



Clark Clements

Salt Lake City, Utah

Lance Corporal

Marines

Infantry

"Escalation"

Interviewer

Give us your full name.

Clark Clements

Clark Tyler Clements.

Interviewer

And you were born where and when?

Clark Clements

January 12th, 1950 in Salt Lake City, Utah.

Interviewer

What was your life like before the military? How was it you grew up?

Clark Clements

You know, my life was very, in a way, kind of complex. I had three stepfathers and one of them was in the military. In my real formative years my father that was in the Air Force sort of didn't indoctrinate me, but you had that kind of military influence. Like I made my rack, or my bed, when I was four years old, and my dad would just come in and bounce a quarter off of it. And I grew up right after Korea, and World War II and so you still had a lot of those movies, to some extent, that kind of romanticized war. And I remember very early on jumping off of the house with a little parachute that I'd made with a sheet and I found out the hard way about gravity. The force of the impact was quite great and all of that. But I grew up playing a lot of war.

Interviewer

What area of Salt Lake City did you grow up?

Clark Clements

I grew up on the west side. I call it "the bad side of the good side of town." I actually grew up right up on the street that the tracks ran on, on 1015 South First West.

Interviewer

And you went to West High? Where did you go?

Clark Clements

No, I actually went to South High.

Interviewer

There's a photo that you showed us of you and your stepbrother?

Clark Clements

My stepbrother, Darrell.

Interviewer

And you're holding what?

Clark Clements

We're holding rifles at port arms. We got these for Christmas. No one told us how to pose for that shot, we just sort of instinctively knew. We just put our rifles at port arms and they took the photo.

Interviewer

It's so foreshadowing isn't it?

Clark Clements

Well absolutely. All along the way the life experiences that I had growing up in the '50s and the '60s, sort of prepared us for war all the way along with the movies, and the games that we played and all of that. I remember in the neighborhood, well one of our early practice at war was to have BB gun fights, or dirt clod fights and rock fights were my favorite because I was pretty good at pelting the rocks. But we used to utilize tactics and things like that. It was just sort of pretty much the American way at that time.

Interviewer

I remember all of the war toys they sold.

Clark Clements

Oh, absolutely. I'll never forget getting that box when I was four years old from my dad and I laid everything out and you saw all of the different kinds of positions that people would play, like the flamethrower, the machine gunner, and on and on. And then little garrison stuff that you would set up and all of that. And in a certain way I remember, like for example, when we were doing the war games, if I got hit, I took it very seriously. If somebody shot me with a BB I went, "Oh, I could've died," you know? It was very real and very serious to me in terms of the game.

Interviewer

Tell us about your friend Brent.

Clark Clements

Well Brent Thomas Mascher – and he liked to be called "Maw-shu," that's how he liked to pronounce it. I met Brent in second grade, and I'll never forget this because I had lived in a neighborhood that was really mixed. I went to three schools, for example, in the first grade. And I lived in a place called Central City here in Salt Lake, and I remember I was not into any kind of ethnic thing or anything like that, but there were some folks from a different

ethnic group that lived down the way and their welcoming to the neighborhood was throwing rocks into our yard at us. And so I had been in a lot of rock fights and so I threw the rocks back. But I did notice that I picked some kind of an attitude, if you will, about certain groups; I saw them as being kind of threatening. So he and I got into an argument about one of these groups because he said he wanted to marry somebody that was a member of that group. And there we were, just little kids, seven years old, and we start arguing over weirdness. And so it escalated. We went to the church lawn and we got into a fight. And I remember his family kind of showed up, and everything and they broke up the fight. But we met, really, on the playground and our relationship began with that first fight because we became best friends forever.

Interviewer

And so you guys grew up together and you went to the same schools together?

Clark Clements

Well actually I left in third grade, went to California for eight years. And I ran track and Brent ran track. Now we hadn't been reacquainted yet and I was on the cross-country team and we ran a race at Liberty Park, and I didn't run it right so I didn't come in first, but I came in third after I just kind of breezed by everybody at the end; I had too much kick because I didn't run it correctly. And I was panting, I was down – (panting sound) and I hear, "Hey Clark." And I went, "Clark?" And I look up and it's Brent. His family had this characteristic accent that sounded like they were from Massachusetts, and so that's when we got reunited and that would've been in tenth grade. And he was out looking at the competition, essentially. And so we spent our high school years together, and we were friends and confidants. He got into a few scrapes, juvenile kinds of things. And I'll never forget, he came and picked me up on his motorcycle and we went to Dee's, it's when they didn't have everything enclosed, it was outdoors and it was across from the city and county building. And we sat there and Brent was telling me, he says, "Well you know, Clark, we can go in the Marine Corps and we can get the GI Bill, and we can come back and we can go to college," and that's when he told me he wanted to be a social worker and work with disadvantaged kids. And we were talking about the idea that when we came back we'd go to college, get our professions and then buy houses next to each other – that's how tight we were – and all of that. And then what happened, in the summer of 1968, he graduated, I didn't, I was kind of thrown out for having long hair.

Interviewer

This is South High?

Clark Clements

South High, yeah. And the irony of that is that when I went back, my social studies teacher who wrote me, Mr. Anderson, during the war invited me to come back, and speak at South High and I was kind of shocked because when I went in, I sat down. I was thrown out for having long hair, and all of the kids that I was speaking to had long hair and beards in high school. Things change. So anyway, Brent, and I, and a couple of other fellahs from the neighborhood, Preston Blewett and Roger Neria, we all joined on the 90-day plan.

Interviewer

What's the 90-day plan?

Clark Clements

Well it's where you join, and they give you a little Marine Corps pin, and you're really proud of it but you haven't paid your dues yet. There's a lot more coming.

Interviewer

Ninety days before you actually go in?

Clark Clements

Before you actually go in. And then we joined and on September 8th, 1968, that's when we went in. And we went to MCRD as a group. We went through basic training. And then after basic training we went to Infantry Training Regiment and that's called ITR. And then after ITR we went to BITs, that's Basic Infantry Training. Brent and I were separated there because he went to 03-11, that's a rifleman and I went to 03-41 and that's a mortar man. We were pretty close to the same area. They were over in some tents located away from us. And then after we went through that training we went on leave for 20 days, and then after that we went back to what's called staging where you do some 24-hour wars and then you do some walks through a course where they have the pop-up targets. Instead of the able targets that are round, you had the silhouette targets, they're called baker targets that would just pop up and you'd shoot. And then after staging we flew to Da Nang and I remember Brent was really quite upset because I was assigned to unit up in 3rd Marines that had just been annihilated.

Interviewer

This is 1968, still?

Clark Clements

This is still 1968.

Interviewer

And what's happening in Vietnam?

Clark Clements

No, sorry. By the time we got through training, in fact, we came home on leave in January. We didn't actually end up in Vietnam until March of 1969. So the 1968 Tet Offensive had already occurred.

Interviewer

But you're aware of all that?

Clark Clements

Oh, yeah. And we're aware of Lieutenant Calley 'cause we heard about Lieutenant Calley and the My Lai Massacre.

Interviewer

What's everybody saying in training about all this?

Clark Clements

You know, nobody said anything about that. We had one person named Carter that was from Utah, he wasn't part of the 90-day plan, we didn't know him that well, but the Utah people kind of hung together; the other folks from Utah that joined. And Carter, I don't know his first name, but Carter had a brother that – if I remember correctly – I know he fought on Hill 881. So we had stories more about these big battles and stuff like that. So we really didn't talk about Vietnam in a way where we were discussing the events that much.

Interviewer

What are you guys thinking about the anti-war movement?

Clark Clements

Well that started kind of early on because I remember in – I think it was '66, I wrote an anti-protest song because there was already an anti-war sentiment starting to form in 1966. We didn't talk about that in training, really. And where it really starting to come out was – for me anyway – I remember hearing about it, maybe in April or May, but when I really thought about it, it was actually in September. And this is after our unit it really been decimated at place called Mutter's Ridge, and I remember getting a letter from home and photos and all of this. And Woodstock had occurred, I believe, and there was all of this anti-war protest. But by that time I'd been through enough in Vietnam and seen enough death and destruction and was disillusioned enough that when I heard about the protests back home, "Yay team!" I was on the side of the protesters.

Interviewer

How did you arrive in Vietnam, military transport?

Clark Clements

Well, we flew there in a commercial jet, and then Brent and I got separated in Da Nang after about three days, and some of it's a little bit blurry, but I remember flying out on a helicopter and then taken to this airbase. I had two rear areas that changed, Dong Ha and Quang Tri. And we went to this one area, and then we caught a convoy out to the rear area of our unit that was, I believe, in Dong Ha and then later it was Quang Tri. And then we spent, it wasn't all that long, maybe four or five days or something like that, in the rear. And then we caught a helicopter out to our unit. And my unit was Echo 2-3, 2nd Battalion, 3rd Marine Division. And they were out in the middle of the jungle, and it was really quite incredible because as we pulled in – I was in one of those Chinooks – and I looked out the window, and I saw what looked like the craters of the moon, only it was the red dirt, the bomb craters, juxtaposed to the green. And it was just pocked. It looked like the moon. The visual impact of that really hit me. Then when I got off the helicopter, it was in an LZ, or a landing zone, that they had cut. And they took me over to the mortar people and I'll never forget looking at these young guys. And when I looked at them I went, "Oh, my God." They were like my age and you could see it in their eyes that they were tired, that they looked – I don't want to be hokey here – but they looked spiritually old. They were very old.

Interviewer

Where was Brent in all of this at that time?

Clark Clements

Brent was still in the rear. They found out he could cook and so for a while he was doing some cooking in the rear. And I was in so much combat the first three months, it was chaotic. But I remember I reached a certain point, and I took a C-rat box, and I wrote like an in-country postcard to him and said, "By all means, do not come out here if you can avoid it."

Interviewer

That look in their eyes, can you describe that? In World War II they called it the thousand-yard stare.

Clark Clements

Right. It was more than the thousand-yard stare. At times, I know I've had it and I've seen it, the thousand-yard stare in other people. But this was different than the thousand-yard stare in that when you looked into their soul, when you looked into their eyes, you didn't see all of the things that had happened to them, but they had aged, spiritually, way beyond their years. Their experience had aged them. They were no longer young men. Now in terms of life experience, we called this place "the world," and there's other ways that people talk about "the world," and being secular and all that but we referred to being back home as "the world." But in regular civilian life, you go through a lot of experiences, and you grow and you go through kind of a natural progression of aging. These people were prematurely old inside.

Interviewer

So you get there and you're assigned to a mortar, or a tube?

Clark Clements

Well it's a gun.

Interviewer

Tell us about your first day in combat.

Clark Clements

Well that was the next day. When I saw these guys I just went, "Oh, man." I just jumped in immediately. Give me the shovel. I took the entrenching tool and started digging the mortar pit because I could tell they were just dead-ass tired, too. So I started digging the mortar pit and all of that. And this was in the afternoon and I'll never forget because when we came in, I'll never forget, for me, anyway, this is how it was. All of these visual things initially just had a huge impact on me because I'd never seen the sun look like this. I remember looking out at the sun and it was this most gigantic orange, red glow. I've never seen the sun that big. And then I looked at their faces with the dirt on it and I went, "Oh, God."

So anyway, dig the hole. We spent the night just sleeping out in the bush, in the weeds and stuff. And the next day we're getting ready and my squad leader, Hernandez, I called him "Mother Herney," Hernandez starts giving me all kinds of like claymore mines, the kind of grenade that you put in the tube that if you think we're gonna be overrun,

and the tube's gonna be captured and you don't want 'em to have the weapons, it will melt it. So he gives me one of those. He gives me a smoke grenade and then I have all of these – God, just everything he didn't want to carry he gave to me. And he gave me all of these fragmentation grenades. Then I had a bandoleer of ammo and then they give me six mortar rounds to carry. Now, at this point I'm in the ammo humper side, I'm not carrying any part of the bipods or the tube or the base plate of the weapon. The gunner and A-gunner do that. So I have the rifle and my job is to defend the mortar crew, the mortar squad.

And so we move out and I had sprained my ankles – went off a cliff when I was home on leave – so I was still having problems with my ankles. So when we stopped I got down. And what I mean by "stopped," they would stop, and then the point man would check things out and everybody stops as a unit. It's like one big caterpillar moving through the bush because you're moving on a trail. And I'll never forget, I got down and I'm taking the weight off of my ankles, but then there was this banana tree. And one thing I'll never forget is I'm so paranoid about water because I didn't know how to manage all of this yet. And so in survival school they had taught us to use what's out on the land. So I took my KA-BAR, my knife out, and I cut into a banana tree. And I cut a wedge out and I'm sucking that instead of using my canteen water.

