



## Transcript of Clarence John Interview

St. George, Utah

### Interviewer

Give us your full name.

**Clarence John**

My full name is Clarence John.

### Interviewer

And where were you born?

**Clarence John**

I was born in Las Vegas, Nevada.

### Interviewer

And did you grow up in Las Vegas?

**Clarence John**

No. I grew up all over. Stayed in Las Vegas, Moapa, here, St. George, Hurricane, all the way up to Salt Lake.

### Interviewer

And when did you get into the Army?

**Clarence John**

Got in right after high school. I graduated in '67, and I got in the Army in '68.

### Interviewer

Did you volunteer or were you drafted?

**Clarence John**

I was drafted.

### Interviewer

How'd you feel about that?

**Clarence John**

Well, in a way, when I first got drafted, I didn't wanna be over in the war. But then they said you'll get drafted anyways if your number came up, so I didn't worry about it. So number came up and got drafted.

### Interviewer

So where did you go for training?

**Clarence John**

I went training down in Fort Ord, California. Fort Ord. And I don't know if that's still open or not. Yeah. I went over right after my first cousin died over there. He was in the 101st Airborne Unit. Crawford Snow. He was the only one from up at the reservation that ever got killed over in Vietnam. And then right after he died, then I got drafted and went over.

### Interviewer

Were you close to him?

**Clarence John**

Yeah. He was my first cousin. So when he left, he had a big sendoff.

### Interviewer

Was there a sendoff for you?

**Clarence John**

Well, just like a party. Just said, "Goodbye. We'll see you when you come back." It was just like just seeing your friends for the last time, I guess. And then you went over and seen some strange faces.

### Interviewer

What did they make you?

**Clarence John**

I was in the infantry. And there, we was all from Salt Lake so they called us the Mormon Battalion 'cause we was all LDS, Latter-day Saints. So that was our nickname. We went to basic and AIT at the same place, so we just stayed there.

### Interviewer

And when did you actually go to Vietnam?

**Clarence John**

In July of '68.

**Interviewer**

Did you fly in?

**Clarence John**

Yeah. They flew us by airplane down through Hawaii and Guam, Philippines, and over to Saigon.

**Interviewer**

So you flew into Saigon?

**Clarence John**

Yeah.

**Interviewer**

Was it day or night when you landed?

**Clarence John**

No. We left there in the daytime. We got there the same day we left. So don't ask me how that did, but that's what we were told. So I guess you gain a day.

**Interviewer**

What did you see when you landed?

**Clarence John**

When I was sitting at the window looking out, all I seen was just little, I don't know what to say, just nothing but trees laying down and rice paddies.

**Interviewer**

What's it like when that door opened?

**Clarence John**

I don't know. The weather was different. It was kinda hot and muggy, almost like mugginess. About like that. The weather was different.

**Interviewer**

Where did you go from Saigon?

**Clarence John**

We stayed there for about a week. There were so many people there that they had to separate the different people to go in different units. We had to wait for my call to be called up to where I was going. So we had to wait around, and then you get your name and then you go a different way. Then from there, another processing area where you go up to where you were going to. And that's where all our friends got there. But once we got there, we all went different ways. And then so when I came back I didn't see any of 'em. So I don't know if I was the only one going back or not.

**Interviewer**

So where did you go from Saigon?

**Clarence John**

I went to a little place called Di An just about north of there somewhere.

**Interviewer**

Tell us what happened when you got there.

**Clarence John**

Well, when we left from Saigon we went to some other place to get on some airplane. What was it? Some kinda airplane that had a big holder in the back of it and we all went inside and sat down on both sides of the seats. Then they flew us somewhere else and got off, and we had to get on some trucks. They was loaded up with all kinds of food and boxes and all kinds of storage. And we had to sit in the back of them and went to our company, to the big red one.

**Interviewer**

So you were part of the 1st Infantry.

**Clarence John**

Yeah, I was 1st and 28th Infantry.

**Interviewer**

Who'd you meet when you got there?

**Clarence John**

When I first got there, they put me on a helicopter and I wasn't a helicopter rider. They had me as a door gunner, what they did, a machine gunner 'cause I was the MOS machine gun outfit. So I was just in that and they put me on

there just to ride around up and down, just riding in and landing, take off. Just coming in like this, and then they'd slow down and they'd take off again up in the air.

What they was saying was you're supposed to fire out on both sides of the helicopters and that's all you was supposed to do. You was mounted on the side of a strap. Just did that. And I did that for about a month, and it didn't feel right and I told 'em it was not my MOS. I said it was infantry 'cause I didn't feel right at all being up in the air just sitting on the side ready to fall out, feel like you was gonna fall out of there. Then I told 'em my MOS is the infantry, 'cause the commander's there. And so they went ahead and got my papers from back down the other place. He said, "He's supposed to be infantry instead of a door gunner." So they went ahead and put me down in the infantry. And then I got to Di An, that was the main base, then they took me out to some other place out at a fire base. What it was was just a fire base with wire around it, had some guns in the middle. Then that's where the company was, and right there you had to go to your assigned company. And you get whatever they were handing out. If I had my way I would've left, would've came back home.

