

My Viet Nam War Oral History Project, UC Irvine

Narrator: DENNIS PHELPS

Interviewer: Bridget Devlin, Chris Le

Date: November 12th, 2021

Location: Irvine, California

Sub-Collection: The Viet Nam War Seen Through Oral History, Fall 2021

Length of Interview: 01:30:08

Field Notes

The interview was conducted in the Multimedia Resources Center at the University of California, Irvine. Present during the interview were the Narrator, Dennis Phelps, and the interviewers, Chris Le and Bridget Devlin. We followed protocol and signed all consent and release forms prior to beginning the interview. We also notified Phelps that the interview was going to be recorded, and he acknowledged and consented. He did not bring any photographs with him. He had a pleasant demeanor and was very cooperative.

Dennis Phelps arrived in casual wear, with white pants, black shirt, and a hat that said, "Vietnam Veteran". On the hat were pins relating to the Army as well as Saigon. He was very comfortable and willing to talk during the interview and often talked at length about various stories. Many of his answers to questions went above and beyond what was asked and bled into other topics, resulting in a long interview. Because his stories prolonged and shifted into other ones, the interview was chronologically out of order at certain junctions. Nonetheless, we were able to have most of our questions answered.

While the interview went well, there were points when it was difficult to interrupt Mr. Phelps or to inform him to answer the original question. This may cause confusion for future researchers, as they will have difficulty following the time order of the interview.

At certain parts of the interview, he also became emotional, but was still able to convey his stories and ideas. During these emotional moments, such as recalling the death of his friend Desmond, the brotherhood he experienced with his fellow soldiers, the legacy of veterans, and his pride of serving in Viet Nam, Mr. Phelps would tear up and occasionally cry. Other times during the interview when he was discussing other issues, such as his recollection of being drafted to Viet Nam, he would wring his hands.

Mr. Phelps also discussed his return home, claiming that he was heckled and called a baby killer when people found out he was a veteran. However, his answers on this topic were a bit vague and not as detailed as his other stories. He states that he felt he was not recognized for his service at the time, and that he concealed his involvement in Viet Nam for over a decade after returning.

He had a firm belief that he would do everything again, and that he was proud of what he did as a Viet Nam veteran. Along with this belief, he also had many political opinions that may have been influenced by his experiences and hardships throughout his life, including Viet Nam.

Some of the questions we asked were not answered fully by Phelps as he became sidetracked in his stories. Even though he may not have answered the question directly, the memories he shared were valuable and contributed to our understanding of his story and the story of the war. Many times, throughout the interview, Mr. Phelps would talk about topics we already covered or had not covered yet, so most of our questions were answered- albeit out of order. However, we believe that other stories told by him answering a different question provide those missing answers.