And all of the sudden all hell broke loose and they opened up. The guy in front of me was shot dead, the guy behind me was wounded. And this is your training, instinctively I started firing and I fired off a couple of magazines, and then the guy that was behind me that was wounded, he was trying to utilize his weapon, and I went down to see what was going on and the little pin on his M-79 grenade launcher had somehow gotten underneath. So I just kind of flipped it back up so he could engage it, he could lock it and shoot it. And then they went, "New guy up!" And that would be me. So I grabbed my pack, because it had the mortar rounds and I ran up the trail. And this is the weirdest thing because the way your mind can work in milliseconds, I'll never forget this. I'm running up the trail with the rounds, there's all this machine gun firing and all this weapons fire going on and I'm sitting there thinking to myself, "Clark, play this like you're playing football, you're doing your position. If you get taken out, you're taken out." You know, because you've got to be pumped up because you're running and there's a lot of stuff going on.

And then I see the mortar squad off to the side of the trail. So I kind of jumped down and Hernandez, the first thing he said, "Did you get any rounds off?" And I went, "Yeah." And then he said, "Give me your frags." So all those frags he gave me, he took those frags and he started throwing 'em. I didn't know this, the enemy machine gun – and we called them – and I don't want to be rude here, but we called them gooks – the gook machine gun position was right over there. And Doggy Doray, the Canadian that came down who initially had joined the Army, and then his brother was killed in Vietnam, and then he joined the Marine Corps – Doggy Doray, blond, curly hair, kind of reminded me of the short version of Jeff Chandler, he has the mortar tube and he has this green towel. And instead

of putting the bipods on – because these tubes get hot when you fire – he's holding the tube straight up because the machine gun is right over here, and they're dropping the rounds down and he's holding it. Boy, that's what we call field expediency.

So anyway, then all I remember is the gunny who had been in World War II, Gunny Thompson, in Korea, he took some of us new guys up further. And the idea, we were going to secure the landing zone because we had a lot of wounded and we had a lot of dead that were killed in that ambush. And we engaged the enemy and he was just like orchestrating. He was the consummate mentor. He was like, "Marine, fire over here!" And he was directing our fire and he was teaching us right then. What a blessing to be initiated, if you will, to go through that rite of passage and have the old salt, the gunnery sergeant, there to teach you early on. Wow, that's all I can say, thank you God for Gunny.

Interviewer

So you secured the landing zone and then what happened?

Clark Clements

Well I'll never forget. Well this is where some of the guilt comes in. Remember I told you I was paranoid about water? Well, we had all of these dead and we had ponchos over them; you do that out of respect, that's pretty universal, whether it's the enemy or your own. The enemy does that to their own. I remember seeing their packs with the water and I went, "God, I can't let that go to waste." So I filled my canteens with their water. And then we hauled the dead up and the helicopter came in.

We had secured the LZ and the smell of the smoke really hits ya, it has a sulfur smell. Kind of reminds me of that smell you smell during the Fourth of July, if you will. Anyway, what happened was we hauled the bodies up and then the wounded got on board. And I'll never forget this, this one guy that was new with me, flipped me the peace sign as he was being hauled out on a stretcher. And the other thing that really struck me that day was when I was looking at the bodies with the poncho liners over 'em, I looked down and what was sticking out were their boots. And you could see the mixture of these old boots that didn't have one smidgen of black polish left on 'em, and then these brand-new boots. So you had these guys, it was their second day – second day – in the bush that perished. So you had the new and the old. And I wouldn't find out until later what those old boots meant until I was wearing 'em.

Interviewer

So what's going through your head?

Clark Clements

Well, to be honest with ya, what was going through my head was this: Now I've got the water, I'm okay. The first thing that I remember that really hit me hard, that went through my mind was, I went, "Clark –" I believe these

numbers are correct, I could be wrong – "the overall unit size is about 300. We just lost 27 people; some dead, some wounded. What are your odds of making it out of the Nam?" You had 13 months to go. So I said to myself, "This is what you have to do, you've got to face what you've gotten yourself into." Because I took responsibility for placing myself there, I volunteered, I was not drafted. And I just said to myself, I went back to that notion of, "Okay, I'm going to play this like I'm on a football team. I will play my position, I will play it well, the best that I can. And if they take me out, they take me out, that's it."

But I also thought this: "I'm going to eat my favorite meal every day first." Because there's some things in those C-rats that you like better than others and I'm going to eat my favorite things on the off chance this could be my last day. That's kind of what went through my mind. But it wasn't really optimistic, I can tell you that, I just kind of resigned myself to the fact that myself and many others that I'm with, at any moment could be those guys lying down there with their boots sticking out under those ponchos. So that's the reality, you know what the rules of the game are, and you're going to play the position the best that you can and you're going to be part of this unit. And the way you earn being part of a unit is by the way you do your job.

Interviewer

Thirteen months to go?

Clark Clements

Thirteen months to go.

Interviewer

Tell us some more things that happened as you're getting used to this. And how are you keeping in contact with Brent?

Clark Clements

We wouldn't keep that much in the way of contact but I remember sending him the postcard indicating, "Do not come out here." And the thing is I got that postcard returned to me in July. He never got the postcard. He was in the rear. And I don't know for sure, but I kind of know that if I was in the same position, if I reversed the situation and he was out in the bush and I was back in the rear doing some kind of a job, that I wouldn't feel real good about it because we kind of talked to each other into this thing. And I don't know for absolute certainty but I'm kind of thinking that he was like, "Clark's my best friend, he's out in the bush and I've got to go too." So he volunteered. And he pressed to go in the bush. And the reason I know that is way later in November, way after Brent's death, I ran into a fellow from his unit that told me. I ran into a guy that he was with that pretty much told me how he died and told me that he had pressed to go out into the bush. He could've stayed in the rear.

Interviewer

When did you hear he died?

Clark Clements

Well, just to let you know, there's a battle that everybody knows about, it was called Hamburger Hill, the Army was in. We were the blocking force in the A Shau Valley.

Interviewer

Talk about that.

Clark Clements

Well we were just hitting it right and left every other day. We were either getting ambushed, or we would be up on a hill and they would assault us and all of that. We were just in so many skirmishes and all of this. And then right after Hamburger Hill went down and it was close to June – this is all I remember – is we ran into the Montagnard people, and our point man killed one of the village elders because he thought he was an enemy. And then we realized what we had run into, the Montagnards are the mountain people that almost live at the Stone Age level of existence. They live like Amazonian Indians.

And we went through all of this jungle and then it opened up into this corn field, like a Kellogg's corn flake commercial with just beautiful rows of manicured corn, and black soil and it was right next to the river. And these people lived up in these hooches or houses up on stilts. And part of it was because of the river rising and they're something else real critical I learned later, it was to get above the ceiling flight of the Anopheles mosquito that causes malaria. Talk about adaptation to your environment. But anyway, this place was incredibly beautiful; it was like the Garden of Eden. There were goldfish in the streams this big, waterfalls and tropical plants and geckoes that used to go "Fuck you!" And we'd go what? We thought that that was the enemy and they called it the "fuck you bird."

And later on one of my friends, Carel Brest Van Kempen and who is a renowned rainforest biologist and artist. I was telling him about this one day and he says, "Clark, that wasn't a bird, that's a gecko that makes that sound." And so I found out years later. But we chopper'd them out to Da Nang where they ended up being treated like third-class citizens living in squalor in Da Nang. Plucked them out of paradise and sent them to Da Nang. And that's one of the unsung tragedies of the war that people don't always talk about. And then we left there, and we went to a place called Charlie 2 that was close to Cam Lo Vill and we spent a month being the perimeter security for the Army. And I'll never forget this because it was on May 26th, 1969 – I was assigned to go out on a patrol. And in broad daylight – and there is a lot of superstition, and magic and religion that goes along with being in war – I saw this vision of a Marine in dress blues in a coffin and I went, "Oh, is this some sort of premonition that my number's up?"

Anyway, went to chow and then after chow got ready to go out on this patrol. And I'll never forget this patrol because as I walked through the gates, I looked back at it and I'm just kind of symbolic in my thinking, I looked at the arch. It was like an archway, and to me this has some kind of import especially after having that vision, and I

just looked back at the archway to Charlie 2 and I said, "If I don't die today in the Nam, I'm not dying here." And then who shows up, this Vietnamese kid that I knew was VC. And they nicknamed me Doc and he goes, "Doc, where you going?" And I says, "I'm not telling you, you VC." And he says, "No, no tell me where you're going." And I said, "I'll tell ya what, do you have a problem here?" And he says, "Well there's booby traps." And I said, "Well why don't you show me where they are on the map." So he did. We go out on the patrol, we don't get ambushed, nothing happens. But we verified that indeed, there were booby traps in that area. And so I went, "God, the kid's looking out for me."

And so we came back and then we had mail call. And this is on May 26th, and during that mail call they called my name and I got a letter. And it was from my cousin, Dale Myerberg, he's the yo-yo man. I don't know if you've heard of him but he taught Tommy Smothers how to do the yo-yo. And Dale said, "Nobody wants to tell you, Clark, but I think you need to know. Brent's dead." Now Dale knew Brent really well because Dale lived right across the street from Brent. He watched him growing up and he knew that we were best friends. So I get the letter and... to be honest with you, I went off by myself, I went into a bunker and I lost it. It was primal. I beat the hell out of that bunker. I ripped it apart with my feet, and my hands, and I screamed and I cried. And now I had a reason to kill.

And like we used to say in the Nam, "Paybacks are a motherfucker." That's when I became old. The darkness started to set in. I went back to the bunker where all my squad was and one of my friends, John Gaffney from New York, he goes, "Clark, are you all right, man? Don't mean nothin'." And by now, hopefully America knows that when we said, "It don't mean nothin'," it's because we know we have to keep going. We're going to have to deal with this later. We have to compartmentalize, we have to focus on the mission at hand and we're gonna do it. And now I'm gonna get some payback.

Right after that, it was within a few days we got this assignment to go into the DMZ to retrieve a Marine body. And the word, the scuttlebutt gets around, and we kind of had the feeling – some of us put it together – and we went, they're gonna be waiting for us. And I'll never forget this – this goes back to that religious magical thinking that seeps in – and I remembered this black butterfly. I had my flak jacket on, but the front of it was open and you get real sweaty. And I'll never forget, the black butterfly kept landing on my heart, and then it would take off again and I'd go a ways further, maybe another thousand meters through all of this rough terrain and all of the sudden butterfly would show up again. And then the only thing I could think of was, "That was Brent." So that furthered my resolve, and we ended up going into this area to get the recon body and we started taking mortar fire. I forgot to tell you, on the way up we started losing everybody from heat exhaustion and heat stroke. People don't always realize just how much the elements take its toll on ya and we started losing all of these people. And then there was one fella that we drew straws to kill. Yeah, that was very real in Vietnam. I drew the straw but I didn't kill him.

Interviewer

Is this fragging?

Clark Clements

Yeah, I drew the straw and I won't mention to the individual was, but I didn't have it within me to ever kill somebody like that in cold blood. And what I did is I just unscrewed the frag, and at night – I didn't throw it in the bunker, I threw it outside the bunker, because they still throw out shrapnel but I wanted him to get the message. So I pulled the pin on the blasting cap, because it sounded the HE part of the frag, and I threw it outside it bunker and it went off. And he got the message, and then the next day he had us all stand up in formation and he says, "I want to know who the cowardly bastard was who did that." And we were in formation and he was the section leader at the time. And I stood forward, but everybody stood forward with me. So he realized he was in deep shit. And the thing is is that he was just kissing up to the officers, and to the gunny, and volunteered us for all kinds of stuff and just kind of treated us like very poorly. And so that's how he brought that upon himself.

Well anyway, on the way up to the DMZ he cut himself with a P-38. And I just happen to have one of these. A P-38 is your C-rat opener, this is the one I carried in Vietnam to open my chow. That is one of the best can openers and all of that. And you just use it like this and go around the can. Anyway, he had cut himself with this and then claimed it was rat bite. So they medevaced him out and then we ended up getting down to two-man squads in mortars. And I went from the A-gunner to the instant gunner, and then my friend John Gaffney became the squad leader and the A-gunner. He had to do the A-gunner's function and that's the person who drops the round down the tube. The gunner is setting it up, taking the coordinates, and you put what we called a DOF on the weapon on the site, and you make all of the adjustments on the mortar for the elevation and deflection. So anyway, this gook, 82-squad was hammering our troops. And they went into this U-shaped ambush, but our folks just happened to be lucky enough to be able to drop down into a ravine and then they started hammering us. And I remember running back with the gun, and then an explosion going off, and hitting me and knocking me on my face. And if I wouldn't have been wearing that flak jacket I wouldn't be here today. I'd either be paralyzed or dead.