**Interviewer**

So what did you do?

**Clarence John**

Yeah. We used to go out on patrols. They said I was the Indian, so I had to be out there in the front leading the pack.

**Interviewer**

Scout?

**Clarence John**

A scout. That's what they said. They gave you a knife and a machete and the little guns on the side and going along waiting to get shot at. And everybody stops and you're supposed to know where they're at, the enemy.

**Interviewer**

How do you learn to do that?

**Clarence John**

Well, I had the good sense of knowing what was there and what was not there. When you was there and something was out of normal you'd know it. 'Cause when the Vietnamese are there, you could smell 'em a long ways because there's a certain smell to 'em. And just like nowadays, it's still the same smell when you see 'em in a restaurant or a motel or something that you know that they're there. They've got a certain smell to 'em. That was how I knew.

**Interviewer**

Were you good at finding booby traps?

**Clarence John**

Yeah. We had all kinds. Our mission over there when I was in Vietnam was search and destroy. You go out and look for certain things that were out of the ordinary that's not supposed to be there, like your bunkers and your booby traps and different trails that's coming in and out. You see what's been walking on there and all kinds of stuff. You're just always doing it 24/7, day and night. You go out there and set up ambushes at nighttime, and during the daytime we'd set up some day ambushes. And sometimes we'd walk around and look for bunkers. Just all in an area where we were going all over the place. And that's what I did for a whole year over there.

**Interviewer**

What was your first real firefight?

**Clarence John**

Well, just about the first week I got there. They put us out on ambush, and we went out there and had somebody coming down the trail. You could hear 'em coming along, and all of a sudden you'd have to hit your little claymore mines like this and fire them, and all of a sudden everything lights up and all the guys lined up on both sides of you, go ahead and open up. What I mean by open up is they start firing their rifles and M-60s, machine guns. Whatever's not there is not supposed to be there.

**Interviewer**

What's it like in the jungle, at night, waiting?

**Clarence John**

It's kinda scary, about like this. You don't see nothing, don't nothing. And all you do is look and listen. They give you a little starlight scope to look through. A starlight scope is a little scope that you could see at nighttime, one of those. And you'd sit there. You'd have a set time on, like, how many hours you had to sit there in one place watching the trail. Watching and listening. And then when your time's up, you wake up your next partner who was gonna take over after you get through. Then you go ahead and go to sleep.

And it's like if you're laying there and if you were snoring, lay over on your side. So he'd have to lay over on his side and not snore no more. And that was part of your duty, to wake him up if he's making noise 'cause you don't wanna be on an ambush with somebody snoring real loud and here comes the enemy right by you. And by that time, they'll

just shoot at you.

There was a certain way that you get over that from being scared of the jungle being nighttime. 'Cause I'm a Native American. We wasn't taught that. We wasn't, like, going out there and getting scared of the nighttime. 'Cause my brother used to say, "Don't be scared of the nighttime. It could save your life." 'Cause he was in the Korean War. And he was saying the same thing like the Vietnam War, he said, "Don't be scared at night 'cause it could save your life."

Like, they didn't know where you were at, and they could know you were over there somewhere but they can't see you. And you could be sitting and listening to 'em watching 'em. They can't see you. So that's what I was raised up that way. And then I was just shooting a gun, and I didn't know where I was gonna shoot and I'd hit it. And then that was part of the growing up way, so it didn't bother me when I was out there.

What you had to get used to was all this foliage and all thickness around you, and all the heat and all the bugs and the weather. The weather was different 'cause it was hot and muggy and it used to rain all the time. When it rains it pours, then it stops and gets clammy and all the ants come around and they climb around your neck and irritate it, pull 'em off. Some guys walk along and they'd fall over and get heat cramps. And it was terrible.

### **Interviewer**

Talk about being on scout.

### **Clarence John**

That was when I was first there 'til they got knowing me better. Then they just went ahead and put me where I was more useful. When I first got there I was on my own, and as I progressed on they put me as the ammo bearer. And the ammo bearer is the person that carries machine gun ammo on both sides, 400 rounds. Carried it for the machine gunner. He's in the middle, and you have two of 'em, one in the front and one in the back and the machine gunner. So what we'd do is if they run outta bullets we'd hook it up and just keep it going.

### **Interviewer**

Tell us about the monsoons.

