you an MP?" I said, "Yes, sir." He said, "We need two MPs to guard the front of the hotel."

RB: So you were not in trouble!

SC: "One from eight o'clock to four o'clock and one from four o'clock to midnight." "Which [shift] do you want?" I said, "Eight to four o'clock." He said, "Good. First thing tomorrow morning come on down and we will give you a .45 [caliber handgun]. You can sit at a desk and you are going to watch the front." It beat filling sandbags and I had a fan over my head! I just watched these [fellows] go out in the morning and watched them come back in the evening. They were all worn out and full of sweat. I was thinking to myself: I am in a nice little building here.

RB: [Laughter]

SC: We ate at the Australian Company's mess hall. They ate great! We had different meats. You could order your eggs special [for] breakfast. [At] lunch they had all the same choices. Those [fellows] knew how to live. They had excellent food.

RB: You were guarding what?

SC: I was guarding the front of the hotel. They had an open entry — not a door; but an open entrance.

RB: That was what housed Americans and Australians?

SC: It housed Americans. The Australians were next door.

RB: Okay, but you could eat with the Australians?

SC: Yes. We did not have a mess hall. The Australians did and we were allowed to eat there in their mess hall. My job was to make sure no one [who] should not enter this hotel was not going to enter. I had a .45 [handgun] with seven rounds. [I was] not going to stop a lot of people; but it beat working filling sandbags at the Air Force Base! Every day they had posted where you were going to be sent; when you were going to be leaving for Saigon. It was terrible. We were told the PX was like three or four blocks away. "Do not go by yourself. Do not go at night." You would hear firefights at night all throughout the city. The MPs [who] worked in the city drove a jeep which followed buses because the Viet Cong would drive by with a little Honda 50 [Honda 250 was a small motorbike.] and throw a grenade into the bus and blow it up. They started putting a mesh around the windows of the buses so the grenades would not go in there anymore. So the [Viet Cong] would throw the grenade in the MP jeep. They were blowing up MPs.

RB: Gosh!

SC: I was hoping I was not going to get stationed in Saigon. I was there probably a week or two. Finally, I checked and I [received] my orders. I was being shipped out in the morning. I was going to fly to a place called Nha Trang, which is in, probably, central Vietnam on the coast. [Nha Trang was 435 miles northeast of Saigon on the coast.]

RB: How do you spell that?

SC: N-H-A T-R-A-N-G. What happens in Vietnam, they start shipping you north and if you are not needed, you keep going north. So when I got to Nha Trang, they picked us up at the airport and brought us back to where I was going to be stationed. And they said, "Are you an MP?" I said, "Yes." They said, "They want to keep you. We are short on MPs." I thought to myself: great! I was a transient there for about four or five days. I was pulled to details again, [like] filling sandbags [and] taking up the filled sand bags.

RB: [Laughter]

SC: After about four or five days, the CO called me in and said, “You are going to be stationed here.” I went from the transient barracks to an MP barracks. I was at a good place, I thought.

RB: What were the barracks made of?

SC: They were wooden barracks. They [were] two stories with a corrugated tin roof and just mesh around for the windows. They had bunkers out back [NOTE: He says front but I think he means out back.] They were probably four or four and a half feet high and maybe two feet wide, filled with sand. We had bunkers out front that were probably four or five feet high as well, and the entrance was only like two and a half or three feet high.

RB: What was your room like?

SC: Probably ten [feet] by ten [feet]. The bunks were probably about as wide as this coffee table.

RB: And you shared it with someone?

SC: I shared it with someone. He happened to have a fan; which was sort of nice because it was hot.

RB: Yes!

SC: Most people did not have fans. If the PX got new fans in they were sold out immediately.

RB: Yes.

SC: Or the black market got a hold of them and we did not get them. I was there for a couple of weeks, I guess, and people were starting to get nervous. I did not understand why. They said, “Well, we have not been hit for a while.” Being hit, where we were at, was either by rockets or mortars. People were nervous. I was working seven at night until seven in the morning. Everybody was still nervous. I was getting nervous myself. I did not know what to expect. Then all of a sudden, usually it was between one and three o’clock in the morning, when they would – mostly just harassment – they would drop in three or four mortars and then they would stop.

RB: Was there any kind of alarm system, or something, to warn you that there was incoming?

SC: Yeah, the noise. Then flares. It would be bright as it is right here.

RB: Wow!

SC: Flares would go up and it would just be daylight.

SC: You go to wherever you are supposed to be. I was already where I was supposed to be. Everybody had an assigned position during an attack. You had to be in a certain position.

RB: Did you have protective gear when you were under attack?

SC: Flak jacket, steel pot or steel helmet.

RB: Right.