Anyway, we decided to move the gun over to the side – brilliant thought – they're gonna keep walking 'em this way, go to the side. I remember climbing up a tree, though. There was this big bomb crater and the whole top of this hill was just barren because there's been a big battle there before. And I climbed up this tree, and when I got up the tree what I saw off in the distance was just this movement and I went that's where they're at. That's why we decided to move over here to the side because I knew that was their A-gunner. So anyway, we started getting really short on high explosive rounds, and we got to all we had left was Willie Peter or white phosphorous. And I'll never forget this, because fired those rounds, and they give a big puff of white smoke, and we heard off in the distance, we heard all of this clamoring like they were cheering and all of that. And I didn't quite know what it was, but anyway, it was our guys, I found out later, they saw us make a direct hit because they could kind of see where these mortars were.

They were trying to give us corrections and we did, we made some corrections. Then the Phantoms came in, and I'll never forget this because they dropped their load – their 500-pound bombs – and then they came back, and they did a pass and they did a victory roll. And they radioed down to us and they said, "Give your mortars credit for kill." The Fly Boys, they knew about what the people were going through on the ground and they just wanted to make us feel good, kind of thing, build our morale. But they were incredible, absolutely incredible.

Interviewer

Go back to the fragging thing.

Clark Clements

Very real. It happened.

Interviewer

It's very important you tell us what would drive you to that point and tell us what fragging is.

Clark Clements

Well what fragging is – now I don't know with absolute certainty, and this is the part where it happened, and – I guess I can put it this way, I was in another unit after 3rd Marines were pulled out – to give you an example – and once again, I wouldn't kill somebody in cold blood but there was a guy and a lot of these folks hadn't seen combat. Echo 2-3 had really been annihilated on Mutter's Ridge on August 10th, 1969, the 10th and 11th. We lost a lot of people. And when they pulled 3rd Marines out I didn't have enough time in-country so they sent me down to 1st Marines. And when I got down there I ran into a lot of folks that were very undisciplined just by virtue of the fact they didn't have the experience, they didn't have the combat experience, they didn't really know what could happen. That's my thinking anyway.

And there was one fella that just notoriously kept falling asleep on lines. And if you have one person that falls asleep on lines, they compromise the security of the whole unit. All it takes is a zapper, and that's somebody that brings an explosive on their body, and they blow themselves up, we've heard about that in the Middle East, well they used to do that in Vietnam. Jump in the hole or run into a bunker, and blow themselves up and take everybody with 'em kind of thing. Or you could have somebody with a knife that gets in the perimeter and goes around slitting everybody's throat. So the one thing that I have to caution people about that have never been in combat is the theater of war is much different than civilian life and your mindset is very different. You don't want to forfeit your sense of humanity and your values, but the rules of the game do change.

So there was an individual and I caught him asleep on lines and I told him, I said, "You know what? The next time I catch you asleep on lines, I'm gonna frag your ass." And what "frag" means is that you're gonna pull the pin, throw the grenade in the hole and blow his ass up. Change his health and dental record and he's gonna go home in a body bag and somebody's gonna say that he died in combat. Essentially that's what happens. So anyway, I ran

across him again, there he was. He's asleep in the bottom of the hole out on lines. Remember Herney gave me those frags? I forgot to tell ya, when you're in the jungle you learn a trick. You take that black electrician's tape, and you wrap that around the spoon, not a whole bunch of times but just once so you can pull the tape off and throw the frag when you need to in combat, but you do that when you're in a real viney situation where the vines could pull the pin and you don't want that going off while it's on ya. So I was used to doing that so I had my frag and it had the tape around it. And I didn't really intend to kill him, but I wanted to make a point. So I jumped inside the hole and I let him have it. Knocked the air out of him. And I got out. And then when he collected himself he started screaming because I threw a frag in there with him. Now the tape was still on there, it wasn't going to go off. So my intent wasn't to frag him and to kill him, but it was to scare the shit out of him. So all these people gathered around and they're investigating what's going on because everybody went on alert. And I says, "Well, I caught him asleep on lines and I tried to frag him, but I forgot to take the damn tape off." So they ended up thinking I was crazy.

But you know what, I thought they were crazy for falling asleep on lines. You don't fall asleep on lines. You don't light up a cigarette like you're back home in your backyard at a barbecue. A sniper can see that a click away, that's a thousand meters and blow your head off. And that's why they say, "The third man on the match," or "three's a charm," the reason why three's a charm, this all has a real practical basis to it. If three people light up a cigarette on the same match or with a lighter, by the time you get to the third person the spotter for the sniper is giving them the elevation, and windage to take you out and you're the third one, you're the one that's shot. So there's a real practical basis to that saying, "Three's a charm," or "third man on the match." So basically what it is, it's not just your individual survival, the driver is this: It's engrained in you that you have to function as a unit. You're only as strong as the weakest link in the chain. If you have somebody that's falling asleep and compromising the security of the unit, they're a dangerous person and you talk to them, you do all kinds of stuff to try to get them in line.

But what would happen sometimes is you wouldn't have an individual like me that would just use the scare tactic, there would be some situations where in the middle of the night out in the bush – and I'm just saying this, I don't know for absolute certainty – but there was guy that was noted for falling asleep on lines and one night a grenade went off. We all thought we were being hit. There was no fire. Nothing happened. So a grenade went off in the middle of the night, and that person died from their wounds and they were chopper'd out.

Interviewer

Were there investigations?

Clark Clements

No, not that I'm aware of.

Interviewer

What about officers? You talked about that one that was a glory hog that was using you.

Clark Clements

Well that guy, he wasn't an officer, that was guy that was a wanna-be, but he wasn't an officer. I remember when I was in 1st Marines, it was a little unsettling because up north when we look at the ethnic groups and things like that, we were really, really tight. And what I learned when I got down to this other unit and at this other location was that wasn't necessarily the case anymore. There was sometimes a war within a war.

Interviewer

This is good you broach this. Talk about the racial tension between the troops.

Clark Clements

Well, you have a real mix of people, and I don't want to inflame folks but there are people – you bring in a lot of your attitudes, and beliefs to the theater of war and there were some people that were very prejudice. And that played itself out in a lot of different ways but a lot of it, at least up north, people just stayed away if they didn't like somebody. But in my new unit there was a lot of tension, if you will. And I remember one officer, lieutenant; he was really, really, really just a top-drawer guy. And the kind of person that got in and worked with the troops. He didn't act like he was removed somehow and better, he was not an elitist or anything like that. And they had the latrines, and we called them "shitters," and you've probably seen the movies where you lift up the back, and you take out the 50-gallon drum that's cut in half and that's what you go in. And then you actually have shit details and I was on one of them.

That one guy that I was talking about where I pulled the straw, he was famous for volunteering us for all of these things. Anyway, you put the diesel fuel on it and you set it on fire and you burn the shit. Well anyway, this one lieutenant went into this latrine and somebody lifted up the back and put a frag in there and blew him up. I don't know who did it. We don't know exactly all of the details. Nothing ever really came out about who actually committed that. But they blew away an incredible individual. So fragging's did occur. I'm not saying it happened all that frequently.

Interviewer

Tell us about USO shows.

Clark Clements

The USO show. We had what we call an in-country R and R, we didn't have a lot of those. My particular unit, like I said, we weren't close to the cities and restaurants, we didn't have contact with those people. But I remember going to one USO show. In fact, the cool thing is that my girlfriend at the time, she never wrote me a Dear John, her mother did. She didn't tell me she was getting married but she had good intentions and good reason. She was trying to be my connection to the world. She was incredible. But she had more time in the Nam than I did because she had done USO shows in Vietnam.

Interviewer

Can you tell us about your pact that you made to the guys?

Clark Clements

Well it was after a major battle that we had, and we would've totally annihilated if Puff wouldn't have come in and helped us about. That's the one that can shoot a thousand rounds a minute and all of that. And anyway, we sustained some losses there and the enemy lost a lot of folks. We stripped 'em naked, and threw them in a bomb crater and all of that.

And I remember seeing the spectacle in all of that. But that night there was a fellow named – and I would be remised if I didn't bring him up, he saved my life more than once in Vietnam – is name was John Jarrett. We were in this position, and an enemy soldier popped up; he'd come up out of a bomb crater, and I was the furthest one – I was on this side of the hole, and when he stood up he was standing over John and had his rifle pointed right at me. And John blew his head off in a millisecond before he shot me. Anyway, John Jarrett was like a philosopher, if you will. He was a streetwise guy, and he was street smart, but he was very philosophical, and he was the kind of guy that after a major battle, and there's all of these bodies everywhere, and everybody's dead and he'd look at me and he'd go – he was Native American by the way, and he goes, "Clark, this might make right."

And then one time there's dead on both sides with all sustained heavy casualties and KIA's or Killed in Action and John says, "Clark, we could've lost an Einstein or a Pasteur on either side." Well anyway, after this one major battle, John and I were talking and then John – he was just way ahead of me in terms of some of these things – and he goes, "Clark, you know and I know that this war's political and we're expendable. And it's the guys in the rear with the gear, the beer, and the women, the politicians in their air conditioned offices with their cigars, they're calling the shots, reaping the rewards." And he says, "You know, one of these days we're gonna grow up –" if we make it through the war – "we're gonna grow up, and we're gonna have families and we may rise to a position of power." And I swear to God he said this, "Are we going to exploit the youth of America by romanticizing war, and selling them like it was sold to us with the domino theory so the American industrial complex can make money off of a war. Are we going to do that?"

And we made a pact that we would not. That when we came back, that we would tell the truth about the war, and that it's not romantic and that we should not fight a war for political reasons. We should fight the war to defend our country absolutely, but not fight for bullshit lies and cooked intelligence. And never use somebody else's son or daughter as bait. And by the way, you asked me earlier when we split up as a unit, it goes back to the boots, because I started over because I took off those boots that didn't have any polish on 'em, and they gave me some new boots and, that next six months I started all over again at the bottom as the ammo humper in my new unit.

Interviewer

Talk about you being called "Doc".

Clark Clements

Well, when we were at Charlie 2 or the Army artillery base, we had certain duties or things that we were assigned to do, like burn the shit and then go out on trash runs where we would go out to this dump. And one of the things, it just kind of started off real simple, I was on a truck, and we got out to the trash dump, and got off the truck, and a lot of the Vietnamese people from the village would go to the dump, and sort through, pick through the garbage and try to find things that they could use and so forth. For might be, for example, C-rats that were thrown away. By the way, they kind of liked C-rats. But as I recall, there was also sometimes the concern that they might be trying to find things in the trash dump that they could use as weapons against us and things like that.

But anyway, there was a papa-san, he had the hat like this and he was out there in kind of a long goatee kind of thing. And he was sitting on the ground, and his foot was bleeding and he stepped on a C-rat can. And you know how sharp a tin can is at the top and sliced his foot. And so all I had was my canteen, and a little first-aid kit and so I wasn't the best doctor in the world. But I took my canteen off, and kind of cleaned his foot, and then all I did was take some of that ointment that I had, and I put it around the cut, and kind of in the cut a little bit, and then took a battle dressing that I had and I put that on his foot. And then the next time I came through on a trash run, there he was. And so I got off, and just changed the bandage and didn't think much of it. So that's where the "Doc" thing came in.

And sometimes when I'd go out there people would come up with little maladies that they had, and I'd just use my first-aid kit, and that's all I really had and tend to it the best I could. So I got the nickname "Doc." And then one day I was in a village, I was doing a mine sweep, as I recall. That was another thing we did for the Army. And there was what we called a ROK Marine, and that's a Korean Marine and they are rocks, they are tough; highly disciplined and fierce warriors. And I had met this kid named Tan, and his sister named Lan, I used to give them my cigarettes, and they would give me other things in return and I think his sister kind of took a shine to me. Because one day Thong told me, because she gave me a bracelet and I said, "Oh," and he says, "Well that means that you're her boyfriend." And I went, "Boyfriend?" And he goes, "Yeah, and you don't want to have any other girl's bracelet on you or she will cockadow you." And I said, "What do you mean by cockadow?" And he goes, (cutting noise) and I went, oh.

So anyway, I ran into Thong in the village and he was being roughed up, manhandled by one of these ROK Marines and I went over, because I knew him and I told the ROK Marine, "Leave him alone." And he wouldn't do it so I locked and loaded on him. Now I know this guy, probably by looking at him, he's got his forearms, he probably could've beat me up with one hand, but I had a weapon. And so he let him go kind of thing. And I started being invited into the village to eat and everybody said, "Man, they're gonna poison you." But I went ahead, and I just mixed it up with the people and I'd go in, I didn't speak Vietnamese, but they invited me in, and I'd go in and eat

their humble meal with them. It was an honor.

Interviewer

You knew they were VC though?

Clark Clements

Well I knew that Tan was.

Interviewer

How did you know that?

Clark Clements

Now I didn't totally know at this juncture, it wasn't until we had an amnesty where we would give them money for weapons, he brought in an AK-47. Because I didn't believe him for the longest time, just to let you know. I just thought he was talking shit. But when he brought in the AK-47 that was a convincer, and then the other convincer was when I went out on the patrol, and then he showed me on the map – now this is really close to the end too – where the booby traps were on the map and all of that. So I didn't really know it at that time completely that he was VC, so I wasn't just going into somebody's hooch knowingly that they were VC. I can't say that.