### **Clarence John**

That was terrible. You'd be out there in the jungle and all it is is all wet, water running everywhere. You sleep in the water, you sit in the water. All you got is a poncho on to keep you dry, and if you was gonna smoke cigarettes you have to have it underneath your little poncho and smoke it that way. And it was terrible, but I wasn't hardly a smoker. That's where I learned how to smoke was in the Army and carry on.

### **Interviewer**

How do you deal with the tension of being in a battle zone?

### **Clarence John**

Well, when I was there my feelings was either you're gonna get shot or you're not gonna get shot. So you had to adjust yourself bodily wise and say if I'm gonna make it through this next day, you're gonna take care of your own self, live day by day by day, 'cause you never know what's gonna run into you the next day.

There was one time we was walking along and nobody was prepared for it. All of a sudden, we had this strange smell coming through us and it was kinda awful. And we didn't know what it was. We couldn't see it. It was just smelling awful. And everybody went through there smelling it. So I said, "What is that smell? It's coming from this direction." So we went ahead and we around it. Not toward the smell, but around the smell. There was a big old bomb that wasn't exploded yet. That's where the smell was coming from. And they were saying that was Agent Orange. I found that out later. And we had that happen two times when I was there, and that's where everybody got affected by it.

### **Interviewer**

Did you keep a calendar?

### **Clarence John**

Yes, I did. I had a little personal calendar about that big and that wide and you'd cross it out, little X's on it every day, keep your days, what day it is. Then you had the opportunity to write letters back home. I did that all the time. So when you're out there in the jungle, you just sit there and write your letters. They don't have to be long or short, and just sorta tell where you're going and what you're doing and what you found and what you seen and send it home. Like twice during the week they'd have a helicopter come in with some kinda food supplies or some C-rations. They'd bring them in sometimes and they'd drop it off. And they'd bring in the mail. Then they'd have they outgoing mail, get delivered that way.

### **Interviewer**

Did you get close to any of the guys?

### **Clarence John**

Yes. I had a lotta my friends over there, got like your brothers. They weren't white. They were brown skinned. They weren't Mexicans. They were Cambodians. They had three Chieu Hoi scouts they called 'em. They were Cambodian. They were in the Army, but they were scouts for our company. And so they were same thing, you know,

like, same color skin. And they'd say, "Just like brother?" I'd say, "Yeah, just like your brother." And they said, "What are you?" I said, "I'm Indian." He'd say, "Indian? You mean like feathers?" I said, "Yeah, like those." And then we became friends that way.

Then he'd talk to me in his own Cambodian language trying to teach me his words. And you could talk to him in English. He knew a little bit of English and we'd communicate that way. And they were pretty good. They hung around all the time. Like, the other ones out there, they'd be over here where I was at just sitting around there. And wherever I was, they was always there. And then I had some of my white friends the same way.

### **Interviewer**

What did you think of the Vietnam civilians?

### **Clarence John**

Well, the only time I ever actually seen 'em was along the Thunder Road, we'd call it. We had mine sweeped the Thunder Road.

### **Interviewer**

Tell us about the Thunder Road.

### **Clarence John**

It was a long road that goes from Saigon all the way up to North Vietnam. Called it the Thunder Road 'cause it went all the way up in a wind. There was a certain area we had from Di An, and it went right straight up all the way up north. And we had to mine sweep the road if you were back at the base camp in order to go up through there, you know, walk along the side of the road with a little mine sweeper. Then they'd find it and we'd mark it, and somebody comes along and digs it out and picks it up and blows it up. And you'd do that for about a week. That's where you'd meet your people, along the road, 'cause there was a lotta people on that highway. They were just walking going different places.

### **Interviewer**

What'd you think of the enemy?

### **Clarence John**

The enemy just looked like just Vietnamese people. Some of 'em were exactly the same. They dress similar. They said they were dressed in black with a little hat like this. That's what they tell you here in the States before you go over. But when you're over there, all of 'em wear those little things like that, and some of 'em wore steel helmets with almost the same kinda shape. Those are the NVA we called 'em, North Vietnamese Army. They had those guys try to run over us when I was over there. What I mean "run over us" is they'd try to overrun the base camp, a ground attack.

### **Interviewer**

Was there a particular big battle that that happened in?

### **Clarence John**

Yeah. It was during the time they had something they were calling Tet Offensives. They had a cease fire that week or that month. Didn't know we was supposed to be fighting. It was supposed to be all peaceful. And it wasn't peaceful out there in the jungle where we was 'cause they tried to overrun us.

### **Interviewer**

So you were there during Tet?

### **Clarence John**

I was there, but then I was in two ground attacks when I was there. And that's a scary one 'cause you don't know if you're gonna get hit from behind or the front 'cause you're firing this way and they're shooting at you, and you're getting bullets from both sides. It's just, like, over each other. And you stand up, you'll get shot.