SC: That was about it. The first few times we got hit it was not really, really close. Maybe the closest was a few hundred yards away. It was really no big deal. I thought to myself: that is all it is? Alright. My mother would hear on the news that where I was stationed was hit. Of course, it would take five or six days for a letter to get there. When I would get it, I would read it and send [an answer] back to her. About two weeks later she [would find out].

RB: She would find out that you were okay?

SC: She would read the letter and know that I was okay. It took a month. "It was across the base. Everything was just fine. Don't worry about it." I told her that if I was killed, the Army would notify you in person. "Until you hear from them, do not worry about it."

RB: I am okay. [Laughter]

SC: Yes. It was just everyday life.

RB: Yes.

SC: That was it.

RB: How long were you at that base?

SC: I was there until, I think, February 27 or 28 of 1970.

RB: You [arrived] there sometime in the spring?

SC: I arrived in Vietnam on March 2 and I probably arrived at the 313th Headquarters Company. I was stationed there for probably eleven-and-a-half months or close to it.

RB: You had mentioned one time in the past when you talked [to me] that you kept having to go north until you found a location [where] they needed you.

SC: Yes. Fortunately, my first stop was where they needed me. Otherwise, if they did not, I would have been going to Chu Lai, or maybe Pleiku.

RB: You would have been going further and further —.

SC: If you were not needed, they would send you somewhere else where you were.

RB: Were you there about eleven and a half months?

SC: Yes, roughly.

RB: [Did] you work twelve hour shifts?

SC: Yes.

RB: Seven days a week?

SC: Yes.

RB: When you were not working, you were either sleeping or eating. Anything else you could do with your down time?

SC: Yes. They poured a cement basketball court; which was probably a half-court of a basketball court, and put up a couple of hoops. So you could go out, but usually it was so hot that nobody really ever played basketball. Just hang out. The town, Nha Trang, was probably off limits half the time I was there. We had a beautiful beach that was off limits half the time I was there. They [the Viet Cong] would be floating land mines up there on the shore. What was odd about the beach was, you sort of chuckled, because there were no girls.

RB: Oh? [Laughter]

SC: You go to the beach and there were just [fellows].

RB: Just [fellows] at the beach.

SC: It was weird.

RB: Yes. [Laughter]

SC: “Where are the girls?” “They are not here. No girls.”

RB: No girls? Did you meet any locals when you were there?

SC: What do you mean “meet?”

BF: [Laughter]

RB: I mean talk to anyone or —.

SC: We had mama-sans.

RB: Oh!

SC: We paid them, I do not know, \$20.00 a month or \$10.00 a month.

RB: What would they do?

SC: Polish your boots; do your laundry.

RB: That was off the base?

SC: No, on the base.

RB: They would come on [the base] and would work for you?

SC: Yes, they worked on the base.

RB: Did they speak any English at all?

SC: Yes, they spoke broken English. I had the same gal for the whole eleven-and-a-half months! I would always run out of socks. They mixed all the laundry together so you never knew what you were going to get back.

RB: [Laughter]

SC: I kept telling her I was missing socks. I ended up leaving with probably, I do not know, twenty pair of socks.

RB: [Laughter] Yes.

SC: Somebody was not getting their socks.

RB: She was looking out for you.

SC: Yes. I had an abundance of socks. [Laughter]

RB: [Laughter]

SC: We had rats.

RB: Really!

SC: Yes. I remember one night I heard this like ‘thud’ and someone was throwing a bayonet at a rat. He said, “Do not stick your head out! Do not stick your head out!”

RB: [Laughter]

SC: Okay. I remember working at the guard post one night. [It was] in the middle of the night. I looked over and there was this big rat, probably about this long with a big tail and about this high. [Gesturing one foot high.] [Gesturing about two feet long.]

RB: Yes.

SC: Big as a dog! [Gesturing motion to show it was sauntering along.] I put up my .45 handgun. I locked and loaded. I thought: no, I will have to clean that thing up. I am not going to do that! I put my gun back into my holster and let it just wander off to wherever he wanted.

RB: Yes. [Laughter] It was not bothering you. [Laughter]

SC: If it will just leave me alone I will be fine.

RB: What was the food like?

SC: Terrible.

RB: What did they serve you?

SC: Dehydrated meat, powdered milk, powdered juice [and] dehydrated potatoes. Crap!

RB: Yes.

SC: I barely ate much every day. I lost thirty-five pounds.

RB: Thirty-five pounds! Oh, man!

SC: Twenty-five. I went from 195 to 170 pounds.

RB: Wow!

SC: I just did not eat. It was just terrible.

RB: Did you exercise at all?

SC: No.

RB: No? Did they have any kind of fitness facility other than the basketball court?