But I went in and here's the way I looked at it, I treated the people the way that I would like to be treated. And I see that as kind of paying off, because whether Tan was VC or not, village people invited me into eat with them, they shared their food with me and he did do that. And the only thing I can say is that a certain measure of good will came back to me. I'm not going to say the parlance of today's world we'd say karma or whatever, but it was just like I treated the people with respect and good will. Because what were we there for? Ultimately I signed up to go protect the people. Brent signed up to go. You know, we had a lot of other reasons as well, but it was to help the people. So what purpose would it serve to go in there, and rough 'em up, or try to treat the folks that you're trying to help is somehow inferior just because they don't have the standard of living that you have, and education and so forth.

Interviewer

You said earlier that it was a tragedy that you had to clear out all of these Montagnards. Talk about that and the purpose of that.

Clark Clements

Well what we did when we ran across the Montagnard people is one thing – this goes back to the food thing, it's kind of like that song by Crosby, Stills, Nash and Young where it goes, "If you smile at me you will understand," because it's the universal language. You know, the physiogamy or the smile. And I remember we had just killed the village elder earlier and these folks were ready to be transported on a C-146 helicopter. And they were cooking. And they had this little pot. And in one pot they had rice and in the other pot they had something else that looked kind of interesting, I didn't know what it was, but I found out it was snails. So this was actually my first encounter

with escargot. But I remember communicating with those people, sitting down, and just the smiles, and the look in their eyes, and they looked at me, and they could see that there was good will and they invited me once again to share their food. And so we couldn't really talk or converse, but they were just beautiful people, absolutely beautiful people. Just really thick, black hair and it looks like a lot of folks you see in Amazonia where it's cut around like this. And they didn't really know what was going to happen, I don't think. But when the helicopters arrived, they were placed on those helicopters and plucked – ripped out of, really – the heart of paradise and taken to Da Nang. And later on, when I went through Da Nang, and I saw how these hill tribes people were living in dilapidated shacks with corrugated tin roofs if they were lucky and just on the fringes.

Interviewer

Why did they move them out?

Clark Clements

This is really good. We plucked these people out of paradise for their own good. The rationale – this is the word that we were getting – was that we're going to relocate them because the NVA are going to be coming into the area and they will kill them and they will take the young boys and conscript them into the NVA army or worse – now this is just hearsay and things that you hear – oh, the NVA will come in and chain 'em to a machine gun and force 'em to fight us kind of thing. So you hear all of this stuff. And really, we didn't really know. We just had to take it kind of at face value that we were moving them out of there for their own good. And then later on you see what their own good is; just a horrible existence because the Vietnamese people are very socially stratified and these folks coming out of the jungle and the hill tribes people are not going to be treated with a great deal of respect because they're going to be at the lowest social rung.

Interviewer

Talk about the moonwalk.

Clark Clements

Now just to let you know, when you're out in the bush you might have a radio but you have to really exercise a lot of discipline, where you can't just be playing a radio like you're back home on the block, but there were times when folks would play their radio, say during the day. So we did have a little bit of music.

Sometimes I remember in the morning hearing some music before we started off to move to a new position because we never stayed in one place more than three days, that's the way the Marines operated in Vietnam. You're on a hilltop, you don't spend more than three days, you move to another place if you're what you call a line unit. And I remember hearing about the landing on the moon and then going out on an ambush – and I can't remember if there was a full moon, but it just sure seems like there was a full moon – but there was some moonlight. And I'll never forget thinking – and I know this is naïve, but I was 19 years old – and I said, "God, how is it we can put a man on the moon –" and I didn't think about this as an accomplishment for the United States, by the

way. I saw this really is being a huge step for human kind. And the idea, how can we put a man up on the moon and I'm sitting here waiting for somebody to walk in front of me with these other fellahs on the ambush and we're waiting for somebody to walk by and we're going to annihilate 'em. We're gonna blast the hell out of 'em. We're gonna send 'em to their Buddha. How is it that we can have that kind of technology and we can't solve other world problems and get along? Pretty simplistic and naïve but that's what went through my mind. It was a horrible juxtaposition.

And what it speaks to is also – this is something that isn't necessarily always brought out – but the idea that you're fighting a war and then you have a racial thing going on. Stanley Kubrick and Oliver Stone in their movies address that kind of thing, but it's different when you're in it. The other part is your own internal war, your own internal struggle. You don't grow up in a Judeo-Christian society with "Thou shalt not kill," and then go through X amount of time in Marine Corps training and then go out there and just totally be able to get rid of all of those values that you've been inculcated with. So you have this internal struggle and the enemy had to as well because they were Buddhist. You have this internal war and then you're hearing about the stuff going on back home, people that aren't buying into the war and you're starting to realize the domino theory that I pretty much took hook, line, and sinker there for a while – doesn't wash anymore. And now you're not believing in the war but you've got to fight it. That horrible internal conflict that you have.

The idea that I used to have on my bush cutter, a band of peace signs that I made with grenades where you pull the pin, you have the ring, you flip the pin up, you secure it, and then you take con wire and you go all the way around it. Nice-looking design and then you go around that pin and then you put some spokes on it for the peace sign and you go around it like that – whenever you had a little spare time. This is kind of center, doing something. And you'd make those. And I had a hatband, if you will, made of those grenade rings. Well the underlying assumption is that in order to get those rings so I could make my peace signs I had to throw the frags. I had to kill somebody. So you have this polarity that's going on inside of you, and this dissonance and that's another component of the war, the internal part of the war that aged the people spiritually, and I just want to get that out there or at least I can speak for myself. That made me old.

When you see so much, so many beautiful young people die in their prime and then you see all of this internal conflict that you're fighting a war within a war and then you know – you're hearing about what's going on in your culture back home that there's another cultural revolution going on, and people are questioning the fundamental values of our culture and society that that's going on, when you see the hope in a song like "The Age of Aquarius," the raising of consciousness, so that you can find that solution like when I was thinking about, "We can put a man on the moon, but we can't solve the world's problems, and come together, and unite as a global village or as the human family?"

Interviewer

Tell me about getting short.

Clark Clements

Getting short is a concept – oh, God, there's some people that maintain the short timer calendars. If I would've done that I would've gone completely nuts, I think. But anyway, there are people that kept a short timers calendar, and so they would mark off the days that they'd been in the Nam.

Interviewer

And short means?

Clark Clements

Short means that you're getting close to finishing your tour of duty; in the Marine Corps that's 13 months. And when you start getting short, there are some things that you may have heard about, and they're very real as far as I can see, and that is is that sometimes – now when you think this you've got to be wired. You're running on adenine a lot. You have your down times, too. There are some times where boredom kicks in where you're not engaged in combat, and the boredom starts taking its toll and you go, "Hit us. I'm tired of the mosquitoes flying all around me at night." I mean you can hear thousands of them because you have repellent on. You have your poncho liner over your head and then you can just hear 'em. And you don't get any sleep, you stand hole watch, and then that means they wake you up in the middle of the night, you stand your watch, then you go back to sleep and then the next day you have to move out in the hot sun. And then you're going up and down, all of this shit, and then you're thinking about, well, they're gonna ambush ya and you're gonna get hit. Well the thing is is there's times when you get bored in between when you don't get hit and you're just like, "Come on, hit us, because I want to get some," because you're just pissed off dealing with the elements. And then as you get short what happens is you can experience what I would call vigilance fatigue.

You've been wired for so long, paying attention to every little damn thing out there to give you a clue about enemy movement and all of that, and been on the alert so much that you start to burn out. That happens and then there's this other part of you where I guess – I don't want to say it's arrogance, it's just you've survived so much shit; you've been through so much stuff, you're just tired. And that can be a problem because that's when you may not move fast enough when a battle starts or incoming comes in, you may not move as fast as you used to so you can get taken out. But there was this short timers kind of thing where a lot of times people would get killed when they were new because of their inexperience and some of the short timers would get it sometimes because they just got tired.

Interviewer

Why were you paranoid about water?

Clark Clements

This is really good. The first half of my tour I was in I Corps or the 3rd Marines were in I Corps. My unit was in I

Corps. And I Corps, that area of operation you've probably heard of battles like Khe Sanh, that was up in I Corps. The A Shau Valley is in I Corps. And so you're in a lot of the Central Highlands and we also went into Laos. Not Laos, but Laos, that's how they say it. And also sometimes into Cambodia – and by the way, a lot of people don't know this, sometimes we got the Chinese. A lot of people don't know this, it's a known fact among the Chinese and I've talked to Chinese folks, students that are well aware of that and we did encounter a unit of Chinese at one point at a place called Big Foot Brown. But the reason why I was concerned with water is we were way up in the Highlands and you have the humidity and then you have the heat. I got there in March and it was hot. The monsoon was over. The thing is is that just early on I had this concern about water, especially being new, because I didn't quite know how to ration things; I didn't know the rules of the game yet, I didn't have that rhythm and flow and really know the everyday workings of being in the unit and being out in the bush. And so I was concerned about not having enough water.

I forgot to tell you this – the first night I was there, it rained and I'll never forget this because I took out my poncho and rigged it up so that the water would land on my poncho and go down and drain into my helmet. I took the liner out and I caught water in the pot. And I didn't end up with all that much water but I did put it in my canteen. And visually I'll never forget moving out in the morning and seeing just a little drop of water on a leaf and going up with my tongue and licking that water off. There was just something about water that I perseverated on.

And one of the things about water – this is very important – people get heat exhaustion, heat stroke if you're not managing your water correctly. A lot of people went down because they didn't manage their water correctly or it was just their individual thing. But you're out in the hot sun, there's high humidity and so you really have to manage your water effectively so you don't get heat stroke or heat exhaustion and that's a big part of being able to survive out there and to be operationally functional. And the thing is is that often times we would be in real high areas, way up on a hill, and in order to get water we would go on what we call water runs. And I'll never forget this because it was on August 8th or 9th we got some new troops in before we had this big battle on Mutter's Ridge. And there was this one fellow that was new and I just kind of took a shining to him. Plus the fact he brought me some socks – my socks were starting to attach themselves to my feet and the skin come off when I took the socks off – and I had to stand bare on a water run. And what you do is you take your web belt off and the plastic canteens have a little strap that connects to the lid so they don't become separated, and then you run the canteens through the belt, string 'em on the belt and then you carry the belt for your unit or your section of fire team or whatever, down to the river. You fill 'em up and you come back up. And you risk being ambushed because it's just like when animals go to a waterhole, that's where the predators go. Well hey, we have a predator part to us, and it's like what better place to catch people off guard than when they're getting water. Of course you set up machine guns and you set up security and all of that, but still, you've got a bunch of people in one area getting water and that's a good place to ambush

'em.

So often times we had to go up on the water runs and one thing that was really interesting that I'll never forget because I have this special place in my heart for bamboo – in part because the Montagnard people, when it came to the bamboo, they would take these big sections of bamboo and they would cut it so that they could make canisters and they would put their corn – they had great big grinding stones like metates like the Native Americans used and the South Americans to grind corn. Well they did that as well, but they kept their corn meal in these canisters. Now we were in this one hill way in the hell up there, and they couldn't supply us with water in those big five-gallon cans and I can't remember why. Sometimes they did, but for some reason in this area they couldn't do it. I don't know if it was the amount of enemy there or what it was, but what we had to do to get water was we shimmied up some of this real big bamboo and then we took the smaller reeds, and we'd go up and we would cut into sections of the bamboo and about half of it typically was filled with water. So we would suck the water out. But water was really a big issue as far as survival. I carried way too many canteens. Admittedly that's a lot of weight. But at the end of the night or in the afternoon after we cut the field of fire, dug the holes, we would sit down.

Doggy Doray, Dave Doray that was from Canada, he used to be a cook, and what he used to do at night is we would contribute water, and coffee, and chocolate and he'd make a great big canteen cup. He had one of those for the metal canteen and they had the canteen cup. He'd make a big thing of mocha and we would pass it around. And we'd be sitting around the hole, and we'd pass that around, and that was part of the bonding was that cup of mocha at night. And then he would take the water when we got really low on chow, and then he'd take anything that anybody had, and he'd take the liner out of the helmet, and the cover off and then he'd take either heat tabs or C-4, you know, the plastic explosive, that will heat water up like that. And he would heat up the water and he'd put all of this mixture of stuff, whatever people had, and he'd make like a mulligan stew and we'd share that when we got low on chow. So water was a real fundamental thing.