### **Interviewer**

So how did your unit get out of that? Was it an ambush?

### **Clarence John**

No. It was overrunning your firebase. They had a constantan wire on the firebase, and then they had another road. And then they had a little area where you go in, follow a little light that goes this way through the fence, through the wire, the constantan wire and back, like a little "S" shape to go into it. You're the only one that knows where the entrance is and where to exit out. And that one night I was out on LP, listening post outside right there by the border of the jungle, and that's when we had our first ground attack. 'Cause I was out there and I was looking through that starlight scope, and all the enemy was out there right around us. And that was scary.

### **Interviewer**

What did you do when you saw the enemy?

### **Clarence John**

I had to call in to our commander, tell him that we were gonna have a ground attack 'cause they had all the enemy out here. And he said, "Get your butts in here. Haul butt and head for that little light," and away you went with three

other little buddies right behind me. And they were all racing toward that little light. And as soon as we got in there, the thing blew up, went boom. Everything happened.

**Interviewer**

How long did that battle last?

**Clarence John**

All night 'til morning. And the morning time you could see all the bodies laying all around, all the way around the NDP. That was kinda scary 'cause we didn't hardly have any casualties on our side. What I mean by our side is the United States, our unit and firebase, those guys that shoot the artillery. The only problem we had was trying to get away from the artillery 'cause they'd put it down kinda low and then tell us to move outta the way 'cause they're gonna fire their rounds out through there.

**Interviewer**

So they would lower the muzzles?

**Clarence John**

Yeah. They got their certain, kinda, shells that they used, that has all kinds of stuff in it that spreads.

**Interviewer**

Like a big shotgun shell?

**Clarence John**

Yeah, like that. And whatever's in the way dies.

**Interviewer**

So you leveled your guns on the enemy.

**Clarence John**

Yeah. That's what they did 'cause they was getting closer and closer, they were getting thicker and thicker and that's the only way to keep 'em down.

**Interviewer**

How many enemy were there that night do you think?

**Clarence John**

I don't know. They counted over a thousand of 'em. They were laid all around. They'd put 'em on top of each other. They were doing all the counting and we didn't count 'em 'cause another company come in from when we left. We got up and packed up and we went back out where it was safe and they took over. And then we was out there in the jungle. To me, it was a lot safer out there than back at that little firebase.

**Interviewer**

Why was it safer?

**Clarence John**

'Cause out there in the jungle you didn't have a set place that's gonna get attacked and where you're gonna get shot at. And, like, your snipers that sit out in the jungle and shoot at you when you was walking around in the firebase and they don't know where you're out. About like that. And out in the jungle, you don't have that.

**Interviewer**

Were snipers a big problem?

**Clarence John**

Yeah.

**Interviewer**

Tell us something that happened.

**Clarence John**

We had two of 'em in a great big ol' tree that was all halfway blown off, and it had big limbs coming out like this. They were sitting right in there. There were two of 'em. And we were walking down a trail. We were in a line, like about five feet apart offset, off this one, one apart, and like this just walking down instead of a straight line like this. So he's firing from the middle and he hit one guy in the middle, and then he shot another one, got hit from behind and kept getting back further. And you'd figure out where they're firing from, so we just all shot over toward that tree up on top just 'cause that's where it was coming from. So we caught 'em both, and they both got outta the tree and that was all.

And then when we out there, too, another place that happened like that. We was walking through the jungle and we came upon a guy that got shot through the leg, and he fell down. And then there was more people inside all those trees. They had bunkers in the trees. And we knew there was a base camp in there.

So what we did, we all pulled back and went out a couple of miles, about a mile and a half, that far away. So we sat down there and our commander called in the B-52 bombers to drop bombs on that area. And they dropped two bombs. We seen two bombs coming down there making noise, you know, like a big humming noise. And all the



trees go flying up and everything blew up two times and shook the ground. And after that happened we had to go back in and check it out and see what happened, and it tore up everything. And they had dead bodies up in the trees and everything all over the place. And what we did, we had the 1st Calvary Division, one with the tanks, they came through and they went ahead and surrounded the area. Then they took out all the stuff that they were finding. They took out all the medical supplies that belonged to the United States. They had 'em in a big area, what they called a Chinook, those big helicopters, and they had to hook 'em in those big sacks, like a fishnet. They took out three of 'em and took 'em somewhere. They were all American made right along with their weapons they had.

**Interviewer**

What'd that make you feel like when you found your own equipment with the enemy?

**Clarence John**

Well, see, they was irresponsible. See, they should have never had those. And somebody got hurt for those. They usually killed 'em to take their weapons or got 'em from somewhere. They had machine guns and M-14s, M-16s. They had everything.