SC: They had a basketball. Other than that, no. We had a little eight-man flag-football team. I think Vietnam was divided up into, I think, four corps – I Corp, 2 Corps [etc.]. We were 2 Corps. There was this football team that worked for the USO [United Service Organization]. Their job was to go to different bases around 2 Corps and play teams. Someone found out about that and challenged them to a game on Thanksgiving. They accepted. We were playing for a keg of beer. On Thanksgiving we had a Thanksgiving meal – fresh food. Fantastic! After the meal we motored on down to the field [which] was just dirt and rock basically. The sidelines were manned by all sorts of spectators; which gave them something to do; and we played a flag-football game. This team had not been scored on the whole time that they had been playing.

RB: Wow!

SC: We had some big bruisers on our team. With just a couple of minutes left, we were ahead of this team. [The score] was like 15-13. I do not remember what it was exactly; but we were up. Our starting defensive back was home on leave, so we had the second teamer in there. I told the second team [fellow], “Look, they are going to flood my area, so just stay where you are at.” Sure enough, they flooded my area and he came to help me. I yelled at him, “Go back! Go back!” They just floated a [fellow] out and threw a pass to him. The [fellow] ran for a touchdown and won the game. They won the keg of beer. After the game, we challenged them for a repeat match and they declined. When we got to the mess hall that night, like at midnight for what they called a mid-chow, we were all glad that we did not play again because we were all so sore. We were just beat up from the game.

RB: [Laughter]

SC: I will never forget that. That was one of the best Thanksgivings ever.

RB: Yes? How about Christmas? What was that like that year? Anything memorable?

SC: Yes, my mother sent me a Christmas tree. It was about this high. [Gesturing about two – three feet high.]

RB: Yes, that was cool.

SC: I got a picture of myself in front of the tree with a couple of packages with my shirt off. I had just got off work – twenty years old. My first Christmas away from home. It was not really sad, but it was just different.

RB: Different, yes.

SC: I remember New Year's [Day]. They had a truce and all the planes were grounded. The reason was at midnight on December 31 people were writing their names with their weapons. Every fifth round was a tracer. So people would just write their names.

RB: [Laughter]

SC: [Laughter] They grounded all the airplanes.

RB: Good idea. [Laughter]

SC: Good idea. That was sort of funny.

RB: [Laughter]

SC: There were probably two or three occasions where I was scared to the point where it occurred to me that I was about to die; your life sort of flashes before your eyes.

RB: Yes.

SC: That happened two or three times.

RB: Really?

SC: I was up in the perimeter guard tower. Did you ever see the show *F-Troop* from the 1960s?

RB: Yes.

SC: We had a guard tower that was sort of like the one on *F-Troop*. I was up there one night and we were on full alert. I was up there with an M-16 machine gun and enough ammunition to last me just a few minutes. The air base was maybe a mile or so away and I was watching a fire fight. A [fellow] came on the megaphone, or some other way of broadcasting, [and] said we were moving from Red Alert One, which means you are under attack, to Red Alert Three which means you are being overrun.

RB: Right.

SC: You could see the fire fight by watching the tracers going across the air base. After they take over the air base and come my way, I am S-O-L [Shit Otta Luck meaning one had run out of options]. I have nowhere to go. I radioed my sergeant and told him what I was seeing. He said, "You have got to stand your ground, Crouse." I said, "I know. I get it." By this time I was thinking: there goes my life

in front of my eyes. I know I am not going to make it. If they come my way, I am dead. All of a sudden the fire fight shifted back. The announcement was made, “We are back to Red Alert One again.” Finally, there was no more firing. Next thing you know, there are jets and airplanes up in the air. They had a plane called “Spooky;” [Douglas AC-47, also nicknamed “Puff the Magic Dragon,” was a gunship used for close air support] which had two Gatlin guns that fires 1,000 rounds a second, or something like that. They could fire over a football field and cover every inch for 100 yards. All you heard when they fired was “Errrrrrrrr.” They had *Spooky* up there firing at the hills and they would send up jets. They would bomb or napalm. They would go straight down and the napalm [would explode]. A cache of arms would [explode in a series of small explosions]. I sat there and watched it.

RB: You were watching it? You were working from seven in the morning to seven at night?

SC: Yes.

RB: You could see all this light — the light show?

SC: [The scene] went from scary to fascinating.

RB: Wow!

SC: Another time we had water behind us and we had a big oil storage tank. They had Sappers [elite North Vietnamese units that were specially trained assault forces] which came up from the water with satchel bags that they were throwing everywhere. They blew up the oil dump. All I heard was a loud explosion.

SC: They were Vietnamese in black pajamas running all over the place. We were just shooting at anything and everything. We had sand bags around the guard shack. I just sort of ducked; because there were rounds going in every which direction. Flares were up in the air. Everybody was shooting. Come morning, there was not a body to be found. Nobody hit anything on either side. They blew up the oil dump. That was gone.

RB: [Laughter] Really?

SC: It was just sort of weird.

RB: With all that fire power and people running everywhere and nothing —.

SC: All that fire power, Yes. Nobody [was] killed. Nobody even [was] hit. Nobody [was] shot!