And by the way, what we called those were blue lines. The river on a map is blue so we called it the blue lines. So we would go on the water runs. And one time I went on a water run – and I'll never forget this – it was in an area where they had B-52' d the area before we went in to cut down on what we were going to encounter in the way of the enemy when we got there because they had a lot of bunkers and things like that, fortified bunkers. And anyway, there was this one hill and all of the trees were just splinters over the top. It was barren on top and just shredded. And there was this blue line, but the blue line was actually brown. And I went on the water run and I'll never forget this because the water was muddy, it's all we had. So I'm sitting there, I'm filling all of the canteens and then all of the sudden I notice this black thing on the water, looked like material. And I reached over and I grabbed it and when I pulled on it, a body came up. And I went, "Not good." This is the only water that we have and if I tell 'em they're

gonna get sick. They won't be able to drink the water. What to do? Well, we had halazone tablets, iodine.

Interviewer

And this is for what?

Clark Clements

And this is to kill bacteria. So I had halazone tablets. I'm not relying on them to put their own halazone tablets in this water so I just opened all of the canteens, put the halazone in, shook it up, went back, didn't say a word to 'em. And nobody got real sick. That's the good part. But you know, you do what you've got to do. It's survival. You're down in the mud and the blood. It's primal.

Interviewer

Some guys said they came from small town farms and they were hunters and farmers, how their life skills translated to the field. Did you find that city boys had a harder time with the environment?

Clark Clements

Well that's an excellent question and one of the things – not necessarily. One of the fellows his name was Barrios and he had gone to the brick for stabbing somebody in the field, got in a fight. He was from the Bronx and everybody was afraid of Barrios. And I guess I was just a dumb shit, you know? I had grown up, and been around, I'd been in a lot of fights and things like that, so the type of person that he was, he just didn't scare me. But that guy was fierce and was used to combat in the Bronx.

But to answer your question in terms of whether the folks from the city or the folks that grew up out in the areas where they had a lot of woods and farming, most certainly, I mean there's going to be cases where people who had that kind of experience would typically be really good at firing weapons, and that's at aiming, shooting and hitting a target. But one of the things about Vietnam that was interesting is that the battles weren't so much based on your ability to just aim, and necessarily bead right in on a target as it was you're in a jungle environment, and the visibility isn't always that good and you're in real close. It's just getting the fire out there and trying to obtain fire superiority. And as far as people adapting to the environment and climbing the hills and being out there with all of that weight, I didn't really see any kind of a breakdown or difference in somebody from the city or somebody from the farm, really.

Interviewer

Plus you had a lot of training too.

Clark Clements

Yeah. Thank you. And the part behind the training is to try to bring as much as you can. There's never a hundred percent, but to bring people up to the same physical fitness level and to try to get them on the same page in terms of the organizational structure of a combat unit kind of thing. But most certainly you're going to have some people that just by nature are going to really fit in, and really like being outdoors because of their experience camping and

hunting, that they may relish that more than others. But I can't really speak for anybody.

Interviewer

What about being in a desperate situation and hearing incoming air support? Talk about Mutter's Ridge.

Clark Clements

On August 10th and 11th, 1969 we were up on Mutter's Ridge. And we made contact on the way in. So it was no surprise that we're going to get hit. In fact, we spent some time at a place called KG Bridge or something like that, on Route 9 before we went up there. And we'd heard stories about Mutter's Ridge, and it's not the kind of place you want to go unless you really love combat and you're fond of the idea of dying.

Interviewer

Can you describe the terrain also?

Clark Clements

Well, Mutter's Ridge was a major avenue or route for the NVA. And I want to be clear about this, you had the Viet Cong that operated on the village level, and sometimes had antique French rifles, and whatever they could get their hands on, and I'm not taking away from them because they were good, and they were good at laying booby traps and doing all kinds of stuff. They made the most of what they had. They made do with it and they're to be respected. But you also had the North Vietnamese regulars, and some people may not be aware of that these are highly equipped, and well-trained regular troops that carried Chicom weapons that were manufacturing and the SKS and AK-47 in Czechoslovakia, beautiful blue steel, wood stocks. And the machine tolerance was such that you could throw their weapons in the mud and they would fire. They took our M-14s away and gave us those Maddy Mattel M-16s; piece of shit that jammed on me three times. But anyway, up on the ridge it was this major avenue or route that the North Vietnamese regulars would infiltrate into the South, there had been a lot of battles there so the tops of these hills were barren. I mean there was some shrubs and stuff like that, but there was a lot of bare areas, a lot of places where the trees were all knocked off and you had the hard mud. And it was high, they had these big ridges, and so forth with these real long fingers, and big riff valleys and things like that.

And anyway, we made our way in and we made contact with the enemy. In fact, this is weird but I remember one morning what happened was we were coming into Mutter's Ridge, and we'd camped for the night, and all of the sudden we had an explosion and we thought, "Oh, this is it," and everybody went on alert, and all of that. But what had happened – and this goes back to people falling asleep – somebody fell asleep on lines and the enemy came up and didn't kill them. And because there was nobody to stop 'em, they threw a bunch of grenades and everybody, Chicom grenades and satchel charges, into the command post and they killed our corpsman. And this was a great guy, he was a good corpsman. He's the kind of guy that in a firefight, in between treating the wounded, he's shooting rounds off at the enemy. So anyway, he was one of us. Corpsmen are. We made contact there. They threw that into the CP, but we didn't have a firefight, there was nobody to fire at. They di di mau'd out of there. They

got the hell out of there.

So anyway, we moved in, and we got up on this kind of hill and on the other side it went very steep, vertical descent into a riff valley. And over on the other side there was this great big ridge with this long finger. And the import of that long finger is the enemy got on that finger, and 3rd platoon was up on that ridge and they had placed 81 mortars on this outside thinking they're gonna get hit from another avenue of approach. Anyway, they got hit and ended up going hand-to-hand. And then we tried to fire for 'em.

I need to back up because first of all we were on this hill, and the night before this happened it was flat on top, and then there was a saddle like this, and we had holes all the way around and we got probed, oddly enough, on that steep side. Stephen Glowe, who died there, he was sleeping behind me and I grabbed his toe, he had his boots off. And I went like that because I had movement. And so I let them know, I've got movement. So this is when Glowe tells me – and I hadn't done this before – Corporal Glowe says, "Clements, pull the pin. Take the spoon off, count to three, and throw it in the air." And I got the idea: Airburst. Because if you throw something they'll typically get down and when it goes up and out, they'll be underneath it. So he wants an airburst and I went, okay, I got that. So I threw it, and I heard this scrambling kind of sound but nothing else.

Well the next day we get this order to move off of this position, and there was this little saddle that went down like this and there was like a knoll, if you will. And there was an impression from an artillery round that had hit there and this knoll – it wasn't much of a hill – had all of these pre-dug holes in it and over, kind of in the middle, just a little bit off from center there was this big square hole. Anyway, I knew that it was bad news that we're moving off of this high ground onto this low ground. And I got a little belligerent and I was vociferous and I just said, "We're gonna be like fucking ducks in a barrel and they're gonna come here, they're gonna get up on top of this hill that we're leaving and they're gonna shoot us like ducks in a barrel." "Clements, shut up!" Well I'm not trying to bum everybody's morale out but it's like this is the reality of the situation. So anyway, we get down there and my squad leader, he's looking at the easy thing of let's just put our mortar pit there where that impression is, let's just dig that out and put the hole. And I just looked at him and he went, "Well where?" And I walked around, and I found this spot, and there was some bushes in front of it and over here's the knoll, and it goes up to what we coined the term "LZ Echo," that area that we left with the high ground – and you had to move logs and all kinds of bushes and shit. But nobody complained, it was really weird. And I just went over to this spot.

So anyway, we starting clearing it all out and we dug our mortar pit. Well, we got resupplied. We got a bunch of chow. So everybody knows we're here, it's no secret. The enemy knows we're here because the helicopter's come in, and dropped off our chow and all of this other stuff, and ammunition; thank God we got ammunition. So anyway,

that evening 3rd platoon gets hit by the NVA, they go up that long finger, they hit 81's, and they break through and they go hand-to-hand. Lieutenant Keller comes over to us and I'm the gunner, and John Gaffney is the A-gunner and the squad leader – we were still kind of short on people. We had some brand-new people that were ammo humpers. And so he wanted us to do a fire mission to try to help them. So we did a fire mission but we finally went if we get hit we've got to save some rounds. So we did a fire mission but then we stopped.

And then this is where "The Age of Aquarius" comes in because there was some people out in front of us, and we had a machine gun over here, we had some grunts right here and then we had another machine gun over here. And we had developed this symbiotic relationship where we would set up behind the gun. Now obviously we're both going to draw fire first, but the idea is if you have zappers – the guys that come in and they have the shit strapped to 'em, willing to blow themselves up – we want to make sure we take them out. And like Doray did in that first ambush I was in, we want to be able to shoot straight up and drop those rounds out in front of our guns to keep the zappers off of our machine guns. So we had developed this system kind of over time. And anyway, they hit us, I don't remember two hours of the battle unfortunately or fortunately. But there came a point where because we were hit by a much larger enemy force, we were gonna be overwhelmed. Some people say we went hand to hand and some people say that our position was overrun, but... I maintain we were not overrun. Lieutenant Keller saved our ass because we called in the Phantoms and we told 'em to drop the load on top of us. Yeah, some folks were hit by friendly shrapnel but I can tell ya, none of us would've walked off that hill if he wouldn't have done it.

Interviewer

Tell us about that moment when the Phantoms came in.

Clark Clements

When those Phantoms came in, because we fought all night, and we heard the screams of our friends, and we tried to help those that were wounded and all of that, I we knew we were way outnumbered. And at first we couldn't get any support, there was all kinds of shit that happened, a comedy of errors back in the rear where we didn't get the artillery support when we needed it and all of that. Actually they made it over to our position more towards the evening.

In fact, what I forgot to tell you was the 1969 thing, the people out in front of us had this little radio going, it was no secret we were there, and they were playing it a little low but I could hear "The Age of Aquarius" song on the radio. Boy, was that a contradiction. So tolerance and understanding, peace for humankind. So anyway, we get hit, we're going through the battle, and we fought all night and didn't get any support. And then finally, somehow, the lieutenant got the Phantoms to come in and when they dropped their 500-pound bombs; they dropped them right on that flat part that's right next to us and then even closer – the whole ground shook. And unless you've been that close to it, with a 500-pound bomb goes off, it's a real unnerving experience. But it's mixed because you're feeling

the shaking of the earth and you're kind of numb anyway. You're so scared that you go beyond fear. You reach a place, believe it or not, where you go beyond fear. But this is shaking and it's just like whoa. And you've never felt anything like that unless you've been in an earthquake or something. But this is local, this is right there and the ground is just – it's incredible. And but then there's this feeling that, oh, my God, finally, those angels, those Phantoms are dropping their load. It was a huge, huge sense of relief.

Interviewer

What happened?

Clark Clements

Well, the Phantoms dropped their load, and then it wasn't over yet because they killed a lot of those people up there. But we were pinned down by somebody who survived, and that son of a bitch was a good NVA soldier and he was great with his weapon. I remember getting up and we were gonna go up and survey the damage. You clear the area, and you take prisoners, or whatever or you make sure everybody's dead. And I started walking up and all of the sudden took fire. And I don't know how I survived not getting shot, but I turned and in one leap – I used to do the running long jump, maybe that's what saved my life – because I leaped, and went over the bushes back into the mortar pit and landed on somebody that crawled in there that was shot; landed right on a wounded Marine.

And anyway, we ended up being pinned down. We were in the mortar pit, and we had grunts with us and all of that. And I'll never forget this because I had to take a piss really bad. And we're pinned down by this guy and I took a leak in a mortar canister. And when I threw that mortar canister out that little son-of-a-bitch shot that and it sprayed all over us. Like, "Goddamn you, Clements." So Corporal Blue heard about one of his buddies getting shot by this sniper or whatever you want to call him up on the hill. He shot somebody and Corporal Blue flipped out. He was just gonna charge and he got up to charge. And – ping – it parted his hair right through there, and his hair sprayed down on us, he was a black fellah so his black hair sprayed down on us and the blood. And we had to hold him down; he was pissed. He wanted to kill this NVA soldier. And so we had to restrain him, get him calmed down. And then finally I went, "Hmm, it's cowboys and Indians. It's this simple, cowboys and Indians. I took my rifle, I took my pot over my helmet, and I put it on my rifle and I said, "Blue, I'm gonna put this out here on this side and I'm gonna draw his fire. And you get him." I barely stuck that helmet up there. Ping. But Blue got him. He was the last one.

So we went up, we surveyed the area, and there was just all of these dead enemy up there and not one of 'em was moving. And I don't remember every single thing, but the part I remember is going over to my friends, and we had been resupplied, and Lawrence Dowd was down in this hole, and I'm not sure if he got morphine or if it was just hypovolemic shock but he was moving in real slow motion. And he's the only one I've ever let call me "Clarky." He was from Massachusetts and he goes, "Clarky, get my soda." And all the training, what we did get about stomach wounds and drinking, how bad it can be, I said, "Well Dowdy, I don't think you should drink anything." Because he

was shot right across here and in the stomach area. And he just looked at me and he says, "Why not? I'm not gonna make it. I'm gonna die." And so at that point I just went, you know, fuck it. I went over and got his Pepsi. The Pepsi made it through all of this shit.