**Interviewer**

What year was this?

**Clarence John**

It was about '68 or '69, one of those years. Same time they had that ground attack. 'Cause we built those firebases out there, the one they tried to overrun.

**Interviewer**

When you hear a helicopter today, do memories come back?

**Clarence John**

Once in a while. It used to bother me a lot, but then it bothered me so bad, just, sometimes I just couldn't take it. I'd just sit there and I'd keep it to myself and I'd go walking around somewhere. And it was kinda bad. And some things irritate me, like if I was hearing things and I couldn't hear and I'd look around wondering what it was. I don't know. It was kinda weird. Then my hearing problem was there and I couldn't quite adjust to it. And it was just making all kinds of racket with my hearing. And then when I'd hear certain things, it brought back memories. And I don't know. I kinda kept to myself and I'd do it the spiritually way, like, praying to the Creator and having Him help you out. And there was just like this one, when was that, about a couple years ago or longer when we went to that wall in Washington.

**Interviewer**

So three years ago you went to the wall?

**Clarence John**

Yeah. They had a fundraiser that sent me back. They wanted to send some Vietnam veteran from one of my cousin's place where he was working. So they went ahead and picked my name outta there and said, "I know a person they could send back to the wall to go see the original wall." 'Cause they had a fundraiser from Ivan's and around the communities, and they gathered up enough to send me back, and I had my own set aside. So me and my wife and our two little grandkids went back.

**Interviewer**

How did you feel?

**Clarence John**

And we went back there. When you touched the wall it was just like a healing wall. They call it a healing wall. And when you touch it, you'll start crying over everybody that was there that you knew and who's gone. It's just like the big lift off your shoulders. It was that powerful.

**Interviewer**

How did you deal with losing friends?

**Clarence John**

When I touched the wall it had a big relief on everybody knowing that they were there for a reason and that they're gone, that their life wasn't just by being shot at and killed and buried and not remembered. And today, it's the same way.

But what kinda irritates me is like they go ahead and celebrate for over across the ocean now when they come back. They get the hero's welcome. Then it's the same thing. They get little kids over there all trained up to shoot the weapons and fire and learn how to kill.

And over in Vietnam, they were doing that to survive, you know, like in order to live 'cause they couldn't shoot at bombs. 'Cause they dropped more bombs on Vietnam then they did over the other wars. 'Cause it looks good over there when you're in the jungle, but when we get in the Eagle flight and get up outta the jungle and look along and all you see is bomb craters and everything all up and down. It was just nothing but holes, holes, holes. And all the

trees are wiped out on top.

**Interviewer**

What did you think of the war back then?

**Clarence John**

Yes. When I first went over we talked about that, had that meeting on that war. And they said we wasn't supposed to be there because that war has been going on for centuries, clear back into that French Dynasty or whatever it was. It goes back further than that, is how long it's been going on.

And then when they turned around and they said it was Ho Chi Minh that was the main person for the North Vietnam that was trying to take over. He was part of the communists. And that communism is what we was trying to clear out. And that was just like terrorism. They were trying to clean that out. And I don't know what's gonna happen after we got him. It's probably the same thing, what happened when they got rid of Ho Chi Minh, and then you'll have the little terrorist attacks again similar. That's what they've gotta think of.

**Interviewer**

When did you come home?

**Clarence John**

I came home in '69. And then when I came home, I had one of my friends, the one I met when I was in Vietnam. He was from Lampasas, Texas. He came up to see me that one day, and up here at the house he came in and he says, "Some guy was looking for you, said he was from Texas. His name was Smitty." And I wasn't here. And he was there. He was one of my best friends when I was over there. And he came all the way from Texas to see me and I wasn't home, that was disappointing.

So all I can do is just pray for him, hope he's okay. They couldn't get a hold of him 'cause they'd lost his address. And when I first got back, he wrote from Texas 'cause we exchanged our addresses and then communicated that way for a while. And I eventually lost it and I couldn't find it no more. And I was thinking maybe it burned down in that house. See, when the house burned down it burned down everything, all the medals and all the other stuff I had, and all the military papers.

**Interviewer**

Were you ever wounded?

**Clarence John**

I was not really wounded, but I had my eardrums busted. They don't say it's a wound, but I always figured it's on the inside. I don't know what they call wound. Not unless you're bleeding. I didn't get wounded, but I came so close to getting shot at through my shirt, put holes in it and that's the closest I've ever gotten.

Then got cut. Their leaves or whatever they call it are like claws. I still got those on my hands. We were going across a stream that a whole bunch of leaches in it. You could see the leaches, the half worms. They were all over the place. You didn't wanna get in there 'cause once you step in it they'll climb up your legs and start sucking on your blood. And when you take off your clothes they're real long and all puffed up, all up and down. And we was trying to stay away from that, and we had the big long log across there and had those leaves on it that had little hooks on 'em and something like that.