RB: [Laughter]

SC: It was sort of funny. We all got a chuckle out of it. We [were] in the mess hall for breakfast in the morning [and] everybody was sort of laughing. One fellow said, "All that shooting. I fired off two clips and I did not hit anything." There you go!

RB: [Laughter]. Safe for another day!

SC: Yes.

RB: Were you pretty much confined to the base that year?

SC: Yes.

RB: [Did] you know that you were going to be there for twelve months?

SC: Yes.

RB: [For] 365 days or thereabouts?

SC: Yes.

RB: To pass that time, did you do anything to mark off your calendar? Or were you waiting for the end?

SC: When you [were] under 100 [days] you had what they called a short-timer's calendar.

RB: Yes.

SC: You sort of marked it off. Then when you [were] fifty [days] you had a calendar of the United States, and you just sort of magic-markered in whatever [you wanted].

RB: Right.

SC: The last state, of course, was your state.

RB: Yes, that makes sense.

SC: The funny part was, when you got close to going home; we called it being "short." [We would say], "I am a short-timer. I am short." When you were "short" you would go by somebody [and] you would say, "Nine days!" "Twelve days!" And they always had less time than you! "Three days!" [I would say to myself:] damn!

RB: [Laughter]

SC: If you said forty-nine they would say forty-eight. Just because!

RB: Just to mess with you! [Laughter]

SC: Everybody knew when you were “short.” “He is a short-timer.” Okay. “How many days? Twenty-nine days.” Twenty-eight days and counting, blah, blah, blah.” When you had five to seven days [left to serve] they called it, “Going Rod.” ROD means: relieved of duty. Then you had to re-process yourself out. You went through the same steps that you came in on, but just in opposite. Just did [everything] in reverse. The last three weeks I was there, I was up in the guard tower and we were getting hit with rockets and mortars. It was really close. It was close enough where the rockets would hit and you would get all this shrapnel, rocks and dirt hitting the tower. They had a communications center there. [This dumb soldier] stuck his head out the back door to see what was going on and I yelled at him to get back into the communication center. Just as he shut the door, a mortar or rocket hit about ten feet in front of the door. He would have been killed.

RB: Wow!

SC: I ducked and all I heard was all this shrapnel hitting the guard tower. They were very accurate in their mortars.

RB: Wow!

SC: They would walk them across. It was as if they had somebody [who] was there guiding or telling them, “[turn] left, [turn] right.” They were getting close. When I went to Germany, probably six months later, maybe less, I had a friend [who] was stationed at the same place. He said they finally hit the communication center and took it out.

RB: Is that right?

SC: Yes.

RB: When you were there, in that eleven-month period, did you see anyone or know anyone that died?

SC: I did not. I knew one or two people that sort of went whacky because of the stress of war. They were sent home — mental, whatever. We were in, I would not say a dangerous area, but it was not really safe either. It was a “free fire” area, which not all of Vietnam was. What that meant was you could fire your weapon at will. You did not have to call in and request or ask permission to fire your weapon. We were close enough where anything could happen!

RB: Yes. Were there other rules of —

[END OF RECORDING ONE.]

RB: — engagement that you were given?

SC: No. There were no rules.

RB: You were in this free-fire area that allowed you to use your discretion.

SC: Yes, fire your weapon anytime you felt like it was necessary. I did volunteer one time to ride shotgun on a — a courier would take a jeep to Cam Ranh Bay. It was about fifty kilometers away. You had the ocean on one side and the jungle on the other side. We were heading down and there must have been fire fight because they were pulling Vietnamese bodies out of the jungle. They were all stripped naked. I noticed that a few of them had, probably, twenty bullet holes in them — like they had just emptied a magazine in them. It was sort of odd.

RB: Wow!

SC: Another time I [had] some eye fungus and I went to the dispensary. They did not know what to do so I went to the hospital in Nha Trang — a military hospital. I was waiting and they helicoptered somebody in to the heli-pad. They brought this Vietnamese soldier in. He had a bullet wound right between his eyes. It was black and the size of a dime.

RB: Wow!

SC: They were sort of dragging him in. The Vietnamese soldier was moaning and the American soldiers were saying, “Shut up! You will be just fine!” I was thinking: oh, geez!

RB: [Laughter]

SC: Then there was a fire fight in front of the hospital. I decided: I am getting the hell out of here! I went out the back door and made my way back to my company.

RB: Fungus or no fungus!

SC: About two days later my fungus was gone.

RB: [Laughter]

SC: It was completely over. I thought to myself: geez! We had some crap, too, that hit our [company]. It was the flu and or dysentery, but it was coming out of both ends.

RB: [Laughter]

SC: We had a company of pretty much naked people on our hands and knees puking and pooping for, probably, almost a week off and on.

RB: Gosh!

SC: Just disgusting.