So anyway, because there was 20 fin assemblies just around our hole from the RPG's, I mean this place was riddled with bullets and all kinds of shit. So anyway, I got him this Pepsi and I just told him, I said, "Swish it around your mouth but try not to swallow it." And then the forward observer was down in the hole and he had to take a leak. And you know a guy is in rough shape when somebody has to get down in the hole – he asked me to help him so he wouldn't piss all over himself. So I did. And then right next to him, there was a fellah that was another artillery forward observer and he was a clump of flesh. He was beheaded and there was just this trunk there. And my ammo humper that I had left earlier with him down in the hole to watch after him, he was sitting there – and I'll never forget this – he was eating a can of fruit cocktail. And I just looked at him and it went through my mind, "How in the fuck can you do that?" I didn't say anything to him but it's like, "How in the fuck can you sit there and eat?" So anyway, he must have been in shock because later he started shitting blood, about three days later.

Anyway, we attend to the wounded, we got some birds coming in but I remember it took a while – once again, all of this logistic nightmare that was going on in the rear – because we didn't get 'em out until the afternoon of the next day. And there were a lot of people I know that would've survived if they would've gotten medical attention but they went into shock. And Dowdy, I don't know if he would've survived those wounds, but he was conscious, and I was talking to him, and then he slipped over where when you're looking at people when they slip over, their eyes are vacant and they're just moving around but they're not there. And he went to that place and all I could do at that point – and maybe part of it's to comfort yourself – but I started talking to him and trying to program his unconscious mind saying, "Everything's going to be all right, Dowdy." And tried to make him think. I said, "Think of your very special place and go there."

Anyway, we hauled the bodies out when the chopper came in and it was horrible when I think about this in retrospect. We weren't thinking because the dead and the wounded were co-mingled together. We didn't really separate 'em out. And then the chopper left. And then they sent in the 2nd Platoon that was outside the area of operation, they had 1st Platoon, and then they had 3rd Platoon in the area of operation and kept 2nd Platoon out. We were at platoon strength going up against – just to let you know, I figured it out pretty quick that we were bait, and that's been corroborated by force recon, and by somebody from the CIA that knows about the unit and knows a hell of a lot more about Vietnam and about what was going on in terms of intelligence than I do. But anyway, 2nd Platoon came in and they walked us out. So we're walking in the middle of the night holding on to each other's belts in the darkness to relocate instead of them just chopperin' us out. And I'll never forget this, I had never run into a

punji pit before, and honest to God, I fell in a punji pit that night. That's a big hole with the bamboo sticks. And we didn't see a lot of that up north, they did that more in the southern part.

Interviewer

Were you wounded?

Clark Clements

No. The stakes were lying over. I fell in the pit and what are the odds? Anyway, we end up going to this new area and I'll never forget this, this is when I really started to turn – and there was a new sergeant and he started trying to tell me where to put my mortar. I know this sounds bad from a military point of view, but at this point I don't have any black on my boots and he does. So I said, "Fuck you. There's no way I'm putting my mortar there." I called it my gun. And he started yelling at me, "I'm gonna write you up Article 15," and all this other shit and I said, "Write me up. I'm not putting my mortar there." So then an officer comes over and he says, "Well what's the problem?" And so the sergeant tells him that I'm disobeying an order and then he looks at me and he says, "Well what's going on, Marine?" And I said, "I'm not gonna place my gun there because that is in a position where the mortar will be knocked out in zero-five seconds. And I'll tell ya what, if you force me to put my gun there, and they hit us, I'll fuckin' shoot you." And he goes, "Sergeant, you let him put the gun where he wants to." So I did and all of that. But anyway, after that, I was medevaced and I spent about three weeks in the hospital.

Interviewer

Were you injured?

Clark Clements

Well I was wounded, but there was probably not many of us that weren't wounded but not everybody was wounded to the extent that they needed to be medevaced. I can't imagine anybody that was on the ridge not being riddled with shrapnel. I had shrapnel coming out of me for years. But the reason I was medevaced – God, I look back on it now, it was something really strange – I got extremely sick. It could've been an acute reaction to the combat, we'd been sprayed with Agent Orange earlier, I don't know. I really don't know. But I was medevaced for three weeks. And the irony of that, because I didn't learn about Catch-22 until I came back from the war, was that there was one fellah, he didn't want to go back out, and he was scared to death and he kept trying to tell the docs not to send him out. And I wanted to be with my unit because if something goes down – one of the things people don't realize necessarily unless they've been through it – is the bonding with your unit, you're with those guys and you go through something, there's a bonding there. And it's a very strong relationship. It's not just the Marine Corps, it's psychological. And I'm not a religious person but there's a spiritual component to it. And the thing is is that if they go through something, it's like Brent. Brent didn't want me to go through all of that combat and him not see. Well I don't want my colleagues, my fellow Marines, going through some shit without me being there for 'em because I know I'm one of the best gunners at this point. They need me out there. And that's not bragging, I earned that. I worked my ass off to be good. And I don't want them out there without me.

So I said, "No, no, you've got to send me back," and they won't send me back. "Oh, no, you're staying, pal." I went up to the corpsman, picked him up and said, "Give me something to do." Because I went from being totally sick, and felt like my neck was in a vice, and lethargic, and just horrible weird feeling, and had no energy to becoming extremely hyperkinetic and wired. And so the corpsman said, "Put me down." So I put him down. He said, "I'll give you something to do, go out and run around the compound." The hospital's air-conditioned. I ran around the compound all right. And I ran around, and I ran around. And I came back and I took showers because I had this real weird feeling. I can't explain it, but the cold showers seemed to give me some relief.

So I finally get to go back out to my unit and at this point they're pulling 3rd Marines out so they send us on what they call a pacification operation. And then all I remember is we marched down to this road and it was a long, long, long march. And then we caught a convoy, and we went to Dong Ha and that's where our unit split up. And those that were in-country longer than eight months got to leave. And I got there in March, and this would've been September so I hadn't been there long enough to leave, so I got reassigned to 1st Marines, and I went to 1st Marines and that was another war, it was a different area.

Interviewer

How did you feel when you had to be split up from your friends?

Clark Clements

Oh, man. You know, I was really tight with the black soldiers, we called them the "brothers" back then. All of this stuff that you see – all of that came from Vietnam and the rap. We used to do things like that to entertain ourselves, and I was really tight with the brothers and all of that. And then the people I'd been in all of this combat with... It was really hard. It was extremely hard. It was like the band of brothers that they talk about in combat. You have that bonding and you get close. And it's really weird how on one level you get really close but they're playing this inside, there's that internal war again. You really care about people and you get close to people, you rely on 'em, you respect 'em because of the job they do, the kind of Marines they are, and then on the other hand you're playing this game trying to not get too close and attached in case they get killed; non-attachment kind of thing. But when you're breaking up, it was very, very hard. It was like leaving your family. And the other part was, is you left yourself behind too because your identity – my identity – was with that unit. That was my identity. I carved a place there. Just all of those Marines carved a place.

Interviewer

How many men did you lose at Mutter's Ridge?

Clark Clements

You know, I can't remember the numbers of how many people we lost, and how many were wounded but all I can tell you is only 13 of us walked off that hill.

Interviewer

Tell us about the sound of a helicopter. What brings up in your mind and how do you react?

Clark Clements

Well, one of the things about the helicopters, even to this day – and I had to learn to deal with it because there's a positive and a negative side to the helicopters. One of the things that happens to me, even to this day is I can be out and about, walking down the street, beautiful sunny day, helicopter goes over and there are times when I go right into the theater of war, I'm back in the war. And the hypervigilance will kick in and I've had to learn to deal with that. And one of the ways that I learned to deal with that, and actually it was just something that was fortuitous, a friend of mine had me do some artwork for the Air Med years ago and I have kind of a bonding to that helicopter. And every time it flies over I know it's doing what our Chinooks used to do and that was to go get somebody and take them for medical treatment. And so there's that positive side to it. But I see the strobing of the light, the smell of the helicopter and then the sound – they're pretty loud.

And the connection to helicopters is positive in that it's going to take your dead and wounded out. The helicopters were our lifeline to what we called to the world; they used to bring us our mail, they brought us our food and in certain places they brought us our water. But there was this other connection, they just represented something that was in and out of the combat zone, and it was an interesting feeling because for a brief moment when they would come in we felt connected somehow to the larger Marine Corps, you know, the folks back in the rear that we didn't see very often. So there's a lot of mixed emotions that come with helicopters, but overall all I can say is that they were our lifeline to the world.

I have a dragonfly. I have that in my garden flying over some weeds, it's up on a pole and it blends in like it's camouflaged. But it reminds me of those Chinooks, it reminds me of the helicopter. So when I walk out I look at that. And so I have both that negative thing associated with it and the positive, and you have to learn if you're going to be able to deal with life after combat, to figure out strategies of trying to turn the negative into a positive, because it can become overwhelming if you let the negative associations take over. And most certainly there are a lot of times when that's happened to myself and I've seen others as well.

Interviewer

Tell me about the smells, and the sounds of the jungle and the smell of a helicopter.

Clark Clements

Well, you can smell kind of the burning of the fuel, if you will. And the sound, it's a real pulsating sound. (makes sound) It's more rhythmic than that. And actually when some of those cars go by now that go boom, boom-boom—that reminds me of incoming. Oh, yeah, and the smell, because we had to burn shit with diesel oil, and there were maggots in there, I forgot to tell you about that earlier because that's part of the biological process. The smell of the feces and the sight of the maggots in there, and then you put in the diesel fuel and you burn it, to this day when I go

by on the road and I smell diesel exhaust I get uptight. You start learning about some of these things.

As far as the jungle goes, I have to tell you, I don't want to be hokey but for me, it was kind of a mystical experience in some ways in that when we went into an area, I could swear that whether it's the animals putting off vibes or the plants putting off some kind of vibration, whatever, you could sense when you were in an area where something really bad had happened or something really terrible was going to happen. And the other thing is right before it rained – we spent a lot of time and a lot of people don't realize this, during the monsoon for at least three months straight. Everything you owned, including yourself, if you own yourself, is just totally wet all of the time. But in the jungle when it's going to rain, all the vines and all the leaves start positioning themselves. So you hear this movement. So it's very organic in the jungle and that's one of the things that you get in touch with is you become – if you allow that to happen – part of that organic whole and you start sensing.

And so those animals and those plants out there become like when you have long hair like an Afro or a cat's whiskers where the cat can sense. And I used to have an Afro when I first came back. I grew one out after a while. It took me a while because I had my hair real short. But I got into it and, wow, I can feel the wind out here. And then in a way it reminded me of when I was out in the jungle, and you become kind of one with it and all of those other things out there become part of your extrasensory perception, if you will.

Interviewer

So did you get good at detecting the enemy or booby traps?

Clark Clements

I really got good at sensing that the enemy was around. Now when it comes to smell though – now this is not some mystical thing – there was a characteristic odor and we had a characteristic odor because of what we eat and all of that. And I remember getting sense of things like mackerel and sometimes before they hit us, they would smoke dope and you could smell it. And so there were certain things that would act as an olfactory or smell kind of trigger that they were in the area. But often times you would also just get a feeling. When you're in combat and you're out in the jungle, at least, you start developing sort of a sixth sense and you can trust that or not.

But I can tell you there are times like on Mutter's Ridge – of course we had a lot of indicators that we'd been probed – but before that there were places where I knew we were going to get hit. And on more than one occasion I would bring that up, and it got so that if I said that to somebody they took it seriously.

Interviewer

What about booby traps?

Clark Clements

You know, when it comes to booby traps, being up north in I Corps, in fact, we didn't run into many booby traps, but

on Route 9, before we went to Mutter's Ridge we were at a place called KG Bridge and I was riding shotgun for this guy that was in a bulldozer and they were some construction on the road, the Seabee's, this is the Navy. And there was this big explosion behind us and out of my peripheral vision I saw something go up in the air. And what it was, was this one fellah was really big and he was one of the nicest people; he was like an ambassador of goodwill to the grunts or to the Marines that came down there to provide security, made sure we got food and cold sodas and things like that. Anyway, he was big enough where he set off a box mine and it blew him up.

But my only other encounter where there was a booby trap involved with me was where in my new unit in 1st Marines – and by the way, in 1st Marines I was in an area where there were big mountains and stuff but there were valleys and in those valleys you had rice paddies and villages. And in this one place they had this one hill that was terraced. And we started to receive fire so we had a helicopter that was coming in on the top while I was going up. And I'll never forget, I had mortar rounds, 81 rounds on me, and we took fire from a tree line and I went, "Oh, shit." So I just boogied up the hill and the people behind me, we wanted get up so we could take cover because we were exposed, we're right out in the open. And I got up on top and some other people got up on top right behind me and I saw this hole – and it may not have been the wisest decision, but I started to move towards that hole. And the guys behind me were moving down as well. And all of the sudden right behind me there was a huge explosion and the people behind me were all killed. It was a booby-trapped 105 round. I don't know if I hit the trip wire or not. Sometimes you wonder. But we had no recourse. We got up on top of that hill, we were taking cover, we didn't have time to look around, so to speak, and assess and evaluate booby traps or anything like that that they might have set.