And when I got through, I had scratches down my legs and on my arms. Just like that where I tried to pull it out, I still got that little skin sticking out. And that's where it grabbed me from the inside and pulled it and just left a little thing where it popped it out and pushed it back in.

**Interviewer**

Were you in rice paddies at all?

**Clarence John**

We was in rice paddies. Not a lot. But mostly where we was at, it had almost like crater puddles. I guess they were once rice paddies, but they weren't there. They were just like crater puddles. I call 'em crater puddles 'cause they're all over the place with water, where you'd drink water.

**Interviewer**

What does being short mean?

**Clarence John**

Being short is like if you had a long stick and if you'd cut it and cut it month by month by month, and by the time you were getting short your stick would be that long. And that's the same way with the calendar. You'd mark 'em all down until you get to your last month. Then you'd mark 'em down and that means short. The shorter you get, the less time you had.

What I mean by that is, over there in Vietnam, most all the guys are dying just before they got out of the service over there. And when you survive your shortness, then you know you're gonna come home. Then they'd give you maybe a couple weeks in order to get you outta the field where you would go back to the base camp where they say you're safe. And get back there, you could either sit around and do nothing or go on watch, go sit out there in the towers and look at the countryside all day long.



**Interviewer**

Tell us about leaving Vietnam.

**Clarence John**

Well, when I left Vietnam in '69, I thought I was gonna be with some of my friends that I went over with. But there was nobody on it that I knew. Just only myself. 'Cause everybody went different ways when we were there. When we came back out, there was nobody there that you knew. Then you just got on an airplane, but you didn't go the same way you came in. You went the opposite way. We went up toward Okinawa, Japan and panned out clear across to Alaska, from Alaska down to Oakland.

**Interviewer**

What happened when you got on that plane?

**Clarence John**

Oh, they were all happy and having a good ol' time, screaming and saying, "Goodbye. Won't see you no more." They were carrying on like that. And that long flight was just like, you wanna do something but there was nothing to do. We just sat there and sat our little assigned seat. And they'd put on a movie for you to watch. And during the movie we'd watch, and all of a sudden we'd hit an air pocket and down the wing goes. It was just like you were flying by south, we were looking out the windows. We didn't wanna die going home. That's how scary it was. The wings on an airplane was just like flying along by itself with those big ol' air pockets. You'd fly down and hit 'em and then go up and the wings would go like this. It's kinda scary.

**Interviewer**

When you got home, how were you treated?

**Clarence John**

When I got home in the States, when I got off down in Oakland, put in the Army clothes, get off to go over to the airport, they were down there. They had protestors down there, signs up in the air: baby killer, go home, get outta here, don't need you down here, go back to wherever you came from. I wouldn't say it was your own American people. The protestors were the same ones that were protesting when you left, and then when they came back they were the same ones protesting against different things while you were there. And it didn't make sense.

Like, it made you feel that low that you wanted to get outta those clothes that you had on, throw 'em away and then go back, put civilian clothes on to hide your identity, in other words, say you wasn't involved in that war. And that's what happened back here when I got here in the States. Even today you see these Vietnam veterans not being recognized like they're supposed to be. They're hiding behind hats.

It's like this for instance. I got my little Vietnam flag right here. It has '69 on it. That's the year I left. And they don't even wear that because they're still not recognized as being a veteran from the Vietnam era. They said they're still shunned upon by the community. And that's what I was talking to some of my friends that was over there, and they said they feel the same way. That's why they're hiding behind their hats and don't wanna be recognized as one of the veterans.

And that's kinda put a question mark on my head. Why? Why be ashamed? You are a veteran of different times. And that was the only era that was that way. 'Cause when my brother went over in the Korean War, and when he came back he said they didn't have all those demonstrators and stuff. I guess they were older and they knew better. But we just happened to be going over in the '60s when all the drugs were going around in the world and it was just big chaos by the time we went over.

**Interviewer**

Was there drinking or drugs?

**Clarence John**

My understanding was just certain places, different companies that was doing all those.

**Interviewer**

When you were in the field were guys drinking a lot?

**Clarence John**

No. With my company we didn't do that. All they did was smoke cigarettes. And they had a beer once in a while when they came in at the firebase 'cause it was safe in the firebase, you see. You could have beer if you wanted to, but they didn't have no ice. Have you ever had hot Coke? It would be just like that. I used to drink hot Coke and hot Pepsi. No ice. It's pretty good. Got used to that.