RB: [Laughter] Who cleaned up after that?

SC: We had an outdoor urinal with a little roof on it and a pole that held the roof up, I thought. They said, “No, no. That is the clap pole.” I said, “What do you mean, the clap pole?” [The soldier said], “When the [fellow] has the clap and he urinates, it burns. And this pole is there for him to hang on to the pole.” I remember the first time I heard this was [when] a [fellow] was taking a leak [and screaming in agony].

RB: Oh, my gosh! [Laughter]

SC: “So and so has the clap!” [Laughter]

RB: [Laughter]

SC: That was the clap pole

RB: Oh, gosh! [Laughter]

SC: One thing I hated, too, was [that] there was no privacy. We had a shower facility, probably, about the size of this and it was heated by the sun. The water tank was heated by the sun. We had outdoor toilets. We probably had four, five or six. They had twenty-five gallon buckets underneath. They had a [fellow] whose job it was to come [when] we needed [to] haul them out, throw them out and reduce them by half. Take them up on a hill, empty them, pour gas on them [and] burn it! When the wind was blowing right, we were good!

RB: Yes!

SC: But when it was not blowing right, we would get the stench of all this burning crap — a big black cloud coming at you.

RB: Oh, man! Yes.

SC: Man! Not good!

RB: [Laughter]

SC: I brought some civilian clothes home with me and my mother washed them. She said, "Steven, these clothes just still stink. I am not going to keep them."

RB: Really?

SC: I did not notice it anymore; I was so used to the smell.

RB: Wow!

SC: To me they still smelled normal. Like I said, the first time I smelled Vietnam it stunk badly.

RB: But after awhile!

SC: When I [came] home, I was so used to the smell that it did not bother me.

RB: When the year was up, what happened? You had to process out?

SC: I processed out. I had a [fellow] there [who] was living, maybe, five miles from my home in Kirkland. We [were discharged] at the same time. We went from Nha Trang back down to Saigon. We left from Tan Son Nhut Air Force Base and were hoping to get a flight with female stewardesses, fly to Honolulu [Hawaii] and then fly to Travis Air Force Base. What happened was, we flew on Tiger Airlines. All male stewards!

RB: Oh, man! [Laughter]

SC: We flew from Vietnam, which was 87°. We got to Yokota Air Force Base where it was like, I do not know, about 25° and a foot of snow on the ground. When we were ready to get off the plane, they handed us blankets; because we were all wearing our fatigues. The next stop was Anchorage, Alaska.

RB: No!

SC: By that time, half the airplane was sick. We all had colds or cold sores coming on. Then we got into Travis Air Force Base. We all got off the airplane and they had a cyclone fence to keep the protestors away. They had signs and were yelling and screaming shit. Most of us just got off the airplane. We were happy just to be alive. Some [fellows] got off and kissed the ground. But none of us said anything to the protestors. We just got off and went into the building and went on our merry way.

RB: How did that feel knowing that you were coming back and there were protestors there? Did that bug you?

SC: At that time, I really did not give it much thought. I was just glad to be home.

But [as] more time went on, the more I thought about it, it was irritating. They had no idea what they were protesting. They did not know what it was like. When I was in Vietnam they had these peace moratoriums. Back in the states they had these peace rallies.

BF: Yes.

SC: The people there [who] were protesting, whatever, had no idea what was going on in Vietnam.

BF: What did you think about the Vietnam Veterans Against the War? It started off about —.

SC: It was fine. They were there. A lot of them were jacked around. A lot of them were in circumstances that could have been different; the outcome could have been different. But the way our government ran the war, it was sad.

BF: Did you get involved with any of that group?

SC: No.

RB: At the time, how did you feel about your service there? Did you feel like you were doing something worthwhile?

SC: You know what? I never really thought about it, to be honest with you. I volunteered. They sent me there. I went. I did not want to go; but I went.

RB: It was my duty and I did it?

SC: Yes, no big deal.

RB: Right.

SC: Again, it just was not much to think about. You just went.

RB: Was that how most people were?

SC: Most of the people I knew, yes. They just went. We were lucky. We were not in a horrible place. We survived. We got out. We could talk about it a bit. We did not talk about it much. No big deal. We went. We survived and moved on.

RB: When you got to Travis, what was your next duty assignment?

SC: I had a thirty-day leave. Then my next assignment was a place called Bad Aibling, Germany, which I was told, was one of the better duty assignments for the Army, which turned out to be true.

RB: Where about is that?

SC: It is in Bavaria; about fifty kilometers south of Munich, Germany. From our barracks we had a view of the Austrian Alps. [Inaudible] We probably had 1,000 people on our post. Maybe 500 were NSA [National Security Agency] civilians [with] 500 obviously military. I was not in the best graces with the provost marshal.

RB: Why was that?