Interviewer

Tell us about being wounded and you came home?

Clark Clements

No, I didn't come home after I was wounded. I did my tour.

Interviewer

What was it like when you got short?

Clark Clements

Well I was with my quote/quote new unit that I never totally fit in with. And the reason being, and I don't want to malign all Marines, I just happened to be in a situation where there wasn't a lot of experience with combat so we'll just chalk it up to that. And people wouldn't dig holes and I'd tell them. I'm sorry, I had to be kind of hard because I lost my best friend and we lost a lot of people in 3rd Marines and I got to the point where I'm going home. Somebody's going to take this story home; somebody's got to make it. And when people screwed around like falling asleep on lines and not digging their holes I would tell them, "If you don't dig a hole and we get hit and you get in my hole, I'll shoot your ass." And it was like, "Yeah, now get over there and dig your own hole and dig it deep."

Because I was used to being in a place where people dug their holes, they knew the importance of being able to take cover when you're under fire, and you're receiving incoming like 82 mortars and RPGs. So when I started getting short there was a certain amount of intensity that set in for me, as opposed to getting lackadaisical because I had to earn my place in this new unit and I had to really remain vigilant to survive.

And so I went out and I'll just give you an example of my last day in the bush, or the day before. I went out and I set a bunch of claymore mines. And I put out a bunch of trip flairs. And what they do is they alert you if the enemy comes. They hit the trip wire, the flair goes off, and then you see 'em and then you typically open fire. And I'd set all of this stuff up and I didn't know that they were going to take me out of the field the next day. And one of my homies – and a "homie" is somebody that's from your home state, that's where all of that came from – Pat Aragon, he was out in the field with me. And anyway, they came up to me the next day. Nothing happened that night.

And it was in the morning and they said, "Clements, get your gear, you're going home." And I went. Because really there was this part of me that fought so hard. It was unbelievable. I was thinking, "I'm gonna get away clean? I'm gonna make it out of here alive?" So then what happened, the helicopter comes in and I get my pack and then they start to take fire. So I run over and they're going to take off without me, and I threw my pack up there and I jumped up on the lip of the ramp because they started to take off. The crew chief comes over and he pulls me inside. Because in my mind it's like, there's no fucking way that bird is leaving here without me on it. And I'll never forget, we're taking off and a round hit the helicopter and it just spun inside of the Chinook like a rock in a tin can. And we made it out of there, we didn't get shot down. Anyway, I'm back in the world and I got a job immediately, I didn't take unemployment. I called my old employer, James Kelso, for Boise Cascade. Thank God we had him. He was a former Marine and Boise Cascade was just an incredible company to work for. And he says, "Come on back." And they gave me a job. And I was working there one day and who showed up? Pat Aragon. And he lived Carbon County.

Interviewer

And he was who?

Clark Clements

Well Pat Aragon was this guy that just had this infectious smile. Brown eyes, really shiny, big white teeth, and he just always had this beautiful grin and just really nice guy. And he was from Carbon County, and as I recall, he was kind of a track star down there. Well Pat showed up because previously he'd worked in the mining industry, which is quite dangerous, but somehow he ended up going to work for Boise Cascade and he showed up. And then he told me, he says, "Clements, you know you set all of those claymores and those trip flairs. They set off every damn one of your trip flairs trying to get in." And I got kind of a kick out of that. And we only messed around one time and I'll never forget this because we got together, there was this reunion. And I'll never forget it, we felt really guilty about

doing this but we played hooky from work one day. And I wasn't into drinking all that much but we took liberties that day and we decided we'd get some beer. So we bought some beer, and we just drank some beer that day and we didn't go to work. Next day we show up and James Kelso calls us into the office. And he didn't really ask us about what we did. He knew. And he just goes, "Guys, you've had your day so I don't want any more of this. So knock off the shit and that's it. Get back to work." Just called it straight and we moved on.

Interviewer

Tell me about the ship coming home.

Clark Clements

Well I ended up being pulled out of the field and I remember a lot of the guys that went over at the same time, that flew over, we were all going back on this ship. We went back on the U.S.S Tripoli. And before we got on the boat we were in a barracks and I believe it was in Da Nang, and that's where I learned more about my friend Brent, because one of the people that was there was in the unit with him when he was killed and told me how he met his demise. And then we got on the ship.

Interviewer

How did he meet his demise?

Clark Clements

Well, the thing is I heard different stories from different people, especially when I got back to the world and all of that, there were stories floating around how he was killed. But this individual told me that he died as a warrior and he was hit by an automatic burst across his body. Another story was that he was hit by an artillery round and all of that. So you really don't totally know and for some reason there's always that wondering. Not that I would do this, but I remember at one point I was very upset one time and I was almost going to dig his body up, open the damn coffin and investigate the wounds. Of course there would've been a lot of decomposition at this point. But sometimes you really want to know the truth, you know? And I don't know why that was important. I think I was in school at the time taking anatomy and I wanted know. But I didn't desecrate the grave or do anything like that, I wouldn't do that to the family. But I don't really know the absolute truth and nobody ever will accept the people that were there with him that carry the stories with them. And whether we want to believe those stories or not, that's what it boils down to.

Interviewer

Almost everybody else came home by commercial aircraft or military aircraft. You came home by ship. How long did it take and was that a good decompression for you?

Clark Clements

Yeah, it was. It was 17 days coming home. And one of the things I remember initially – we called them Squids but no offense against the Squids – and there's something I need to put on record and people need to know. Our corpsmen were in the Navy but we considered them Marines. Now I don't know all of the terminology what they

called it, but you have the bulkheads, you know, you're walking down like a hall, and the Squids, or the Navy, they'd stand up against those bulkheads and really respectful and let us walk by and all of that. And then somebody floated a story that they think we're animals. And I said, "What are you talking about?" And they said, "They think that we're gonna shit and piss in the corners and all of this stuff, you know? They think we're barbarians." And I said, "Hmm, that's interesting."

But anyway, you kind of get a feel for what the Navy has to put up with, because that's close quarters and it's like the smell of a gym, like dirty socks and sweat because there's so many people packed into one place where the bunks are. And I remember lying in the bunk and reading. This was good for me, I read a book about Laos. And at that time three-quarters of the place was unexplored, and I'd been there and carved my initials on a tree way out in the middle of the jungle. But I got to read and then we'd get chow and stuff. And the way I dealt with it, I hooked up with somebody that was into working out, and he just used a towel, and a footlocker and we'd do exercises. He'd put the towel here and then he'd give me the resistance. And we did things like that to kind of take our minds off of things and to get in good shape for whatever reason. Probably to get girls. But we did some corny things.

I remember being up on the deck and I actually was involved in this. We took a battledress uniform and we stuffed it and then we tied a helmet to it and then we tied boots down where the feet would be. And we threw it overboard and we yelled, "Man overboard!" And we found out what their reaction to this was. They weren't gonna turn that ship around. But I think they were onto us kind of thing. So we did some juvenile crazy things on the way back.

But one of the other things, I remember we were sitting up on deck and we started talking when you settle down a little bit. And we started talking about some of our experiences with one another because we could relate, and we started talking about some of the people that we came over with that weren't coming back with us on that ship. It was quite noticeable. And some people had stories about what happened to so-and-so and all of that. So we just kind of swapped a few stories like that. But when I came home and I got off that ship – I did this – when I got off that ship, and I got on the ground, I got on my hands and knees and I kissed that ground. And I kissed that ground because I was so thrilled to just make it out of there alive, but I also recognized the only reason that I made it back, and the only reason I'm here today is better Marines than myself perished in the country of Vietnam.

Interviewer

What day was that?

Clark Clements

That we got off the ship? On that one I don't remember the exact day. I'm pretty good with dates. I have what we call anniversary kind of things where certain days – and I have a lot of 'em – like August 10th and 11th – ooh. March 10th is one of them. And I probably didn't remember the day correctly, but we had a major battle that really left a big

impression on me at Big Foot Brown in April. And so it just goes on and on. I have certain anniversaries. Like May 26th, when I went out on that patrol and I came back and I found out that Brent had been killed; that always sticks with me and all of that. But I don't remember the exact day we actually landed.

Interviewer

So how soon were you discharged?

Clark Clements

Well, I spent about five months as a weapons instructor at San Mateo and I was a little bit of a bad boy in the Marine Corps when I got back. I have to tell you this though, what we tried to do, those of us that had been in combat, when we were training new people we knew that we're going over there, we didn't go by this book thing, we told them the straight scoop. Here's how you set your base plate, here's how you really do it. We tried to pass on the practical real world combat efficient methods of doing things. Well anyway, my grandmother was dying of cancer and they wouldn't let me fly home, they wouldn't give me leave. So some of my buddies said, "Clements, we'll cover for ya." And I said, "Yeah?" And they said, "Yeah. Don't worry about it. Formation, I'll pretend like I'm you." And I thought about it and I went: You only have one grandmother and my grandmother raised me, pretty much. So I flew home to see her. And that worked for a while, but as I understand it, one day they finally said, "Clements, step out." They wanted to see me. Somehow it might have gotten back to them that I wasn't really there. And anyway, nobody could step out for me. And so when I got back – this is why I didn't come out with a little bit higher rank is because they busted me, and I was up for promotion and all of that.

And then they put me on this duty where every hour on the hour for a month they would wake me up. Every hour for a month. And this is kind of reminiscent of the time when I was going out on ambush with some other Marines that were over-utilized while other people refused to go, and we'd do the work details during the day and then go out on ambush at night. And I expressed my chagrin in a very interesting way in that situation. But what happened is I was doing this with one of my fellow Marines, we were going into the headquarters' building and cleaning it and buffing and waxing the floors and doing all of the janitorial kinds of work.

And Gillian – I'll never forget this, he says, "Clements, come here." And I went in, and he said, "Can you help me?" And I don't know if it was a colonel or a general, but I said, "What do you need?" And he said, "Well, I want to move this desk." "Really?" And at that point I was in pretty good shape, I'd been working out every chance I got. So I just walked over, picked up my end of the desk and went like this and the whole top, the glass, slid off, crashed all of the monogrammed stuff and coffee mugs and all of that. So what happened was – we called him the "Old Man" – didn't even want to hear my name. And the Marine Corps, they were releasing people that had what they call a combat military occupational specialty. So because I upset the brass so much when I did this – at least one member of the brass – they just kind of put my name up at the front to muster me out. So I got my pink ID card.

But the interesting thing is right before this happened, the lieutenants all gathered around me and tried to encourage me to re-up to go to officers candidate school, which would've meant I would've gone back as a lieutenant, a 90-day wonder, a butterbar, that's the gold-colored bar, and gone back to Vietnam. And I went, "I don't really want to do that, I want to be a private fuckin' civilian." So I got my pink ID card, got an honorable discharge and I left. Now there was a lot of discord and polarization within our culture and society. There were people that were really down on the troops; I had people call me out to get in fights when they found out I had been in Vietnam. And at that time it was no surprise because I had a tan and I had short hair coming out of the military and all of that. But then I also met some interesting people that were involved with Vietnam veterans against the war.

And I just happened, at that point, to no longer believe in the war effort and believed that we should get our troops back home. And so I participated in some of the marches having to do with Vietnam veterans against the war, which I'm really glad that I did, that I supported the folks. But within a year I started college and I remember they burned Nixon an effigy and I remember there were a lot of folks that were anti-war and all of that, and I really didn't enter into it in terms of arguing. I knew these people didn't know what the war was about and I saw it as being futile in terms of trying to educate them at that point, especially when they're all riled up and emotional, about my insights with respect to the war having been there.

And what I was really in pursuit of was America. I was trying to find the hideout of the human race and especially find the new America that had evolved during the time that I was gone. And I misjudged, I thought that in America, even with the polarization that I somehow believed there was a movement – John Jarrett was always talking about the movement in Vietnam. He was about human liberation way back then: women's rights, gay's rights. He was way, way ahead of his time. And so somehow I thought I was part of this movement where people had evolved on an intellectual and spiritual level and I wanted to be a part of that. I never found it. It wasn't until I was 30 when John Lennon was shot. I was working at the VA hospital in physical therapy working on vets. And I'll never forget, I had this epiphany all of the sudden, "Clark, you're not really part of a movement. There is no movement." And that was a little depressing.

Interviewer

1975, April 30th, we're watching Saigon fall on TV. What were you doing and what did you think?