But out there when you're out in the boonies, you're not supposed to be doing that because you could cost your company their lives if you did that. I was working with those guys down there with the 1st Calvary. They were doing that, and just smoking marijuana, driving along, and we were right behind 'em going to the Michelin plantation where they had that firefight in there. Found some bunkers in there, too. And that Michelin plantation is a rubber plantation over there.

And they had big ol' bunkers in there, and that's where the little kids were shooting the RPGs at us, the rocket launchers. Sitting on those trees up there and pointing it right down toward 'em, blowing 'em up. And then we had to

shoot them off the trees. And then I guess they were baby killers. You'd shoot at 'em and they were shooting at you, and they'd shoot you 'til you die or not. It was weird.

**Interviewer**

Did you watch the U.S. pull out of Saigon on TV?

**Clarence John**

I seen that but I don't know what year it was. I seen that on television. When they was pushing those helicopters off, I was thinking God, look at all those millions of dollars that's going to waste by doing all that. And just like helicopters that still could fly, they just pushed 'em off into the ocean and polluting the ocean up. That's what they were doing. Hiding all this stuff. And the only way anybody wanted it was to go dig 'em up with a boat. And they were just like those, I guess World War I, World War II where they had those submarines and boats and stuff that same thing, sunk in the ocean.

**Interviewer**

How did you feel when the war ended?

**Clarence John**

What kinda irritated me was when they went ahead and took over Saigon and they called it Ho Chi Minh City. And that was what we was trying to protect down there in the first place. 'Cause when I was there, our mission was search and destroy everything that came down from North Vietnam or everything that came through the jungle, we had to find it. We had to find it and stop it and blow it up. It didn't matter how many guys got killed. But it was terrible.

And in my way, I don't feel no regrets on what I did 'cause it was for my own safety and the safety of others. And I feel the same for the other veterans, too. They shouldn't be guilty on what they did. They're surviving just like they're doing today, fighting for a cause that was there. And the only thing I could say is we're the lucky ones 'cause we came home.

But I kinda regret on missing my hearing loss. I wish I had my hearing back, but they didn't do nothing for that. And so I just live with my loss of hearing, and I just regret it. I wish I had it back 'cause I can't hear myself talking to my wife. She's the one that's always saying, "Quit yelling at me. You're talking too loud." Then I talk low and they say, "Speak up. I can't hear you." Then when I speak up loud they said, "Don't yell at me. You're talking too loud." Can't even keep her happy once in a while.

**Interviewer**

What would you do to blow off steam when you were off duty?

**Clarence John**

Well, we had a little thing when I was over there called R&R. If you could save up so much money, you could go wherever you wanted. You could go to Australia, Hawaii, Singapore, Bangkok. You name it, you could have went there. But you had to have the money to go. You had to have so many thousands of dollars to go to Australia 'cause the cost of living there was a little bit higher, and you had to have that much to go to Hawaii, to go to them two places.

**Interviewer**

Where did you go?

**Clarence John**

I went to Bangkok. That was a good choice. That was just like going into Vietnam. Went to that place. That's the rice paddies down there, and then we took off. But coming into Bangkok all you see is rice paddies, like you wasn't going anywhere, going back into the jungle again.

Got down there and I got off and there were cities, but they weren't like the United States. The buildings are there, but the signs are different. The people were different. And what was interesting when I was there on my R&R, I had another one, he was a Mexican from California. I met him when I was there at the airport and he wanted to go downtown and go find someplace to stay. So we stayed in the same motel.

And he said, "What do you wanna do?" I said, "Let's go to a movie. There's a movie down here. Let's go see what it's like." So we didn't know what we were doing. We walked in, handed him the money, said, "Here, take what you want to go see it." So they pulled it out and went in. And it was a John Wayne movie. That's the first time I seen John Wayne speak Vietnamese, Bangkok, whatever their language. They were talking that. And underneath that had words, what John Wayne was saying. They changed it around. And I was sitting there laughing, looking at that movie. It was a Western movie and he was talking that language. And underneath we had to read the American words. That was interesting.

**Interviewer**

Did people treat you differently because you're Native American?

**Clarence John**

We were treated a little bit differently because we were brown. They used to say the same same, but we wasn't speaking the same language. And they'd look at you wondering what you're doing there.

## Interviewer

I mean your fellow GIs, did they treat you differently?

## Clarence John

When I first went in you'd have to talk to 'em in order for them to come outta the little shell of theirs. 'Cause if you didn't talk to 'em, they wouldn't know what you was about or what you did. 'Cause they thought I was just a regular Indian, didn't know nothing. And then when I started talking, it was just like the same education they had. And we started communicating with each other. Then it was a lot different. They accepted you, who you were.