SC: I worked nights again. The group I was involved with, he called us "The Mod Squad." We always needed haircuts. We always needed a shave. Our uniforms were always a mess so that is what he called us.

RB: [Laughter]

SC: He did not care for me and the rest of them. They were going to move the military from Bad Aibling to Augsburg, Germany; which is north of Munich. They were going to keep military police here at Bad Aibling. They said they needed four security guards for NSA. When the army left they were going to have four people there to work security for NSA. He asked me, "Would you be willing to do this down the road?" I had twenty-four months left. If you are down the road you have eighteen to twenty-four months, "Sure I could last four months." The next day I was assigned to NSA. I was working for civilians now.

RB: When you say NSA that is the National Security Agency?

SC: Yes. It irritated him because all of a sudden I went from twelve-hour shifts to eight-hour shifts. My bosses, my superiors, were civilians. They were GSs [General Schedule, positions in Federal Government service administered by the office of Personnel Management] instead of captains, majors and so forth. They were all pretty easy going. They really did not care. Most of them had been in the service and had [been discharged]. Now they had their civilian jobs.

RB: As an assignment then, that was kind of a cushy position.

SC: It was an upgrade, as far as I was concerned.

RB: Great!

SC: He hated that because he wanted to screw me.

RB: What was your rank at this point?

SC: [I was an] E-4, Spec [Specialist] 4. I had thirty-six months' time [as] a Grade E, Spec-4. [Laughter] I was not going to be promoted. But I was making as much

money as a sergeant. I really did not care. I knew that they were not going to promote me. They were going to allow me to re-enlist. I was just a bad egg, I guess.

RB: Yes. Had you even thought about re-enlisting?

SC: No; but all of us had to go through our 212 [personnel] file? It had all your [records] in there. That does not sound right; but it was some personnel files. I waited in line for about an hour-and-a-half and finally got my turn. When I got up front they said, "Oh! Your file was shipped someplace else. We do not have it."

RB: What?

SC: That is what I said.

RB: [Laughter]

SC: "Why didn't you tell me so that I did not have to wait in line for an hour and a half?" They said, "Eh." I said to myself: okay, that is fine. I said to them, "Why was it shipped out?" They said, "Because they were debating whether or not you could re-enlist." There was a head-scratcher for you! I am not going to re-enlist – idiots!

RB: Yes. Do not waste your time! [Laughter]

SC: The kicker was, when a lot of the military were leaving, the MPs were allowed to use the Officer's Club with the civilians. The provost marshal was an MP. But he hated the thought of him being there with me. When I left, the assistant provost marshal – I apparently did not get a hearing test. He didn't tell me. At the last minute he said, "You can't leave until you get a hearing test." The test took about six hours. I took the hearing test and I failed. I failed twice. The test officer said, "You really want to leave?" I said, "Yes." He said, "Let us do it one more time. When I want you to push the button I will raise my hand." I was watching him. He would raise his hand [gesturing in a motion raising his hand up] and I would push the button; push the button. He passed me.

RB: You passed! [Laughter]

SC: I got out!

RB: You were at Bad Aibling for how long? The whole time?

SC: No, I was supposed to be there for thirty months. I was there for about twenty three and a half [months].

RB: Then where did you go?

SC: I [was discharged]. I was supposed to [be discharged on] September 25, 1972.

RB: That would have been four years from 1968 when you enlisted.

SC: Four years, yes.

RB: You [were discharged] earlier than the four years.

SC: I [was discharged] earlier because the Army was down-sizing at the time. I was told, probably the fall of 1971 that I would probably be getting out maybe August or July. Come December, they said I might be getting out in, maybe, June. Come January, they said it looks like April. In February, they said, "You are leaving here March 8, 1972. If you don't want to get out March 8, you will have to stay until your original ETS [Expiration of Term of Service] date." I said, "I want out." I had to scramble to get everything ready and get the hold baggage shipped whatever. The Army, in its infinite wisdom, I arrived at Fort Dix, New Jersey, where we were going to get processed out of the military. They were so understaffed [so they were overwhelmed because the Army was downsizing. They were shipping everybody out and [they] were not increasing the labor force on the other side. So instead of taking six hours, I got there March 8 and I [was discharged] March 11 at midnight. We laid in bunks with no sheets, no pillowcases, no nothing. Everybody just sort of hung around.

RB: Waiting and waiting.

SC: Yes, I got out at midnight. There was a [fellow] from NSA [who] told me when he got out of the [United States] Navy it was sort of a disappointment. I said, "Why?" He said, "I thought there was going to be a band playing or something. I do not know, "Steve." I had been looking forward to this day since the time I joined the Navy until the time I got out. And then it was disappointing." Well, I got out at midnight. I was tired. They gave me my cash [and] said, "There is a bus outside taking you to the Philadelphia [Pennsylvania] Airport." Not a "Thank you for your service." They just gave me my discharge papers, my money and I went. Everybody was lined up. Everybody was quiet. Got [belongings and went to] the airport. Got out of the bus; went to the airport. There were no flights going out that night. They had a little USO area down below. Some people were congregating down there trying to get a little bit of sleep. Come morning we all got our flights and went home.