Clark Clements

Wow, it was '75? The only way I can explain this and I don't really feel good about saying this but I worked very hard to survive. It wasn't easy because as time rolled on, the first year you're excited about getting home and then I was in pursuit of America and I was throwing myself into all kinds of things to kind of take me away from the war and trying to disconnect or disassociate from the war. And I remember hearing about the war ending and Saigon

falling. And there wasn't jubilation or anything like that. I had removed myself, I think, and I was kind of numb about that. Well not necessarily numb. As time rolled on I got a little bit more bitter as time rolled on, and things started to seep in, a darkness, an anger about losing not only Brent but some of my other friends in the neighborhood, but also the way that the people died that I witnessed over there, and knowing that a lot of this was political and people made a lot of money off of the war. And so I developed kind of an anger. So when I heard about the end of the war, I just kind of took it in stride.

Interviewer

So what did you do during R and R? Did you have a girlfriend when you left? Did you have a girlfriend when you came home?

Clark Clements

I left women out, but you're right, they were a very important part. Yeah, I'd like to share that with you.

Interviewer

Talk about women in Vietnam and in America.

Clark Clements

I was in on the 90-day program, that's where you have that 90 days before you go into boot camp. I was out and about with Brent, my best friend and some other folks. And we went into a little place here in Salt Lake, it's gone now, but it's called the Miniature Market, and I started chatting up this cute little blond lady and we ended up dating before I went. And so while I was in Vietnam she wrote me, and she was really quite sweet because in that mail call on May 26th where I learned about Brent dying I also got a letter from her, and it was very romantic and very sweet. But then in July I also got a letter from her mother that said that she's engaged to get married and please stop writing my daughter. And I didn't flip out over this because I saw clues that she was really into this fellah before I left. And the thing is I took that in stride. I just thought it was really nice that she had taken the time to write me, and that she didn't want to give me the Dear John letter and upset me kind of thing.

So I told John Gaffney and I says, "Well, I got one of those letters." And he goes, "Ooh, are you all right?" And I said, "Yeah, I'm all right." But anyway, what happened is his cousin sent – and we didn't get to party very often – but she sent us a package and it had some booze in it, and it had some Johnny Walker Red in it and I was into that back then a little bit. And we partied, some of us in July. It was the last time we would ever party together because many of those people died on Mutter's Ridge. So I wrote her a thank you note.

Now John, in September, he was pulled out with Doggy Doray and they went on a ship, and they got involved with playing war games in the Philippines and all of that. And John's cousin, Terry, started writing me, and she became like my lifeline. And wrote beautiful, incredible letters to me and kept me going. And she invited me to come see her in New York when I got back, but I got caught up with other things and that's one of my big regrets in life, that I

didn't go out there and actually see her and tell her in person "Thank you for being there for me," because she certainly was.

Now in Vietnam, Tan, either the VC or wannabe VC kid, he had a sister named Lan and she's the one that gave me the necklaces, and the bracelets and things like that, that saw me as being her boyfriend. But I saw these people as being from a different culture, and even if the women were 21 years old I saw them as being very young and so I just looked at them really like sisters. When I went on R and R, that would've been in November, and I had a tan then. I put in for Australia, Bangkok, and Japan, and they gave me Japan. And I go to Japan and it started to snow, so I bought a ski sweater, and some Levi Strauss and all of that. And I did get involved with some of the women there on R and R, but it was the kind of thing where it was nothing romantic, it was just a young fella pent up in the jungle where everybody else is out dating during that time, and your testosterone level and all kinds of other things are like a furnace and maybe that's why they send you to war when you're young. You know, I had a little bit of a run on the women so to speak. In addition to Terry that was writing me, my best friend Brent, a lady that we were both really quite close to also wrote us, Diana.

Interviewer

What was it like to receive those letters? What was it like to get that mail from home?

Clark Clements

Well, getting mail from home, in fact I have a picture of the squad in Cam Lo Vill and I'm kind of standing to the right and I have a package that we received. And we didn't receive 'em all that frequently, but when we did they were usually filled with goodies. And it really did perk us up because you know, we tried to be strong and all of that, each and every one of us, in our own way, but you reach some real lows. Your emotions are like a rollercoaster when you're in combat. And you try to remain as even and professional as you can, but you're still a human being with emotions and when you got those letters, really, it reminded you of what you had to live for and the people that were in your life. Especially when people would send letters, for example, Diana Tahtarus sent me a packet of photos that showed Sugar House Park, which is still really near and dear to me to this day, and then a picture of Dennis Alvera and Shirley Mascher which was my best friend's sister, of their wedding. And that kind of included you in it. For a brief moment you felt connected. You were still part of that. So the letters, like the helicopters, were a tremendous lifeline and brought hope.

Interviewer

Was it dangerous to get a Dear John?

Clark Clements

It could be. It really could be. If you get a Dear John, depending on the person, and the mental makeup and the situation that they happen to find themselves in at the time, that could prove to be real dangerous. Somebody might just say, "Fuck it," and in the next firefight jump up, play John Wayne and get killed. That's a very real possibility.

Interviewer

You've had all these years to process this and your detail is amazing. At 30, when you thought there was no movement, there is part of a movement because you're expressing your truths to many people. When did that movement die?

Clark Clements

Yeah, and one of the things I want to bring up and this is real important – on Mutter's Ridge, in the aftermath of that battle, there was a machine gunner and his name was Lopez and he asked me to write a letter home for somebody who had perished. And I'll never forget this. He had two rounds that had gone through his helmet and the other fellow, Garcia, they're both machine gunners, he had one round through his helmet and Red – we called him Red, I don't remember his real name – we knew a lot of people by nicknames or last names – and he was shot through the head and was killed. And Lopez looked up at me with these big brown eyes and he goes, "Clements, you're really good with language. Will you promise me something?" And I said, "Well what's that?" And he goes, "Will you write about this someday and tell people?" He wanted people to know kind of thing.

And you're right, John Lennon died in 1980 and I went, God, I'm not part of the movement because I didn't see anybody out there that was riding the same wave, so to speak. I felt pretty isolated. And I was taking a lot of classes, for example, in philosophy and anthropology to still come to terms with my experience, and to deal with the ethical issues that surround war, and what I had participated in and what I had done. And the culture, they went through a transformation and was self-questioning, but I certainly was going to the very foundations because at one point I hit the abyss, I went into the pit and had to crawl back out. And so I felt kind of alone and I didn't talk to other vets about this.

In fact, I felt so removed from some of the other people sometimes that when they had the dedication of The Wall here in Salt Lake up at the capitol building for those that died in Vietnam, I remember going up there and I saw a lot of people in their uniform, and I went up there on my motorcycle because I was always flirting with death, and was wearing my leather jacket, and all of this and my boots. And I got off, and I walked up, and I saw all of these guys in their uniforms with their medals, and all this stuff and I thanked them. I thanked them for going to war, for what they did. That's how far I removed myself from having been in it at that particular point. So you know, I didn't feel connected. I really, really did feel alone.

And it screwed up my relationship because I married an incredible woman that was an artist and her biggest complaint was "You really never talk to me." She says, "You talk at me or you tell me things but there's no emotional connection. Are you really there?" And the thing is, is that it's like I had stuffed the emotions and put up all of the armor, almost like a sarcophagus around me so that nothing could penetrate. But on the other hand, if you can't receive, isn't it kind of hard to send? So I was nurturing to people, like when I was working in physical therapy

and I could feel them; that was very therapeutic to me. And I could get involved in that and the healing process when it came to other people, but when it came to my own personal life I wasn't there emotionally for my wife and she finally found somebody else and she left. And this is when I was 33.

I had to really reevaluate things and go back to the core. Who am I? Where am I and where am I going? We all have to answer those existential questions. And at certain points in your life you have to do that. But there are things that precipitate that, life events. And when she left it was like whew, I'm back in the basement, and I'm back at square one and I'm climbing out of the abyss again. And then you go out and it's really hard to say, but it's very true – I know a lot of my friends like John Gaffney expressed this to me when he came to visit me, one of my colleagues from Vietnam. We were sitting in a bar and he told me he had the same problem, and that is – this is very important, probably one of the most important things I can say in this interview – is that whether it was Diana Tahtarus, Brent's girlfriend that I ended up living with, we almost got married; one of my very dear friends and always will be – my wife or anybody – when I started to get close to these people I would all of the sudden see them dead. I'd see the specter of death and it would horrify me. And started feeling like when a lot of things would happen to bad people that somehow it was my fault.

And I guess it goes back to the survival in the war and not getting too close to people because all of the sudden I'd see these people, and I'd see 'em dead and I'd go, "Oh, shit." And it was really hard to deal with and it caused me to pull away, break away when I started getting too close emotionally. And that's been just a constant battle and talking with some of my friends that were in the war that open up to me – not everybody does, but I have a small few that open up to me. Ken Wells sat on Mutter's Ridge with me, I got in touch with him from the Echo 2-3 website, he has a much better memory for the details than I do, and he's gone through the same kind of thing and various others. So it's nothing unique to me, it seems to be something that isn't really addressed and talked about because it's so uncomfortable to tell people that.

Interviewer

Tell us about the piece that you wrote that you're going to perform for us.

Clark Clements

Well the piece that I wrote called "1969" kind of addresses – well first of all, I have to say my stepdaughter, Nicole Madrid was in high school and she had an assignment. And with the kids I used to always work with them on their assignments, and help them and things like that, I really believed in education and all of this so I used to help her with her homework assignments when she asked. And it wasn't very often. But this was something where she said, "You know about this. You know about the '60s." Her assignment was to write about the '60s so I wrote kind of a poem for her. And then I guess she turned it in and the teacher said, "Wow, this gives us a glimpse of the '60s, it seems to ring true."

And then one day I went, you know, it's a poem but maybe I ought to put that to music so I can share that with folks. And I did sort of an emotional version with some haunting chords and all of that, and then somebody said, "I think it might be easier to get the point across if you make the rhythm a little more upbeat." So I changed it and I actually did that quite recently. But the idea is that the song, for me, kind of captures, like a stream of consciousness, the high points, the transition, say from the mid-'60s when we had the human rights things going on, the marches for human rights, and all of that against segregation and so forth, and then in the Vietnam War, and Woodstock and putting a man on the moon kind of thing, because I was trying to lay out what we went through, at least from my perspective because it meant a lot to me.

Interviewer

What are the lyrics, can you tell us?

Clark Clements

It's "1969," I took a few liberties because some of the things actually happened earlier, but I saw 1969 as being the apex or the pinnacle in philosophical terms, what we would call the Hegelian Culmination of things that were going on in terms of "the movement." It goes:

"We boogied through the '60s we fought for human rights/
We wiretapped at Watergate shredded paper late at night/
We watched our sons and daughters go away to war/
Two men from the government came knocking at the door

Now the gods of war had told us they controlled our fate/
Someone gave the orders but they always came too late/
We fought and died for something sometimes against the great unknown/
Protesters marched in Washington to bring the troops back home

Now I can still remember Uncle Sam knocking at the door/
he said, 'Come on, my native son do your patriotic chore'/
I tried to get some courage but I was chilled to the bone/
When I called upon my conscience he said, 'Now you're on your own'/
It was a good hard time it was a good hard time/
A good hard time in 1969

John and Bobby had the vision Martin Luther had the dream/
But the evil assassin's bullet made the whole world scream/
Our world fell into chaos what were we fighting for/
John Lennon sang 'Imagine no country and no war'/
Now Woodstock celebrated the coming of an age
Crosby Stills Nash and Young and the streetwise poets' sage/
But out there in the jungle the battles continued to rage
back home in Chicago they put freedom in a cage/
Arlo Guthrie sang his motorcycle song/
Country Joe and the Fish sang a song about Vietnam/
The Grateful Dead were jammin'
you could feel the music inside of you/
Then Jimmy Hendrix topped that off with the red white and blue

Now I can still remember Uncle Sam knocking on the door/ he said 'Come on my native son and do your patriotic chore'/ I tried to get some courage but I was chilled to the bone/ when I called upon my conscience he said, 'Now you're on your own'/ It was a hot night in July when we got the news/ the United States of America put a man up on the moon/ The radio was playing 'The Age of Aquarius' tune then the battle started we lost half our platoon/ Now I'm missing all the people that can't be here tonight because Death struck 'em down at dawn's early light/ 'But remember,' Mr. Dylan said 'Everyone must get stoned'/ But they poisoned all the grass where the deer and the antelope roam

Now a lot of things have changed when I look back over the years/ some things are a rerun but it's still hard to confront your fears/ But now we've got computers will the system fail/ All I know is I'm going to heaven because I spent my time in hell/ I can still remember Uncle Sam waiting at the shore/ he said 'You're not welcome home because you didn't win the war'/ I tried to get some courage but I was chilled to the bone/ when I called upon my conscience/ he said 'Now you're on your own'/ It was a good hard time, a good hard time, a good hard time in 1969"

Interviewer

Thank you, Clark.