'Cause I've seen some Native Americans go in there, and they didn't say nothing. They were just, like, there. They tried to follow orders, but they didn't do it. And then they'd get in more trouble than it was worth. Some tribes are different. Some persons out of certain tribes don't like to talk. You have to talk to them in order for them to talk back to you and ask 'em real simple questions. 'Cause if you make it hard, then they kinda shun away. They don't wanna talk to you. They'll turn around and walk off. So that's just the way they are.

## Interviewer

Talk about the B-52s.

## Clarence John

After the guy got wounded, they had some more movement inside all the trees. We went back, walked back no more than a mile and a half. We sat down and we had our squad leader call in an air unit, the B-52 bombers. Their bombs are real big. You could see 'em just coming out of the air and making a humming noise. Two of 'em off center just a little bit coming down, whistling noise, and they just blew up all the trees. They just started flying up in the air.

They were taking pictures when they was there, and that ended up in "The Stars and Stripes" right along with that big medevac, all that medication. Those two were taken for "The Stars and Stripes" because we had a photographer with us. I just remember that 'cause he was the one that took my picture when I was over there when I was sitting on the brim. I was reading a letter and he came by. And he gave it to me and I brought it home, but I had that little clipping. It was in a little newspaper. I had it up at the building for a while there. I don't know what happened to it.

## Interviewer

Did you see any news people?

## Clarence John

Yeah. We had some. They were with us for a while, but they ended up going with another company.

## Interviewer

What were they like?

## Clarence John

They had the little thing that they packed around. It looked like a camera. And they'd just walk along with the company. They were just with them and taking pictures of whatever was happening. And we had one with us that he wasn't a photographer, he was just a cameraman, and he was taking pictures of the B-52 bombs coming down and the big thing we took out.

## Interviewer

Talk about what you found after the bombing.

## Clarence John

Have you ever walked through that powdered dirt, white dirt that flips up in the air when you're walking through it? That's how it was. When you walked back in there, it was just like walking through all that powdered dust that was all over. And you'd look up in the trees that was all broken up. You'd see an arm dangling up there broken off, blew up and dangling there like that. And then you'd see the bodies, and they're all white with their little mouth open, just like somebody put 'em in the trees like here and there, on the ground, laying all over. It was like that. Almost like in a movie or something.

And it was almost like a ghostly feeling, what it was, them laying around. And you could see some of 'em moving around, like saying, "Shoot me. I'm dying over here. I can't move." Like they were in misery or something. So we got called outta there to make that (inaudible)(58:21). I don't know what happened with them other ones when they went in. They mighta killed some of 'em. 'Cause we didn't climb underneath where the bunker complex was. We just where the hole was like this is where they crawled into or go into. They mighta been back in there, too.

## Interviewer

Did you ever have to go down into any tunnels?

## Clarence John

I just looked into 'em, but I didn't go all the way in. I only went down to here, and it was enough for me. I said, "There's nothing in there. Just a big hole that goes back further." Then we put a little marking there. They had some of those, what they called tunnel rats. Those guys went in there.

**Interviewer**

What were the tunnel rats like?

**Clarence John**

They were just normal people, wore just like a little camouflage. And they were skinny and they'd go in the holes. Just like gun in your hand and go in there and looking for something. Like, inside those tunnels are just like a gopher hole. A gopher hole goes like this and it goes out and they come up for air. And they go back around and they come outta the hole. That's the way the tunnels were.

So wherever the air pocket comes out, then that's where their little bunkers are. So they're hiding so whenever they see somebody they can shoot at 'em, and then you could duck back in and take off and pop out somewhere else.

**Interviewer**

If you had come home and been treated with respect like your brother had, would that have been different for your life?

**Clarence John**

Yes. It was a lot different, 'cause when they came home, that was just like they were fighting for a cause. If you were working for somebody on a ranch or something and you guys all decided to go to the Army, like they did, then they all went in as one group and they were all like buddy-buddy. They could help each other. Then when they call come back and said, "Yeah, we made it," then they were all happy just like when they left.

But when I went over, it was good but I didn't think of anything else. But when I came back out, I was kinda expecting that, but I wasn't expecting it for sure. I thought things would change in years' time, like, all the drugs and everything would be gone. But I came back, it was the same thing. That was back in the '60s days when all the drugs and marijuana and heroin and all the pills were going around, psychedelic pills and flower power and all that. And then when you came back a little later, just didn't have all the signs, but they had the signs up. I don't know. Pretty big question mark on my head.

**Interviewer**

Is there anything you'd like to add?

**Clarence John**

I'd like to say that I would like to have my feelings, my say, part of the deceased families that have their families gone from the Vietnam War that ain't here. Like, we've got three Native Americans from around here that are Southern Paiutes, and their families are still here, their relatives. And we feel sorry for them and not take it real badly, knowing that they died for something instead of died for nothing. I'd say that to all the veterans, that they're well respected in my point of view.