RB: You flew to Seattle?

SC: [I] flew to Seattle, got off the plane, went into the bathroom, took off my uniform and threw it in the garbage.

RB: [Laughter]

BF: [Laughter]

SC: Put on a pair of blue jeans, tennis shoes, a tee shirt and a light jacket.

RB: And I am home!

SC: I was going home!

RB: Were your parents expecting you?

SC: No, I wanted to surprise them. I told them that I was going to Greece on leave so do not send me any mail. It was Sunday morning at about eleven o'clock. The front door was unlocked. I opened the door and walked in the door. It was a two-story frame home. I went upstairs. My mother thought it was my sister coming home from work [and] maybe she forgot something. I got to the top of the stairs and I said, "No, it is me!" They about shit bricks! I had not seen them for over two years. I thought to myself: wow! It was pretty cool. I got to surprise my folks. It was pretty cool!

RB: If you had to describe say your most exciting experience in the war, what comes to mind, or your military time? Not necessarily in the war, [but] over all?

SC: Most exciting?

RB: Yes. Maybe you have already mentioned it. [Did] anything good happen during that four-year period?

SC: Yes, I made a lot of good friends.

RB: Any [that] you keep in touch with?

SC: Yes; actually, after all this time. We had a good group of MPs, their wives and we hung out together. We had an intramural basketball league. If we were not working after the games, we would all go out, with husbands and wives, to a gasthaus [German style inn or tavern] had lunch and a few beers. We had a good time. We all got along pretty well, had a great group and we were close.

RB: Did you travel, at all, when you were there?

SC: Yes, I did. In Germany, a fellow MP and I took off for about five weeks in 1971. I had a 1962 Volkswagen Beetle. We bought a tent, a camping stove and a cooler loaded up with Spaghetti-Os.

RB: [Laughter]

SC: We put about 4,000 miles on my Bug [Volkswagen] in five weeks.

RB: Where all did you go?

SC: We left Bad Aibling and went to Copenhagen [Denmark]. [We] spent a few days up in Copenhagen. We went to Amsterdam [The Netherlands]. We spent about a week there. We went to Brussels, Belgium. Then we went to England. We took a hovercraft from Calais, France. That was pretty cool. [We] spent about a week in England and then went up to Edinburgh, Scotland for a few days. Then [we] came down and went to Paris [France]. We went down to a place called Saica, Spain, which was south of Barcelona. I do have an exciting story for you.

RB: Okay.

SC: We were camping next to some British soldiers. We went out drinking with them our last night there. Do you want a chair or stool or something?

BF: Yes, that is fine. Thanks.

SC: Somebody had run into my car, smashed in the left rear fender and broke the tail light. We pulled it out so I could drive it. We got back to our campground. In the morning we got up and the [fellow] helped rewire and got everything going again. He put some red paper on my car. They told us that we needed a special visa to get into Spain. We had travel orders for every place else, but when we were in Scotland we figured we had more time than we thought. "Let us go to Spain. Okay." We borrowed the [fellow's] typewriter and typed "Spain" on our orders unknowing that we needed a special visa to get into Spain. We were in Spain now illegally and we were a little worried about getting back. I got to the border and the [fellow] waved me on through. As soon as I went through he saw the back end of my car. He told me to stop. I floored it! He had a sub-machine gun. My buddy said, "Do not stop! Do not stop! Do not stop!" We were both ducking while I was driving waiting for the shots to fly.

RB: [Laughter]

SC: I looked up in my rear view mirror. There three or four [fellows] with sub-machine guns and no one was shooting. I thought to myself: whew!

RB: So you made it out?

SC: We made it out of there! That was exciting.

RB: A little excitement there. Did you get any medals in this period?

SC: Yes, I [received] the Army Good Conduct Medal. In Vietnam they had — what the hell was it?

RB: The Southeast Asian Medal?

SC: No. But they had the —.

BF: Vietnamese Service?

SC: When they have a — gosh, I have gone blank here. If you were in 2 Corps and they had an operation in 2 Corps, everybody was given a medal.

RB: Right.

SC: They would give you a service medal for that period of time. I had three or four of those. I never knew what it was about half the time. Everybody just got them. [Besides the service medals, I received] a good conduct medal and an Army Commendation Medal. That was about it. Which I cannot find today. I kept the medals and threw my uniform away. I had them put some place, [but] I have moved so many times that they just sort of [were] lost in the shuffle. I have no idea what happened to them.

BF: Actually, if you have lost your medals, the Veterans Administration will replace them.

SC: I don't really care anymore.

RB: [Laughter] To wrap up a little bit after your military service — your highest rank was E-4?

SC: Yes.

RB: What did you do after you were a civilian? You mentioned, I think, a little bit about when we were talking about your job service. When you came back and [went] to Kirtland —.

SC: Yes, my father had a business. He installed natural gas appliances — natural gas piping and [appliances]. When I was in high school I worked for him part-time, in the summertime. He was looking for somebody, so I went to work for him. I worked for him for about seven years. I did not like it, but it was a job.

RB: Okay. [Is there] anything else that comes to mind if you were to think back on your military experience that you have not mentioned already? Maybe the most fun experience that you had?

SC: We had fun. I played intramural sports. I played intramural basketball, flag football and fast-pitch softball. I enjoyed them all immensely. I had a lot of good times with a lot of the same people and we enjoyed that.

RB: Did you feel a sense of camaraderie when you were in Vietnam?

SC: Oh definitely! Yes, not just there, but in Germany as well. When I [was discharged from] the Army it was a tough transition for me. In the Army there was always somebody around. Always somebody there to do something with. We played a lot of cards. In Germany, Spades was the big card game. If your door was open, there was always somebody to talk to — always somebody to do something with. All of a sudden I was home now and most of the friends I hung out with were no longer there. It was like: gees, now what do I do? I don't know anybody. It was pretty weird. The first year or so, it was like: wow, I am sort of lonely.

RB: Did you encounter any negativism from people who had not served and did not like the fact that you went to Vietnam?

SC: No.

RB: None of that up there?

SC: No.

BF: Nothing discrimination-wise?

SC: No. In Germany there was a lot of discrimination. It was a terrible. There was a lot of black against white.

RB: Oh?

SC: The same issues there that were in the states, only it was compounded because it was such a small area. [There were] a lot of issues with black and white. The blacks would actually wear their black armbands and march on the post.

RB: Oh man!

SC: I had a reputation as a hothead [who] liked to fight.

RB: Is that right?

SC: We would play the blacks in basketball. They were called the Soul Patrol.

RB: [Laughter]

SC: We were MPs. We were not as talented, but we were just a little bigger. It got a little bit ugly. There was usually a — I would not say a brawl, but there was usually some conflict. A lot of hard feelings. The funny part is, a couple of years

after I was out I met a black [fellow] from Louisiana who was about as black as that TV [television] screen there. He was my best friend.

RB: Wow!

SC: These blacks I had conflicts with in Germany would not have believed that my best friend was black. There were other blacks that were over there as well. They were called Toms by the black community.

RB: Is that right?

SC: Because they associated with the whites.

RB: Yes.

SC: Most of them said, “I don’t care, “Steve.”” [I would say to them], “I don’t want to get you in trouble.” [They would say], “I don’t care about that.” [They would say to me], “They can sit there and piss and moan about everything. I don’t care.” They would say to me, “I will be friends with who I want to be friends with and not worry about it.” It was a little nasty.

RB: Yes, I can imagine.

SC: I remember one evening I was at the front gate. There was this black sedan, probably about eighty or ninety yards away, maybe less, with a sickle and hammer on the front. I called my desk sergeant. He came out and said, “As long as they don’t get any closer, “Steve.” They are allowed to get within so many feet or so many yards of our camp.” We knew ahead of time that they were going to be in the area. We were already warned. No big deal. They did not get any closer for awhile. Bavaria was still — this was the early 1970s — the heart of Nazi country. We had a little base — not base, but a little —

BF: Encampment?

SC: — encampment that you had to go through [in] this area. They said, “Whatever you do, never stop.” They had rallies a few times during the year. They would say, “Just keep going.” My very first day driving out there, my very first day on the job as an MP at Bad Aibling, the one MP sedan we had was in the shop. I had to use the colonel’s vehicle. There was a very windy road and we had to go very slow. I was on my way to this encampment and a [fellow] came around the corner and ran me off the road. I ended up in a civilian’s garden.

RB: Oh, no!

SC: My very first day. I got on the horn and said, “Somebody better come out here.” They said, “Well, you have the car, Crouse!”

RB: [Laughter].

SC: I had a flat tire. They came out. The desk sergeant spoke German. He interviewed the German couple [who were] working in their garden. They testified that, “Yes, this fellow came around the corner and ran [him] off the road. [He] was not responsible for this accident.”

RB: That was nice.

SC: It was! It would have not been a good start.

BF: [Laughter]

RB: [Laughter] [While you were] in southern Germany, in Bavaria, in the middle of the cold war, was there fear about what might happen with the Soviets or anything?

SC: No, no, no, nothing.

RB: Nothing.

SC: Nope. [Laughter]

RB: I think that concludes our interview. I appreciate it, “Steve.”

SC: Sure, no problem.

RB: Great.

SC: Not the most exciting, I am sure!

[END OF RECORDING TWO. END OF INTERVIEW.]